

The Holy Spirit has Come!

- I. He's Come with Miraculous Signs
- II. He's Come with the Gift of Tongues
- III. He's Come with a Message of Salvation for All

*(Acts 2:1-21) 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 Rome {11} (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.'*

Tell me, if you were to ask the average first grader on the night before Christmas, "Do you know whose coming we're going to celebrate tomorrow?" what do you think they would say? You might get the answer, "Baby Jesus." But you're just as likely to hear, "Santa Claus is coming!" And if you were to ask you that same question on the night before Easter, "Whose coming, whose appearance, will we celebrate on Easter?" you might hear, "Jesus." But then again, you might hear, "the Easter Bunny." But if you were to ask that same child last night, "Do you know whose coming we're going to celebrate tomorrow, you probably get, what? A blank stare? "What, is someone coming to church tomorrow? Whatchu talkin' about?"

Sadly, that's often what happens with the Festival of Pentecost. It gets forgotten, overlooked, passed by. Certainly, that's true from the world's perspective. And maybe that's a good thing. Maybe we can be grateful that the world hasn't commercialized Pentecost with Pentecost sales out at the mall or chocolate Pentecost bunnies. Or Pentecost costume parties. But just because the world doesn't "get" Pentecost, doesn't mean that we have to join them in their spiritual ignorance. Today we have the opportunity to focus on what Pentecost is all about. Today we celebrate the 3rd of the big three festivals of the church year. On Christmas we celebrate the Christ child coming into the world. At Easter we celebrate Jesus coming out of the grave. And on Pentecost we celebrate a third coming. The coming of the Holy Spirit. Today we join those first century Christians as we celebrate this powerful truth namely,

The Holy Spirit has Come!

As we look to the events of that first Pentecost, we'll see that

- I. He's come with miraculous signs
- II. He's come with the gift of tongues
- III. He's come with a message of salvation for all nations

Our text begins with the words, *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.* In this case, "they" most likely refers to the 12 Apostles, but could have included a larger number of believers. We aren't sure exactly where they gathered, but exact location, but we do know it was somewhere in the city of Jerusalem, for Jesus had given his disciples specific directions just before he ascended into heaven. He told them, *"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."* (Acts 1:4-5)

With those words, Jesus was promising that the Holy Spirit would come. On Pentecost day, that promise was fulfilled. The Holy Spirit did come. He came, (I.) With Miraculous Signs. Luke describes the event. *Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.* Notice it's the sound of a blowing wind. It's not that the house they were sitting in was hit by a tornado. It just sounded like the house was hit by a tornado. And that sound, understandably, attracted quite a crowd of people. We'll hear in a moment how that played into God's plan.

The second miraculous sign that accompanied the Holy Spirit was this ball of fire which split into individual flames which then came to rest on the heads of the disciples. Again, Luke tells us that these flames only seemed to be fire. They didn't actually burn the hair of the disciples. This too was a miraculous sign, similar to The Burning Bush, which looked like fire, but didn't burn up the bush. This too, was a miraculous sign to announce the presence of the Holy Spirit.

But the Holy Spirit not only came with miraculous signs. On Pentecost day, the Spirit also came, (II.) With the Gift of Tongues. Luke writes, *All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.* Now, the question is raised, "What is meant by that term 'tongues'?" Were the disciples so overwhelmed with emotion that they began to babble gibberish? Were the disciples given the ability to speak in a language known only to God? No, these disciples were given the ability to speak in real foreign languages, languages which these disciples had never learned—but languages which were understood by the people gathered outside the house. Luke tells us, *the crowd came together and bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own language?"*

You realize that this too was a miracle. Up until this time the disciples were common fisherman, from the rural region of Galilee. They knew their native tongue of Aramaic and undoubtedly some Greek. But they were not fluent in languages from around the world. But suddenly, they were given them the ability to speak all these different languages. The Holy Spirit was thus equipping the disciples to carry out the great commission that Jesus had given them, namely, *"Go and make disciples of all nations"*—including nations that speak a language you previously didn't know.

And notice, the disciples didn't waste any time putting into practice their new found skills. When the disciples start speaking in foreign languages, what do they start speaking about? Sports? The weather? No, what do the crowds of people gathered around them say? *"We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues."* In other words, the disciples used their new found fluency to preach the gospel, to tell people the wonderful things that God

had done for them in Christ.

You see, that's the real reason the Holy Spirit was poured out on these early Christians. The Spirit came to give these disciples the courage and the ability to share the most important message of all. On Pentecost day, the Holy Spirit came, III. With a Message of Salvation for All. Actually, it's Simon Peter who steps forward and preaches this amazing sermon for all to hear. The fact that it's Simon Peter who speaks—the same guy who was once too afraid to speak up in front of a little servant girl in the courtyard of the high priest, the same guy who once hid behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, the fact that he was the one who stands up to speak to the crowds—well, that's already evidence that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on this man in a very powerful way. It's the fulfillment of the promise that Jesus had made to his disciples earlier when he told them, *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* At that very moment, Peter was becoming the powerful witness that Jesus said he would be.

