

thESource *Worship*

An Ascension Journey

by Lee Hovel

Introduction

Through the church year we have followed Jesus on a journey from the cradle to the empty tomb. At ascension we come to the end of Jesus' earthly pilgrimage. Jesus now ascends to rule with His Father. The church on ascension celebrates God's great victory. The task He sent His Son to complete is finished. We now are called to continue the journey and live for our Lord, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

This ascension worship event is designed for the whole church family. The service is patterned after a progressive dinner. Instead of each stop having food, however, each stop will be a place where we will celebrate a place Jesus stopped on His journey on earth. We will remember the most important stops on Jesus' journey, and so be encouraged on the journey our Lord has called us to be on. Our ascension journey will have six stops. Each stop is planned for only 15 minutes; leave 5-10 minutes to travel to the next stop. We suggest the first and the last stop be at your church, the other stops at members' homes. Plan for no more than 20-25 people in each home at one time. If more people sign up, have more than one journey route.

Please read the entire design carefully, then recruit homes for the stops. Ask each host to provide the materials needed at each stop. Some of the materials will need to come from you, the leader. Adapt this program to your congregation's and group's needs. Ask people to sign up so you know how many people to plan for. It is possible to hold the entire event at church by moving from room to room.

Journey Stop 1 — The Mount of Our Lord's Ascension

Materials Needed

- Maps for people to find each stop
- A Bible with Acts 1:6-11 marked
- Copies of a hymn to sing
- Explanation of the journey

Structure

1. Gather in your sanctuary.
2. Begin with an Ascension hymn (choose your own).
3. Pray the collect for ascension: "Grant, we pray, almighty God, that even as we believe your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into heaven, so we may also in heart and mind ascend and continually dwell there with him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever." (from Lutheran Worship)
4. Read the ascension lesson (Acts 1:6-11).
5. Explain the upcoming events: As Jesus ascended into heaven, His disciples had many feelings—feelings of loss, fear, anxiety. They were challenged to continue the journey Jesus began. Today we will remember the special events in Jesus' life, so that we can be strengthened for our journey, which is the challenge to carry Jesus' cross into the world and share the Good News. (Explain how you have designed your special event. Give out the maps. Tell the group when you expect them back at church.)

Journey Stop 2 — Christmas: God's Yes

Materials Needed

- Recorded Christmas music
- Christmas tree (artificial) with lights
- Christmas ornaments (one to give to each person). Each ornament should have a Christmas symbol and the word "Yes" on it. Use these ornaments to decorate the tree.
- A sheet of Christmas carols
- A Bible with 2 Corinthians 1:18-22 marked
- A copy of the "Yes" litany for each person
- Christmas cookies and punch

Structure

1. As the people arrive, have Christmas music playing.
2. Gather around the Christmas tree. Light the tree and sing a few Christmas carols. Read the lesson (2 Corinthians 1:18-22).
3. Read the "Yes" litany printed below.
4. Give each person a Christmas "Yes" ornament.
5. Sing one more carol if time permits.
6. Call the next place and tell them you are on your way. Go to the next stop.

"Yes" Litany

Leader: *And* is a connecting word.

Response: We, the people of God, are connected to God through His promises, and through His people who had faith in those promises.

Leader: *And* is a word of continuation.

Response: God came in the past through His Word and His Son, and promises to come again. Our Lord still creatively continues to come to us today.

Leader: *And* is a word of addition.

Response: Christ comes into our lives to add meaning and purpose to our living.

Leader: And God said, "Yes," through His Word. His Word sets in motion the means of grace and gives meaning to all our living. And God said, "Life."

Response: At God's Word, creation began. God said, "Let there be earth, light, animals, birds, mountains, water, and man."

Leader: And God said, "Love."

Response: The Word of God became the Word alive. The Word became flesh, and lived among us. God said, "Love," in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Leader: And God said, "Live."

Response: God's word of grace liberates us to live free from sin. God's Word pushes us out to share the life of love we have experienced from God. God says "yes" to us so we can say "yes" to the world.

Leader: We experience God's "yes" continually, every day!

Response: In the water of baptism and its remembrance.

Leader: In His daily forgiveness.

Response: In His body and blood.

