



SESSION 1 of 4

Ascension

MEETING AIM

To explore how Jesus prepared his friends for his departure as he said goodbye to them.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Acts 1:1-11

BACKGROUND

Jesus' ascension is hard to comprehend, and quite how it happened is a mystery. But children can grasp that Jesus had to leave. He wanted his disciples to be ready for him to go and to be able to share his good news. Allow the children space to ask questions, and acknowledge when you don't know the answer. The ascension cannot be separated from the resurrection story, so don't cut short your review of the Easter story.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children and share out any refreshments you have. Ask the children how many times a day they say goodbye to someone. Ask for suggestions and count them. How many times do we say: "See you soon" after we've said "Goodbye"? Talk about times when we've said farewell to someone knowing that we wouldn't see them for a long time.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: drum or shaker instruments (optional)

Learn this song to the tune of 'Auld lang syne', waving goodbye appropriately. Use drum or shaker-type musical instruments if you can.

The time had come for Jesus to say Goodbye to all his friends.
"Goodbye," he said to all his friends,
"Goodbye," he said, "goodbye."

"Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, my friends,
Goodbye to all my friends.
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, my friends,
Goodbye to all my friends."

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a small suitcase containing items you would need if you were going to another country for a few months, including a passport, a mobile and a ticket, plus anything else you might need, such as money, clothes and sunglasses.

Talk about what the children can remember from the resurrection story. Remind them of Mary in the garden, Jesus' walk with two of his disciples on the road from Jerusalem, the chat he had with Thomas the following week, the breakfast he cooked on the beach and the conversation he had with Peter. Remind them that Jesus couldn't be with his disciples for ever. He was getting ready to leave them.

If someone in your family was going to another country for a few months they would pack a suitcase. What would they pack? *Open your suitcase and empty its contents during the discussion. Let the children repack the suitcase.*

But Jesus didn't need any of those things, because...

He didn't need a passport. *Hold this up.* You don't need a passport to go where he was going. He was going to heaven to be with his Father God. You don't need passports to be with God in heaven. Anyone who loves Jesus is welcome there.

He didn't need his mobile. *Hold this up.* He had already told his friends what would happen once he was gone. There was nothing else to tell them. He was going away, but he was sending the Holy Spirit in his place. As a human being Jesus could only be in one place at one time, but the Holy Spirit, who is also God, can be everywhere at the same time. Jesus' friends would have the Holy Spirit instead.

He didn't need a ticket. *Hold this up.* He wasn't going to travel on a bus, a train or a plane.

This is what happened. As he was talking with his friends, Jesus was taken up into the air and disappeared into a cloud. Jesus' friends kept looking up into the sky open-mouthed, but he was gone. *Encourage the children to look up with open mouths.*

All of a sudden, standing beside them were two men dressed in white, who were probably angels. They said: "What are you looking like that for? Jesus has gone to be with his Father in heaven. He will come back one day."

So Jesus' friends went back to the city of Jerusalem and waited for Jesus to send the Holy Spirit to be with them. They didn't have to wait long!

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to talk about the story, encouraging everyone to join in:

- How do you think Jesus' friends felt when Jesus talked about leaving them? They loved him. How would they cope without him?
- How might they feel as they looked up into the cloud and saw him disappear?
- Why do you think Jesus had to leave?

You might want to talk about how he was limited to being in one place at a time. You could also explore the idea that Jesus had completed the task he had come to do on earth, so it was time for him to leave. He had instructed his disciples to share his good news with others, and if he had stayed they might not have got on with job! The children may have lots of questions about how it happened, but we have to accept that it's ultimately a mystery.

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: a lump of playdough for each child (see playdoughrecipe.com for a simple recipe)

Talk through the whole story of Easter, making the following shapes as you do so:

- A circular stone – rolled away from the tomb entrance
- A fish – which Jesus cooked for breakfast
- A bread roll – which Jesus broke with the two friends he had met on the road
- A cloud shape – into which Jesus disappeared
- A foot – the last part of Jesus' body the disciples saw
- One other shape the children might like to make that is connected to the story

5 PRAYER

Jesus said goodbye to his friends, but he had made sure they would be OK without him. He was going to send the Holy Spirit, who is like 'God everywhere', in his place.

Invite the children to say a one-sentence prayer of thanks to Jesus, such as: "Thank you, Jesus, that you helped your friends to be OK without you" or "Thank you, Jesus, that you made breakfast for your friends" or "Thank you, Jesus, that you had done what God wanted you to do" or "Thank you, Jesus, that you are now in heaven".

Sing the goodbye song again. You could finish off by singing the first verse as you go home: "The time has come for me to say goodbye to all my friends..."

