

Pentecost

Introduction

We celebrate today the most important date in the history of the Christian Church. It is its birthday.

From the establishment of the Christian Church on the Day of Pentecost to the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ, this is the era of the Church. Meaning a body of believers, the ecclesia that is the called out ones.

Background

The events leading up to the founding of this worldwide organisation

a) Ministry of Jesus

A man called Jesus had been born 33 years previously. He did not start his ministry until three years before his death. He worked mainly through twelve people he called apostles. He performed many miracles, healed a number of diseases like leprosy, blindness and on occasions raised the dead. Many tormented by demons and separated from their families where released back into the community perfectly healed.

b) Opposition from the Religious

c) He received opposition mainly from religious people who saw him as threatening the present political stage. The Roman Empire had absorbed Israel into its empire and the religious leaders were favourably treated. This man Jesus threatened their favoured status so must be stopped. The religious followed a strict code of conduct. Years ago there had been some meaning in it but that had become ridged and unbending in their rules. In fact to help people keep the ten commandments they had produce hundreds more so that if you broke one of the these protective laws like washing the inside of a cup, it would prevent you from breaking a larger commandment. So lives were governed by rules and regulations that tended to strangle original thought and development. They were in fact, in a religious a time warp.

These people could not cope with this Jesus who healed very ill people on the Sabbath when he could have done in the other six days. The actual miracle escaped their attention.

He even went round forgiving peoples sins when they knew that only God could do that. He even went as far as to say that God and him were in fact one. If you had seen Jesus you had seen the Father.

d) Death of Jesus

Eventually, they caught up with him and had him killed in a most horrific way. By being flogged half to death then nailed to a cross and allowed to very slowly suffocate.

e) Resurrection

Jesus had said many times that he would die and be raised up on the third day. The authorities were taking no chances. They set a guard over the grave which was in a cave and not only rolled a heavy stone at its mouth but put a seal on it and guard of soldiers.

This is where it gets very interesting. A group of women came early in the morning on the third day and suddenly there was a great earthquake and an angel appeared terrifying everyone. The soldiers froze like dead men. While the women were afraid. The angel rolled back the stone and sat on it. The angel said to the women do not be afraid for I know you are looking for Jesus, come see where his body lay. Jesus had already gone having passed through the stonework!!!

They were told to tell the disciples and Jesus was going to Galilee to see them.

They rushed back excited but the apostles did not believe them. Why? Because they were women. Rather emotional creatures they thought. No doubt imagined it. But John and Peter thought they should go just to prove it was a wish and a dream. Wow! They found it as the women had told them. Meanwhile two people were walking on the Emmaus road when Jesus disguised joined them. Invited to stay the night he revealed himself to the by breaking bread and they saw his hand injuries and just disappeared.

They rushed back to tell the apostles and as they were telling the story Jesus appears to them.

2. The Promise of the Father

After many appearances over several weeks we catch the present event, the birth of the Church.

Ac 1:3-11

After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**" When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

Whatever was to happen while staying in Jerusalem was to shake the earth and lead at this present time to a third of the world being Christian!

So they waited in an upper room. Their attitude was important. Acts 1:14 says "These, i.e. the Apostles, the women and the brothers of Jesus "continued with one accord in prayer and supplications. They must have waited some days but on one particular day we read this. Acts 2:1

3. Day of Pentecost (Ac 2:1-8)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. 5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"

8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

4. Baptism in the Holy Spirit – speaking in tongues

The Holy Spirit came on them and the most unruly member of the body according to James is the tongue and that God took over and gave them the ability to speak many different languages that they had never learned.

The Feast of Pentecost was an important one for Jews and many Jews living abroad would gather to celebrate. Also they got a whole list of citizens from other far flung empires attending Jerusalem. For any Jew living within twenty miles of Jerusalem it was compulsory to attend the festival.

