

Lesson 13

Ascension of Our Lord

The Holy Gospel: Luke 24:44–53

In the Upper Room, on that Easter Sunday evening, there stood Jesus in the midst of His disciples. They were startled and frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus went out of His way to let His followers know that it truly was He—the same Jesus they had known before His death. He called attention to His hands and feet, where the wounds caused by the nails were visible. He invited them to touch Him and see for themselves that He had truly risen from the dead. He ate a piece of broiled fish in their presence.

Luke's Greek text uses the word *sarka*, translated "flesh"—a word that pointedly pertained to the physical body. Paul made our salvation dependent on the truth of Jesus' resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15:12–19).

There in the Upper Room, Jesus reassured His disciples that His suffering and death were all part of the saving plan. He reminded them that He had told them beforehand that everything written about Him in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. This text has Jesus saying, "The Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead." The Greek text uses the little word *dei*, meaning "it is necessary." His suffering, dying, and resurrection *had* to happen! God's saving will *had* to be done! Luke said that Jesus had "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures," especially His suffering and dying and resurrection as the climax of God's saving plan.

202. According to Jesus' words to the disciples in the Upper Room, what is the key to understanding the Bible?

203. Jesus commissioned His followers to proclaim "repentance and forgiveness of sins" in His name to all nations. Why did He tell His disciples first to stay in the city instead of telling them to get right to work with their mission? What does this say to us about our own mission of representing Jesus in our world? How may we be clothed with power from on high for our mission?

204. The reaction of those who witnessed Jesus' ascension was to return to Jerusalem with great joy and to continually bless God in the temple. Why is Jesus' ascension, His return to heaven, a source of joy and a reason for praising God also for us?

The First Lesson: Acts 1:1–11

Luke wrote his Gospel to instruct Theophilus regarding the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. *Theophilus* means “friend of God.” Most scholars see him as an individual, probably of some position and prominence, for in his Gospel, Luke addressed him as “most excellent Theophilus.” Some, because of the name’s meaning, think Luke used it to address anyone who wants to be a friend of God. Acts is a sequel to Luke’s Gospel. It focuses on Jesus’ continuing presence and power and direction in the apostles through the Holy Spirit. Acts is sometimes called “The Gospel of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus “ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father.” The apostles had been commissioned by Jesus and blessed with the Holy Spirit already in the Upper Room on Easter Sunday. In this lesson, Luke tells of Jesus giving them instructions through the Holy Spirit during the weeks that followed the resurrection.

205. Why didn’t Jesus just tell them, “You have your assignment; get to work!”

The apostles still didn’t understand the nature of the Kingdom Jesus was establishing. They asked, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

206. How are we too at times tempted to force our agenda on the Lord’s kingdom?

207. What did Jesus say His gift of the Holy Spirit would do for the apostles?

Jesus outlined the mission they would carry out for Him. Paraphrase Jesus’ words to fit our own location. As we hear Him describe its outreach, we can use adjectives to say that the mission is to be ____, ____, ____, and ____.

Jesus’ ascension came to a climax when “a cloud took Him out of their sight.” Clouds were frequently the setting for theophanies in Scripture. Witnessing this event assured the apostles again that Jesus is ____.

208. What assurance did the angels bring the wondering apostles?

Luke listed the eleven apostles and the group who waited with them, which included Jesus’ mother, Mary, and His brothers, and tells us they “joined together constantly in prayer”—no doubt praising their living Lord and asking that His promise of power in the Holy Spirit be fulfilled (see 1:12–14). In our worship life, we, too, are “waiting” for Pentecost. We still exult in Easter praise, but we recognize also our need of power in the Holy Spirit to be faithful disciples as we carry out our commission to represent Jesus in our world.

209. How does this First Lesson tie in with the emphasis of today’s Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Ephesians 1:15–23

Paul told the Ephesian Christians that they had gained a reputation for ___ in the Lord Jesus and ___ toward all the saints.

210. Does our congregation enjoy a reputation like that of the Ephesian Christians?

211. What spiritual blessing did Paul keep asking God to give them?

212. If we know we have been saved by grace through Jesus, and we even believe that in His grace God chose us in Christ before He created the world, why should we, like Paul, keep on praying for “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him”? How may we work at gaining that spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him that God wants to give us?

Paul tells us that it is when the eyes of our hearts are enlightened that we will be able to know the ___ to which He has called us, “the ___ of His ___ in the saints,” and “the ___ toward us who believe.”

213. What amazing thing did Paul say about the Christ—now exalted to God’s right hand, under whose feet God has place all things—in His relationship to the Church?

214. What equally amazing thing does he say about the Church in its relationship with its Lord Jesus as the Head of everything as it carries out the mission He has assigned to us?