

The Ascension of Our Lord May 30, 2019

Year C – the Gospel of Luke

Lutheran Living the ^ Lectionary

*A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.
An opportunity to make Sunday worship more meaningful and to make the rhythms of the readings part of the rhythms of your life.*

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<https://www.blainsport.org/pastors-blog/ascension-day>

Hymn of the Day

Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 491 The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH)

“Up through endless ranks of angels”

This hymn first appeared in the **Lutheran Book of Worship**, was retained in **Lutheran Worship** and is now in the **Lutheran Service Book**. Since it was not written until 1974, it could not appear in the 1941 **The Lutheran Hymnal**. Text: Jaroslav J. Vajda © 1974 Augsburg Publishing House, Tune (ASCENDED TRIUMPH): © 1973 Henry v. Gerike; setting © 2006 Henry V. Gerike

It can also be sung to the melody (Picardy) of LSB 621, “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent”. This tune begins with an ascending musical scale that goes well with the opening phrase, “Up through endless ranks of angels...”

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxKstPK15QE> Join the [LutheranWarbler](#) as she sings this hymn
- <https://vimeo.com/269258069> Join St John’s Lutheran, Neillsville, Wisconsin as the congregation, choir and a few instrumentalists sing the hymn.

Commentaries have been chosen because the author has written in a way that compliments the reading. Not all of the commentaries are from Lutheran sources. They have been edited for length and in some cases for additional content that is not in keeping with a Lutheran understanding of Scripture. Links are provided for those who wish to read the entire commentary.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

1st Reading – “, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?”

Psalm – “Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!”

Epistle – “I do not cease to give thanks for you”

Gospel – “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures”

Acts 1:1-11; Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), the same reading

“The Ascension seems like the poor cousin among church festivals: often overlooked, passed over without being missed.

A few congregations will worship on the Thursday that comes 40 days after Easter. More congregations will observe the Ascension on the following Sunday, thus bumping the seventh Sunday of Easter from the calendar. Most, I suspect, will simply not observe it at all.

This seems like poor treatment for one of the great ecumenical feasts, and an event that the writer of Luke-Acts thought important enough to narrate twice... (Also in Luke 24:49-52, today’s Gospel)

The author of Acts, as any master story-teller, narrates the ascension without stopping to explain its theological significance, but there are at least three claims narrated here that are worth homiletical attention. The first is that the ascension is the narrative portrayal of Luke’s pervasive claim that Jesus is Lord. This point becomes more explicit later in Acts. In 2:33, Jesus’ ascension is the reason that he can send the Holy Spirit. In Acts 5:31 it is because of his ascension that Jesus can give repentance and forgiveness...”

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1629 [Brian Peterson](#) Professor of New Testament, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, SC

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.³ 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.

⁴ And while staying^[a] 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;⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

The Ascension

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”⁷ He said to them, *“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.⁸ 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.”*⁹ 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.¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,¹¹ 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.”

- a. [Acts 1:4](#) Or *eating*
- b. [Acts 1:5](#) Or *in*

Cross references:

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Acts 1:4 : Luke 24:49 2. Acts 1:5 : ch. 11:16; See Matt. 3:11 3. Acts 1:5 : ch. 11:16; See Matt. 3:11 4. Acts 1:5 : ch. 2:1-4 5. Acts 1:6 : See Luke 17:20 6. Acts 1:6 : [Mic. 4:8; Matt. 17:11; Mark 9:12; Luke 19:11] | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Acts 1:7 : [Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32] 8. Acts 1:7 : Dan. 2:21; 1 Thess. 5:1 9. Acts 1:8 : ch. 4:33; Luke 24:49; 1 Thess. 1:5; [ch. 10:38; Luke 4:14] 10. Acts 1:8 : ver. 5 11. Acts 1:8 : [ver. 22]; See Luke 24:48 12. Acts 1:8 : [Isa. 43:12] 13. Acts 1:8 : ch. 8:1, 14; [Matt. 10:5] 14. Acts 1:8 : ch. 13:47; [Mark 16:15; Col. 1:23] |
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“The book of Acts begins by reminding its reader, Theophilus, of an earlier book -- the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:1-4), placing the reader in the midst of an extended story with Jesus at the center.

