

### Notices

- Christian Aid Quiz on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May, 6pm. There is food, sausage and chips or a ploughman's, as well as the quiz. Donations from £8.
- Help with the collecting at Roys Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> May, please see Christine
- Church Meeting on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> May after the morning service.

### Banns of Marriage

The Banns will be read for George Henry Booth and Emma Jane Strivens, both of this parish, Bowthorpe St. Michael.

### Welcome

A warm welcome to our service this morning. As you can see later on, we will be gathering around the Lords table in celebration and obedience. All songs and hymns will be on the screen and in the order of service.

### Call to Worship and Opening Prayer

We meet in the presence of God, who knows our needs, hears our cries, feels our pain, and heals our wounds.

Since we believe that Jesus our Saviour has ascended into heaven, and opened the way into God's presence for us, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith; let us hold fast to the hope we profess; and let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds.

Faithful one, whose word is life, come with saving power to free our praise, inspire our prayer and shape our lives for the kingdom of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### Confession

Christ himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds we have been healed. Let us then seek forgiveness for the sin by which we have denied God's claim upon us. Shall we say the words of the confession together.

**Have mercy on me, O God, in your constant love; in the fullness of your mercy blot out my offences. Wash away all my guilt and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Give me the joy of your help again and strengthen me with a willing spirit. Amen.**

### Assurance of pardon

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Therefore, to all who truly repent this is his gracious word: 'Your sins are forgiven.'

**Amen. Thanks be to God.**

### Songs of Praise and Worship

**Shout To The North**

Men of faith rise up and sing  
Of the great and glorious King  
You are strong when you feel weak  
In your brokenness complete

Shout to the North and the South  
Sing to the East and the West  
Jesus is savior to all  
Lord of heaven and earth

Rise up women of the truth  
Stand and sing to broken hearts  
Who can know the healing power  
Of our awesome King of love

We've been through fire we've been through rain  
We've been refined by the power of his name  
We've fallen deeper in love with you  
You've burned the truth on our lips

Rise up church with broken wings  
Fill this place with songs again  
Of our God who reigns on high  
By His grace again we'll fly

Source: LyricFind Songwriters: Martin Smith Shout To The North lyrics © Integrity Music

### **Guardian**

King of love and grace, my Guardian,  
All my hopes and fears are in Your hands;  
I'm in Your hands.  
Where You go, I'll go; show me the way.  
Every step I take be now my guide,  
God on my side.  
You go before me, You're there beside me,  
And if I wander Love will find me.  
Goodness and mercy will always follow.  
You go before me, my Guardian.  
When I hear You say, 'trust and obey',  
I will walk by faith and not by sight,  
God of my life.  
So let Your kingdom come, Your will be done.  
All Your promises will stand forever.  
You're my defender.  
You go before me, You're there beside me,

And if I wander Love will find me.  
Goodness and mercy will always follow.  
You go before me, my Guardian.  
You are God, our great defender,  
Strong in love, forever faithful.  
We are Yours and we will trust in You.  
You are God, our great defender,  
Strong in love, forever faithful.  
We are Yours and we will trust in You.  
You go before me, You're there beside me,  
And if I wander Love will find me.  
Goodness and mercy will always follow.  
You go before me, my Guardian, my Guardian, my Guardian.

Source: Musixmatch Songwriters: Stuart Garrard / Ben Cantelon / Nick Herbert Guardian Lyrics © Thank You Music Ltd.

**There is strength within the sorrow (Sovereign over us)**

There is strength within the sorrow  
There is beauty in our tears  
And you meet us in our mourning  
With a love that cast out fear  
You are working in our waiting  
You're sanctifying us  
When beyond our understanding  
You're teaching us to trust

Your plans are still to prosper  
You have not forgotten us  
You're with us in the fire and the flood  
You're faithful forever  
Perfect in love  
You are sovereign over us

You are wisdom unimagined  
Who could understand your ways  
Reigning high above the heavens  
Reaching down in endless grace  
You're the lifter of the lowly  
Compassionate and kind  
You surround and you uphold me  
And your promises are my delight

Your plans are still to prosper  
You have not forgotten us  
You're with us in the fire and the flood

