

Mike's message

Ascension Day (14th May)

Forty days after the great feast of Easter comes Ascension Day. We'll be observing this at St Andrew's on Thursday 14th May with a 7pm Eucharist, followed by a Beetle Drive and Hot Dogs Social Evening.

Ascension Day is when, according to scripture, the Risen Jesus ended his earthly presence by 'ascending' into heaven. According to Luke in 'Acts of the Apostles' (Chapter 1 vv 9-11), this took place forty days after the Resurrection. Luke does have another account though, in his Gospel (24 .50-53), where Jesus' departure is sooner after Easter. (*see also* Mark 16.19).

The language of 'ascending into heaven' is strange to us these days. It comes from an age when heaven was 'up there', hell 'down below' and the earth was in between. Someone once called a literal reading of scriptures describing the Ascension as 'Cape Canaveral Theology' with Jesus 'blasting off' into space! That's how many old paintings depict it, and an ornate plaster ceiling in Rome has only Jesus' feet visible, sticking out below a cloud!

So what are we to make of The Ascension?

When we celebrate the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, at Christmas, we talk of God-became-Man. God sanctifies all human life by becoming part of it in the person of Jesus Christ. At Ascension the Risen Christ, still bearing the marks of human suffering on his hands, feet and side, carries the realities of our human lives into the very heart of God.

Charles Wesley reflected on this in this famous Ascension Day hymn:



An Ascension Day Hymn

Hail the day that sees him rise, Alleluia!
to his throne above 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 hath conquered death and sin; Alleluia!
take the King of glory in! Alleluia!

Lo! the heaven its Lord receives, Alleluia!
yet he loves the earth he leaves; Alleluia!
though returning to his throne, Alleluia!
still he calls mankind his own. Alleluia!

See! he lifts his hands above; Alleluia!
See! he shows the prints of love: Alleluia!
Hark! his gracious lips bestow, Alleluia!
blessings on his Church below. Alleluia!

Still for us he intercedes, Alleluia!
his prevailing death he pleads, Alleluia!
near himself prepares our place, Alleluia!
he the first fruits of our race. Alleluia!

Lord, though parted from our sight, Alleluia!
far above the starry height, Alleluia!
grant our hearts may thither rise, Alleluia!
seeking thee above the skies. Alleluia!

There we shall with thee remain, Alleluia!
partners of thy eternal reign, Alleluia!
there thy face forever see, Alleluia!
find our heaven of heavens in thee, Alleluia!

Charles Wesley 1739