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SESSION 2 of 4

Pentecost

MEETING AIM

To talk about how God 'speaks' in different ways.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Acts 2:1-41

BACKGROUND

Reflect on the miracle of people hearing about Jesus in their own languages, and ask the Holy Spirit to help each child share something true about Jesus with someone else.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children and share out any refreshments you have. What shapes can the children make with their mouths and lips? What can they do with their voices? Encourage imaginative suggestions.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: small pieces of card roughly measuring 5cm by 5cm; felt-tip pens

Before the session, make sets of playing cards by drawing the following images on cards: the outline of an upturned mouth, a downturned sad mouth, a 'straight' mouth, an open mouth and either a flame or 'flickering' squiggle. You will need one set per child.

Hide the cards around your space and show the children a copy of the five cards. Challenge them to find as many individual cards as they can, then ensure that each child has a full set of five. If there is time, play a game of snap. You'll need to add in extra cards for a longer game.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a set of cards from 'Intro activity' for each child

Remind the group of the ascension story from last week. Jesus' friends had gone into the city of Jerusalem and were waiting. Jesus had told them he would send the Holy Spirit to them. They waited on Friday and on Saturday and on Sunday and on Monday and on Tuesday and on Wednesday and on Thursday and on Friday and on Saturday. How long were they going to have to wait? They were puzzled. *Show the 'straight mouth' card.*

Sunday came around again; the day when they remembered Jesus had come

alive again; the first day of the week! This Sunday was a special festival, Pentecost, when everyone celebrated the fact that the wheat had been harvested. Pentecost was also the festival when everyone remembered that God had given Moses the Ten Commandments. All Jesus' friends had gathered together in one large room. They were still waiting.

And then...suddenly there was a loud sound, coming from above them. The sound was like a wild, wild wind; a wind that seemed to crash from one wall to another. They felt it on their faces. They heard it with their ears. It blew their hair all over the place. It ruffled their clothes. And then...suddenly they saw orange and yellow flickering, like flames, darting around the room, and finally a flickering flame settled on each person's head. *Show the 'flickering' card.*

The Holy Spirit had come. Everyone in the room began to speak in different languages. *Ask how many different languages the children can name. Show the 'open mouth' card.* The Holy Spirit, who is 'God everywhere', had come to be with everyone who loves Jesus; not just then, but for all time. For now! Jesus had gone to be with his Father. He had sent the Holy Spirit in his place. Jesus' followers were very happy and excited! *Show the 'upturned mouth' card.*

This Sunday was a special day in Jerusalem. It was the end of the wheat harvest, called Pentecost. Hundreds of Jewish people were visiting from lots of different countries that we now know as Israel, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iran. They all spoke different languages. But now they could hear Jesus' followers speaking their own languages. They were amazed. What was going on?

Peter stood up, opened his mouth and began to talk in a loud, clear voice. *Show the 'open mouth' card again.* He told them everything that Jesus had done. He told them how, years earlier, God's people had been told that Jesus would come. He told them how Jesus had died but come back to life again, and had then gone back to be with his Father, God.

The crowds got upset and sad. *Show the 'downturned mouth' card.*

"What do we have to do?" they called out.

Peter simply said: "Turn back to God. He will forgive you for the wrong things you've done. He will wash them away. You too will receive the Holy Spirit. This is for you and for your children, wherever you live."

Wow! The crowds were amazed at this, and thousands of them turned back to God. Thousands knew that God had forgiven them. The Holy Spirit was with them. *Show the 'upturned mouth' card.*

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to talk about the story, encouraging everyone to join in:

- What miracles that Jesus did can you think of? What about the miracle of the Holy Spirit coming, of the wild wind, the flickering and the speaking in lots of languages?
- Why was it an important miracle that people visiting Jerusalem could hear what Peter had to say about Jesus in their own languages?
- Why is it important everyone has a chance to hear about Jesus?

Share a time recently when you have been able to tell someone a truth about Jesus. (It's important for them to realise that this is true today, and that you needed the Holy Spirit to give you the best words to speak.)

5 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: lollipop sticks; elastic bands; little stickers; strips of yellow, orange and red paper (as long as possible) with something true about Jesus written on, such as 'Jesus came alive again', 'Jesus loves me', 'Jesus made sick people well' and 'Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be with me'

Let the children choose at least six strips of paper to decorate with stickers. Fasten them together on the end of the stick with an elastic band. Encourage everyone to wave their streamers and shout the true statements about Jesus.

5 PRAYER

You will need: a lighted candle

Sit in a circle and light a candle. Ask each child to think of someone they would like to tell something true about Jesus. Invite each child to share the name of the person they have thought of, and what it is about Jesus they want to say. Remind them how the Holy Spirit helped you when you did this. Go around the circle and simply pray over each child:

"Holy Spirit, be with _____, and help them share something true about Jesus with _____."

