

Helping children understand Pentecost

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FOCUS

Jesus told the disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to them so that they might spread the good news to the ends of the earth. We can help children understand how this promise from Jesus was fulfilled at Pentecost.

GETTING READY

At Pentecost, the apostles were empowered in a new way—changed from being hesitant and uncertain about what they were to do. They began to proclaim with confidence what God had done in Jesus Christ, and their vision expanded to include a ministry to the whole world.

Pentecost is named for the fiftieth day after Easter and is celebrated as the day the Holy Spirit descended upon the Church. Just before he ascended, Jesus told the apostles that they would be baptized in the Spirit. At this point, Jesus was lifted away in a cloud. Suddenly two men appeared before the apostles and asked them why they were looking towards heaven. The men told them that Jesus would come again in the same way he left them.

On the day of Pentecost, all the apostles were gathered in a house. A great wind from above rushed about the house and tongues appeared so that each man could speak a new language. The apostles began preaching to the people outside using the different languages. The crowd could not believe that the men really were able to communicate with them in their own languages. Peter told the crowd that it is the will of God. He began telling those assembled about the good news of Jesus Christ. The people believed and 3,000 were baptized that day.

At our own baptisms, we are assured of God's presence and aid in our lives. Being baptized "by water and the Spirit" empowers us to continue in the apostles' teaching. We, too, share with joy the good news of the risen Christ.

Help children link the celebration of Pentecost to baptism. The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost; we are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

O God, who on this day taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit: Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. Pentecost The Book of Common Prayer, p. 227

TEACHER TIP

Until now, the children may have thought of the celebration of Pentecost only as the church's birthday. This is most appropriate for young children. Primary-age children, however, can begin to be aware of the wider significance of the story. In this session, the vision expands as we think about the coming of the Holy Spirit and what this means to the people of God.

STORYTELLING

Share the story of Pentecost by reading from the Bible. Show the children where Acts 1:8-2:4 is found in the Bible. Read aloud Acts 1:8:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Finish with the words: The word of the Lord.

Response: Thanks be to God.

The story for this session includes both the Ascension story and the Pentecost event. Use the following outline and information from the Getting Ready section in constructing your story:

1. Review the events of Holy Week and Easter. Describe Easter Day as the time of Jesus' resurrection.
2. For forty days after Easter, Jesus appeared and spoke to the disciples, teaching them many things.
3. The time came for Jesus to ascend into heaven. This is called the Ascension.
4. Just before he was lifted up into a cloud, Jesus promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to help the disciples spread the good news. They waited.
5. On the tenth day after the Ascension, the disciples heard a sound like the rush of a mighty wind, and tongues of fire appeared to rest upon them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. When they spoke, those who heard them could understand in their own languages.
6. With the coming of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were empowered to spread the gospel. The work of sharing the good news of Christ continues to this day; it is a task shared by all baptized Christians.

CREATING (Time: 15-20 minutes)

Option 1. **Wind Pictures** Give each learner a sheet of construction paper, chalk, markers, and crayons. Invite the group to draw pictures of the wind. Possibilities might include great swirls of clouds, trees bending, flags flying, or water spray. See Talking It Over (below) for suggestions on conversation that might accompany this activity.

Option 2. **Wind Streamers** Obtain a large curtain ring (or a similar) for each child. Cut lengths of red, white, and gold ribbon (or thin strips of crepe paper or colored cellophane). The children can tape or tie the ribbons or strips around the rings to form Pentecost "wind streamers."

TALKING IT OVER (Time: 10-15 minutes)

Talk about the wind. When do we feel the wind? What does the wind sound like? When we are indoors, how do we know the wind is blowing outside? The Bible talks about the Holy Spirit as the rush of a mighty wind. The disciples could not see the Holy Spirit, but they could hear it and feel it.

Invite the children to share their thoughts. How would they describe the Holy Spirit? Have they heard people talk about the Holy Spirit? When have they heard the words said in church? (Describe how we baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.)

IMAGINING (Time: 10-20 minutes)

Share a story starter: "The disciples heard the sound of a strong wind blowing. Then they felt . . ."

Invite the children to use their imaginations and discuss how the story could continue. What could the disciples have felt?

Individual response. The children can write their own endings or draw pictures. Encourage the children to express their own thoughts. Avoid giving the impression that there is a "right" way to finish the story.