

77 The Comforter

It's Pentecost - the "birthday of the Church". It's "Whitsunday" - White Sunday, which used to be the main time in the Church's year for the baptism of new believers, when the candidates wore white.

God's chosen people the Jews were to keep Pentecost, (from the Greek word for "fiftieth"), seven weeks after Passover. Pentecost marked the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest, and is thus also known in the Bible as the "Feast of Weeks" (Exodus 34.22, Deuteronomy 16.10) or the "Feast of Harvests" (Exodus 23.16).

It is significant that this was the occasion when the Lord God chose to pour out the fullness of His Holy Spirit on His people (Acts 2.1-13), who were gathered patiently in Jerusalem in response to Jesus' instruction (Acts 1.4), waiting for just this moment.

These first believers in "Jesus Christ as Lord" were all Jewish, so they would have instinctively reacted to what was going on from their Jewish perspective.

For them, Pentecost was all about harvest - the end of one harvest and the start of the next. So they could understand this outpouring of the Holy Spirit as the completion of the wonderful harvest of redemption recently achieved in their midst by the Lord Jesus - His incarnation and ministry, His death, resurrection and ascension. Here now was the Holy Spirit given in all His fullness and power, truly the final act showing that, as the old hymn has it, "all is safely gathered in"!

But Pentecost for the Jews was no time for sitting in the sun with their feet up! - they were only halfway through the work of harvest. So in their minds at this particular Pentecost there was also a looking-ahead, to the spiritual harvest still out there in the fields, the harvest still needing to be safely gathered in.

And that harvest? - was the harvest of souls from amongst the nations. The Lord had spoken of the fields being "white already for harvest" (John 4.35). Before His ascension He had told His followers to "disciple all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"; and again, in Acts 1.8 - "you will be witnesses of me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and unto the end of the earth" (JPGreen, Literal Translation).

So our Jewish, newly-Christian forebears, present on that Day of Pentecost (Acts 2.1) had quite a time of it! They looked *back* with thankfulness to the fulfilled harvest of redemption; they looked *around* them in awe at those "tongues as of fire"; they listened in awe *around* them at the outpourings of praise to Almighty God in many of the known languages of the day; and they looked *forward* to the next harvest, that harvest of souls, in which each of them had a critical part to play.

And the "game-changer" in this transition from one harvest to the next was the giving of the Holy Spirit. Until then, at first sight they seemed to have everything

they needed already: for they were convinced, believing, knowledgeable and keen.

But look a little closer, and we see that somehow they lacked the "bubbles and the fizz" essential for effective Christian discipleship and witness. Suddenly on that wonderful morning of Pentecost they were given those bubbles and fizz in proverbial "spades"!

The disciples rose up, the Gospel burst forth, the Church "took off" - just read Acts through in one sitting if you can, to understand afresh the enormity of what went on. No-one could shut them up. No-one could keep them locked up. No-one could deny what was happening. Truly, they became the men who "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17.6) - what a glorious compliment to be given!

So for us today, we know what to be, we know what to do and we know who we particularly need - the Holy Spirit Himself, who is still "the Comforter", still "the Spirit of truth", and still the Giver of those "bubbles and fizz". You could look again through John Chapters 14, 15 and 16, and Romans Chapter 8 - particularly helpful passages, presented to us by the Lord, to give us greater understanding of the Holy Spirit and His role.

"Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen".

True then. True now. True always.