

## **St Raphael's Community: The Liturgy of Ascension Day**

### **Welcome**

Welcome to the St Raphael's Community service for Ascension Day.

*Ascension Day is the fortieth day since Easter. It has been celebrated as a festival of the church since the late fourth century, and there is a long history of choirs going to the top of church towers to sing. Thankfully, the words are before us – the hymn: Hail the day that sees him rise.*

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

### **Hail the day that sees him rise, Alleluia!**

1. Hail the day that sees him rise, Alleluia!  
to his throne beyond the skies. Alleluia!  
Christ, the Lamb for sinners given, Alleluia!  
enters now the highest heaven. Alleluia!

2. There for him high triumph waits; Alleluia!  
lift your heads, eternal gates. Alleluia!  
He has conquered death and sin; Alleluia!  
take the King of glory in. Alleluia!

3. Highest heaven its Lord receives; Alleluia!  
yet he loves the earth he leaves. Alleluia!  
Though returning to his throne, Alleluia!  
still he calls us all his own. Alleluia!

4. Still for us he intercedes; Alleluia!  
his atoning death he pleads, Alleluia!  
near himself prepares our place, Alleluia!  
he the firstfruits of our race. Alleluia!

5. There we shall with you remain, Alleluia!  
partners of your endless reign, Alleluia!  
see you with unclouded view, Alleluia!  
find our heaven of heavens in you. Alleluia!

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

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 read the story of his parting.

**Gospel: Luke 24. 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.**

**Gloria in Excelsis**

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.

**Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to his people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father,  
we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world:  
have mercy on us;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:  
receive our prayer.**

**For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.Amen.**

### **The Collect of Ascension Day**

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 Christto have ascended into the heavens,so may we in heart and mindalso ascendand 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.**

*It's good that Marjorie Warner has been able to share with us her reflection on Luke's Gospel. The text at the end of her reflection is of the poem she mentions, W. B. Yeats' The Lake Isle of Innisfree.*

### **Reflection**

Luke is preparing to close his first book with these words, "Then they worshipped him", (that is, Jesus.) As Jesus ascends with an action of blessing, he is taken up to Heaven, and Luke leaves us amidst an atmosphere for the disciples of worship's joy and continuing praise.

The disciples worshipped Jesus? To any who have gathered in a place of worship or in private devotion, the notion of worship may sound "normal" or "average," in the sense that this is an expected activity for us and our church communities. Worship is what we do. Worship usually involves, of course, actions, silence, spoken and sung liturgy – such as texts, prayers, and hymns. Nonetheless, if we are more used to hearing the scriptures in "pieces" week-by-week, rather than a whole book reading, we might be surprised to hear today's words, "Then they worshipped him." Yet from Luke's opening chapters, through the Spirit-inspired voices of Elizabeth, Mary, Zechariah, and others, we have been led to this place of climax. Jesus is – worthy of worship. This revelation comes through the Holy Spirit, as those disciples are impacted by the

encounter with the Father's very nature and glory in his ascending Son, Jesus Christ. Luke certainly ends his first book on a high note – sorry, no pun intended!

In Luke's opening sentences of his second book, the Acts of the Apostles, Luke paints in more detail this same event. Now we have hills and clouds, sky, voices, heights and angels, we focus again on Jesus being taken to Heaven. Jesus' true identity is expressed in the very highest terms as glorious in God, glorious with God. If we read on a little more, we hear of the early believers constantly devoting themselves to prayer, to worship. What springs from the disciples' conviction of ascending Jesus with Father and the Spirit, spills over into that amazing flood of the 28 blockbuster chapters of Acts, filled with the acts of the Holy Spirit. Ascension is the fulfilment of Resurrection. Heaven is earthed; Heaven is upon earth.

Worship is in the very DNA of the Christian. Jesus is worthy in God's eyes. How we worship, and our inner states vary, of course, from time-to-time- and not least in this experience of great uncertainty and change to our usual routines. But how wonderful! We can still worship – albeit in some newer ways. Let us be re-called to that heart of worship, to our Christian DNA. Let's remember those witnesses who knew deep within that the Father had drawn his Son home to glory. Let us be recalled to this heart of worship – to remember that because of Jesus, the Father still offers to draw you and me and all humanity "above" too, into Himself, forgiven and restored.

In this time of challenge and opportunity, may we all find resources deep which bring alive and alert us to the mystery – the mystery revealed in Christ – that the God-centre of life itself is suffused with love, forgiveness, blessing, wonder, glory and worship, and to draw on the poet, W. B. Yeats, may we find worship in our deep heart's core.

**W. B. Yeats: The Lake Isle of Innisfree.**

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:  
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee;  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;  
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

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

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.  
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 Lord's Prayer**

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.****

*We finish with a reading from the Acts of the Apostles, a short responsary, a closing prayer, and the Peace, before joining in one of the great Ascension hymns: Christ Triumphant, ever reigning.*

### **A reading from the Acts of the Apostles**

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.

### **Responsory**

As we wait in silence,  
**make us ready for your coming Spirit.**

As we listen to your word,  
**make us ready for your coming Spirit.**

As we worship you in majesty,  
**make us ready for your coming Spirit.**

As we long for your refreshing,  
**make us ready for your coming Spirit.**

As we long for your renewing,  
**make us ready for your coming Spirit.**

As we long for your equipping,  
**make us ready for your coming Spirit.**

As we long for your empowering,  
**make us ready for your coming Spirit.**

O Great Love, thank you for living and loving in us and through us. May all that we do flow from our deep connection with you and all beings. Help us become a community that vulnerably shares each other's burdens and the weight of glory. Listen to our hearts' longings for the healing of our world. Knowing you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer these prayers in all the holy names of God. **Amen.**

### **The Peace**

Jesus says: 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.

If you love me, rejoice because I am going to the Father'.

May the peace of the Lord be always with you. Alleluia! Alleluia!

### **Christ Triumphant, ever reigning**

1. Christ triumphant, ever reigning,  
Saviour, Master, King!

Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining,  
hear us as we sing:

*Yours the glory and the crown,  
the high renown, the eternal name.*

2. Word incarnate, truth revealing,  
Son of Man on earth!

power and majesty concealing  
by your humble birth:

*Yours the glory and the crown,  
the high renown, the eternal name.*

3 Suffering servant, scorned, ill-treated,  
victim crucified!

death is through the cross defeated,  
sinners justified:

*Yours the glory and the crown,  
the high renown, the eternal name.*

4. Priestly king, enthroned for ever  
high in heaven above!

sin and death and hell shall never  
stifle hymns of love:

*Yours the glory and the crown,  
the high renown, the eternal name.*

5. So, our hearts and voices raising  
through the ages long,

ceaselessly upon you gazing,  
this shall be our song:

*Yours the glory and the crown,  
the high renown, the eternal name.*