

## Ascension - Holy Trinity

When I was a child I used to look at the banks of cloud on the horizon and imagine that they were mountain ranges containing a whole new world different from our own. They seemed very mysterious to me, a new horizon beyond the world as we know it. Well, the child's imagination is no more, but one of the pleasures of Madeira is the glorious sunsets, my favourite spot is from Christo Rei.

We've all had the experience of flying in an aircraft when it's dreary and overcast; a roof of thick cloud over-head, when the plane takes off in the drear and the rain. It bumps its way through the grey canopy and suddenly you are out into the cloud fields where every thing is white and sparkling, the sky a dome of pale blue and the sun shining. The writers of the different parts of the Bible could never have that experience of course, Like us the writers of the Bible marvelled at the glories of the dawn and the sunset, when the heavens are ablaze, the light turning the clouds red and orange and pink, their edges turned to burnished gold and silver as the sun's rays stream downwards from behind them. **"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork."** It's no wonder the shining cloud became the image for the presence of God. The people of Israel followed the cloud as they journeyed to the dawn and the promised land. When Moses went up the mountain to seal the Covenant with God and receive the tablets of the law the Bible says, **"The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days....Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel."** Just as the clouds of this world became a symbol of God's presence with us, so that idea was taken further to describe heaven itself. In the Book of Daniel, the writer says **"I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven."** The splendour of the glorious sunrise is the image of heaven itself. And the voice of God came from the bright cloud to Jesus at his transfiguration. **"This is my Son, the beloved, listen to him."**

This is the background imagery of the story of the Ascension that we think about at this time of the year. **"As they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight."** It's very difficult to know how the people who wrote and read these words understood **"lifted up"**. In his other book, the Gospel, Luke describes it in this way. **"While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven."** It is natural to think of heaven as above and there is so much in our language which uses this idea, from the footballer who lifts his game, to the King who ascends the throne. The Ascension is always going to be a mystery for it attempts to put into words what is beyond words and description. But much more important than what it might have been like to be there, is what it actually meant to them and to us.

First it was the ending of one time and the beginning of another. The time when the faith of the disciples depended on a flesh and blood and person, was ended. The Jesus of history was taken into the gold fringed, bright fringed cloud of God's eternity. Jesus returns to the Father. But it is not the same Jesus, for this Jesus was taking with him his humanity, and all that means. He became like us so that we might become like him. He has gone on before, so that we might follow. **"I am the gate of the sheepfold."** He is the gate of heaven, that through him we too might enter. To him has been given glory and power and he has prayed that God's blessing may be upon us **"..that they may be one, as we are one."**

And it holds a promise, the promise that we are not left comfortless, he told his followers to return to Jerusalem and wait for the power that he would send to them. They were filled with joy and commitment to their Lord. It was a new faith that never left them in all the difficulties and suffering that they faced as the years went by. They took the message of the living and ascended Christ out to the world and they challenged it to receive this blessing too. The story now is not just of what Jesus did in his life here but what he is still able to do through us his followers

The story of the Ascension shows us that our humanity has been glorified and taken up into God. It is a revelation of what God has eternally proposed for mankind, a life freed from all restrictions of space and time, a totally new life, like the plane bursting through the heavy grey rain clouds into the sunlit vault of Heaven. Now they knew that their friend on earth was their friend in heaven. And that self same Jesus who was so funny and kind was waiting for them. **"I shall go and prepare a place for you, so that where I am you may be also."** Death is no longer a fearful step into the unknown dark, but going to a home long prepared for us.