

Ascension Day
Thursday, 21st May 2020

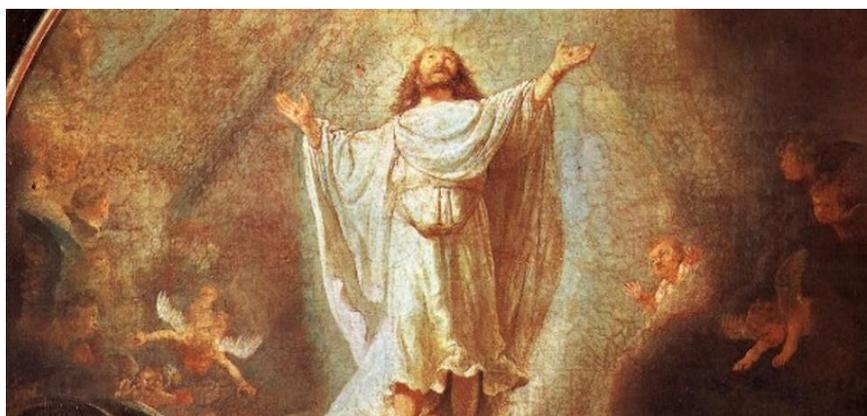


Dear Friends in Christ,

'While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up to heaven.'
(Luke 24: 51)

Today, Christians celebrate the fulfilment of the Easter message: He is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!! Forty days after His resurrection from the tomb of death, Jesus ascends bodily to heaven and promises His followers the power of the Holy Spirit to guide them and help them live out the truth of His word. On the precipice of Pentecost, Jesus empowers and sends us all out to make, baptise and teach others the message of God's saving love. Emanuel, who came *from* God and *of* God in physical form, returns *to* God; His earthly ministry complete:

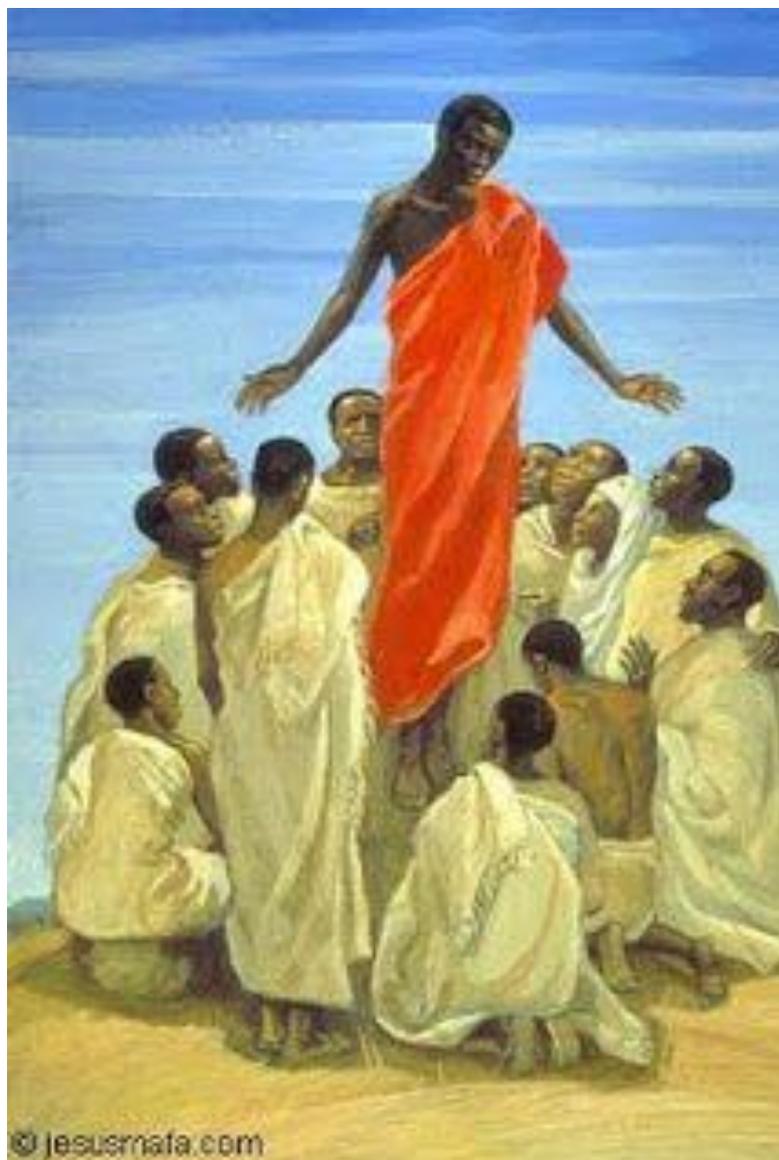
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1: 1-5)



