

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

### [The Ascension]

Today we acknowledge that Jesus has ascended into heaven.

We’re familiar with how it happened.

We just heard about it in today’s reading from Acts.

In fact, we’ve been hearing about it all year long!

It was that day, surrounded by His disciples on a hill outside Jerusalem,  
that Christ commanded (though not in so many words):

“*Go into all the world and preach the Gospel!*”

So we respond: “***Here I am!***”

Then Jesus lifted up His hands,

gave a final blessing,

and was gloriously “*lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight.*”

(Luke 24:50)

(Acts 1:9)

Yes, we all know Jesus ascended into heaven.

But have you ever stopped to think about these events?

Why Jesus went *up* via *cloud*?

It is not as though heaven is literally “up,” spatially, in the physical sky.

He could have opened a portal to that magnificent dimension.

Or simply disappeared, as He had in many ways before:

He made Himself invisible to a crowd that meant to stone Him,

(John 8)

unrecognizable on the road to Emmaus,

(Luke 24)

and simply vanished from the Upper Room just as He appeared!

(John 20)

And why go away at all?

He had already conquered Death!

His disciples weren’t silly for expecting Him to reign in fullness now:

“*Lord will you at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?*” they asked. (Acts 1:6)

Some of those answers are not for us to know.

(Acts 1:7)

Perhaps they will be revealed to us when He returns in the same way He left.

(Acts 1:11)

But we do have answers to some of those questions.

And those answers are filled with Good News.

### [Majestic]

Take that first question: why go *up*?

When God created the heavens above,

He gave us a reminder of His Kingdom’s immenseness and majesty,  
of the light and clarity there.

When pastor begins the Service of the Sacrament,  
he will direct you to “*Lift up your hearts!*” (Colossians 3:1)  
And we will “*lift them up unto the Lord!*”  
This is not an empty gesture!  
It is not naïve to “look up” when we lift our hearts to God—it is natural!  
Going “up” was a way to remind us of the majesty of God,  
of the majesty of His creation,  
of the majesty that Christ restores to us.

When the Soviets put a man in space,  
their propagandists used it to prove that God is not “up.”  
Yet the man they put into orbit, Yuri Garagarin, said:  
“*A man cannot be suspended in space and not have God in his mind and his heart.*”  
Looking “up,” we cannot help but be reminded of God’s infinite **majesty**.  
He is **majestic**.

### [Mediator]

Going “up” is fitting for a **majestic** Savior, but why go up in a *cloud*?  
Why not a magnificent chariot of fire or a whirlwind like Elijah? (2 Kings 2)  
Why not walk up Jacob’s Stairway? (Genesis 28)

Throughout the Scriptures, clouds have symbolized God’s presence in His creation—  
how He **mediates** between Himself and humanity.  
When Noah left the ark, (Genesis 9)  
God placed His bow in the *clouds*.  
When God led His people from Egypt, (Genesis 17)  
he led them in a pillar of *cloud* for 40 years,  
shielding them from the elements and their enemies.  
When Moses **mediated** with God on behalf of the People, (Genesis 13)  
he did so enveloped by a *cloud* on top of Mt. Sinai.  
And when Jesus, who is far greater than Moses, (Matthew 17, Mark 9, Luke 9, John 1)  
Was Transfigured, the voice from heaven spoke through the *clouds*.

The Mediator between God and Man **mediates** in a *cloud* of glory.  
Jesus went up in a *cloud* to prove that we have a **Mediator** between God and Man.  
Someone who pleads our case before His Father.  
This is a proof of God’s love for us.

When we pray, He hears us!  
The Lord answers, calls to us, and we respond: “***Here I am!***”  
Yes, with that Old Testament word of acknowledgement:  
“*Hineni! I am acknowledged!*”  
*I can stand before the throne of God with confidence because of Him!*”

## [Merciful]

This highlights another aspect of our **majestic Mediator**:

He is **merciful**.

Luke began this account of Acts in the same way he began his Gospel.

(Acts 1:1, Luke 1:3)

Both books are addressed to “Theophilus.”

A name that literally means “God-loved” or “Beloved of God.”

You are all loved by God; you are all Theophiluses.

(Or Theophilusees? Theophilites? Tehophilusen? Theophiloi? Theophilii? Theophili?)

We’ll just keep it singular.

That’s more fitting anyway.

God’s Word is addressed to *you*, personally, *Theophilus*.

*You*.

Despite your sins,

Despite your inability to fully trust Him on your own,

Despite your tendency to look down at worldly troubles or distractions

rather than *up* to Him...

Your Lord and Savior is truly *your* personal Lord and Savior.

Jesus Christ died *for you*, personally.

When He returns to judge the living and the dead,

It will be *His* righteousness acknowledged

in place of your own wickedness.

He is **merciful**.

## [Mighty]

Leaving *up* in a *cloud* is proof that our **majestic Mediator** is **merciful**.

But why *leave* at all?

We may be tempted to say something akin to Mary at the death of Lazarus:

“*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*”

(John 11:21-23)

Wouldn’t it be nice if Jesus was still here.

If He had established His Kingdom in its fullness then?

Yet He did not.

Instead, He told His disciples it was not for them to know when He would.

It is not for us to know the mind of God.

Consider where He ascended to:

We confess that He now sits at the right hand of the Father.

(We read the Scriptural proof in today’s reading from Ephesians.)

(Ephesians 1:20)

It’s a way of saying that He is in a place of power, authority—

Our **majestic Mediator** is **mighty**.

He shares that **might**,  
that authority,  
with *us* through the Holy Spirit.

In John's Gospel, Jesus explained:

*"I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."*

(John 16:7)

He left, so that we would receive the Holy Spirit.

But that story is for Pentecost – you'll have to wait for next week!

### [Mission]

And in another sense, our **majestic, merciful, mighty Mediator** has not left at all.

Wherever two or more are gathered in His name, there He is also.

(Matthew 18:20)

And more than that, we can see, touch and taste Him.

He gives Himself to us in Holy Communion,  
where we receive His promises.

His promises are good forever!

They apply to you, *O Theophilus!*

He will return with glory to judge the living and the dead.

He has already judged you according to *His own* goodness.

He wants to share that **message** with all people.

Our **majestic, merciful, mighty Mediator** is on a **mission**.

You are to join Him!

Men of Galilee

–or, rather, *men and women of Iowa City*–

why do you sit here looking up into the heavens?

Or down into your bellies with worry,

Or around at the world's distractions?

Christ says, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel!"

It is time you respond: "***Here I am!***"

In Jesus name. Amen.

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**Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous deeds among the people. Amen! (Psalm 96:3)**

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