The first book portrays Jesus -- the crucified, risen, and ascended redeemer -- in the context of a drastic condensation of world history. It begins with a story of miraculous events, births, and

prophecies that interrupt the lives of a young Joseph and Mary and an older, related Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1-2) who live under the rule of the dominant empire of the first century. From these couples come John the Baptist, who proclaims that the reign of God is near, and Jesus, who brings that reign to fulfillment (Luke 3-4). The rest of the book illustrates how Jesus' story reinterprets all other stories, tracing the roots of his ministry through the history of Israel, the Temple, prophets, the Law, patriarchs and matriarchs, all the way back to Adam, and to God (Luke 3:23-38).

The second book, Acts, retains its links to this primal history and describes a new, equally primal history. The book also begins with a small family, brothers and sisters in Christ, living under the rule of that same empire. As the Holy Spirit empowers them, they will become Christ's "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The reader is welcomed into this narrative with its own miraculous events, rebirths, and prophecies that will interrupt and transform individuals and communities. From the start, these people overcome severe opposition and find the joy of life God intended from the beginning, enduring into the future.

Through the opening interchange between Jesus and the apostles, Acts reminds its readers of their grounding in a central element of history -- God created us for life and preserves us. "After [Jesus'] suffering he presented himself alive to them" (Acts 1:3). Because he has life, we have life. No matter how relentlessly the world seeks to lead us astray or frighten us with the threat of death, or even if Jesus physically departs from the earth, the Holy Spirit keeps alive God's purposes and brings God's life-giving power...

Though, as mentioned above, Acts has moments where the people are advised to wait, it is foremost a record of people and God in motion. Luke and Acts show how people, based on all that Jesus did and taught and all the Spirit empowers them to do, act where they are and wherever God calls them to go. And, so, the two men in white robes say to Jesus' followers, "People wherever you are, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? It's time to move."

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2848
Frank L. Crouch Dean and Vice President, Moravian Theological Seminary, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Psalm 47; RCL, Psalm 47 or 93

"The scope of this psalm is to stir us up to praise God, to stir up all people to do so; and,

I. We are directed in what manner to do it, publicly, cheerfully, and intelligently (v. 1, 6, 7).

II. We are furnished with matter for praise.

1. God's majesty (v. 2).
2. His sovereign and universal dominion (v. 2, 7-9).
3. The great things he had done, and will do, for his people (v. 3-5)..."

- https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Psa/Psa_047.cfm Matthew Henry

God Is King over All the Earth

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.*

47 Clap your hands, all peoples!
 Shout to God with loud songs of joy!
² For the LORD, the Most High, is to be feared,
 a great king over all the earth.
³ He subdued peoples under us,
 and nations under our feet.
⁴ He chose our heritage for us,
 the pride of Jacob whom he loves. **Selah**

⁵ God has gone up with a shout,
 the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.
⁶ Sing praises to God, sing praises!
 Sing praises to our King, sing praises!
⁷ For God is the King of all the earth;
 sing praises with a psalm!^[a]

⁸ God reigns over the nations;
 God sits on his holy throne.
⁹ The princes of the peoples gather
 as the people of the God of Abraham.
 For the shields of the earth belong to God;
 he is highly exalted!

a. [Psalm 47:7](#) Hebrew *maskil*

*” ...Along with his weeding out false religions in Judah, Jehoshaphat appointed certain Levitical families in Jerusalem, "to give judgment for the LORD and to decide disputed cases."

Amongst these Levites were the sons of Korah. These men were warriors, Levitical priests, musicians, writers and singers of Psalms. Psalm 47 is one of their psalms and most commentators, [of Psalm 47], associate this psalm with a victory of Jehoshaphat over the Ammonites, Edomites, Moabites, and [their allies] at which the sons of Korah were present..."

