

26<sup>th</sup> May 2022

## Ascension

**“Christ beside me, Christ before me,  
Christ behind me, Christ within me,  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me.”**

*St Patrick, St Patrick's Breastplate*

In the Christian Year, *The Feast of the Ascension*, which we celebrate today, comes forty days after Easter. To be honest, the Ascension is a mystery to me. Why did Jesus leave after being with his friends, having promised: “Lo I’ll be with you to the end of time.”?

I’ll explore the Ascension further this coming Sunday, but for now I offer this thought. “St Patrick’s Breastplate” is an Old Irish “prayer of protection”, given the title *Faeth Fiada*, “The deer’s cry”. We’re told:

*St Patrick sang this when an ambush was laid against his coming that he might not go to Tara to sow the faith. And then it appeared before those lying in ambush that they [St Patrick and his monks] were wild deer with a fawn following them.*

All the saint needed was an awareness that the blessedness of Christ was beside, before, behind, within, beneath him – and above? Well, that too, it appears. But ascended, distant, gone, heaven? It’s still a mystery ...

The Old Parish Church of Cockenzie in East Lothian is full of fishing symbols: banners with fishing scenes; a six-spar boat-wheel; lifebelts with biblical texts; a carved fish, with “ichthus” below it, a historic symbol of Christianity; several model fishing-boats. But most striking are two dominant fishing-boat lamps on either side of the pulpit, one shining red and the other green. In past days, lamps like these would be oil-filled, the green one shining on the starboard side (the right) of a fishing boat, and the red one on the port side (the left), as visible signals to other craft. A light on both sides, so that the boat, and vessels around it, could ply the waters in safety. These fishing-boat lamps remind us what St Patrick celebrated in *Faeth Fiada*, that God is on the right, and on the left. God, in the person of the Saint’s Christ, is all around. God is on *all* sides. What matters is a belief that the blessedness of God is completely present.

On this Ascension Day, St Patrick *and* Cockenzie Old Parish Church offer guidance in my mystery. Believing God is all around is enough.

### **A prayer for today**

*Ascended? OK, have it that way if you like. But all around me? That’s more like it.*