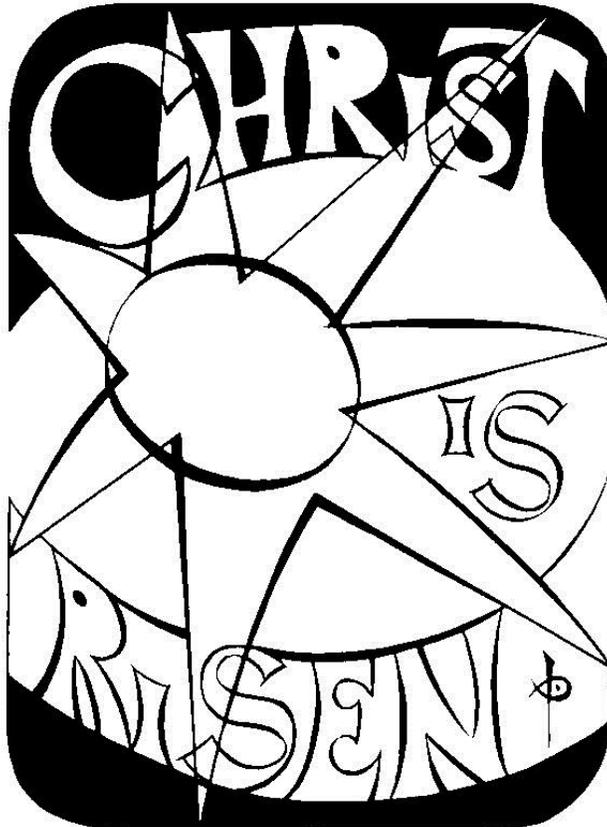


**St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
*A Family Connecting in Christ*



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## WELCOME TO ST. JOHN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

If you join us online, please "Connect With Us" on our Worship Online archive page! Click on the "Connect With Us" box and let us know who and how you are. Thank you!

May 24, 2020

### DIVINE SERVICE II

**IN OUR WORLD TODAY ...** we look around and we might not see God doing what we want. For some people, the conclusion is painful - "Where is God? God must not care." For some people, the conclusion is victorious - "I don't see God, so see - there is no God!"

**IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ...** we rejoice in the truth that Jesus the Christ is in heaven ruling at God's right hand for the welfare of his Bride, the Church. As Jesus rules, we shouldn't expect him to always work public, easily seen miracles. In the same way, we shouldn't expect him to always work immediate solutions. Instead, we get to know that our God - even when we can't see it - is working his eternal plan behind the scenes. And that is exactly what we need!

#### OPENING HYMN

*"A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing"*

**Hymn 171**

(vs. 1-4)

A hymn of glory let us sing!  
New songs throughout the world shall ring:  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Christ, by a road before untrod,  
Ascends unto the throne of God.  
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

The holy apostolic band  
Upon the Mount of Olives stand,  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
And with his followers they see  
Their Lord ascend in majesty.  
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

To them the shining angels cry,  
“Why stand and gaze upon the sky?”  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
“This is the Savior,” thus they say.  
“This is his glorious triumph day.”  
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

“You see him now, ascending high  
Up to the portals of the sky.”  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
“Hereafter Jesus you shall see  
Returning in great majesty.”  
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

#### INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
C: **Amen.**

#### CONFESSION

M: Dear friends, let us approach God with a true heart and confess our sins,  
asking him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us.  
C: **Lord of life, I confess that I am by nature dead in sin.**  
**For faithless worrying and selfish pride,**  
**For sins of habit and sins of choice,**  
**For the evil I have done and the good I have failed to do,**  
**I deserve to be cast away from your presence forever.**  
**O Lord, I am sorry for my sins. Forgive me, for Jesus' sake.**

## ABSOLUTION

M: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. In his great mercy, God made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in our sins. Hear the word of Christ through his called servant:

I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

## LORD, HAVE MERCY †

### *Kyrie*

M: In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

For the well-being of all people everywhere, that they may receive from you all they need to sustain body and life, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: For the spread of your life-giving gospel throughout the world, that all who are lost in sin may be brought to faith in you, hear our prayer, O Christ.

