

**THE EXALTED JESUS AND THE
GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

ACTS 1:1 - 2:13

¹In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning

In this his second book, Luke continues his account of Jesus, of the word of God which Jesus embodies and proclaims, and of what Jesus has done and is doing in this world. There was too much material for one scroll, so he chose to finish ‘the first book’, which we know as the *Gospel of Luke*, with Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension. In this second book, known to us as the *Acts of the Apostles*, Jesus is still present and active, but now in a different way.

As explained in the Introduction, Luke is a historian. He has researched the facts carefully, but it is precisely as a historian that he is not content simply to record the facts. He wants to share with Theophilus, and through him with the reader, the profound significance of what God is revealing in Jesus and in the community in which Jesus continues his life and mission. Luke explains his aim to Theophilus at the beginning of the first book. It is ‘so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed’ (Luke 1:4). At the beginning of his commentary, composed in the opening years of the eighth century, the Venerable Bede uses the meaning of the name Theophilus to invite us all to read Luke’s book as though written for us personally. He writes:

Theophilus means lover of God, or beloved of God. Therefore, if you are a lover of God you may believe that this work was written for you, because the physician Luke wrote it in order that the reader may find in it health of soul.

Since Luke begins by referring back to his Gospel, and since his whole work is about the good news of God’s grace as revealed in Jesus, we would do well to recall some of the key aspects of Jesus as portrayed by Luke in his Gospel in which he records what ‘Jesus did and taught from the beginning’. We will find these truths proclaimed again through the words and actions of some of the key figures in the life of the early church. This is not the place to follow the story of Jesus’ life as recorded in Luke’s Gospel. However, we can look at Luke’s two opening chapters in which he introduces the main themes which he wishes to develop in both parts of his work. The portrait of Jesus which Luke gives in these opening chapters of his Gospel sets the scene for Jesus’ words and actions during his public ministry. It sets the scene also for the way in which Jesus continues his revelation through his apostles.

Everything about Jesus reveals God. He is conceived by Mary, his mother, because the Holy Spirit comes down upon her and she is drawn into the powerful embrace of God’s love. ‘Therefore’, as she comes to realise in prayer, ‘the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God’ (Luke 1:35).

Jesus is the Lord's Messiah, the one in whom all God's promises to Israel, given through Abraham, David and the prophets, are to be fulfilled: 'The Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end'(Luke 1:32-33). At his birth, the heavens burst into song and greet the one who is proclaimed as 'a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord'(Luke 2:11). This proclamation will be repeated throughout *Acts*. Because Jesus is the promised Messiah, he fulfils the mission given to Israel: to take the revelation of God out to the world. When Simeon takes the child into his arms he greets him as God's salvation 'which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel'(Luke 2:31-32).

Jesus is 'the Lord'. The Jews spoke of God as 'the Lord', a title that is best understood in reference to the revelation given to Moses (see Exodus 3). The 'Lord' is God, the One who hears the cry of the poor and who comes to liberate. The Lord is God as Saviour. This is the meaning of Jesus' name (Luke 1:31), and Elizabeth greets Mary as 'the mother of my Lord'(Luke 1:43).

Jesus' first words are about his Father: 'Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'(Luke 2:49); and he begins his public life, a life committed to revealing God and God's gracious purpose, only when the Holy Spirit descends upon him one day in prayer, 'and a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased"'(Luke 3:22). When Luke gives Jesus' genealogy, he places him in the family of David, Judah and Abraham, but he traces him back to Adam (Luke 3:38), for he belongs to 'all peoples.' Jesus goes into his ministry 'full of the Holy Spirit'(Luke 4:1). 'All that he did and taught from the beginning' flows from one who is 'filled with the power of the Holy Spirit'(Luke 4:14).

The whole of the Gospel is given over to revealing the kingdom of God, that is to say, what happens when God's will for creation is realised. The key point of Jesus' proclamation is summed up by Luke in the opening scene of Jesus' public ministry. In the synagogue of his home town Jesus selects to read from the scroll of Isaiah. Notice, once again, the focus on the Spirit of God:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

– Luke 4:18-19

As Jesus is dying, a man such as has just been described pleads with him to be part of this kingdom of God: 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom'(Luke 23:42). *Acts* is the story of how Jesus continues to proclaim the kingdom through his Spirit acting in the apostles (see 1:3). We witness people from all walks of life entering God's kingdom through sharing in the Spirit which Jesus has from his Father.

When Jesus dies, it is to God his Father that he returns: 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit'(Luke 23:46).

The risen Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the apostles

²until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

Luke ended his Gospel with Jesus withdrawing from ‘the eleven and their companions’ and being ‘carried up into heaven’ (Luke 24:51). For Jesus, as for us all, death means the end of life as we experience it here on earth. However, Jesus ‘was taken up to heaven’, to a life that is not bound within the limits of space and time. God has taken Jesus, his beloved Son, to himself.

