

Pentecost

Despite what appears to be chaos in the amazing account of this day of Pentecost, order rests in God's hands. God's Spirit pours abundantly on the community of disciples, renewing them with a diversity of gifts for the common good. Jesus' followers then and now pray to remain open to where the Spirit may blow.

Focus Scripture: Acts 2:1–21

We continue with the story of the disciples after Jesus' ascension. In Acts 1:4, Jesus tells them to wait in Jerusalem for "the promise" of God. During this time, other Jews gather in Jerusalem to commemorate the Hebrew observance of Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks, also called Pentecost. Initially this was a celebration of harvest (Exodus 23:14–17). Later, the festival focused more on Jewish religious history. After the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in CE 70, the feast was transformed into an observance of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. *Pentecost* literally means "fiftieth" (Deuteronomy 16:9–10).

God's law and covenant were the foundation of the community of Israel, described in the Hebrew Scriptures. The writer of Acts describes God's giving of the Spirit on this day of Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection as the foundation of a new community living in covenant with God – the Body of Christ.

In Acts 2:1–21, the writer struggles to offer a verbal description of this day's events. The writer speaks of Pentecost's phenomena as "like the rush of a violent wind" and "divided tongues, as of fire." Surely, the words fall short of the stunning reality.

Acts lists an intriguing variety of peoples that make up the crowd on that day. Gathered from a multitude of nations to celebrate Pentecost, they marvel as they hear the gospel proclaimed in their native languages. Explanations of how this might have occurred pale in comparison to what those words convey. Some wonder what the testimony means. Others wonder if the disciples are drunk.

In Hebrew, the word for "hear" also means "obey." The gift of the Spirit at Pentecost unleashes the Spirit's power in the disciples, power that strengthens faithful living and witness. The conclusion to this story of

Pentecost has remained open down through the centuries since that day.

God's pouring out of the Spirit in ways that do not follow human convention is also evident in **Numbers 11:24–30**. Joshua complains against the prophesying of two "unauthorized" people. Joshua's complaint is not unlike that of later disciples who report someone who is "not with us" casting out demons in Jesus' name (Luke 9:49–50). Moses, as does Jesus, turns aside the murmuring. God's Spirit is given to whom God chooses.

The psalmist in **Psalms 104:24–34, 35b** sings of God's Spirit breathing life upon all creatures, not human beings alone. God's Spirit renews the face of the ground.

The nature of God's Spirit is the focus of the additional texts. According to **1 Corinthians 12:3b–13**, the Spirit comes with gifts for the Body of Christ. With these gifts come responsibilities to employ them for the common good. John's gospel tells of the giving of Spirit in **John 20:19–23**, when Jesus breathes upon the disciples. In Greek as in Hebrew, "spirit," "breath," and "wind" are expressed by the same word. In **John 7:37–39**, Jesus links the promised gift of Spirit with "living water." In the arid Near East, water served as a powerful image for life. God's Spirit flows over all.

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The diverse gifts of God's Spirit make each person and each part of creation distinctive. From this diversity, the Spirit weaves communities and creation in a common life enriched by God's presence. What do you sense about the abundance and exuberance of God's Spirit? What signs of God's Spirit are emerging or exploding in your own life and in your faith community?



June 12, 2011

Focus Scripture
Acts 2:1–21

Additional Scriptures
Numbers 11:24–30
(optional reading)
Psalm 104:24–34, 35b
1 Corinthians 12:3b–13
John 20:19–23 or John
7:37–39

**Come, Holy Spirit,
come. Breathe
upon us and fill
us with your gifts.
Open us to your
guiding in our
words and deeds.
Fit us for serving
in God's holy
realm. Amen.**

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

The Focus for All Ages



This session is designed for all ages to come together for approximately one hour to explore the gift of the Holy Spirit. If, for reasons of space or number, you choose to meet in age-specific groups, the session offers ways to customize the materials for different age groups.

