



On your marks

The following special outreach event for families and children is set out in the same format as the outlines in the book (now out of print) *Footsteps to the Feast*. These days provide an opportunity to explore the Big Story of God's purposes for the world and its people linking to Christian Feast Days and Festival themes. Many children and families come irregularly to church now or have been disconnected from the Christian story for some time and so, being invited to a special half-term event such as this is one way to introduce our story to them. The following idea contains material for icebreakers, team games, drama and music. At its heart there is space for Bible storytelling, reflection and simple worship. The festival in question here is Ascension Day.

Get set

Read through the material below and select carefully the ideas that will suit the dimensions of your venue and the adults and children who you hope to invite to this event. You will need a team of leaders, including someone to be up front and others to take groups or be responsible for the workshops. In addition there should be stewards, a registration team and additional helpers for the groups.

Go!

Here are the sections for this event:

- Introduction to the theme
- Bible Footsteps
- First Steps (ways into the event)
- Footsteps Chant
- First Footing (ideas for icebreakers)
- Footbridge (ideas for games)
- Best foot forward (telling the story)
- Footrest (snack and a drink)
- Footprints - Footlights (drama ideas)
- Footprints - Footnotes (music ideas, which could also be used in other parts of the programme, as part of the introduction for example)
- Footprints - Fancy footwork (craft ideas)
- Foothold (an idea for worship and refection)
- Footsteps to the Feast (a way to round off the theme)
- Stepping out to the Feast (ending with food!)

Introduction to the theme

Ascension Day may be one of the four major feast days of the Christian year (along with Christmas,



Easter and Pentecost), but it is nevertheless very often completely overlooked. This is partly because it falls on a weekday but also perhaps because it is easily overshadowed by the fire and excitement of Pentecost that follows ten days later. It wasn't always so, and some older children's leaders at your church may well remember a time when Ascension Day even meant a day off school!

This festival marks the transition moment between Jesus' 40 days of resurrection appearances and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Annunciation is the prelude to the life and work of Jesus, the Ascension is the prelude to the life and work of the Spirit through the church and it opens the third act of God's wonderful rescue plan for the world that moves from creation, through redemption to sanctification. Acts 1 stands alongside Genesis 1 and the Christmas narratives as a starting point for each stage of the great story of salvation.

Jesus had already told his followers that he must ascend to his Father (John 20:17) and that, unless he does, the Spirit cannot come (John 16:5-7). Jesus in human form could only be with some people, in some places, at some times but by going to his Father in heaven he would send the Holy Spirit so that God could be with anyone, anywhere, at anytime (John 14:23).

In Luke's version of the Ascension (Luke 24:45-53), Jesus tells his followers that they should wait in Jerusalem to receive the promise from on high. Later in Acts 1:6-11, Luke tells us how Jesus disappeared from their sight up on the Mount of Olives. However, they were not downhearted because they knew that this was not a final goodbye but more of an 'au revoir', because very soon he would return, although none of them quite knew exactly what that would mean.

The following outline for a half-day programme picks up on the idea of Jesus 'lifting off' from earth to heaven, blazing a trail which one day we, too, will follow and opening the way for the return of the Holy Spirit, who will empower us to be like rockets taking out God's love right around the world.

Bible Footsteps

You can find a retelling of this story in [The Barnabas Family Bible](#) (BRF, 2014), page 206. The full Bible story comes in Luke 24:45-53 and Acts 1:6-11

First Steps

As you register and welcome the children, divide them up into three teams, which could be the colours of traffic lights, red, orange and green, which picks up on the last words of Jesus where he tells his disciples to: *stop* in Jerusalem, *wait* for the Spirit, then *go* into all the world.

Each team area could be decorated in the appropriate colours, along with other items of the same colour. Then set the teams off making a group Ascension Day rocket, using large carpet rolls for the main fuselage, which will need to be painted and decorated with fins and wings and a nose cone, of course. Older groups will be happy to junk model their own idea of a space rocket, whereas younger children will need more help and ready-prepared pieces. Let the groups choose suitable names for their 'Lift Off Rockets' - perhaps Thunderbird 1, Voyager 2 or Apollo 11 and so on. The groups can come back to carry on working on the rockets and complete them at various points during the

programme, particularly during the mid-session break (Footrest) or as part of the craft time (Fancy Footwork).

