# ASCENSION and PENTECOST

With the coming of Easter, our forty day journey through our own inner wilderness in Lent, as well as our related journey of solidarity with our Lord in his passion in Holy Week:– both reach their fulfilment in the great liturgy of Easter night/morning which incorporates each of us – together – wonderfully, into the *Mystery* of Easter.

*St. Melito of Sardis* characterises this mystery as both old and new, eternal and temporal, mortal and immortal. He says that it is transient and material in its prototype: the Jewish Passover observance, but eternal in the grace of its effects by the Holy Spirit.

And so it is that in our re-living, as a community, the story of the empty tomb at Easter, (as well as our reliving of the narrative of the Lord’s fasting, Passion and death before that,) we are enabled to **‘become ourselves: passing away’** (words on a memorial tablet in our cathedral.)

When the disciples, the first Christians, experienced the empty tomb, they were in a state of shock. Their world had been shattered as they witnessed the arrest of Jesus and his death on the cross. It took more than an empty tomb to convince them of the truth of the resurrection.

So we may say, the empty tomb, itself the goal of our Lent and Holy Week journey, was only the beginning of a process that led to faith. We want to be part of that process in our Easter season journey. Gradually, over a period, again, of forty days those first Christians had a variety of experiences of meeting the risen Lord which enabled them finally to proclaim with conviction, as Peter says in *Acts* ‘they killed him by hanging on a tree, yet three days afterwards God raised him to life and allowed him to be seen ... by certain witnesses...now we are those witnesses.’

So, with the coming of Easter, we can contemplate the whole sweep of the divine/human story which began at Christmas, and was foretold before. At the mid-point of that story the relationship of the disciples with Jesus began with the call to follow him. It grew as they went with him on his public ministry – they heard his words they witnessed his healing they saw his love and compassion for people and gradually the conviction grew that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God. All this was dashed when they witnessed his betrayal, arrest and death on the cross. They only really came to understand who Jesus is after the resurrection when the Holy Spirit came to lead them into all truth; that Spirit whom we celebrate in this Easter season culminating at Pentecost: – only then did they have supernatural faith.

The risen Lord appeared for forty days, after Easter, to those who received the gift of faith. Then, in what we call the Ascension, he was no longer visible in the created world but returned to the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The gift of that Sprit, given in his fullness at Pentecost, brings us into relationship with Jesus. It enables us to see beyond what is immediately obvious to our physical senses, (e.g. the earthly experience of the incarnate and risen Christ to his followers before the Ascension) into the reality of God, where we can experience a whole new life.

Saint Paul, in *Collosians,* expresses this experience of faith in the very Easter terms of death and rebirth. When we have faith in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we are enabled to die to the things of this world and come alive to the things of God. All that used to be important to us is no longer, our whole sense of values changes because ‘our life is now hidden with Christ in God.’

Like the disciples, however, we have to grow in our faith. That is our journey from Easter to Pentecost. Like them, we have to follow the call of Christ, to listen to his word, to allow a relationship with him to develop through prayer and sacrament. Without that our world is stuck at an empty tomb. As we journey towards Pentecost let us open our hearts to the gift of the Spirit who will enable is to see what, since the Ascension, is no longer visible to the eyes of our body, and to believe that the lord is truly risen and living among us.

We at St. Philip’s will be joining, this year, with are bishop, Michael, and with our sister parish of St. Bart’s, Westwood Hill, for a common celebration of the Ascension, on Ascension Thursday 29th May, at St. Bart’s, at 8.00pm.

Then on the evening of Whitsunday 8th June, at 6.00pm there is the service in our cathedral to close Bishop Christopher’s *Faith, Hope, Love* initiative.