



On your marks

Pentecost celebrates the birthday of the Church: the day when Jesus fulfilled his promise of sending the Spirit of God to his followers 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 coming upon them from on high - a power that enabled them to carry out the task of taking the good news to the ends of the earth. Jesus had told his followers:

I will send you the one my Father has promised, but you must stay in the city until you are given power from heaven.

Luke 24:49 (CEV)

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 you and your children' (Acts 2:17-18, 39).

Get set

You will need:

- a small birthday cake with some candles
- a large sheet of paper - draw five circles on the paper and a wide border around the edge of the paper
- coloured pens
- ribbons
- large pieces of card
- items for the prayer ideas you choose - see below.

The Bible story can be found in Acts 2:1-4. There is a retelling of this story in The Barnabas Children's Bible (stories 317 and 319) and in [The Barnabas Family Bible](#) (p. 208).

Go!

Opening up the story

Introduce the story by producing a birthday cake with a small number of candles. Make connections to any birthdays in the group at this time. Then explain that today's session celebrates a birthday too but the cake would have over 1985 candles! Today's focus is Pentecost, which is the birthday of the Church.

It is also the day that the church was filled with power from on high. To illustrate this, introduce the idea of being full of power and then running out of power through the movement of clockwork toys. Get the group moving around the room as the toy and then slowly running out of power - for



example, as a robot, a clockwork rabbit, a toy box ballerina, a clockwork soldier... or as any clockwork toy of their choice... which works, then winds down slowly... and stops.

Talk about what you'd need to do to make the toy work again. 'Wind' some of the toys up and set them moving again. You could set a challenge for one child to keep them all on the move, rushing from one to the other, 'winding them up'.

Alternatively, you could create machines with sound effects in groups of four or five - for example, make a washing machine, a Hoover, a lawn mower, a car, a windmill, a firework... and show what happens when you plug it in and switch it on!

Telling the story

Tell the story of Pentecost as follows, inviting your group to add drawings to the large sheet of paper with the border and circles that you have pre-prepared as the story progresses.

It was the Festival of Shavuot or Pentecost, the festival when Jews would come from all over the world to Jerusalem to celebrate together.

Inside the border around the edge of the sheet of paper, draw adults and children of all races and colours smiling and running in towards the centre.

What were they celebrating? It was the harvest festival - the time they would bring offerings of the first fruit of the crops to God and decorate the houses with flowers, very much like we do in church in the autumn.

In one circle, draw as many sorts of fruits and vegetables and grain as your group can think of.

Shavuot was also the festival to celebrate the time God gave Moses 'the law' - the ten commandments. Can you remember them?

In another circle, write the ten commandments - or with younger groups, draw the stone tablets and talk about what the commandments are.

On this particular Shavuot or Pentecost festival, the one after Jesus had died and come back to life and gone to be with God, his disciples were together in a house in Jerusalem. Suddenly, there was a noise like a strong wind from heaven and it filled the whole house.

Fill a circle with swirls of colour for the wind.

As well as the wind, something like flames of fire separated and came to rest on each person there.

Fill a circle with flames.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages. People who heard them were amazed to hear them speaking every one of their own languages.



Fill a circle with as many foreign words as your group knows.

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, told the crowds who Jesus was and about 3000 people started to believe in Jesus that very day.

Talking about the story

Use the pictures on your sheet of paper to help the group make connections across the Bible.

Now look at the five circles. How can we move in and out of them?

- Harvest: Why do you think God chose a harvest festival to give them his Holy Spirit?

Talk about the fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22 and write these fruits in a bigger circle around the harvest circle.

- Law: Why do you think God chose the time they remembered God's law to give them his Holy Spirit?

Talk about Jeremiah 31:33: the way God now puts his law into our hearts, helps us keep it and makes us want to keep it as his Holy Spirit changes us to make us more like Jesus. Draw hearts around the law circle.

- Wind: Where else do we hear about wind in the Bible?

Talk about the breath of God or God's Spirit moving over the waters of creation. With Pentecost, God is making us into his new creation. Draw the world and other symbols of creation around the wind circle.

- Fire: Where else do we read of fire in the Bible?

Talk about the fiery pillar of God that guided the Hebrews across the desert. That guiding light is put into our hearts so we know which way God wants us to go. Draw signposts round the fiery circle.

- Languages: When in the Bible did languages tear people apart?

Talk about the Tower of Babel and how the Holy Spirit brings different people and races together again. Draw lines from each of the characters drawn in the border to the foreign words circle.

Ask children to pick out what they like best about the Holy Spirit, from all the pictures on the sheet of paper.

Playing with the story

The outward signs of the Spirit's coming were:



- a strong wind
- the appearance of flames
- the ability to speak God's praise in new languages.

Work as a group to create the sights and sound of the first Pentecost. Organise:

- One group to be ready with pieces of stiff card of varying sizes, with which they can create a breeze (and stronger!), as they wave them.
- One group to be ready with yellow, red and orange ribbons, with which they can create flame effects, as they wave them.
- One group to be ready with words of praise on placards in four languages, which they read out in an 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).

Now put the whole drama together to catch a flavour of what the people on the streets then heard and saw.

Reflecting on the story

Here are some simple prayer ideas based around the symbols of the Spirit - oil, water and wind. You might like to use just one or two rather than all of them.

Oil: You will need a bowl of perfumed oil, such as aromatherapy massage oil (choose one unlikely to cause an allergic reaction). Invite the group to sit or stand and close their eyes, waiting for the scent to reach them. It is invisible but we sense its presence with us. Thank God that he is always with us through his invisible Spirit, even though we can't see him with our eyes. Choose to invite God's Holy Spirit into your life and, as a sign of your invitation, smooth a little of the oil on to your wrist.

Water: You will need a sand tray or a tray of dry compost or stones to represent a barren desert, a bucket of water surrounded by lush greenery like pot plants, and plenty of small bowls or pots. The Holy Spirit brings life to dead places, just as water brings life to a barren desert. Ask the group to think of what parts of their lives or which place or situation or relationship is dry and dead like the desert? Ask God to make his Spirit flood into that place like a spring of fresh water. Fill a small bowl with water and place it in the desert as a sign of your prayer.

Wind: You will need a bowl of bubble mixture and several bubble wands. Ideally, situate this near a warm air source like a heating vent to give the bubbles more buoyancy. God's Spirit can lift a situation or relationship and take it to a new level, filled with life and hope. Ask the group to hold such a situation before God and breathe out your concern for the people involved by blowing into a bubble wand and watching the bubble take on a life of its own.