

Ascension Joy

[Acts 1: 1-11](#), [Luke 24: 44-33](#)

How is it that Jesus leaving his disciples to ascend to heaven is such a joyful occasion? It certainly strikes a contrast with their behaviour after Jesus' death, when they hid in fear behind locked doors in the upper room.

Ascension is an essential part of the story of faith. Not only did Jesus die and rise from the dead, but he returned to God the Father. The clouds which come and hide him from the disciples' sight is a sign of God's glorious presence, just like the pillar of cloud announced God's presence to the Israelites in the wilderness.

It's a physical reminder of the fact that Jesus is God's Son, and he is glorified with his Father.

But this isn't the end of the story: in this opening chapter of Acts Jesus promises his disciples that they will receive the Holy Spirit, and that they will be his witnesses across the whole world: messengers to the Jews, to those who previously were "beyond the pale" in Samaria, and to parts of the globe which they barely knew existed: "the ends of the earth." This is a new beginning, where human beings, inspired by the Holy Spirit, will take the message of Jesus' love and saving work out through space and time.

It's not surprising, then, that the disciples are left standing, staring up into the sky.



Yet the two angels, those strange men dressed in white, don't let them keep still. Looking up won't get the disciples very far. Instead of looking up, they are being told to go out, to take the story which they have seen unfold before their eyes and to share it.

And even that isn't the end, for the disciples are told that Jesus "will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

The story of God's loving purpose for humanity is being demonstrated here. The door between heaven and earth has been opened, and just as Jesus has gone up in all the glory of God, so he opens the way for us. There is no need to stay afraid and isolated, but instead there is news which is so good, and so liberating that it won't stay shut in.

The conclusion of Luke's Gospel shows how the disciples were affected: they are no longer afraid of the Jews but stay continually at the temple. They cannot contain their worship. Jesus' ascension is the start of something new for them.

Does our love of Jesus have the same exuberant effect on us, or are we still hiding in the shadows? The angels couldn't understand why the disciples were standing staring into the heavens – there was much more for them in store if they stepped out into the world.

Even in lockdown, we can still be praying for others and sharing the good news of Jesus in practical ways with people both near and far. Whether it's helping or encouraging our near neighbours or farther afield through social media or assisting with international aid efforts, we can still be sharing the good news of the risen, ascended Jesus.



As we wait with the disciples in the forty days to Pentecost, when we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit, we have a great opportunity to focus our attentions on others as we pray. **Thy Kingdom Come** is a global prayer movement that invites Christians from different denominations around the world to pray between Ascension Day (21 May) and Pentecost (31 May) for more people to come to know Jesus. There are lots of resources, such as the one here: <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/stories/prayer-and-care> which is designed to help us in this period of social distancing.

Let us be joyful as we praise the risen Jesus, and share our joy with others.

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