

Thursday 18 May 2023

Ascension Day



The observance of Ascension Day is of great antiquity and commemorates the bodily ascension of Jesus into heaven, forty days after the resurrection. The account in Acts 1:3 says that Jesus appeared to his disciples 'during the forty days after his resurrection' so today we compute the Ascension Day as the fortieth day of Easter. For that reason, Ascension Day is always celebrated on a Thursday. The Church calendar used in Britain means the earliest possible date for Ascension Day is April 30 (as in 1818 and 2285) and the latest possible date is June 3 (as in 1943 and 2038).

Sermon © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

Liturgy and prayers of intercession © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

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The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration are included at the end.

The hymn can be accessed via a YouTube link.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,
<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 Crown him with many crowns
Crown him with many crowns

(rock version)
(traditional version)

God has gone up with a shout,

All the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.

In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

All Amen

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, for forty days we have been celebrating with joyful hearts the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, his bursting from the tomb and his defeat of the power of sin and death. He appeared to his disciples many times and told them about the kingdom of God.

Today we recall how he left this earth and returned to his Father, ascending into heaven to take his throne over all dominions and powers. Trusting in his reign over all creation, and submitting to his kingly yet loving rule, let us hear the story of his parting.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. 'This', he said, 'is what you have heard from me; for John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set 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, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

Acts 1:4-11

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

All He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

The Gloria

Seeing we have a great high priest who has passed through the heaven,
Jesus the Son of God, let us offer him the praise that is worthy of his name.

All **Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.**

**For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.**

The Collect for Ascension Day

Let us pray that our risen and ascended Lord will lead us to eternal life.

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that as we believe your only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ
to have ascended into the heavens,
so we in heart and mind may also ascend
and with him continually dwell;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

First reading

A reading from the prophecy of Daniel

As I watched, thrones were set in place,
and an Ancient One took his throne,
his clothing was white as snow,
and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames,
and its wheels were burning fire.

A stream of fire issued
and flowed out from his presence.

A thousand thousands served him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him.

The court sat in judgment,
and the books were opened.

I watched then because of the noise of the arrogant words that the horn was speaking. And as I watched, the beast was put to death, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

Daniel 7:9-14

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints and what is the

immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far 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 age to come. He has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:15-23

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

**HYMN 2 Hail the day that sees him rise
Hail the day that sees him rise
Hail the day that sees him rise**

(led by a brass band)

(led by an organ)

(folk-song style)

Gospel reading

Alleluia, alleluia.

Go and make disciples of all nations, says the Lord.

Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke

All Glory to you O Lord.

Jesus 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, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Luke 24:44-end

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Ascension Day remembers Jesus ascending from earth to Heaven in bodily form. He was not unique in doing so, for Enoch ‘who walked closely with God’ was taken to God in bodily form (or at least Genesis 5:22 says ‘Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away’). And the prophet Elijah also ascended in bodily form (2 Kings 2:11). But nowhere else in scripture is anyone described as ascending *bodily* to live with God.

Taken together, these ideas suggest that each of these three ascension narratives (Enoch, Elijah, then Jesus) describe a reward for great holiness. This point may seem obscure until it’s noted that a body that does not ascend will undergo decay after death which, in the ancient mindset, was seen as proof of any underlying corruption: death makes visible that which was previously hidden. Even today, in some forms of Christianity, a body remaining uncorrupted after death is seen as proof of saintliness.

Jesus’ body ascended from earth to heaven, so he underwent a seamless transition from a life lived with a physical environment to life in heaven which is wholly spiritual. Jesus’ holiness was so wrapped up in his relationship with God that his ascension ensured the continuity of that relationship, even after his body had risen from the earth.

A central idea in Christianity is that we must follow Jesus, which explains why he described himself as the way, the truth, and the life. We cannot follow him with a bodily ascension, but we will follow him to heaven if we wish to—the choice is ours. The extent to which we follow him depends on us: if we live lives of holiness then, like Jesus, we can pass almost seamlessly from earth to heaven when we die.

The previous sentence contains a very big ‘if’. The holiness that we are called to live within means putting aside everything that is not of God—the catch-all word is ‘sin’.

Matthew’s Gospel does not describe the Ascension but does allude to it. Jesus meets with his disciples one last time and gives one last commandment—the so-called Great Commission. He tells them to, ‘Go out to all the nations and baptise in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’. By ancient tradition Jesus then disappeared from their sight, presumably as described in Luke and Acts, who don’t mention any dialogue. But the Great Commission is part of the clue that ties together the strands of these stories.

All of us will die some day and, if faithful, like Jesus we will pass seamlessly from life lived with God but on earth to life lived with God but in Heaven. Faithfulness and obedience are the keys to ensuring the transition is indeed seamless. And baptism is not only the sign of that obedience but also empowers our spiritual lives for in baptism we are given the Holy Spirit.

A soul that receives the Holy Spirit and obeys the Spirit’s promptings will seek to

obey the commandments, which will include the new commandment to love and the final commandment, living the Christian life in such a way that propagate the faith and help bring about the Kingdom of God. The message of the Ascension then becomes very simple. Obey God; share the faith; love God; love neighbour; and we too share eternity with God.

It's no surprise, then, that we grow closer to God in proportion that we respond to the God who is living within us. Perhaps that's why as we await Jesus' return, the collect for Ascension Day reminds us to pray that, 'we may also in heart and mind there ascend, and with him continually dwell.'

Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
you have exalted your Son Christ Jesus to your right hand,
and made him the head over all things for his body the Church:
hear us as we pray for the Church throughout the world ...

Make us and all your people receptive to the gifts he pours upon us,
that we may use them to your glory,
and the building up of the body of Christ.

Lord, in your mercy:

All **hear our prayer**

Lord God Almighty, the Ancient of Days,
you have given your Son all authority in heaven and on earth:
hear us as we pray for the world he came to redeem ...

Grant that we may know even in this time the things that make for peace,
and may strive for the reconciliation of all people
in his kingdom of justice and love.

Lord, in your mercy:

All **hear our prayer**

Father of all, whose Son has promised to be with us always,
to the end of the age:
hear us as we pray for those among whom we live and work ...

Grant that we may be so aware of his presence with us,
that people may take note of us, that we have been with Jesus.

Lord, in your mercy:

All **hear our prayer**

O God our Redeemer, whose Son ever lives to make intercession for us:
hear us as we pray for those in any kind of need ...

May he who has borne our infirmities strengthen and heal them,
that they may find grace to help in time of need,
and rejoice in his salvation.

Lord, in your mercy:

All **hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, whose Son has borne our humanity into the heavenly realms,
and gone before us to prepare a place for us:

hear us as we remember before you those whose earthly sojourn is over,
and whose life is now hidden in him with you ...

Make us joyful and expectant, that at his coming with all his own
we too may go forth to meet him and share in his eternal joy.

All hear our prayer

Merciful Father,

All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The peace

Jesus says: 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.

If you love me, rejoice because I am going to the Father'. Alleluia.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you. Alleluia!

HYMN 3 Of the Father's heart begotten
Of the Father's heart begotten
Of the Father's heart begotten

(click on this link to hear the hymn)
(instrumental version)
(sung as plainchant)

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right and good,
our duty and our joy,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Jesus Christ the King of glory.
Born of a woman,
he came to the rescue of our human race.
Dying for us,
he trampled death and conquered sin.
By the glory of his resurrection
he opened the way to life eternal
and by his ascension, gave us the sure hope
that where he is we may also be.
Therefore the universe resounds with Easter joy
and with choirs of angels we sing for ever to your praise:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.
He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with and all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

I heard the voice of a great multitude crying, Alleluia.

The Lord our God has entered into his kingdom.

**All Blessed are those who are called to the supper of the Lamb.
Alleluia.**

Breaking of the bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.
Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.
Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All **We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us. Amen.**

Jesus is the Lamb of God
who takes away the sins of the world.
Happy are those who are called to his supper.

All **Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,
but only say the word and I shall be healed.**

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

God our Father,
you have raised our humanity in Christ
and have fed us with the bread of heaven:
mercifully grant that, nourished with such spiritual blessings,
we may set our hearts in the heavenly places;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

**All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him, we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out
in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.**

HYMN 5 Go make of all disciples [\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Then the disciples returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying. They were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Acts 1:12,13a,14

The Dismissal

God the Father,
who has given to his Son the name above every name,
strengthen you to proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord.

All Amen

God the Son,
who is our great high priest passed into the heavens,
plead for you at the right hand of the Father.

All Amen

God the Holy Spirit,
who pours out his abundant gifts upon the Church,
make you faithful servants of Christ our King.

All Amen

And the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 5 Alleluia! Sing to Jesus!

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

Waiting expectantly for the promised Holy Spirit,
go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia.

**All Thanks be to God.
Alleluia, alleluia.**

Ascension Day

When Christ went up to Heaven the Apostles stayed
Gazing at Heaven with souls and wills on fire,
Their hearts on flight along the track He made,
Winged by desire.

Their silence spake: 'Lord, why not follow Thee?
Home is not home without Thy Blessed Face,
Life is not life. Remember, Lord, and see,
Look back, embrace.

'Earth is one desert waste of banishment,
Life is one long-drawn anguish of decay.
Where Thou wert wont to go we also went:
Why not today?'

Nevertheless a cloud cut off their gaze:
They tarry to build up Jerusalem,
Watching for Him, while thro' the appointed days
He watches them.

They do His Will, and doing it rejoice,
Patiently glad to spend and to be spent:
Still He speaks to them, still they hear His Voice
And are content.

For as a cloud received Him from their sight,
So with a cloud will He return ere long:
Therefore they stand on guard by day, by night,
Strenuous and strong.

They do, they dare, they beyond seven times seven
Forgive, they cry God's mighty word aloud:
Yet sometimes haply lift tired eyes to Heaven—
'Is that His cloud?'

Christina Rosetti

Ascension Day

We saw his light break through the cloud of glory
Whilst we were rooted still in time and place
As earth became a part of Heaven's story
And heaven opened to his human face.

We saw him go and yet we were not parted
He took us with him to the heart of things
The heart that broke for all the broken-hearted
Is whole and Heaven-centred now, and sings,

Sings in the strength that rises out of weakness,
Sings through the clouds that veil him from our sight,
Whilst we our selves become his clouds of witness
And sing the waning darkness into light,

His light in us, and ours in him concealed,
Which all creation waits to see revealed.

Malcolm Guite

Rise Rising Risen

I
Four letters
Three tenses
Two choices
One LORD

II
Rise! Risen!
As Victor wrote:
Minus "the resurrection,
there is no Christianity"
But Jesus defeated death—He rise from the tomb—
His promise is, We can do so, too!

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