



God Sends the Holy Spirit

Birth of the Church

About the Story

On the day of Pentecost the church celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit. Our lesson includes two different passages about the Holy Spirit: the familiar Pentecost story of Acts 2:1-4 and another reading that continues the series in Paul's Letter to the Galatians. The Acts passage falls out of order in our Galatians sequence; we are mainly reading it according to our Christian tradition of hearing this story on Pentecost. You might want to focus on just one of these passages—either the traditional Acts story or the in-sequence Galatians passage. Looking at both stories, however, might help you to discuss different aspects of the Holy Spirit.

The Point:

We are all made children of God through the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit's power, and not through our own, we are all loved and welcomed by God. At Pentecost, we celebrate this gift of the Spirit to the church and to the world: the power to receive and share God's love across barriers of all forms—social, cultural, linguistic, etc. This power gives us new eyes to see one another not as persons we may not always understand but as fellow children of God.

Pentecost was an annual Jewish feast day long before it was a Christian festival (see What Is Pentecost?). The specific Pentecost mentioned in the Acts reading is said to have occurred in Jerusalem around 30-33 CE, 50 days after the Passover and Jesus' death and resurrection. So when we read that people were gathered for Pentecost, we realize they were gathered for an annual celebration that was an ongoing tradition for the Jewish people. This particular Pentecost was not a first-annual event. But it certainly became a one-of-a-kind Pentecost. This time, the Holy Spirit fills the disciples with the power to understand one another—despite the barriers of language.

What Is Pentecost?

As a Jewish festival, Pentecost was celebrated on the fiftieth day—which in Greek is *pentecostos*—after Passover. In Hebrew, the festival is called Shavuot. It was an agricultural festival during which farmers would bring in the first fruits of their wheat crop, offering part of the crop to God as a sign of gratitude. Both Passover and Pentecost also served as remembrances of the Exodus, when God delivered God's people out of slavery and into freedom, and the giving of the law on Mount Sinai.

The events mentioned in Paul's Letter to the Galatians occurred 15-25 years after the story in Acts. By this point the apostles and other disciples have gone on several missionary journeys to start churches, including the church in Galatia. In today's passage of Galatians, Paul connects that we become children of God because of Jesus, and it is the Holy Spirit that gives us this ability. Paul uses the metaphor of the "heir" to make his point. Growing up in the ancient world was a well-defined process—at least for a young man. Until age 18, a boy in the Greco-Roman world was strictly under his father's care. He could not own

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, we read Paul's first mention of the Holy Spirit in Galatians. This week, we continue that reading with the passage directly following as we continue talking about the Spirit in the context of Pentecost. This is the last week of the Narrative Lectionary for this year, but you can continue reading the Book of Acts or more of Paul's letters!

anything until he reached adulthood, so in some respects he did not have control of his own life and had no more freedom than a slave. Paul references this reality at the beginning of today's Galatians reading to illustrate the freedom we have in Christ.

Opening Prayer

Start your time together with this, or another, prayer:

Holy Spirit, you open us to a life with God and a life with one another. Come down among us as we celebrate the gift of your presence in the church and the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Into the Story

Have participants share their favorite or best-known sentence in another dialect or language, stories of misunderstanding because of language barriers, stories from travels in non-English-speaking countries or unfamiliar neighborhoods, or funny stories of studying other languages. These stories will help open your group's thinking about barriers in language and culture—and the gift of the Holy Spirit in breaking down those barriers.

Learning the Story

In Acts, we read about one particularly eventful Pentecost celebration when the Holy Spirit came down, and suddenly Jesus' disciples spoke all sorts of different languages, and the people could understand them. In Galatians, we read about how Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, makes us children of God and recipients of God's promises for life.

Read Acts 2:1-14 – The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

- ❓ This event happens when everyone was already gathered for the Pentecost celebration. How do you think you would react if this happened during a regularly scheduled church celebration—like Easter or Christmas?
- ❓ The Spirit is described as being both like “a violent wind” and “fire.” What do these two images tell you about the Spirit?
- ❓ The Spirit gives disciples the ability to speak in other languages. Why, of all things, do you think this is what the Spirit does? What is the significance of speaking in other languages?
- ❓ What are some different dialects or languages spoken in your neighborhood or town?
- ❓ How have you learned about “God's deeds of power” (verse 11) from someone of another culture?

