

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus,

**All giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ.**

Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

**All let us sing to God with thankful hearts.**

Open our lips, Lord:

**All and we shall praise your name.**



### HYMN **Crown Him with many crowns (StF 347)**

**1** Crown him with many crowns,  
the Lamb upon his throne.  
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns  
all music but its own.  
Awake, my soul, and sing  
of him who died for thee,  
and hail him as thy matchless King  
through all eternity.

**2** Crown him the Son of God,  
before the worlds began;  
and ye who tread where he has trod,  
crown him the Son of Man,  
who every grief has known  
that wrings the human breast,  
and takes and bears them for his own,  
that all in him may rest.

**3** Crown him the Lord of life,  
who triumphed o'er the grave,  
and rose victorious in the strife  
for those he came to save.  
His glories now we sing,  
who died, and rose on high;  
who died, eternal life to bring,  
and lives, that death may die.

**4** Crown him the Lord of peace,  
whose power a sceptre sways  
from pole to pole, that wars may cease,  
absorbed in prayer and praise.  
His reign shall know no end,  
and round his piercèd feet  
fair flowers of paradise extend  
their fragrance ever sweet.

**5** Crown him the Lord of love;  
behold his hands and side —  
rich wounds, yet visible above,  
in beauty glorified.  
All hail, Redeemer, hail!  
for thou hast died for me;  
thy praise and glory shall not fail  
throughout eternity.

**TITLE:** Crown him with many crowns

**BY:** Matthew Bridges (1800–1894) and Godfrey Thring (1823–1903)

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### PRAISE – Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

**All Worship the LORD with gladness;  
come into his presence with singing.**

Know that the LORD is God.

**All It is he that made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.**

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,  
and his courts with praise.

**All Give thanks to him, bless his name.**

For the LORD is good;

**All his steadfast love endures for ever,  
and his faithfulness to all generations.**

## CONFESSION

'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.'

We long for the fire of God's cleansing to touch our unclean lips,  
for our guilt to be removed and our sin wiped out.

So we meet Father, Son and Holy Spirit with repentance in our hearts.

**All** O King enthroned on high,  
filling the earth with your glory:  
holy is your name,  
Lord God almighty.  
In our sinfulness we cry to you  
to take our guilt away,  
and to cleanse our lips to speak your word,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May the God of love and power forgive us and free us from our sins,  
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit, and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. Amen

## ADORATION

From the rising of the sun till its setting in the west,

**All** God's holy name be praised.

On the lips of children, by babies at the breast,

**All** God's holy name be praised.

In the visions of the old and the dreaming of the young,

**All** God's holy name be praised.

In the banquet hall of heaven and the forgotten corners of our hearts,

**All** God's holy name be praised.

Let all that has life and breath praise the Lord.

**All** Amen. We praise the Lord!

## HYMN All Heaven declares (StF 293)

**1** All heaven declares  
the glory of the risen Lord ;  
who can compare  
with the beauty of the Lord ?  
For ever he will be  
the Lamb upon the throne ;  
I gladly bow the knee,  
and worship him alone.

**2** I will proclaim  
the glory of the risen Lord,  
who once was slain  
to reconcile us to God.  
For ever you will be  
the Lamb upon the throne ;  
I gladly bow the knee,  
and worship you alone.

**TITLE:** All heaven declares

**BY:** Noël Richards (b. 1955) and Tricia Richards (b. 1960)

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## PRAYER

O God the King of glory,  
you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ  
with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven:  
we beseech you, leave us not comfortless,  
but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us  
and exalt us to the place where our Saviour Christ is gone before,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.  
**Amen.**

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. *'This', he said, 'is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'*

So when they had come together, they asked him, *'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?'* He replied, *'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'* When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, *'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'*

## REFLECTION

We talk about Jesus' 'Ascension' because Luke tells us that Jesus was 'taken up' to heaven. The imagery would have made sense to his readers, steeped in the world of the Old Testament and familiar with the visual references. The cloud symbolised the presence of God, the two men in white, his angelic messengers; the prophet Elijah had been swept up into heaven.

