

The Ascension of the Lord, Year C

GOSPEL

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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, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.

‘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.’

Then he took them out as far as the outskirts of Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. Now as he blessed them, he withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven. They worshipped him and then went back to Jerusalem full of joy; and they were continually in the Temple praising God.

(Luke 24:46–53)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Gospel of Luke opens with Zechariah praying in the temple and closes with the disciples praying in the temple. The temple plays a critical role in Luke’s account of Jesus’ public life.
- Although the New Testament frequently mentions Jesus’ ascension to the Father (Mark 16:19; John 6:62; John 20:17, Ephesians 4:8–10), only Luke describes the event itself, both in his gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles.
- Bethany is a small town not far from Jerusalem, just over the Mount of Olives. It was the hometown of Mary, Martha and Lazarus.
- The nine days between the ascension and Pentecost that the disciples spent in praying together gave rise to the ‘novena’, a devotional practice of praying in a particularly focused way for a special intention over nine consecutive days.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The disciples’ reaction to Jesus’ absence after his ascension starkly contrasts their reaction to him leaving at his death. After his death on the cross, they shut themselves in an upper room in fear. Now, they worship him and rejoice in the temple. Clearly, after Jesus’ ascension, the disciples did not lose the sense that Jesus was still present among them. Something has changed. Jesus’ return to God opens the way to glory for all who believe, and this is the source of their joy. He is beyond their sight yet truly with them, and he has repeated his promise to send the help they will need to undertake their mission in the world. These final verses of the Gospel of Luke introduce what will become the story of his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles: ‘Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’ Acts describes how the Gospel is taken to all the nations—which is a story that continues to this day.

- In what ways are you just like the disciples—beginning a new journey out into the world?
- In what ways is the Gospel still being taken to the ends of the earth?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What has the Father promised to you?
- How have you felt since you ‘were clothed with power from on high’ at the Easter ceremonies?
- ‘You are witnesses to this.’ Try defining what you are called to witness. In what ways can you attest to the truth of that?
- This gospel describes the closing of one era and the opening of another. What experiences in your life involved once chapter closing and another opening? Share your stories.
- Live joyfully this week. Try to bring joy to others. Practise continually praising God in all the small actions of your day.
- Today’s entrance antiphon is suitable as a prayer for this week:

*You kingdoms of the earth, sing to God;
praise the Lord who ascends to the highest heavens;
his majesty and might are in the skies, alleluia.*