Detail from 'The Ascension of Christ' by Rembrandt

Jesus leaves His disciples in the midst of prayer. He asks that God will empower them to continue His mission in the world and prays that God will protect them and keep them in the truth of His word. Jesus' Ascension to heaven at this point takes us with Him sacrificially - from His birth, through His death and resurrection and right into the intimate presence of God.

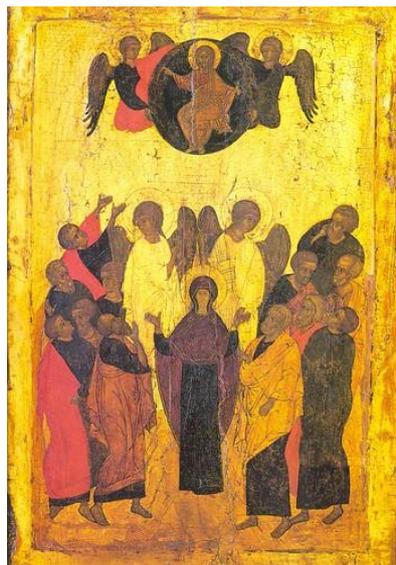
In this action, we are assured that Jesus continues to intercede for us: pleading through His blood, and praying for us in the very presence of the Father: *'Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because He always lives to intercede for them.'* (Hebrews 7:25). In this way, the Ascension story answers the question, *'where is Jesus now?'* His life with us on earth is over, but He lives with God and continues to love the whole world. And in a little while, at Pentecost, the world will come to know how the work of discipleship is to continue. Jesus clearly passed the baton to his disciples – and to us.



The Ascension by Jesus Mafa Community, Cameroon, Africa

Thy Kingdom Come is an annual invitation to prayer from our Archbishops of Canterbury and York which many of you across the Benefice will remember being part of over the last few years. Ascension Day marks the first day of this powerful action of prayer in which we can all take part - despite the Coronavirus Lockdown! Lasting for eleven days from Ascension Day to the day of Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* encourages Christians to join together across the world in prayer for the growth of faith in Jesus Christ in our nation and across the world. The focus is specific prayer for us to take part as individuals, as families, friends, communities and countries to come to know the saving love of God in Jesus Christ, that, empowered by God's Spirit we would grow in confidence to show and tell of God's love.

In previous years, *Thy Kingdom Come* has culminated in a massive service from parishes all across our diocese in Winchester Cathedral. Since we are not able to gather together in worship this Ascension Day, nor for the special *Thy Kingdom Come* service in Winchester Cathedral, I have prepared a service here which we can use in our homes and share with our family and friends by email. This resource and many more are also available on The Downs Benefice website. There you will find sermons from Archbishops Justin Welby and John Sentamu along with bright ideas to help families and young people pray together – including a brilliant Family Prayer Adventure Map!



Ascension of Christ, Russian, 16th century icon

Just like the disciples, learning to be in the world without being able to see Jesus face to face, we must ask ourselves how we can live, pray and act so as to bring to light the energy at the heart of all things – to bring the face of Jesus to life in our faces, and to do this by turning again and again to the deep well of trust and prayer that the Spirit opens for us.

