

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Today is the Day of Pentecost, the day the Church celebrates the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to send "*the Helper, the Holy Spirit,*" sent to "*teach [the disciples] all things and bring to [their] remembrance all that [He] said to [them].*" Thus, we read about it again today, about this theophany, this visible manifestation of God, not unlike some of the awesome Old Testament theophanies.

To be sure, our Old Testament lesson talked about the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel, but today I want to make connection to some other Old Testament events and people, for clouds descended upon the mountain like "*vapor of smoke.*" Lightning flashed; thunder rumbled. The LORD was there. He "*had descended on [the mountain] in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. ... Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder*" (Ex. 19:18-19). "*God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me'*" (Ex. 20:1-3). Thus God gave Moses His commandments to convey to the people: "*Thus you shall say to the people of Israel*" (Ex. 20:22).

It's not the only theophany that Moses would witness. Moses had come into the presence of the LORD before. "*And the angel of the LORD appeared to [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ... And [the LORD] said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'* And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (Ex. 3:2, 6). "*God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'* And he said, '*Say this to the people of Israel: "I AM has sent me to you"*'" (Ex. 3:14) ... another theophany.

How different when God's own Son came down to dwell among us in humility! The coming of Jesus in the city of David happened in relative obscurity. He was born of a lowly maid accompanied only by animals and shepherds. Yes, an angel heralded the good news of great joy; a host of angels broke into song; a star appeared in the sky; but there was no lightning, no thunder, no fire, no smoke.

Thirty-three years later, God would up the ante a bit. As Jesus hung on a cross, darkness would descend on the land for three hours. When Jesus breathed out the Holy Spirit, "*the curtain of the temple was torn in two ... the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs ... were opened*" (Matt. 27:51-52).

And three days later, there would be more — another earthquake, a stone rolled away, and not lightning, but an angel "*whose appearance was like lightning*" (Matt. 28:2-3). Still, this was also done in relative obscurity, but there

were words to share: “*you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead*” (Matt. 28:5-7). The women did just that: “*with fear and great joy, [they] ran to tell his disciples*” (Matt. 28:8).

Still not done, 40 days later, on a different mountaintop, with only His disciples with Him, Jesus openly ascended into heaven, back to the Father’s side, wrapped in a cloud. Yet, He departed with promises: “*you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now ... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, ... you will be my witnesses ...*” (Acts 1:5, 8).

And so we come to today, for ten days later came the Old Testament harvest festival called Pentecost — the fiftieth day from the Sunday after the Passover Sabbath, and to a theophany more like we expect and want from God — a thunderous “*sound like a mighty rushing wind,*” fire that did not consume the hair on the heads of the disciples, and words to speak to the people.

But in these words was another theophany, for there were people from many nations that surrounded Jerusalem, perhaps as many as 300,000 visitors gathered there for this major festival. You heard the list of peoples: “*Parthians ... Medes ... Elamites ... residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus ... Asia, Phrygia ... Pamphylia, Egypt ... the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, ... visitors from Rome ... Cretans and Arabians.*” They surely could all speak Greek, the common language of the Empire, but they all had their own native languages. And this was the miracle: unschooled disciples, who had not been taught the diverse languages, spoke to the people in their heart language.

And there was a difference in content. Unlike when Moses came down the mountain to tell the people what they must do — teaching the people the commandments, the disciples had a different message. They told of “*the mighty works of God*”; they told of His work of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. They told of a redemption that was paid by the blood of Jesus poured out unto death. They told not of a righteousness that comes by the law, for the Jews “*crucified and killed*” “*this Jesus*” (Acts 2:23), but of the forgiveness of sins that comes by being filled with the Holy Spirit and believing in this same Jesus whom God raised from the dead. They told of a salvation that comes by faith: “*everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*”

To be sure, this preaching came out of the mouths of the disciples, but it really was God’s own preaching, as Luther said: “you have often heard that there has never been a public sermon from heaven except twice,” and he identifies the two “sermons” we’ve been considering today, the giving of the law when Moses came down from the mountain, and the preaching of the gospel when the Holy Spirit

came upon the disciples on Pentecost (“How Christians Should Regard Moses,” *Luther’s Works*, 35:161). And these sermons are as distinct as law is from gospel, as works are from grace. Both of these sermons are God’s word, but the final word of God is Gospel.

Moses wrote especially for the Jews, but the promise of the Spirit was not just for the disciples then, but for the church, for “*all flesh*,” for “*your sons and your daughters*,” for “*your young men ... and your old men*” for “*male servants and female servants*.” On the church beginning then and continuing to today, does God “*pour out [His] Spirit*,” that the Gospel might go forth and be preached “*to the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:8), that “*repentance for the forgiveness of sins*” might be preached in Jesus’ “*name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem*” (Luke 24:47).

This is the way Luther distinguishes the two sermons: “Now the first sermon, and doctrine, is the law of God. The second is the gospel. These two sermons are not the same. Therefore we must have a good grasp of the matter in order to know how to differentiate between them. We must know what the law is, and what the gospel is. The law commands and requires us to do certain things. The law is thus directed solely to our behavior and consists in making requirements. For God speaks through the law, saying, ‘Do this, avoid that, this is what I expect of you.’ The gospel, however, does not preach what we are to do or to avoid. It sets up no requirements but reverses the approach of the law, does the very opposite, and says, ‘This is what God has done for you; he has let his Son be made flesh for you, has let him be put to death for your sake.’ So, then, there are two kinds of doctrine and two kinds of works, those of God and those of men. Just as we and God are separated from one another, so also these two doctrines are widely separated from one another. For the gospel teaches exclusively what has been given us by God, and not—as in the case of the law—what we are to do and give to God” (*LW*35:162).

That doesn’t make Moses or the law bad. Moses is still a good teacher. The law is still good, as Paul says: “*if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin*” (Rom. 7:7). And we have this law written on our hearts (Rom. 2:15). Yes, the law is especially good to show us what we cannot accomplish by our striving and to terrify us. But the disciples’ preaching on Pentecost shows us a better way, the way of the Spirit, the way of the Gospel, the way of life, the way of faith that makes no demands but only receives the grace of God — forgiveness, life, and salvation — and bestows the Spirit’s fruit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. “*Against such things there is no law*” (Gal. 5:23).

Therefore, I encourage you. *“Do not quench the Spirit”* (1 Thess. 5:19), but receive from Him by Word and Sacrament. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; live lives of repentance, bearing fruits of repentance; *“walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”* with our *“minds [set] on the things of the Spirit”* for *“the mind [set] on the Spirit is life and peace”* (Rom. 8:4-6).

Blessed Pentecost.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.