The people gathering suggested they were either mad or drunk. The physical manifestation must have been very visible. Peter's explanation following criticism was to say that prophet Joel said would happen one day. "Ac 2:17-18

'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. 18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

This is what God intended his Church to be for all time. A people that is moving in the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. However, formalism and ritual can so easily take over from the Spirit even after one or two generations.

Peter tries to link what is happening to Joel but it should be noted that Joel did not mention tongues of fire or the speaking in tongues. In fact nothing could have prepared them for this experience.

a) First sermon of the new Church

Peter then preaches the first Christian sermon and the Holy Spirit convicts over 3000 people of the need to be right with God. They stopped Peter short in his sermon and were 'cut to the heart and said to the Apostles Men and brethren what shall we do? Peter said, Repent,

and let everyone of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and your children, and to as many as the Lord our God will call.' 3000 people responded. These formed the first Christian Church.

3. The Spirit is now in each believer with exceptional results

Once the Spirit invaded the believers it was **THE** source of guidance.

Look at the incidents in the Book of Acts

The Spirit moved Philip to go to Samaria and catch up with an Ethiopian official and lead him to Christ (Acts 8:29). Consequence was that Ethiopia becomes a Christian country.

The Spirit prepares Peter in a vision to go to a Gentile house of Cornelius (Acts 10:19 which the Jewish law prevented him from going. The consequences were amazing. As Peter was speaking to an assembled group the Holy Spirit fell upon them and they began to speak in tongues and Peter command them to be baptised. Peter was now in deep trouble. This experience was only meant to be for Jews. He had to explain to the Jerusalem Church that this had happened.

Before that Peter was taking money from believers who had sold land and Ac 5:1

Judgement by the Holy Spirit in the Church

Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold land but did not give all the money to the Church but pretended they did. So when the husband gave the money to Peter, Peter said did you sell the land for so much? He said yes. Peter responded why have you lied to the Holy Spirit. And the man dropped down dead. Two hours later the wife told the same lie and she dropped down dead. Result was great fear came upon the whole community but still converts were recorded. The Holy Spirit had certainly arrived.

a) Other acts of the Holy Spirit

The Spirit enables Agabus, a prophet, to foretell the coming famine in Acts 11:28.

Guides Paul past Asia, Mysia and Bithynia, down to Troas and there on to Europe (Acts 16:6).

Tells Paul what awaits him in Jerusalem.

All leaders of the early church were men of the Spirit. The Apostles asked the congregation to chose seven men of the Spirit (Acts 6:3).

It was recorded that both Stephen the first Christian martyr and Barnabas are full of the Spirit (Acts 7:55 & 11:24).

Paul tells the elders at the Ephesus Church that it was the Spirit who made them overseers.

The Spirit was the day to day Source of courage and power. **THIS WAS A CHURCH MOVING IN THE MIRACULOUS.** When they were placed in prison an angel would release them.

In Ephesus Paul asked a group of believers this question:

Ac 19:2-7

He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.....6 When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied — 7 altogether there were about twelve of them.

5. Pentecostal experience today

In 1906 at an Anglican Church in Sunderland the Rev Alexander Body and his wife had this same experience. They commenced waiting meetings for the Holy Spirit in an adjacent hall. Many hundreds of people from all walks of life began to attend. A revival of these same signs and wonders began to manifest itself. Many critics tried to get it stopped. Eventually the Bishop of Durham had an enquiry into this phenomenon.

He concluded his statement with the words of Joel. This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel.

The Pentecostal movements came from this development as the Established Church could not contain this abounding type of Christianity.

In the 1960's a revival of the Holy Spirit occurred in the Roman Catholic Church and other Establish churches so that now it is more common to see these Churches undertaking extemporary prayer, praying for the sick and speaking in tongues and prophesying.

See the full list of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. Gifts include words of wisdom, words of knowledge, faith, healing, prophesy, discerning of spirits, various types of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

6. The Christian of today is described by Paul

In Romans 8:1-6

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

The Holy Spirit now lives with all those who have confessed life in Christ to guide, help and encourage them in life's journey.

What about you?