

Overview: Come, Holy Spirit! The Spirit is given on the Day of Pentecost in fulfillment of promise and prophecy, and he continues to come to his faithful through Word and sacrament. Thus the Church never ceases to be renewed and to grow.

Suggested Service is Service of the Word (CW p. 38).

Suggested Hymns: 176 "Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord"

181 "Come, Oh, Come, Life-Giving Spirit"

188 "Creator Spirit, by Whose Aid"

185 "O Holy Spirit, Grant Us Grace"

* Please feel free to sing additional hymns from the Pentecost section: CW 176-190.

Prayer of the Day: Holy Spirit, God and Lord, come to us this joyful day with your sevenfold gift of grace. Rekindle in our hearts the holy fire of your love that in a true and living faith we may tell abroad the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Father, one God, now and forever.

First Lesson: Joel 2:28-29 Joel prophesies the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost heralding the dawn of the New Testament church. The outpouring will show itself in visions and dreams granted by God, but especially in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ by young and old, men and women, and all to whom the Spirit is given.

Psalm is Psalm 51b (CW p. 87) The Church sings David's beautiful psalm of petition for the continuing gift of the Spirit.

Second Lesson: Acts 2:1-21 In fulfillment of Jesus' promise and Joel's prophecy the Holy Spirit comes upon the apostles and disciples in Jerusalem on Pentecost. Boldly and with a miraculous gift of language the apostles preach the wonderful works of God in Christ Jesus to the crowd that assembles to hear and see what is happening. Peter, speaking for all the apostles, preaches a bold sermon of repentance and faith in Jesus.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people, and kindle in them the fire of your love. Alleluia. (From the antiphon: Come, Holy Spirit)

Gospel: John 16:5-11 On the night of his betrayal the Lord Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to his disciples. The Spirit will come for their consolation and empowerment, and to the judgment of unbelief that rejects the Son.

Prayer: CW p. 127 or p. 42. Lord's Prayer: CW p. 43.

PENTECOST – GOD’S GREAT HARVEST FESTIVAL

PENTECOST

MY DEAR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,

Pentecost means 50. Our Festival of Pentecost takes place 50 days after Easter. Since Easter can occur on various dates of the year, Pentecost does also. While the date of Pentecost can vary on the calendar, its date is fixed by Easter, as is the date for the Ascension of our Lord. Ascension is always 40 days after Easter. There are always seven Sundays in the Easter season. And the 50th day after Easter is always the Day of Pentecost.

What we often remember about Pentecost is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Just as Joel had prophesied in the Old Testament and just as Jesus promised to his disciples, the Holy Spirit came upon them. The disciples were all gathered together in Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus had told them to do. While they were together, there was a sound like the blowing of a violent wind coming from heaven that filled the whole house where they were. Then they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each one of them.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. We cannot know exactly what this speaking in tongues was like; but we do know that when Peter addresses the crowd, the people from many different nations all heard Peter speaking in their own language. Peter and the other disciples did not speak in unknown languages; but in tongues or languages that were understood by people from many lands. What the people heard on that first Pentecost was a bold proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ. They heard it plainly and simply in their own language, even though Peter did not know most of these languages. It certainly was a miracle—a miracle that God used to begin the New Testament Church.

We often remember many of these events and happenings from that first Day of Pentecost, but how often do we remember that there was also a Feast of Pentecost in the Old Testament? The Feast of Pentecost in the Old Testament was really one of three harvest festivals. If we look at the Feast of Pentecost from the Old Testament alongside side of the Festival of Pentecost from the New Testament, we will find some similarities and we will gain a better understanding for and appreciation of Pentecost. Today we look at PENTECOST–GOD’S GREAT HARVEST FESTIVAL. I. The Old Testament harvest of wheat II. The New Testament harvest of souls.

The Old Testament Feast of Pentecost was one of three annual harvest festivals. The Feast of Ingathering, or also called the Feast of Tabernacles, was in the fall of the year during the grape harvest. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was when the harvest of wheat began and they presented the first grain sheaf. On Pentecost, or 50 days later, the Israelites were to celebrate the harvest and present the first fruits of the harvest to the Lord.