Just when it seems that the festivals of the church year are over, Pentecost bursts upon us. Although a specified number of days after Easter lead up to it, these weeks don't have the traditions and customs that we associate with Advent and Lent. For people who aren't paying much attention to the church year, Pentecost simply pops into the church calendar sometime in May or June. Unlike other special days of the Christian year, Pentecost was celebrated by the Jews long before Jesus was born. This harvest festival comes 50 days after Passover. Christians today celebrate it 50 days after Easter. Some traditions call this time between Easter and Pentecost "Eastertide".

This session is written for a group of all ages who have come together to learn about and celebrate the Pentecost story found in the book of Acts. The Pentecost story is told every year and is foundational to the story of the Christian faith. Such stories are important to everyone, young and old, new to the Christian

faith, or a child of the church. If a team of leaders other than the weekly church school staff is planning this Pentecost celebration, take a few moments to talk about the participants you expect and what they might know about Pentecost. An important feature of the church is that anyone, of any age, can be a model of faithfulness to someone else. All ages events provide an opportunity for people to meet and discover new friends and faith models. Plan the activities so the age groups interact.

If you are leading a single age group, you will find help in this plan too. Select activities appropriate to the ages you are leading. Notice that some adaptations for groups of children or groups of adults are suggested. You know your group, so use your knowledge of them and your creativity to plan an exciting celebration of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Pray that everyone leaves this session with the Holy Spirit guiding them and that your congregation is renewed by God's Spirit as well.

June 12, 2011



Materials needed

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Acts 2:1–21 and biblical background material (p. 107). Imagine being present for the arrival of the Holy Spirit. How would you describe its presence?
- ❑ If possible, display the poster *The Seasons of the Church Year* (available from your curriculum distributor).
- ❑ If possible, invite four people each to read a paragraph on *today's resource sheet* "After the Resurrection." Provide *copies of the resource sheet* in advance. Suggest that they bring simple *costumes* or *headdresses*. If not, you will need to recruit readers as the participants arrive.

Gather

- ❑ Prepare worship table with *red cloth*, *Christ candle*, *matches*, *Bible*, and *offering basket*.
- ❑ Bring *photographs* or *illustrations* showing the wind blowing.
- ❑ Cut apart the stories on *today's resource sheet* "After the Resurrection." Provide

costumes (optional) for the four readers.

Engage

- ❑ Prepare to tell the story on *today's resource sheet* "A Surprising Pentecost."
- ❑ Make *copies of discussion questions* for the small groups.

Respond

- ❑ **Art zone:** *resource sheet* "Pentecost Wind Catchers," *crepe paper streamers* or *ribbon* (reds and orange), *embroidery hoops*, *cardboard tubes*, *clear tape*, *fishing line*
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** *paper*, *pencils*, and *directions*
- ❑ **Conversation zone:** *copies biblical background* (p. 107) and *copies of the discussion questions*
- ❑ **Music zone:** *red crepe paper streamers*, *recordings of joyful music*, *hymnbooks* and *songbooks*. Ask a *musician/song leader* to be in this zone.
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** *computer* and *printer* (optional)



Pentecost

Scripture

Acts 2:1–21

FOCUS To celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit.**GATHER**

As the participants arrive, ask four volunteers to prepare to read the paragraphs about the post-Resurrection appearances in Engage. Give each one a copy of today's resource sheet "After the Resurrection." If you have costumes for them, suggest that they go to another area and put on the costumes and practice their stories during the opening ritual.

Opening ritual

Call to learning When everyone is settled and focused on the worship table, welcome them to this special day in the church year, Pentecost. If you have displayed the poster *The Seasons of the Church Year*, show the group where Pentecost is found in the church year cycle. Then light the Christ candle. Explain that in the call to learning you will pause for the group to name examples of what you describe. Practice with "God created human beings." The group responds with names of individual people or groups.

Our God, you made everything that is in your wisdom.

Earth is covered with your creations (*pause for response*).

Earth is alive with creatures, small and large (*pause for response*).

The skies are bright with your creations (*pause for response*).

Your Spirit gives life to all the Earth.

You are amazing and incredible.

We praise you now and forever. Amen.

Sing a song that the participants have sung during the opening ritual during the Easter season. If you wish, receive an offering during the song.

Pray this prayer, or one of your own:

God of the Spirit, be with us as we study your word and as we seek to follow your child, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Extinguish the candle as a sign that the opening ritual is over.