Footsteps Chant

Here is a special Ascension Day chant that you could use during the event as you move from one activity to another or if you want to call the whole group together at anytime. Initiate a simple clapping rhythm and then have the children echo each line of the poem after you, repeating it several times, varying pace and volume:

*We're on a special journey
Of stories from the Book
How Jesus left to come again
It's here we're going to look*

First Footing

Welcome the children and altogether take them through a high-energy warm-up to set the event off to a lively start.

Let's get fit!

Introduce a countdown sequence: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, lift off! Lead this at different speeds and at different volumes. Then introduce movements:

crouching low and jumping high on the word 'lift off'

crouching low and jumping wide on the word 'lift off'

crouching low and jumping backward on the word 'lift off'

crouching low and then jumping forward on the word 'lift off' and so on.

Now do some fingers and thumbs exercises to the countdown... 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and shooting up the whole hand for 'lift off'.

Now make number shapes with their bodies: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and jumping up high in a star jump for 'lift off'.

Finally, some fast running on the spot for *Go!*

Some slow-motion running for *Get ready*

And standing completely still for *Stop*

Keep changing the commands and try to catch them out!

Stop, Get ready and Go.

Footbridge

1. Ask the children to get into a circle. Number off the children 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and ask them to cross the circle only when his or her number is called but without bumping into anyone. Mix up the numbers you ask to cross. All should move when they hear 'lift off.'

2. Get into groups to create different modes of transport, using their bodies in a group sculpture, for example car, plane, boat, bicycle, hot-air balloon and finally a lift-off rocket!
3. Play a relay game between the teams, in which one person at a time has to go and collect items for a team rucksack, ready to set off on a journey. The items could include some silly, awkward objects to pack as well as some that link to the story, such as a crown (*'Will you come as a King now, Jesus?'*), a jar of olives (*The Mount of Olives*), feathers (*angels*) and a globe or atlas (*'Go into all the world!'*). To add to the fun, each collector could be blindfolded so he or she has to rely on the directions and instructions from the team.
4. Put up some points of the compass signs around the meeting area. The children should be gathered in the middle and then a leader calls out a direction in which they must travel but in a certain way (for example, hopping, crawling, tiptoeing). Keep changing the directions and the way they must move. You might even throw in some in-between points of the compass such as NNW or ESW. Following Ascension Day and Pentecost, the followers of Jesus would soon be travelling off all around the world.

Best foot forward

Today's Feast Day is always on a Thursday and it is a very special day.

It is **SAMTSIRHC** day.

Show everyone this word written large on a big piece of card.

Has anyone any idea what this special festival anniversary is about? Maybe tease out some silly answers but also slowly move towards the fact that it is CHRISTMAS written backwards. It is 'Christmas backwards' day. That explains everything, doesn't it!?

What happened at Christmas?

God sent Jesus to earth as a baby for us. Now on this 'Christmas backwards' day, God takes Jesus back to heaven from earth as a resurrected man. Because we often think of heaven as 'up there' and earth as 'down here', Christmas is seen as a descent or going down, whereas 'Christmas backwards' day is a going up or an ascent. Its proper name is **Ascension Day**.

Today we're exploring the most amazing lift-off ever.

No rocket, no engine, no explosion and no vehicle were involved.

The person who lifted off went from earth to heaven; he went to the top job in the cosmos; he went from the lowest place to the highest.

He blazed a trail for us to follow and opened a path for a return visit.

It was 40 days since that amazing Easter morning.

Jesus had kept appearing to his friends:

on the road, in a room, one to one, one to 500 and by a lake.

He really was alive again.

But gradually they began to realise that it was time to say goodbye.

I wonder how they felt?

Explore some possible feelings with the whole group to be used in the drama activity later, for



example, 'What might they have asked?' Here are some ideas:

'Why can't you stay? Why not stay and be a king here on earth? Just where are you going? What will happen to us? How will we manage without you?'

Now walk with the group around your meeting area and come to a stop at a spot that you have decided will be *Olive Hill* (The Mount of Olives).

All sorts of things had happened here (Jesus used to pray here; he had cried here; he had stayed near here).

Act out 'climbing' to the top.

Then Jesus said:

God has it all organised

I will be back as a king but not the sort of king you are expecting.

I will be a king in people's hearts

So here's what you must do.