There were other names for this Feast of Pentecost: The Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Harvest, and the Day of First Fruits. The Feast of Pentecost was one of three great Old Testament festivals for which every Israelite was to gather in Jerusalem. The references for these feasts and their requirements can be found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

Some people think that Pentecost was 50 days after the Passover; which is close but not entirely accurate. It was really 50 days after the presentation of the first sheaf of grain. The first sheaf of grain was presented as part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which immediately followed the Passover. Perhaps this occurred because of how difficult it would be to predict the beginning of the harvest in any given year. The Feast of Unleavened Bread and the presentation of the first sheaf of grain would take place on the Sunday of the Passover, which is when we now celebrate Easter. The Feast of Pentecost would be 50 days after the first Sunday after the Passover.

The symbolism surrounding the Old Testament Pentecost and the other festivals is striking. On a day when the Israelites would be out looking for the Passover Lamb, Jesus was riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. On the day when the Israelites were concerned about the slaughter and eating of their Passover Lamb, Jesus would hang on a cross as our Passover Lamb. As John the Baptist would say: *“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* On the day when the Israelites would present the first sheaf of grain, Jesus rose from the dead as the first fruits of those who had fallen asleep. On the day when the Israelites brought their first-fruits of the grain harvest to the Lord, namely on Pentecost; the first gathering of souls into the New Testament Church took place.

In the Scriptures, God has such a beautiful way of tying things together. As Paul would say to the Romans (11:33): *“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”* Pentecost is really God’s great harvest festival. In the Old Testament that festival celebrated the harvesting of the grain crop and giving the first-fruits of that crop to the Lord. In the New Testament, Pentecost celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit, the beginning of the New Testament Church and the harvest of souls.

The Festival of Pentecost for the grain harvest was part of God’s covenant with his people in the Old Testament. It reminded them of God’s blessings; but more importantly it reminded them of the greater blessings to come. These blessing would be when God would make a new covenant with his people by sending his only Son to fulfill the old and to begin the new. Even a festival for the grain harvest was pointing God’s people ahead to the time when Christ would come.

The New Testament Pentecost was all about the harvest of souls. After receiving the Holy Spirit on Pentecost the harvest began immediately. Peter and the others spoke boldly and in different languages so that the people gathered from every corner of the earth could hear and understand the gospel. Faith comes by hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of God.

The people were amazed and perplexed. They even asked, “*Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each one of us hears them in his own language?*” Of course it was a miracle. Even the disciples likely had no idea that this was going to happen. Yes, they knew Jesus had promised them the Holy Spirit. But I do not think they could have imagined speaking and then being heard and understood in so many different languages.

Certainly God had a purpose in all this. God wants all people to come to the knowledge of salvation through Christ. God wants all people to be saved. On that first Pentecost God wanted all people to be able to hear the gospel in his own native tongue. God wanted and still wants all people to be saved. Even though the audience that day was God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven, God was already planting the seed in the apostles’ minds that Jesus’ sacrifice and God’s salvation is for all people. God’s will was being carried out. Salvation came by the Jews and went to the Jews first, but God would extend his salvation to all people, including Gentiles.

Of course, there will always be some skeptics in the crowd. Some thought that perhaps the disciples have had too much wine. It is at this point that Peter takes over. He assures them that the disciples are not drunk—after all, it was only 9:00 in the morning. Peter reminds them of the prophecy of Joel, a prophecy all good Jews should have been familiar with. God was keeping and fulfilling the prophecy he had made through the prophet Joel.

God promised that he would pour out his Spirit. The disciples were now living proof that God indeed had poured out his Spirit. But remember what the prophet Joel said as he was speaking for God: “*In these last days I will pour out my Spirit on all people.*” God was doing just that through his apostles on that day. The Spirit would work through the Word to bring people to faith in Christ.

All of us are very comfortable with the fact that God the Holy Spirit has called us to faith in Christ, enlightened us with his gifts, and that he sanctifies and keeps us in the one true faith. All of us are comfortable with the fact that God daily forgives all sins to you and me and to all believers in Christ. Yet, God wants all people to be saved. The work the apostles began on Pentecost is not over. There are still people in every nation under heaven who need to hear and believe in Jesus as the only Savior.

The harvest of souls continues until the day our Savior returns to judge the living and the dead. On that day, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Until that day comes when everyone does call on the name of the Lord or until that day our Savior does return, God’s great harvest festival will continue. You and I are a part of the great harvest festival—the harvest of souls for time and eternity. In Jesus’ name. AMEN.