

Ascension Day 2020

Collect 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

Readings for Ascension Day

Acts 1: 1-11

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking 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.'

Psalm 47

To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.
Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with loud songs of joy.
For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome,
a great king over all the earth.
He subdued peoples under us,
and nations under our feet.
He chose our heritage for us,
the pride of Jacob whom he loves.
Selah

God has gone up with a shout,
the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.
Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.
For God is the king of all the earth;
sing praises with a psalm.
God is king over the nations;
God sits on his holy throne.
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.

Ephesians 1:15-23

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards 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. And 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.

Luke 24:44-53

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, 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 worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

A Message for Ascension Day 2020

Marian Bond

Luke reminds the reader, Theophilus, (meaning the one who loves God) that he has written a complete life story of Jesus. While Mark mentions the Ascension briefly, it is only Luke, both in his gospel and in the book of Acts, who describes the event so vividly that we could almost imagine we were there.

A complete life story indeed! Not just a story but a challenge for us as he nudges us to reflect on the part that we too may play. He reminds us that Jesus gave the disciples instructions. What might they be? He reminds us that John baptised with water, something that has happened to us, too. And he brings us down to earth as we read how the disciples still did not understand what Jesus had come for, as they asked him if he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel. How much, we wonder, do we really understand?

The disciples would witness to the truth of Jesus not only in Jerusalem and the nearby nations but right to the ends of the earth. We are left in no doubt that all of this is the work of God. God's presence is often implied in the Bible by the presence of a cloud. After all, it was a cloud from which God's voice sounded at the Transfiguration. The cloud is said to have taken Jesus from their sight as He ascended into Heaven.

Luke ends his account in Acts with the challenge presented to them by the two angels. Why ever were the disciples standing there simply looking up toward heaven? There was no need for a sad farewell; they were reassured that Jesus will return.

His gospel account has Jesus explaining how everything pointing towards Him in the scriptures must now be fulfilled. This was an occasion for rejoicing. Jesus had told them that they would be baptised with the Holy Spirit and would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. This would result in people all over the world understanding the need for repentance so that their sins would be forgiven.

Like us at this difficult time, they were asked to stay where they were, in their case, in the city. They were waiting to be clothed with the power from on high, in other words, waiting to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Receiving Jesus' final blessing filled them with such joy.

2000 years later, we, as baptised Christians, may wonder sometimes what gives us the confidence in our faith. Paul's prayer for the people of Ephesus for understanding and wisdom might equally be a prayer for ourselves. We long to see for ourselves that power which God has put to work in Christ, the Head of the Church. In these difficult times, our understanding of Church has altered. Maybe we have come to understand more what the true nature of His body is, as we worship and reach out to people in different ways.

On this Ascension Day, believing as we do in the power of prayer, let us pray fervently that this terrible virus will be defeated. We pray, too, that God will use His power to make us ready for the coming of the Holy Spirit, to enable us all to live more fully as baptised Christians in His world today. Amen

HYMN

Hail the day that sees him rise, Alleluia!
to his throne beyond the skies. Alleluia!
Christ, the Lamb for sinners given, Alleluia!
enters now the highest heaven. Alleluia!

There for him high triumph waits; Alleluia!
lift your heads, eternal gates. Alleluia!
He has conquered death and sin; Alleluia!
take the King of glory in. Alleluia!

Highest heaven its Lord receives; Alleluia!
yet he loves the earth he leaves. Alleluia!
Though returning to his throne, Alleluia!
still he calls us all his own. Alleluia!

Still for us he intercedes; Alleluia!
his atoning death he pleads, Alleluia!
near himself prepares our place, Alleluia!
he the firstfruits of our race. Alleluia!

5 There we shall with you remain, Alleluia!
partners of your endless reign, Alleluia!
see you with unclouded view, Alleluia!
find our heaven of heavens in you. Alleluia!

Charles Wesley 1739