

RAISING SAINTS

CHILDREN + FAMILY MINISTRY // WEEKLY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS + PARENTS

FEAST OF THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Ascension Day (*Hampartzoom*) is a very important Church feast because it recalls and celebrates the final earthly event in Christ's life. We always celebrate it on the fortieth day of Eastertide. This year it falls on Thursday, May 14.

Jesus Christ's ascension is the fulfillment of all of his earthly ministry as savior of the world. The story of Christ's ascension to heaven and his sitting at the right hand of the Father is recounted only in two of the gospels, Mark 16:19 *"So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, he was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God."* and Luke 24:50-51 *"And he led them out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while he blessed them, that he was parted from them and carried up into heaven."* Luke also mentions it in the Acts of the Apostles 1:6-11 *"Therefore, when they had come together, they asked him, saying, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And he said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'"*

Now when he had spoken these things, while they watched, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why

do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven.'"

We know that the apostles returned to Jerusalem after Christ's ascension as they were instructed, and spent their time in prayer in the Upper room where they had eaten the Last Supper with Jesus. At this time, they felt the need to restore the number of apostles to twelve, electing someone to replace Judas, as we read in Acts 1:21-26 *"Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when he was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, 'You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two you have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.' And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.*

The traditional Armenian "vijag" (casting of lots) ceremony is derived from this event in the life of the young Church. It was customary for Armenians to celebrate Ascension with joyous outings right after the end of Badarak. At this time, they would have the "vijag-a -khagh".

Casting of lots is not unique to Armenians; we

know that the twelve tribes of Israel received their inheritance of land by lot (Numbers 26:55-56). Also, the order of priestly service for the tribe of Levi was determined by casting of lots.

We need to remember that there always are vacant seats that need to be filled in the life of the Church. There could be a vacancy inviting one to serve in a number of capacities such as teaching or passing on the Good News of Jesus’ resurrection, as an ordained priest or deacon, as someone serving the needs of the community, serving during the liturgies of the church, visiting the sick and the shut-ins, etc. It behooves us to learn from the example of the apostles who chose the person most fit to replace Judas by praying and asking God’s guidance.

As parents and teachers who have been called to continue the work of the apostles by raising our children in the faith:

- Let us approach our responsibility with awe and seek our Lord’s blessings.
- Share the joy of Jesus Christ’s Ascension to

Note to Parents and Teachers: For Levels 2 and 3 the answers are as follows:

Comparing the Three Passages

1. Acts 1:8 The Holy Spirit shall come upon you.
2. Acts 1:8 You shall be my witnesses
3. Acts 1:10-11 Jesus will come again

Working with Scripture

1. Prayer
2. witness

Note: The material for the children will be presented in three levels in order to make it age appropriate:

- Level 1: Ages 5-8 (K-3rd grades)
- Level 2: Ages 9-12 (4-7th grades)
- Level 3: Ages 13-17 (8-12th grades)

heaven with them.

- Give them the hopeful message that “Jesus will come again” to lift us all up to be with him in heaven. This we proclaim and profess in the Nicene Creed during each Divine Liturgy.
- 21 “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”
- 23 And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. 24 And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen 25 to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.” 26 And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

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