



On your marks

The starting point for this reflective story is to show that the Holy Spirit is present right from the beginning of creation and that his presence is evident throughout the whole Bible, not just in the New Testament. The story moves from creation to Pentecost in seven parts. Each part demonstrates the presence of God's Spirit in the chosen story and introduces a new symbol of the Spirit as the story unfolds.

The story can be told as one piece, setting out each of the objects in order as the story unfolds. Alternatively, in the context of a quiet day, it can be told in three parts with Psalm 133 sitting in the centre of the story. In this way, the Old Testament part of the story - the flame of hope, the breath of life and the soft whisper of a voice - is told first. The New Testament part of the story - the dove of peace, the life-giving water and the tongues of fire - follows, and the story concludes with the Psalm, reflecting how the oil of joy and healing flows from the heart of God: from creation, into the life of Jesus and onward into our own lives today.

The Psalm draws together the three themes of creation, re-creation and harmony:

'It is truly wonderful when relatives live together in peace. It is as beautiful as olive oil poured on Aaron's head and running down his beard and the collar of his robe. It is like the dew from Mount Hermon, falling on Zion's mountains, where the Lord has promised to bless his people with life for evermore.'

Seven Signs of the Spirit was originally developed as a workshop on the Holy Spirit for Pentecost. It made its debut at a children's festival in Rochester Diocese in 2002, where the story was shared, in small groups, with over 60 children. After the storytelling, the children made seven banners, one for each of the seven signs. The story has since been used with children in the season of Pentecost, for quiet days with adults and to form the basis of sermon material.

The words used for the storytelling come primarily from the Bible, using the Contemporary English Version.

Remember to tell the story slowly, focusing on the objects and on the story itself, not on the children who are listening. When you have finished telling the story, leave a short space and then use the wondering questions written out for you at the end of the piece. When you have finished wondering slowly and carefully put the story away in reverse order, naming each object and that part of the story as you go. Finish by rolling up the white underlay, placing it in the box on top of the other materials and replacing the lid.

Get set

For this presentation you will need the items below. Choose or make three-dimensional objects that are both simple and attractive. As part of your preparation, you will need to ensure that the objects are placed in to the box in such a way that they can be taken out in the right order without too much



fishing around.

You will need:

- A gold-painted shoe box in which to store the items
- A piece of white felt measuring 20 cm x 110 cm. (Roll the felt in preparation for the storytelling)
- 7 x squares of felt each measuring 15 cm x 15 cm, one in each of the following colours: black, green, purple, yellow, grey, blue and red.
- A piece of green felt measuring 15 cm x 7.5 cm, with one of the longer edges cut in a scallop shape (wavy edge)
- 2 x candle holders, one clear glass or earthenware; one red glass
- 2 x tealight candles (one in each holder)
- A box of matches or a candle lighter
- 3 x small wooden figures
- A small craft box containing some earth
- A small shell of the type in which you can 'hear the sound of the sea'
- A small flagon containing scented oil
- A small craft box containing some confetti hearts
- A white feather and a small model dove
- An ornamental fish made from wood
- Blue gift packing strands (tissue)
- 3 x red feathers

Of course, you may want to substitute your own symbols and visuals, or even your own stories, rather than use the ones selected here. Or you might just have different ideas that mean more to you. We would value feedback on how you used the story and your ideas for sharing it in different situations.

The storytelling takes place on the floor. You need to sit comfortably (if needed, use a cushion to help reduce discomfort) with the children gathered in a semi circle around you. The space in the centre is the storytelling space.

Remember to tell the story slowly, focusing on the objects and on the story itself, not on the children who are listening. When you have finished telling the story, leave a short space and then use the wondering questions written out for you at the end of the piece. When you have finished wondering slowly and carefully put the story away in reverse order, naming each object and that part of the story as you go. Finish by rolling up the white underlay, placing it in the box on top of the other materials and replacing the lid.

Go!

