

Spiritual Understanding

The variety of scripture readings for this major festival of Pentecost reflect the range of activities that we associate with the Spirit of God. The Spirit is active in creation, in forming community among culturally diverse people, and in the multi-faceted task of building a community that involves everyone with their different gifts and abilities.

Focus scripture: Acts 2:1–21

The Acts account of the sending of the Spirit is many-layered. It connects with the Hebrew scriptures and links the events of Pentecost with the Hebrew “Feast of Weeks,” 50 days after the Passover that commemorates the giving of the Law to Moses, now celebrated by the Christian church for the giving of the Spirit. Pentecost also came to be linked with the completion of harvest; now the Christian church celebrates the gifts and fruits of the Spirit. There is also a connection with the start of the gospel of Luke, where we read of the overshadowing of Mary by the power of the Spirit and bringing about the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:35). Here in Acts, the Spirit is instrumental in the birth of the church, the continuing Body of Christ on Earth. As well as connecting with the Law and Hebrew practice, Peter quotes from Joel, validating this Pentecost experience by relating it to an event foretold by the prophet, when God’s activity in the world would be vindicated (Joel 2:28–32a). Pentecost can also be seen as a reversal of the Tower of Babel where people were divided by language differences and their inability to understand each other (Genesis 11:1–9).

How do we interpret the details of this vibrant account of the Spirit’s coming? For any new experience, words elude us. How can we describe something that is new and unexpected, yet totally real and life-changing? For those who were present, the coming of the Spirit was as powerful and overwhelming as a strong wind, as purifying and all-encompassing as tongues of fire. The effects were far-reaching, bringing understanding and astonishment, reaching across barriers of culture, gender, and social standing. A Passover crowd in Jerusalem had earlier united against Jesus (Luke 23:13–25), Peter had denied him (Luke 22:54–62), and the disciples had fled (Luke 23:49). Now a crowd listens attentively as, supported by the 11 apostles,

Peter stands up to explain and witness to the power of God.

Commentators continue to discuss what might have happened at Pentecost: did people really hear their own language in a society where the languages of Aramaic or Greek were understood by nearly everyone? Was it the phenomena of glossolalia? Or was it that people came together and understood the good news in a vital and Spirit-inspired way?

Numbers 11:24–30 There is no room for exclusivist attitudes or jealousy, but a call to embrace an all-inclusive outlook towards others whose circumstances may be different, but whose call to be Spirit-filled is universal.

Psalms 104:24–34, 35b reflects on the dependence of creation on the Spirit, also connected with Sophia-Wisdom, who brings life and renewal.

In **1 Corinthians 12:3b–13** Paul reflects on the practical out-workings of the gifts of the Spirit from the perspective of the fledgling church. This letter was probably written before the accounts of Acts was committed to paper, but again stresses the diversity of gifts and backgrounds activated and united by the one Spirit.

The short lections from John’s gospel (**John 20:19–23** or **John 7:37–39**) remind us that John reflects from a different pneumatology or understanding of the Spirit. For the author of the gospel of John, the Spirit was given after Jesus was risen and glorified, but still to that group of fearful disciples hiding behind closed doors. The giving of the Spirit was associated with the forgiveness of sins and the commission to go and continue the work of God; here there is also a link with peace and joy (fruits of the Spirit).

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A strong theme emerging through these readings is the uniting and life-giving work of the Spirit of God in the diversity and variety of creation. What does this say to us about living with difference?



Focus scripture
Acts 2:1–21

Additional scriptures
Numbers 11:24–30
(alternate first reading)

Psalms 104: 24–34, 35b

1 Corinthians 12:3b–13
or **Acts 2:1–21**

John 20:19–23

or **John 7:37–39**

Holy Spirit, who came as wind and flames of fire, fan into life the gifts and abilities of people everywhere; unite us in a creative love that includes others, celebrates differences, and brings glory to God. Amen.

Lection Connection

links current events with this week’s scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for All Ages



This session is designed for all ages to come together for approximately one hour to celebrate the Pentecost story. Gather a group of leaders to plan and lead the session and choose a variety of Respond activity zones to meet the needs of the age range of the group. If you will be using this plan with a single age group you may need to adapt the materials for your particular group and follow a familiar format.

