

Welcome to our worship on this **Ascension Day, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020** coming from **St Mark's Church in Reigate**. Today we celebrate Jesus ascending into heaven and wait upon the Holy Spirit to fill us anew. As you watch this broadcast, perhaps you can join in with the usual responses, the hymns and with the Lord's Prayer.

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

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
**Amen.**

Alleluia! Christ is risen.  
**He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, 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.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 1 verses 4-11.

While staying with them, Jesus ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

This is the word of the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

Seeing we have a great high priest who has passed through the heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us offer him the praise worthy of his name.

We join together in singing this hymn version of the Gloria.

**Glory in the highest to the God of heaven!**  
**Peace to all your people through the earth be given!**  
**Mighty God and Father, thanks and praise we bring,**  
**singing Hallelujah to our heavenly king.**

**Jesus Christ is risen, God the Father's Son!  
With the Holy Spirit you are Lord alone!  
Lamb once killed for sinners, all our guilt to bear,  
show us now your mercy, now receive our prayer.**

**Christ the world's true Saviour, high and holy One,  
seated now and reigning from your Father's throne:  
Lord and God, we praise you! Highest heaven adores:  
in the Father's glory, all the praise be yours!**

*Christopher Idle (b.1938) after Gloria in Excelsis  
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Let us pray that our risen and ascended Lord will lead us to eternal life.

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.**

Our Epistle is read by Ben Read.

A reading from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, chapter 1 verses 15-23.

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

Alleluia, alleluia.

Go and make disciples of all nations, says the Lord.

Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

**Alleluia.**

A reading from Luke, chapter 24 verses 44-53.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus said to the disciples, "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, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

### **Sermon**

Crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. All in a little over forty days. From sadness to guilt, to hopelessness, to fear, to doubt, to hopefulness, the feelings of the disciples have been a roller coaster. Jesus has told the disciples that he had to suffer, but would be raised in three days. Did they believe him? Certainly not! Peter even rebuked Jesus, saying that this could not happen, leading to Jesus calling him Satan. Then Jesus *was* arrested. And then Jesus *was* crucified. In three days, the stone was removed, and the tomb was empty. Angels and even Jesus himself appeared to tell his followers that he was raised, and still they doubted! He had to appear inside locked doors, on the road to Emmaus walking with some disciples, and by the beach to cook breakfast with them, just to convince them that he was raised.

Now, forty days after his resurrection, once again, Jesus recapped what he had told the disciples before: that he is to fulfil the Scriptures. The disciples had not been able to understand what the life and ministry of Jesus were about while he was with them before, so Jesus told them one last time while he was still among them. He commissioned the disciples to proclaim: "repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations," and that they should begin this proclamation in Jerusalem.

In today's Gospel reading, the author talks about Jesus being "carried up into heaven." The disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple blessing God. In the sequel to the Gospel of Luke, the Book of Acts, the author elaborates on the reactions of the apostles: "When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?'"

Why do you stand looking up toward heaven? Yes, their rabbi is really gone! These disciples are at a loss again. God is showing steadfast love, sending these two messengers to remind them not just to stand and look up, but to look around, look ahead, and look towards the work they must do. They must proclaim "repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations." They must be witnesses to what just happened. And they must *not* worry; they will receive the Holy Spirit to carry out the mission. Jesus has promised to send the Paraclete, the advocate in his absence, the power from on high. Jesus has told them to stay in Jerusalem to wait for it.

Going through something traumatic, such as the times we are living through now, it is easy to dwell on the past or fantasize about the future, but it is not easy to stay in the present.

However, the present is exactly where Jesus wants the disciples to be. Now the disciples should realize they are not only followers, but they are also leaders. They cannot only stand there, looking up towards heaven. Rather, they need to follow Jesus' commission, and they need to get into action. Nevertheless, before their action, before the Holy Spirit is bestowed on them, they need to reflect, to pray, and to bless God.

The verses after today's reading from the Book of Acts tell us that, "When [the disciples] had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying... All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers." (Acts 1:13a, 14). Finally, the disciples' minds are opened to understand the Scriptures and the purpose of Jesus' teaching. The disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God. (Luke 24:53). As we read in the Letter to the Ephesians, "With the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you."

