



# MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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May 18, 2023

Pastor James Enderle

The Festival of the Ascension of Our Lord

First Lesson: [Esther 6](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 110

Second Lesson: [Colossians 3:1-4](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Luke 24:44-53](#)

## The Ascension is Essential

### Jesus Ascended...

1. To show He \_\_\_\_\_ this \_\_\_\_\_
2. To help us \_\_\_\_\_ our \_\_\_\_\_
3. To \_\_\_\_\_
4. To \_\_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_\_

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

How has your Ascension celebration been? This is one of those festivals of the Church year but it's not like those major festivals. It's not Christmas. You didn't have all those days off. You don't have the Christmas tree up and all the Ascension decorations. The family didn't get together. It's not Easter, where we have that Holy Week and all the celebration of the worship leading up to Easter. It's Ascension. If you think of those special meals, what would be a special meal for Ascension? I was trying to think about it; maybe cotton candy to represent the clouds, something kind of fluffy.

We know that we have these major festivals of Christmas and Easter and Pentecost (coming up soon). We know Christmas is so important. That's when Jesus came to be one of us. God sent His Son to live among us, to live under the Law, and to be one of us. Easter is so important. On Good Friday, Jesus dies for us and on Easter, He rises again. I won't steal all of Pastor Ott's thunder about Pentecost coming up, but we know there is some important event that happened here. He even talks about it in our text.

So why is Ascension so important? Why is it this minor festival? **Ascension is** important and is a festival because it is **essential**. There are some really important things that happened because of Christ's Ascension; some things that happened for Jesus, for the

disciples, and for us in understanding why He came and what we are to do, also then for what is going to happen.

For the disciples, we often give them a hard time at Ascension because even still at that time, not in our text here but in other texts it says, "Now, Lord, are you going to restore your kingdom?" ([Acts 1:6](#)) They were still focused on that earthly kingdom thinking "Hey, Jesus, I know you died and you rose again, but can you just kick out those Romans? That's really what we thought the Messiah was going to be all about." But Jesus here says that He opens up the Scriptures to us. Verses 44-46 tell us some very important things. **He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day..."**

If you were here a few weeks ago, those words sound pretty familiar. These are almost the same words that Jesus spoke to those disciples on the way to Emmaus. They were so confused. They were sad and wondering, "Everyone knew about Jesus and we thought that He was going to be the one. We hoped that He would save us and restore the kingdom." So Jesus kind of rebukes them and says "How foolish you are that you didn't understand what the Scriptures said!" ([Luke 24:13-35](#))

This is what Jesus does here. He opens up the Scriptures pointing to the Old Testament—the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. Notice what He says. **"Everything must be fulfilled..."** What He is telling them is that *He had finished the mission*. Jesus had fulfilled everything that was promised about Him, that He had to suffer and die and to rise again. He opens up the Scriptures to them and points them to why this was necessary. So the Holy Spirit works in their hearts and helps them to understand that this is what Jesus came to do. Even though they were maybe still a little confused and wondering, Jesus tells them "When I died on the cross, when I spoke those words 'It is finished,' it was true." The work of salvation was finished. He died to forgive our sins and that work was done. When He rose again, it was finished. He's reminding us and showing us that we, too, would rise.

So why is it important for Him to ascend into heaven? I think that is that final stamp to say that mission is done. His work of salvation, of forgiving us and then showing us that we, too, would rise again and go to heaven, that work is done. I think you could say that He is saying His mission is done, but we're going to see He still has some work to do. He is still doing things. We are going to see that in a little while.

As Jesus rises and ascends and disappears, He is assuring us that our salvation is won. It is finished. But notice there is more to this lesson. As the disciples are wondering what is next, He tells them what is next. He says that **"The Messiah will suffer and rise from**

***the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.***” Jesus ascends and tells them this so that we can understand our mission. It’s easy to get sidetracked when we are focused on the earthly things. In Colossians (Second Lesson), Paul reminds us that we have to focus on the heavenly things because it’s so easy for us to be focused on the earthly things, all the worries, and all the things that are in front of us. He’s saying “You have a mission.” What is that? “You are my witnesses. You saw everything I did; how I died and rose again. And there is something to be done. Repentance and forgiveness are to be preached.”

