


# Starting with the Spirit

## Acts 2.1-21

At Pentecost, Jesus' disciples experience being filled dramatically with God's Holy Spirit, the culmination of many centuries of waiting for the fulfilment of God's promise, made known through Old Testament prophets.

**This week's resources explore:** experiencing God; how the Spirit inspires confidence.

 Look out for ways to connect faith with everyday life.

## Bible notes

### New Testament Acts 2.1-21

Before leaving his disciples, Jesus had encouraged them to 'wait' in Jerusalem (Acts 1.4), but this was no empty space. We can imagine them meditating on what they remembered of Jesus, in the light of their Scriptures (Luke 24.44-49). The inevitable uncertainty of those days was resolved by what they experienced at Pentecost.

Originally a harvest festival, Pentecost came to celebrate God's covenant with Israel and the giving of the Law. There are echoes of this in Luke's references to 'wind' and 'fire' (cf. Exodus 19.16-20). The contemporary Jewish writer Philo (c.25BC-AD50) believed that the children of Israel heard God speaking intelligibly in the fire at Sinai. But Luke sees these traditions with fresh eyes. His language suggests that the disciples had a shared visionary experience, for which their prayer since Jesus' departure had been preparing them (Acts 1.14). There are enough signatures of God in this scene to indicate a heavenly rather than earthly source for what Luke pictures.

Outside on the street, Jewish pilgrims hear and understand what the disciples are saying (so this is not the tongues of 1 Corinthians 12-14). What does this mean (v.12)? Cynics in the crowd see only drunkenness. Others are less sure what to make of it. Luke's opening (literally, 'When the day of Pentecost had been fulfilled') suggests that this is the fulfilment of John the Baptist's words and Jesus' promise to the disciples (Luke 3.16; Acts 1.5,8). Peter's speech goes back further, to the prophet Joel. Eight hundred years previously, Joel had announced an outpouring of God's Spirit to restore Israel's fortunes

(Joel 2.28ff.). Luke alters Joel's words slightly: 'afterwards' in Joel 2.28 becomes 'in the last days' (v.17). Israel's hopes for a bright, new future have arrived on a Jerusalem street at Pentecost, just weeks after the dark days of Passover. And, most surprising of all, Peter's speech goes on to connect the two.

The accounts of the coming of the Spirit in John 20 and Acts 2 are sufficiently different to ward off attempts to harmonise them. But what they have in common – the Spirit as the gift of the crucified and exalted Jesus – is surely enough to inspire confidence that they speak of the same Spirit as the fulfilment of hope for a new creation.

### New Testament Romans 8.14-17

Just as Paul makes the closest possible association between 'God our Father' and the 'Lord Jesus Christ' at the start of this letter (and elsewhere), so he links prayer to God as 'Abba, Father' with the leading of the Spirit. This is evidence of solidarity with Christ in his sufferings, and a sharing in the inheritance that will culminate in the redemption of all creation, under the rule of Christ (Romans 8.18-25; Philippians 2.9-11). Paul's prayer has what we might now call a 'trinitarian' shape, because he cannot imagine praying outside the nexus of Father, Son and Spirit. Spirit-led prayer is evidence of the world it hopes for.

### Gospel John 14.8-17,(25-27)

Philip last appeared in the Gospel in 12.20-26, when he acted as a spokesperson for some Greek-speaking Jews who 'want to see Jesus'. Now it is Philip who wants to see: 'Show us the Father' is his response to Jesus' enigmatic words, 'No one comes to the Father except through me' (14.6).

Jesus speaks of seeing the Father in him, echoing earlier statements in the Gospel (5.18; 10.30). This seeing is less about eyesight than insight, the very stuff of relationship. Philip is called to trust that what he hears and sees in Jesus is nothing less than the expression of the Father who dwells in him. As 'another Advocate', 'with you and...in you' (v.17), the Spirit speaks and acts with God's authority through the community whose faith is expressed in prayer and love, and in works even greater than those of Jesus, in number if not by nature. This suggests that to see the common life of Jesus' friends, animated as it is by the breath of resurrection (20.22), is to see the Father-Son relationship extended into ordinary human life. Their vocation is not simply to follow, but (however imperfectly) to reveal.

### The links between the lectionary readings

The coming of the Holy Spirit fulfils God's ancient promise to renew all creation. In Romans 8 and John 14, this starts with the Spirit drawing us into Jesus' relationship with God as Father. In Acts 2 and John 14, the Spirit renews relationships among people and with the wider world.