Now teach the following version of 'the Great Commission' with the suggested actions:

Go (*point forward with one arm and finger outstretched*)

Into all the world (*describe a tiny circle with your outstretched finger and then make that circle bigger and bigger*)

And share the good news (*cup hands together and offer 'the contents' around to people left and right*)

With everybody, everywhere (*rapidly point to everyone in the whole group and beyond*)

And I will be with you.

Just wait, stop in Jerusalem until you receive the promise.

Now, bring the whole story together, using the following simple poem to the tune of 'Two little dickie birds sitting on a wall'. Maybe the children can learn the chorus to this later in the music workshop?

1 amazed disciples, sitting very still,

Listening to Jesus, up on Olive Hill.

'Time to go', says Jesus and then a cloud came down.

'I'll send the power that you need, just wait inside the town.'

Fade away Jesus, walk home friends

Come soon Spirit, the promise that he sends.

Jesus was in one place, in Israel where he came

But soon he will be everywhere, with all who call His name.

Fade away Jesus, walk home friends

Come soon Spirit, the promise that he sends.



**Jesus had begun his work and showed us what is true
He went... but comes with power again. Over to me and you.**

*Fade away Jesus, walk home friends
Come soon Spirit, the promise that he sends.*

Footrest

At this point in the programme, take a break for a drink and a biscuit. Groups could also continue work on their lift-off rockets.

Footprints

Now comes an opportunity for groups to explore the story and theme in up to three activities, depending on the time available. The suggestions for three workshops are drama (Footlights), music (Footnotes) and craft (Fancy Footwork). It may be better, depending on the numbers involved, to do each activity all together and in succession as opposed to working a carousel of activities, so that there are not too many in each group. You might decide to leave out one of activities, possibly the music workshop, incorporating its suggestions into other parts of the programme.

Footlights

Start the children off walking around the room in various moods and poses and attitudes, becoming statues of those moods when the leader says 'freeze': happy handshakes; half smiles and nods; suspicious looks; fearful.

Now add in some more 'feelings' from the story for them to model:

Excited - Jesus was back from the dead

Sad - Jesus said he had to leave them soon

Puzzled - Jesus said he would be back with power for them

Shocked - Jesus disappears from their sight

Dive into groups of five people to make special [freeze-frame](#) tableaux

- they remembered all the things the Jesus had done - his baptism, his telling stories to the crowds, calming the storm from a boat, helping the sick, breaking bread at a table, dying on a cross and alive from the tomb
As a group create some stills of some of these scenes.
- they thought Jesus should be a king
As a group can they make a throne with a king upon it?
- they wanted him to stay for ever
As a group create a scene with one person standing and the others pleading with him/her in various ways.

On the way up the mountain, they were still asking questions.



Ask the group to be the disciples, asking some of the questions you have already thought about before.

With an older group you could [hot seat](#) some as different disciples in order to discover more about what might have been on their minds.

Now, after Jesus had left, explore how the disciples might have been feeling:

Split up into groups again and set them off walking back from the mountain.

I wonder what they'll be talking about?

One group might be puzzled - ask them to work out their dialogue.

Another group might be excited - ask them to work out their dialogue.

Another group might be scared - ask them to work out their dialogue.

A final group might be sad - ask them to work out their dialogue.

Footnotes

Here are some suggestions for songs that you could sing either in the workshop or as part of the introduction and ending to the event:

Come and Join in the Song (He's alive!) (*Kid's Source*)

Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice (and the second verse in particular: 'Now you are exalted to the highest place') (*Kid's Source*)

Jesus isn't dead anymore (*Kid's Source*)

You are the King of Glory (*Junior Praise*)

Majesty (*Junior Praise*)

Lord, I lift your name on high (*Kid's Source*)

All of these pick up on the fact that Jesus is now reigning in heaven, King over all. This is one of the great truths of Ascension Day. The last song has some helpful actions, which you could rehearse with the group, so you can use this song as one to sing at the end of the programme.

Fancy footwork

Groups could go back and finish off their team's lift-off rockets at this point. In addition, here are some ideas for further craft activities:

- Colour and cut out some jet flames for the rockets
- Create parachutes from plastic bags and pipe-cleaner parachutists
- Insect or butterfly models to press out and colour (available from large toy shops)
- Drawing faces on balloons to link with 'stop', 'get ready' and 'go'
- Make smaller individual rockets, using kitchen roll tubes and cones and fins/wings of cardboard

Foothold

As part of your special event make space for some quieter reflection and worship together. Gather



the group in a large semicircle so everyone can see. The following simple act of worship includes a visual presentation.