Luke has already given us Jesus’ final ‘instructions’ in the last chapter of his Gospel (see Luke 24:47-49). There are three. The first: ‘Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem’. The second: ‘You are witnesses of these things’. The third: ‘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’. These instructions were given by Jesus ‘to the apostles whom he had chosen’ after a night of prayer (see Luke 6:12-16). Now that Jesus has finished his public ministry, it is time for his ‘apostles’ (Luke 6:13) to take up the ministry given to them:

Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

– Luke 9:1-2

What we watched Jesus saying and doing during his public ministry, we are about to watch him continuing through the words proclaimed and the deeds carried out by those who live, speak and act through the power of his Spirit, and so witness to him. In his final instruction, Jesus reminds them that the ‘authority’ and the ‘power’ needed to carry out their commission comes from Jesus himself, through their sharing in the intimacy of his love and in the power of his Spirit.

Acts is about Jesus’ apostles only as instruments of the action of Jesus through his Spirit. Peter and John feature in the first half. The apostles appoint seven others, and we are told a little about two of them: Stephen and Philip. The second half features Paul. Anyone interested in the details of the lives of any of these people, however, is in for quite a disappointment. The reason is simple enough: *Acts* is about God’s self-revelation, and about God’s purpose unfolding in history through the power of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of Jesus which continues in the lives of Jesus’ disciples. Luke features the apostles only in so far as they witness to Jesus. Through what the apostles do and say, Luke wants us to see that Jesus is alive and is continuing his liberating and saving mission in the world. We are being invited to share in his life through welcoming the Holy Spirit who is Jesus’ gift to us.

Out of love, God offers us the gift of his Holy Spirit, and so forgiveness and intimacy. We are free to accept or to reject this gift.

This theme, too, is present in Luke's Prologue. Simeon says: 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed' (Luke 2:34-35). Jesus is God's obedient Son and Servant. He will suffer through human rejection, but through his faithful love, he will reveal God's purpose for the whole human race, and hold out hope for all, Jew and Gentile alike. Luke develops these ideas in his Gospel. He develops them also in *Acts* as Jesus continues his ministry through his apostles. As we watch Peter or Stephen or Paul, and as we listen to them proclaiming their faith, Luke wants us to keep our hearts fixed on Jesus and to be attentive to his Spirit inviting us to repentance, to communion and to mission.

Throughout *Acts* Luke wants his readers to recognise that the church is apostolic, in that the witness of the apostles is foundational. What we believe must be consistent with their teaching. It is they who explain the significance of Pentecost (see 2:14-36). It is they who appoint the seven (see 6:6). It is they who recognise the authenticity of the experience of the Samaritans (see 8:14-17). It is Peter and then the Jerusalem community who acknowledge the entrance of the first Gentiles (see 11:18), and who acknowledge Paul and his mission (see 15:19). Luke sees Paul, like Stephen and following on from him, as a witness who continues the witness of the apostles, and with their blessing goes to the Gentiles. Because of this, though Paul is not one of the twelve who were with Jesus from the beginning (see 1:22), he is recognised as an apostle (see 14:6,14 and 22:21) who takes the word first to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles (see 9:15; 22:14-15; 26:16).

The Holy Spirit is the loving God, creating and renewing the world and inviting everyone to enjoy divine communion. In commenting on the previous verse we noted the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus. Luke has already prepared us to recognise Jesus in the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. When Jesus speaks of the persecution that his disciples will suffer after his death, he says: 'Do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for *the Holy Spirit* will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say' (Luke 12:11-12). On another occasion, he says: '*I* will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict' (Luke 21:15).

Throughout *Acts* it is the Holy Spirit who is inspiring and empowering Jesus' disciples, demonstrating that Jesus is alive and is continuing his ministry through them. At times the action of the Spirit is demonstrated in spectacular manifestations (see 2:4; 10:44-46; 13:2; 19:5-6; 21:7-11). We will watch the disciples doing the 'signs and wonders' that we saw Jesus doing in the Gospel. We will watch them speaking as Jesus spoke and suffering as Jesus suffered. The Spirit of love who is the very being of God will enable them to share Jesus' own prayer-communion with his Father, and from within this communion Jesus will continue his mission in their actions and words. Jesus is absent physically, for he died and has been 'taken up into heaven' (1:1). He is present, however, through the Holy Spirit and through the word that is proclaimed by the apostles. *Acts* is the story of Jesus' continued presence, enlightening, healing, liberating, saving, and drawing everyone into communion with him and with each other in sharing the very life of God, the life of the Holy Spirit.

³After 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.

Jesus' contact with his apostles after his death was necessarily not the same as before. Luke has already said that the instructions which he gave them were 'through the Holy Spirit'(1:2), and that Jesus 'was taken up into heaven'(1:2). Central to everything that Luke is saying, however, is that Jesus is 'alive'. They know this because of the many experiences which Jesus' disciples had in the period after Jesus' death – experiences which convinced them that he is 'living'(Luke 24:5; 24:23), and that, beyond death, he is actively present in their lives.

In the final chapter of his Gospel, Luke captures in two powerful scenes the essence of the post-crucifixion experiences of Jesus' disciples. In the first scene (Luke 24:13-35) we see two despondent disciples heading away from Jerusalem towards Emmaus. They have company, and they find their hearts being lifted as they come to understand the place of suffering in the life of the Messiah. It is at a meal that they recognise that it was Jesus himself who was with them, though they had not realised it at the time. They hurry back to tell the eleven, and their experience is confirmed.