C: **Christ, have mercy.**

M: For patience and perseverance in this life, that we may not lose the hope of heaven as we await your return, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: Lord of life, live in us that we may live for you.

C: **Amen.**

## HYMN

### *“A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing”*

#### **Hymn 171**

(vs. 5-6)

Be now our joy on earth, O Lord,

And be our future great reward.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Then, throned with you forever, we

Shall praise your name eternally.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

† Kyrie is the Greek word for Lord. The expression “Lord, have mercy” is one of the oldest worship responses in the Christian church

O risen Christ, ascended Lord,  
All praise to you let earth accord.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
You are, while endless ages run,  
With Father and with Spirit one.  
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**PRAYER OF THE DAY** (*Spoken together*)

**Lord Jesus, King of glory, today we celebrate your ascension far above the heavens and that you sit at God's right hand ruling over all. Remind us that we are not alone, and send us your Holy Spirit so that - even in all trials and temptations - we live with your confidence and share your love; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

**HOLY GOSPEL**

Luke 24:44-53

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 Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and 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."

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. [Acts 1:9-11 ... he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood

beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."]

Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

**HYMN**

*"On Christ's Ascension I Now Build"*

**Hymn 173**

On Christ's ascension I now build  
The hope of my ascension.  
This hope alone has always stilled  
All doubt and apprehension;  
For where the head is, there as well  
I know his members are to dwell  
When Christ shall come and call them.

Since Christ returned to claim his throne,  
Great gifts for me obtaining,  
My heart shall rest in him alone,  
No other rest remaining,  
For where my treasure went before,  
There all my thoughts shall ever soar  
To still their deepest yearning.

Oh, grant, dear Lord, this grace to me,  
Recalling your ascension,  
That I may serve you faithfully,  
Adorning your redemption;  
And then, when all my days will cease,  
Let me depart in joy and peace  
In answer to my pleading.

**EPISTLE**

Ephesians 1:16-23

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

**HYMN OF THE DAY***“Alleluia! Sing to Jesus”***Hymn 169**

Alleluia! Sing to Jesus;  
His the scepter, his the throne;  
Alleluia! His the triumph,  
His the victory alone.  
Hark! The songs of peaceful Zion  
Thunder like a mighty flood:  
“Jesus out of ev'ry nation  
Has redeemed us by his blood.”

Alleluia! Bread of heaven,  
Here on earth our food, our stay;  
Alleluia! Here the sinful  
Flee to you from day to day.  
Intercessor, Friend of sinners,  
Earth's Redeemer, hear our plea  
Where the songs of all the sinless  
Sweep across the crystal sea.

Alleluia! Not as orphans  
Are we left in sorrow now;  
Alleluia! He is near us;  
Faith believes, nor questions how.  
Though the cloud from sight received him  
When the forty days were o'er,  
Shall our hearts forget his promise:  
"I am with you evermore"?

May 24, 2020 - Ascension Day

Esther 6

Do you ever wonder: "God, where are you? Jesus, where have you gone? What in the world are you up to?" Well, let me take you to a time and place where God is nowhere to be seen or heard.

This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled the middle-east from India to Egypt and beyond, from India to the edge of Greece. The time is about 480 years before Jesus is born. The place is Susa in modern-day Iran. Xerxes is throwing a party for all the big-wigs of the empire. He wants their support, so for 180 days he wines them, dines them, tells them how great he is, how great they are, how great the kingdom is. But of God, nothing is seen or heard.

Then Xerxes throws a second party, this one only 7 days. By day 7, Xerxes has had so much to drink he gets an idea. He wants to show off his trophy wife to his guests. He orders his wife, the Queen, to leave the party she was throwing; he orders her to appear and show off what a fine-looking wife she is. You can imagine how that goes over - she refuses. And high-spirited Xerxes? He's not just a bit put out; he divorces her as wife; deposes her as queen; and sends out a royal edict throughout the empire - "every man should be ruler over his own household." That'll show 'em. And of God, nothing is seen or heard.