You're faithful forever  
Perfect in love  
You are sovereign over us

Your plans are still to prosper  
You have not forgotten us  
You're with us in the fire and the flood  
You're faithful forever  
Perfect in love  
You are sovereign over us

Even what the enemy means for evil  
You turn it for our good  
You turn it for our good and for your glory

Even in the valley, you are faithful  
You're working for our good  
You're working for our good and for your glory  
Even what the enemy means for evil  
You turn it for our good  
You turn it for our good and for your glory

Even in the valley, you are faithful  
You're working for our good  
You're working for our good and for your glory  
Your plans are still to prosper  
You have not forgotten us  
You're with us in the fire and the flood  
Oh, you're faithful forever  
Perfect in love  
You are sovereign over us

You're faithful forever  
Perfect in love  
You are sovereign over us

Source: Musixmatch

Songwriters: Bryan Brown / Aaron Keyes / Jack Anthony Mooring  
Sovereign Over Us lyrics © Meaux Jeux Music, Worshiptogether.com Songs, Thankyou Music Ltd., Jack Mooring Music

## The Offertory

(Gift Aid envelopes are available)

Generous God, creator, redeemer, sustainer, at your table we present this money, symbol of the work you have given us to do; use it, use us, in the service of your world to the glory of your name.

**Amen.**

### **Prayer for Sunday Club**

Lord, we pray for the Sunday Club for our youngsters and leaders. May their time together open young hearts and minds to your glory and saving grace. May their activities be enjoyable as well as instructive. We thank you for the preparation, prayer and deliberation that has gone into the organising of their activities and ask your blessing will be with them as they go out now. **Amen**

### **Reading Acts 1: 1 – 11**

#### **Jesus Taken Up Into Heaven**

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with[a] water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with[b] the Holy Spirit.”

6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

7 He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## Reflection

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

Lord be with each one of us as we prepare to hear your word this morning may our hearts and minds be stilled and able to block out interruptions and concentrate on you this morning. **Amen.**

## Opening discussion – Ascension and Theophilus

Our reading today starts with the greeting Dear Theophilus, who was Theophilus? I think, however, a more revealing question is, “Are you Theophilus?” This depends on which view we take, some argue that Theophilus was real person, either a Jew in Alexandria, a Roman official, Paul’s lawyer in Rome, or even the high priest at the temple in Jerusalem. Or it could be an honorary title meaning one loved by God, but it could also be one who loves God.

The main part of our reading is dealing with the ascension a topic often overlooked in some churches, but it is an integral part of our faith.

Imagine what would have happened if after the resurrection and ascension that was all that happened, end of story or if the ascension never happened. One Bible commentator argues there would be no church today, perhaps because up to now all the instructions were to wait in Jerusalem. If the apostles had followed the pattern set out in Acts 1, they would never have left Jerusalem. They might have formed a tribute act, a society for the preservation of Christ’s teachings. In short, they would have been nothing more than a footnote in history. That is why the ascension is so important to us, whether we remember it or not.

## Timeline

But first a bit of context. Scripture tells us that Jesus stayed on earth for a period of time, usually taken as 40 days when he appeared to many in his resurrection body. 1 Corinthians 15: 6 says, “ that the Messiah died for our sins, exactly as Scripture tells it; that he was buried; that he was raised from death on the third day, again exactly as Scripture says; that he presented himself alive to Peter, then to his closest followers, and later to more than five hundred of his followers all at the same time, most of them still around (although a few have since died)”

So, our timeline looks something like this with Jesus walking the earth, meeting with the disciples, meeting with large numbers of his followers. However, his glorified body was not for this earth and so Jesus returned to heaven. Firstly, I must confess the disciples were very patient not sure I’d be waiting 40 or 50 days. What can we take away from our reading this morning?

There are seven aspects I want to pick up on.

### 1. Earthly ministry completed

Some may see the ascension as the end of God’s might acts on earth when Jesus returned to heaven. However, we might say no they have only just begun. It is true to say that at the

ascension Jesus had achieved all he came down to earth to achieve, hence his earthly ministry is complete. He came as our saviour and as such he paid the price for our sin, we can see this clearly in Mark 10: 45, 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

When Christ first came to earth, he did not come to condemn he came to save. This comes through loud and clear in John 3: 17, 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” His saving mission has been completed, when he returns it will be to judge all mankind – the living and the dead as the Apostles creed puts it, or as we can read in John 5: 26 – 29. Jesus said that everyone who has died will be raised from the dead and be judged. So, all of us will stand before “Christ as Judge.” At that time may Christ recognise us as his own.