In the second scene (Luke 24:36-49) we are with the assembled community, once again at a meal. Jesus is present, though in such a way as to allow hesitation and doubt. Once again, it is through reflection on the sacred writings and in particular through an understanding of the role of suffering in the life of the Messiah, that they come to grasp the meaning of Jesus' wounds. They experience the power of Jesus' Spirit, forgiving them for their failure at the time of Jesus' passion, and inviting them to carry on Jesus' mission.

How was Luke to find words to describe these experiences and others like them? The scenes are necessarily highly symbolic and draw richly on the liturgical language of the scriptures. When it comes to speaking of Jesus, Luke uses a number of terms. The most simple one, yet at the same time the most rich, is the word 'life': 'Jesus presented himself *alive* to them'(see Luke 24:5; 24:23). He is with 'the living God'(Jeremiah 23:36). The proclamation made by the apostles throughout *Acts* is 'about this *life*'(Acts 5:20).

Another way of speaking of Jesus, and one that is used four times in the first few verses of *Acts*, is to say that he was 'taken up' into heaven (1:2,9,11,22).

Luke uses yet a third expression. He speaks of Jesus having 'entered into his glory'(Luke 24:26). 'God has glorified his servant Jesus'(Acts 3:13). He shares in the radiant beauty and power of God.

The word which Luke uses most is the word ‘raised’(Luke 24:34; see Acts 3:15; 4:10; 10:40; 13:30). He wants to insist that they did not experience Jesus as some kind of ghost. They experienced Jesus himself, in person, the Jesus of Nazareth whom they knew so well, transformed now and enjoying the fullness of life in God for which we all long.

As regards the post-crucifixion experiences of Jesus’ disciples we note the following words from Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians. While there is no indication that Luke uses any of Paul’s correspondence as sources for his own writing, they surely would have spoken about a matter that is so central to their faith. Paul writes;

He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

– 1Corinthians 15:5-7

The ‘forty days’ mentioned here by Luke reminds us of the forty days during which Moses was in communion with God on Mount Sinai (see Exodus 24:18; 34:28), as well as the forty days of Elijah’s journey to the mountain of God (1Kings 19:8). The symbolic use of the number forty goes back to the forty years during which the Hebrews journeyed through the desert before reaching the Promised Land. Forty represents a lifetime journey. It is another way of saying that Jesus is with them, as he is with all his disciples, all along the way till we reach the same goal as Jesus’ himself: till we see the face of God. This point is made by the Venerable Bede. commenting on the forty days, he writes: ‘Jesus signified that by his hidden presence he would fulfil what he had promised – Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.’

The focus of Jesus’ teaching during his public ministry is the ‘kingdom of God’: the reign of God’s love made possible through the gift of the Spirit (see Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:11). He instructs his apostles to have the same focus (see Luke 9:2,60; 10:9,11). After his suffering, Jesus shares fully in the eternal glory of the Father. The ‘throne’ of this kingdom has been given to Jesus and the reign of the Messiah will never end (see Luke 1:33).

⁴While staying with [sharing a meal with] them [the apostles], he [Jesus] 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

The Greek *sunalizomenos* can mean ‘staying with’ (in the one courtyard, *aulē*); it can also mean ‘sharing salt (*als*) with’, that is to say ‘sharing a meal with’. Peter will recall how they ‘ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead’ (10:1). We have already noted that it was at a shared meal that the disciples at Emmaus recognised Jesus (see Luke 24:30-31), and it is also at a meal that the ‘eleven and their companions’ recognised their risen Lord (see Luke 24:41-43). Throughout Luke’s gospel we constantly find Jesus teaching and revealing his Father’s love at a shared meal (see Luke 7:36-50; 14:1-24). We recall how important it was for the father in Jesus’ parable to celebrate the return of his son at a banquet, and how he kept pleading with the older brother to come and join them in the celebration (see Luke 15:23-32).

In *Acts* this becomes a symbol for the importance of Jews and Gentiles sharing in a common meal. This will require that the Jews accept to loosen the strict connection between obedience to God and following the law as regards food and drink (see 10:15). Again and again throughout *Acts*, Luke will highlight the importance of the community coming together to share the mind and the heart of Jesus (see 2:1, 42; 4:24, 32). Jesus is with us as we share our meal (2:46; 20:11).

Luke begins and ends his Gospel in Jerusalem, and it is in Jerusalem that the apostles are to receive the Holy Spirit. Luke highlights this fact for it demonstrates that the good news which they are to proclaim is the fulfilment of the promises and the mission given by God to Israel.

The mission of the church does not come from the initiative of Jesus’ disciples, but from the action of God. Luke focuses our attention, therefore, on ‘the promise of the Father’, echoing the words of Jesus found in the final chapter of Luke’s Gospel:

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.

– Luke 24:49

We recall Paul’s words: ‘You were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit’ (Ephesians 1:13).

Let us pause to reflect on some texts of the Old Testament which express this promise:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah ... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

– Jeremiah 31:31-34

For the promise to be realised, it must bring with it forgiveness, for the people have failed to keep the covenant. The gift of forgiveness is not an external act. It is realised through God's gift of his own life in the pouring out of his Spirit.