**WEB** Notes on Psalm 104.24-34,35b and ideas for using it together.

### See [www.rootsontheweb.com](http://www.rootsontheweb.com)

**With very young children:** resources on the reading to use with under 5s.

**Children's Sheet and Colouring Sheet** (Welsh version available).

**Drama:** *A reading for Pentecost*

**Bible study:** a selection of this week's resources to print out.

## Pentecost

### Lectionary Bible readings

RCL Pentecost Year C

#### Acts 2.1-21

Psalm 104.24-34,35b

Romans 8.14-17

John 14.8-17,(25-27)

#### Thy Kingdom Come

30 May – 9 June

# Prayers

**WEB** Welsh translations.

## Call to worship

Gathered disciples, tired and wary,  
were looking ahead to a future so scary.  
Jesus had left them, what to do now?  
Then along came the Spirit and...WOW! WOW! WOW!  
Everything changed on that Pentecost day.  
Come, rejoice, and celebrate today!

## A gathering prayer

God of energy and purpose,  
as lava erupts from a volcano,  
so may your Spirit erupt today;  
as water thunders down a waterfall,  
so may your Spirit thunder today;  
as a downpour refreshes a tired garden,  
so may your Spirit refresh us today –  
that, gathered together with confidence,  
we may celebrate this special day.  
**Amen.**

## A prayer of approach

God of all,  
when we are tired, send your spirit of energy;  
when we are jaded, send your spirit of refreshment;  
when we are hesitant, send your spirit of confidence;  
when we are complacent, send your spirit of challenge;  
when we are afraid, send your spirit of courage;  
when we are divided, send your spirit of unity;  
when we are inward-looking, send your spirit of mission –  
that your love and grace may spill out from us into your world.  
In Jesus' name.  
**Amen.**

## A prayer of confession

Forgive us, God of the universe,  
when as individuals, as a church or as a nation,  
we limit your love and hinder the healing work of your Spirit.  
May we not be restrained or restricted in our faith,  
but be agents of reconciliation,  
praying that your saving grace goes out  
into every corner of the world,  
to your glory.  
**Amen.**

## A prayer of praise

We praise you, God of all language and all culture,  
that in the coming of your Holy Spirit,  
Jesus' promise to be with us always is fulfilled,  
and we are equipped and enabled to serve you  
in the strength and with the energy  
you delight to bless us with.  
May every day be as Pentecost –  
an opportunity to hear you speaking to our hearts,  
a commissioning to share your gospel,  
and a chance to celebrate your presence among us.  
**Amen.**

## Prayers of intercession

*Response after each phrase: Holy Spirit, affirm them today.*

We pray, Holy Spirit, for all who lack confidence.  
For parents struggling to meet the needs of their families...  
**Holy Spirit, affirm them today.**  
For children struggling with their work at school...  
For teachers struggling to meet the demands of the day...  
For young people who feel misunderstood...  
For young adults struggling to find their place in the world...  
For carers trying to support and comfort those who are vulnerable...  
For the frail, facing diminishing strength and loss of identity...  
For all people struggling to be who they truly are...  
**Holy Spirit affirm them – and us – today. Amen.**

## An active way into prayer

Make a collage of images of the Holy Spirit. Think of as many different images as you can. Make it bright and colourful, full of life. Pray for that energy and life to come into the world and into the lives of all those you know who are struggling:  
Holy Spirit, colour our world.  
Holy Spirit, make us sing.  
Holy Spirit, teach us your dance.  
Holy Spirit! **Amen.**

## A prayer for all ages together

Dear God,  
thank you for your superhero Holy Spirit, who gives us:  
the power to be there for others when they are struggling;  
the power to try again when things go wrong;  
the power to be a friend to someone who is lonely;  
the power to speak a kind word to someone who is upset;  
the power to share with those in need;  
the power to be AWESOME like the first disciples;  
the power to pray in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

## A sending out prayer

May the Holy Spirit of God  
breathe hope into your hearts,  
transform your fears,  
and bless you with the gifts of courage, compassion and understanding,  
that you may share your faith with renewed confidence and new commitment.  
In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

## A personal prayer

Gracious God, equip me with  
**Power,**  
**Energy,**  
**Newness,**  
**Trust,**  
**Eagerness,**  
**Confidence,**  
**Opportunity,**  
**Strength, and**  
**Truth –**  
that I may serve you in your world today. Amen.

