

Acts 2:1-21
“What Does This Mean?”
The Day of Pentecost

May 31, 2020
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

To get everyone caught up: Christ was crucified and died for our sins. Christ is risen for our justification, so our faith is not in vain! Christ is ascended and He promises to come again!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[The Pentecost Festival]

“And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’” (Acts 2:12)

So, who were these amazed and perplexed people in our text? And, why were they in Jerusalem?

Well, perhaps you remember that “Pentecost” means “fiftieth” or “fiftieth day.” But, if you know that, you are still left with the question: the fiftieth day after what?

The reference is actually a major Jewish festival. This festival was observed seven weeks after the Passover, plus one day. This festival was known as “Pentecost.”

Now, Christians have always used Easter as the starting point for figuring out the day of this festival. Therefore, it is always on a Sunday. That is, every Pentecost day following this particular Pentecost day.

Before the people were amazed and perplexed by the disciples and asked, “*What does this mean?*” They arrived every year to Jerusalem to celebrate the Pentecost festival.

On Pentecost Eve, the Jewish priests began to gather at the inner court of the Temple. Days before, Jewish people from around the ancient Near East would have begun filling the city, because they could not travel far on the previous day, which was the Sabbath.

You know what? In a small way, we are like the visiting Jews coming to the Pentecost festival. Except, we are Lutherans, and we, are finally home!

Now, the rest of us may not be here today, but they are on their way! They are traveling here, but for some, it may take some more time.

On that first Pentecost morning, farmers from around Jerusalem would gather baskets with several types of food. Then a flute player would lead the farmers up Mount Zion as they sang the Songs of Ascents – Psalms 120 through 136. One of the Psalms sung was Psalm 121:

*I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.*

This liturgy of procession and psalms was know as the Great Hallel. The final Song of Ascents was Psalm 136, which served as a climax of praise to God, “**who alone does great wonders**” (Psalm 136:4) through creating the earth, delivering the people out of Egypt, and conquering the Promised Land.

As the procession neared the city, officials went out to join the procession up to the Temple Mount. The king would place a basket of food upon his shoulder and lead the people into the Temple courts as the Levites sang Psalm 30, which was written for the Temple dedication.

In the Temple courts, the farmers would present their baskets before the priests. Each farmer would step forward and say the liturgy of recitation: ***“I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our fathers to give us”*** (Deuteronomy 26:3).

Then, he would remove the basket from his shoulder and tip it toward the priest. The priest, then, took hold of the basket, and the two of them swayed it back and forth as a “wave” offering. Then the farmer would recite:

“A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me”
(Deuteronomy 26:5-10).

The farmer would leave the basket, bow before the Lord, and make way for the next farmer.

The festival of Pentecost was huge! Jerusalem was bustling! Jewish people came from all around the world and they spoke a wide variety of languages.

[The Unexpected Pentecost Day]

Then, came the unexpected for these visitors. They were astonished as they heard Galileans speaking in their own language! They asked one another: ***“Are not all those who are speaking Galileans?”*** (Acts 2:7)

You see, Galileans were not known for their linguistic ability. This is especially the case among working Galilean men. Galileans never really needed to learn other languages, since they remained in their own region.

This certainly caught their attention! Who were these men?!

“How is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:8, 11b).

Then these visiting Jews asked this question to one another: ***“What does this mean?”*** (Acts 2:12)

This is far out of the ordinary! They expected the same old Pentecost celebration! They expected to only sing the psalms, leave their basket and recite the liturgy. This was odd.

“What does this mean?!”

Now the greater number of visiting Jews were sensible. They stopped with their questions and gave no hasty answer. They were willing to wait and see what this meant.

The minority were of a different character. They said mockingly, ***“They are filled with new wine”*** (Acts 2:13).

Yes, this minority heard the great things of God, but they passed the whole thing off with scoffing. They called the disciples *tipsy*, rather than attempting to ponder what this meant.

Even for us, during the months of watching on Facebook, you may have asked ***“What does this mean?”*** due to the echoes. But, you may have noticed that as time went on, God’s Word was heard clearer and clearer. Today, we hear God’s Word clearly!

[Hearing the Voice of the Savior]

So, what exactly is going on with the disciples?

Peter actually gives us the answer in his Pentecost sermon: ***“Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:”***

“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh... And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:14-17, 21).

The Triune God picked this particular day for a reason. He picked this day, so that all peoples of all languages would be saved! This is why the visiting Jews heard the mighty works of God in their own language!

This is a promise that cannot be broken: *Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!*

You see, God promised through the prophet Joel that all people – male and female, old and young, all skin colors – that they would receive the Holy Spirit. All people include both Jews and Gentiles!

There is no other name by which we can be saved! There is no other way. We cannot save ourselves on our own. No self-help book can save us. No government can save us. No other religion can save us.

From that day nearly 2,000 years ago through today and into the future, salvation begins the instant the sinner calls upon the saving name of the Lord!

So, when we lament of our sin and ask for mercy *“in the name of the Lord,”* He hears us!

Today, we hear Christ’s under shepherds *“telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God”* (Acts 2:11).

We hear of God the Father’s love for us by sending His only begotten Son Jesus to die the death we deserve and rising to life three days later, so that we, too, would be saved!

We heard the voice of God at our Baptism as He adopted us as His own through the water and the Word!

We hear of our forgiveness when we confess our sins to God the Father. Through our repentance and trust in Jesus, God the Father sees us as perfect!

We hear the Holy Spirit inspire the words of the prophets, the evangelists, and the apostles in the Scripture readings and in the preaching of His Word!

We hear the words of Jesus saying: *“Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me.” And when He took the cup saying, “Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”*

We hear Christ saying: *“I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).

So, as we follow the news from the Twin Cities, take heart, for Christ has overcome the world. In Him alone, we have peace.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which began on that Pentecost day nearly 2,000 years ago continues today wherever the Gospel is preached!

Everyone – all languages and all people – who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved! This gift of forgiveness, life and salvation is all by grace through faith in Christ alone! Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