I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

– Ezekiel 36:23-27

I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore.

– Ezekiel 37:26

Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

– Joel 2:28-29

God's design from the beginning is that the whole of creation might share in the communion of love which is God's very being. In rejecting the covenant, in cutting ourselves off from God, the only source of life, we human beings have introduced disharmony to the whole of creation. The psalmist, therefore, acknowledges:

When you send forth your spirit, they [God's creatures] are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

– Psalm 104:30

⁵for John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'

The gift of the Holy Spirit is not bound to the rite of baptism, whether the baptism of repentance proclaimed by John the Baptist, or baptism in the name of Jesus. It is enough to recall the wonderful outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' conception and birth. However, there is a close relationship between both rites of baptism and the gift of the Spirit.

It was after Jesus had been baptised in the Jordan by John that the Holy Spirit descended upon him (Luke 3:22), inspiring and empowering him to begin his public ministry (see Luke 4:1, 14, 18). It was John the Baptist who declared:

I baptise you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming ... He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

– Luke 3:16

When the apostles 'not many days from now' receive the Spirit, Peter knows that it is the gift of the risen Jesus:

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear.

– Acts 2:33

He calls on the assembled Jews:

Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.

– Acts 2:38-39

When Philip proclaims the word to the Samaritans, calling on them to renounce sin and to accept the forgiveness offered to them by God through Jesus, they welcome his words and are in turn welcomed into the Christian community. The Jerusalem community hear of this and judge that something further is needed, so they send Peter and John to Samaria. They 'prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus)' (Acts 8:16-17). We are reminded of the statement in John's Gospel: 'as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified' (John 7:39). There are obviously various levels in our reception of God's divine Spirit.

Because Jesus has promised this divine gift, we can be assured that he will give it. We are therefore to pray for it with expectant desire. This is what Peter and John do when they go down to Samaria, and Jesus is faithful to his promise, pouring out his Spirit over the newly baptised Samaritans (see 8:16-17). It is the same later with Paul and the disciples in Ephesus (see 19:5-6).

In Caesarea the situation is reversed. Cornelius and his companions first receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This causes Peter to say:

‘Can anyone withhold the water for baptising these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ So he ordered them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ.

– Acts 10:7-48

God promised to pour out his Spirit on everyone (see 2:17). It is this Spirit who is poured out upon the apostles (see 2:33), the disciples (4:31), the Samaritans (see 8:17), Cornelius and the other Gentiles who were with him (see 10:44-47), and the disciples in Ephesus (see 19:6). The seven are chosen from among those who are full of the Spirit (6:3). Stephen is a man ‘full of the Holy Spirit’ (6:5; see 6:10; 7:55), as are Barnabas (see 11:2) and Paul (see 13:9). The Holy Spirit inspires Peter (see 4:8), the Antioch community (see 13:2), and the prophet Agabus (see 11:28; 21:11). It is the Holy Spirit who guides Paul on his missionary journey (see 13:4; 16:6-7; 20:22-23).

Acts is the story of the presence and action in the world of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of love that is the bond of communion between Jesus and his Father. It is the story of what happens when people are open to God’s gift and welcome the fire of divine love that is offered to us all.

6So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?'

7He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.

8But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you

Luke continues his summary of the last chapter of his Gospel. These are Jesus' final words before 'he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven'(Luke 24:51). It is Jesus' last testament. The Book of Deuteronomy purports to be the farewell discourse of Moses before the leadership of the people of God is handed over to Joshua. This became a model for a number of testaments found among the apocryphal works of the late Old Testament period, in which leading figures like Abraham, Moses and the sons of Jacob give their final thoughts and instructions before being taken mysteriously into the realm of the divine. The difference here is that Jesus is not another inspired seer speaking from the fullness of the Holy Spirit before departing. He is the glorified one who sends the Spirit of God, and his testament is not a book but the living witness of his disciples.

From the question put to Jesus by the apostles, it is clear that Luke intends us to understand that the disciples have grasped God's purpose. We recall the words of Amos:

On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old.

– Amos 9:11

The kingdom of God is, indeed, to be restored to Israel. This is why the apostles are to begin their witness in Jerusalem. This is why they are to go beyond Judea to Samaria, for the northern and southern kingdoms are to be united once again in a restored Israel. From the beginning to the end of *Acts*, Jesus' witnesses go first to the Jews, inviting them to accept Jesus as the Messiah promised to them and to accept the mission given to them to make God's saving action known to all the world. As we shall see, some follow the example of the apostles and accept the challenge. Others refuse. However, the offer is always there, and when Paul, for example, leaves the synagogue and goes to the Gentiles, it is as a Jew that he goes, carrying on the mission given him by the risen Lord on behalf of his Jewish brothers and sisters.

However, as Jesus' reply indicates, when and how God chooses to achieve God's design is not something which we are to know. It is not something within our control. Rather, it is something for which we must pray: 'Father, may your kingdom come'(Luke 11:2).

