The Evangel: Pentecost Edition

ST STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, OAK RIDGE, TN

Welcome to the latest edition of The Evangel, which will now be published seasonally to coincide with Advent/Christmas, Epiphany, Lent/Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, and ordinary time (the time after Pentecost until Advent). In each seasonal edition, we will offer some history, art, poetry, and reflection to accompany you through the season.

From Father Bailey:

Welcome to the rebranded edition of The Evangel! The Evangel is our longstanding newsletter for St. Stephen's, although in recent years, the information pieces of it have been moved over to the E-News. I am so grateful to the many hands who have worked on the Evangel over the years, especially to the most recent, Judith Delaney.

I am delighted that the Evangel is now in the hands of Jamey Kennedy. Jamey, among her many ministries through the church, has served as EfM mentor for many years and is also a licensed spiritual director. She brings a wealth of spiritual insight, a deep faithfulness in God, and a humility to know there is always more to learn to her work of the Evangel.

With Jamey's leadership, the Evangel will now switch to primarily being a "teaching" tool – driven by content rather than information or events. While we will include a calendar of upcoming events and eventually list birthdays and anniversaries, the focus of the Evangel will be an enrichment tool to help deepen your faith AND provide you with opportunity to engage your clergy or other parishioners in the questions of faith that Jamey will pose.

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This edition focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit as we enter the long Pentecost season. Like a magazine (remember those?), feel free to read as much or as little of the content you like. But I hope each edition will provide you something that will make you think a bit more, desire to pray a little more, and engage more deeply with this community of faith a little more.

As we move forward, we will solicit articles from the congregation that can contribute to the topic each edition. Our vision is that the Evangel is not just the "experts" offering perspective, but it becomes a resource for our congregation to both receive and offer their perspectives as we mutually engage in the joys and mysteries of this wonderful faith we share in Christ.

Fr. Bailey

The History of Pentecost

Origins: In ancient times, there were two harvests in Palestine. The early harvest was in May/June, and the later harvest was in the Fall. Pentecost celebrated the start of the early wheat harvest and was, therefore, sometime in May/June.

There were several Jewish festivals, celebrations, or observances that took place before Pentecost, one of which was the Feast of Firstfruits, which celebrated the beginning of the barley harvest. According to the Old Testament, the 50th day after the day that Firstfruits was celebrated is the day of Pentecost.

Pentecost, El Greco

Because Pentecost was always 50 days after Firstfruits, and because 50 days equals 7 weeks, it was said to come a "week of weeks" later. Therefore, it was either called the Feast of Harvest or the Feast of Weeks. Later, Pentecost also became know as Whitsunday because in English-speaking countries, the catechumens (a person preparing for baptism) who were baptized on Pentecost wore white robes symbolizing purity and new life in Christ. Early Church practices included baptizing those who had not been baptized at Easter on the eve of Pentecost, in a ceremony similar to the Easter Vigil. After baptism, the newly baptized would wear white albs, symbolizing purity and new life in Christ. The term comes from old English meaning White Sunday.

Pentecost and Christianity: What began as a Jewish feast became a defining moment for the Christian Church, as God empowered His people to proclaim the gospel with boldness and gather believers from many nations into one body in Christ.

Acts 2: 1-21 says the following: ***1*** *When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.* ***2*** *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.* ***3*** *Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.* ***4*** *All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.*

5 *Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem.* ***6*** *And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.* ***7*** *Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?* ***8*** *And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?* ***9*** *Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,* ***10*** *Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,* ***11*** *Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."* ***12*** *All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"* ***13*** *But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."*

Peter Addresses the Crowd
14 *But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.* 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.* 18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.* 19 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. 20 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.* 21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'**

After Christ ascended, Pentecost is the moment when his promise not to leave the disciples alone is fulfilled. He had promised during his earthly ministry that he would send the comforter, the Holy Spirit. Peter is chosen to be the one who stands up in front of thousands of people to proclaim the gospel. During this Jewish celebration, Peter tells them about the Messiah, who is the eternal protection for all of humanity. Thus, Pentecost becomes the day when many people say the church was born.

Historical Facts about Pentecost: (1) Pentecost was a pilgrim festival. That meant that according to Jewish Law, all the adult Jewish men went to Jerusalem to be in attendance during this celebration. (2) Pentecost was a holiday. No servile work was to be done. Schools were out. The shops were closed. It was a day to celebrate. (3) There were certain celebrations and sacrifices and offerings that were prescribed in the Law for the day of Pentecost. On Pentecost, the High Priest offered two loaves of freshly baked wheat bread to the Lord.[1]

And the Spirit Danced

And the Spirit Danced

You were there when the light first shone -
You were there when the wind began to blow -
And you hovered above the dark earth
Then you swept across the face of the empty waters
You were there!
You were there in Nazareth
When a young girl, young girl said "Yes"
You were there in a quiet stable
To hear the first cry of Emmanuel
You were there!
You were there on a Sunday morning
When you rushed in without warning
Tongues of fire in a mighty windstorm
The first shout of the church newborn
You were there!
And the Spirit danced leaping up in wild fire
Before our eyes – God's great surprise!
And the Spirit danced in living fire
The world has never been the same since the Spirit
Danced!

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[1] Adapted from material on www.Christianity.com website.

Reflection Questions on Pentecost:

1. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit's presence in your life?
2. How did you know that it was the Holy Spirit speaking to you?
3. Why do you think God chose such a dramatic display to mark the coming of the Holy Spirit?
4. How can the church embody the Holy Spirit's power in today's divided world?
5. What does the unity among the believers on Pentecost have to teach us about the church today
6. What practical steps can we take to be more attentive to the Spirit's leading as a community?

If you would be willing to share your reflections (with or without attribution), please email them to jkennedy@ststephensor.org and we will include them in future editions. Note that your reflections can be in any form you like: a poem, a written reflection, a piece of artwork, etc.

What Else Would You Like to Know/Hear About?

Our next Evangel will be during Ordinary Time. Do you have theological questions or issues that you would like us to consider as we prepare for the next issues? Would you like to contribute artwork, poetry, historical content to future editions? We'd love to have your offerings. Send your questions, thoughts, or comments to jkennedy@ststephensor.org.