

What do we celebrate on Ascension Day?

What do we actually celebrate on Ascension Day and why is it so important?

The Ascension of Jesus

Ascension can be quite a confusing word. Ascension, in the Bible, means to go – go to heaven. Who ascends to heaven? At the end of his time here on earth, Jesus returned to heaven. He died on the cross and rose from the dead three days later. After that, God took him up into heaven. You can read about this in Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:6-11. Jesus gave his final instructions to his apostles, then he ascended into heaven until a cloud covered him and the apostles could no longer see him.

On Ascension Day, we celebrate Jesus' ascension to heaven. Luke 22:69 says: "But from now on the Son of Man will be seated on the right of Almighty God." This does not mean that he just sits all the time, somewhere above us in heaven, next to God who sits on a throne. What the writers of the Bible want to make clear by this, is that Jesus is now close to God. Jesus is not only close to God, he has a high position with God. Jesus is exalted by God and reigns with him. You can read about this, in Philippians 2:9, Colossians 3:1 and 1 Peter 3:22. This is why we celebrate Ascension – Jesus' exaltation with God in heaven, after his humiliation on the cross, is well worth celebrating

Why did Jesus go to heaven?

Jesus was exalted by God after his death and resurrection. Therefore, he was taken up by God into heaven, to be close to his Father. By going to heaven, Jesus made way for the Holy Spirit, who gives Christians the power to spread the gospel. When Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples, he said to them, "Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit ..." (Matthew 28:18-20). After Jesus had talked with the disciples, he was taken up to heaven and sat at the right side of God. The disciples then went and preached everywhere.

Jesus also said that he goes to prepare a place for those who believe in him (John 14:2) and will come back to earth someday, according to Luke 21:27 and Acts 1:11.

After saying this, he was taken up to heaven as they watched him, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They still had their eyes fixed on the sky as he went away, when two men dressed in white suddenly stood beside them and said, "Galileans, why are you standing there looking up at the sky? This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way that you saw him go to heaven." Acts 1:9-11

Christ's ascension is absolutely important for the daily life of every Christian. When Christ ascended into heaven, it wasn't just because he had finished things up and needed to get back to heaven. Ascension places emphasis on the divinity of Christ, his reunification with the Father and his presence through the Holy Spirit. It also symbolises the power of Christ to plead for us and to prepare for our place in the house of the Father.

What is the difference between Easter, Ascension and Pentecost?

During Easter, we celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead. He has conquered death.

On Ascension Day, we celebrate that he not only rose from the dead, but that God took him up into heaven. This is the reverse of his death on the cross – first, Jesus was severely humiliated and now, he is greatly exalted.

Finally, at Pentecost, we celebrate that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles (indeed, for all mankind) after Jesus left the earth.

So, these are three feasts that tell a chronological story: Jesus rose from the dead, he ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit began his work on earth.

When is Ascension celebrated and why at that time?

Ascension is celebrated on the fortieth day from Easter. This is always on a Thursday because Easter is always on a Sunday. Pentecost is celebrated ten days after Ascension.

We celebrate Ascension for forty days, because it says in Acts 1:3 that Jesus appeared to his apostles for forty days after his resurrection (Easter). Then, it says in Acts, Jesus ascended into heaven.

Ten days later, we celebrate Pentecost. This is because the Jewish Feast of Weeks takes place fifty days after Passover (Easter). During the Feast of Weeks, the Holy Spirit came, therefore, we celebrate Pentecost.

Those fifty days are also found in the Greek word for the Feast of Weeks: Pentecost (penta means five; think of the Pentagon: a building that looks like a pentagon from above).

The sun and sky are thousands of light years away from Earth, aren't they?***Did Jesus also take that long to ascend?***

According to the book of Acts, Jesus disappeared in a cloud during his ascension (Acts 1:9). However, you should not imagine that Jesus has been sitting next to God somewhere above the clouds ever since. When talking about the ascension, the biblical writers want to make it clear that Jesus is exalted and close to God. It is not necessarily about heaven or the clouds, as we see them now when we look up, but about Jesus' place with God.