Maybe, before Jesus rises, they think “*Oh, hey Jesus, that’s your job.*” As He was going out and teaching, that’s what He did. He taught about the kingdom and taught repentance and forgiveness. But now what? Where is Jesus? As they are looking up, we know from other texts that the angels say “Why are you standing here? He has gone to heaven.” ([Acts 1:10-11](#)) So whose job is this? It’s the job of the disciples to go and share that repentance and forgiveness; that blessed message that we are loved and forgiven. They could no longer depend on their Master/Teacher that they had followed and said “He is going to do the work.” They were going to do it.

It’s no different for us. God calls us His witnesses; those who go out to share that message. That’s exactly what we heard as the Paschal Candle went out. As God goes out into this world, as forgiveness is preached, who does it? We do. We get the blessed opportunity to share God’s Word; to share the message that we have true forgiveness and peace in a world that struggles with that so much.

But as we look up and as the disciples looked up, we know that Jesus was taken up in front of them, and it says that He blessed them. After that they worshiped Him, returned to Jerusalem and waited. What I think is important for us to understand is as He ascends into heaven, the disciples knew very well that Jesus was still around. Though they did not see Him, they worshiped Him. Though He would not be visible to them, they worshiped Him. They knew that He was still ruling and He showed them by leaving what type of rule this was going to be. Over and over again they were so confused. They thought this was going to be an earthly kingdom. No, it was going to be a Spiritual rule. God was guiding the Spiritual Kingdom that we know is in each and every person’s heart who believes what Jesus taught. He said you will not be able to see the kingdom because it is in your hearts. It’s here. It’s there. It’s everywhere that people believe. Where the Sacraments and the Word is taught, Jesus is there, ruling.

Are there times when we struggle with that type of rule, where we struggle and wonder and say, “Who is in charge here? Is our world falling apart? Does God have any control?” The Jewish people at Esther’s time probably wondered that. Christians over

centuries, as they were persecuted maybe have wondered that. It's no different today. As Christianity is maybe not as popular or we no longer live with a Christian culture around us, we too can maybe lose hope and wonder who is in charge. But then we have to remember it's not about this world. It's not about all of those things that sometimes we put our hope in that really give no hope. We can be distracted by governments, by politics, by sports, by our jobs, by all of the ways that culture might be moving and we may throw up our hands and say "Man, God has lost control!" No He hasn't. That Word continues to go out and we get to preach and teach and share that message.

It's important that we understand that Jesus left *to rule*; not only to rule but that He is going *to return as King*. Yes, it's true, it doesn't seem like He is ruling now. Things are hard. There is suffering. There is sin. There is death. We live in this sinful, broken world and we sometimes yearn to say "How long, Lord?" We yearn for the day that He comes back as King.

This is also why it is so important that He left; so that He could return and bring restoration. We know that God is ruling the Spiritual Kingdom and Jesus continues to rule spiritually. He guides things for our spiritual good, but we know on that day when He returns, something special is going to be happening. The physical and the spiritual will be reunited. This world that is so broken will be no more.

It just happened in the last few weeks that I had a couple conversations with people that were talking about how because of war or different things that life was hard and how hard and broken things are. We say "How good, Lord, that He is returning." He will bring an end to all the pain and suffering in this world. We know that our Lord will return similar to how He left, but even greater. Every eye will see Him. Every knee will bow. What great truth it is that we know that He is our King. Not just a king who doesn't care for us, but a King who died for us; a King that loves you so much to give you that peace and forgiveness.

So even in the midst of the hardship that we have now, we don't lose hope, for we know that He is always working and guiding, protecting us and guiding us for that eternity. It's very easy for us to sometimes lose hope and to wonder because He's not always here. We don't see Him, but He is here. He is here working and the blessing that, as He finished His mission, we continue that mission. We get to be the ones who share that great message of forgiveness and hope. As He has departed, He gives us the work and the things we need to do; to share that joy, to share that peace so that others may be welcomed home to be with Him forever. We look forward to that day, for our Lord will welcome us home to be with Him; the King who loves us and has redeemed us. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.