

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Mike Grieve

Collect of the Day:

Almighty God, as Your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, ascended into the heavens, so may we also ascend in heart and mind and continually dwell there with Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Introit:

Psalm 47:1-2, 5, 8; antiphon: Acts 1:11 – *God reigns over the nations in the person of Jesus*

Psalm:

Psalm 110 (antiphon: v. 1) – *Announcement of the Messiah's reign*

Old Testament Reading:

2 Kings 2:5-15 – *Elijah ascends to heaven*

Gradual:

(During the celebration of Easter and Pentecost, the Gradual is omitted and the verse is expanded.)

Second Reading:

Acts 1:1-11 – *The Holy Spirit promised; Jesus ascends to heaven*

Verse:

Psalm 47:5; 68:18a – *Alleluia. God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Alleluia. You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train. Alleluia.*

Mark 16:14-20 ESV

Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit caused St. Mark to write this gospel sometime around AD 64. This account takes place between Jesus' resurrection and His ascension. Jesus rebukes the eleven for not believing the eyewitness accounts of those who saw Him after He was raised. He gives the authority to preach the Gospel to the whole creation, promising salvation to all who believe and are baptized.

¹⁴ **Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.**

- Unbelief is not befitting of those who are to preach the Gospel. Before the Gospel can be preached, it must be believed. The eleven, therefore, are first rebuked for their unbelief concerning Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Before they can preach the Word that is to be heard, they need to hear that they have not themselves believed the Word. This is true for all of us: first we are convicted of sin; then of the righteousness of faith. Martin Luther writes, "Consequently, what is here said about the disciples, remains true today: Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe." (*House Postils: Ascension 1533*; Vol. 6, 131)

¹⁵ **And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.**

- Luther says, "The heart of this Gospel lesson is the commission our Lord Christ gives to his disciples, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.'" (*House Postils: Ascension 1533*; Vol. 6, 126) It is faith that comes by hearing, and hearing by this Word of Christ (Romans 10:17). Jesus sends these out to preach, as Paul also

reminds us in Romans 10:15: “And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” The ministry of the Gospel is the means God has established to create, sustain, and complete faith.

¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

- Belief and baptism go hand in hand in the one true Gospel. Faith in Christ saves; unbelief condemns. The message which the apostles will be preaching and teaching they also are to believe. Baptism brings us into Christ’s Church and faith. The promises attached to baptism—forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and devil, eternal life to all who believe—are fed and sustained in the ongoing hearing of the Word.

¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.

- The Gospel, faith, and Jesus’ name are the power by which anything is done. The signs receive their meaning from Jesus’ Word. Without the Word, there could be no casting out of demons and speaking with tongues. With the Word and Jesus’ name great things are accomplished in this faith, including standing up against the devil with all his lying, deceiving, and tempting.
- The healing of the sick, casting out of demons, and taking up of serpents was fulfilled in the Acts of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, showing us the ongoing activity of Jesus’ name and Word in the Church. His name and Word carry the authority to do these things. These are not magic tricks but the very power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This power is ultimately shown to us in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

¹⁹ So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

- His ascension is not His disappearance, as if no longer being here. The right hand of God is also not a place, but a station of authority. Johann Gerhard writes: “What the evangelist Mark states here about Christ ascending up to heaven and seating Himself at God’s right hand, St. Paul explains in Eph. 4:10 this way: ‘He who ascended is far above all heavens so that He fills all things.’” (*Postilla: Ascension*, 421)

²⁰ And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the accompanying signs.

- The message confirmed by the accompanying signs is the Gospel, which was, is, and will continue to be preached until the Son of Man returns on the last day. Luther writes, “For a fact, if we could but be convinced that the message, which the apostles and their successors are proclaiming, is truly God’s Word, then everyone who hears that message would lift up his arms in prayer and say, Lord God, I shall thank you through all eternity for letting me hear this message; I shall obey you with all my heart, and I shall gladly serve you with all that I am and have, and I shall revere and honor your apostles and messengers who are carrying out your command.” (*House Postils: Ascension 1533*; Vol. 6, 131)

