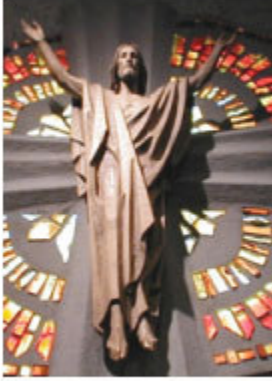


## The Ascension of the Lord



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### Luke 24:46-53

**46** Jesus said to his disciples: ‘You see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, **47** and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem. **48** You are witnesses to this.

**49** ‘And now I am sending down to you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city then, until you are clothed with the power from on high.’ **50** Then he took them out as far as the outskirts of Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. **51** Now as he blessed them, he withdrew from them and was carried

**up to heaven. 52** They worshipped him and then went back to Jerusalem full of joy; **53** and they were continually in the Temple praising God.

Other readings: Acts 1:1-11 Psalm 46 (47) Ephesians 1:17-23

This gospel reading contains the final verses of the Gospel of Luke. Each of the gospels comes to an end with the appearances of the risen Jesus. In Luke the climax comes with his appearance to the eleven disciples on the evening of the first day of the week, the same day on which the discovery of the empty tomb had been made.

Jesus declares that the Scriptures have been fulfilled in him. The events of his death and resurrection are the fulfilment of the hopes and expectations of Israel. The overriding theme here, however, is preparation for mission. The disciples will preach to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. They are to be ‘witnesses’, the Greek word *martyres* reminding us that witness to Jesus can lead to death. The reading from the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles makes the mission more explicit, saying that the disciples will preach ‘not only in Jerusalem, but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth’.

Once more there is the promise of the Holy Spirit, referred to here as ‘power from on high’. The most remarkable manifestation of the Spirit will be on the day of Pentecost. The departure of Jesus here might seem like a rehearsal for the departure after forty days narrated in the Acts, that we recall and celebrate on this feast as the ‘ascension’ of the Lord. The important point is that, from the moment of his resurrection, Jesus is with the Father. The going up to heaven makes this point in graphic terms.

The gospel ends where it began, in the temple in Jerusalem. It began with Zechariah offering incense, and it ends with the disciples joyfully praising God. Despite the fact that Christ is no longer visible to us, we are filled with joy at his abiding presence.

*How do the Scriptures of the Old Testament prepare us for Christ?*

*What is the deep meaning of the ascension of the Lord?*

*Pray for the church scattered to ‘the ends of the earth’.*

*Pray that we may joyfully receive ‘power from on high’ as we approach Pentecost.*