So what does Peter say to the crowd? He begins by quoting the Prophet Joel. He says that Joel had foretold the events that occurred on Pentecost Day when he wrote, *In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.* What does that mean? Well, with those words, Joel was drawing an important distinction between God's saving activity before Christ and his saving activity after Christ. In the Old Testament, God worked primarily with one nation, the nation of Israel. Although there were foreigners who were led by the Holy Spirit to believe in the God of the Israelites, the God of the Bible, by and large, most of the Spirit's work took place among the Jews themselves. You might say that the Holy Spirit worked in a relatively limited field.

But now, Joel says, God was going to work in a much larger field. Now God says, *“I will pour out my Spirit on all people.”* In other words, God the Holy Spirit would no longer focus on just one nation, but rather, on people of every nation. You might say that Pentecost was the birthday of the New Testament Church, a church that would be a church for all nations.

But not only did Joel see the beginning of what we call the New Testament era. He also saw the end of it. The prophet immediately goes on to talk about a time when, as he puts it, *“the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.”* What was the prophet talking about with those words? Is he saying that on Pentecost the lights in the sky would be turned off? No, actually, he's looking further down the line. He's talking about Judgment Day. He's talking about the end of the world. But you see, from his vantage point in the Old Testament those two events looked like they were going to happen at the same time. It's kind of like when you look at a mountain range in the distance, and you can't tell how far apart the individual peaks are from each other. So the prophet couldn't tell how much distance, or in this case how much time, there was between when the Spirit would be poured out on all people and when the world would come to an end.

The prophet didn't know how much time there would be between Pentecost day and Judgment Day. And, in fact, neither do we. All we know for sure is that we are somewhere between those two events. The Holy Spirit has come. But Jesus has not yet returned.

So, what does that mean for our lives today? Does it really matter that the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost Day? Is the takeaway here that we should all hope to be speaking in tongues some day? No, the gift of tongues served a specific purpose in the history of the Christian Church. God used the gift of tongues to affirm that he was working in their midst. God used tongues to confirm that what the apostles were teaching was the truth. Today we don't need to have someone speak in tongues to determine whether they are from God or not. Now we have

the inspired New Testament Scriptures in our hands. We can simply compare what people teach and believe with what God says in his word. It's not tongues that confirms that people are really Christians or not. It's the Word that does that.

So then, what application does Pentecost have for our lives today? What reason do we have to celebrate the Festival of Pentecost today? Three reasons. First, Pentecost is reminder that the Holy Spirit is real. Even though the Bible doesn't talk about the Spirit as much as the Father or the Son, that doesn't mean that the Spirit is not just as powerful, just as eternal, just as important, just as real, as the other two persons of the Godhead. Pentecost is the chance to give the Spirit his due.

But Pentecost is not just the celebration of the person of the Holy Spirit. It's the celebration of the work of the Holy Spirit. Do you remember what St. Paul said about the work of the Holy Spirit? *No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.* Do you realize what that means? It means that if you have felt the weight of your sins, if you know that all you've earned from a just and holy God is hell, if you know that on the cross of Calvary, Jesus went to hell in your place and suffered the full penalty for your sin so that now you stand forgiven in God's eyes, if you know that purely by God's grace in Christ, you have a room waiting for you in heaven. If you know that Jesus has paid the price to make you his own, then you can know that the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in your heart. Because you know you have a savior, you can also know you have the Spirit. And really, that's true not just for you, but for millions of people just like you around the world.

For you see, that's the third reason to celebrate the Festival of Pentecost. Today is a day to just stand in awe of what the Holy Spirit is doing in people's lives around the world. I mean, to think that on that first Pentecost, a handful of disciples were suddenly speaking all those different languages. And today, we have Christian missionaries taking the gospel out into the world speaking a lot of those same languages. (Granted, our missionaries often have to learn those languages the old-fashioned way—they have to study them.) But the fact is, it's still an extension of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is empowering his people to bring the gospel to people of every nation and tribe and language.

Is the WELS a part of that international work? Yes it is. Check out the WELS Multi-Language Publications website to see how many different languages we've translated gospel materials into. Think about the work we are doing in Vietnam. Actually, this week, the mission board is meeting at Mount Olive to extend a call for a second missionary to Vietnam. That man will spend a number of years learning the Hmong language so that in time, the people in Hanoi will be able to say what the on Pentecost said, namely, "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our tongues!"

My friends, don't you think that this is all part of the vision that the prophet Joel said that men and women, young and old alike would see? This vision of the Holy Spirit working around the world, in different nations, through different languages, all to bring people the eternal peace that comes from knowing Jesus as Lord.

Yes, it's true. The Holy Spirit has come. By God's grace, he's come into your heart. And by that same grace of God, he's still coming into the hearts of others. And that, my friends, is a miracle worth celebrating, today and every day. To God the Holy Spirit be our heartfelt thanks and praise! In Jesus' name. Amen.