The Pentecost story found in the book of Acts is another foundational story of the Christian faith, and is important for both those new to the Christian faith and those who have been part of a faith community from childhood. Pentecost was originally an ancient Jewish celebration. It was a harvest festival which came 50 days after Passover. Christians today celebrate it

50 days after Easter. Pentecost is sometimes called “the birthday of the church” and gathering together with all ages can celebrate the communal life of a congregation. Pray that participants will experience in this session the guidance of the Holy Spirit and that your congregation will continue to be renewed by God’s Spirit.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week’s scriptures, Numbers 11:24–30; Psalm 104:24–34, 35b; John 20:19–23 or John 7:37–39; Acts 2:1–21, 1 Corinthians 12:3b–13, and [biblical background material](#) (p. 107).
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Songbook*, *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Music CD*, *Seasons Songbook (Volume 9)*, and *Seasons Music CD (Volume 9)*, and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.
- ❑ Prepare a worship space with red fabric, a Bible with a bookmark placed in the focus passage, a candle, matches, and offering basket.

Gather

- ❑ Bring self-adhesive name tags and sheets of red, yellow, and orange construction paper.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, song “Come, Holy Spirit” (p. 12 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).
- ❑ Bring a calendar, and, if possible, the poster *The Seasons of the Church Year* (supplementary poster available for order at www.seasonsonline.ca).

Engage

- ❑ Bring this week’s resource sheet “[Windswept Spirit](#)”; print discussion questions in Engage on newsprint.

Respond

Choose from the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Art zone:** copies of resource sheet “[Pentecost Symbols](#),” florist wire, clay or florist foam, strong paper plates
- ❑ **Activity zone:** red and orange crepe paper streamers, rhythm instruments, bubble-blowing materials, pavement chalk
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** copies of section “Spirit spiral” on resource sheet “[Pentecost Activities](#)”; option: copies of the resource sheet “[Windswept Spirit](#)”
- ❑ **Craft zone:** copies of section “Pentecost ribbons” on resource sheet “[Pentecost Activities](#),” long lengths of wide fabric ribbons (shades of red, yellow, orange), dowels, fine-tipped permanent markers
- ❑ **Discussion zone:** copies of [biblical background material](#) (p. 107) and “[Discussion questions](#)” (p. 111)

Bless

- ❑ Bring four tealights, and a taper.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song “The Peace of the Earth” (p. 36 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).



Spiritual Understanding

Scripture

Acts 2:1–21

FOCUS To celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit

Gather

Welcome participants as they arrive, introducing guests and newcomers. Distribute name tags and invite group members to print their first names and decorate their tags. Help younger children as needed.

Opening ritual

Call to gather Invite participants to gather in the worship space. Point out the red fabric and explain that this colour marks this as a special day, Pentecost Sunday. Ask a volunteer to light the candle and receive an offering.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song “Come, Holy Spirit” (p. 12 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #13 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Pray O God, your Spirit
gives life to all the Earth.
We ask you to be with us
as we open ourselves
to the joy and wonder of this day. Amen.

Extinguish the candle to signify the end of the gathering worship.

Connecting with the focus

Explain that this week we reach the end of the great 50 days of the Season of Easter. If available, indicate this section on the poster *The Seasons of the Church Year*. Show the group the calendar and, beginning with Easter Sunday (April 16), count off the days aloud until you reach this Sunday. Explain that today is Pentecost Sunday, and the Feast of Pentecost was celebrated by the Jewish people long before Jesus was born. It was a harvest celebration and everyone gathered in family and community groups to give thanks, as we do for Thanksgiving or harvest celebrations today. The story we will hear from the Bible today is about something incredible that happened at one of those Pentecost celebrations.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Remind the group that after the Resurrection on Easter Sunday Jesus’ friends and followers had many experiences of feeling Jesus close by and with them. After a while they didn’t feel him as close any more, but they remembered that Jesus had promised that after he left they would receive a special gift from God. In this week’s story from the Bible all Jesus’ friends and followers were gathered together in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost.

The Bible story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship space and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Acts. Read the story on the resource sheet “[Windswept Spirit](#)” based on Acts 2:1–21.

Share initial responses to the story as a whole group.

- **What did you like about this story? What surprised you?**
- **What was the special gift from God that came to Jesus’ friends and followers?**
- **What symbols did the writer of this story use to tell us about God’s Spirit?**
- **How do you think the lives of Jesus’ friends and followers were different after that day?**

The Bible story and us

Before God’s Spirit came the disciples had been afraid. After Jesus had been killed it was a dangerous time to be a follower of Jesus. But at Pentecost the Spirit gave them courage to start sharing

the good news of Jesus and the things that Jesus had taught with everyone. Peter had once been so afraid that he pretended that he didn't even know Jesus. Now the Spirit filled Peter and gave him courage to preach a very bold sermon about God's love.

■ **What does this story tell us about the power of God's Spirit?**

Pentecost has been called the birthday of the church. Invite participants to think about their own congregation.

