

Ascension of the Lord, Year A

The Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension are all essential parts of the sacrifice of our redemption. The Ascension does not celebrate the absence of Jesus Christ, but rather, his glorification.⁵

Acts 1:1-11

1In the first book, **Theophilus**, Luke addresses both his gospel, which was the first book, and this second book of Acts to Theophilus, which means “one who loves God.”¹ **I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught**

2until the day he was taken up, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. Christ prepared the Eleven for their role in the Church. Judas was no longer with them and he had not yet been replaced. The Ascension is like a hinge between the account of the works and teaching that Jesus did and those done by his followers.

3He presented himself alive to them by many proofs The Resurrection of Jesus is a miracle substantiated by multiple strands of historical evidence such as: His tomb was empty Easter morning, he presented himself alive to Mary Magdalene and later in the day to the apostles and other disciples, he invited eyewitnesses to touch his risen body and examine his wounds, he showed himself risen to more than 500 people at once, and he appeared to the Church’s fiercest adversary, Saul of Tarsus, and transformed him into her most zealous apostle.⁶ **after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days** This is where we get the idea that the Ascension took place 40 days after Easter which would make it a Thursday, but now it is celebrated in the US on the Sunday following the forty days. The number 40 signifies a time of preparation for the disciples, just as Jesus underwent 40 days of preparation before his own ministry. **and speaking about the kingdom of God.**

4While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for “the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; This refers to the Holy Spirit who will be given to empower them to fulfill their mission. This is the fulfillment of the promise that was given to Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed.⁴

5for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Both Luke’s Gospel and Acts emphasize that being “baptized by the Holy Spirit” is the way God’s power is given to humans. The Spirit came upon Jesus and thus began Jesus’ mission of preaching and healing. At Pentecost the same Spirit would be given to the apostles to begin their preaching and healing in Acts. Receiving God’s powerful Spirit far surpasses the effects of John’s baptism, which had merely used water as a sign of repentance.²

6When they had gathered together they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” This question shows the continued misunderstanding about what the kingdom of God meant. Judaism hoped for a militant Messiah who would redeem Israel from the yoke of Roman oppression and rebuild the kingdom of David that had lain in ruins since the sixth century B.C. These political aspirations are given a spiritual fulfillment in the Ascension with the enthronement of Christ in heaven. Later, in Acts 15, James announces that the vision of Amos that promised that Yahweh would raise up the fallen house of David was being fulfilled through the missionary outreach that was uniting Israel and the Gentiles together into a single covenant family.⁶

7He answered them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. Jesus affirms the coming of the kingdom but conceals the precise timing determined by the Father and his words imply that speculation is pointless.⁶

8But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses All the disciples bear witness to the death and rising of Jesus by their words and many of them by their

death. **in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**” *Power...Spirit... come upon* are terms also used together in the first chapter of Luke showing that the same Spirit who brought forth Christ in the womb of Mary is about to bring forth the Church in the world.⁶ This is a rough outline of the book of Acts, which begins in Jerusalem and then spreads to Judea and Samaria and finally goes all the way to Rome.

9When he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, This was the last event, the last mystery of our Lord’s life on earth. It proves that his kingdom was not of this world. On top of Mount Olivet from which Jesus is said to have ascended, there is a flat stone on which can be seen what is thought to be the final footstep of Jesus on earth. **and a cloud** The cloud was a symbol of heaven.⁵ It was also an ancient Israelite symbol for God Who led Moses and his people by a pillar of cloud by day. **took him from their sight.** It must have been hard for them to believe that the one who did not come down from the cross could ascend into heaven!