Fast forward a few years. The mighty Xerxes has gone off to war, but he comes home a loser. Not only a loser at love, but now a loser at war. He needs a new queen to make him look and feel like a winner. So his boys propose a beauty

contest. The most beautiful girls from all over the empire would be brought in to Xerxes for his harem, for Xerxes to try out. Xerxes liked the idea. I'm not sure what the young girls - or their moms and dads - thought of the idea - a night with a drunken king and then a life of wondering and waiting and nothing to live for. At any rate, one of the young girls chosen was a young Jewish girl, Esther, an orphan. Her mom and dad had died, and now she was taken care of by her cousin Mordecai, until she was drafted for Xerxes' harem, drafted to be tried out by Xerxes. After a year of beauty and skin treatments, when it was Esther's turn to be tried out, Xerxes liked what he saw; he liked what he touched; and he made Esther his queen. But of God, nothing is seen or heard.

Now it wasn't just beautiful young girls who were in danger in Xerxes' empire. And it wasn't just Xerxes who needed to hear people tell him how great he was. Haman - the man Xerxes had set up as his number 2 - he liked to see, he needed to hear people tell him how great he was. But Esther's cousin Mordecai, Mordecai the Jew, wouldn't; he wouldn't kneel before Haman. That slight got under Haman's skin. He so wants Mordecai dead; he wants all Jews dead. He talks Xerxes into ordering that all throughout the empire all the Jews are to be killed, all their property plundered, on a day set by casting lots. The lots were cast. The order goes out. But of God, nothing is seen or heard.

Now what if Haman has his way? God had promised Abraham that through Abraham's "Jewish" family, God would bless the world. God had promised David that through his "Jewish" son, God would rule forever. God had promised through Isaiah: **"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever."** God had promised through Jeremiah: **"The days are coming, when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness."**

What Mordecai thought of those promises, we just don't know. But we do know what those promises mean for us - a Savior! In a world where so much is wrong, the promise of a King who will do what is right for his people, a King who will make life right for his people, a King who will make us right for life with God! Better than a year of beauty treatments, in baptism he washes us, forgives us, and covers us in his righteousness to be the bride of Christ! Not just a plaything in his harem, but to be his bride with him forever in heaven. That's God's promise for you! But if Haman were to have his way, all those promises of a Savior would be undone. And yet, of God, nothing is seen or heard.

We don't know how much Mordecai thought of those promises; we just don't know. But we do know that Mordecai thought of himself and Queen Esther. He sent word to Esther: "Beg the king for mercy." He appeals to her fear: "Don't think you'll escape." He appeals to her sense of duty: "**Who knows but that you have become queen for such a time as this?**"

Esther approaches the king; she begs for a banquet, for supper with Xerxes and Haman. Haman is fired up - he's invited to supper with the King and the Queen! He sees Mordecai disrespect him and he's fired up even more - Mordecai must die; all Jews must die. Tomorrow he'll ask to have Mordecai killed. But still, nothing is seen or heard of God.

That night Xerxes can't sleep. He orders that someone read to him from the record of his reign. And what do they read about? How one day years ago, Mordecai had saved the king's life. Xerxes wants to thank Mordecai; he wonders how. Meanwhile, Haman is so eager to have Mordecai killed he's there at the palace waiting his turn. Xerxes asks: "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Haman naturally thinks Xerxes must want to honor him, so Haman lays it on thick - the one the king wants to honor should be given a parade; he should be paraded throughout the city wearing the king's clothes, riding the king's horse. Xerxes approves, and he appoints Haman to do the honors for Mordecai. Haman's mortified! He went to Xerxes to have Mordecai killed, and now he's the one parading Mordecai through the city: "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!" Maybe God wasn't as absent as he seemed to be.

That night, Haman is brought back for an encore banquet with the King and Queen. Xerxes asks his Queen: "What can I do for you?" Esther begs: "Spare my life; spare the lives of my people!" Xerxes doesn't know what to think: "Who would want you dead?" Esther answers: "This vile Haman." Xerxes tears out of the room in a rage. Haman turns to Esther begging for his life. He falls on Esther's couch just as Xerxes comes back into the room. Not a good look. You can imagine what Xerxes thinks. And Haman is sent to the gallows he had built for Mordecai. Perhaps God wasn't as absent as he seemed to be.

But what about Haman's plan? What about the edict to have all the Jews killed? Well, Xerxes sets Mordecai and Esther up to undo Haman's plan. On the day set for the Jews to be killed, the Jews now had permission from the king to fight and defend themselves. And that is what they did. Maybe God wasn't as absent as he seemed to be.

