



# THE NEW SHOFAR

*Jesus is the filter through whom we see life*

*Easter 5*

## *The Ascension – mankind drawn into the living God*

The ascension expresses our belief that in Christ, human nature, the humanity in which we all share, has entered into the inner life of God in a new and hitherto unheard of way. It means that man has found an everlasting place in God.

We need to understand how heaven is not a place beyond the stars, somewhere “up there”. Christ’s *ascension into heaven* is a theological expression

meaning man now has a place *in God*. Christ, the man who is in God and eternally one with God, is at the same time God's abiding invitation to all human beings.

**The basis for this assertion is the interpenetration of humanity and divinity in the crucified and exalted man Jesus. Through divine grace, in the Ascended Christ, God and humanity are at one.**

One way to come to grips with this theology is to go back to the thinking of the early Christian communities. For them, Jesus himself is now what we call "heaven". It is not a place. Heaven is a person, the person of Him in whom God and man are forever and inseparably one. To find heaven is to find the living and reigning Christ.



And we go to heaven and enter into heaven to the extent that we go to Jesus Christ and enter into him. In this sense, "ascension into heaven" can be something that takes place in our everyday lives. Today’s feast serves as an invitation to live in Christ and so be drawn into God. But as with all of the graces and gifts of God, it stands as an invitation from God, an invitation to which we must respond by a life lived in faithfulness.

## *God actively present in an apparent absence*

For the disciples, the "ascension" was most certainly not a temporary absence of Christ from the world. It means rather the new, definitive, and irrevocable presence of Christ in our lives, in this world through His participation in God's royal power... God has a place for men and women who seek Him, respond to Him and serve Him as He was

served by Jesus His only Son. Here is the core message of the Ascension: In God there is a place set aside for us! Tertullian (155-220 A.D.), the great theologian of the early Church puts it beautifully: *Be consoled, flesh and blood, for in Christ you have taken possession of heaven and of God's kingdom!*

For I know the  
Plans  
I have for you,  
declares the Lord  
Plans to Prosper you  
and not to harm you  
Plans to give you  
Hope and a Future  
-Jeremiah 29:11

It is worth reading Hebrews chapter 9 to understand the importance of the Ascension for the early Jewish Christians. It relates back to Leviticus 16 which speaks of the Feast of Yom

Kippur – the Day of Atonement, a feast celebrating atonement and repentance, the gift of forgiveness of sins. It was the only time in the year someone was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, the most sacred of spaces in the Jerusalem temple. On that day the high priest enters in bringing with him the blood of the sacrifice.

In Hebrews 9, St. Paul teaches that the Holy of Holies is symbolic and representative of heaven. So, when Christ ascends into heaven with the blood of the sacrifice, that is, with his humanity, Christ acts as the true high priest and so completes the work of salvation. Our sins are forgiven in ways no altar sacrifice could achieve.

St Thomas Aquinas writes that *Christ by once ascending into heaven acquired for himself and for us in perpetuity the right and worthiness of a heavenly dwelling-place.* This is the works of Christ until His return in glory.

So, by the Ascension, Christ **1)** completes his work of reconciling God and humankind through the sacrificial death of Jesus, **2)** allows the saints to enter heaven and **3)** anticipates his second coming.

### ***The Ascension, God still working within us and all around us***

What then does the Ascension offer us as we strive to be as one with God? For us, it means that we are now at peace with God. Whatever of our limitations, sins and failings, God draws us to himself, just as He drew His Son into His own heavenly



existence. With Jesus the Christ sitting on God's throne, we have the ultimate refuge from the evils and challenges of this life, and confidence that Our Lord is Lord overall. We are never without hope. Not even death has the power to chain us to a life of darkness, meaningless existence and conflict. In a year of uncertainty, chaos and violence, the Ascension of Christ can shape our hope by reminding us that we do not belong to this world but even now, by his grace, *we sit with him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6).*

### **We too will follow Christ and live in the Father**

The Lord's Ascension was essentially for us. For disciples of God's Son who respond to the call to repent, to believe and to live the Good News of God's reign on earth. After all, his mission of redemption was for us. Let us not forget how Jesus said to the apostles, and so also to us, *"I ascend to My Father and to your Father, to my God and your God"* (John 20:17). Jesus also said, *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself* (John 20:17).

And let us not forget the prophesy of Jesus relating to the importance of the Ascension of Jesus in God's story of salvation... *But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.* This is where we now stand, on the edge of Pentecost.