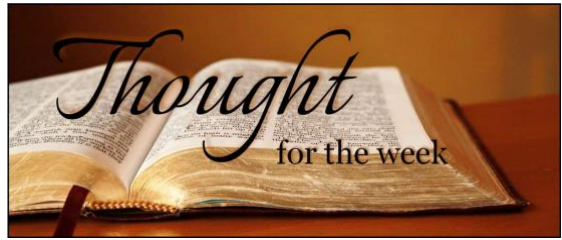


## "What is the day of Pentecost?"

**Answer:** *Pentecost is significant in both the Old and New Testaments.* "Pentecost" is actually the Greek name for a festival known in the Old Testament as the Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:15; Deuteronomy 16:9). The Greek word means "fifty" and refers to the fifty days that have elapsed since Passover. The Feast of Weeks celebrated the end of the grain harvest. Most interesting, however, is its use in Joel and Acts. Looking back to Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28–32) and forward to the promise of the Holy Spirit in Christ's last words on earth before His ascension into heaven (Acts 1:8), Pentecost signals the beginning of the church age.



### **The only biblical reference to the actual events of Pentecost is Acts 2:1–3.**

Pentecost is reminiscent of the Last Supper; in both instances the disciples are together in a house for what proves to be an important event. At the Last Supper the disciples witness the end of the Messiah's earthly ministry as He asks them to remember Him after His death until He returns. At Pentecost, the disciples witness the birth of the New Testament church in the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell all believers. Thus the scene of the disciples in a room at Pentecost links the commencement of the Holy Spirit's work in the church with the conclusion of Christ's earthly ministry in the upper room before the crucifixion.

**The description of fire and wind mentioned in the Pentecost account resounds throughout the Old and the New Testament.** The sound of the wind at Pentecost was "rushing" and "mighty." Scriptural references to the power of wind (always understood to be under God's control) abound. Exodus 10:13; Psalm 18:42 and Isaiah 11:15 in the Old Testament and Matthew 14:23–32 in the New Testament are only a few examples. More significant than wind as power is wind as



life in the Old Testament (Job 12:10) and as spirit in the New (John 3:8). Just as the first Adam received the breath of physical life (Genesis 2:7), so the second Adam, Jesus, brings the breath of spiritual life. The idea of spiritual life as generated by the Holy Spirit is certainly implicit in the sound of the wind at Pentecost.

**Fire is often associated in the Old Testament with the presence of God** (Exodus 3:2; 13:21–22; 24:17; Isaiah 10:17) and with His holiness (Psalm 97:3; Malachi 3:2). Likewise, in the New Testament, fire is associated with the presence of God (Hebrews 12:29) and the purification He can bring about in human life (Revelation 3:18). God's presence and holiness are implied in the Pentecostal tongues of fire. Indeed, fire is identified with Christ Himself (Revelation 1:14; 19:12); this association naturally underlies the Pentecost gift of the Holy Spirit, who would teach the disciples the things of Christ (John 16:14).

**Another aspect of the Day of Pentecost** is the miraculous speaking in foreign tongues which enabled people from various language groups to understand the

message of the apostles. In addition is the bold and incisive preaching of Peter to a Jewish audience. The effect of the sermon was powerful, as listeners were “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37) and instructed by Peter to “repent, and be baptized” (Acts 2:38).

*The narrative concludes with three thousand souls being added to the fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers, apostolic signs and wonders, and a community in which everyone’s needs were met.*

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

### **Acts 2:1-2**

**Pentecost is one of the great festivals of the Church. In modern popular culture it isn't nearly as well-known as Christmas or Easter, but for Christians it's profoundly significant. It marks the coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples and their transformation from frightened and confused people to men who would face martyrdom for what they believed.**



**1. Pentecost means '50'.** Pentecost is from the Greek word 'Pentekostos', which means 'fifty'. It's the 50th day after the Sabbath of Passover week and in Judaism is called the Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:16).

