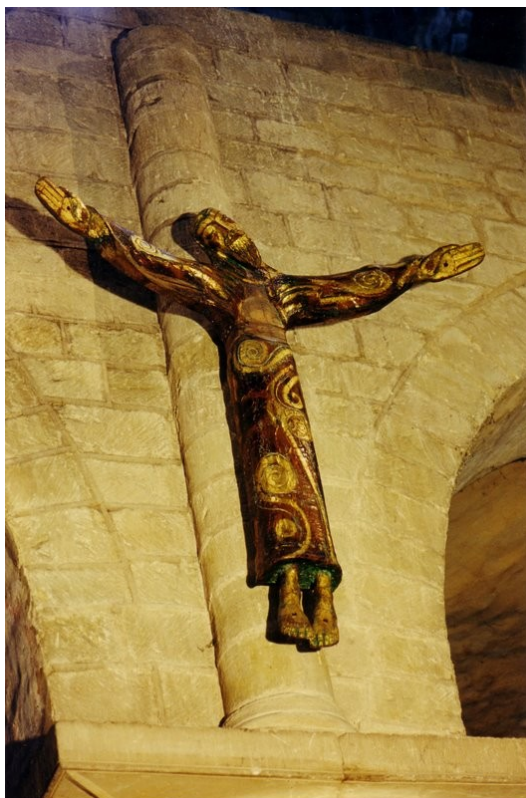


**05 May 2016: Ascension Day**  
**Fr. Christopher Durrant @ St. Michael's**  
**(Luke 24.44-end)**



*Peter Eugene Ball 'Christus'*

+ In the name of God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Have you noticed that some congregations and their priests feel somewhat embarrassed about Jesus' Ascension? As if this pivotal event in salvation history was just a bit too ridiculous. And I do have modicum of sympathy with this view...

If we were to consider Jesus Christ a sort of Jewish Mary Poppins, His Ascension would be ridiculous!

It would be ridiculous if Jesus Christ, came and went according to the east wind flying under the canopy of a talking umbrella!

But in other more subtle ways, the comparison between Mary Poppins and Jesus Christ is often too easily made and accepted. For example:

Like a wise nanny, Jesus came to give good advice through his parables and teaching.

Like a good nanny, Jesus came to witness in his life and death how we ought to live and die.

Like a kind nanny, Jesus came to heal the sick and comfort those who mourn.

Like a nanny as the end of her service to us, Jesus left when we didn't need Him any more.

Yes, there is truth in this descriptive comparison, but Jesus Christ is *so much more* than our nanny.

Here at glorious St. Michael's, this Principal Feast of the Church is not only celebrated by this evening Mass, but also by Mattins earlier today, and a slap-up breakfast! (Which I am sore sorry to have missed this year.) We at St. Michael's know the Ascension also *to be so much more*.

As we have just heard from the Gospel according to Luke: Jesus lifted up His hands in blessing, and while He was blessing His disciples, He left them, and was carried up to heaven.

This is the only recorded time in the NT where Jesus performs Benediction: Jesus raises His hands in blessing. His raised hands are not a farewell gesture to his friends; rather, Jesus raises His hands in blessing because this is His forever-gesture upon all creation.

As Jesus ascends to the right hand of the Father, He was then, is now, and ever shall be, blessing His beloved Church, blessing His Father's good yet fallen creation; blessing us.

Jesus' body enacts what His will resolves and what His mouth declared – He is wholly blessing.

In a few minutes, when the priest at that High Altar, raises his hands in blessing, He is living witness to the ongoing outpouring of the Benediction of Jesus Christ Ascended.

Still, some people may feel a little sceptical towards the Ascension event; perhaps thinking “If Jesus came to Earth from the Father through an invited act of Holy Spirit upon Mary, why does the resurrected Jesus need to go to such *ostentatious* trouble to return to the Father in Heaven”? And yes, it does seem a little OTT from that perspective. But as ever with God, *there is always more*.

It could be that the clouded Ascension of Jesus was a lasting pastoral act done for His disciples. Perhaps they needed to see Jesus so obviously leave them, so they would no longer hunger for any new post-resurrection appearances.

Perhaps. Or perhaps the Incarnation only makes sense because of the Ascension.

Now, stay with me here... Mary Poppins flew up and away from her children when her job was done. Whereas Jesus Ascended – Jesus incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary – Jesus Christ ascended the entirety of the human condition up with Him, in His very self, towards and into God. Our shared human condition is seated on the right hand of God.

Mary Poppins blessed her children by singing ‘Super-califragilistic-expi-alidocious’.

Jesus Christ blesses those under His care not with a whimsical musical number, but with His body; His body enacting what His will resolves and what His mouth declared: assurance of and full welcome into perpetual relationship with our God, who is sometimes faintly ridiculous, but who is always more.

*Alleluia. Amen*

### **Luke 24.44-53 (NRSV)**

<sup>44</sup> 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.” <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup> 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, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> 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.”

### **The Ascension of Jesus**

<sup>50</sup> Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; <sup>53</sup> and they were continually in the temple blessing God.