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Jesus Goes Up to Heaven

Acts 1:6–11 · Bud · Ages 9–12

Luke wrote two books, a Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, and he tells the Ascension in both. The Gospel ends with it (Lk 24:50–53), and Acts begins with it (Acts 1:6–11). It is the hinge between the story of Jesus and the story of the Church.

Acts tells us that for forty days after his Resurrection Jesus showed himself alive to the apostles and spoke about the Kingdom of God. He told them to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit.

On the Mount of Olives they asked whether this was the moment he would restore the kingdom to Israel. Jesus answered that it was not for them to know the times the Father had set. Instead, they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. That sentence is a map of the whole book of Acts.

Then, while they watched, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight. In the Bible a cloud is often the sign of God's presence, like the cloud at Mount Sinai. As they stood gazing upward, two men in white appeared and told them that this same Jesus would come again in the same way.

Luke's Gospel adds the ending: Jesus led them out toward Bethany, lifted his hands and blessed them, and was taken up to the Father. They worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem full of joy, and they were continually in the Temple blessing God.

Why joy? Because the Ascension is not a goodbye. Jesus, true God and true man, has entered the Father's glory in his risen body (CCC 659). He sits at the Father's right hand, which means he shares the Father's power and glory (CCC 668). And he promised the Spirit, who would make him present in a new way.

One more thing: when we say Jesus went up to heaven, we don't mean he traveled to a place in outer space. Heaven is not a location in the sky. It is God's own life and glory (CCC 2794).

Talk about it

1. Why does Luke tell the Ascension at the end of one book and the start of the next?
2. What did Jesus tell the apostles to do instead of guessing the timing of God's plans?
3. What does it mean that heaven is not a place up in the sky?
4. Why were the apostles full of joy instead of sad?

Key verse: Acts 1:8. Look it up in your Bible.