

Greetings from God the Father and from our Risen and Ascended Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and from the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Acts 1:1–11

Christ began and it continues

In the First Reading for today we heard these words read from the Book of Acts, ***In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.***

Luke's first book was the Gospel of Luke. Now Luke records these words of Jesus that He spoke to His disciples just before He ascended into heaven: ***And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*** After speaking these words Luke records: ***So when they had come***

together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

End of Story, or as the movie ends the screen displays THE END, Jesus goes into heaven and the Apostles receive the Holy Spirit and so Christ being with you ends. Right? No!

However, many times we act like it is that Christ is no longer with us in our lives. Even the way we talk and think or look at the church here in San Bernardino as tho Jesus is not present among us? When was it the last time you remembered you were meeting Jesus this Sunday. And you invited someone else to come and see Jesus in hearing of the Gospel?

Many times your human reasoning is puzzled by this mystery and blessings from our Lord. We think “if Jesus ascended into heaven--and He did as our Scripture readings make so clear--then He is gone from us, right?” He went up into the sky until a cloud hid Him from sight. He talked about going away--and then He went away, promising to return. He said that if He didn't go away, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would not come.

Is that why Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit, to take His place until He returns on the Last Day in all His glory? Is the Holy Spirit a substitute for Jesus until the end of the age? For many, the answer is if Jesus has ascended into Heaven, He can't be in two places at once! And so you have to wait until you go to Heaven to see Him, unless He returns first. That's why when you enter most churches today, you will find no altar or no crucifix--nothing that would even hint that Jesus is there. Of course, we Lutherans are different--at least we're supposed to be. That's why the altar is so prominent in our architecture. That's why Lutheran churches, for so long, have had crucifixes for all to see. For we believe that Jesus actually shows up in our worship services. That's why we have the nerve to call a worship service a “Divine Service,”

When Jesus told the Eleven, His Apostles, at the end of St. Matthew's Gospel, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age,” He wasn't just

leaving them with some sentimental-sounding words. Nor was Jesus saying that He would only be with them in Spirit.

What did Jesus tell the Eleven to do, when He had gathered them on the mountaintop, before His ascension? I'm sure you know. He told them, the disciples, to engaged in baptizing and teaching. In Lutheran shorthand, others are brought to the faith and kept in the faith in Christ's Church through His Word and Sacraments. In this case, Baptism and the Lord's Supper are Sacraments and teaching is the delivery of the spoken Word. But how could Jesus be with the Eleven, as He said, until the end of the age? The Eleven, the Apostles, would soon all die. And then what would happen to the Word and Sacrament ministry they were given to do. That had to go on until the end of the age, right, until Jesus returns on the Last Day? Yes, it did--and it does.

And so Jesus is still with us today as He promised in Word and Sacrament, until the end of the age. And so even today, Jesus really is here with us--and we can see Him, if we have the eyes of faith! For we are to take Jesus at His Word. And so we believe that He is still among us just as He has promised--even though He has ascended into heaven. If Jesus is God--and He is--then He can do that!

The risen and ascended Lord of the Church is with us. That's why the Divine Service is not really about us serving the divine God. More importantly, it's that the divine incarnate Son of God is here and has gathered us around Him--not to be served--but to serve us. You don't come here to do something for God; you come here for God to do something for you. Christ serves you to strengthen and sustain your faith and for Him to reflect His Word and His Love to others through you. Like Moses who went up Mount Sinai and saw God face to face. He reflected God's Glory when He came down from the mountain. We as His children are served by Him here today. And so we can reflect His Love to others as we come down from the mountain.

Yes, the divine Lord of the Church is with us! This is holy ground! And so we are to be filled with awe and reverence, realizing that what Jesus promised to His Apostles is still true. He will be with us and we can still see Him, even to the end of the age.

Jesus' ascension has changed how He reveals Himself to us. Jesus is still here with us, revealing Himself in His Words and in His deeds, not simply the words and deeds of back then, but in the Words and Deeds that He brings to us, today. Yes, even today, Jesus still speaks His Words of forgiveness and Peace to us. Today, Jesus still washes us clean of sin in

the regenerating waters of baptism and in His feast of His precious body and blood.

Jesus invites you and all to come and hear His Word. Jesus has not abandoned you like a common orphan. No, He has adopted you into the family of God and continues to serve you in His Divine Service. And so Jesus is here, right now! He is here to serve you, to feed you, to clothe you in His righteousness, and to take you safely to your heavenly home.

And may the peace of God, which is beyond all human comprehension, keep your hearts and minds through your faith in Christ Jesus. Amen