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SESSION 3 of 4

Meeting others

MEETING AIM

To recognise the initiatives the followers of Jesus took once the Holy Spirit had come, and to think about what this might mean for children today.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37

BACKGROUND

The followers of Jesus were so emboldened by the coming of the Spirit that they took the initiative to care for one another as well as telling others about Jesus. If you're going to explore how they celebrated the last supper in their homes (and children probably would have been present), you may need to talk with your church leaders if it's not the custom for children to participate in Holy Communion.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children and share out any refreshments you have. Talk about what makes us excited. What sort of things do we say and do to show that we're excited? Refresh their memories about Pentecost. The followers of Jesus in Jerusalem were excited about what they had seen and heard about Jesus, and were very bold once the Holy Spirit had come to them.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: two of the following cards (4cm by 3cm) for each child (eight cards per child): an outline of a large loaf and grapes, three apples, two open hands and five circles piled together; four small bowls

Stick one card visibly on each bowl and place the bowls around the room. Mix up all the cards, putting them on a tray, and explain the meaning of each card. The challenge is to sort all the cards, one by one, into the correct bowls. Once you have finished, congratulate everyone and wonder together about what all the cards mean.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: two long pieces of string, rope or wool; a set of cards from 'Intro activity'; scarves to wear on heads when acting (optional)

Begin by singing any song of praise the children already know. Then tell this story:

The followers of Jesus were really happy because they knew Jesus had come back to life and gone to be with his Father in heaven, and the Holy Spirit had come in his place. They met together very often during the week. Let's discover which five new things they did.

Create a 'street' by arranging your string into two lines. Jesus' followers would walk down the street, and when they met someone who didn't know about him they would say something about him. Ask a few children to act out walking down the street, with some wanting to talk about Jesus coming back from the dead, some wanting to listen and some not wanting to listen.

Create a 'temple' gateway by stretching the string over the backs of two chairs, or with two adults holding the string to form an archway. Every day, Jesus' followers went to the temple (the large building where people worshipped God). Here they would pray to him. Show the 'open hands' card. While they were there, they would talk about what they were learning as they listened to Jesus' disciples telling them about him. Ask a few children to walk through the 'gateway' of the temple, acting out praying and discussing in small groups.

Create a 'home' with a circle of string on the floor, allowing several children to sit inside. Jesus' followers spent time in each other's homes, getting to know each other and finding out more about Jesus. This might have been in the evening after work or maybe during the day. Many of them would have been working in their homes.

They remembered Jesus' death and the last supper he'd had with his friends when they broke bread and drank wine together. Show the 'bread and grapes' card. They made sure that people who didn't have enough to eat were given plenty of food. Show the 'three apples' card. They generously made sure that the poor people had enough money. Show the 'coins' card. The children inside the circle should act out looking after sick people, giving out money and food, and breaking bread and drinking wine.

The Bible tells us that people living in Jerusalem really liked how these Christians were behaving and that lots more people became followers of Jesus. Read Acts 2:42-47.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to talk about the story, encouraging everyone to join in:

- How did the early Christians care for each other and talk about Jesus?
- How would the children have felt if they had been in Jerusalem and seen the followers of Jesus behaving like this?
- What do they think the best thing they did was?

- How do followers of Jesus care for one another today?
- These followers hadn't done these things before the Holy Spirit came. Why did they (and why do we) need the Holy Spirit to help them?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: a large loaf of bread; washed red grapes; a small clean cloth; a candle (optional)

If your church is celebrating Holy Communion this Sunday, would it be possible for the children to join in to reinforce the practice of the early Christians?

If this is not possible, provide an agape meal for the children. Sit in a circle with a large loaf of bread and red grapes laid out on a cloth. You could light a candle as a sign that God is present. Talk about the last meal Jesus had with his disciples, discussing his death and why he died. You could read part of the passion story from Luke (23:44-56). Remember to say that Jesus rose from the dead.

Explain that you're all going to take part in remembering his last meal, just as the early followers of Jesus did together in their homes. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Thank Jesus that he died and that he came back to life again. Tear the bread in half so that it has a jagged edge and say that his body was broken. Walk around the circle to give each child a chunk of bread. Then give each child three or four grapes, asking them why you are using red grapes (to signify Jesus' blood). What do the children want to thank Jesus for? Invite them to pray out loud if they would like to. This may well be a holy moment.

5 PRAYER

You will need: a large sheet of paper; felt-tip pens; cards from 'Intro activity'

Refer to the small cards and the new things the Holy Spirit enabled the followers of Jesus to do. Which of them might the children be able to do in the next few weeks? How can they show their love for other children in the group? They could draw suggestions on the paper. Standing around the paper holding one of the cards in each hand, ask the Holy Spirit to help you show love for one another and to tell other people about Jesus.

