

# The Ascension - Are You Waiting for a Sign?

by Sir Knight **James N. Higdon**, KCT, P.G.C. of Texas and E. Grand Prelate of Texas, 2007-2008

The Ascension was a seminal event in the lives of the remaining eleven disciples and their converts. They saw the resurrected Christ taken up into heaven before their very eyes, until a cloud hid Him from their sight. (Acts 1: 9) They were, also, according to Acts 1: 11, instructed by two angels that Jesus would return in the same way that He departed from them.

Left in shock at what they had seen, they were challenged by these angels to stop gawking at the sky and follow Jesus's instructions to them. Jesus wanted them to be certain that He had left the earth and had left to them the task of carrying out the duties He had assigned to them. They'd been trained and equipped. Though they lacked Jesus's physical presence and guidance, they had a job to do.

He had sent them out in twos before, on a training mission as it were, to intern as teachers, preachers, and healers, making their mistakes along the way while they could come back to their mentor for more instruction. They knew Jesus was still there physically so they could report back to Him; they knew that Jesus was then still their teacher. Now that they had seen with their own eyes His physical ascent into heaven and had been charged by the angels, they knew it was now up to them to carry out that Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19-20) without his physical presence.

Ascension is the last of the obligatory observances of Templary. Given mere lip service in the four gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, it's a footnote to Christian history given the amount of writings that address it, yet it is a very significant and seminal event in Christian history, in Templar liturgy.

What is the significance of the Ascension? Why did Jesus allow His disciples to witness His Ascension? Why did He, in fact, lead them out away from Jerusalem to a spot near Bethany according to Luke 24: 50 or even farther away from Jerusalem to a mountain in Galilee according to Matthew 28: 16, but in either case, away from the historical center of Jewish religious and political thought and government and away from the Temple to witness His Ascension into heaven? Associated with coming to some answers to these questions is arriving at an answer to the question of why Jesus appeared to the disciples and others in His earthly entourage over a period of forty days before His Ascension.

Although these questions are thought-provoking, we will never know the answer to them in this earthly life. One answer might be that Jesus wanted to prove to them that He had overcome death and was just as alive as was Lazarus, whom they had all seen Jesus command to come forth from the tomb. (John 11: 1-44)

It is also significant that the gospels and the Acts have recorded that Jesus ate fish with His disciples on several different occasions, again proving His humanness, His being alive, thus alleviating their fears that He was just a ghost or a spirit. He walked and

talked and taught His disciples on several occasions during this forty-day period to also give them several opportunities to validate for themselves that He was the same Jesus that had lived among them, ate with them, and taught them so short a time ago, making them "legal" witnesses under the law of His Resurrection and life after death, but, also again, reinforcing to them His humanity.

Throughout this forty days after the Resurrection (Acts 1: 3), Jesus continued to teach them and to talk to them but now more earnestly about the kingdom of God and their role in it on earth, the real significance of the Ascension. Here, at the end of His earthly ministry, He instructed His disciples as to their duties in the furtherance of the Kingdom.

In Matthew 28: 18-20 He tells them, and us, that He has been given authority in heaven and on earth and then commands that if we are to be His disciples as we are going about living life, we are to make disciples - not just of the Jewish nation from which they came - but of all nations and to baptize them as John had done Him "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

But the duty of their lives was not to end with just making and baptizing disciples. He then further instructed them - He further instructed each of us - to teach these newly made disciples to obey everything He commanded the first disciples to do.

Their commission is our commission. Luke tells us that after Jesus had ascended out of sight, they worshipped Him there on the mountain and then returned to Jerusalem "with great joy" and "stayed continually at the temple, praising God." (Luke 24: 52) Just as the disciples returned to Jerusalem "with great joy" and praised God at the temple, that is our charge as well: to return to our homes, our churches, our work places, "with great joy," praising God, waiting always for our instructions from the Holy Spirit.

The disciples were following Christ's instructions by remaining in Jerusalem, waiting to receive the gift promised them, waiting to be clothed with the Holy Spirit. It came down and empowered the disciples at Pentecost, ten days after the Ascension.

That was their sign and their power. That began their ministry to all nations. Then, they went into "all the world and (preached) the good news to all creation." We are the fruit of the labor of those original eleven disciples and of many, many other disciples throughout history since. We don't have to wait for the Holy Spirit to come; it has already come and surrounds each of us if we will simply reach out and be open enough to allowing it to indwell in us.

Our charge today is the same as that given to the eleven, to "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16: 15, Matthew 28: 19-20), remembering that Our Lord is with us "always, even to the end of the age," until He returns from heaven just as the angels said He would.

Thus, the significance of the celebration of the Ascension is that it confirms our belief in the Risen Lord; it affirms our challenge of The Great Commission! He is with us today, tomorrow, and forever. If you have been "waiting for a sign," the record of the Ascension

and the gift of the Holy Spirit is that sign, our sign! So as you are going on your way through life, that is, living your life; preach the Good News, preach the Ascension, and preach the gift of the Holy Spirit!

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## Knight Templar Magazine Index - ARCHIVE of ARTICLES

<a href="#">HOME</a>	<a href="#">2007</a>	<a href="#">2008</a>	<a href="#">2009</a>	<a href="#">2010</a>	<a href="#">2011</a>	<a href="#">2012</a>	<a href="#">2013</a>	<a href="#">2014</a>
----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------

[Top](#)