



## On your marks

Ascension Day used to be celebrated much more than it is today. In the past some schools even had the day off! Coming on a Thursday, as it always does, it can get overlooked. However it does mark an important moment. It is the end of the earthbound ministry of Jesus; it includes the words of Jesus' commission to his disciples; and it also prepares the way for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Being a weekday festival, it could prove useful material for a midweek group. The following idea could also form part of a school assembly or the all-age section of a service in church on the Sunday following Ascension Day.

## Get set

You need to prepare a big sign with this strange word for today on it, as explained below. Perhaps also a paper crown for the storytelling idea would be useful.

## Go!

- 1 Every day is in fact some sort of anniversary or birthday. Look up in a big book of dates what happened on the day you are presenting this idea but also find out from the children about any recent birthdays or anniversaries of special events that they have recently celebrated.
- 2 This Thursday is a very special day. It is SAMTSIRHC day. Show them this written large on a big piece of card. Has anyone any idea what this special festival anniversary is about? Tease out some silly answers maybe but also slowly move towards the fact that it is CHRISTMAS written backwards. It is 'Christmas backwards' day. That explains everything doesn't it!?
- 3 What happened at Christmas? God sent Jesus to earth as a baby for us. Now on this 'Christmas backwards' day, God takes Jesus back to heaven from earth as a resurrected man. Because we often think of heaven as 'up there' and earth as 'down here', Christmas is seen as a descent or going down, whereas 'Christmas backwards' day is a going up or an ascent. Its proper name is Ascension Day.
- 4 Listen to the story of that day which comes at the beginning of the book of Acts in the Bible (Acts 1: 6-11). Tell the story by acting it out with your group.

Lead the group in a circle around the room, explaining as you go that Jesus kept appearing to his disciples and to others for a period of 40 days, after he came back from the dead. Many people saw for themselves that he was alive. They could see the nail prints in his hands (point to your wrists).

Come to a halt and explain that the disciples by then were getting the idea that maybe Jesus was going to stay with them for ever and become a new king of Israel on earth. Perhaps a child could try and put a crown on your head but you should refuse with words like "I am to be crowned but not in that way and not yet. Instead here are some things that I want you to do".



List the following out on your fingers as three key pieces of instruction:

- Wait in Jerusalem in the special meeting room we have and pray
- God's Holy Spirit will come and fill you up, so that you will know what I am always with you
- In the power of the Holy Spirit, go out in ever-widening circles to tell more and more people about God's love and forgiveness through me (*demonstrate this by drawing on the ground ever larger concentric circles - first in Jerusalem, then in the nearby district of Judea, then among the people who are traditionally enemies to the Jews (the Samaritans) and finally (draw a huge circle) right to the edge of the known world.*)

The disciples would have been puzzled, shocked and saddened by what Jesus said. Ask the children to produce some puzzled, shocked and sad faces.

*Why do you have to go? What do you mean about being filled with God's Spirit? Surely we aren't meant to go and speak about God to our enemies and foreigners?*

Finally lead the children to an area, which you explain is a hill just outside the main city, called the Mount of Olives. Climb on to a chair or table. Explain that Jesus then left them and disappeared into a cloud. Immediately crouch down low and whisper the next words to them "But they saw two angels who said that Jesus would be back in the same way as they saw him go - but not yet".

5 Lead the children back to a discussion area and think through the following questions with them:

- I wonder what the disciples felt like after Jesus left?
- I wonder what they expected was going to happen?
- I wonder why Jesus had to go?

6 You might like to link the last words of Jesus to the symbol of a traffic light. This could be worked up and become the basis for a craft activity to remember the teaching of the day.

- Red = Stop in Jerusalem
- Amber = Wait for the Holy Spirit
- Green = Go into the world to share the love and forgiveness of God through Jesus

7 All this happened just ten days before Jesus' promise about the coming of His Holy Spirit came true. He did come back in a new invisible form of God, so that he could be with anyone, anywhere, anytime. This is how he can be with us too. If the group want to find out what the disciples did while they waited, then they can read the rest of the story in Acts 1.