There are verbal references to that as well. Elijah had passed on his ministry as prophet to Elisha who watched him go up into heaven. So also we heard how Jesus passed on his ministry to the apostles as witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Images and language of 'up' and 'down' are also woven throughout our contemporary speech and writing. We talk about 'top jobs' and 'career ladders', 'high-up people' and 'rising stars.' Someone who is 'above' can 'look down on' others and 'oversee' them, while those below have to 'look up to' them. High places are 'commanding' positions, easy to control and safe from attack. No wonder we associate height with power. No wonder we imagine God dwelling 'in the highest heavens.'

So, Jesus went 'up' to that place of power, of God's power, to a place where, as Ephesians tells us, he is 'far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.' And when he went up, he left the disciples below looking up. 'why are you standing there looking up into the sky?'

Well why not? Did you see that?

The dominant feeling I get from that event is astonishment, wonder at what might be going on and perhaps uncertainty and the anxiety that goes with it about 'what now?!

So why, as St Luke puts it, did they return to Jerusalem 'with great joy'? He was 'up', far beyond the human world, and they stayed where they were, with their feet firmly on the ground with everything now on them.

Why weren't they in floods of tears at being separated from their beloved Lord?

Why weren't they in panic at what he'd just told them they had to do?

Saint Luke gives a trailer for the Ascension at the end of his Gospel. But it's the first main event at the *beginning* of Acts.

The Ascension is not so much the end of Jesus' earthly life, as the beginning of the life of the Church. It's a story that turns our ideas of absence and presence, of 'up' and of 'down' – well, it turns them upside-down!

10 days, but only the next chapter after the Ascent of Jesus comes the Descent of his Spirit, and all these up and down ideas of power are transformed. Jesus went 'up', only so God could come 'down'. This time, He comes down not as a human being, external to them, but as the Holy Spirit 'poured into our hearts'.

In other words, his power is no longer just external – power *over* us. It has become power *in* us and *through* us. Jesus may be physically absent, but he could not be nearer to us. Now he is present not just with us and for us, but in us, through us and for others too.

In our fallen world, where all fall short of the glory of God, 'up' implies competition, rivalry, promotion - in a job or in a league table. If I go *up*, I go *above* you. But Christ's love, present *in* us through his Spirit, doesn't lift us *above* other people. Rather, our mission as his followers is precisely to lift other people *up*.

Soon after Pentecost Peter encountered a man who could not walk. Peter healed him, and he jumped *up* with joy. Saul, the arrogant persecutor, had to fall *down* on the ground before he could see the truth. Then he was helped *up* by Ananias and began to share in Peter's mission. Paul healed a cripple at Lystra, saying to him, 'Stand *upright* on your feet.'

When young Eutychus fell asleep during one of Paul's extra-long sermons and fell out of the window and was killed - a warning to all of us preachers! - Paul *raised* him back to life.

This physical raising up – in line with much of Jesus' ministry in raising up the sick, the dead, the marginalised and overlooked – physical raising up is a symbol of the ongoing task of Jesus people: to build *up* communities in which people can grow *up* into mature Christians. Then they in their turn lift up others. No doubt all of us will know plenty of people who are *down*, from grief or loneliness, sickness, poverty, or anxiety. Lifting people *up* who are suffering - through acts of kindness, generosity, patience, however humble – lifting people up is the daily life of Jesus' people. Exactly how that plays out is different for each person in each place and each situation.