- <https://lutheran-church-regina.com/blogs/post/the-purpose-of-the-lord-fulfilled-psalm-47-sermon-from-august-prayer-service> Mount Olive Lutheran Church - Regina, SK. A member congregation of Lutheran Church Canada.
- Read the full story of Jehoshaphat in 1 Kings 22

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“Since ancient times Psalm 47 has been used for worship.

It is plain to see why Christians have used it on Ascension Day. “God has gone up with a shout” (47:5) brings to mind Jesus’ ascent into heaven. “The early church used the psalm to celebrate the ascension of Jesus, a practice that is commonly followed still in the liturgy of many churches,” observes biblical scholar James Luther Mays...

Long before Easter, Psalm 47 had a place in Israel's worship. It is an enthronement Psalm, not for an earthly king but for God. In Psalm 47, the LORD reigns. Psalm 47 proclaims that God is in heaven, ruling over earth.² The Psalm summits in verse 5: "God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of the trumpet." Some scholars have supposed that 47:5 envisions the entrance of God into the sanctuary, symbolized by the procession of the holy ark of the Covenant. In any case Psalm 47:5 "expresses the theological heart of the psalter, God reigns."³

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1652 [Nancy Koester](#) Adjunct Professor, Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minn.

Ephesians 1:15-23; RCL, the same reading

"Ephesians 1:15-23 is one of the longer prayer sections in Paul's letters.

Rhetorically, Paul's prayer does more than just record the content of his prayer for his audience to read. It serves to (re)establish the vision for their identity and reassert the nature of the faith-life into which they have been called.

Why is Paul doing this, why does he say things in the particular way he does in Ephesians? Context would explain this, of course. But we know little about the context of Paul's audience. It is likely that the original audience may have been broader than the community in Ephesus. Nevertheless, one clear theme is reconciliation in Christ -- reconciliation to God and consequently also to one another, reconciliation that crosses established lines Greco-Roman culture and human traditions had drawn that kept certain peoples apart. Reminding people of our rootedness in God's reconciling action in Christ and of its very real consequences for how we live in relation to one another is something we can never wear out..."

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2245 [Kyle Fever](#) Director of Beyond Ministries, Ingham-Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camps, Lake Okoboji, Iowa

Thanksgiving and Prayer

¹⁵For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love^[a] toward all the saints, ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

- a. [Ephesians 1:15](#) Some manuscripts omit *your love*

"...The opening verses of this book (vv. 1-14) include a greeting from "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God to the saints who are at Ephesus" (v. 1), and a thumbnail sketch of

Paul's theology (vv. 3-14). That sketch opens with a joyful response to the blessings that God has provided, and ascribes blessings or praise to God for his grace (v. 3).

In verses 4-14, Paul outlines the nature of some of those blessings...

Verses 3-14 were one long sentence in the original Greek. Verses 15ff. constitute another lengthy sentence...

EPHESIANS 1:15-16a. I DON'T CEASE TO GIVE THANKS FOR YOU

"For this cause" (Greek: *dia*) (v. 15a). "For this cause" translates the little Greek word *dia*, which has several meanings, depending on its context. In this verse, it means "on account of this" or "for this reason." As used here, it points back to the blessings that Paul outlined in verses 4-14 (see above).

"I also, having heard of the faith (Greek: *pistis*) in the Lord Jesus which is among you" (v. 15b). Paul made a brief visit to Ephesus on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18:19-28). He returned there on his Third Missionary Journey (Acts 19:1), remained in Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31), and founded the church there.

EPHESIANS 1:16b-19. THAT GOD MAY GIVE YOU A SPIRIT OF WISDOM

... **"making mention of you in my prayers"** (v. 16b). What would be the contents of Paul's prayers for these Ephesian Christians? For one thing, he would give thanks for their faith (v. 15), but he would also petition God to give them "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (v. 17). He would pray that they might "know what is the hope of his calling"—and that they might know "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (v. 18) and "the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe" (v. 19)...

