

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.

¹⁵ These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ “‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke.²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’
(NIV 84)

Theme: The Holy Spirit and his Festival Day

1. He/It is often forgotten.
2. He/It is often misunderstood.

You have Christmas and Easter. Christmas, of course, is when God sent his Son, Jesus Christ—who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. It is the celebration of the birth of our Savior. Easter, of course, is when our Savior rose from the dead three days after he died when he took our sins upon himself and gave us his perfect life on the cross. Easter is the celebration of what our Savior has won and given us.

Many love Christmas and Easter; but not only that, they also know when they happen too. Sure, this is partly because of the secular holidays that go along with them. But it’s still important from a religious standpoint—often the highest attended services of the year. After all, they are the two big festivals of the Christian Church year, right? Not exactly. There are three. Today—the Day of Pentecost is the third major festival of the Church year—it has been celebrated since at least 217 A.D. It is the Holy Spirit’s day. Some call it the birth of the Christian Church. The Father gave his son up on Christmas. The Son gave up his life only to rise during Holy Week. And now on Pentecost, we see the Holy Spirit giving us the gifts of understanding and courage. Today we see that the Holy Spirit and his day of Pentecost is often forgotten and often misunderstood.

There were also three major festivals for God’s Old Testament believers. First came Passover. This was a celebration of the time when God passed over the houses with blood from a lamb on their door post during the 10th and final plague—thus saving his people and leading them out of slavery. The last festival was the feast of booths or tabernacles. During this festival the Israelites stayed in tents remembering the 40 years they spent in tents as God led them through the wilderness. It was also called the feast of ingathering because they celebrated the fruit harvest at this time.

The middle festival was known as the feast of harvest. During this festival the Jews praised and thanked God for the wheat harvest. Because this was the first harvest of the year it was known by the feast of the firstfruits. A third name for this festival was the feast of weeks.

That is because it took place a “week of weeks” that is, seven weeks after the first Sunday after Passover. Later it would become known as Pentecost. Pente is Greek for 50—and since this feast took place 50 days after the week of Passover, this feast was often referred to as Pentecost. So the Day of Pentecost was a time to praise God for the wheat harvest.

When Jesus ascended into heaven he told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came. This promise was fulfilled when the disciples were in the temple complex on the day of Pentecost. We tend to focus on certain aspects of Pentecost. We talk about what we read in our text for today. The wind, the tongues of fire, the speaking in tongues—they get a lot of attention. And they certainly are amazing. But we often miss the best part about Pentecost. After our text, after Peter’s sermon, we learn that 3000 people were brought to faith by the Holy Spirit that day. 3000! By one sermon! The largest conversion in one day!

It truly was a harvest. That’s the connection between the Old Testament festival of Pentecost and the New Testament festival of Pentecost. The Old Testament festival was a harvest of wheat. The New Testament fulfillment and replacement is a harvest of souls. The New Testament festival far exceeds the Old Testament festival. So we have an even greater reason to praise and thank the Holy Spirit. And yet, it’s sadly forgotten. Pushed aside by the things of this world. The Old Testament Pentecost was one of the three pilgrimage festivals for the Old Testament Believers. Along with the other two we already mentioned every adult male was to travel to Jerusalem for these three festivals. They came from all over the world imply for a harvest of wheat. And we have a harvest of souls. We have all the more reason to praise God. We have all the more reason to celebrate this occasion. To sing the praises of the Holy Spirit. So let us not forget the Holy Spirit. And let us worship and praise him on his great festive day.

But sadly the Holy Spirit and his day of Pentecost are not just forgotten, they are often misunderstood.