Kind words to a lonely neighbour, an ear for a grieving friend, a warm welcome for a family of refugees, a smile for a stranger in the street. In whatever your walk of life - in families, work places, local communities, local interest and leisure groups - going the extra mile, so that children, pupils, students, patients, colleagues, customers, friends get the *lift* they need. Then rejoicing, not competing, when they are lifted even higher than you. Mostly we don't need to work miracles – it's just about one miracle – a miracle that has already happened and continues to happen, which we remember especially next weekend, but which is available even before that: the miracle of being clothed with power from on high, made possible by Jesus' ascension – the miracle of the gift and power of the Holy Spirit so that the love of God lives in us, for us, through us and for others. **Amen**

### **HYMN:** Jesus Is King (StF 327)

**1** Jesus is King  
and I will extol him,  
give him the glory,  
and honour his name ;  
he reigns on high,  
enthroned in the heavens —  
Word of the Father,  
exalted for us.

**2** We have a hope  
that is steadfast and certain,  
gone through the curtain  
and touching the throne ;  
we have a priest  
who is there interceding,  
pouring his grace  
on our lives day by day.

**3** We come to him,  
our Priest and Apostle,  
clothed in his glory  
and bearing his name,  
laying our lives  
with gladness before him —  
filled with his Spirit  
we worship the King :

**4** 'O Holy One,  
our hearts do adore you ;  
thrilled with your goodness  
we give you our praise !'  
Angels in light  
with worship surround him,  
Jesus, our Saviour,  
for ever the same.

**TITLE:** Jesus is King

**BY:** Wendy Churchill

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### **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Rejoicing that Jesus has ascended into heaven,  
we pray in confidence to God our Father for the gift and power of the Holy Spirit.

We pray in gratitude for those who were witnesses to us of Jesus' call to us;  
for those who help and guide us on our spiritual journeys.

We pray for one another and for Christians young and old, near and far.

We pray with longing for the world to be governed in accordance with your law of love;  
that all creation may be revered and treated with respect.

We pray with concern for all the homes, schools and places of work in all our communities.

We rejoice in all that is of you and pray healing,  
forgiveness, peace, harmony and love wherever there is discord, bitterness or conflict.

We pray with hope for healing and wholeness, courage and patience for all who are ill or troubled,  
damaged or depressed and those who care for them.

We pray with joy as we celebrate Jesus entering his glory  
and wait expectantly for the fulfilment of your Kingdom in the new creation.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

**All** Our Father in heaven  
Hallowed be your name  
Your kingdom come  
Your will be done  
On earth as in heaven  
Give us today our daily bread,  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
And deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen

## HYMN The head that once was crowned with thorns (StF 312)

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| <p><b>1</b> The head that once was crowned with thorns<br/>is crowned with glory now ;<br/>a royal diadem adorns<br/>the mighty Victor's brow.</p> <p><b>2</b> The highest place that heaven affords<br/>is his, is his by right,<br/>the King of kings and Lord of lords,<br/>and heaven's eternal light.</p> <p><b>3</b> The joy of all who dwell above,<br/>the joy of all below<br/>to whom he manifests his love<br/>and grants his name to know.</p> | <p><b>4</b> To them the cross, with all its shame,<br/>with all its grace, is given,<br/>their name an everlasting name,<br/>their joy the joy of heaven.</p> <p><b>5</b> They suffer with their Lord below,<br/>they reign with him above,<br/>their profit and their joy to know<br/>the mystery of his love.</p> <p><b>6</b> The cross he bore is life and health,<br/>though shame and death to him ;<br/>his people's hope, his people's wealth,<br/>their everlasting theme.</p> |
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**TITLE:** The head that once was crowned with thorns

**BY:** Thomas Kelly (1769–1855)

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## BLESSING AND ENDING

Christ our ascended King pour upon you the abundance of his gifts  
and bring you to reign with him in glory;  
and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit  
be among us and remain with us  
and those we love and all for whom we pray today and always.

**Amen**

The Lord God almighty is our Father:

**All** he loves us and tenderly cares for us.

The Lord Jesus Christ is our Saviour:

**All** he has redeemed us and will defend us to the end.

The Lord, the Holy Spirit, is among us

**All**he will lead us in God's holy way.

To God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be praise and glory today and for ever. Amen.