Yours, in the vibrant life of Christ,

Jax

Revd Jax Machin, Rector, The Downs Benefice

Order of Service for Ascension Day and *Thy Kingdom Come*



Ascension by Jan Richardson

You might like to pray the words, and say those words printed in bold out loud!

Opening acclamation:

God has gone up with a shout.
All the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. (Psalm 47:5)

Welcome:

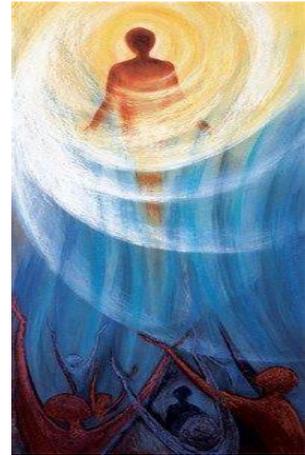
In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
All Amen.

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you
All and also with you.

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.

Collect Prayer for *Thy Kingdom Come*

Almighty God,
your ascended Son has sent us into the world
to preach the good news of your kingdom:
inspire us with your Spirit
and fill our hearts with the fire of your love,
that all who hear your Word
may be drawn to you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



The Ascension Reading

You or a member of your family might like to read this out loud:

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles 1.1-11

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

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 baptized with water, but you will be baptized 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.'

At the end the reader says:

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

All He is risen indeed. Alleluia.



The Disappearing Feet – from an 15th-century manuscript illustration

A Cantic from Revelation 15: 3-4

**All All nations shall come and worship You, O Christ,
and share in the feast of Your kingdom.**

1 Great and wonderful are Your deeds,
Lord God the Almighty.

2 Just and true are Your ways,
O ruler of the nations.

3 Who shall not revere and praise Your name, O Lord?
for You alone are holy.

4 All nations shall come and worship in Your presence:
for Your just dealings have been revealed.

**All To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honour and glory and might,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

**All All nations shall come and worship You, O Christ,
and share in the feast of Your kingdom.**



Ascension by Barb Carr

The Great Commission

You or a member of your family might like to read this out loud:

A reading from Matthew 28:16-20

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

This is the word of the Lord
All Thanks be to God.

Reflection

Taken from the Northumbria Community liturgy of Ascension and Thy Kingdom Come:

Forty days after Easter Christians celebrate Ascension Day, remembering that Jesus returned to His Father, and left His disciples waiting in expectancy for the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower them for their new mission of spreading the Good News of Jesus throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the very ends of the earth.

We shouldn't imagine Jesus 'powering off' from the ground like a rocket and disappearing into the clouds, the disciples watching as His feet eventually disappear from view. What happened is a great mystery, Jesus returning to be with His Father. The book of Acts tries to put the experience of the disciples into words that would be understood in the first century. All we can know is that Jesus is with us now in spirit, and He is with His Father also, waiting for the day when He will return to bring in the Kingdom, with all its blessings, for all eternity.

Almighty God, while it is a great mystery to me, I believe that Your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus, ascended to heaven to be with You once more. Help me, therefore, to seek Your dwelling place with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, and so continually dwell with You, with the Saviour and with the Holy Spirit. Amen.



