

In the name ✠ of Jesus.

We have come to the end of the festival half of the Church year. It begins with Advent and concludes with Pentecost. In the weeks to come we'll follow the long church half of the liturgical year, the long, mostly green season in the church.

Today is Pentecost, the final festival of this first half of the church year. Yes, much of this half — and it really is about half of the year going generally from the first of December to some time in May or early June — much of this half of the church year is marked by festivals ... and most of these are Christ festivals: Christmas and Epiphany, Transfiguration, Good Friday and Easter, Ascension. Today is a festival of the Holy Spirit, a celebration of His coming.

Characteristic of these festivals is promise and fulfillment. *“I will put enmity between you [O serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel”* (Gen. 3:15) — the promise of a Savior made to Adam. *“[I]n your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”* (Gen. 22:18, 26:4, 28:14); the promise was made to Abraham and repeated to Isaac and Jacob. *“I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever”* (2 Sam. 7:12-13) — a promise made to David. *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”* (Isa. 7:14) — a promise spoken through the prophet Isaiah. These promises were fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, the Son of the Virgin Mary. We celebrate that at Christmas.

“[N]ations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ... They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD” (Isa. 60: 3, 6) — a promise fulfilled in the Epiphany of our Lord. Jesus was transfigured on the mountain; *“his face shone like the sun”* (Matt. 17:2) — the fulfillment of a promise prefigured by the shining face of Moses after he had been in the Lord's presence.

“[H]e was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (Isa. 53:5) — one of many Old Testament promises concerning Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross which we celebrate on Good Friday. Christ's three day sleep in the earth and His resurrection back to life again is prefigured vividly by Jonah's three day sojourn in the

belly of the great fish. “*God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet*” (Ps. 47:5) — a promise fulfilled in Jesus’ ascension.

Today, Pentecost, is another promise made and a promise fulfilled. The promise of the sending of the Holy Spirit can be found in the Old Testament; Jesus called it “*the promise of my Father*” (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:4); we heard this promise read earlier. God said through the prophet Ezekiel: “*I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live*” And Peter quoted the promise through the prophet Joel: “*And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, ... even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.*”

This promise was echoed by Jesus Himself, who names Him the Paraclete, the one who comes along side of us as an aid. The ESV translates it “Helper” ... others translate it as “Comforter” (KJV), “Counselor” (RSV), “Advocate” (NIV), but “Helper” may be the best: “*when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth*” Again, “*if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.*”

As we heard today, this promise was fulfilled on Pentecost in a mighty display of power. There were the outward manifestations of the Spirit’s coming — the sound of a “*mighty rushing wind*” and the fire that divided into “*tongues*” and came to rest on the disciples. But more than that, the disciples were “*clothed with power from on high*” (Luke 24:49), as Jesus had promised, for the “*Holy Spirit*” came upon them (Acts 1:8) and filled them (Acts 2:4), and they went forth as Jesus’ witnesses (Acts 1:8).

Again, in a magnificent display, these disciples began to speak to the multitude gathered there in Jerusalem for the festival, gathered from “*every nation under heaven.*” For us, perhaps, that may be the greatest miracle. Quaking disciples became bold proclaimers of Jesus as Lord and Savior, willing to die for the sake of Jesus, as His witnesses, as μάρτυρες. And most of them would die that death, the death of a witness. They would become martyrs, a word that originally meant witness, but today is yoked inseparably with dying for the sake of one’s beliefs.

But death would not come to them on this day. On Pentecost, these Galileans were speaking in other languages “*as the Spirit gave them utterance*” — it was the Spirit’s doing. Learning another language is hard work, and it takes time. The disciples were preaching in the native languages of the multitudes there in Jerusalem from the four corners of the world. No

foolish explanation of them being drunk could explain it. Whose speaking ever got clearer when they were drunk? No! The Spirit had been poured out upon the disciples, and they bore witness to Jesus, to the crucified One, to the risen One. That's what the Spirit does — He bears witness to Jesus; and we, filled with the Holy Spirit from baptism on ... we do the same, that by this same Spirit we might come to believe the folly of the cross, the folly of resurrection, the folly of forgiveness of sins and everlasting life through faith in Jesus as Lord.

That's the work of the Spirit: to convict us of our plight as sinners and to move us from unbelief to faith ... to convince us that the blood of Jesus really can and does cleanse us from our sins (1 John 1:7), that by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection we truly are considered righteous in His sight (Rom. 3:24-26), that this faith comes to us not by our doing but as a gift from God by His Spirit working through the Word and water and bread and wine ... to convince us further that by His death, Jesus defeated death and destroyed him "*who has the power of death, that is, the devil*" (Heb. 2:14). "He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done" (LSB656:3).

That's why Pentecost is so important. What Jesus came to do He accomplished. By His conception and incarnation, by His passion and death, by His resurrection from the dead, by His ascension into heaven, our salvation was won. But the Father still had one more thing to do for our salvation; He had to deliver it to us. That's what Pastor-elect Saunders mentioned last Sunday, and I'll repeat it here today, quoting Luther: "We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world" (*Luther's Works*, 40:213-14).

We are Christmas people; this is true. We celebrate Jesus' coming in the flesh as our Savior. We are Good Friday people. With somber but glad hearts, we acknowledge what Jesus did for us poor sinners by cross and death. We are Easter people; we celebrate Jesus' victory over death and the grave by His rising from the dead. We are Ascension people; we rejoice in Jesus' gracious rule over us as He sits at the Father's right hand. But we are also Pentecost people, day in and day out, who come to receive the Spirit's

gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation by Word and Sacrament, and to receive the aid of the Helper in our ongoing life of faith.

And so, with this Festival of Pentecost, we close out this festival half of the church year, remembering all of the promises made, and the promises kept. And we begin the long “green” season of Pentecost, taking up the work of the Spirit. God grant us zeal in this labor.

I leave you with these words from St. Peter at the close of his second epistle: *“You therefore, beloved, ... take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen”* (2 Pet. 3:17-18).

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