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SESSION 4 of 4

Telling others

MEETING AIM

To engage with the story in which Peter realises that God wants everyone to hear about Jesus, which is still true today.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Acts 10

BACKGROUND

This is an important story in the spreading of the gospel as the early Christians realised Jesus had not come just for the Jews but for the Gentiles, too. It is also a story about the importance of recognising and respecting our differences.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children and share out any refreshments you have. In welcoming them, talk about how they have been able to show their love for others, and especially for any other child in the group.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

Play a sorting game by creating different groups of children to demonstrate the many differences there are between us. For example, separate the girls from boys; different ages from each other; those who walked, drove, cycled or came by bus to church; those who wear glasses and don't; those wearing shoes and trainers; those who live in A or B or C or go to school X, Y or Z; those with a brother, sister or neither. The children may suggest other differences.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: two large seaside buckets and spades, one with the letter C stuck on and the other with a letter P, with a long piece of string attached to the handle of bucket P; a photo or picture of a pig, a crab and a rabbit; a chair
Gather the children together and tell this story:

This story takes place in two seaside towns, which is why we've got buckets and spades. *Place them either side of you.*

Captain Cornelius was an officer in the Roman army. He lived in Caesarea, a beautiful new city by the sea. He loved God and prayed to him, as everyone in his family did, but he didn't know much about Jesus. He was a good and generous man, and he gave money to the poor. He was not a Jew.

Some of the food he ate was food that Jewish people did not eat. He especially liked pork from the pig farm, crab from the sea and rabbit from the countryside. *This is a rhyme the children repeat at appropriate points. Ask three children to place the three photos in the C bucket.*

One afternoon at three o'clock an angel came to him and said: "Cornelius, God has heard your prayers. Send for a man called Simon Peter to come to you. He lives in the seaside town of Joppa." Cornelius was very surprised, but he did what the angel had told him. Joppa was 48km away from Caesarea: a day's journey.

The next day, while waiting for his lunch, Jesus' disciple Peter went up onto the roof of the house. He was living in Joppa, a seaside town with a high cliff and a large harbour. It was hot and he fell asleep. In his sleep he had a dream. In this dream he saw a bucket coming out of the sky. Inside the bucket was pork from the pig farm, crab from the sea and rabbit from the countryside. *Transfer the three photos from bucket C to bucket P. Ask a child to stand on a chair and lower the bucket to the floor. Different children could do this two more times.*

A voice said to Peter: "Eat this food!"

But Peter said: "I can't. Jews think this food is dirty."

The voice replied: "God says it is OK to eat this food."

The bucket came down a second time. Inside was pork from the pig farm, crab from the sea and rabbit from the countryside. For the second time, a voice said: "Eat this food!" *Repeat as before.*

The bucket came down a third time. *Repeat as before.*

Peter woke up. He was very puzzled. Then the Holy Spirit told him that some of Captain Cornelius's men had just arrived and were looking for him. Because of his dream, Peter knew that he had to go with them to the seaside town of Caesarea. The next day they left.

Before having this dream, Peter would never have gone into the home of anyone who ate pork from the pig farm, crab from the sea and rabbit from the countryside. *Transfer the photos to the C bucket.* The first followers of Jesus were Jews, and Jesus himself was a Jew. But Peter knew that God was saying it wasn't only Jewish people who could become followers of Jesus. Rules about what people could eat didn't matter any more. He realised God loved everyone and wanted everyone to hear about and love Jesus. So, Peter went to the house of Captain Cornelius, who was really, really pleased to meet him. Peter told everyone in the house about Jesus, and everyone who was listening began to worship Jesus and follow him.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to talk about the story, encouraging everyone to join in:

- What differences were there between you and the other children in the game at the start?
- Which differences make some people think they are better than others?
- How did Peter think he was different and more special than Captain Cornelius?
- What made him change his mind?
- If God loves everyone, it's important that everyone should hear about Jesus. Who can we tell about Jesus?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: A4 paper; sticky tape; scissors; pencils

Stick two pieces of paper together with tape at the short ends. Fold the long sheets into a concertina. Draw the outline of a figure and cut it out to create a line of joined-up people. Give each child a chain of people and encourage them to draw on distinctive features of the people they would like to tell about Jesus. As you work, chat about what they might say to these people.

5 PRAYER

Line the children up with the tallest and shortest at either end. Then take the shortest and put them next to the tallest, the second tallest next to the second shortest and so on. Comment that you have mixed everyone up as an example of how our differences don't matter. In these new pairs, give the children 60 seconds to talk about who they want to tell about Jesus, just as Peter told Captain Cornelius. Pray for the children. You could sing the song 'Big family of God' by Nick and Becky Drake to conclude.

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