The initiative is always from God: 'It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom'(Luke 12:32). The expression 'the times or periods' is a traditional one for speaking of God's mysterious providence unfolding in history (see 1Thessalonians 5:1; Daniel 2:20-21). The redeeming activity is that of the Holy Spirit. God's own life was received into the womb of Mary because the Holy Spirit came down upon her and because she was drawn into God's embrace by God's own power (Luke 1:35). She was blessed, not because of what she could understand, but because she 'believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord'(Luke 1:45). So it must be with the apostles. They will be 'clothed with power from on high'(Luke 24:49) when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. They are not to be concerned with how and when God chooses to act, but only to ensure that they are open to receive God's gift and are attentive to the surprise and inspiration of God's Spirit. As Mary received the word of God into her womb, so the word will continue to be conceived throughout the history of humankind wherever people are open to welcome God's grace.

^{8b} **and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**

The apostles are Jesus' witnesses because they share in the intimacy of his communion with God. They are Jesus' witnesses because they are to witness not only to what God has promised and to what Jesus has done and said but to Jesus himself, for it is Jesus' own Spirit, the Spirit of love given him by the Father, that will bring about the restoration of all things through their ministry. They are to begin in Jerusalem (compare Luke 24:48), for they are witnessing to what has been promised to Israel. Their witness is to include Judea and Samaria, for the kingdom of God is to be experienced by an Israel that is healed of division. It is to reach out 'to the end of the earth', for no one is excluded from God's loving design. We are listening to the glorified Servant of the Lord, who is to continue through his apostles the mission entrusted to him by the Father:

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

– Isaiah 49:6

Israel can now carry out its mission which, from the first, was to be universal. Did not God promise Abraham: 'In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed' (Genesis 12:3; see Acts 3:25); 'All the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring' (Genesis 26:4)? That God's saving purpose reaches to all people is a constant theme in Luke's writing. Let us recall the words of Simeon as he takes the baby Jesus into his arms:

My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

– Luke 2:30-32

Jesus reminds the people of Nazareth that God sent Elijah 'to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon', and that in the time of Elisha it was 'Naaman the Syrian' who was cured (see Luke 4:26-27). Luke records Jesus' response to the faith of a Roman centurion in Capernaum (see Luke 7:1-10). It is a Samaritan who exemplifies what it means to love one's neighbour (see Luke 10:25-36) and to find salvation through faith (Luke 17:19). Jesus promises that 'people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God' (Luke 13:29). He reminds the chief priests and scribes that the vineyard belongs to God and not to them, and that if they continue to fail to produce fruit for God, they will lose the vineyard and it would be given 'to others' (Luke 20:16). It is clear that God's purpose is not bound within Judaism.

Map 1 : Judea and Samaria



⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

¹¹They 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.'

The presence of a cloud turns our eyes from earth to heaven. Throughout the Bible a cloud is a symbol of the divine presence, active in our lives, but shrouded in mystery. At Jesus' conception, Mary is told that 'the power of the Most High will *overshadow* you' (Luke 1:35). The one conceived in her womb is holy because it is the fruit of her being taken up into God's mysterious and loving embrace. At the transfiguration, Jesus is in prayer and 'a cloud came and overshadowed' the three disciples:

They were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'

– Luke 9:34-35

Jesus has completed his life on earth (see Luke 9:51; Acts 1:2). He is taken by God into the sphere of the divine, caught up in an eternal love. Two men appear as in the transfiguration scene, where the disciples see Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament. There are echoes in this scene of the assumption of Elijah. Elisha asked for a double share of his spirit and was told that if he saw Elijah ascend, his request would be granted (2Kings 2:10). It is enough that the apostles have seen Jesus ascend. They are not to gaze into heaven, waiting for Jesus to return, or waiting to be taken to join him. They are to live as Jesus lived. Rather, they are to let Jesus live again in them through his sharing with them the Holy Spirit who is his bond with the Father. In this way Jesus will continue his mission in the world through them. We recall Paul's words:

Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.' ... He ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.

– Ephesians 4:7-10

You are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. ... If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

– Romans 8:9-11

In the scene before us, as in Luke 24:4, the two heavenly witnesses assure the apostles that, though Jesus' life on earth has come to an end, his activity on earth is not over. Jesus promised his disciples that they 'will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory' (Luke 21:27). In quoting from Daniel 7:13, he is assuring them that God does indeed hear the cry of the poor and will share his glory with whoever takes a stand in favour of the oppressed.

Though this passage as well as other passages in the New Testament are sometimes interpreted as though the early church expected the imminent end of the space-time creation as we know it, there is, in fact, no evidence for this. The 'coming of Jesus' was not thought of as being the 'end of time' or the 'end of the world'. Rather, it was to be the end of the world dominated by sin. There was an expectation, reinforced by the resurrection of Jesus, that a new creation was being born, in which God's will would be done, in which God would reign in the world, and in which people would see Jesus as God's answer to the promises given to Israel.

We will see Jesus, but it will be 'in the same way'; that is to say, in a 'cloud'. Wherever we witness the mysterious activity of God acting in our lives, there we are seeing Jesus. Jesus continues to walk the earth, no longer as he did prior to his death, but now in a hidden way, as the 'Son of Man', continuing to take the side of the oppressed, continuing to heal, to love, and to combat evil through the life and ministry of his disciples. *Acts* is the story of the activity of the glorified Jesus in the world through the gift of his Holy Spirit, living in and acting through Jesus' disciples.

