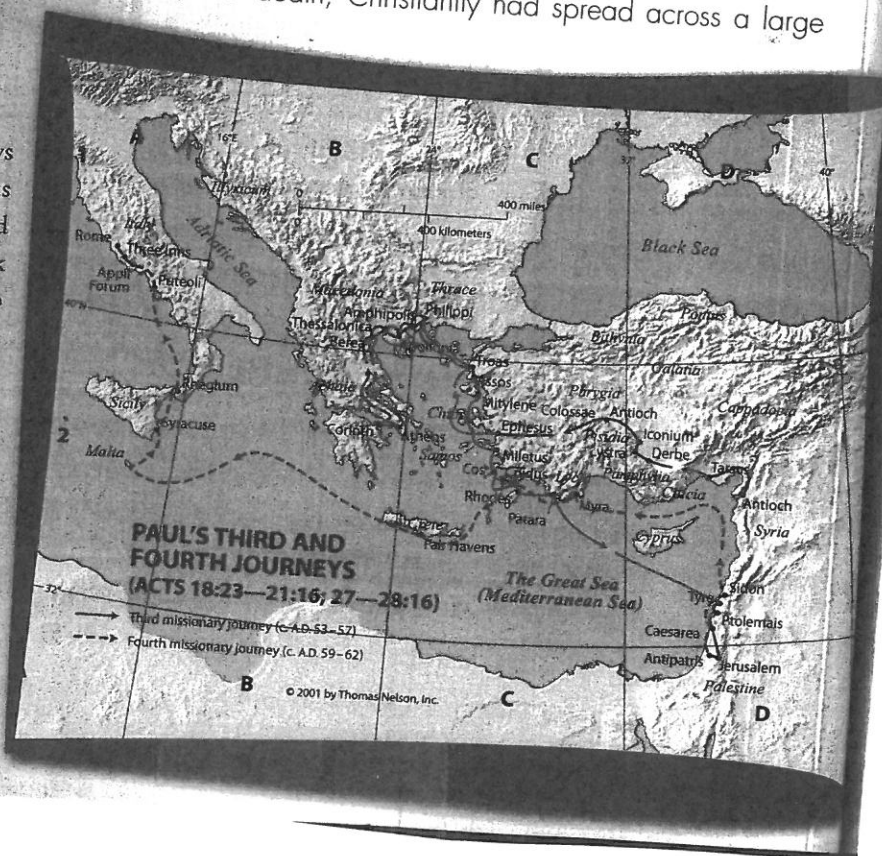


17

PENTECOST AND THE EARLY CHURCH

To spread the news about Jesus Christ in the early years of the Church, there were no cable news networks, satellite TV, cell phones, Internet, e-mail, MySpace, or blogs; no IM-ing or texting; and no FedEx overnight delivery. Yet, within twenty years after Jesus' death, Christianity had spread across a large

The good news about Jesus spread far and wide. Check out this map of Saint Paul's travels. Trace his journey to Rome, where he was martyred.



geographical area. How could Christianity have spread so quickly without modern means of communication?

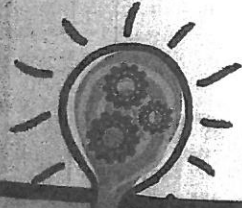
Hop in a time machine. Take yourself back to the first century AD. You know when friends change—you notice something different about how they act or look. Sometimes you wonder and want to ask, "What's different about you? Something's different." Now imagine that your friend next door, back in the first century, is acting a bit differently. You can't quite pinpoint what it is. His family regularly gathers with other families in their homes. You're not sure what they do when they meet. His parents still go about their daily business of taking care of work and ordinary tasks. Even your parents comment there seems to be a certain something different that wasn't there before, like a peacefulness or joy in them. You notice this in your friend too. There's something different about how

Did You KNOW?

On This Rock

Jesus knew that after he was gone, his disciples would need a leader. He prepared the Apostle Peter for this role. In a conversation between Jesus and Peter, Jesus asks him, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter replies, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:15–16). Peter understands who Jesus is. Jesus says to him, "And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:18–19).

Peter would be the one to lead the Church after Jesus was gone.



THINK ABOUT IT!

The work of making the Good News of Jesus Christ known in the world today is the responsibility of every follower of Jesus.

How do you participate in the call to make disciples of all nations? How does knowing that the Spirit is alive in you affect how you see the world and your place in it?

he is treating his sister (whom he's never gotten along with well), and he is actually helping out around the neighborhood.

Finally, you ask, "You've changed. Something is different. What's happened?" Your friend might say something like, "Yes. I have changed. My family is Christian now. We follow the teachings of Jesus Christ." You're curious, so you say, "Tell me more." Now remember, this is the first century. Your friend does not whip out a Bible from his pocket or pull a *Catechism* off the shelf. None of these things was in the early Church. Instead, he would rely on the spoken word and the modeling of a new way of life. With the help of the Holy Spirit, he would share this new faith with you.

