

A short liturgy & reflection

What is the Ascension?

When we think of Christian holy days that are filled with joy, Easter and Christmas are generally the first ones we think of. And this is rightfully so. After all, the birth of Jesus and his glorious Resurrection are the miraculous events that shape our faith and give us all great hope. But how often do we reflect on the joys of other holy days?

The Ascension of Our Lord is one holy day that's frequently overlooked by many. But it's filled with as much joy, hope and peace as Christmas and Easter.

The Feast of the Ascension is celebrated forty days after Easter Sunday (therefore always on a Thursday) and recalls Jesus being taken up into heaven. After his crucifixion and resurrection, the bible tells us, he was seen for forty days before he ascended into heaven to be "seated at the right hand of God the Father." After Jesus' ascension, the disciples awaited the promised Spirit in Jerusalem.

The Ascension is the third event in the cycle of **crucifixion-resurrection-ascension** in which Jesus' life on earth culminates with his being raised to live and reign gloriously with God forever. The concept of Jesus saying goodbye to the disciples and ascending to God in heaven is an opportunity for us to consider the importance of how we live our lives on earth.

A Reading from The Acts of the Apostles 1:6-11

Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

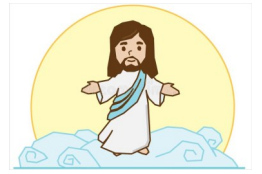
He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After he said this, 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."



Ascension: Why Did Jesus Leave?



Everything had seemed to be going well. Jesus was alive! His scattered, frightened followers had been reunited. Everything seemed great, and then Jesus announced, **'Now I am leaving you!'** The disciples must have felt abandoned - even deserted - and certainly confused. It must have been like saying goodbye to an old friend, someone you have known all your life who is moving from the area. It is an end. You will keep in touch, but it will never be the same again.

Jesus left the disciples, but he did not *abandon* them. There is a big difference. He left them for a very good reason. If he were always with them, they would have been constantly referring back to him:

'What shall we do in this situation? '

'Did we get that right?'

' I need to speak to you now.

My need is more important than his.'

The disciples would have wanted to stay close to Jesus all the time and would expect him to continue the work that he had started. However, Jesus had trained them and inspired them, so the time was right for them to scatter and do the job that he had planned for them to do.

It was time for the disciples to do the work that Jesus had been doing and Jesus trusted them to do this. He was giving them the freedom to be themselves. Freedom to take his ideas, make them their own and bring their own God-given skills and interpretations to them. Jesus didn't abandon the disciples, he promised them the Spirit of God. This was his way of being able to be in and with each and every one of them, no matter how scattered they were across the face of the Earth.

Time for reflection

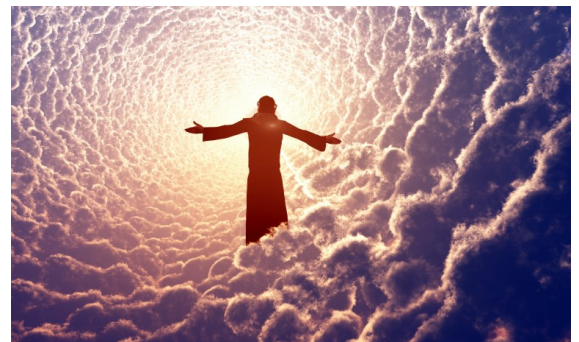
We believe that Jesus went back to heaven and is still alive in heaven today. We believe that Jesus has a plan for people's lives and that he will help them to fulfil this. We believe that we need not be afraid because Jesus is alive, so he will be with us in everything that we do. He can give us peace, confidence, hope, contentment and joy.

We believe that after the Ascension, carrying out Jesus' vision became the responsibility of his followers. We believe that we all have God-given skills that we can develop, enjoy and use to transform the world for good. We believe that God's spirit can live in us to help us to do this.

It is our time to use our skills and talents for the good of all, knowing that Jesus is with us.

Prayer

Dear Lord,
Thank you for the Ascension story
Of Jesus going back to heaven
To get it ready for us;
And promising the Holy Spirit
To keep in touch with him.
Thank you for helping and supporting us.
Thank you for giving us confidence.
Help us to use our gifts to do your work.
Help us to have the courage to pick ourselves up and carry on again when we get things wrong.



Amen.