Where did Jesus go when he went back to heaven?

## 2. Jesus is at the right hand of God

Next, we can take it that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is acceptable to God and as a consequence of this Jesus is glorified and is sitting at the right-hand of God, hence the ascension. Sitting at the righthand is regarded as a position of favour, prestige and honour. It may not be obvious from our reading but if we look at Mark 16: 19 it makes it very clear, “19 After the Lord Jesus had charged the disciples in this way, He was taken up into heaven and seated at the right hand of God.

From this position Jesus exercises dominion overall creation. A view captured in Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus in its opening chapter Friends, it is this same might and resurrection power that 20 He used in the Anointed One to raise Him from the dead and to position Him at His right hand in heaven. There is nothing over Him. 21 He’s above all rule, authority, power, and dominion;

The key question is who will confess Jesus now? From the Apostles creed we know that when Christ returns all creation will have to admit he is indeed Lord overall but those who have failed to do so will be judged. Or looking later on in Acts 17: 31 we read 31 because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained; of which he has given assurance to all men, in that he has raised him from the dead.” The key question comes down to this in Matthew 7: 21 21 Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven. Simply calling Me “Lord” will not be enough. Only those who do the will of My Father who is in heaven will join Me in heaven. When he comes again, he will return to judge, it will mean complete separation from the father for those he does not recognise as his own. The flip side of the good news is in that bad news of separation.

## 3. His bodily ascension means we will ascend too

Two weeks ago, I mentioned Enoch and Elijah as people who walked with God and who were both taken up into heaven, they had ascended into heaven. You can read about Enoch

in Genesis 5 24, where it says, “but Enoch had such a close and intimate relationship with God that one day he just vanished - God took him. Enoch leaves this world in an unusual way. He is taken without experiencing death. But he is not the last.

Elijah in 2 Kings 2: 11 is taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot, “11 Now as the two continued walking along and talking as they normally did, something incredible happened. A blazing chariot pulled by blazing horses stormed down from the heavens and came between Elijah and Elisha. Then Elijah was swept up into heaven by the fiery storm.”

Both of these two examples differ from Jesus’ ascension because neither Enoch nor Elijah died their resurrection was of their earthly bodies. Christ’s ascension was of his resurrection body. We know though that when Christ returns, he will raise up the dead. In this resurrection, those who have died believing in Christ will have body and spirits united in a body like Christ’s resurrection body. Look at 1 John 3: 2 for confirmation, “2 My loved ones, we have been adopted into God’s family; and we are officially His children now. The full picture of our destiny is not yet clear, but we know this much: when Jesus appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him just as He is.” When Jesus comes again, we will be like him. Paul writing to the church in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17) said, after the dead in Christ rising those that remain, we will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord. So, we too will ascend.

What is he doing in heaven?

#### 4. Jesus is interceding for us

He is advocating for us. In Romans 8: 33 - 34 we plainly see this, “Can anyone be so bold as to level a charge against God’s chosen? Especially since God’s “not guilty” verdict is already declared. 34 Who has the authority to condemn? Jesus the Anointed who died, but more importantly, conquered death when He was raised to sit at the right hand of God where He pleads on our behalf.

Why do we need to have someone intercede for us if the verdict is in already and it’s not guilty? Because in Revelation we learn even at this late-stage Satan is accusing us before God of all sorts of things, as in Then I heard a great voice in heaven saying Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Anointed One have come. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who relentlessly accuses them day and night before our God, has been cast down and silenced. I don’t know about you, but I have done things that I am not proud of, things that when I stop and think about them, I feel guilty over. But Christ is there pleading my case like a good defence barrister. But why did he have to go back to heaven?

