

PENTECOST – WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?

Do you know what Pentecost is all about? Most people are aware of the Christmas and Easter stories but many would not be able to describe what Pentecost is about. Christians believe that Jesus was born, was crucified, rose from the dead and then after appearing several times to his disciples he ascended into heaven – watched by his disciples. What comes next is Pentecost, and Pentecost Sunday (15th May this year) is a celebration of the receiving of the Holy Spirit by the early church.

A few facts about Pentecost

- Pentecost in Greek means 'fifty'. It's the 50th day after the Sabbath of Passover week and in Judaism is called the Feast of 'Pentecost' or 'Weeks' (Leviticus 23:16).
- Pentecost comes 10 days after the Ascension of Jesus Christ.
- Pentecost is the birthday of the Church and marks the beginning of Christianity.
- It's traditionally celebrated as Whitsun.
- Modern day Pentecostal Christians emphasise the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

What actually happened on the day?

The disciples were part of a huge crowd of Jews staying in Jerusalem, celebrating the Feast of Pentecost. *"A sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them."*(Acts 2). The people there could not understand how they all heard the disciples talking in their many different languages.

Why is it important for Christians?

In the Old Testament there are many accounts of the work of the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit filled judges and prophets with great power, anointing them for supernatural action.

However, there is a promise in the Old Testament – Joel 2:28; "I will pour out my Spirit on *all* people", promising a time in the future when the Holy Spirit would be available for *everyone*.

In the New Testament, just before Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples are told to wait – *"You're the first to hear and see it. You're the witnesses. What comes next is very important: I am sending what my Father promised to you, so stay here in the city until he arrives, until you're equipped with power from on high."* (Luke 24).

An example of why this is so important to Christians is the experience of Peter, the disciple who denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed (as Jesus had predicted) – that same Peter, after receiving the Holy Spirit, gave a challenging message to large crowds and 3000 people became believers.

So the promise for the Christian today is supernatural power to be God's agents in the world. Although Christians differ in what they believe about the work of the Spirit, all will agree that God's Spirit can and will do what He wants, when He wants and through whom He wants. He'll not help us feel comfortable either, but He'll both challenge and inspire us. God wants his people to think big and pray for great things. Are Christians out there up for it?

Sue Richards.