Paul is praying is that God will reveal himself to these Ephesian Christians—that God will make it possible for them to know God more intimately. This would include their coming to an understanding of God's will for their lives.

The knowledge that comes by God's revelation is God's gift to us (v. 17c). Wisdom (v. 17b) is also a gift—the gift of knowing how to use that knowledge effectively...

So in this verse Paul is praying that God will open the spiritual eyes of these Ephesian Christians so that their very beings might be transformed by the spiritual insights that God alone can provide.

"that you may know (Greek: *eido*) what is the hope of his calling" (Greek: *klesis*) (v. 18a). The Greek word *eido* means to see, to know, or to understand...

Paul is praying that these Ephesian Christians will know "what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." He wants to insure that they appreciate the stunning nature of the blessings associated with the inheritance that Christ has prepared for them. He wants them not to take this inheritance lightly, but rather to take great joy in its promise...

"and what is the exceeding (Greek: *hyperballo*) greatness of his power (*dynamis*) toward us who believe, according to that working (*energeia*) of the strength (Greek: *kratos*) of his might" (*ischys*)" (v. 19).

This verse is jam-packed with interesting words:

The word *hyperballo* (exceeding or surpassing) is composed of two Greek words: *hyper* (over or above) and *ballo* (to throw)—and is therefore an "over the top" kind of word.... When Paul talks about "the exceeding greatness of (God's) power," he intends for us to imagine power beyond imagining.

And then Paul uses four power words—words that, in this context are essentially synonymous:

- *dynamis* (power—*dynamis* is where we get our word dynamite).
- *energeia* (harnessed energy—power at work)
- *kratos* (the presence of significant power—manifest power)
- *ischys* (strength, whether physical or moral)

While I have made a modest attempt to differentiate these four words, Paul is using them to drive home in our consciousness the reality of God’s power. It is as if Paul is using four blows of a hammer to speak of God’s power to make sure that we “get” it...”

EPHESIANS 1:20-23. CHRIST—FAR ABOVE ALL

“which he worked in Christ, when he raised him from the dead” (v. 20a)... Note that the actor in these events is God. Christ is the one acted upon. Paul doesn’t say that Jesus rose from the dead, but that God raised Christ from the dead. The resurrection was a manifestation of the power of God the Father.

“and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places” (v. 20b). In verses 20b and 22a, Paul alludes to two Old Testament verses:

- The first (v. 20b) is Psalm 110:1, where “Yahweh says to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool for your feet.’” Originally, that was a royal psalm, celebrating the king of Israel, but it came to be interpreted as a messianic psalm.
- The second (v. 22a) is Psalm 8:6, which says, “You make him ruler over the works of your hands. You have put all things under his feet.” Originally, this was a celebration of humanity—God made man a ruler. However, it also came to be interpreted as a messianic psalm.

These verses celebrate the ascension of Christ to his heavenly throne (see Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9). The early church emphasized the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ as a single event with three stages. Jesus’ ascension returns him to the heavenly throne at the right hand of God from whence he came to earth (John 1:14; Philippians 2:5-8). He will remain there until he comes again in glory (Acts 1:11)—a cataclysmic event that will come suddenly and without warning (2 Peter 3:10). In heaven, Christ intercedes for us with the Father (Romans 8:34)...”

- <https://www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/ephesians-115-23/>
Copyright 2013, 2017, Richard Niell Donovan This is a highly edited summary of the complete commentary. It is worth following the link to read the entire article. It is one of the few that do not approach the reading on the theme of Christ the King Sunday in year B.

Luke 24:44-53; RCL, the same reading

“As a pastor I used to dread preaching assignments on Ascension Day.

The texts seem so fantastic and otherworldly. How could I help people relate to the story of Jesus being taken away from his disciples and being lifted up into heaven? Would it not be better to move quickly past the Ascension and on to Pentecost and the founding of the Christian church? But this might be a bit rash. Properly considered, the story of Christ’s ascension can lead to a powerful proclamation of the gospel...”