■ **What do you think God's Spirit is helping our church to do?**

Chant Lead the group in this chant by inviting them to repeat each line after you:

We can't see the wind
but we know it's there,
'cause it rustles the leaves
and blows through our hair.
God's Spirit is with us,
we know this is true.
And people can see it
in the things that we do.

Respond

Review the choices of activities and invite the group to choose one or more zones in which to participate. Encourage older group members to help younger group members in each zone.

❑ **Art zone: Pentecost stabile** The symbols of dove and flame have come to represent God's Spirit. Invite participants to make a "stabile," or centerpiece for a table at home. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Pentecost Symbols](#)" and invite participants to cut the shapes out and decorate both sides of these with joyous colours. Follow the instructions on the resource sheet for assembling the stables.

❑ **Activity zone: Pentecost activities** (for younger participants to do outside if weather permits) Invite participants to celebrate the Pentecost spirit through activities outside. Distribute streamers and rhythm instruments and lead the group in a parade outside around the church building. Provide bubble blowing materials and invite participants to fill the air with bubbles, symbolizing the movement of the spirit. Provide pavement chalk and invite participants to cover the walkways and parking areas with Pentecost symbols (dove, wind spirals, flames of fire).

❑ **Quiet zone: Spirit spiral** The disciples had an amazing and puzzling experience at that gathering for Pentecost. Distribute copies of the section "Spirit spiral" from the resource sheet "[Pentecost Activities](#)" and review the instructions. Invite participants to solve the puzzle and fill in the words in the spaces below to discover the answer to the question. (Answer: All of them were filled with God's Spirit.) Encourage older children

to help younger ones. If time permits, invite participants to create their own word puzzles to find words used in the Pentecost story, using copies of the resource sheet "[Windswept Spirit](#)" as a source for the words.

❑ **Craft zone: Pentecost ribbons** The wind of God's Spirit blew through the people gathered at Pentecost. Distribute supplies and copies of the section "Pentecost ribbons" on the resource sheet "[Pentecost Activities](#)." Invite participants to use the markers to write words and phrases on the ribbons, working in pairs with one holding the ribbons taut while the other prints the words. Attach the ribbons firmly to the dowels and then practice twirling these to celebrate this special day.

❑ **Discussion zone: Pentecost readings** (for older youth and adults) Invite participants to explore in more depth all the lessons for this day. Distribute Bibles and copies of the [biblical background](#) material. Invite a volunteer to read the commentary on the focus passage. Distribute copies of the section "[Discussion questions](#)" (p. 111) and discuss these together. If time permits, invite volunteers to take turns reading **Numbers 11:24–30; Psalm 104:24–34, 35b; John 20:19–23 (or John 7:37–39), 1 Corinthians 12:3b–13,** and the commentary for each passage. Discuss how each passage might relate to and inform our understanding of the events of Pentecost.



Bless

Gather again in the worship space and light the candle. Place four tealights around the candle and invite four volunteers to use a taper to light a tealight each as you say: God's Spirit brings new dreams...God's Spirit brings new life...God's Spirit brings love...God's Spirit brings hope.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "The Peace of the Earth" (p. 36 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #10 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

Blessing Invite participants to say the following blessing to each other: "God's Spirit be with you."

Reflect

How did this session help all ages celebrate the story of Pentecost? What worked well? What might you change for a future all ages session?

Discussion questions

■ **What is familiar to you in the reading from Acts?**

■ **What was new or surprising?**

Greek and Hebrew languages use the same word for "spirit" and "breath" and "wind."

■ **What does this suggest to you about the work of God's Spirit?**

■ **Where do you see the abundance of God's Spirit in the story from Acts?**

■ **Where do you see the abundance of God's Spirit evident in the world today?**

■ **How does your experience of church compare with the scene described in Acts 2:1-21?**





Windswept Spirit

(based on Acts 2:1–21)

There was something special in the air that day in Jerusalem. Oh, it was more than the hot sun beating down on their heads. It was more than the sound of chirping birds or clip-clopping donkeys, braying as they dragged squeaky carts full of grain and fruit for the festival of Pentecost. It was even more than the cooing doves or the bleating baby lamb carried to the temple.

People travelled from far and wide along many different paths to come to this festival. When you looked around, you saw people of all shapes and sizes, all ages and colours of skin. Some people wore strange and mysterious clothes and everyone seemed to be speaking a different language.

There was something in the air all right: a kind of commotion, with grownups talking, children laughing, and travellers singing to pass the time. Even the disciples, Peter and the rest, Jesus' followers who had been together after his death and resurrection, must have sensed something strange and wonderful in the air that day.

