

# Ascension Day Service Together

## May 2020



*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.*

### An Acclamation for Ascension

All: God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.

It is 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, we join with the universe resounding with Easter joy and with choirs of angels and sing for ever your praise.

Hymn Crown him with many crowns

### Preparation

All: This is the day that the Lord has made.  
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Through the brokenness of Christ, we become one body  
as one body we now gather in the name of Christ to offer our praise and thanksgiving, to receive God's holy word, to pray for the needs of the world,  
and to seek the forgiveness of our sins, that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may give ourselves to the service of God.

## Our Confession

*Seeing we have a great high priest who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, and make our confession to our heavenly Father.*

All: Jesus Christ, risen Master and triumphant Lord, we come to you in sorrow for our sins, and confess to you our weakness and unbelief.

We have lived by our own strength, and not by the power of your resurrection.  
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes, as faithless and not believing.  
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone, and doubted our home in heaven.  
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

*Be still for a moment in confession and in receiving God's Grace in Christ*

All: May Almighty God, who in Jesus Christ has given us a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, forgive us our sins, open our eyes to God's truth, strengthen us to do God's will and give us the joy of his kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Risen Lord.

**Amen.**

## The opening prayer

All: The night has passed, and the day lies open before us; let us pray with one heart and mind.

*Silence is kept.*

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence, O God, set our hearts on fire with love for you; now and for ever. Amen.

## The Psalmody Psalm 8 *We say the psalm aloud*

O Lord our governor, how glorious is your name in all the world!

Your majesty above the heavens is praised out of the mouths of babes at the breast.

You have founded a stronghold against your foes, that you might still the enemy and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have ordained,

What are mortals, that you should be mindful of them; mere human beings, that you should seek them out?

You have made them little lower than the angels and crown them with glory and honour.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands and put all things under their feet,

All sheep and oxen, even the wild beasts of the field,

The birds of the air, the fish of the sea and whatsoever moves in the paths of the sea.

O Lord our governor, how glorious is your name in all the world!

Glory 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

## Scripture Reading Revelation 5

Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals; <sup>2</sup> and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' <sup>3</sup> And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. <sup>4</sup> And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. <sup>5</sup> Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.'

<sup>6</sup> Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. <sup>8</sup> When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> They sing a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; <sup>10</sup> you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.'

<sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup> singing with full voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!'

<sup>13</sup> Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, 'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!'

<sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' And the elders fell down and worshipped.

*At the end of the reading we say:*

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

## Gloria

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.

*To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might, for ever and ever. All nations shall come and worship you, O Christ, and share in the feast of your kingdom.*

<sup>14</sup> Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. <sup>16</sup> The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. <sup>17</sup> And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.'

<sup>19</sup> So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. <sup>20</sup> And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.

*To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might, for ever and ever. All nations shall come and worship you, O Christ, and share in the feast of your kingdom.*

## A Reflection for the day

"I believe in one God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible:", so say the opening lines of the Creed in Prayer Book language.

Living so close to a military airfield which fly helicopters in both daylight and pitch darkness we maybe forget the visual aids the crews use to see the world about them. These aids go beyond simply seeing in the dark, they stretch into areas of the visual spectrum we simply have no sight in under normal circumstances. The Creed acknowledges that there is much about us that is very real and present, yet beyond our normal visual range.

Artists have created many wonders depicting the crucifixion, and even the resurrection, but there is a complete failure to capture the ascension in anything other than ridiculous cartoon-ship; feet just poking from beneath a cloud or a golden staircase are simply daft.

Jesus spends much time in the run up to the ascension talking of 'going' but not of ever 'leaving'; a paradox maybe, or is it simply a mystery beyond our visual comprehension? The thrust of the words in Greek used by the gospel writers suggest Jesus was 'removed from their sight and went up to his rightful place on the throne of the heavens'. This is his 'going', but it is not his 'leaving'; this is the mystery of the faith – Christ has gone up to the Father, to the throne, yet he is still present, still here, still now today and will be tomorrow! We are not left orphaned!

