



On your marks

Ascension Day used to be better known as a day of celebration than it is today, even within church circles. It marks the moment that Jesus finally leaves his disciples 40 days after his resurrection. He gives his followers both a command and a promise, which are still true for us today.

Get set

The following idea is an outline for a simple, short celebration focused on the story of the Ascension. It could be used in an all-age service or as part of a Messy Church celebration; for a Sunday or midweek group; or even, with suitable adaptation, for a collective worship in a school. The outline includes a call to worship, Bible links, a way into the story, a way to tell the story together, a suggestion for a song, a prayer activity, something to go on talking about afterwards and, finally, a blessing.

Go!

Call to worship

Use one or more of the following 'call and response' phrases:

Leader: We are not just once in a while friends.

All: We are the family of God.

Leader: We are not just a cosy club.

All: We are the body of Christ.

Leader: We are not just strangers meeting.

All: We are temples of the Holy Spirit.

Leader: We are not here by accident.

All: Father God has called us to worship.

Leader: We are not just passing time.

All: Jesus wants us to know him better.

Leader: We are not just doing the same old thing.

All: The Holy Spirit has some special words for us.

(You might choose to use one or more of these regularly to give a pattern to this sort of short act of worship.)

Bible links

- Matthew 28:16-20
- Luke 24:50-53
- Acts 1:3-11

A way into the story

Call out different ways of saying goodbye in English and some other languages, and have everyone chorus back the word each time with a wave:

goodbye, farewell, cheerio, see you, bye bye, adios, arrivederci, auf wiedersehen, au revoir, adieu

Ascension Day was Jesus' big 'goodbye' moment - at least to being on earth in one place, at one time and with one group of people at a time. He was returning to God in heaven, but he left a promise and a command which are still true for us today.

A way to tell the story together

- 40 days after Easter, Jesus climbed a hill with his friends - *invite everyone to act out climbing up a hill.*
- It was time for Jesus to go back to God in heaven but he left a very special promise: 'I am always with you' - *get everyone to count out these five words on the digits of one hand.*
- And he gave them all a job to do: 'Go into all the world' (*invite everyone to point forward with one hand and then describe a big circle*) 'and share the good news of God's love' (*invite everyone to hold out both hands together as if offering a gift*) 'with everybody, everywhere' (*invite everyone to point to everybody else in the room as rapidly as possible*).
- And he promised them that the special power to do this would come from God very soon - *invite everyone to look puzzled.*
- And then Jesus disappeared before their very eyes - *invite everyone to shade their eyes with one hand, looking intently as Jesus leaves and then to react with amazement.*
- And the story says that angels appeared, who said that Jesus would be back one day in the same dramatic way - *invite a reaction of shock and joy.*

A suggestion for a song

'Sent by the Lord am I' is a song from Nicaragua that picks up the theme of Jesus' great commission. Words and music, including an echo track, can be found [here](#).

A prayer activity

The friends of Jesus were 'left behind' and now had to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit. Use



this 'left behind' idea for prayers:

- Invite everyone to put their left hand behind their backs - *let's pray for all those who feel left behind because they have no job and no hope.*
- And Jesus promises(*speak out the following words together on the fingers of the left hand, which they all now bring to the front*): 'I am always with you'.
- Invite everyone to reach out their left hand to the side - *let's pray for all those who feel left out because they are sick or afraid.*
- And Jesus promises(*speak out the following words together on the fingers of the left hand, which they all now bring to the front*): 'I am always with you'.
- Invite everyone to put their left hand palm-down flat in front of them - *let's pray for all those who feel left alone because they have no friends or are sad.*
- And Jesus promises(*speak out the following words together on the fingers of the left hand, which they all now bring to the front*): 'I am always with you'.
- To all of us, Jesus promises (*now count out the five words on the fingers of each other's hands*): 'I am always with you'.

Something to go on talking about afterwards

- How is it that Jesus can be in heaven and also with us at the same time?
- How will we know that Jesus is with us this week?
- How can I share God's love with someone this week?

Blessing

(Perhaps this could be a blessing you learn and use every time for these sorts of short celebrations?)

May...

God the Father watch over us - *hands reaching up high above the body*

God the Son walk with us - *hands reaching out wide either side of the body*

God the Spirit work through us - *hands crossed over the body*

Until we meet again - *shake hands or high-five each other*

Amen.