

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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The Holy Spirit Establishes His Church

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The Day of Pentecost: This was a Jewish feast held 50 days after Passover, celebrating the first fruits of the wheat harvest. At Pentecost, the first fruits of this harvest were presented to God. Jewish tradition teaches that Pentecost marked the day when the Law was given to Israel. Some Jews therefore call Pentecost שמחת תורה (shimchath torah), or “Joy of the Law.”

In Acts 2 Pentecost is transformed in the sense that here the Holy Spirit is presenting to us a recounting of the revelation of the “first fruits” of His church. See Leviticus 23:15-22. Why 2 loaves? Because not only Israel (the Hebrews) were children of the promise, but the “Nations” (Gentiles) as well!

Jesus’ disciples were “warned” about this, weren’t they?

Luke 10:1-20

John 14:15-18

John 20:19-23

Acts 1:4-5

The “sound”. The association of the sound of a rushing mighty wind, filling the whole house, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is unusual. But it is probably connected to the fact that in both Hebrew and Greek, the word for spirit (as in Holy Spirit) is the same word for breath or wind (also true in Latin!). So the “sound from heaven” was really the sound of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the disciples.

This phenomenon might prompt the disciples to recall Genesis 1:1-2, Genesis 2:7, Ezekiel 37:9-10, etc. The scriptures literally coming to life for them! And one wonders if any of them were witness to John the Baptist prophesying that Jesus would “baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matthew 3:11)?!

What else do we learn about the Holy Spirit from this event?

Under the Old Covenant, the Holy Spirit “rested” on God’s people more as a nation, that is, Israel. Now under the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit rests upon God’s people as individuals; the tongues of fire sat upon each of them. This strange phenomenon had never happened before and would never happen again in the Bible, but was given to emphasize this point, that the Spirit of God was present with and in and upon each individual.

Speaking in “tongues” (γλῶσσα, διάλεκτος). Not many homes of that day could hold 120 people. It is likely that the “upper room” was part of the temple, which was a huge structure, with porches and colonnades and rooms. The crowd was the people milling about the temple courts.

Galileans were rather low-class and uneducated, as a rule. They were considered to be uncultured, and rather sloppy speakers (cf. the Queen’s English vs. cockney, or Inside-the-Beltway American English vs. Cajun creole.) This explains why those who heard them were so impressed with their ability to speak eloquently in other languages.

Ever since the early church fathers, commentators have seen the miracle of tongues on Pentecost as a deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel by the Holy Spirit; they all understood each other!

What is the purpose of “the gift of tongues”? Is it different today than it was for the disciples?

Read Paul’s teaching and instructions in 1 Corinthians 14.

Was this the same thing that Paul was talking about? Apparently the speaking in tongues stopped when Peter began to preach. Did Peter preach his sermon in Aramaic, Greek (the “common” language), or...?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:20. This gift/ability to speak or pray “in an unknown tongue” is not given to every believer.

Peter’s sermon. There is a remarkable change in Peter here. He had courage and boldness that was a complete contrast to his denials of Jesus. Lead by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, Peter didn’t teach as the rabbis of the day usually did, who gathered disciples around them, sat down, and instructed them and any others who might listen. Instead, Peter proclaimed the truth like a herald. It was not prepared beforehand, but was spontaneously given. Peter certainly didn’t wake up that morning knowing he would be preaching to a multitude that day, and that *thousands* would come to faith in Christ through it.

Yet we could say that in a way this was a very well-prepared sermon. It was prepared by Peter’s life of faith in God, and his relationship with Jesus. It flowed spontaneously out of that life experience, and out of a heart and mind that believed very deeply in Jesus, as perhaps uniquely, too, as only an eyewitness could.

Acts 2 reports only a portion of what Peter actually said. Like almost all the sermons recorded in the Bible, what we have is a Holy Spirit-inspired abridgment of a longer message.

Regarding the time of day as a deflection of the charge of drunkenness, most Jews – pious or not – did not eat or drink until after 9:00 (the third hour), because that was the time for prayer, and they would only eat after their prayers.

What did Peter do? Essentially, he said, “Let’s have a Bible study. Let’s look at what the prophet Joel wrote!” This focus on God’s Word did not quench the moving of the Holy Spirit; instead it fulfilled what the Holy Spirit wanted to do. All the signs and wonders and speaking in tongues of that miraculous Pentecost day were preparing for this work of God’s Word.

“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Peter used this passage from Joel evangelistically. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit meant that God now offered salvation in a way previously unknown! To anyone who “calls on the name of the Lord”, that is, believes in Him, be they Jew or Gentile.

It would be years before the gospel was preached widely to Gentiles, yet Peter’s sermon text announced the gospel invitation by saying, whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Peter could not possibly have known what the Holy Spirit had in store for Saul/Paul at this point, yet he is prophesying specifically about those future events.

“You crucified this Man who God sent.” Peter’s concern was clearly not to please his audience, but instead to tell them the truth.

The sermon concludes with a summary: all Israel should know that even though they crucified Jesus, God has declared Him both Lord and Christ, and loves even those who killed His Only Son.

What shall we do?

Peter had some previous experience with this feeling. When Jesus was arrested, Peter cut off the right ear of one of the men who came to arrest Jesus (John 18:10). An embarrassing mess that Jesus had to clean up. That showed Peter in the flesh, doing the best he could with a literal sword of human power. Now he did some much more effective “cutting”; cutting hearts, opening them to Jesus. This is what Peter could do through the power of the Spirit, doing God’s best with the sword of the Spirit, God’s Word. Which sword was more powerful?

Repent and be baptized...

Peter gave them something to do! Both repentance and baptism are useless and senseless apart from faith; these people were already showing the mark of the Holy Spirit on them in that they asked the question at all. So you might say the Holy Spirit had already done the work, and now Peter was helping them to see the natural consequences of what God was doing within their hearts: repent and be baptized.

“Repent” sounds like a harsh word to many modern ears, but it is an unavoidable aspect of the gospel. Believing hearts repent! Repentance should not be thought of as something we must do before we can come to God. Repentance describes what having the Holy Spirit at work in you looks like. This is not a message of condemnation; it is a message of great hope. It is a message that says, “You don’t have to continue the way you’ve been going, you can turn to God, because He has already come to you, and gave up His own life for you.”

In that day, Jews were not commonly baptized. Baptism signifying conversion was reserved for Gentiles who desired to become Jews. For these Jewish men and women to be baptized, then, showed just how new the New Covenant is.

...That day about three thousand souls were added.... So the church grew from about 120 people to 3,120 people in that day.

...They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship... The Christian life is designed to be full of fellowship, study of the scriptures, and of encouraging and sharing with each other.