(Today / Pentecost) is the birthday of the Church - the day when the promise Jesus made to his disciples came true: the day when the Holy Spirit came. God has given us the gift of his Holy Spirit



as a sign that he is always with us; always present in our lives, helping us to know right from wrong, and enabling us to tell others the good news of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is a gift from God, but I wonder where we can find his story? I wonder if there is anything in the Bible that can help us to learn more about the Holy Spirit?

Draw the box in front of you as you begin the story.

This box is the colour gold. Gold is a very precious colour, so perhaps there is something precious, like gold, inside this box. This box also looks like the sort of a box that a gift would come in. Yes, perhaps this box is a gift box. Perhaps there is a gift inside this box. ... Well, (today / Pentecost) is the birthday of the Church - the day when the promise Jesus made to his disciples came true: the day when God gave us the gift of his Holy Spirit as a sign that he is always with us; always present in our lives. The Holy Spirit is a gift from God, but I wonder where we can find his story? I wonder if, as we get ready to celebrate the Church's birthday, this box has something inside that will help us to learn more about the gift of God's Holy Spirit? Shall we open the lid and see what's inside?

Gently open the box and lean the lid at an angle across the box so that the children can't see what is inside. Take out the white felt. Unroll it just enough to accept the black felt square. Place the black felt square on the white underlay and smooth it out. Carefully, place the clear glass (or earthenware) candleholder (with a tealight inside) in the middle of the square.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was empty with no form of life; it was under a roaring ocean covered with darkness...

... but the Spirit of God was moving over the water.

Hold your hand above the black felt square to imitate the Spirit moving over the water.

God said, 'I command light to shine!' - and light started shining...

Light the candle.

...God looked at the light and saw that it was good.

Pause.

Hold your hand over the black felt square in a sign of blessing.

A flame of hope - this is a sign of God's presence in the world. It comes from the heart of God...

Pause.

Unroll the white felt underlay just enough to accept the green felt square. Place the green felt square on the underlay next to the black felt square and smooth it out.

When the Lord God made the heavens and the earth, no grass or plants were growing anywhere.



God had not yet sent any rain, and there was no one to work the land. But streams came up from the ground and watered the earth...

Take the craft box containing the earth, open in and place some earth in the palm of your hand. Shape it and breath into it as you say the following words.

...Then the Lord God took a handful of soil from the ground and made a man. God breathed life into the man, and the man started breathing.

Carefully, place the wooden figures in the middle of the green square.

Pause.

Hold your hand over the green felt square in a sign of blessing.

The breath of life - this is a sign of God's presence in the world. It comes from the heart of God...

Pause.

Unroll the white felt underlay just enough to accept the purple felt square. Place the purple felt square on the underlay next to the green felt square and smooth it out.

There was once a man called Elijah. Elijah was feeling very unhappy, he had been trying to tell people about God, but they had turned against him and would not listen. 'It's too much,' said Elijah, and he climbed Mount Sinai, the mountain of God, and hid himself away in a cave.

Make a hiding movement with your hands.

While Elijah was on Mount Sinai, the Lord asked, 'Elijah, why are you here? Go out and stand on the mountain. I want you to see me when I pass by.' So Elijah left his cave and climbed to the top of the mountain. When he reached the top he stood very still. All at once, a strong wind shook the mountain and shattered the rocks.

Make a movement with your hands to show Elijah squaring his feet against the wind.

Elijah squared his feet against the whipping, windswept ground and listened. But the Lord was not in the wind.

The wind stopped blowing, and next there was an earthquake.

Make a movement with your hands to show Elijah squaring his feet against the earthquake.

Elijah squared his feet against the shaking, shifting ground - and listened. But the Lord was not in the earthquake.

The ground stopped shaking and after the earthquake there was a fire.



This was too much for Elijah. He ran down the mountain and back into his cave and listened to the crackling flames from the safety of the dark. But the Lord was not in the fire.

Make a hiding movement with your hands.

The smoking, smouldering fire burnt itself to nothing and, in the silence that followed, there was a gentle breeze like the soft whisper of a voice...

...When Elijah heard the soft whispering voice, he covered his face with his coat and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. He didn't want to run away any more. He wanted to hear what God had to say to him.

Carefully, place the shell in the middle of the purple square.

Pause.

