

GOD HAS ASCENDED

- ² **For the LORD Most High is awesome, the great King over all the earth.**
³ **He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet.**
⁴ **He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loved.**
⁵ **God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets.**
⁶ **Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises.**
⁷ **For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise.**

In the calendar of our Church Year, we celebrate most of the steps of Jesus' humiliation and exaltation. During Advent we ponder the words, "**Conceived by the Holy Spirit.**" At Christmas we worship at the manger and rejoice over the words, "**Born of the Virgin Mary.**" During the long weeks of Lent and Holy week and especially on Good Friday, we remember that he "**Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.**"

There is usually not enough time on Easter to ponder what "**He descended into hell**" means, but everyone who has had me for Catechism for the last twenty-five years should well remember the significance of this event, and even the sound-effects I sometimes us.

Easter is the celebration that our Lord Jesus "**Rose again from the dead,**" and today we come to the words, "**He ascended into heaven.**" We might combine this with "**He is seated at the right hand of the Father,**" and then of course next October we will remember that "**He will come again to judge the living and the dead.**"

Now, "**The ascension is the real, visible elevation of Jesus Christ from earth to heaven.**"^a This Psalm along with Psalm 68 are the two main Old Testament prophecies about this event, and Jesus often talked about it ahead of time. He said, "**You will see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before**" (John 6), and "**I am going to him who sent me,**" (John 16), and he said to Mary Magdalene, "**I have not yet returned to the Father**" (John 20).

In the text before us, the prophet shows the Christ is "**the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth,**" proclaiming both our Lord's divinity and his humanity, a paradox and yet a fact. The prophet also proclaims the great victory of Christ over sin, death and the devil, with simple-sounding words: "**He subdued nations under us, peoples under our**

^a Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics* Vol. III p. 131.

feet,” for what victory is greater than the victory of the cross and the empty tomb? If I could meet my personal hero, Ulysses S. Grant, would I congratulate him for winning Vicksburg, or Shiloh, or would I jump right to the main point, that he won the battle that won the whole Civil War? So it is here; that Christ has trampled death to death, has put the grave in its own grave, and has condemned the devil to be tormented and tempted and to suffer for all eternity; he has branded him to be the Loser.

What shall we think when we read verse 6 and 7? **“Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise.”** First, let’s remember that this is not just a couple of throwaway lyrics in an old song. The Holy Spirit wants us to know and believe what it proclaimed here. It has doctrinal weight. Christ Jesus is called, “God” and “King” and again “God” and “King.” This is for emphasis. We are being preached to by the Holy Spirit, and the subject is the First Commandment, and Jesus Christ worshiped, glorified, honored and believed in according to the First Commandment. For when God commands to **“Have no other gods,”** he does not only mean the Father, nor only the Father and the Holy Spirit. He means the Son as well. For Jesus says: **“This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent”** (John 17:3). And the Apostle says, **“Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son”** (2 John 1:9).

Our Psalm describes our ascended Jesus as both “Lord” and “King.” In the Gospel accounts, and the account in the book of Acts, emphasizes that Jesus is both true God and true man. This is what God the Son has done for us: Christ Jesus, who emptied himself and took on a servant’s form, who humbled himself and became obedient even to the death of the cross, was exalted by God the Father. It is not Christ, true God alone, who has ascended into heaven. It is Christ Jesus, true God and true man, fully and truly human, who is risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, and who is seated even now at the right hand of the Father. His position there is given to him as the place of honor at the Father’s right hand, and also as Christ who is the victor over sin and death.

Does this mean that Christ, who is in heaven, is therefore not here with us on earth, or that his body and blood cannot be taken in communion with the bread and wine in the sacrament? Not at all! For at his ascension he promised: **“I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”** It isn’t as if the victorious Son of God is a prisoner in his own palace, unable to do the very things he promised to do on account of remaining in his flesh.

He has retained his flesh, and he will not set it aside. What he took into his divine nature at his conception in the womb of Mary he will keep forever. It is Christ in the flesh that we will see him in heaven. Not a blinding light, brighter than the sun in our sky, nor the Angel of the Lord, nor a hovering dove. Jesus Christ, God and man together, who came for us once and who will come for us once again in the end.

In this Psalm, we are shown that anyone sins against the First Commandment first when they reject Jesus as the Son of God, and also whenever we hear the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus and deny it to anyone who believes in Jesus. He has ascended, leaving us, his true Church on earth, to do the work of planting and harvesting, of tending his flocks and herds (that is, his church of good Christian souls), and of looking after his household as good servants until he returns. And he has told us that he wants us to love one another above all else, and that this is how we show our love for him. When we disobey our superiors, allow hatred to fester in our hearts, allow lust and other cravings to find a place in our lives, to covet or gossip-- all of these things rebel against our Savior's love, and for all of these things we need to repent.

But as Paul says for our comfort and consolation, **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit are with us**, all of us. The victory of Christ is the forgiveness of these same sins for which we are guilty. They are removed from us, washed away from us, lifted from our shoulders, and we are given a clear conscience in Jesus.

In this Psalm, the Holy Spirit causes the writer to realize, **“God chose our inheritance for us.”** Remember that faith, forgiveness, salvation, are not things that we choose for ourselves. A baby does not choose baptism, but the baby's parents bring the child to Christ who pours out his grace without any merit or worthiness in that that child, to make the child his own, and to give him all of these things that God has prepared for him in advance.

So we praise God and we praise our ascended Lord Jesus. Without the ascension, we would wonder, was anything in the Gospels true? We would work our way backward from the resurrection-- If he is risen, where is he now? Did he truly rise? Did he die once again? No-- the ascension tells us that the resurrection was real, and that the victory of Christ is complete.

Without the ascension following the resurrection, we would wonder, was his suffering a payment for sin, a true atoning sacrifice, or just the terrible tragic death of a good man? But no-- the ascension tells us that the death of Christ on the cross was acceptable to God for our sins, and through this, we are truly forgiven, and truly have a place with him forever in heaven.

The ascension is therefore like the plug in a washbasin. It keeps everything from running out and drying up in rust and dusty disuse. The ascension of Jesus Christ is also a reminder that you yourself will be taken into heaven on Judgment Day. His ascension means your ascension. His ascension is proof of his resurrection, of the value of his atoning death, or the acceptance of his perfect and sinless life, and of the fulfillment of every prophecy and prediction made by God in the Scriptures. Praise God for the ascension of his son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And to him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE THIRD PETITION

Your will be done on earth as in heaven.

What does this mean?

God's good and gracious will certainly is done without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.

How is God's will done?

God's will is done when he breaks and defeats every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, which try to prevent us from keeping God's name holy and letting his kingdom come. And God's will is done when he strengthens and keeps us firm in his Word and in the faith as long as we live. This is his good and gracious will.