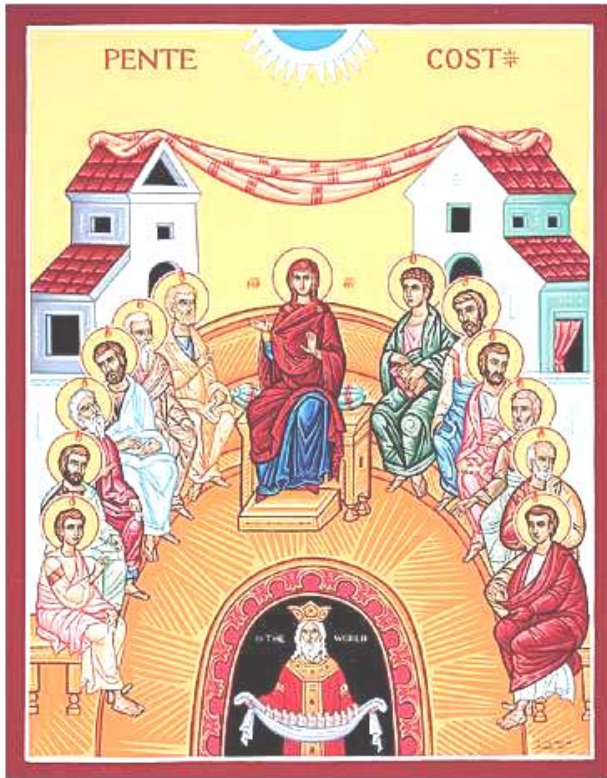


Pentecost – the birth of the Church



Overview

The Easter season lasts for 50 days – ending with Pentecost Sunday. The word Pentecost comes from the Greek word *pentekoste* – which means **fiftieth**. The colors for Easter are white - while for Pentecost they are red symbolizing the intense fire of the Holy Spirit. Ranking only second in the church to Easter, Pentecost has deep spiritual significance.

An original Jewish Feast

Like many of our Christian feasts, the timing for Pentecost comes from the Jewish tradition of a Feast of Weeks – which is a season of 7 weeks of thanksgiving beginning with the Passover Sabbath. See 2 Maccabees 12:32 and Tobias 2:1 and 2 for this account. This was a prolonged festival to celebrate the harvest and to give thanks to God from the Jewish community.

Biblical Source

Gathered together in the Upper Room in Jerusalem were the Apostles, the Virgin Mary and dozens of the disciples who followed Christ. Jesus had told

them to go there and to await the arrival of the Comforter – which is the Holy Spirit. The Acts of the Apostles 2:1-4 describes this monumental event – *“When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.”*

When those who were in the Upper Room departed they were so filled with the Holy Spirit and so excited that those outside thought that they were drunk as seen from Acts 2:12-13 *They were all astounded and bewildered, and said to one another, “What does this mean?” But others said, scoffing, “They have had too much new wine.”* The spectators outside were astounded because everyone – no matter what language they spoke – could understand Peter and the others. Theologians like to think that this event corrects the event of the Tower of Babel when languages were created and confused all of mankind.

Pentecost History

By the end of the 2nd century, the early Christians were observing a 50-day period similar to the Jewish festival – rejoicing after the annual Pascha or Passover. During these weeks the fasting, kneeling and abstinence were forbidden because of the joyful experience of the Resurrection.

By the 4th century, the feast of the Ascension was celebrated 40 days after Easter. The 9-days between Ascension and Pentecost are the preparation for that outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is popularly called the first Novena.

The Church is born

Alleluia – the Church was born on that special day almost 2000 years ago – because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost closes out the season of Easter and celebrates the experience of God that pours out the Holy Spirit upon that first Christian community.