There are many things that happened on Pentecost that may be a little confusing or easily misunderstood. As the disciples were together that morning they suddenly heard the sound of a strong wind. It filled the

whole place. Then tongues of fire appeared on top of the heads of the disciples. Those tongues of fire point to the speaking in tongues. The disciples were given the ability to speak in languages that they had never learned or spoken before. So there’s the confusion—what do these three miracles mean? Here’s the misunderstanding—because they happened to the disciples, they will happen to us today. Most people don’t expect to have wind rushing through a room when the Holy Spirit is present. Most also don’t expect to have fire dancing on top of their heads. Yet, for some reason, many believe that they will receive the gift of speaking in tongues; or that they may somehow feel the Holy Spirit in them. Sure, it is true that God did give this gift to others during the Apostolic times. But he never promised to continue giving this gift. Plus this is a descriptive passage—not a prescriptive one. That means this is a story that describes what happened—it’s not a passage that tells us what God promises to give us.

So what’s the proper way to look at these happenings on Pentecost? The sound of the violent wind served as a sign of the gift. But it wasn’t the gift itself. The tongues of fire marked the arrival of the gift. But it wasn’t the gift itself. The speaking in tongues sure was amazing. And it was a result of the gift—but it wasn’t the gift itself. The gift was the Holy Spirit himself. **All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.**

The prophecy of Joel that Peter quotes may also lead to some confusion and misunderstanding. Does it mean that we will be able to prophesy? Does it mean that God will give us visions and dreams? Many think so. But once again, there is no specific promise that God will do so. We, as New Testament Christians who are not apostles, should not expect dreams or visions from God. And the basic meaning of the word prophecy means “to speak to another.” So here it could be basically saying that Christians will speak about God to another. Or what about the other section of Joel’s prophecy? **I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.** These are signs of the coming of Christ on the Last Day. Whenever we see them we are reminded that the time is near. Blood could refer to the **wars and rumors of wars** that Jesus talks

about in Matthew 24. The smoke could refer to the same thing—or perhaps the aftermath of the earthquakes that Jesus also mentions in Matthew 24. The language used by Joel in this prophecy is similar to language used elsewhere in the Bible about the Last Days. For instance in Revelation we read that there is no need for a sun. **The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.** Peter’s point by quoting Joel is that the day of Pentecost ushered in the End Times. Ever since the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost the world could end at any moment.

What does Joel’s prophecy mean for us? It tells us that we are in the last days. And what will happen in those last day? He says, **I will pour out my Spirit in those days.** And about that Day of Pentecost we read, **They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.** That is what Pentecost was all about and still is about for us today—the coming of the Holy Spirit. He dwells then in people from all nations. Young and old, male and female, rich and poor.

And God still does the same today. But he doesn’t promise to do so through dreams or visions. But through the means of grace. That is, the gospel in Word and Sacraments. Those are the only ways that God promises in his Word that he will come to us. So the Day of Pentecost is a day to remind us to get into the means of grace. Read the Word on a regular basis. Bring your children or other loved ones to the baptismal font. Make regular use of the Sacrament of the altar. For through them and through them alone God gives us his grace. Through them the Holy Spirit lives and dwells in us. Through them he gives and increases faith.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:3, **no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.** It is the Holy Spirit who works faith. Without him we are not saved. Without the Holy Spirit doing his work of bring us to faith we don’t stand a chance. Peter mentioned that too. At the end of our text Peter says, **everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.** That line may seem out of place if you don’t understand Pentecost and the work of the Holy Spirit. But when you understand that he was sent to bring and keep us in the one true faith, it makes perfect sense. Those whom he brings to faith through the gospel will be saved. For it is only through faith that we receive the blessings that Christ won for us.

At the end of his Pentecost sermon Peter again points out the connection between faith and the Holy Spirit. **Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** Through baptism we receive the Holy Spirit. It is through baptism that he comes into our hearts as he creates faith in us. And so we have the forgiveness of sins. Through our baptisms the Holy Spirit is in us. For he brought us to faith and gives us understanding and power. And those who have this gift of the Holy Spirit will be saved. And ultimately that is what Pentecost is all about.

Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. The three major festivals of the Christian Church. And none is greater than the other. For without one, we cannot be saved. So let us rejoice and praise the Holy Spirit. He has brought us to faith. And he now dwells in us so that we would dwell with him in heaven forever. Amen.