

THE *Episcopal* CHURCH



MAY 15, 2016

DAY OF PENTECOST

Today we mark Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit among the apostles and followers of Jesus. Celebrated 50 days after Easter (including the day of Easter itself), the name of the holiday comes from the Greek *Pentēkostē*, which literally means “the 50th day.”

The events of the day are foretold by Jesus in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, just before his Ascension. While his followers were with the risen Christ, he tells them, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5, NRSV). He goes on to say to them, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).



Photo: Trinity Episcopal Church, Fort Worth, Texas

The followers would not wait long for the promised Spirit. The author of Acts, traditionally believed to be Luke, recounts:

“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. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each” (Acts 2:1-6).

We celebrate Pentecost as the inauguration of the Church’s mission in the world. Empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are to go out into our neighborhoods and the wider world—to Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth—witnessing to the risen Christ.

The Day of Pentecost is identified by the Book of Common Prayer as one of the feast days “especially appropriate” for baptism (Book of Common Prayer, p. 312). Because of this, Pentecost is also known as “Whitsun” or “Whitsunday” (“White Sunday”), a term used to describe the white baptismal garments worn by those who were baptized at the Vigil of Pentecost and then worn to church on the Day of Pentecost.

Collect for Pentecost

Almighty God, on this day you opened the way of eternal life to every race and nation by the promised gift of your Holy Spirit: Shed abroad this gift throughout the world by the preaching of the Gospel, that it may reach to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen (Book of Common Prayer, p. 227).