What happened on the Mount of Olives must have been every bit as mysterious and awesome as the events on the Mount of Transfiguration for Peter, James and John, or perhaps on Mount Sinai for Moses and the people of God. Suddenly Jesus was not there, as he disappeared into a cloud, and then there were angels assuring the twelve that Jesus would come again. It must have been wonderful and frightening at the same time. It is Jesus' coronation, as he takes his seat at the right hand of God; the moment of triumph, in which we, as Christians, can all share.

Teach the following response to a line from the leader, which should be repeated as you tell the story slowly in the act of worship that follows:

Jesus returns to God the Father

He reigns as King over everything

You will need some simple visuals to create a focus for this worship. Make them large so they can be clearly seen by everyone:

- a golden crown, cut from gold card
- a piece of green felt and a cushion
- four large red arrows made from stiff card

Bring everyone in the large semicircle to quiet and then, after a pause, use the response:

Jesus returns to God the Father

He reigns as King over everything

Put down the cushion and lay the green felt over it to create the Mount of Olives.

Jesus led his friends up the Mount of Olives. It was here that Jesus had prayed for his friends and he also prayed for you and me. (pause)

Jesus returns to God the Father

He reigns as King over everything

It was here that Jesus had said 'yes' to God and had accepted the cross for his friends (pause) and for you and me. (pause)

Jesus returns to God the Father

He reigns as King over everything

Now place the golden crown on top of the hill you have created.

Jesus told his friends that he would be King but they were not to know when and how this would be. (pause)



Jesus returns to God the Father

He reigns as King over everything

They learned that he was a King but not the sort of king they had expected. He would be a king who reigns in heaven and in our hearts. (pause)

Jesus returns to God the Father

He reigns as King over everything

Now, with each of the four arrows, point clearly in four different directions from the hill and then lay down each one radiating outward from the crown.

Jesus told his friends that they should take the good news of his story to everybody, everywhere. (pause)

Jesus returns to God the Father

He reigns as King over everything

It is good news for friends at home; for others who live nearby, and for everyone, no matter where they were in the world. (pause)

Jesus returns to God the Father

He reigns as King over everything

Finally, lift up the cross slowly, as high as you can.

Jesus disappeared and they could see him no more, (pause) but they had his promise that he would always be with them.

Jesus returns to God the Father

He reigns as King over everything

And the angels said he would come again. Jesus inside us by his Spirit and one day us at home with Jesus in heaven. (pause)

Jesus returns to God the Father

He reigns as King, over everything

Leave another pause and then quietly put the objects away.

All this happened just ten days before Jesus' promise about the coming of His Holy Spirit came true. He did come back in a new invisible form of God, so that he could be with anyone, anywhere, anytime. This is how he can be with us, too.

If the group want to find out what the disciples did while they waited, then they can read the rest of the story in Acts 1.



N.B. Should you want an outline for an all-age talk that might build on this event, see [Ascension Day: empty shoes - a presentation](#).

Footsteps to the Feast

Use the Footsteps Chant from this event to walk everyone into a circle for a finale to the programme. Standing in the circle, you can now act out some of the last words of Jesus at the Ascension.

Jesus is now seated on high as king.

Each person should lift their hands up high while still holding on to the person next to them, so as to create the points of a large, circular crown.

Jesus has given each of us a job to do: to go to the ends of the earth with the good news of his story.

Each person should turn outwards and point away from the circle to cover every point of the compass.

Jesus will come again to fill us and to take us home one day.

Each person should turn in and face the centre of the circle. Now everyone should reach out both hands to 'touch' the heart of the person either side of them, saying the words 'Jesus in us by the Holy Spirit.' Then everyone should hold out their hands in front of them and move forward towards the centre of the circle, until each person is touching as many hands as is possible, saying the words 'At home with Jesus in heaven.'

Finish by inviting everyone to give a high-five handclap of celebration to all the people near to them.

Stepping out to the Feast

End your special event with some food for the Feast of Ascension such as pizza pieces cut as rocket shapes and rocket ice-lollies! You might also like to risk giving everyone a rocket balloon that when blown up and release zooms off around the room with a high-pitched whine (available from toy shops). It would certainly make a noisy but memorable end to the programme!