The Spirit at Work

Hop back into your time machine. Come back to the present. Imaginative scenes like the one just described can't capture the reality of life during the early years of the Church. While some families like the one mentioned above may have kept their faith fairly quiet, other Christians were open and vocal. They actively recruited followers and preached the Gospel, even when this meant risking persecution.

The Acts of the Apostles gives us the earliest written accounts of the Church. Acts describes what

we call the Apostolic Church—the Church of the Apostles and their first followers. It describes the travels of Peter and Paul spreading the Word of God from Jerusalem to the far reaches of the Roman Empire. A main theme in Acts is how the Holy Spirit worked to guide the community so the Word of God could spread.

Let's recall how it all started. Jesus does not leave his Apostles, not even Peter, with a "getting started" guide. There are no step-by-step instructions for what to do next. Jesus doesn't map out an organizational plan for the Church. He doesn't give them a practice schedule or leave them with a week-at-a-glance

FUN FACT

Rome was the most important city in the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. Thanks to the work of people like Peter and Paul, the Church in Rome became the most important in the Church, and the bishop of Rome became the most important Church leader, known as the Pope. Pope Benedict XVI is the current bishop of Rome and the Pope.



LIVE IT!

After they received the Holy Spirit, the Apostles could speak to total strangers and spread the Good News to people with whom they shared nothing in common, not even their languages. You might experience a world of difference between you and another person such as culture, interests, friends, race, ages, and religion. Sometimes it is difficult to overcome those differences.

Get to know someone who is different than you are. Take the time to find out about the beliefs you share and the beliefs that are different for each of you. Discover that people who are different from you can be a gift. They help you be more accepting and respectful. They can help you become a better person. Maybe you will even have a chance to share why Jesus is important to you, as the early Christians did.

Part 3: The Holy Spirit and the Church

KEY WORDS

evangelize
Pentecost
Christians

planner, homework assignments, or agenda items for meetings. Instead, what he leaves them with is the promise that he will send his Spirit to guide them. "The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you" (John 14:26).

In the first chapter of Acts, we read about how Jesus stays on earth for forty days after the Resurrection. He appears to the Apostles and instructs them by the power of the Holy Spirit. He talks with them about the Kingdom of God. He tells them to stay in Jerusalem and that "in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). He even gives them the following hint as to what the Spirit will help them do: "When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, and

Tongues of fire. This is what the disciples saw on the great feast of Pentecost. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, they went out to transform the world. When we are on fire with the Spirit, we can do the same.

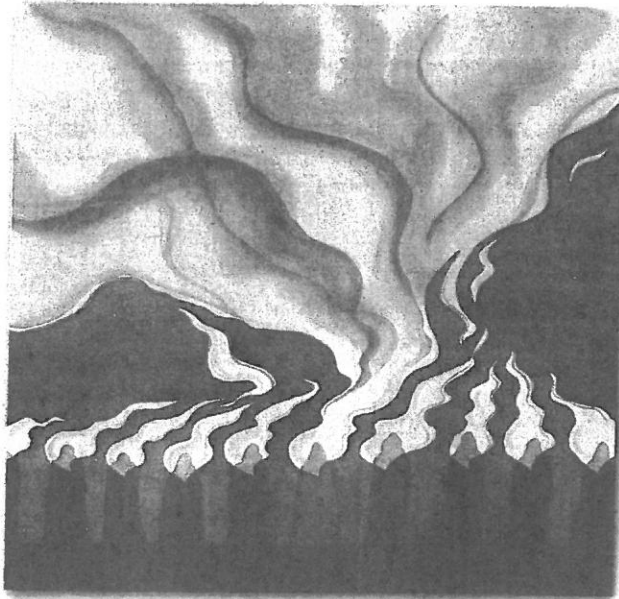


Illustration by Elizabeth Wang, "The Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost", copyright © Radiant Light 2008, www.radiantlight.org.uk

Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Jesus tells the Apostles what they are to do and what their mission will be: to **evangelize**. This means to continue the mission of Jesus Christ by spreading the Good News to the ends of the earth.

Come, Holy Spirit

Jesus' promise about the coming of the Holy Spirit came true a short while later. We call this event **Pentecost**.

"When the day of Pentecost came, all the believers were gathered together in one place. Suddenly there was a noise from the sky which sounded like a strong wind blowing, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then they saw what looked like tongues of fire, which spread out and touched each person there. They were all filled with the

Did You Know?

Bishops and Priests

The Apostles formed new Christian communities when traveling to preach the Good News. Before leaving these places, they would designate leaders for the communities by laying their hands on them. These leaders were called bishops, or *episkopos* in Greek. Christianity spread quickly, and soon the Church communities were too large to be cared for by one bishop. The bishop ordained priests to help him in his ministry. By the end of the first century, the Church had defined the roles of bishops, priests, and deacons. You can read more about the ordained ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons in chapter 31 of this handbook.

