

# Worship at Home

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Prepared by the

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## Call to Worship

*Our God has ascended with a mighty shout.  
The Lord has ascended with trumpets blaring!  
Come, let's sing praise to God together,  
for our God is sovereign over all the earth!*

## StF 300: Hail the day that sees him rise

**Hail the day that sees him rise, Alleluia!  
ravished from our wistful eyes! Alleluia!  
Christ, awhile to mortals given, Alleluia!  
reascends his native heaven. Alleluia!**

**There the glorious triumph waits; Alleluia!  
lift your heads, eternal gates. Alleluia!  
wide unfold the radiant scene; Alleluia!  
take the King of Glory in. Alleluia!**

**Him though highest heaven receives; Alleluia!  
still he loves the earth he leaves. Alleluia!  
though returning to his throne, Alleluia!  
still he calls the world his own. Alleluia!**

**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!**

**Master, parted from our sight, Alleluia!  
high above the azure height, Alleluia!  
grant our hearts to you may rise, Alleluia!  
following you beyond the skies: Alleluia!**

**Cast ourselves before your throne, Alleluia!  
here our heaven of heavens to own, Alleluia!  
there we shall with you remain, Alleluia!  
partners of your endless reign: Alleluia!**

*Charles Wesley (1707-1788)*

## Prayers

O God of all power and majesty, you created the heavens and stretched them out.  
You formed the earth and all that comes from it.  
You give the breath of life to all who walk on the face of the earth.  
Jesus, you conquered sin and death and now reign victorious. You are Lord; glory is due your name.  
The former things have come to pass; we now await the new things you will bring through the Holy Spirit.  
We rejoice to be gathered in your name. Alleluia!  
Accept our praise and petitions.

Where we have been corrupted, **purify us.**  
Where we have been in error, **direct us.**  
Where we have given ourselves to unworthy goals, **reform us.**  
Where we have sinned, **forgive us, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.**

## Reading: Acts 1:1-11.

## Message

The Ascension is narrated without any explanation of its theological significance. However, there are at least three claims here that are worth attention.

The first is that the Ascension story is told to back up the continuous claims throughout the Gospels that Jesus is Lord. In Acts 2:33 we are told that Jesus' ascension is the reason that he can send the Holy Spirit – *“Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear”*. In Acts 5:31 we are informed that it is because of his ascension that Jesus can give repentance and forgiveness – *“God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel”*.

Does it not seem incredible, therefore, that we don't celebrate the ascension as of equal importance to the resurrection in our lives? Without it we would not receive repentance and forgiveness, and we would

be attempting to live our lives without the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit!

The cloud in our text is not a heavenly elevator, instead it is a sign of God's presence as clouds appear elsewhere in scripture – the pillar of cloud in Exodus or the cloud that comes appears at Jesus' transfiguration. If we ask the question 'Where did Jesus go?' perhaps the only adequate answer is that Jesus went to the Father. We don't actually know whether that is a place 'up there' somewhere. The ascension into the cloud is Jesus' welcome into the Father's presence.

This is not, however, simply a return to the way things were before Jesus came to earth. No, the world has changed, because it is only now that Jesus is its enthroned Lord. Without the ascension, Easter would have little meaning. Jesus is instated to his rightful place, fulfilling all the promises of the Bible. No longer do powers, pursuits or empty promises vie for control of our lives because Jesus is Lord of our lives instead. Ultimately, it is the ascension which clarifies what the resurrection means. Jesus is God's promise and plan for the whole world, and neither death nor any of its minions can stop that.

The second theme highlighted in the Ascension story is that the stage is now set for the giving of the Spirit. Jesus' going to the Father means that the Spirit will be poured out on God's people. For now, the disciples must wait to receive that power which will come from the Holy Spirit.

In the Bible, when we see God's Spirit moving in the world it is bringing something new. In Genesis 1 we are told of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters as God begins his work of creation. In Luke 1:35, as the angel Gabriel brings Mary the news that she is carrying Jesus, we are told *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you”*.

Here too, in Acts, it will be the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which will bring about the birth of something new in the form of the church and its witness.