Leader: In each new day, filled with new possibilities.

Response: In each new birth.

Leader: In death, because of God's promise of life.

Response: In the good things of life—

Leader: Beauty, music, food, entertainment.

Response: Through His people who share His "yes" with one another.

Leader: God's "yes" to us sets the scene for our celebration and worship.

Response: Let us celebrate in word and action God's "yes" to us.

Leader: Our celebration becomes our "yes" to God, our amen, our recognition of His worth to us.

Response: The presence of God's "yes" is among us. Let us celebrate.

Journey Stop 3 — Epiphany: God's Aha!

Materials Needed

- Small candle (with a drip guard if possible) for each person
- A Bible with Matthew 5:14-16 marked
- Epiphany "Aha" litany

Structure

1. Give a candle to each person.
2. After everyone has entered, make the house as dark as possible.
3. Read the Epiphany lesson (Matthew 5:14-16).
4. Have the people light their candles from one another.
5. Read the Epiphany "Aha" litany.
6. Call the next place and tell them you are on your way.

Epiphany "Aha" Litany

Leader: Give me an E
Give me a P
Give me an I
Give me a P
Give me an H
Give me an A
Give me an N
Give me a Y
What's it spell?

Response: Epiphany? What's that?

Leader: It means to shine, to see. A modern day translation might be, "Aha!"

Response: Aha?

Leader: Aha...now you see. Epiphany is a time for us to see Jesus and His love. Epiphany is a time to shine for Jesus and share His love. Epiphany is a time for us to bring our gifts to Jesus as the Wise Men did.

Response: Gifts?

Leader: Yes! The gift of yourself—to shine for Jesus. That's an epiphany.

Response: Aha! Jesus! Amen.

Journey Stop 4 — Lent: God's Love, a Savior

Materials Needed

- A Lenten cross with a white candle in the center and six purple candles on the arms
- Ashes or some other material to make a cross on each person's forehead. Another option might be a washable marking pen to make a cross on each person's hand.
- A Bible with Mark 15:33-39 marked
- Copy for each person of "Seven Last Words" litany (printed below)
- A copy of the song "Were You There?" for each person (printed below)
- A pocket cross to give to each person (available at Christian book stores)
- Pretzels or hot cross buns.

Structure

1. Have the Lenten cross candles lit before the people arrive.
2. As each person arrives, mark him or her with a cross on the forehead or hand. Gather the people around the cross.
3. Read the Bible lesson (Mark 15:33-39).
4. Read the "Seven Last Words" litany, extinguishing each candle at the appropriate time.
5. While in darkness, sing "Were You There?".
6. After the song, light the Christ candle again.
7. Share pretzels or hot cross buns.
8. Call the next place and tell them you are on your way.

Seven Last Words Litany

Leader: Let us remember our Lord's death for us as we review His last words from the cross.

Men: Father, forgive them. (Silence as the first candle is extinguished.)

Women: Today you will be with Me in paradise. (Silence as the second candle is extinguished.)

Men: Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother. (Silence as the third candle is extinguished.)

Women: My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? (Silence as the fourth candle is extinguished.)

Men: I thirst! (Silence as the fifth candle is extinguished.)

Women: It is finished! (Silence as the sixth candle is extinguished.)

All: Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit. (Silence as the seventh candle is extinguished.)

Song: "Were You There?"

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when the crucified my Lord?

Leader: Light the Christ candle once again.

All: I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.

Journey Stop 5 — Easter: God's Alleluia

Materials Needed

- Plastic Easter eggs that come apart (one for each person)
- Pieces of paper. Write AL or LE or LU or IA on each piece. Place one piece of paper in each egg.
- Places in the house or yard to hide the eggs
- A Bible with Matthew 28:1-10 marked
- Copies of the "Alleluia Wave" litany for each person (see below)
- Hard-boiled or chocolate Easter eggs for each person

Structure

1. Have the eggs hidden before the people arrive. As the people arrive, invite them to go on an Easter egg hunt.
2. When the Easter egg hunt is over, group the ALs, LEs, LUs, and IAs together for the Alleluia Wave.
3. Read the Easter story from Matthew 28:1-10.
4. Do the Alleluia Wave. All ALs, LEs, LUs, and IAs shout together at the appropriate time.
5. Share hard-boiled or chocolate eggs.
6. Return to the church for the conclusion.

