

Theme: The Meaning of Pentecost

Acts 2:14-21 (EHV)

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and spoke loudly and clearly to them: **“Men of Judea, and all you residents of Jerusalem, understand this, and listen closely to my words. ¹⁵ These men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ On the contrary, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:**

¹⁷ **This is what God says will happen in the last days:**

I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy.

Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ **Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.**

¹⁹ **I will show wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and a rising cloud of smoke.**

²⁰ **The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.**

²¹ **And this will happen: Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**

If you had been there on that first Pentecost and heard the rushing wind, seen the tongues of fire above the apostle's heads, and heard them speaking in many different languages to the multi-national crowd that had gathered in Jerusalem that day do you think you'd react the same way many in the crowd did: **They were all amazed and perplexed. They kept saying to one another, “What does this mean?” (Acts 2:12).** Of course you would! We're Lutherans, after all. Asking “What does this mean?” is what we've done since Martin Luther wrote his Small Catechism!

So, **“What does this mean?”** What is **The Meaning of Pentecost?** Peter answered the peoples' question in our text. He first defends himself and the apostle's after they were accused of being drunk (**Acts 2:13**), by pointing out that it was too early in the day for that (9am), and then points them to the Old Testament Scriptures. Peter quotes from the Prophet Joel in the last verses of our text (**v. 17-21**) and points out that God had, in fact, prophesied that the sending of His Holy Spirit would **“happen in the last days” (v. 17)** and that it would be accompanied by miraculous signs.

The **“last days”** as they are defined by the Bible refer to the time after Jesus completed His work of salvation. In other words, after His ascension into heaven until He returns again on Judgment Day. That means the apostles who were alive on Pentecost were living in the **“last days”** and so are we. Although the Holy Spirit's working among us is not usually manifested in the same way today as it was on that day of Pentecost, yet the Spirit still works, lives and dwells in the hearts of believers. God still **“pours out His Spirit” (v. 17)** on us through His Word and the miracle of Baptism.

The last verse of the Gospel of Mark tells us that these miraculous signs and manifestations of the Holy Spirit were used to **“[confirm] the word through the accompanying signs” (Mark 16:20).** When we examine church history we see that after the New Testament Scriptures were completed the need for these signs essentially ended since the Scriptures themselves confirm their authenticity and truth, and are filled with promises of the Spirit's presence in the hearts of all believers. That is why God could say through the Prophet Joel and the Apostle Peter, **“This is what God says will happen in the last days: I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy” (v. 17-18).**

The tongues of fire and the speaking in tongues were the *visible* and *audible* proof that God had indeed sent His Holy Spirit to His apostles, and as the Prophet Joel had predicted, **“they [did] prophecy” (v. 18)**. This word, **“prophecy”** first and foremost means to *“proclaim what God wants to make known”* (Friberg Greek Lexicon). We sometimes hear that word and automatically think of telling the future, but when God gave His Holy Spirit it did not always involve the foretelling of future events. It has always involved the preaching of a message that God wants to make known, especially the Gospel message of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus.

After all, what was the reason the apostles were given the ability to speak in tongues that day? The people of the crowd answered that question for us in our Scripture reading from earlier in this chapter of Acts. In bewildered amazement they said, **“we hear them declaring in our own languages the wonderful works of God.” (Acts 2:11)**. The miracle itself was done in order to do something greater, namely, to spread the Gospel and proclaim **“the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11)**.

The greatest miracle of Pentecost is, of course, the power of the message—the Gospel! The astonishing power of the Holy Spirit is displayed most evidently in His use of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Through these Words He does the impossible: He creates living, saving faith in the stone-dead hearts of men and women, infants and elderly, rich and poor. Peter refers to this greatest of all miracles as he concludes his quote of the Prophet Joel in the last verse of our text, **“And this will happen: Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (v. 21)**. Now that is a miracle! **“Calling on the name of the Lord”** is an Old Testament expression that means *believing* in the one true God, Jehovah—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through the miracle of faith, created by the Holy Spirit, we are saved from the death that we deserved and given everlasting life in heaven instead! This greatest of all miracles happened in an incredible amount on that day of Pentecost. Later on in this chapter of Acts we are told, **“And that day [Pentecost] about three thousand people were added” (Acts 2:41 EHV)**. Three thousand souls that day were rescued from eternal death and were written in the book of life in heaven! Is there a greater miracle than that?

This miracle of Pentecost was clearly not just intended for that day of Pentecost. The coming of the Holy Spirit is the last great miracle of God before the day of Christ’s return. Yes, that great miracle began on Pentecost, but it continues today wherever the Gospel is preached; whenever God’s saving Word is shared. The great miracle of Pentecost continues still today and won’t end until Jesus comes again.

So, **“What does this mean?” (Acts 2:12)**, and what does this mean for us? It means that this great miracle of Pentecost is still happening today. It has happened to each one of us through the power of the Spirit in the Word of God, and His power working through the Word and water in the Sacrament of Baptism, and in the Word and bread and wine in the Sacrament of Lord’s Supper. Our souls too have been rescued from eternal death and our names have been added to heaven’s book of life! Think of what an amazing miracle that is! A miracle God has performed for you, and in you!

As we commemorate and celebrate this day of Pentecost, may we always remember what it means. And may we always be thankful that God’s Holy Spirit has worked that great miracle of faith within us. Amen.