

On your marks

Pentecost celebrates the birthday of the church. The day when Jesus fulfilled His promise of sending to his followers the Spirit of God to be with them and in them. This coming of God as the Holy Spirit was marked by the sounds and signs of God's power - a power which enabled them to carry out the task of taking the good news to the ends of the earth. God's Spirit still empowers Christians today to share and show the love of God and bring people into His kingdom. This promise is for young and old, men and women **and** '*for your children*' (see Acts 2 verses 17-18 and 39). The story is found in Acts chapter 2

Get set

You will need various sizes of thick stiff card; orange, red and yellow ribbons; large placards with various words of praise (see below); words on cards and on overheads for individual readers and the congregation (see below); small flame shapes, pencils/crayons and a large Pentecost flame for prayers.

A little rehearsal time with readers would also be good!

The following outline is a way of presenting the story of Acts 2, in which the whole congregation can take part.

Go!

1. Introduce the theme by showing a birthday cake with a small number of candles. Link to any birthdays in the congregation at this time. Today is a birthday and there should be over 1,970 candles! Link to the theme of Pentecost and the birthday of the church.
2. Begin the presentation with a time of quiet and then introduce some reflective music as a background to listening to the following promises of Jesus about the gift of the Spirit.
 - If you love me and keep my commandments, I will pray to the Father and He will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever. (John 14:15-16)
 - When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. (John 16:13)
 - He who believes in me, as the scripture has said: 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water'. This Jesus said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive. (John 7:38-39)
 - Jesus breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (John 20:22)
 - Behold I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in Jerusalem, until you are clothed with power from on high.' (Luke 24:49)
3. The outward signs of the Spirit's coming were: a strong wind; the appearance of flames; and the ability to speak God's praise in new languages. See Acts 2: 1-4, which reading could be dramatised with the following effects.

- arrange one group of adults and children to be ready with pieces of stiff card of varying sizes, with which they can create a breeze (and stronger!) as they wave them toward the rest of the congregation.
 - arrange a second group of adults and children to be ready with yellow, red and orange ribbons, with which they can create flame effects, as they wave them over the rest of the congregation.
 - arrange a third group of adults and children to be ready with words of praise on placards in four languages, with which they can lead the rest of the congregation in a repeated and ever louder chorus of international praise. Suggested phrases might be:
 - Demos gloria al senior (Spanish)
 - Isus e minunat (Romanian)
 - Bwana Asifiwe (Swahili)
 - Stuti Hoos Prabhu (Hindi)
4. Following the sound-effects part of the reading, allow a pause for silence and then play some thoughtful music, while the congregation share the crowd's response of 'what does this mean?'. In Acts it was Peter who helped explain to them what it was they were witnessing. In a similar way allow a group of children (reading in chorus) to unpack the key points of what Peter says first (Acts 2: 14-21)
- This is what God promised would happen.
 - It was all predicted long ago in the scriptures.
 - God wants to live inside His people by His Spirit
 - The Holy Spirit is a gift for all- young and old; rich and poor; women and men
 - Whoever calls on God can experience all this because of what Jesus did.
5. Peter then goes on (v22 -36) to focus on Jesus - the story of His life, death and resurrection. This could now be declared by the whole congregation saying the Creed together.
6. The reaction of the people in Acts was to ask 'What shall we do?' Ask the congregation to turn to those sitting near them in groups of 3 or 4 and to put themselves into the shoes of the crowd at the first Pentecost. Put up the following questions for them to talk over in their groups.
- *I wonder what the crowds really thought was happening that morning?*
 - *I wonder what most impressed the crowds?*
 - *I wonder what the crowds thought of Peter and his words?*
 - *I wonder what they thought Peter would say next?*

Listen to some of the thoughts from the congregational groups. And then read together what Peter says next from Acts 2: 38-39

7. This same gift is clearly also for us, if we do what Peter says, both receiving God's forgiveness



through Jesus and then opening our lives to the work of the Holy Spirit. Use a confession together and then give space for an individual response of receiving the Spirit afresh today. After a time of silence, follow this by some singing together.

8. What difference does the Holy Spirit make?

See what happened at the first Pentecost (Acts 2:41-47)

What difference will it make for us today? As individuals... a church... as a community?

A leader could share some thoughts about this and/or invite responses from the congregation. Perhaps when you prepare items for this worship with the children, ask if they have ideas for this section.

In order to involve everyone at this point, ask people to write or draw their own personal response onto small flame shapes which they can then bring up to the front and stick onto a large Holy Spirit flame at the front of the church, while some appropriate music is playing. Let this become a time of prayerful response to God's Pentecost gift of the Holy Spirit to us all.