Alleluia Wave Litany

The "Alleluia Wave" takes its inspiration from the popular wave actions at sporting events. Participants group together according to the slips of paper in their eggs. At each wave section, worshipers rise to raise their hands and show their praise in wave fashion. The wave is repeated three times between each verse section. ("Alleluia Wave" was written for the 1986 LCMS Youth Gathering, "On Wings Like Eagles," by Rev. Dean Nadasdy.)

Leader 1: For the faith that crowns our days

Leader 2: Let's begin a wave of praise!

The Wave: AL-LE-LU-IA! AL-LE-LU-IA! AL-LE-LU-IA!

Leader 1: For His justice for all nations

Leader 2: Stand and shout your adoration!

The Wave: AL-LE-LU-IA! AL-LE-LU-IA! AL-LE-LU-IA!

Leader 1: For His mercy, all-abounding

Leader 2: Lift your hands up, praise resounding!

The Wave: AL-LE-LU-IA! AL-LE-LU-IA! AL-LE-LU-IA!

Leader 1: For the hope that lasts forever

Leader 2: Stop the waves of praises? Never!

The Wave: AL-LE-LU-IA! AL-LE-LU-IA! AL-LE-LU-IA!

Journey Stop 6 — Ascension: God's Victory

Materials Needed

- Elements for the Sacrament (your pastor should be involved in the planning and celebration)
- Copies of the litany, printed below, for each person

Structure

1. Enter the sanctuary; sing a few favorite hymns.
2. Have the pastor lead the Closing Litany, printed below.
3. Following the Confession, the pastor speaks the Words of Institution. The Sacrament is shared.
4. The pastor leads the benediction.

Closing Litany

Pastor: We have seen again the Savior's love. We have followed His footsteps and now we are invited to taste the goodness of the Lord.

Men: He is the "yes" to all of God's promises.

Women: God's great "Aha," Jesus, shines in our darkness. We now are His great "Aha" to the world, shining brightly with the light of His love.

Men: God's great "yes," His shining "aha," now shows us what the name, Jesus, means: "Savior!"

Women: God's great "yes," His "aha," the loving Savior lives forever. We now have His promise that we will live with Him forever, and our response is:

All: AL-LE-LU-IA! (each group shouts their letters)

Pastor: We have heard some important words. We have two more words to share: victory and always! We have followed where our Savior walked. We are called to walk with Him, to carry His cross in the world, and to shine brightly for Him.

Congregation: We are ready to shine brightly and celebrate His presence among us.

Pastor: We have come to celebrate the feast of victory for our God. He has ascended into heaven and rules for all eternity. He has placed all enemies that would threaten us under His feet and has promised us victory over our sins. Come now, and confess your sins, and receive the assurance of our great God's forgiveness.

The Confession

Pastor: Let us confess our sins in the presence of God and one another.

Congregation: Our sins get the best of us, Father, and we are deprived of joy, love, and even life itself. Forgive us for being so easily defeated by the power of sin, even to the point that we are insensitive to Your presence and the needs of other humans. Come into our midst and give us the "yes" of your forgiveness.

Pastor: Lift up your hearts and hear the good news: Our King, God's "yes," draws us near and brings forgiveness and freedom. Your sins are forgiven. God's "yes" has been spoken.

The Benediction

Pastor: One last word—the "yes" to all God's promises, the "aha" that shines brightly, the "Savior" who shares His love, the "alleluia" we shout, and the "victory" won, calls us to say one more word: Always! Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.

Men: Yes!

Women: Aha!

Men: Savior!

Women: Alleluia!

All: Always (whisper), always (louder), always (shout); Amen!

Pastor: "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. Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God" (Luke 24:50-53). Amen. Depart in peace in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Originally published in Youth Ministry Quarterly 90.4.

Updated and revised for thESource in April 2012.

thESource is published on the Web by LCMS District & Congregational Services—Youth Ministry. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 South Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; 1-800-248-1930; www.youthesource.com. Editor: Sherrah Holobaugh Behrens. VOL. 9 NO. 4. April 2012.