

Pentecost

Pentecost is the third most significant event in our Christian liturgical calendar...just behind Easter and Christmas...but its origins are Jewish. In the Old Testament we hear of the Jewish celebration called the Feast of Weeks, sometimes called the Feast of Harvest. (Exodus 23:16, Numbers 28:26-31, and Deuteronomy 16:9-12).



Israel had an extended growing season with two harvests. The early harvest came somewhere between mid-May and early-June. The final harvest came in the Fall. The Feast of Weeks was a celebration of the very beginning of the wheat harvest in the Spring. The date of the Feast of Weeks was determined by counting to the 50th day following Passover. Since 50 days equals 7 weeks, (49 plus 1) The Festival of Weeks was celebrated a "week of weeks" after Passover.

When Christians incorporated this harvest celebration into their observed feast days, they placed it exactly 50 days after Easter and changed its name to Pentecost from the Greek word "pentekoste" meaning 50th. Christians observe Pentecost as a special day, not to celebrate the wheat harvest but to remember when the early followers of Jesus

were empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2)

The account in Acts 2 reports that after Jesus ascended to heaven, Jesus' followers were gathered together for the Feast of Weeks and all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in languages that would be understood by all the people from other nations on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Spring harvest festival. This strange occurrence drew a massive crowd and Peter stood up to speak about repentance and the good news of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. By the end of this day three thousand people believed in Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah and the church was born.



The coming of God's Spirit had been predicted by the prophets, including Joel (Joel 2:28-29) and promised by Jesus. (John 14:26). Jesus had told his disciples that he would be crucified but that he would send the comforter, the Holy Spirit to empower them after his death. The first evidence of the fulfillment of Joel's prediction and Jesus' promise was when Peter stood up in the middle of thousands during the Jewish Feast of Weeks and said, "Let me tell you about the Messiah...let me tell you who he is...he is Jesus of Nazareth, the one who died on a cross but God raised from the dead." (paraphrased)

Today we celebrate Pentecost as the day when a small sect of believers who followed a Jewish rabbi from Nazareth welcomed thousands into the faith and the church was born. We come to worship on this special Sunday wearing red to remember that the Holy Spirit appeared to the disciples as tongues of fire and we celebrate with balloons to remember that Jesus taught that the Spirit of God is like the breath of God that brings life.