

Filmed at Kingbarrow and St James Aldherholt

Risen Christ,  
you have raised our human nature to the throne of heaven:  
help us to seek and serve you,  
that we may join you at the Father's side,  
where you reign with the Spirit in glory,  
now and for ever.

#### Acts 1.1-11

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 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. 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. For John baptized with[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with[b] the Holy Spirit."

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

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 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."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "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."

From the early days of Christianity, people have celebrated Christ's ascension into Heaven.

Eusebius - a church historian in the 4th Century, and Augustine in the fifth - both mention services which hint at an apostolic tradition, going right back to the beginnings.

And why not. This was a moment for the disciples, they were left in charge, Jesus was really leaving them. But not quite a second bereavement - they knew the spirit was coming (if you read John they had already received it!) so they were not alone. But they would remember - standing on that hillside, looking up. Looking up like you do at a plane or train or car, carrying your relatives to the some far away place- long after they can't see you - your eyes follow where your heart is - with them.

So there is a tradition of going to the highest place - in Cambridge it was the College tower, in Salisbury it was Old Sarum -

and then letting off fireworks - even though they couldn't be seen, but because we would all be looking up - just like the disciples. And perhaps a rocket is better than a balloon, that was only an option in the 19th century anyway - new fangled thing!

And the theology? That Christ is taking our humanity into heaven. That's why its one of the big 7 - Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost , Trinity and All Saints. Christ came to show us God. Christ came to redeem us and save us. Christ came to take us into heaven - to open the door. Where he goes, we will go, if we abide with him. Over the years, it has grown on me more and more. And a bit like the church forgot about

Pentecost and the Holy Spirit for hundreds of years it seems, or got lost in the Trinity (and not in a good way), so our over selling of Christmas and Easter, leaves Ascension looking a bit empty.

Here in the early 1600's, is George Herbert's poem - The Bag - about an empty bag, that Jesus had, ready to take us into heaven.

Away despair! my gracious Lord doth heare.  
    Though windes and waves assault my keel,  
    He doth preserve it: he doth steer,  
    Ev'n when the boat seems most to reel.  
    Storms are the triumph of his art:  
Well may he close his eyes, but not his heart.

Hast thou not heard, that my Lord Jesus di'd?  
    Then let me tell thee a strange storie.  
    The God of power, as he did ride  
    In his majestic robes of glorie,  
    Reserv'd to light; and so one day  
He did descend, undressing all the way.

The starres his tire<sup>1</sup> of light and rings obtain'd,  
    The cloud his bow, the fire his spear,  
    The sky his azure mantle gain'd.  
    And when they ask'd, what he would wear;  
    He smil'd and said as he did go,  
He had new clothes a making here below.

When he was come, as travellers are wont,  
    He did repair unto an inne.  
    Both then, and after, many a brunt  
    He did endure to cancell sinne:  
    And having giv'n the rest before,  
Here he gave up his life to pay our score.

But as he was returning, there came one  
    That ran upon him with a spear.  
    He, who came hither all alone,  
    Bringing nor man, nor arms, nor fear,  
    Receiv'd the blow upon his side,  
And straight he turn'd, and to his brethren cry'd,

If ye have any thing to send or write,  
    I have no bag, but here is room:  
    Unto my Fathers hands and sight,  
    Beleeve me, it shall safely come.  
    That I shall minde, what you impart;  
Look, you may put it very neare my heart.

Or if hereafter any of my friends  
    Will use me in this kinde, the doore  
    Shall still be open; what he sends  
    I will present, and somewhat more,  
    Not to his hurt. Sighs will convey  
Any thing to me. Harke, Despair away.