Connecting with the focus

Wind Show the group pictures that give evidence of the wind blowing. Invite them to look closely at the pictures. Ask:

■ **How can you tell from the picture that the wind is blowing? Do you think it is a breeze or a strong wind?**

After the group has decided how strong the wind might be, ask:

■ **When you are outdoors, how do you know that the wind is blowing?**

Tell the group that the Bible story for this session has an important wind in it.

ENGAGE**Preparing for the story**

After the Resurrection To bridge the weeks between Easter and Pentecost, have the four people portraying Mary Magdalene, Cleopas, Nathanael, and Peter read their stories from today's resource sheet "After the Resurrection."

The Bible story

Waiting and waiting From the memories go directly to telling the story on today's resource

sheet "A Surprising Pentecost," based on Acts 2:1–21. The story opens with a description of the streets of Jerusalem on this special Pentecost day.

Conversations Have the participants form groups of three or four. Children between the ages of 5 and 10 can select two older people, or determine some other way so each small group will include children, youth, and adults, if possible. Give each group a paper with the following questions:

- **How could the followers of Jesus in the room tell the wind was blowing?**
- **What do you think the people said to each other after Peter spoke?**
- **How do you think the people's lives were different after that day?**

The Bible story and us

When all the groups have had time to discuss the three questions, bring everyone together. Hear some of their answers to the last question. Tell the group that the church has celebrated the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost for hundreds of years. Continue that celebration in the Respond zones.

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RESPOND

Explain the choices in the zones. Invite everyone to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Art zone: Pentecost wind catchers** Flowing red wind catchers will remind everyone of the Pentecost arrival of the Holy Spirit. See today's resource sheet "Pentecost Wind Catchers" for directions for making three types of wind catchers.

To use this activity with an all-ages group, invite some people to make one or more large wind catchers to display inside or outside the church building. Then hang them.

To use this activity with a group of children, make the wind catchers to display at home. Or make the smaller wind catchers to shake during Pentecost songs. If the weather permits, go outdoors and run so the streamers float in the air.

- **Quiet zone: Poetry** Distilling the Pentecost story or an explanation of the Holy Spirit into a few words encourages participants to think deeply and clearly. The poetic form, haiku, provides a pattern for such writing. Supply writing paper and pencils. Display these directions:

Think about the story of Pentecost. What are the most important words in the story? Use those words to write a haiku poem. Here's how:

- **The first line of the poem has five syllables. For example: Pentecost is that**
- **The second line has seven syllables. To continue the example: day when the people received**

- **The third line has five syllables. To complete the example: the Holy Spirit.**

Haiku usually does not rhyme and it is written so each line is in the middle of the page.

When you are satisfied with your haiku, copy it on another paper.



To use this activity with young children, ask young people or adults to act as their scribes.

Share the haiku poems with the congregation. Print them in the church newsletter, or make a bulletin board display with them.

- **Conversation zone: The Holy Spirit** Learn more about the Spirit in conversation with others. This activity is most appropriate for adults and youth. Have a volunteer read Acts 2:1-21 aloud. Discuss the following questions, noting information in the biblical background article (p. 107):

- **What in the narrative is familiar, and what is new or surprising to you?**
- **In Greek and Hebrew, "spirit" and "breath" (and "wind") are the same word. What does this information suggest to you about the work of God's Spirit?**
- **What in this passage describes the abundance of God's Spirit?**
- **In verse 5, how do you understand "every nation under heaven?"**

- **Why do you think Peter quoted the prophet Joel (Acts 2:17–21)?**
- **How does your experience of the church compare with the scene described in Acts 2:1–21?**

To extend the discussion with adults, include conversation about the other lectionary passages for Pentecost Sunday (see biblical background, p. 107). Explore how they relate to and help interpret the events Pentecost.

- **Music zone: Joyful movement** Celebrate Pentecost with music and movement. Select joyful songs of praise and hymns about the Spirit of God from your congregational hymnbook or songbook. Give everyone streamers to wave to the rhythm of the music. The participants can stand, move around, or remain seated. With these options, many people can participate.