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1635
[Mark Tranvik](#) Professor of Religion, Augsburg College, Minneapolis, MN

“The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the 24th Chapter”

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, *“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”* ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, *“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for^[a] the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”*

The Ascension

⁵⁰ And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them.

⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.

- a. [Luke 24:47](#) Some manuscripts *and*

“This is the Gospel of the Lord” “Praise to You, O Christ”

“Have you noticed that Luke is the only evangelist to record the Ascension?

In Matthew 28:16-20 the ascension is presupposed, as it is also in John 21:22, when Jesus says: “If it is my will that he (the beloved disciple) remain *until I come*, what is that to you.” And Mark does not even mention it!

Why this lack of consensus on something so crucial for Christian theology as is Jesus’ return from heaven at the end, the so-called *Parousia*? For if Jesus is going to come back from heaven he has to first be there, and this is only possible via the Ascension.

The best way to explain this conundrum is to say that the gospels reflect different views on how the kingdom was going to be established, either by interruption of history through an eschatological coming of Jesus from heaven, or through the transformation of history by the issuing of the kingdom on earth.

Luke seems to be making narrative and theological space for the birth of the church, a view that he will develop in the book of Acts. The church will be the main focus of Luke’s theology so much so that the promise of Jesus’ return from heaven in Acts 1:11 will slowly disappear from the narrative.

Luke has two accounts of the Ascension, one in the gospel, one in Acts. The one in the gospel is placed at the end of Jesus’ ministry (Luke 24:44-53) and its purpose seems to be the *vindication* of his ministry. The one in Acts is placed at the beginning of the apostles’ ministry (Acts 1:6-11) and the purpose seems to be the *authorization* of their work of proclamation...”

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3650
[Oswaldo Vena](#) Professor of New Testament Interpretation / Profesor de Nuevo Testamento, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Ill.

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Our Gospel reading may be divided into three movements, each with a distinctive theme.

I. The past: The necessity of these things (vv. 44-47)

In the first movement, Jesus reviews the critical events of Luke's Gospel and deems them necessary fulfillments of scripture. First, he recalls what he earlier taught, that "everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled" (v. 44)... Second, Jesus "opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (v. 45)...

These verses constitute a Reader's Digest version of how Luke's Jesus interprets his death, resurrection, and their significance: as the fulfillment of scripture. In these ways, Luke 24:44-47 recalls the highlights of Luke's Gospel and deems them necessary acts of God's purposes.

II. The promise: The call to be witnesses (vv. 48-49)

But Luke's Jesus does not dwell simply on the past. He turns the focus next to his followers: "you are witnesses of these things" (v. 48)... In Acts "witness" is language for the comprehensive call to testify about Jesus to "the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39; 13:31; 22:15, 20; 26:16).

Even more, in Luke 24:49 Jesus pledges "what my Father promised," which will allow them to be "clothed with power from on high." Though these words alone are unclear, elsewhere Luke's writings imply that Jesus here envisions the coming of the Spirit (Luke 11:13; 12:11-12; Acts 1:4-8), who will enable the apostles to bear witness effectively (Luke 4:18-19; 12:11-12; Acts 4:31)...

III. "While You Wait": The call in the meantime (vv. 50-53)

The final movement of our text features the main event of the liturgical day: Jesus' Ascension. Unique to this version of the event is the prominence of "blessing." First, while Jesus ascends he blesses his followers, a point doubly emphasized (vv. 50, 51). Second, after worshipping and returning to Jerusalem, his followers are "continually in the temple blessing God" (v. 53), causing Luke's Gospel to both begin and end with prayer and worship at Israel's chief sanctuary (1:10; 24:53). In fact, the phrase "blessing God" (*eulogountes ton theon*) is the Third Gospel's final word in more ways than one. This colorful "blessing" and worship language (vv. 50-51, 53) gives the narrative ending an atmosphere of worship and mutual blessing, which constitutes the closing word of Luke's Gospel...

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2385
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