The disciples see no need to wait. They ask if 'now' is the time to restore the kingdom to Israel. But what God has in mind is not just bringing Israel back to the good old days. Instead, God's plan is far greater because it entails bringing Israel to its yet unrealised goal of being light to the whole world. The disciples thought they were on the verge of inheriting an old-style-kingdom, when in fact they are at the edge of God's mission to redeem all nations, a mission that will consume the rest of their lives and ours.

The disciples must be called away from staring up, in expectation and wonder at where they last saw Jesus. They aren't looking for the wrong thing, but they are looking in the wrong place because all that Jesus began to do and to teach doesn't end with the ascension. The church continues to proclaim, to teach, to love and to serve in Jesus' name.

In John's gospel, Jesus prays for all believers. Jesus was aware that not only will he depart from the world, but likewise those who stand with him, his immediate circle of followers, will also depart to be with him in his glory. This will leave those whom they disciple, the church, to represent the kingdom in the world. Therefore, Jesus now turns to pray for these followers whom he has not yet met, men and women who will follow the apostles, indeed the Church today, which carries the mission set down by Jesus during his final week.

Jesus prays, first, that they will have unity, like that of his first disciples. This unity must be visibly based on love so that when the world sees them, it will know immediately that they represent Jesus. But this love is not based on a moral effort, it is instead an outward growth of the union Christians enjoy with Jesus himself: a union modelled on the oneness of Father and Son which indwells in believers once they are given new birth.

Jesus looks towards a profound spiritual intimacy that changes human life. It is a unity which encompasses the Father with the Son, the disciples with them both, and with one another. Many point out that Jesus' prayer does not mention the Holy Spirit. But it is the Spirit who enables this intimacy.

Later John writes in his first letter *"We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit"*.

The confidence of the Church and her mission rests here. If it lives in the Spirit and thereby in the Father and Son, if it reflects God's glory and love, if it shows a unity in its ranks born by a shared knowledge of God, its testimony has the power to astonish the world.

In the work of the Spirit, we encounter Jesus and what he continues to do. We aren't left staring at where Jesus used to be in our own faith journey because Jesus is alive and ever present with us through the Holy Spirit. For the disciples, the ascension must have been heartbreaking. This was Jesus whom they loved, their teacher and greatest friend. But it is because Jesus ascended as our risen Lord that the departures we experience in life such as loss of relationships, loss of health or even loss of life itself can no longer harm us or rob us of God's promise. For this reason, we should most definitely celebrate the Ascension with praise and thanks.



### **StF 342: All hail the power of Jesus' name!**

**All hail the power of Jesus' name!  
Let angels prostrate fall.  
Bring forth the royal diadem,  
and crown him Lord of all.**

**You seed of Israel's chosen race  
you ransomed of the fall,  
hail him who saves you by his grace,  
and crown him Lord of all.**

**Hail him, the heir of David's line  
whom David Lord did call,  
the God incarnate, Man divine,  
and crown him Lord of all.**

**Let every kindred, every tribe  
on this terrestrial ball,  
to him all majesty ascribe,  
and crown him Lord of all.**

**O that with yonder sacred throng  
we at his feet may fall,  
join in the everlasting song,  
and crown him Lord of all!**

Edward Perronet (1726-1792); adapted by John Rippon (1751-1836)

### **Prayers for the world**

**Gracious God**, you have called us to be the church of Jesus Christ. Keep us one in faith and service, breaking bread together, and proclaiming the good news to the world, that all may believe you are love, turn to your ways, and live in the light of your truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Eternal Ruler**, hope of all the earth, you sent us a Saviour, Christ Jesus, to break down walls of hostility that divide us. Send peace on earth, and put down greed, pride, and anger, which turn nation against nation and race against race. Speed the day when wars will end and the whole world accepts your rule; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Merciful God**, you bear the pain of the world. Look with compassion on those who are sick and bring healing as a sign of your grace. Stand with those who sorrow that they may know your comfort through Jesus Christ our Lord. God of compassion, bless us and those we love, our friends and families, that, drawing close to you, we may be drawn closer to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Almighty God**, your blessed Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, ascended far above all heavens that he might fill all things. Mercifully give us faith to trust that, as he promised, he abides with us on earth to the end of time; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**