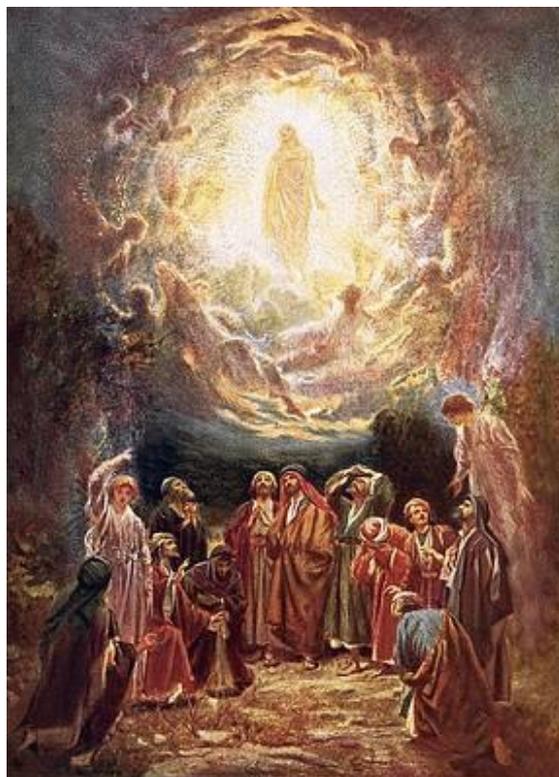
Ascension by Anish Kapoor

During the 11 days of *Thy Kingdom Come*, it is hoped that everyone who takes part will:

- Deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ
- Pray for God's spirit to work in the lives of those they know
- Come to realise that every aspect of their life is the stuff of prayer

After the very first Ascension Day the disciples gathered with Mary, constantly devoting themselves to prayer while they waited for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Like them, our reliance on the gift of the Holy Spirit is total – on our own we can do nothing. Through the centuries Christians have gathered at this time to pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit. *Thy Kingdom Come* picks up this tradition.

Over the past three years, more and more worshipping communities have dedicated the days between Ascension and Pentecost to pray '*Come Holy Spirit*'. We are praying that the Spirit will inspire and equip us to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with our friends and families, our communities and networks. It has been amazing how many varied ways there have been in which people from every tradition have taken up this challenge. The effects have been remarkable. It is our prayer that those who have not yet heard the Good News of Jesus Christ and his love for the world will hear it for themselves, and respond and follow Him. Specifically, we again invite each and every Christian across the country to pray that God's Spirit might work in the lives of friends who have not responded with their 'Yes' to God's call. Whether you have joined in *Thy Kingdom Come* before or not, we invite you to take part – along with churches from over 65 different denominations in over 170 countries around the world.



Jesus ascending into heaven by William Brassey Hole

We renew our commitment to our reigning Lord

Let us affirm the faith of the Church which Christ commissions us to share with the world:

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

All I 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 I 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 I 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**

Intercessions

A Key feature of *Thy Kingdom Come* is the commitment to pray for five particular people to come to know Jesus. The intercessions include space for people to pray silently for their five people, or to consider who the five we are praying for might be.

A Prayer for Ascension and Pentecost by Christine Sine, founder of Mercy Ships:

Peace O Lord to all whose lives entwine with ours,
Peace to all who walk this earth with us.
Peace to friend and to stranger, to neighbours near and far,
Peace to all who struggle,
Peace to the lost, the broken and the hurting.
Peace from the Christ who has redeemed and saved us,
Peace from the One who sits at the right hand of God,
An advocate for all God's children,
May we follow him into the new creation and join him in making all things
whole.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Being made one by the power of the Spirit, let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us:

All 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, the power and the glory,
Forever and ever, Amen.



The Ascension by John Singleton Copley

Responsory

As we wait in silence,
All make us ready for Your coming Spirit.

As we listen to Your word,
All make us ready for Your coming Spirit.

As we worship You in majesty,
All make us ready for Your coming Spirit.

As we long for Your refreshing,
All make us ready for Your coming Spirit.

As we long for Your renewing,
All make us ready for Your coming Spirit.

As we long for Your equipping,
All make us ready for Your coming Spirit.

As we long for Your empowering,
All make us ready for Your coming Spirit.

The Blessing

We say together, wherever we are:

**The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ,
The love of God, and
The fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
Be with us all, evermore.
Amen.**



The Ascension of Jesus by Andrei Rublev

Collect Prayer for Ascension Day

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.
Amen.



***Ascension - Altarpiece from
Thuisson-les-Abbeville, France***

Luke 44:49–53 (NLT) - The Ascension of Jesus

Then Jesus said to them, 'And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven.'

Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting His hands to heaven, He blessed them. While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up to heaven. So they worshiped Him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God.

~

***NB: Top image: Mural of Christ ascending to heaven on a graffiti wall in Bristol,
UK: Vanderbilt Library***