Hold your hand over the purple felt square in a sign of blessing.

The soft whisper of a voice - this is a sign of God's presence in the world. It comes from the heart of God...

Pause.

Unroll the white felt underlay just enough to accept the yellow felt square. Place the yellow felt square on the underlay next to the purple felt square and smooth it out.

It is truly wonderful when people live together in peace...

...It is as beautiful as olive oil poured on the heads of those who love God, running down their faces and the collars of their clothes...

Carefully, place the flagon of oil centre top of the yellow square.

...It is like the dew from the mountain caressing bare feet on early morning grass.

Lay the small green felt on the yellow square, with the wavy edge sitting across the centre of the yellow square. Smooth it out.

To live together in peace is to receive the joy of God, who blesses his people with life that never ends.

Take the craft box containing the confetti hearts, open it and sprinkle some hearts over the yellow felt square and green grass shape.

Pause.



Hold your hand over the yellow felt square in a sign of blessing.

Oil of joy and healing – this is a sign of God’s presence in the world. It comes from the heart of God...

Pause.

Unroll the white felt underlay just enough to accept the grey felt square. Place the grey felt square on the underlay next to the yellow felt square and smooth it out.

Jesus left Galilee and went to the River Jordan to be baptized by his cousin, John. But John kept objecting and said, ‘I ought to be baptized by you. Why have you come to me?’

Jesus answered, ‘For now this is how it should be, because we must do all that God wants us to do.’

...

...So Jesus was baptized and as soon as he came out of the water, the sky opened, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down on him like a dove...

Gently lower and raise your hand over the grey felt square in imitation of Jesus’ baptism.

Carefully place the white feather on the grey felt square. Set the model of a dove in the centre of the feather.

... Then a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him.’

Pause.

Hold your hand over the grey felt square in a sign of blessing.

The dove of peace – this is a sign of God’s presence in the world. It comes from the heart of God...

Pause.

Unroll the white felt underlay just enough to accept the blue felt square. Place the blue felt square on the underlay next to the grey felt square and smooth it out.

On the last and most important day of the most important festival in the Jewish calendar, Jesus stood up and said in a loud voice, ‘If you are thirsty, come to me and drink! Have faith in me, and you will have life-giving water flowing from deep inside you.’ ‘...

Carefully place some blue tissue strands in the centre of the blue felt square. Set the ornamental fish in the centre of the strands.

Pause.

Hold your hand over the blue felt square in a sign of blessing.



Life-giving water – this is a sign of God’s presence in the world. It comes from the heart of God...

Pause.

Unroll the white felt underlay completely to accept the red felt square. Place the red felt square on the underlay next to the blue felt square and smooth it out.

On the day of Pentecost all Jesus’ friends were together in one place. Suddenly there was a noise from heaven like the sound of a mighty wind! It filled the house where they were meeting...

... Then they saw what looked like fiery tongues moving in all directions, and a tongue came and settled on each person there...

Carefully place the three red feathers in a triangle shape on the red felt square.

...their fear left them and they were filled with joy.

Place the red candleholder (with a tealight inside) in the centre of the triangle of feathers. Light the candle.

Pause.

Hold your hand over the red felt square in a sign of blessing.

Tongues of fire – this is a sign of God’s presence in the world. It comes from the heart of God...

Pause.

Hold your hand in a sign of blessing over each object as you slowly recap the seven signs of the Spirit.

A flame of hope...

The breath of life...

The soft whisper of a voice...

Oil of joy and healing...

The dove of peace...

Life-giving water...

Tongues of fire...

These are the signs of God’s presence in the world. They come from the heart of God.



Pause.

Sit up, moving your position as you do so, and catch the eyes of the children as a sign that the story has finished.

Wondering questions

I wonder which of these signs of the Spirit you like best?

I wonder which of these signs you think is the most important sign?

I wonder which of these signs is most about you?

I wonder if there are any other signs we could have to have all the signs of the Spirit that we need?

Bible references

Genesis 1:1-4a

Genesis 2:4b-7

2 Kings 19:1-13

Psalm 133

Matthew 3:13-17

John 7:37-39

Acts 2:1-4