



## Summoning the Divine Meditation: The Ascension of Jesus

Since the 4<sup>th</sup> C., Ascension has been celebrated 40 days after Easter in both Eastern and Western churches. The Feast of the Ascension ranks with Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost in the universality of its observance among Christians.



On the left is an image from an illuminated manuscript (4<sup>th</sup> c. A.D.) that is the first pictorial rendering of the Ascension. Carrying his cross, Christ has climbed to the mountain top and, grasps an extended hand extended from a cloud. The hand is that of God the Father whom “*no man could behold and live*” (Exodus 33:20). Jesus will ascend as the Apostles watch in rapture.

**Sources:** [aleteia.org 2018/05/15/analyzing-art-the-icon-of-the-ascension-through-the-ages/](https://aleteia.org/2018/05/15/analyzing-art-the-icon-of-the-ascension-through-the-ages/)

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“All....crucially depends on Christ’s being raised up in the midst of his astonished apostles, only to vanish in a cloud that...carries him straight to the Father....Ascension is truly the pivotal turning point in our relationship with God. Until then, the unleashing of the Holy Spirit cannot take place....that hovering and mysterious Presence can only take place when Christ in his blessed humanity is raised to receive the praise and honor of the Father. Only then may the promised Pentecostal fire fall into the gap, the time-bound interval between Ascension and Parousia. [Note: Parousia is the time when Jesus Christ will return to judge humanity at the end of the world.] Between the time of already and not yet, there ...falls the bright shadow of the Spirit, whose sending awaits the Ascension of the Son.

How well our ancestors in the faith understood this when they placed the Christ of the Ascension in the dome of their churches. Like a lance aimed at the heart of God...here was the very point of the spear itself, thrust through the dome that opens onto the Godhead. Our ancestors realized with the certitude and intuition of real belief that an entirely new beginning has been struck, that the last days had surely come. That he who was the splendor of the Father, the effulgence of eternity itself—who had, indeed, first burst into the darkness of a fallen world—was now bathed in a light and warmth so incandescent as to illumine all creation.”

**The Gospel. Luke 24:44-50** (King James). **44** And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. **45** Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, **46** And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: **47** And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **48** And ye are witnesses of these things. **49** And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. **50** And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. **51** And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. **52** And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: **53** And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen. See also ACTS 1:3-5, 9-11.

Here are two 14<sup>th</sup> C. renderings of the Ascension. **RIGHT:** Italian painter and Florence architect, Giotto (1267-1337) focuses on Jesus' using both hands to pierce the gates of heaven. The angelic host surrounds him with shouts of joy as the earthly gathering gazes upward in prayer and amazement. **BELOW LEFT:** In this painting by German Hans von Kulmbach (1480-1422), Jesus has ascended into Heaven; only his legs are dangling. The Virgin and the apostles stand witness to this event. This image was popular during the Middle Ages.



**ABOVE RIGHT:** Italian Renaissance painter Pietro Perugino (1447-1523 1510) accomplished the most famous depiction of the Ascension. Christ strides into

heaven in a frontal posture. His appearance is augmented by a mandorla of light. The mandorla was often in the classic almond shape. Inspired by Roman mythology that referred to the transportation of the deceased into heaven on the wings of an eagle or other flying spirits. Perugino used the clouds for Jesus' magnificent walk to heaven. Perugino was recalling the "pillar of cloud" that assisted the Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land. The cloud was the sign of the unseen God and His divine omnipotence. Perugino's most famous student was Raphael (1483-1520), the Italian Master of the High Renaissance.

## Charles Wesley: His Life & Hymn *Rejoice, the Lord is King!*

You-Tube has a superb version of the hymn. Don't miss it. Here's the link.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2NoiVysrykU> **2:56 min.**

Inspired by the mission, faith, and consistent joy of St. Paul, Charles Wesley selects the hymn's refrain from Philippians 4:4. *Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice* (King James Version). St. Paul is writing these words as he sits imprisoned in Rome. He has been wrongfully arrested, shipwrecked, bitten by a snake, and left under house arrest for two years (Acts 27:39–8:16). He had every reason to complain, yet he rejoiced. Indeed, St. Paul firmly believed that Joy is from the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). In the hymn, Wesley implies that the Ascension confirms the joyful assurance the Christ's promise and power gives to each of us.