10While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments While some consider these to be angels reminiscent of the angels at the empty tomb, others see them as an echo of the description of Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration for Jewish tradition accredits both of these figures with being taken up into heaven and giving a portion of their spirit to their successors.⁶ **stood beside them.**

11They said, “Men of Galilee, All of the apostles except Judas had their origins in Galilee. **why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.”** This is a reference to the Parousia, our Lord’s second coming.⁵ The departure of Jesus is the pattern and pledge of his future return. The same cloud that took him away will bring him back to retrieve the saints destined for glory. The Church’s earliest creeds affirm that Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.⁶

Ephesians 1:17-23

This letter was either written by St. Paul or it was written by somebody else in his name and its content was built upon the earlier writings of Paul. It seems to have been written to combat heresy and it was doubtlessly meant to be a circulating letter to be read by all the churches in the Ephesus region.⁷ The first paragraph is a greeting and a blessing, a prayer for all who hear it. For all of us who no longer experience Jesus’ bodily presence, we are encouraged to see him in the world in other ways. The second paragraph gives us a glimpse of the risen Christ at the right hand of God where he continues to intercede for us. The final paragraph portrays Christ as the ruler of the world, head of his body the church, which is now guided by the Holy Spirit.⁹

Brothers and sisters:

17May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, This is the God who has revealed himself through Christ and to whom Jesus himself, as man, prays and asks for help. It is the same God who was described in the Old Testament as “the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob.”⁷ **the Father of glory,** The glory of God means his greatness, his power, the infinite richness of his personality. The greatest manifestation of God’s glory and power was the raising of Jesus from the dead.⁷ **give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him.** Here St. Paul is asking God to grant Christians supernatural wisdom to recognize the greatness of the blessings he has given them through his son; that is, to acknowledge that he is their Father and the origin of glory. By asking for a “spirit of wisdom and revelation, the Apostle is seeking special gifts — on the one hand, wisdom, that gift of the Holy Spirit which enables one to penetrate the mystery of God. The apostle also asks God to give them a spirit of revelation, that is, the grace of personal revelations, such as he himself

received. It is a special light from the Holy Spirit so as to have a deeper appreciation of the truth of faith or of the will of God in a particular situation.⁷

18May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, God and hope are inseparable. St. Paul wants God to enlighten their minds and make them realize the consequences of their election or calling as members of the holy people of God, the Church. Hope is a supernatural virtue that is infused by God into our soul by which we desire and expect eternal life, promised by God, and the means necessary to obtain it.⁷ **what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones,**

19and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might,

20which he worked in Christ, God's power is made available to men in Christ.⁸ **raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens,** Paul sees the resurrection, ascension, and glorification of Christ as one great continuous act of the Father.

21far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, These are angelic spirits, some good and others evil, that were considered to have control over human events and destiny. Christ has conquered them so that they have no more power over men and nothing interferes or stands in the way of God's plan for men in Christ.⁸ **and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come.** No present or future force or power can block God's work.⁸

22And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, The "church" as it is used here does not mean the community in one town, but rather, the catholic or universal institution that is the body of Christ with Christ himself as its head.¹⁰ God the Father has put all things under the control of Christ.

23which is his body, Paul sees Christ as the invisible anointed leader and head of a visible world community.⁸ **the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.**

As the fullness of God was in Christ, the fullness of Christ is in the church.³

Matthew 28:16-20

16The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. Matthew sees Jesus as the Second Moses so this, like so many important events, takes place on a mountaintop.

17When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Faith in every age has its insecurities.

18Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. The Father vindicates Jesus at his Resurrection and has given full dominion over creation to him and Jesus in turn confers his authority on the apostles to preach the gospel and make disciples as witnesses of his Resurrection.¹¹

19Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, Note the universal directives: go to ALL nations, teach them ALL that I have commanded you and I will be with you ALL the remaining days until the end of the world. **baptizing** Baptism is a rite of initiation and the person being baptized thus belongs to the Trinity as their names are invoked.⁸ Note that this initiation is into the TRINITY and that the church does not recognize any baptism that does not use the Trinitarian form. **them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,** Although this is not the only place in the Bible where the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are mentioned together, it is the only place where the liturgical phrase "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" is

used.¹ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. This is a new way of life!⁸ “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” This is called the Great Commission.

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers” by Martin Connell, (2) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Acts Of The Apostles” by William S. Kurz, S.J., (3) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by Lawrence E. Mick, (4) “The Acts of the Apostles” by Luke Timothy Johnson, (5) “The Navarre Bible: Acts Of The Apostles,” (6) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles” with Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (7) “The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles,” (8) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (9) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers,” by Aelred R. Rosser, (10) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: EPHESIANS” by Ivan Havener, O.S.B., and (11) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew” with Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.