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

¹³When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

¹⁴All these were constantly devoting themselves [*with the same heart and mind*] to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

In obedience to the command of Jesus (see 1:4), the apostles return to Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives (see Luke 19:29; 21:37) is associated with the final judgment. We are about to see that this judgment is one of love, when God pours out over the whole world the fullness of the Spirit of love that burns in the heart of the risen Jesus. The prophet Ezekiel sees the glory of God moving to the Mount of Olives as it prepares to leave Jerusalem to go out to the exiles: 'The glory of the Lord ascended from the middle of the city, and stopped on the mountain east of the city' (Ezekiel 11:23). God promises to be 'a sanctuary for them while in the countries where they have gone' (Ezekiel 11:16). That this will be so, God promises to give them a new spirit, a share in his own Spirit (see Ezekiel 36:27):

I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.

– Ezekiel 11:19

Luke notes that the Mount of Olives is 'a Sabbath's day journey' from Jerusalem. He is portraying the apostles as faithful and observant Jews (see Exodus 16:29; Numbers 35:5).

The 'apostles' (1:2) are named as in the Gospel (Luke 6:14-16), though here John, not Andrew, is linked with Peter. Apart from a brief mention of James's death (12:2), Peter and John are the only apostles to be featured in *Acts*. The apostles were sharing a meal with Jesus when he promised to send his Spirit (see 1:4). They were gathered together when he gave them their final instructions (see 1:6). Now they are gathered together again in prayer in an upstairs room, not referred to as a 'guest room' like the upstairs room where Jesus celebrated the last supper (see Luke 22:12). They are 'constantly devoting themselves'. They are together, persevering (Greek *proskarterountes*) in prayer with the same ardent longing (Greek *homothumadon*), the same mind and heart: the mind and heart of Jesus.

Jesus has promised to send the Spirit. It is a gift of love and so cannot be imposed, nor can it be received without a willing welcome. He assured them: 'the heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him' (Luke 11:13). So here they are as a community devoting themselves to trusting prayer and waiting in hope for the promised gift.

With the apostles are ‘certain women’ (see Luke 8:2-3; 23:49,55-56). Luke singles out ‘Mary, the mother of Jesus’ for special mention. This adds to the air of expectancy that pervades the scene. Mary was there at the beginning of the Gospel, and she is here again at the beginning of the miraculous outpouring of the Spirit. She knows what it is like to be embraced in love by God’s Spirit (Luke 1:35), and she continues to ‘treasure’ God’s words and to ‘ponder them in her heart’ (Luke 2:19; see 2:51). She is the mother of Jesus. Here we see her continuing her maternal role in the community of Jesus’ disciples. Gathered around her, with one mind and one heart, they prepare for the fulfilment of God’s promise and for the ‘great things’ which ‘the Mighty One’ (Luke 1:49) is about to do.

With the apostles, besides the women, there are also other men disciples, described here as Jesus’ brothers. We recall Jesus’ words when his mother and others of his family came to speak with him:

Jesus’ mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, ‘Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.’ But he said to them, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.’

– Luke 8:19-21

One of Jesus’ brothers, James, is mentioned later by Luke as the leader of the elders in the Christian community in Jerusalem (see 12:17; 15:13; 21:18). The exact nature of his relationship to Jesus is not clear from the New Testament. He is named as one of Jesus’ brothers by Mark (6:3) and Matthew (13:55). However, in the extended family the word ‘brother’ included half-brother, step-brother and cousin. The ancient tradition that Jesus was Mary’s only child fits with the scanty evidence we have from the New Testament. Luke mentions the presence of a woman called Mary among those who informed the apostles that the tomb of Jesus was empty. In order to distinguish her from the other women of the same name, Mary Magdalene, Mary the sister of Martha, and Mary the mother of Jesus, Luke identifies her as ‘Mary, the mother of James’ (Luke 24:10). Matthew (27:56) and Mark (15:40) include the mother of James among the women at the foot of the cross. If this Mary were also Jesus’ mother, surely she would have been identified as such in this context, and not in relation to someone who had been mentioned chapters earlier. The husband of this Mary is called Clopas in John’s Gospel (John 19:25). Hegessipus, writing in the middle of the second century, tells us that Clopas was the brother of Jesus’ father, Joseph. This would make Mary, the mother of James, the sister-in-law of Jesus’ mother and it would make her son, James, the first cousin of Jesus.

¹⁵In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said,

¹⁶Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus —

¹⁷for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.'

¹⁸(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.

¹⁹This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

²⁰For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it' [Psalm 69:25] and 'Let another take his position of overseer.' [Psalm 109:8]

The community of believers is numbered as about one hundred twenty persons, the minimum number required in Jewish law for a community to have its own synagogue (see Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 1.6).

Peter recalls Judas's role in the arrest of Jesus (see Luke 22:47) and how he had been chosen by Jesus to share in the ministry of the twelve (see Luke 6:16). The word 'ministry' (Greek: *diakonia*) is used only once by Luke in his Gospel, in relation to Martha (see Luke 10:40). It means ministry in the sense of being a servant of God, and hence carries with it the idea of being an obedient instrument of God's will.