From then on, the disciples of Jesus set up the Church and proclaimed the repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus to all nations. That is how we have had the Good News passed to us. They have set a great example for us, the later followers. When we are at a loss, before we carry out our call, we need to pray and bless God, being in the very presence of God.

In our divided world, things seem to have changed for the worse. Life seems to be upside-down, not just with the coronavirus pandemic but with racial tension, terrorist attacks, chaos in the Middle East, and so much more. We may be like the disciples, with the tendency to look upward and not see the present, our call. But no, we must stay in the present, grounding ourselves in Jesus the Christ to proclaim repentance and forgiveness in his name, and bearing witness to the grace of God.

We have been celebrating the joy of Jesus' resurrection, looking forward to being in God's kingdom in the future. But it is not for us to know when or how. The season of Easter is about to end. We know in order to get to Easter, we had to go through Good Friday. Now, with the hope of that blessed day, we are not afraid of suffering. The time for action is here. It's not an easy task, but we will not be alone; the Holy Spirit will be with us.

The next 10 days are special days of prayer where in recent years the churches have come together to pray "Thy Kingdom Come". May I encourage you to pray that the Holy Spirit will fill us all anew for his work of mission in this area as we move into the future. Please use the materials and follow the links on our website. Let us all stay in the presence of God. *Amen.*

**The Choral Scholars of St Martin-in-the-Fields lead us in singing the hymn: Hail the day that sees him rise**

**Hail the day that sees him rise, alleluia!  
Glorious to his native skies; alleluia!  
Christ, awhile to mortals given, alleluia!  
Enters now the highest heaven! Alleluia!**

**There the glorious triumph waits; alleluia!  
Lift your heads, eternal gates! Alleluia!  
Christ hast vanquished death and sin; alleluia!  
Take the King of glory in. Alleluia!**

**There we shall with thee remain, alleluia!  
Partners of thine endless reign; alleluia!  
There thy face unclouded see, alleluia!  
Find our heaven of heavens in thee. Alleluia!**

*Charles Wesley (1707-1788), Thomas Cotterill (1779-1823) and others*

Let us declare our faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is,  
seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary  
and was made man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son  
is worshipped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.**

**We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Let us join our prayers with those of our Saviour Christ,  
seeking the Father's blessing and the gifts of the Spirit.

**Louise Wallis** leads us in prayer.

Jesus Christ, great high priest,  
living for ever to intercede for us,  
pray for the Church, your broken body in the world.  
Lord, hear us.  
**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.  
Lord, hear us.

**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.  
Especially we pray for all those suffering from Coronavirus.  
Lord, hear us.

**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.  
Lord, hear us.

**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.  
Lord, hear us.

**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.**

**The Choral Scholars of St Martin-in-the-Fields lead us in singing the hymn: Crown him with many crowns**

**Crown him with many crowns,  
the Lamb upon his throne;  
hark, how the heavenly anthem drowns  
all music but its own!  
Awake, my soul, and sing  
of him who died for thee,  
and hail him as thy matchless King  
through all eternity.**

**Crown him the Lord of love;  
behold his hands and side,  
those wounds yet visible above  
in beauty glorified:  
no angel in the sky  
can fully bear that sight,  
but downward bends his burning eye  
at mysteries so bright.**

**Crown him the Lord of peace,  
whose power a sceptre sways  
from pole to pole, that wars may cease,  
and all be prayer and praise:  
his reign shall know no end,  
and round his pierced feet  
fair flowers of paradise extend  
their fragrance ever sweet.**

**Crown him the Lord of years,  
the Potentate of time,  
creator of the rolling spheres  
ineffably sublime:  
all hail, Redeemer, hail!  
for thou hast died for me;  
thy praise shall never, never fail  
throughout eternity.**

*Matthew Bridges (1800-1894)*

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 1, verses 12-14.

Then the disciples returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying. They were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Let us pray:  
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.**

Looking for the coming of his kingdom,  
let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us:  
**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.**

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 among you and remain with you always.

**Amen.**

Waiting expectantly for the promised Holy Spirit,  
go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia!

**Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia!**