

5.24.2026 The Feast of Pentecost

In the first century, Jews and Gentiles were social, political, and religious enemies. The Jews viewed the Gentiles as cruel and oppressive, idolatrous enemies of God, and the Gentiles viewed the Jews as strange, backward, and superstitious. The division and misunderstanding between these groups was vast, and yet, in the early days of Christianity these two groups that the world would view only as enemies are described as being one in Christ. St. Paul, a Pharisee, who characterized himself as a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Jew circumcised on the eighth day, wrote in his letter to the Galatians that “*there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (3:28NLT).

The division and misunderstanding that so often creates enemies in this world has no place in Christianity, and the feast of Pentecost that we celebrate this morning is further evidence of that truth. When you consider the passage we read from the book of Acts, which describes the miraculous way Jesus fulfilled His promise to send the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; John 14:26), what you find in that rushing mighty wind, the cloven tongues like fire, and the Apostles speaking in different languages to people who were gathered in Jerusalem from *every nation under heaven* (Acts 2:5), is the comfortable truth that on the Feast of Pentecost instead of division, we celebrate union with God and one another, and instead of misunderstanding, Pentecost is a celebration of the grace of God given that we may hear and receive the truth.

All that we celebrate today sharply contrasts the division and misunderstanding we encounter in this world and in our culture, and there’s an Old Testament account that not only parallels what we experience, but actually exposes the root cause of this ancient problem we still face today. In the book of Genesis, we read the account of the tower of Babel. In that story people thought that, apart from God, by their own effort, they could build a tower that would reach up to heaven, a tower that would put them in a position where they would no longer have to rely on, believe in, or be obedient to their Creator. These people arrogantly thought they’d evolved and progressed to a point where they had the ability to take God’s place on the throne. Well, they were deceived, in the same way Adam and Eve were deceived into believing that they could “*be like God*” (Genesis 3:5).

The temptation our first parents faced in the Garden is the temptation the people faced at Babel, and it's the same temptation we still face today: the temptation to rebel, to be our own gods, to sit upon a throne and decide for ourselves what's right and wrong, to foolishly believe that we can live in unity and love for one another, apart from God who is the only source of unity and love. Whether it's in Eden, Babel, or our own culture, the result of turning our back on God and going our own way is always the same. When we separate ourselves from God, we separate ourselves from one another.

For example, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve lived in harmony with one another, until the day, when in sinful rebellion, they separated themselves from communion with God - and the battle of the sexes began. In the Garden, when God spoke to Eve about the consequences of sin, He said to her, "*You will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you*" (Genesis 3:16 NLT). In other words, instead of Adam being a man who would always lovingly care, protect, and provide for his wife, who he called bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh (Genesis 2:23), Adam would now seek to rule over her, and instead of Eve being the equal and perfect counterpart to Adam, she would now desire to control him. When we separate ourselves from God, we separate ourselves from one another.

We see the same result in the story of the tower of Babel. People who at one point could work together and cooperate with one another, suddenly realized that they couldn't even communicate with each other. In trying to take God's place by building this manmade throne, they separated themselves from Him, and when they separated themselves from God, they separated themselves from each other.

These biblical accounts of Eden and Babel are our experience as well. The incredible progress we've made in science and technology has convinced many people that we don't need God, because they'd say, apart from Him, by our own effort, we can create and build and achieve anything we can imagine. There are a number of people who think we don't need God, because now, we can "*be like God.*" Yes, that ancient lie is still being told today, many are falling for it, and we're all living with the consequences. In this world of 24 hour news, social media, and a cell phone in every hand, the

number of possible ways to instantly communicate with each other continues to increase every day, and yet, our actual ability to communicate, to truly and intimately know, love, and understand one another, seems to decrease every day.

Eden, Babel, our own experience that comes from living in a culture that has in so many ways moved away from God, these things all reveal the truth that when we separate ourselves from God, we separate ourselves from one another, and that fact reveals the importance of the miracle of Pentecost, because on that day in a rushing mighty wind and with cloven tongues of fire, instead of separation from God, there was union with God through the power and presence of His Holy Spirit, and through this intimate union with Him, people “*out of every nation under heaven*” (Acts 2:5) were united to one another, and they heard, in their own language, “*the wonderful works of God*” (Acts 2:11).

People *out of every nation under heaven*, united to one another. That sounds a lot like what America was meant to be, and when you think about all we considered today, what you find is the only way for us to be a people, united to one another, is to be one nation under God.

On the day of Pentecost, Jesus fulfilled His promise to send the Holy Spirit, and where there was once division and misunderstanding, it was God’s gift of the Holy Spirit that brought unity and the grace we so desperately need to hear and receive the truth. As we celebrate today may we remember that the same miraculous gift of God Himself, His Holy Spirit poured out upon the Church, and into our hearts, souls, and minds of the first Christians, has been given to us - for the same purpose. God dwells in us to the end that we may truly live in union with Him, that we may love one another, and that we may open our mouths and proclaim to people out of every nation under heaven *the wonderful works of God*.