In the account of Judas's death which is given us by Matthew (27:3-10), we are told that Judas hanged himself (compare the death of the traitor Ahithophel in 2Samuel 17:23). Luke has Judas 'falling headlong' like the 'ungodly' in the book of Wisdom 4:19 (which is the only other place in the Greek Bible to use the word translated here as 'headlong'). We might compare Judas's death to that of Antiochus Epiphanes IV as recounted in 2Maccabees 9:7-12. There is a small discrepancy in the accounts given by Luke and Matthew. In Matthew it is the priests who buy the Field of Blood with the money returned to them by Judas. Two sayings of Jesus are relevant here: 'You cannot serve God and wealth' (Luke 16:13); and 'Those who try to make their life secure will lose it' (Luke 17:33).

Peter quotes scripture which he has already declared 'had to be fulfilled'. This focus on necessity is common in Luke, occurring eighteen times in his Gospel and twenty-two times in Acts (including 1:15 and 22). As noted in the Introduction, Luke is not denying human freedom. He is not speaking of the human dimension of choice and of cause and effect. Rather, his focus is on the transcendent dimension of God's design. God's action is always consistent with who God is. We are free to follow or to reject God's will, but God does not change according to our choice. God is faithful to his choice and to his promise. In what Jesus did and in the way in which Jesus responded to the actions of others, Luke sees the fulfilment of what God has revealed through his word as contained in the sacred scriptures.

The Rabbis sought to discover as many meanings as possible in a biblical text, for, since it is inspired by God we should expect it to be rich in divine meaning. They loved to quote from Jeremiah: ‘Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?’ (Jeremiah 23:29). They sought to break open the text with the hammer of argument, knowing that they could never exhaust the sparks of light that issued from it. Peter discerns in the texts quoted an expression of God’s will that Judas be officially removed from his office and that he be replaced.

The office is described in Psalm 109 as one of overseeing (Greek: *episkopē*). Luke uses this word on only one other occasion (where it is translated as ‘visitation’) when he has Jesus lament: ‘You did not recognize the time of your *visitation* from God’ (Luke 19:44). He uses the related verb (*episkopeō*) variously translated) three times in his Gospel in texts which also shed light on the nature of the ministry to which Judas has been unfaithful, and for which a substitute is to be sought:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has *looked favourably* on his people and redeemed them.

– Luke 1:68

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will *break upon* us.

– Luke 1:78

They glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has risen among us!’ and ‘God has *looked favourably* on his people!’

– Luke 7:16

God is constantly coming to his people, looking favourably upon us, caring for us and inviting us into the communion of love that is God’s very being. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the glorified Jesus is constantly coming into the world, though as in a ‘cloud’ (see 1:11). He chose twelve apostles to symbolise his desire that Israel, once again, be reunited, so that it could carry out the mission given it by God to carry the message of salvation to the whole world; so that all nations would share in the blessings of Abraham. Since Judas failed to carry out his ministry, he must be replaced.

We noted in the Introduction that Luke would have been expected to investigate what was actually said on this occasion before composing the speech which he attributes to Peter. At the same time it is clear that verses eighteen and nineteen belong to Luke and not to Peter (hence the NRSV translation presents them here in brackets). Firstly, Peter would hardly have had to identify Judas in the way we does in Luke’s text. Secondly, he would not have said ‘in *their* language’ when referring to Hakeldama (Aramaic was presumably the first language of everyone in the room). We must also add that the texts quoted in verse twenty fit the context only in the Greek version, not in the Hebrew. While the Greek version was more commonly used in Palestine than scholars once thought, if, as is likely, Peter knew and quoted the Hebrew Bible, he would hardly have chosen these texts. While the care and accuracy demonstrated by Luke throughout *Acts* should encourage us to assume that he has given us a faithful account of the gist of Peter’s reflections, we should remember that he wrote to bring out themes that were important to him as a historian, and in language that would make sense to his Greek speaking readers.

21 So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us — one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.'

23 So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias.

24 Then they prayed and said, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen

25 to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.'

26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

Before Jesus chose the twelve he spent time in prayer (see Luke 6:12). Likewise here, the community prays, for they want the risen Lord to be the one to choose Judas's replacement. In keeping with tradition, lots are drawn. In this way, and always in a spirit of prayer and openness to God, was determined which areas of the Promised Land were to go to which tribal group (see Numbers 26:55-56), who was to be king in Israel (see 1 Samuel 10:20-21), and which priests were to carry out which sacred duties (see 1 Chronicles 24-26). We read in the Book of Proverbs: 'The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is the Lord's alone' (Proverbs 16:33). Luke's expression, however, could be a way of saying that a vote was taken after a period of prayerful discernment.