#### 5. So that the Holy Spirit can come

When Jesus walked this earth, he could not be with all of us his earthly body was confined to one geographical place to one moment in time. But now that he has ascended scripture in the form of Matthew 18: 20 tells us that whenever 2 or 3 are gathered in his name there



he is also in our midst. Jesus ascended so that the promised helper/comforter – the Holy Spirit could come and empower us preparing us to that we could live with Christ. Have a quick look at John 16:7 for confirmation, 7 But the truth is that My departure will be a gift that will serve you well, because if I don't leave, the great Helper will not come to your aid. When I leave, I will send Him to you." There is a specific sequence to these events hence Christ having to return to heaven first. When I started talking, I said the ascension marked the end of Christ's earthly ministry, but it did not mean the end of his ministry only that phase of it. As we have seen he acts as our intercessor, he sent the Holy Spirit to empower us, he meets with and convicts us of our sin. His ministry continues it entered a different phase when he ascended but it continues, nevertheless.

#### 6. The work of Christ on earth now resides with the church

Wow – that's a big ask! Christ's earthly ministry is now the work of the church! It's down to you and me! I like the bit in our reading where the angel says in effect Well what are you lot hanging about for! Go do what Christ told you to do. We are all called to do his business until he returns. Just like the servants in the parable of the ten minas in Luke 19: 11 – 27 he instructed his servants to do business with this until I return in v 13. Similarly in Matthew 28: we see Jesus instruct the disciples, and by extension us to go spread the word, he said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Still a work in progress but clearly the work of Church and all his followers.

#### 7. Jesus' return will be like his departure.

What do I mean by that well his return will be with clouds, it will be a bodily return, it will be seen by others? The angels says as much in v 11 The very same Jesus who they had been following for 3 years or more, the same Jesus who was crucified, died, was buried and rose again on the third day, this Jesus who had appeared to them for the last 40 day after his resurrection would return in a like manner.

#### Consequences

To quote RC Sproul, "The ascension of Jesus was the supreme political event of world history. He ascended not so much to a place as to an office. He departed from the arena of humiliation and suffering to enter into his glory. He, in one moment, leapfrogged from the status of despised Galilean teacher to the cosmic King of the universe, jumping over the heads of Pilate, Herod, and Caesar Augustus. The Ascension catapulted Jesus to the right hand of God, where he was enthroned as King of kings and Lord of lords."

The ascension of Jesus was and is an integral part of the plan of salvation that was determined before the foundation of the world. The ascension is a key part of that plan. Christ paid the price with his life in place of ours to reconcile us to the Father that was another key part of the plan. The next part could only about when Christ ascended making way for the Holy Spirit to come and enter all of our lives to empowers us to follow Christ's

example and do the work of the Father. That work is quite simply to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Also note the full plan for salvation includes all three parts of the Godhead – the father send the son, the son gave his life, the Holy Spirit works on the hearts of man. But I'm spilling over into Pentecost, so I need to pull back a bit.

Oswald Chamber puts it this way At His Ascension our Lord entered heaven, and He keeps the door open for humanity to enter.

### Close

We know God loves us the question is do we love God the whole bible seeks of it, hence my question at the start Are you Theophilus? Are you someone who loves God? The bible tells us of God's love for us not least in sending his only begotten son to pay for our sin, but the question is will we reciprocate and love God back?

### Prayers of Intercession

Lord, we thank you for those who have waited patiently on you like the disciples who waited in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. Help us to serve you faithfully and patiently, watching for you to be revealed in our own lives. We remember the older and retired people here in our church and around us in our lives and give you thanks for all that they do in our Sunday worship, in the life of our church fellowship and in our communities. Send your Holy Spirit to inspire each one of us to use and share their life experiences with wisdom, humility and gladness.

Lord, in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Lord God, we pray for all who work for peace and unity, and for all world leaders that they will continue to seek for an end to the suffering caused by war and violence, injustice and inequality, disease, prejudice, poverty and hopelessness and bring healing to the world. We pray especially for the people of Ukraine for those killed or displaced, civilian, or military, those fighting the invader and those fleeing the invasion. Lord Jesus –as a child you were a refugee and were kept safe in another country –help us to hold that example, as a solution to the current crisis is sought.

Lord, in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Lord, we ask that you help each one of us be better stewards of your bounty. Where there is money, food and fuel lead us in ways to share all you have given us more fairly. Help our world leaders to see our interdependence on others and lead us not into greedy and self-centred ways.