To prepare for congregational worship, invite a choir member to teach the hymns that will be sung on this Pentecost Sunday.

- **Outreach zone: Litany** Celebrate with a joyful litany. This group will write a litany for the participants to pray in Blessing. In a litany one person prays a line and the group responds, often with the same response each time. The group response for this Pentecost litany will be “Come, Holy Spirit, come.” Provide these sample lines based on Acts 2:

God has given the Spirit to everyone.
(Response)

God calls us to see visions. (Response)

God calls us to dream dreams. (Response)

Encourage the group to create lines that are particular to them and the congregation.

If possible, enter the litany into a computer and make copies for the participants to take home to pray during the weeks after Pentecost, or send them to the participants as an email attachment.

To share this litany with the congregation, provide copies to your worship leaders for inclusion in congregational worship.



Gather When it is almost time to conclude the session, ask the participants to finish their activities and come to the worship table. Light the Christ candle.

The Holy Spirit Invite the participants to show their wind catchers, read haiku, or present other products from Respond zones.

Pray the litany written in the outreach zone, or this prayer:

Giver of the Holy Spirit, we give thanks for your word and your Spirit. May they bring new life to our lives and to our congregation.
Amen.

Blessing Invite the participants to say this blessing to persons next to them: “God’s Holy Spirit is given to you.”



How did the participants celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? How did this session help all ages express the joy of Pentecost? When did you observe adults, children, and youth working together outside family groups?



A Surprising Pentecost

based on Acts 2:1–21

Build the excitement in the story by speaking softly and slowly at the beginning. Build to a shout of "Listen!" when Peter quiets the crowd.

Something unusual was in the air in Jerusalem that day. It wasn't the heat, the chirping birds, or the clip-clopping donkeys, pulling squeaky carts of grain and fruit for the festival of Pentecost. An air of excitement hovered over the city, along with the sounds of the cooing doves and the bleating lambs on their way to the temple.

Jerusalem was always bustling on the day of Pentecost. People came from all over Judah to celebrate this festival. Sitting at a gate into the city or a marketplace provided an amazing sight. All sizes and shapes of people walked by. Mysterious languages touched your ears. Smells of exotic spices and herbs wafted before your nose.

The commotion of adults talking, along with children playing and laughing, gave a special joy to the day. As people travelled to Jerusalem they sang praises to God to lighten their steps on the dusty roads. Their songs lingered in the air.

Peter and the rest of Jesus' followers had been in Jerusalem for many days. After the crucifixion and Resurrection, Jesus had instructed them to wait in the city for a special gift, the Holy Spirit. Today they too were excited and eager to celebrate Pentecost.

On the day of Pentecost, Jesus' followers were all together. They spent much time praying together. Perhaps they were praying when it happened.

For suddenly, it was no ordinary day, not even an ordinary Pentecost day.

A breeze came into the room where they were. The breeze got stronger and sounded like the rush of a mighty wind, filling their ears and the room with its sound. It was like being outdoors in a windstorm. With the wind came what looked like tongues of fire, little flames. The flames danced over the head of each person in the room, but no one was burned.

When the wind and the flames disappeared, the people in the room found they could speak languages they had not spoken before. They found they could understand languages they had not understood before. This was the gift of God's Holy Spirit. This was the gift Jesus had promised them.

All this noise had attracted a crowd looking in the door. "They must be drunk," someone said. "And how can these people speak so many languages?" asked another. "Why, I hear that person speaking my language," said someone else.

Peter heard the people outside. "Listen, everyone!" he shouted above the din. Everyone, the people outside the room and the followers of Jesus inside the room, stopped talking.

"We are not drunk. It is only nine o'clock in the morning. Remember what the prophet Joel said!

God declared,

'I will pour out my Spirit upon everyone.
Your daughters and sons will have words
from me.

Old and young alike will dream marvellous
dreams.'

Peter's words, the words from God, astonished everyone, the people outside the room and the people inside the room. Peter told them about Jesus and the promise of the Holy Spirit. On that special, unusual Pentecost, three thousand people joined the followers of Jesus. Alleluia!



After the Resurrection

I am Mary Magdalene

Everyone knows that I saw Jesus after he left the tomb. Jesus spoke to me that same day.