Stephen's blasphemous declaration is for us a blessing; if we have eyes to see then we will know the truth, Jesus is 'gone' but he has not left us. None of us would wish for a martyrdom like Stephen to catch sight of the reality hidden from our normal sight, but if we would be open to seeing things God's way maybe we would be blessed with him in worship and praise. And maybe this is simpler than we might think.

In 1963 on the 'With the Beatles' album the group play a cover of a Broadway tune from the 1957 play 'The Music Man'. The lyrics talk of how what was very real in the world was not ever seen until another came. 'There was love all around, but I never heard it singing, no, I never heard it at all, till there was you.

'If I go the Father I will ask and he will send to you another, the advocate', says Jesus in John 14. The

advocate would come and reveal the truth to the disciples that whilst Jesus was 'gone' he had not ever 'left them'. And Mark tells us the same, 'So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.'

It probably isn't Specsavers we need to see that love is all around, that Jesus is with us, that we would do more than he had so far accomplished. It is the promised one of the Father, the advocate, the Spirit. The Spirit who had come to Jesus in his baptism and likewise to us. The Spirit who enabled all who would look to see that in Jesus the Father was known; the Spirit who gives sight beyond the usual visual range.

The modern hymn cries 'Open the eyes of my heart Lord, open the eyes of my heart .... to see you high and lifted up shining in the light of your glory'. Whilst we stand with the disciples, rubbing our eyes and asking 'where has he gone?' we also hear from them and from countless generations of disciples that followed 'look, he hasn't left, and more he is at work doing the things of the Father, bringing into reality the Kingdom'.

Is this a mystery, in the sense of something beyond our comprehension – no! Is this 'mysterious', in the sense that we don't know the science of how –yes! The beauty of the mysterious is that we are invited to come and discover the reality within it, to know the truth that God in Christ Jesus has not left us, and never will do so!

*Open the eyes of my heart Lord and make visible to us the things of your Kingdom hidden from our normal vision!*

## The Creed

All: I believe in one God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth,  
and of all things visible and invisible:  
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,  
begotten of his Father before all worlds,  
God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God,  
begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father,  
by whom all things were made;  
who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven,  
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man,  
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.

He suffered and was buried,  
and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,  
and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father.  
And he shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead: whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeded from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.  
And I look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

## Prayers

*We make our intercessions*

Let us join our prayers with those of our Saviour Christ, seeking the Father's blessing and the gifts of the Spirit. Jesus Christ, great high priest, living for ever to intercede for us, pray for the Church, your broken body in the world ...

*Ascended Lord, graciously hear us.*

Jesus Christ, king of righteousness, enthroned at the right hand of the majesty on high, pray for the world, and make it subject to your gentle rule ...

*Ascended Lord, graciously hear us.*

Jesus Christ, Son of Man, drawing humanity into the life of God, pray for your brothers and sisters in need, distress or sorrow ...

*Ascended Lord, graciously hear us.*

Jesus Christ, pioneer of our salvation, bringing us to glory through your death and resurrection, surround with your saints and angels those who have died trusting your promises ...

*Ascended Lord, graciously hear us.*

Jesus Christ, Lord over all things, ascended far above the heavens and filling the universe, pray for us who receive the gifts you give us for work in your service ...

*Ascended Lord, graciously hear us.*

Jesus Christ, keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace, and bring the whole created order to worship at your feet; for you are alive and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## A Prayer during the Covid-19 Pandemic

All: Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy  
in this time of uncertainty and distress.  
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,  
and lift up all who are brought low;  
that we may rejoice in your comfort  
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love  
in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Amen.

## The Collect

All: Risen Christ, you have raised our human nature to the throne of heaven:  
help us to seek and serve you, that we may join you at the Father's side,  
where you reign with the Spirit in glory, now and for ever. Amen

*Gathering our prayers and praises into one, 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  
for ever and ever. Amen.

## The Conclusion

All: Christ, as a light illumine and guide me this day.  
Christ, as a shield overshadow me.  
Christ under me, Christ over me;  
Christ beside me on my left and my right.  
This day be within and without me.  
Amen.