Maybe God wasn't as absent as he seemed to be. Our eyes and ears, our senses and thinking don't determine whether God is or what God is doing. Whether we see it or not, whether we believe it or not, God is ... and God is always working his plan. Maybe not always the way we expect or want, but always in a way that keeps his promises!

And so we learn the lesson of Esther! There in Susa, behind the scenes, God did his thing. And today, behind the scenes, from God's right hand in heaven, Jesus does his thing. We won't always see or hear or know what he is doing. But whether we see it or not, what do we know? God will work his way; he will keep his promises - for you!

## APOSTLES' CREED

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

## HYMN

*"Be Still, My Soul"*  
Hymn 415

Be still, my soul; the Lord is on your side;  
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;  
Leave to your God to order and provide;  
In ev'ry change he faithful will remain.  
Be still, my soul; your best, your heav'nly friend  
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul; your God will undertake  
To guide the future as he has the past.  
Your hope, your confidence, let nothing shake;  
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.  
Be still, my soul; the waves and winds still know  
His voice who ruled them while he lived below.

Be still, my soul, though dearest friends depart  
And all is darkened in the vale of tears;  
Then you will better know his love, his heart,

Who comes to soothe your sorrows and your fears.  
Be still, my soul; your Jesus can repay  
From his own fullness all he takes away.

Be still, my soul; the hour is hast'ning on  
When we shall be forever with the Lord,  
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,  
Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.  
Be still, my soul; when change and tears are past,  
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

### PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

M: Almighty God, we acknowledge with thanks that all we have and enjoy is a gift from your gracious hand. We come before you today in heartfelt appreciation for our nation and its people.

**C: We thank you for enabling us to worship you in freedom and to serve you without fear.**

M: You have enriched us with the bounties of farm and factory, the beauty of forest and mountain, and the marvels of medicine and science.

**C: For all these blessings, we praise and glorify you.**

M: Look with favor upon our nation, and preserve our cherished liberties. Enable our leaders to govern with wisdom, honesty, courage and justice. Protect those who serve in the armed forces and those who maintain peace and safety in our communities.

**C: Give us willingness to obey our nation's laws and to work for the common good.**

M: Secure our financial institutions and strengthen our economy for all people. Bless our fields that they may produce abundant harvests. Guard us from calamities of nature and accident, and spare our land from the ravages of disease and epidemic.

**C: Teach us not to worry but to cast all our cares on you.**

M: Strengthen the homes of our nation. By your Spirit lead husbands and wives to love each other, parents to nurture their children, young adults to assume responsibility, and children to show respect.

Hear us, Lord, as we bring you our private petitions.

M: Heavenly Father, we come to you and ask you for your grace to rest upon our military serving throughout the world. We ask that you keep them safe and watch over them with your loving care. Protect them as they protect us. Bless them and their families for their selfless acts of service. Bind up the broken-hearted and heal those who have been wounded. Comfort those who are grieving and strengthen those in need of courage. Grant our leaders wisdom and firm resolve. Please bring peace to lands filled with conflict and strife. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus who is the Prince of Peace.

To you, O Lord, we bring our thanks and our requests.

C: **Hear our prayers for Jesus' sake. Amen.**

#### **LORD'S PRAYER**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

#### **BLESSING**

M: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.

C: **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

*"Draw Us to Thee"*  
Hymn 170

Draw us to thee, For then shall we  
Walk in thy steps forever  
And hasten on  
Where thou art gone  
To be with thee, dear Savior.

Draw us to thee, Lord, lovingly;  
Let us depart with gladness  
That we may be  
Forever free  
From sorrow, grief, and sadness.

Draw us to thee; Oh, grant that we  
May walk the road to heaven!  
Direct our way  
Lest we should stray  
And from thy paths be driven.

Draw us to thee That also we  
Thy heav'nly bliss inherit  
And ever dwell  
Where sin and hell  
No more can vex our spirit.

Draw us to thee Unceasingly;  
Into thy kingdom take us.  
Let us fore'er  
Thy glory share;  
Thy saints and joint heirs make us.

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