Peter and the others were gathered together when, all of a sudden, it happened. Out of that strange still air a breeze started to blow. It was quiet and almost ticklish at first. Then that little breeze got stronger and stronger until it rattled the shutters on the windows. It whirled and twirled between the followers of Jesus in that room and all around them! Faster and stronger the wind blew until it made their hearts beat as fast as the wings of a dove! That wind moved so fast the people felt as if flames were dancing upon their foreheads!

When all the travellers saw what was going on, they were astonished. The followers of Jesus started speaking to them, but it was as if that wondrous wind made them able to understand one another. And the wind continued to wrap around them, whirling and twirling between them! Some of the travellers thought these followers of Jesus were drunk or crazy!

Then Peter, standing with the followers and friends of Jesus, said in a loud voice, "Listen!"

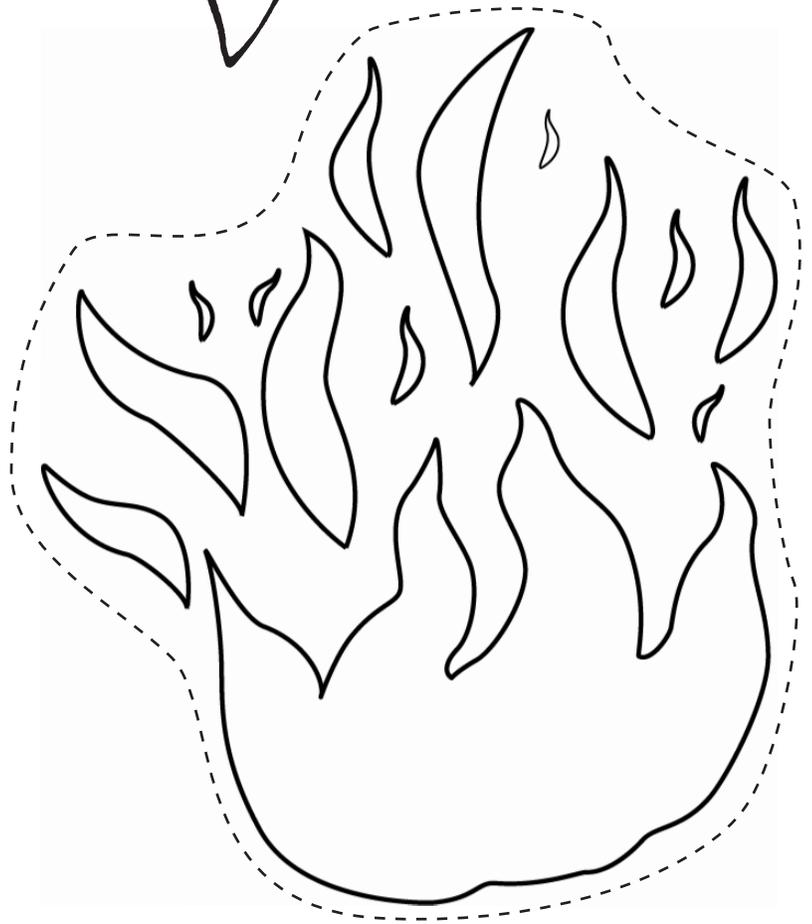
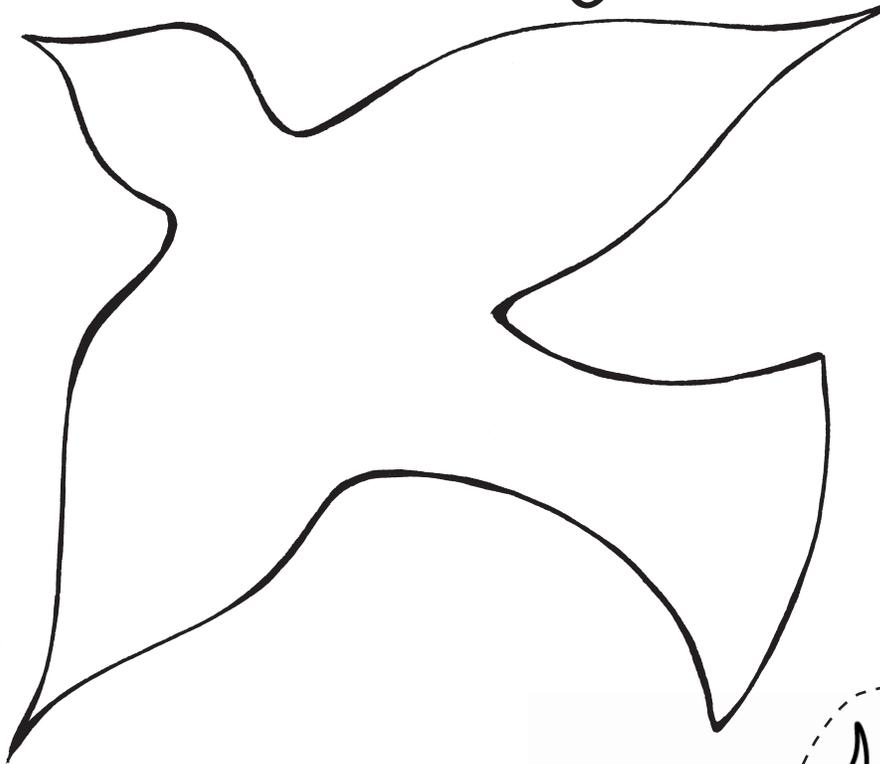
And everyone became quiet. Their eyes shone and they smiled. "Remember what the prophet Joel said!