Read Galatians 4:1-7 – Children of God

- ❓ Read the explanation of the “heir” metaphor in About the Story. How do you relate, or not, to this metaphor today?
- ❓ Paul speaks of the “elemental spirits of the world” (verse 3). Scholars differ on their understandings of this term. What do you think it might mean? What are some “elemental spirits” in our world today?
- ❓ Paul mentions all three persons of the Trinity in this passage (Father, Son, Spirit). What stands out to you in the way Paul says they relate to one another?
- ❓ This passage is often read on or near Christmas. Why do you think that would be? How does the passage also relate to Pentecost?
- ❓ The term “Abba” (verse 6) is an informal name for Father, much like “Daddy.” Why might this specific term be important for Paul’s argument here?
- ❓ How does this passage enhance—or confuse—your understanding of what it means to be a child of God?

Bible Connections

- ✚ The festival of Pentecost is explained in the Old Testament (Leviticus 23:15-21).
- ✚ “Tongues, as of fire” (Acts 2:3) are also mentioned in Isaiah, while fire accompanying the presence of the divine is mentioned in Exodus and also in Isaiah (Isaiah 5:24, Exodus 19:18, Isaiah 66:15-16).
- ✚ The Acts story is the fulfillment of the promise of baptism through the Holy Spirit, as mentioned by John the Baptist (Luke 3:16).

Supplies

- ✚ Poster board
- ✚ Red, orange, and yellow markers
- ✚ Internet-connected device(s)

Living the Story: Fellowship

Look up “spirit” in as many languages as possible. Assign two to three languages per person in the group. As a group, then, create a large word art drawing within outlined “SPIRIT” letters. For example, write the words for spirit in French, Spanish, Greek, etc., within the outlined letters. You may wish to use reds, oranges, and yellows to create a drawing that looks like fire.

Closing Prayer

Use the various words meaning “spirit” found in your language research. Open the prayer by taking turns saying “spirit” in various languages. Create a discord of sorts by speaking these “spirit” words over and over. Designate someone to open and close this Spirit prayer by saying, “Holy Spirit, you make us one.”

Bible Nuts & Bolts: The Holy Spirit

In Christian tradition, the Holy Spirit is considered a person of the Trinity along with the Father (Creator) and the Son (Jesus). Without question, the Spirit can be the most difficult of the three to understand. Our understanding of the Spirit stems from the biblical images for the Spirit—which include wind or breath (from the Hebrew word *ruach*, the Greek word *pneuma*, and the Latin word *spiritus*, which all mean both wind and breath), Comforter, Advocate, Flame, and Dove. Today’s story includes the images of wind and fire, implying the Spirit’s great power to move and change people and communities.

At Home

- ✝ Go fly a kite! Observe the wind, considering the image of the Holy Spirit as wind.
- ✝ Have coffee or lunch with a person from another Christian tradition, celebrating your unity in Christ through the Holy Spirit.
- ✝ Do a concordance or online search for biblical passages about the Spirit (in the New Testament and the Old Testament), paying attention to the different images used to illustrate the Spirit's power.

Daily Readings**Sunday – Read Acts 2:1-14; Galatians 4:1-7**

The Holy Spirit unifies people of cultures and languages other than their own. Dine out at a restaurant of an culture other than your own, or try out a new recipe at home.

Monday – Read Acts 2:5-12

The people understand the Spirit in other languages as though they are hearing their own native language. Look up the Lord's Prayer in another language, preferably one you have learned. Pray the Lord's Prayer in this other language for the remainder of your week, seeing eventually how you gain greater understanding when you return to the prayer in your mother tongue.

Tuesday – Read Galatians 5:16-26

Life in the Holy Spirit looks like the attributes listed in verse 22. Write these virtues on a sheet of paper and place them by your desk or mirror under the words, "Come, Holy Spirit."

Wednesday – Read Romans 15:14-21

Paul credits the Holy Spirit with his power to proclaim the gospel. Pray for "those who have never been told of him."

Thursday – Read Acts 19:1-7

Paul explains the Holy Spirit to some early disciples, connecting the Spirit to baptism. Look at pictures of your own baptism or, if photos are not available, give thanks to God for the Spirit's presence in your life.

Friday – Read John 20:19-23

Jesus connects the Holy Spirit with forgiveness. Offer a word of forgiveness today to someone who has wronged you, or apologize to someone you have wronged.

Saturday – Read John 1:1-18, 29-34

The Spirit has been present since the beginning of time. Read the creation stories in Genesis 1–2.