Peter was the first bishop of Rome and the head of the Church. To this day, the bishop of the Church of Rome is the Pope. He is the successor of Peter and is the head of the universal Church on earth.

Part 3: The Holy Spirit and the Church

PRAY

Holy God,
Send your Holy Spirit
to fill my heart with
your love. Help me
live in harmony with
others as the first
Christians did. Help
me resolve differences
and forgive. May the
power of your Spirit
help me teach others
about your Son by the
way I live. Come, Holy
Spirit! Fill my heart and
kindle in me the fire of your
love. I pray this in the name
of Jesus, your Son. Amen

When we
open ourselves
to the energy
of God's love,
great things
happen.

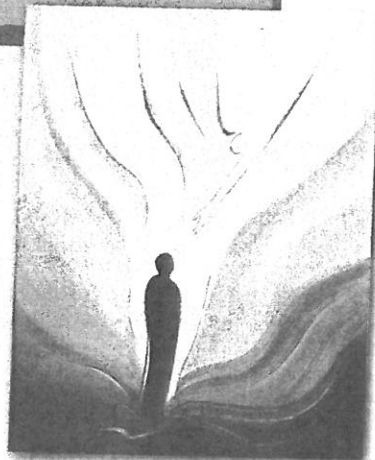


Illustration by Elizabeth Wang, "Through the Touch of the Holy Spirit",
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Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak" (Acts 2:1-4).

Suddenly there was a noise from
the sky which sounded like a
strong wind blowing. (Acts 2:2)

What Does This Mean?

Before Pentecost, Peter emerged as the leader of this Christian community struggling to find its way. One of the first things Peter does after Jesus ascends to heaven is guide the Apostles in choosing a successor to Judas (see Acts 1:12-26). On Pentecost, Peter, along with the other Apostles takes on a more visible and brave role in spreading the news about God's Kingdom.

Imagine the scene after the Holy Spirit has come. The Apostles are speaking in different languages. There is noise and confusion. People are wondering, "What does this mean?" (see Acts 2:12).

Things are so wild and crazy that "others made fun of the believers, saying, 'These people are drunk!'" (Acts 2:13).

What is Peter to do? He gets up in front of the crowd with the other Apostles gathered around him and speaks. First, he tells the crowd: "These people are not drunk, as you suppose; it is only nine o'clock in the morning" (Acts 2:15). Then he reminds everyone that God has promised he will pour out his Spirit (see Acts 2:18). He also reminds them about Jesus of Nazareth and the meaning of the Resurrection. He makes a stunning announcement to the crowd: Jesus is the one whom God has made Lord and Messiah! (see Acts 2:36).

"God has raised this very Jesus from death, and we are all witnesses to this fact. He has been raised to the right side of God, his Father, and has received from him the Holy Spirit, as he had promised. What you now see and hear is his gift that he has poured out on us." (Acts 2:32-33)



PRAY IT!

Liturgy Connection

Every year, the Church celebrates the feast of Pentecost during the Easter season.

When you go to Church on Pentecost Sunday, you will see red vestments (the special religious clothing worn by priests) and red decorations. One of the things the color red symbolizes when you see it at church is the Holy Spirit. The red tongues of fire descended on the Apostles at Pentecost.

If you go to the vigil Mass on the Saturday evening before Pentecost, you will hear John 7:37-39 proclaimed. In this passage, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as living water. What does this tell you about how the Holy Spirit works in your life?

Part 3: The Holy Spirit and the Church

Troubled by this, the people ask the Apostles, "What shall we do, brothers?" (Acts 2:37). Peter answers them: "Each one of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit. For God's promise was made to you and your children, and to all who are far away—all whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (Acts 2:38–39).

Know, Love, and Serve the Lord


From this moment forward, the job is clear: spread the Good News. Baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. From this moment forward, the Holy Spirit takes charge. Believers gather in community as followers of Jesus Christ. These believers come together to know, love, and serve the Lord. They are

Saints Peter and Paul (center, in front of tapestry) took seriously the mission Jesus gave us to go out and make disciples. How do young people contribute to this mission?



Bill Wittman

called **Christians** because, like Christ, they have been anointed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism. *Christos* is Greek for "anointed one." From this moment forward, followers of Jesus Christ, on fire with the Spirit, will take his message to the ends of the earth.



Looking Back

The Epistles

The Acts of the Apostles gives us a wonderful sense of the early Church communities and the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The New Testament also includes letters, called epistles, that tell the story of the early Church. The epistles include thirteen Pauline letters written to various communities to help them with particular issues. (The letters are called "Pauline" because either Paul wrote them or someone else wrote them and they were attributed to Paul.) The epistles contain songs of praise, advice for family life, and instructions on how to live and how to run the Church. To see an example, open your Bible and read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. In this passage, Paul teaches the people of Corinth about a special kind of love called "agape." This is love that is offered without any conditions. It is love that is constant, no matter who you are or what you do. How can you live the kind of agape love Paul talks about?