**1.** Rejoice, the Lord is King  
Your Lord and King adore  
Rejoice, give thanks, and sing,  
And triumph evermore;  
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;  
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

**2** Jesus, the Savior, reigns,  
The God of truth and love;  
When He had purged our stains  
He took His seat above;  
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;  
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

**3** His kingdom cannot fail,  
He rules o'er earth and Heav'n,  
The keys of death and hell  
Are to our Jesus given;  
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;  
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

**4** Rejoice in glorious hope!  
Jesus the Judge shall come,  
And take His servants up to their  
eternal home.  
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;  
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

### Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

- Wesley is best known for creating more than 6,000 hymns. He was born the youngest of 18 children; only 10 children survived. He adored his mother Susannah. His father was a fierce Church of England priest, who found himself in debt and in trouble with his parishioners. His son John became his father's advocate.
- Charles adored his mother, who educated the children. She was a hard task mistress who instilled self-control, routine study, daily prayer and devotions.
- His older brother John (born in 1703) won a scholarship in London; Charles joined him two years later. John was ordained an Anglican priest in 1725. He returned to Lincolnshire to assist his father. Charles won a scholarship in London and soon followed his brother John. Charles studied diligently and attended to religious duties. John became the leader of Charles and a group of devout young men whose performed charity work. Their methodical ways resulted in their being known as "Methodists."
- John was drawn to the beliefs of George Whitefield, a leading evangelist and open-air preacher, who launched the Methodist movement. John began formulating the foundation of Methodist beliefs. Insisted John, salvation was for all and all should strive for "Christian perfection." John believed in



personal salvation by faith, the witness of the Spirit, and sanctification. God's grace was the theological underpinning of his belief that all persons were capable of being saved by faith in Christ.

- Ordained an Anglican priest in 1735 Charles travelled with John to serve as missionaries in the new colony of Georgia. During their 4-month sojourn in the Americas, both were influenced by the serene faith of Moravian Christians. In Savannah, Charles served briefly as the secretary to the Governor, General James Oglethorpe, but he was not prepared for the resistance to his message.
- Exhausted, disheartened and depressed, Charles returned to England. Similarly dispirited John returned a few months after. They sought out Moravians in London. Both were moved by the Moravians profound witness & renewal.
- By 1739, both brothers had taken to teaching "in the field" of open air. Charles transformed his preaching. He began sharing the Gospel with ordinary people, and it was for them that he began to write his poetic hymns. They covered thousands of miles on horseback over the years throughout England and in Scotland, Wales and Ireland. London, Bristol, and Newcastle were the main centers of their work.
- The travelling allowed Charles time for reflection and it was on horseback that he composed the words of many of the Methodist hymns sung today. John developed and preached Methodist theology, but it was Charles who enabled the people to learn it as they sang his hymns.
- Charles married in 1749; he and his wife Sally had 8 children; only 3 survived. His marriage created difficulties between the two brothers. Charles resisted the steps which John was taking that led to the separation of the Methodists from the Church of England, rather than being a revival movement within it. This caused a rift between the brothers.
- Charles wanted to spend more time with his family and to travel less. John, on the other hand, placed increasing importance on itinerant preaching. Charles gave up travelling in 1756 and was able to dedicate more time to hymn writing while sustaining a preaching and pastoral ministry, first in Bristol and then in London, after the family moved there in 1771.
- John used his authority to make decisions that moved Methodism farther away from the Church of England. Even though these events cast a shadow over their relationship, Charles retained his brotherly love for John until the end of his life. High-intensity preaching took its toll on Charles, who suffered from nervous exhaustion and severe depression, died in March, 1788.
- **Sources:** [bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/people/charleswesley\\_1.shtml](http://bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/people/charleswesley_1.shtml); [christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/wesleys](http://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/wesleys); [satucket.com/lectionary/Wesley.htm](http://satucket.com/lectionary/Wesley.htm); [christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-69/tale-of-two-brothers.html](http://christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-69/tale-of-two-brothers.html)