

## **What the Ascension of Christ means for us**

**Acts 1:1-12**

This coming Thursday, May 5<sup>th</sup> is known in the church calendar as Ascension Day. It has long held great meaning for Christians as the day when Jesus the Son of God ascended to his Father in heaven, that spiritual realm outside of our space and time. The Ascension is also important because it prepares us as we meditate on it for the promise of a new coming or gift made to the Apostles. Ascension is that day on which the church celebrates the return of the Son of God to Our Heavenly Father. It is the Day our Lord's time on earth ended. His earthly life and mission began when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He lived, He taught, He healed, He was rejected, He suffered, He died, and He rose again from death. From the time of His Resurrection to His Ascension His human nature is transfigured because now Jesus possessed a resurrection body, a new spiritual body. Although Jesus had previously walked on water, he had never appeared and reappeared as he did now at will behind locked doors, able to eat, complete with nail scars in his hands and a wound on his side to make him recognizable to his disciples. Evil can no longer touch him for Jesus resurrection body is unconstrained by the laws of nature, along with the power of death and the rule and authority of governing authorities. When Jesus died on the cross, his temporal body ended but when he rose from the dead, it was with an indestructible body. He was transfigured and tuned, good and ready to go as the naturally supernatural instrument for salvation. He is full of the spirit of salvation that he wants to foster in others as they join his band of devoted followers during his last remaining days on earth, where he pauses briefly between time and eternity.

According to the accounts in the Gospel of Luke and our reading in Acts, beginning on Easter Sunday Jesus appeared to many of his disciples over a period of 40 days. On day 40, he came again to the Apostles and led them out to the Mount of Olives where he instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then, as they were watching, he ascended up up up into clouds. As they continued to watch, two angels appeared and declared to them that, just as he ascended, Jesus would return in glory. From that day, it has marked a very important occasion for Christ's followers.

According to Augustine of Hippo, one of the early church fathers, the Feast of Ascension originated with these very Apostles who witnessed Jesus taken from them ascending up into heaven. There were others, John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa, contemporaries of Augustine, who also refer to Ascension Day as being one of the oldest feasts practiced by the Church, possibly going as far back as AD 68. There is no written evidence of the Church honouring Ascension Day until Augustine's time in the fourth century. However, the importance of Ascension Day's meaning for us remains, just as it did for Jesus' apostles who witnessed it on that day and the Church that has celebrated it for nearly two millennia now.

For we Christians, Ascension Day's meaning provides us with a sense of hope that the glorious and triumphant return of Christ is near. It too is a reminder of the Kingdom of God that is within our hearts, and of the ever-present Spirit of God, watching over and protecting us as we spread the light of Jesus' truth throughout the world.

### **What the Ascension of Christ means for us:**

**[ 1 ] It provides a sense of hope that the glorious and triumphant return of Christ is near and it will be in the same way, according to the angels that addressed the apostles on Ascension Day v.11 as he departed.**

We live in the age of the 'Now but not yet'. It is this age when the kingdom of God has come between Christ's first appearance on earth and His return. When Christ shall come again a second and final time to judge the living and the dead completely fulfilling all his promises and establishing his kingdom in power forever, and what glorious day that will be!

In the gospel of Matthew 24:30 Jesus speaks of this day when he says, *'Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.'*

The son of man coming on the clouds was not new to Israel for the Old Testament prophet alludes to it in Daniel 7:13-14 referring to Christ's second coming in power and glory on the clouds.

**13** *'In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

Both the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1:7b and John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, in one of the closing chapters of the last book of the Bible [Revelation 19:11-12] wrote of the very opening of heaven that marks Christ's return from heaven in the manner that the angels describe to his apostles on Ascension day. The very Christ who since his ascension is seated at the right hand of the father and proclaims three times in the last chapter of the Bible, *"I am coming soon."* To whom John responds, *'Amen come Lord Jesus.'* [Revelation 22:7, 12, 20]

The risen and ascended Jesus Christ whom we worship and adore remains there until the time heaven opens for him to return in glory on the clouds.

**[ 2 ] The meaning of the Ascension to us is a reminder of the Kingdom of God that is within our hearts.**

The heart of Jesus' preaching continually focused on the kingdom of God and remained equally so even after his resurrection right up until the day he ascended to heaven v.3.

When Christ came to earth he ushering in the 'kingdom of God', which is God's eternal kingship. God's rule and reign drawing near to humanity in the presence, person and ministry of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, who had to suffer, die, then be bodily resurrected and ascend to heaven – all so that God might establish his rule in the hearts and lives of humanity. For God through Jesus his son overcame all the forces of evil and removed from humanity all the consequences of sin including the power of death and all else that diminishes life, so that a new order of peace and righteousness between God and humanity is created.

Anyone who has believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and received him as their Saviour has been born again by the Holy Spirit. For in this act of devotion you have submitted your own life to God's kingship, his rule, and reign in your heart.

So, it is then that the Ascension reminds us of this commitment to God and that by his Spirit his kingdom resides within our hearts.

**[ 3 ] With God reigning over a believer's life we are reminded by the Ascension of the ever-present Spirit of God, filling us, watching over and protecting us as we spread the light of Jesus' truth throughout the world as we preach the kingdom of God.** As we receive from Jesus and take upon ourselves in faith all his authority that he has given us to go and make disciples of all peoples, 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 Christ has commanded us. Knowing that as we do so we have the promise of Christ's spirit being ever present with us because of the words he spoke before he ascended to heaven. "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." [Matthew 28:18-20] The end of the age that will be marked by is return on the clouds in just the same way he left his apostles on Ascension Day. Certainly, these are reassuring and empowering words for us as we continue as Christ's church to teach about the Kingdom of God being near. Especially when it includes preaching the need for repentance for the forgiveness of sin which the often the heart of humanity hates to hear and rebels against, along with the prevailing culture of society and the world we live in today. People in general are not happy to be told the good news we have to share and react adversely to it both as individuals and in the media. Remember then the next time you suffer an adverse reaction for being a follower of Christ. The Ascension reminds us of the ever-present spirit of God watching over us and protecting us from everything from harsh words and criticism, abandonment and exclusion, even on the pain of the suffering of death as a witness and martyr for Christ, your life is protected by God both now and forevermore in eternity!

**In Conclusion:** Contemplating what the Ascension means for us is all about worshipping and adoring the Saviour who invites us into intimate communion with Our Heavenly Father. Christ has completed His Father's mission. And now a new relationship emerges between His friends –the Apostles, their successors, you and me, and our God. Have you personally entered into this new relationship? If not then why not today? Let us enter in to that communion as we partake in the Lord's Supper, a visible sign of his grace to us today, that celebrates through Christ- His life, death, resurrection, ascension and expected return.