# Gather

## All-age introduction

A way to begin worship when all ages are present.

### Taste the difference!

You will need: milkshake syrup, milk, a clear glass, a whisk, some paper straws. Ask: Who inspires you or gives you confidence? Do we surround ourselves with positive influences? (It may be helpful to have some images of influential people, past and present, to use as a prompt.) Share examples of how the experiences of others, and the faith that they put in us, builds our confidence. How can we continue to be inspired in our daily lives particularly when we are on our own? The Holy Spirit can be a part of our lives if we allow him to 'stir us up'. Pour some milkshake syrup into the glass – say that this represents the Holy Spirit. Slowly add some milk – this represents our lives. But there will be no taste to the milkshake until it is whisked up together (*whisk it up*). Once the Holy Spirit is a permanent presence in our lives, we can be confident in his closeness. Give out straws and say: Let's taste and see that the milkshake is good!

## With very young children

**WEB** Resources on the reading to use with under 5s.

# Open the Word

### To help the listener

The reader could use these words to provide context.

This week's readings appeal strongly to our imagination. As you hear the Acts reading, picture the power of God as wind and fire. In Romans and John, imagine the tenderness of God in the Father–Son relationship of Jesus that we now share.

## Present the New Testament


This passage from Acts is inherently dramatic and lends itself to being presented as a drama. You will need a crowd of six or more people, and 'Peter'. Three (or more) members of the crowd represent the disciples. They should speak loudly and all at the same time with phrases such as 'Jesus is alive', 'Praise the Lord', 'He is risen', 'Jesus is Lord'. After a while, other voices in the crowd say, 'Aren't all these people Galileans?' and 'How is it that each of us hears them in our native language?' Then, 'Parthians, Medes and Elamites', 'Some are residents of Mesopotamia', 'Judea', 'Cappadocia', 'Pontus', 'Asia', 'Phrygia and Pamphylia', 'Egypt', 'Libya near Cyrene'. There is scope here to involve anywhere between two and fourteen people! After a brief pause, someone calls out, 'Nah – they've had too much wine!' Peter moves to a prominent place (e.g. a step, or lectern or pulpit) to deliver his speech (2.14b-21).


## Present the Gospel


Whether the shorter or longer option is used, these verses are almost entirely a speech by Jesus. The exception is Philip's opening request to Jesus. Gather a group of people around the lectern or place from where the reading is to be delivered. One person – Philip – begins by asking, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied' (v.8). The group – and hopefully everyone else present – listens carefully to Jesus' reply.


# Explore & respond

## Sermon ideas

**WEB** *PostScript*: Linking this week's reading to the news .

 What makes things start? In an oven? In a car? A rocket? A kettle? In all of these things, there is considerable power at work, but the action required to start them involves (usually) just one small step. Pentecost was the start of the Church, and we see how something seemingly so small – an event affecting a few dozen people in one city on one particular day 2,000 years ago – has led to the Church spreading across the globe. How might the Holy Spirit be at work in our generation? What small Spirit-filled steps might we be called to take right now?

 The disciples had been told to wait for the Holy Spirit. They had received teaching on what the Holy Spirit would do. When the Spirit came, they recognised it as the work of God and joined in. Some of the crowd asked questions – they wondered what was happening; some even dismissed it as the ravings of a bunch of drunkards. Peter and the disciples knew this was the work of the Spirit because they were well prepared. How should we prepare? Do we recognise the work of God – even if it might look to some as if it is something else entirely? Are we prepared to stand up and give an account of ourselves and the gospel?

 Do you know anyone who has sought 'Dutch courage'? People sometimes use alcohol to help them lose their inhibitions and gain confidence. The disciples certainly were different after being filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit made them bolder, gave them confidence and purpose. In later chapters of Acts, we see how they continued God's work in the face of opposition and persecution. Paul, writing to the Christians in Ephesus, encourages people to 'not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit' (Ephesians 5.18). What might it look like if we were filled with the Holy Spirit in a similar way today?

● In speaking to the crowd, Peter draws on Scripture that would be familiar to those listening. What might we draw upon today – in a culture where most know nothing of Hebrew Scripture – that would ring bells and make sense for people when we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit? Joel's prophetic message is one of restoration not just of Israel but of the whole of creation. How can we speak of the Spirit as the gift of the crucified and exalted Jesus, and the fulfilment of hope for a new creation, in today's world?

