

Thursday 25th May 2017

Ascension Day

White or Gold



Collect

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

Acts 1:1-11

1¹ 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 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 the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” 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.”

COMMENT: As the first paragraph points out, the author of the Acts of Apostles intended his work to be the completion of the story he had to tell. The main character, however, was not Jesus of Nazareth, as in the Gospel of Luke, but the Holy Spirit. In order for the narrative to continue, the hero of the Gospel had to leave the scene. It should be noted, however, that the details in this passage seemingly differ from those in the concluding paragraph of the Gospel. In the latter instance, it appears that the departure took place immediately after Jesus' final

appearance. In Acts, there have been many appearances over a period of forty days. According to this narrative, the apostles had to wait several more days before being baptised by the Holy Spirit. Jesus' instructions was for the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Spirit (verse 4). The differences are superficial. In Luke we are given a brief description which is exploited fully at the beginning of the Acts. We can note for example the injunction to wait for the Spirit is also found at the end of Luke (24:49). What Luke is conveying in Acts is that the role of the disciples was to receive the Spirit and to be witnesses to what they had seen and heard while he had been with them. In verse 7-8, Jesus further stated the inclusive, universal nature of their mission. As Galileans, most of the apostles would have recognised this when he named Samaria as a local example of going beyond Judea, but enforced by the hyperbole 'to the ends of the earth'. As in these opening paragraphs of Acts, this is no time for standing gazing at the clouds. We have work to do between the ascension of Christ and his promised return.

Luke 24:44-53

24⁴⁴ 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 and 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."⁵⁰ Then 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.

COMMENT: Our modern sensibilities have difficulty with the idea of Jesus floating upwards and so many scholars dismiss the Ascension. They are eager to point out, for example that for Paul, Resurrection and Ascension were one and the same thing, and to strengthen that point to note that the Gospel of John has no Ascension text, and seek to exploit this difference with the Synoptics, over the issue of Resurrection and Ascension. In other words, there was no Ascension.

The experience of Paul on the Damascus Road was of the risen, ascended Lord. Further, it is a matter of exegesis on how we read Pauline texts. "*Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us*". Romans 8:34. Christ died; he was raised – **resurrection** – who is at the right hand of God – **ascension**. As to John's gospel having no knowledge of the Ascension this is not true. Just as Mark's gospel end pointing to the Resurrection, so too, our Lord's discussion with Mary Magdalene points to his impending Ascension; John 20:14-18.

As to the precise manner, the Gospels differ in their treatment. After forty days of appearing to the believers, Luke notes that Jesus ascends into heaven

Luke 24:44-53 & Acts 1:1-11. In Mark and Matthew Jesus simply disappears from the story line. John notes a forthcoming Ascension (John 20:17) but no event is described. What Luke is doing is describing the departure of Jesus in the concepts most easily available to him, in conformity with the pre-Copernican Revolution (pre-mid 1500s) cosmology he understood.

Psalm 47

℟ God goes up with shouts of joy; the Lord goes up with trumpet blast.

¹ *For the Choirmaster. Of the sons of Korah. A Psalm.*

² All peoples, clap your hands,
cry to God with shouts of joy!

³ For the Lord, the Most High, we must fear,
great king over all the earth. ℟

⁴ He subdues peoples under us
and nations under our feet.

⁵ Our inheritance, our glory, is from him,
given to Jacob out of love. ℟

⁶ God goes up with shouts of joy;
the Lord goes up with trumpet blast.

⁷ Sing praise for God, sing praise,
sing praise to our king, sing praise. ℟

⁸ God is king of all the earth,
sing praise with all your skill.

⁹ God is king over the nations;
God reigns on his holy throne. ℟

¹⁰ The princes of the people are assembled
with the people of Abraham's God.

The rulers of the earth belong to God,
to God who reigns over all. ℟

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: This psalm is often included with Psalms 93 and 96-98 as Psalms of the LORD's Enthronement festival, which was probably instituted post-exile. The psalmist celebrates the sovereignty of the LORD over all nations, but supremely over Israel whom The LORD loves. The opening verse summons all peoples to join Israel in rejoicing. This has been interpreted as a triumphal song of victory over the Canaanite false gods whom The LORD displaced after the conquest of the land by the Israelites. In verse 6-7, the image of the LORD 'going up' amid a fanfare of trumpets described a procession of the LORD as represented by the monarch amid enthusiastic applause of the multitude. The pageantry of the coronation of the British monarchy follows a very similar pattern. Even the monarchs and heads of state of the world's many nations gathered when Elizabeth II was crowned in 1953. The last image of verse 9, 'the shields of the earth', symbolises the role of the nations' monarchs as the protectors of their people. In like manner, the psalmist claims that those shields for the LORD, Sovereign above all others.

Short Preface

And now we give you thanks because, after his most glorious resurrection, he appeared to his disciples, and in their sight ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us; that where he is, thither we might also ascend, and reign with him in glory.

Post 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. **Amen**

Blessing

Christ our ascended King pour upon you the abundance of his gifts and bring you to reign with him in glory; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be rest upon you now and forever, **Amen.**