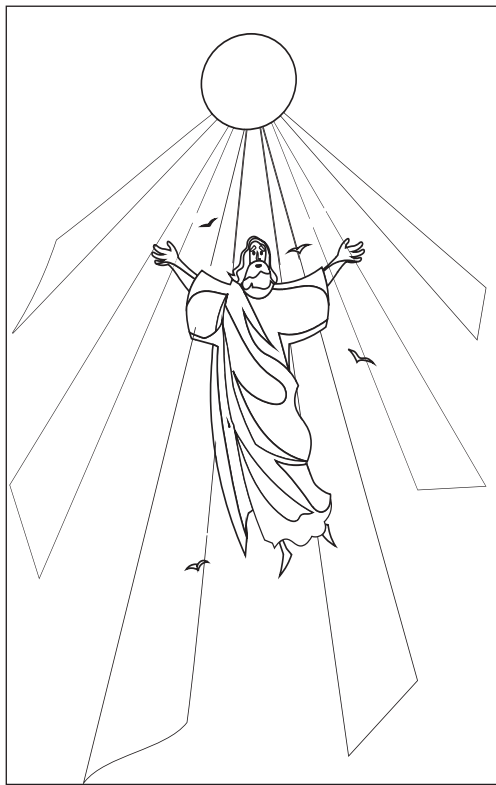


Jesus is Taken up to Heaven



Colour me!



Acts 1:4-11

For forty days after Jesus had died and come back to life, he appeared to his friends and spoke to them about God's kingdom. Now, he appears to them for the last time on earth:

While he [Jesus] was still with them, he said: Don't leave Jerusalem yet. Wait here for the Father to give you the Holy Spirit, just as I told you he has promised to do. John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

While the apostles were still with Jesus, they asked him, "Lord, are you now going to give Israel its own king again?" Jesus said to them, "You don't need to know the time of those events that only the Father controls. But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world." After Jesus had said this and while they were watching, he was taken up into a cloud. They could not see him, but as he went up, they kept looking up into the sky.

Suddenly two men dressed in white clothes were standing there beside them. They said, "Why are you men from Galilee standing here and looking up into the sky? Jesus has been taken to heaven. But he will come back in the same way that you have seen him go."

Commentary

For 40 days after Easter, Jesus kept appearing to the disciples, both as a group and individually, sometimes up in Galilee but also in and around Jerusalem. During this time he was preparing them for the next stage in God's plan. Now it was over to the disciples, and those who would believe because of them, to bring people into the kingdom. It would start in Jerusalem and slowly spread outward to include nearby countries and eventually the whole world. But Jesus knew they would need help. He couldn't be with everyone, everywhere, all the time, even in his new body, so he told them to wait in Jerusalem for God's power to come. He would come back to them in a new, invisible form—God the Holy Spirit. They needed to be filled and surrounded with the Spirit in order to do this new work.

Interestingly, the disciples still didn't quite understand the scale of the task and were thinking about a new king just for Israel. On the Mount of Olives above Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed just before his death, he finally left them. We call this 'the ascension', but it happened only so that Jesus could live in his disciples by his Spirit and, one day at the end of time, could return again when the job they were about to begin would be completed.

Questions

- ▶ What do you think Jesus meant by being baptized in the Holy Spirit?
- ▶ Do you think that the disciples really understood how big a plan they were caught up in?
- ▶ Why did Jesus need to go back to heaven?
- ▶ What did the angels mean about Jesus coming back in the same way that the disciples saw him go?



Visual aid

Use a picture of some traffic lights. The 'stop, wait, go' colours are a simple way to remember the instructions that Jesus gave his disciples before he left.



Activity idea

In today's story we hear Jesus' last important instructions to his disciples. Do you really think they were up to the job ahead of them? Talk together about this and make a list of all the arguments for and against trusting the future of the kingdom of God to this small bunch of believers.



Prayer idea

Jesus' strategy for growing the kingdom of God was to start where you are (in Jerusalem), go to those you know (Judea), then take the message to those people you don't know so well or even don't like (Samaria), and only afterwards set off into the whole world. On a piece of paper draw a set of concentric circles getting larger and larger. Put your family at the centre and then, in each circle further away from the centre, put the names of people who are close to you, neighbours and friends, people you are not so sure about, or people a long way away. Ask God for the power of the Holy Spirit to help you find practical ways of loving these people.

Key verse

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power" (Acts 1:8).

Old Testament story link

Zechariah 4:1-9: Zechariah receives a message from God about the power of God's Spirit and the promise to bless small beginnings.



Colour me!

