

Church History 101

Lesson 2

Jesus: ~~The Fulfillment~~Pentecost

Key Concepts: The Jewish holiday of Pentecost is considered the birthday of the church and is discussed in the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

The Story: The backstory for Pentecost that when Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection, he had instructed them to stay together and to stay in Jerusalem. This was necessary because after Jesus' death, his followers had returned to their original occupations. They believed that his crucifixion was the end of their ministry. Even after the resurrection though, it was only Jesus' command to remain together that kept them going. In addition he promised them that the Holy Spirit would come and show them what they were to do next. To be clear, the Spirit had been around from the beginning of God's work in the world. You can read about the Spirit in the Old Testament as well as in the Gospels. The disciples followed Jesus' instructions and remained in Jerusalem.

I suppose it might be nice to report that they were out and about telling people about Jesus' resurrection, but they were not. They were afraid. They were afraid because Jesus had been crucified as a rebel, as someone who had claimed to be King of the Jews. This meant that they too could be seen as rebels, liable to arrest and death themselves. In addition they were opposed by many of the Jewish leaders who did not want to upset the Romans if Rome suspected that the Jews were going to rebel.

After a period of time, the Jewish festival of Pentecost arrived. Pentecost was another name for *Shavuot*, or the Feast of Weeks. It was a commemoration of the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. It also marks the wheat harvest (Exodus 34:22). Jews would come from all over the Roman Empire to celebrate the holiday and bring their First Fruits to the Temple.

The book of Acts (2:1-4) describes what happens next. *"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."* The disciples all filled with the Spirit leave the upper room and begin telling people about Jesus. Even though the disciples are all from Galilee, meaning they only speak Aramaic, the people from around the Empire understood what was being said. In some ways this ability to understand is the first great miracle of the church.

Peter then makes an impassioned speech about Jesus. He does so by drawing upon numerous Old Testament passages with which the Jews would be familiar. The point that Peter makes is that Jesus is the long awaited messiah, whom God had promised to send. For many Jews this would not have mattered because not all Jews had been waiting for a messiah. On the other hand, at that time, there was a messianic fervor within parts of the Jewish population. Thus, in response to Peter's speech, a great many people asked the question, "What must I do to be saved" which meant, how can I be part of the new Kingdom that God and the messiah are bringing about? Peter's answer is that they need to be baptized in the name of Jesus. According to Acts more than 3,000 people did just that. This is why the church celebrates Pentecost as its birthday.

Questions

1. What about this story surprises you?
2. If you did not know this story, what did you think was the origin of the church?
3. Why do you think that it is important that the Holy Spirit be at the heart of the story?