Everything happened so fast that it is hard to remember how it went. But I came back and told the disciples hiding in the darkened room that Jesus was alive. Not all of them believed me. But they soon found out that I was right. Seeing Jesus was both wonderful and frightening. And I was the first to see him, our risen Saviour.

I am Cleopas

Jesus' death was the saddest thing that ever happened to me. I couldn't stand to stay in Jerusalem with the others. So we started home to Emmaus. A stranger joined us and asked all kinds of questions. We told the stranger about Jesus and how we thought Jesus was the Messiah. When we got to our home, we invited the stranger to come in and eat with us. When the stranger picked up the bread to give thanks to God, we were shocked. It was Jesus. And then Jesus was gone. We hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the others what had happened. We had seen the risen Saviour. But they had seen Jesus too.

I am Nathanael

We didn't see Jesus only on that day after the Sabbath when Mary Magdalene found the empty tomb. Many days later, seven of us were fishing. We fished all night and didn't catch one fish. As the sun was coming up and we were returning to the shore, we saw a man standing on the beach. He called to us, "Have you no fish?" "No," we shouted back. The man called, "Cast your nets to the right side of the boat. Then you'll catch some." So we did cast our nets to the right side, and our nets were so full we couldn't drag them into the boat. Peter looked at the man again, and said, "It's Jesus!" When we reached the shore, Jesus said, "Come, have some breakfast." Jesus, our risen Saviour, fixed fish and bread for our breakfast.

I am Peter

I remember the last time we saw Jesus on this earth. He taught us many things about God. And he told us that we would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Then we were to tell everyone about God and Jesus. As Jesus was telling us this, a cloud came over him and Jesus was taken into heaven. We could only stare at an empty sky. Jesus is our risen Saviour!



PENTECOST WIND CATCHERS

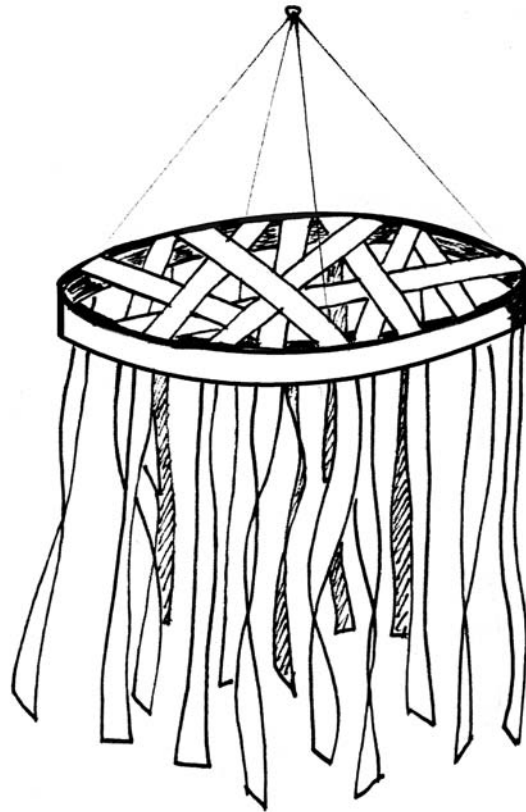
For display at the church

Supplies

- 20 cm/8 in (or larger) embroidery hoop
- bright red, dark orange, and dark red crepe paper streamers
- fishing line

Cut the crepe paper streamers into 2.5 m/8 ft strips.

Drape them over the inner ring of the embroidery hoop. Work with the hoop lying on a table. Then place the outer ring around the inner one. Tighten it. Attach fishing line to hang it.



For display at home

Supplies

- embroidery hoop
- red satin ribbon (various shades) of several widths
- fishing line

Cut the ribbons into 60 cm/24 in lengths. Follow the directions for the larger wind catcher.

For your own celebration

Supplies

- cardboard tubes
- red and orange markers
- red crepe paper
- clear tape

Draw flames on the cardboard tubes.

Tape strips of crepe paper to one end.

Shake the wind catcher to the music of a Pentecost song, or shake it when the Spirit enters in the Pentecost story.