I will pour out my Spirit upon you all.
Your daughters and sons will have words from me for you.
Old and young will dream great dreams."

Peter's words, the words from God, whirled and twirled among the people, bringing them the fiery love of God. Peter told them about Jesus and the promise of the Holy Spirit. Three thousand people joined the followers of Jesus that day. Alleluia!



Pentecost Symbols



Directions:

1. Cut out the shapes and decorate them.
2. Tape each one to the end of a length of wire.
3. Poke the other end of the wire into a base of clay or florist foam.
4. Decorate a paper plate and place your creation on it.
5. Bend the wires to balance and arrange the symbols.



Pentecost Activities

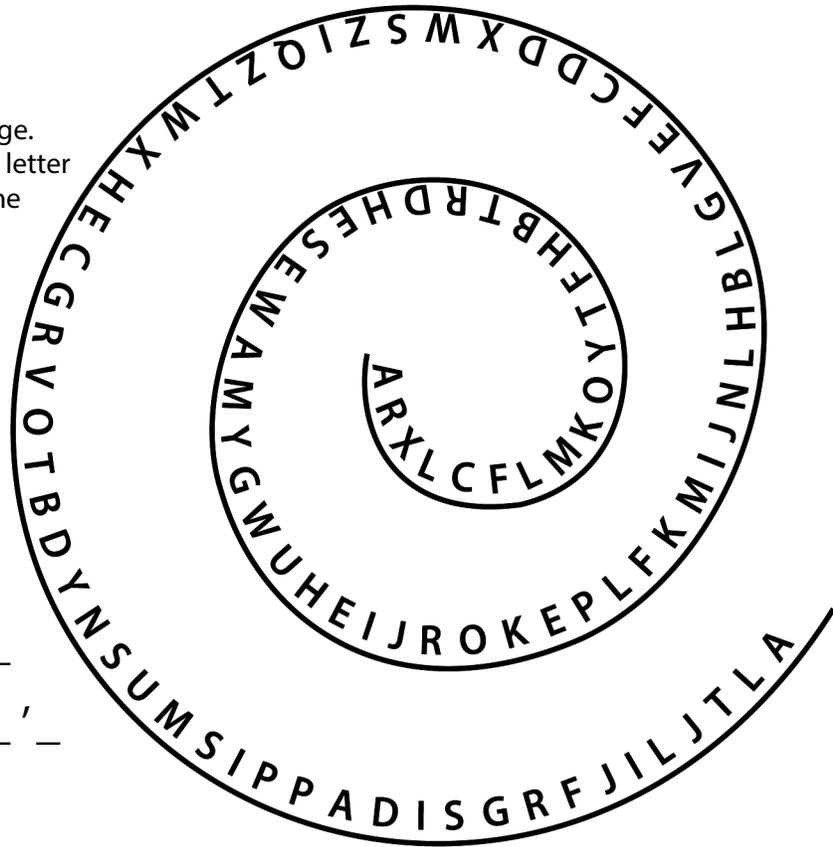
SPIRIT SPIRAL

Solve the puzzle to find a hidden message. Start in the middle of the spiral with the letter "A." Then use every third letter to fill in the blanks to answer the question.

Question:

What happened to the disciples at Pentecost?

Answer:



PENTECOST RIBBONS

What you do

1. Brainstorm a list of words or phrases that represent Pentecost and the gift of God's Spirit. Write them on newsprint.
2. Cut the ribbon into 30 cm/12 in lengths. Each person will need eight to ten ribbons.
3. On each ribbon, print or write words or phrases about Pentecost or the gift of God's Spirit. Write one per ribbon, or write several on each ribbon.
4. Gather the ribbons together and tape them to one end of a dowel. Tape them securely so they do not come off when you wave the Pentecost ribbons.

