

Lectionary Texts for May 13, 2018 • *Ascension Sunday* - Year B
Acts 1:1-11 • Psalm 47 • Ephesians 1:15-23 • Luke 24:44-53



Acts 1:1-11

Ascension, 6th century, unknown illustrator
Rabbula Gospels
Laurentian Library, Florence, Italy

The artist of the Rabbula Gospels illustrated more scenes from the book of Acts than from the Gospels, including this Ascension scene that includes a symbol associated with Ezekiel (wheels) and a small, brown hand of God. The Rabbula Gospels is a 6th century illuminated Syriac Gospel Book. One of the finest Byzantine works produced in Asia and one of the earliest Christian manuscripts with large miniatures, it is distinguished by the miniaturist's predilection for bright colors, movement, drama, and expressionism. It was completed in 586 at a monastery believed to be in western Syria.

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It was signed by its scribe, Rabbula, about whom nothing else is known. The text is the Peshitta version of the Syriac translation of the Gospels. The scene of the Crucifixion is the earliest to survive in an illuminated manuscript and shows the Eastern form of the image at the time. Also unusual is a miniature of the Apostles choosing a new twelfth member (after the loss of Judas); this event is not found in the Canonical Gospels (though it is mentioned in Chapter 1 of Acts) and is almost never seen in later art. The artist was trained in the classical illusionist tradition and is a competent and practiced hand rather than an outstanding talent. Surviving images from this period are so rare that his are extremely valuable for showing the style and iconography of his age.

Texts: Acts 1:1-11 • Psalm 47 • Ephesians 1:15-23 • Luke 24:44-53

Acts 1:1-11

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 during 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 toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward 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.”

Psalm 47

Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy.

For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome, a great king over all the earth.

He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet.

He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves. Selah
God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.
Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises.
For God is the king of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm.
God is king over the nations; God sits on his holy throne.

The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted.

Ephesians 1:15-23

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Luke 24:44-53

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you — that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.