Lord, in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Lord, we thank you for our health and care services. We take for granted being able to call on these at the point of need but increasingly are finding those service are too stretched

and the alternatives too expensive. Help our leaders to make good on their promises to protect the NHS and provide for health and wellbeing throughout life for the benefit of all of us. We particularly lift Mary, Carl and as they come to terms with Mary heart condition.  
Lord, in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Merciful Lord, your love reaches beyond the grave. At the end of our days on earth be with us and with those we love. May those who have gone before us rest in your eternal peace. We remember those who have died, and we pray for all whose life is saddened by the death of a loved one -be with them in their loneliness  
Lord, in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer**

Merciful father: **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.**  
**Amen**

**Song/Hymn (during which Sunday Club returns)**

**Dear Lord and Father of Mankind**

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
Forgive our foolish ways!  
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,  
In purer lives Thy service find,  
In deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard  
Beside the Syrian sea  
The gracious calling of the Lord,  
Let us, like them, without a word  
Rise up and follow Thee.

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!  
O calm of hills above,  
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee  
The silence of eternity  
Interpreted by love!

With that deep hush subduing all  
Our words and works that drown  
The tender whisper of Thy call,  
As noiseless let Thy blessing fall  
As fell Thy manna down.

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,  
Till all our strivings cease;

Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
And let our ordered lives confess  
The beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire  
Thy coolness and Thy balm;  
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
O still, small voice of calm.

### The Peace

'Where two or three are gathered together in my name,' says the Lord, 'there am I in the midst of them.'

The peace of the Lord be always with you  
**and also, with you.**  
Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

### The Act of Breaking Bread

When we share the cup of the Lord and break bread together, we express our common participation in the benefits of Jesus' death for us. So, we should examine ourselves before we eat the bread and drink the cup, confessing our sins to God, acknowledging the need to care for one another, and renewing our trust in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. As we prepare to gather around the Lord's table let us take a few moments of silence to clear our hearts and our minds and remember why we do this.

We come to this table not because we must, but because we may.  
We come not because we are strong, but because we are weak.  
We come not because we have perfect faith, but because we have questions and even doubts. But we come nonetheless because Jesus invites us to come and we will never be turned away.

The apostle Paul tells us of the institution of the Lord's Supper:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you:

The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed, took bread,  
and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.'

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

(1 Corinthians 11: 23–26)

### The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

### Distribution of the Bread and Wine

If you require a gluten free wafer, please ask.

If you do not wish to receive communion, you are welcome to receive a blessing.  
Parents, if you believe your children are ready in understanding to take communion,  
please indicate that they can receive the bread and wine.  
Otherwise, please ask for a blessing.  
Please use this time for silent prayer and reflection or join quietly in the singing.

### Prayer After Communion

**Gracious God, we praise you for what you have given and for what you have promised us here. You have made us one with all your people in heaven and on earth. You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service. Now we give ourselves to you; and ask that our daily living may be part of the life of your kingdom, and that our love may be your love reaching out into the life of the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### Song/Hymn

#### Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)

Amazing grace how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost, but now I'm found  
Was blind, but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear  
And grace my fears relieved  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed

My chains are gone, I've been set free  
My God, my Savior has ransomed me  
And like a flood His mercy reigns  
Unending love  
Amazing grace

The Lord has promised good to me  
His word my hope secures  
He will my shield and portion be  
As long as life endures

My chains are gone, I've been set free  
My God, my Savior has ransomed me  
And like a flood His mercy reigns  
Unending love  
Amazing grace

My chains are gone, I've been set free  
My God, my Savior has ransomed me  
And like a flood His mercy reigns  
Unending love  
Amazing grace

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow  
The sun forbear to shine  
But God, who called me here below  
Will be forever mine, will be forever mine  
You are forever mine

Source: Musixmatch Songwriters: Chris Tomlin / Louie Giglio

### **Closing Prayer and Blessing**

The love of the Lord Jesus draw you to himself; the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you in his service; the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**

If you would like someone to pray with you, please ask – people are always available.  
And do stop and join us for a cup of tea or coffee in the kitchen area.