**2. It's traditionally celebrated as Whitsun.** The word Pentecost has become more common in the UK, but traditionally the Church celebrated it as Whitsun – 'White Sunday'. It's believed that this is because it was a day for baptisms and those being baptised would wear white. Another explanation is that it derives from the Anglo-Saxon word 'wit', which we still use for verbal cleverness, but which meant 'understanding' – Pentecost was when God poured out the wisdom of the Spirit.

**3. There's debate about speaking in tongues.** Luke tells the story in Acts 2:1-13. Some scholars think he was referring to an experience of 'glossalalia' or speaking in tongues, an ecstatic outpouring of praise in an unknown language. Others point out that what the disciples said seems to have been understood by their hearers.

**4. Pentecost is the fulfilment of two promises.** One promise is in the Old Testament – Joel 2:28, which says "I will pour out my Spirit on all people", and one in the New, where Jesus says he will send another Counsellor, the Spirit of truth (John 16: 5-15).

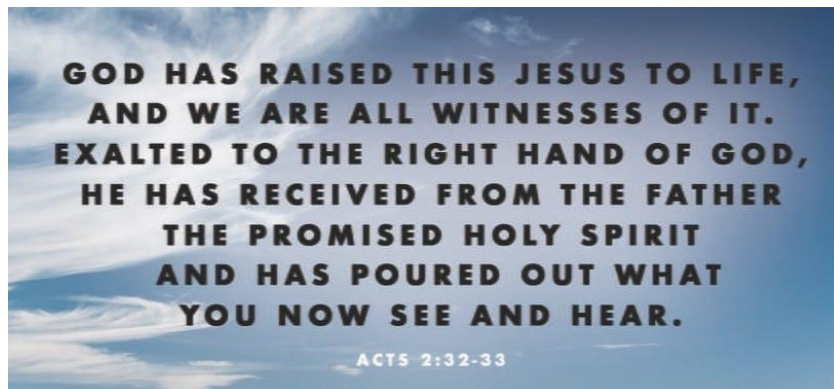
**5. Modern day Pentecostals emphasise the gifts of the Spirit.** Pentecostals are so called because of the emphasis they place on the gifts of the Spirit, particularly speaking in tongues. They stress the possibility of a direct personal experience of God, like the first disciples, which – just as it was then – is often manifested in dramatic ways. e.g. Modern Pentecostals trace their origins to the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 Los Angeles.

**6. There was wind...** Luke tells of three distinct experiences. A violent wind filled the house: breath or wind is a symbol of the Spirit of God. Ezekiel 37 tells the story of the prophet's vision of a valley of dry bones which come together: when the 'breath' of God enters them, they come to life and stand on their feet. The Pentecost wind represents the power of God to bring life to the 'dry bones' of faith.

**7. ...and tongues of fire...** Tongues of fire separate and come to rest on each of them. Jesus told his disciples, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). In John 8:12 he says, "I am the light of the world." The picture in Acts seems to be of a single flame that separates and symbolically rests on each of them; the disciples will do what Jesus did.

**8. ...and other languages.** The nature of the original experience has been queried, but in Luke's telling of it the point is that it breaks down barriers between people. The story links back to one of the earliest of the Old Testament stories, in Genesis 11, when the people begin to build the huge Tower of Babel. God confuses their language so they can no longer understand each other. At Pentecost, this Babel confusion is reversed.

**9. Pentecost is the birthday of the Church.** It marks the beginning of Christianity as a purposeful movement and a new community. When Peter preached immediately afterwards, around 3,000 people believed and were baptised.



When Christ said: I was hungry and you fed me, he didn't mean only the hunger for bread and for food; he also meant the hunger to be loved. Jesus himself experienced this loneliness. He came amongst his own and his own received him not, and it hurt him then and it has kept on hurting him. The same hunger, the same loneliness, the same having no one to be accepted by and to be loved and wanted by. Every human being in that case resembles Christ in his loneliness; and that is the hardest part, that's real hunger. Mother Teresa

