



St Alban's Church



# The Feast of Pentecost

By Andrew Carr, Reader

**Reading:** Acts 2:1-41

Click on the following link for the reading: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2%3A1-41&version=NIVUK>

For Genesis 11:1-5

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+11%3A1-5&version=NIVUK>

For the Festival of Weeks or Shavuot

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shavuot>

## Homily

Today is Pentecost – the birth of the Christian church (possibly c.22 May AD33).

The promised gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is rightly a big thing in Christian history and celebrated annually. Yet the account of gift given and received takes just four verses – one can sing (appropriately) ‘Happy Birthday’ in roughly the time it takes to read them... The real point is not, however, the outer audio-visual display inside the Upper Room which, I assume, was quite something, but rather the inner spiritual transformation of the disciples. Remember they had been locked down in isolation and social distancing – not because of plague, but rather out of fear of arrest and execution. Now empowered, emboldened, eloquent in many languages, the first Christian sermon is preached drawing upon Old Testament prophesy and symbolism stating that Jesus is the Lord, the promised Messiah, that they, and all those listening, can call upon to be saved.

Luke makes much of the various tribes and peoples in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost (the Jewish Festival of Weeks or Shavuot – see link above if you’d like to know more) and that all of them heard this sermon in their own language/dialect.

It is Babel reversed.

In Genesis 11:1-5, we read about the construction of the Tower of Babel (though more likely a ziggurat – a pyramid-like staged structure with steps and/or ramps leading to the top on all sides, per the illustration) on a plain in Shinar between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (later the site of the capital cities of the Akkadian and Babylonian empires). We are told that, at this time, all people ‘had one language and a common speech’ (Sanskrit perhaps..?) and that they decided to build a huge monument to themselves, a wonder of the world, a prime example of human ingenuity and achievement. This was so that “...we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

Quite why they feared being scattered is unclear, but God indeed confused their language and scattered them over the face of the whole earth...

Now here at Pentecost, an untold time later, the descendants of those scattered people have gathered together (possibly in the shadow of the Temple at Jerusalem, a huge monument to God, a wonder of the world, an example of human ingenuity and achievement which impressed even the occupying Roman Empire) and hear God through Peter speaking to them in uniting love not separating judgement...

The essential Christian message is set out – repentance, forgiveness, baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Repentance – a conscious turning back to God, a turning away from sin (what we do, say and think that is wrong); Forgiveness – a conscious act of forgiving and of being forgiven (to be done as often as necessary); Baptism – the sign of identifying with and becoming part of the Body of Christ and the community of believers in Him; and the Holy Spirit – God’s presence and power enabling believers to live in transformational love and experience holiness producing both fruits (Galatians 5:22-23) and gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11) with which to daily serve God, the world and the church (links below):

Fruits: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+5%3A22-23&version=NIVUK>

Gifts: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+12%3A1-11&version=NIVUK>

So, in closing, a group of some 70 becomes a church of some 3,070 – a fearful group is added to by scattered peoples to become a community that is One in Christ (‘Followers of the Way’ as they were initially called), and one beginning the transformational process of being daily renewed and restored just as the modern church (the people not the buildings) has and is.

Until we meet again, keep safe, keep well and be open to receive Jesus for yourself as Saviour and Lord.

**AMEN**