The ministry for which they are seeking a replacement is the ministry of 'apostleship'. Luke has Jesus say to the apostles:

I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

– Luke 22:29-30

They are to be in intimate communion ('eat and drink') with Jesus. They are also to 'judge', that is to say, like the judges in the tribal confederacy they are to watch over and protect 'the twelve tribes of Israel'. Jesus' concern, and now the concern of Peter, is that there be twelve, for the apostles are to symbolise the union of the twelve tribes, reconciled through their communion with the Messiah. It is essential that the twelve be restored, as a symbolic statement of God's will to bring his promises to fulfilment through a restored Israel - restored through those who accept Jesus as the Messiah and who undertake the mission given to Israel to proclaim God's kingdom to the Gentiles.

Now, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Luke can add that an apostle is to 'witness to his resurrection', or rather, witness to Jesus (see 1:8), the 'Living One' (see 1:3) who 'has risen' (Luke 24:6). Notice again Luke's use of 'must' in 'one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection'. As in verse sixteen, Luke is focusing on God's eternal purpose.

Matthias (meaning ‘gift of the Lord’) is to join the eleven in being sent to all the tribes of Israel. They are to witness to Jesus as the one in whom the promises made to them by God have been fulfilled, and they are to invite the whole of Israel, and through Israel, the whole of humanity, to become disciples of Jesus. In this way Israel is to carry out its vocation, which is to be God’s instrument in making Abraham ‘the ancestor of a multitude of nations’(Genesis 17:4), so that ‘all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him’(Genesis 18:18).

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

‘The day of Pentecost’ (‘the fiftieth day’) is the name used by Greek-speaking Jews for the harvest festival, the ‘Feast of Weeks’, celebrating the conclusion of the grain harvest. The fifty days were counted from the day after the Sabbath following the Passover and the eating of the unleavened bread (Leviticus 23:15-16). At least from the time of the fall of the temple in 70AD Pentecost also celebrated the gift of the Torah at Mount Sinai in the third month after the Hebrews left Egypt.

The disciples are still together, gathered in prayer (see 1:14), awaiting the baptism of the Holy Spirit promised them by Jesus (see 1:5). ‘Suddenly from heaven’ the gift is given. Moses ascended Mount Sinai in response to God’s call (Exodus 19:20), and returned with the Torah, sharing with the assembled people what he had received. So it is that Jesus, ‘taken up into heaven’ (1:2), now gives to his assembled disciples the Spirit which he has received from the Father.

The scene recounted here by Luke has a parallel in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. Paul names some of the gifts (the ‘tongues as of fire’) that the glorified Christ poured out over the assembled community. Quoting (and adapting) Psalm 68:18, Paul writes:

Therefore it is said, ‘When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.’ (When it says, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

– Ephesians 4:8-13

The revelation of the Torah, the renewal of the covenant, and the final judgment are themes celebrated in the Jewish liturgy. All these themes find echoes in Luke’s text. God’s gift surpasses the gift of the Torah, for God is giving his own Spirit: the Spirit with which Jesus was baptised (see Luke 3:21-22), the Spirit that anointed Jesus ‘to bring the good news to the poor’ (Luke 4:18). In the new covenant the old covenant finds its fulfilment, and the final judgment is revealed as one of amazing and universal grace.

Luke borrows from the dramatic and symbolic language of the Book of Exodus to highlight the connection between the outpouring of the Spirit and the revelation on Mount Sinai:

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire ... while the whole mountain shook violently.

– Exodus 19:16-18

We might recall also the words of Deuteronomy:

On earth he showed you his great fire, while you heard his words coming out of the fire.

– Deuteronomy 4:36

Inspired by the Spirit, they were able to speak ‘in other languages’. This is not referring to the prayer-gift of glossolalia referred to elsewhere in the New Testament (see Paul’s discussion in 1Corinthians 14). The gift given here is precisely in view of intelligible communication. God is reversing the divisions brought about by human pride at Babel (see Genesis 11:7-9). The words of the Spirit transcend the boundaries of human languages and bring together into a communion of love all the peoples of the earth (see 10:45; 19:6).

From every nation under heaven

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.

⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?

⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene,

and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

¹¹Cretans and Arabs —

in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.'

¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'

¹³But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

A section of the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was composed after the return of the exiles from Babylon. In it, again and again, we hear expressed the promise that God will bring his people back from 'every nation under heaven' to which they have been dispersed, and Jerusalem will once again be home to all God's chosen people. Indeed 'the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together' (Isaiah 40:5). The promise extends beyond Israel (see commentary on 1:8):

The foreigners who join themselves to the Lord ... I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer ... for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

– Isaiah 56:6-7

The Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you.

– Isaiah 60:2-4

I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. From them I will send survivors to the nations ... to the coastlands far away that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations ... For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the Lord; so shall your descendants and your name remain ... all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord.

– Isaiah 66:18-23

At the centre of assembled Israel is the community of Jesus' disciples, filled with his Spirit 'and speaking about God's deeds of power' in a way that transcends the limits of human communication. People are amazed as were those who heard Jesus' words at the beginning of his ministry (see Luke 4:22). Others are 'perplexed' (as was Herod, see Luke 9:7). There is evidence of another fifty-day celebration in the fifth month to celebrate the wine harvest. It may be this that accounts for the remark about 'new wine'. The division of opinion highlights the need for apostolic witness and prepares us for the speech of Peter which follows.

Map 2

