

# Mike's message .....

## May Days!

May Day is a special day with origins as a Spring Festival going back many centuries and, from the nineteenth century onwards, also observed as International Workers Day. This year May also contains three very special Christian festivals, the dates of which vary each year as they are linked to Easter.



The first of these, forty days after Easter, is **Ascension Day** (Thursday 10th May). According to Luke the Risen Jesus ended his earthly presence by 'ascending' into heaven. In Luke's 'Acts of the Apostles' (Chapter 1 vv 9-11), this took place forty days after the Resurrection. Luke also has a different account, in his Gospel (24 .50-53), where Jesus' departure is sooner after Easter. (cf Mark 16.19).

The language of 'ascending into heaven' is strange to us. It comes from an age when heaven was 'up there', hell 'down below' and the earth was in between. Someone once described the idea of the Ascension as 'Cape Canaveral Theology' with Jesus 'blasting off' into space! That's how art often depicts 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 birth of Jesus we talk of God affirming the sanctity of 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, one verse of which reads:

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!

In his ministry Jesus spoke about sending a 'blessing' to his people. He'd spoken about an Advocate or helper (John 14 .25ff). It's this gift that we observe at **Pentecost** (Sunday 20th May) which used to be called 'Whit Sunday'. The name Pentecost also refers to a Jewish harvest festival held 50 days, hence the name, after Passover. The disciples were celebrating this when they received the gift Jesus spoke of which we refer to as the Holy Spirit. Luke records this in Acts (Chapter 2) but again there's an alternative interpretation, by John, that the Holy Spirit was given on Easter Day itself! (John 20 .19-23).

The third special day is **Trinity Sunday** (Sunday 27th May). This is least 'scriptural' of the days as the formulation of the idea of 'Trinity', God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, was a development of the early Christian Church (see Matthew 28.19 where it's believed to be added as a 'postscript'). One God in three persons? That needs an article of it's own!