

The Ascension of the Lord

The Ascension is the event, where Jesus arose into heaven, at the end of his time on earth.

Jesus' time on earth began with his birth. It was interrupted for three days by His death on the Cross. During that time, He descended into the realm of the dead and preached the Gospel to the good people who died before Him. This allowed those good and holy souls--the righteous dead, as we call them--who accepted Christ as their Saviour to proceed to heaven. On the third day after his death and burial, Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, an event we call the Resurrection. He spent the next 40 days preaching and preparing His disciples to perform the work of preaching and baptizing all people. At the end of this 40 day period, Jesus ascended into heaven. We call this the Ascension.

The Bible tells us what happened on that day:

1. In my earlier work, Theophilus, I dealt with everything Jesus had done and taught from the beginning
2. until the day he gave his instructions to the apostles he had chosen through the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven.
3. He had shown himself alive to them after his Passion by many demonstrations: for forty days he had continued to appear to them and tell them about the kingdom of God.
4. While at table with them, he had told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for what the Father had promised. 'It is', he had said, 'what you have heard me speak about:
5. John baptised with water but, not many days from now, you are going to be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'
6. Now having met together, they asked him, 'Lord, has the time come for you to restore the kingdom to Israel?'
7. He replied, 'It is not for you to know times or dates that the Father has decided by his own authority,
8. but you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to earth's remotest end.'
9. As he said this he was lifted up while they looked on, and a cloud took him from their sight.
10. They were still staring into the sky as he went, when suddenly two men in white were standing beside them,
11. and they said, 'Why are you Galileans standing here looking into the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in the same way as you have seen him go to heaven.'

(Acts of the Apostles 1:1-11)

It is said that by His death and Resurrection, Jesus opened the gates of heaven for all humanity. This is true, and His Ascension demonstrates this to us. It is His proof that

those of us who believe in Him in faith and follow Him will also be raised on the last day and enter into heaven.

From heaven, Jesus hears our prayers and intercedes for us with His Father.

We celebrate this on Ascension Sunday, which is celebrated forty days after Easter.

Traditionally it is celebrated on a Thursday as a Holy Day of Obligation. The Church presently observes it on a Sunday to allow more of the faithful to attend Mass. It remains a Holy Day of Obligation, and the faithful are reminded that all Sundays are obligatory by default.

The Ascension should not be confused with Pentecost, which is celebrated 50 days after Easter. Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples of Christ, after His Ascension.

ARTICLE 6 - Catechism of the Catholic Church

"HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN AND IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER"



659 "So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God." ⁵³¹ Christ's body was glorified at the moment of his Resurrection, as proved by the new and supernatural properties it subsequently and permanently enjoys. ⁵³² But during the forty days when he eats and drinks familiarly with his disciples and teaches them

about the kingdom, his glory remains veiled under the appearance of ordinary humanity.⁵³³ Jesus' final apparition ends with the irreversible entry of his humanity into divine glory, symbolized by the cloud and by heaven, where he is seated from that time forward at God's right hand.⁵³⁴ Only in a wholly exceptional and unique way would Jesus show himself to Paul "as to one untimely born", in a last apparition that established him as an apostle.⁵³⁵

660 The veiled character of the glory of the Risen One during this time is intimated in his mysterious words to Mary Magdalene: "I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."⁵³⁶ This indicates a difference in manifestation between the glory of the risen Christ and that of the Christ exalted to the Father's right hand, a transition marked by the historical and transcendent event of the Ascension.

661 This final stage stays closely linked to the first, that is, to his descent from heaven in the Incarnation. Only the one who "came from the Father" can return to the Father: Christ Jesus.⁵³⁷ "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man."⁵³⁸ Left to its own natural powers humanity does not have access to the "Father's house", to God's life and happiness.⁵³⁹ Only Christ can open to man such access that we, his members, might have confidence that we too shall go where he, our Head and our Source, has preceded us.⁵⁴⁰

662 "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."⁵⁴¹ The lifting up of Jesus on the cross signifies and announces his lifting up by his Ascension into heaven, and indeed begins it. Jesus Christ, the one priest of the new and eternal Covenant, "entered, not into a sanctuary made by human hands. . . but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf."⁵⁴² There Christ permanently exercises his priesthood, for he "always lives to make intercession" for "those who draw near to God through him".⁵⁴³ As "high priest of the good things to come" he is the centre and the principal actor of the liturgy that honours the Father in heaven.⁵⁴⁴

663 Henceforth Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father: "By 'the Father's right hand' we understand the glory and honour of divinity, where he who exists as Son of God before all ages, indeed as God, of one being with the Father, is seated bodily after he became incarnate and his flesh was glorified."⁵⁴⁵



664 Being seated at the Father's right

hand signifies the inauguration of the Messiah's kingdom, the fulfilment of the prophet Daniel's vision concerning the Son of man: "To him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."⁵⁴⁶ After this event the apostles became witnesses of the "kingdom [that] will have no end".⁵⁴⁷

IN BRIEF

665 Christ's Ascension marks the definitive entrance of Jesus' humanity into God's heavenly domain, whence he will come again (cf. Acts 1:11); this humanity in the meantime hides him from the eyes of men (cf. Col 3:3).

666 Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes us into the Father's glorious kingdom so that we, the members of his Body, may live in the hope of one day being with him for ever.

667 Jesus Christ, having entered the sanctuary of heaven once and for all, intercedes constantly for us as the mediator who assures us of the permanent outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

- The Catechism of the Catholic Church