## All-age conversation


A way for leaders to help all ages explore the reading.

What does a loaf of bread start out as? Do you know the key ingredient that makes the bread rise? What does bread look like if none of this ingredient (i.e. yeast) has been added?

We can think of the Holy Spirit as being God's yeast. The Early Church broke out – it rose up – at Pentecost in response to this key ingredient. But it wasn't easy. People laughed at the disciples. Others tried to make trouble for them. However, this personal experience of being touched by God's Spirit inspired them. It made them bolder and gave them confidence to talk about Jesus, and to overcome the difficulties that they faced. Without the Spirit – like the loaf without yeast – things would have continued to be very flat!

Two thousand years later, what can we do to make sure that we, the Church, do not turn out flat? How can we let the Holy Spirit touch and fill our lives? What things might the Spirit give us confidence and boldness to do? Are there some practical steps we might take right now?

## Active worship

Ideas to engage different ages, learning preferences and spiritual styles. Key: **W**ord, **E**motion, **S**ymbol, **A**ction. Find out more  in *Worship and learning support*.


### A simple worship activity for all ages

Set up an indoor water feature and switch it on. Play some background music (preferable on a 'Spirit' theme – e.g. 'Spirit Fall' by Phil Wickham, or the Taizé chant 'Veni, Sancte Spiritus'). Invite people to sit in a comfortable receptive posture, with their hands in their laps, palms facing up – then pray, simply, 'Come, Holy Spirit'. Be still and quiet for several minutes, perhaps repeating the phrase every now and then. You could end by singing together a more active song/hymn invoking the Holy Spirit. **E S**

## Picture pointers




### Knowing Jesus

Invite people to reflect for a few moments on how they picture or imagine Jesus. What does he look like for them? Display or project different images of Jesus from around the world  – perhaps on a loop. Ask people to reflect on these images, and their own, praying that they might experience his presence in a new way on this day of Pentecost. You could play some quiet background music or do this activity in silence. **E S**

### Witness statements

What is a witness required to do? Invite people, in pairs, to discuss this question as if they were preparing to give a witness statement in a court case that was to assess if Jesus was real and alive. Remind them that they can only speak of things they know to be true for themselves – a court witness cannot report hearsay, or share someone else's experience! Give enough time to this activity so that people have the opportunity to think it through in some depth. **W A**

### Spirit streamers

Make streamers to represent the Holy Spirit as fire, that can be taken home and placed on the handlebars of bikes, car dashboards, tied to straps on bags, and so on. You will need red, yellow and orange ribbon and rainbow string  cut into approx. 20cm lengths. Give each person at least one ribbon of each colour and a piece of string. Bind the ribbons tightly together at one end using the string, leaving enough string to make a tie or a loop to fasten the streamer onto something suitable – it could be a wrist! **E**

Questions for reflection

- ▶ What do you think this person is experiencing?
- ▶ When have you 'abandoned' yourself totally to God?
- ▶ What were/are the practical consequences of doing so?

## Hymns & songs

Songs in italics are suitable for all ages.

\*Music links on .

*Awaken us to see the reality*

*Because of your love*

*Be still, for the presence of the Lord*

*Come set your rule and reign*

*Fall, Holy Spirit, fall*

*Filled with the Spirit's power, with one accord*

*From wherever spring arrives to heal the ground*

*God is good all the time*

*God's Spirit came at Pentecost*

*Gracious Spirit, Holy Ghost*

*Here I am, send me\**

*Holy Spirit, come with your fire*

*In our hearts, Lord, in this nation*

*I will never be the same, now my eyes are open wide*

*Lord, let your glory fall*

*Love divine, all loves excelling*


*She sits like a bird, brooding on the waters*

*Spirit of God, unseen as the wind*

*Through all the changing scenes of life*


*Where would I be if you had not been by my side?*

### Songs from Out of the Ark for Churches

 Thank you God

## Send out

### Live your faith

Encourage everyone to put their faith into action. Use the suggestion below or distribute the **Live your faith** sheet .

Prepare a simple one-sentence response to give when people ask you, 'What did you do at the weekend?' – e.g. 'celebrated the birth of the Church', 'received peace', 'prayed', or simply, 'I was in church'. Think each day what it means to be a witness for Jesus. **W E S A**