

# *What is Pentecost?*



The study is meant to accompany the video "What is Pentecost?" To get the most from this lesson, you will need to be able to show the video to your class. The video is currently available, at no charge, from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary at [http://www.pts.edu/Pentecost\\_Resource\\_Kit\\_2016](http://www.pts.edu/Pentecost_Resource_Kit_2016).



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## USING THIS LESSON GUIDE

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## BEFORE CLASS

Read the “Teacher’s Background on Pentecost” and handout before class. If you prefer not to use the handouts, you can teach this class with Bibles if you simply read the discussion questions out loud.

During Class:

- A. Open with Prayer.
- B. Watch the video.
- C. Distribute the handouts and read Acts 2:1-4.
- D. If you would like, explain that Pentecost was a harvest festival celebrated before the first Easter. It was on that holiday that the Pentecost event occurred. Discuss the Acts study questions either as a large group or as smaller groups who then report back.
- E. Have the group or sub-groups complete the first group activity.
- F. Read the Exodus and John passages.
- G. Give the group time to complete the second group activity.
- H. Close in prayer.

If you use this study, we would love to hear your feedback! You can reach us at [SYI@pts.edu](mailto:SYI@pts.edu).

## LESSON PLAN

### TEACHER’S BACKGROUND ON PENTECOST

“The period of harvest-gladness, reckoned by the Jewish Church from the Passover to the Feast of Weeks on the 50<sup>th</sup> day (hence called Pentecost) was observed by the Christian Church, as early as the second century at least, in commemoration of the spiritual harvest, of which Christ’s resurrection was the first fruits, and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost caused the ingathering.”

“And this was the season when Christ’s promise to His disciples was fulfilled in the descent of the cloven tongues of fire, the emblem of power poured out upon them to enable them to teach to all tongues and nations the new law of Christ....”

*This History of the Christian Church  
During the First Ten Centuries*  
Philip Smith, pp 212; 30

“Pentecost as the anniversary of the descent of the Holy Spirit, the birthday of the church of Christ, was observed as one of the chief Christian festivals from a very early time.”

*Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*  
William Smith and Samuel Cheetham, p. 1619

This study will focus on the definition of Pentecost and its significance to the Christian Church as well as its connections to the Passover. Additionally, the study is intended as a brief introduction to some of the elements of Pentecost that we don’t often discuss.

For your own background, it may be helpful to read the following passages in their entirety:

Acts 2  
Exodus 12:29-51  
John 19-20

If your class enjoys deeper engagement with larger passages of Scripture, it may be to your advantage to read these longer passages rather than the few verses included in the handouts for this lesson.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION GUIDE

### ACTS 2:1-4

1. According to the video, what does the word “Pentecost” mean?

*Fiftieth*

2. Why does that celebration bear the name Pentecost?

*Because it took place fifty days after the Passover*

3. What happened at Pentecost?

*There are many possible answers to this question. There was a harvest festival, the Holy Spirit came to the new church, people heard the disciples speaking in different languages, the Spirit appeared as a flame, the church was born, etc.*

4. Do you remember celebrating Pentecost in the past? If so, how did you celebrate it?

*If people don't have anything in mind, prompt them to think about childhood. If they still can't recall anything, ask them why it might be that we don't remember celebrating Pentecost. Is it because we don't do much to acknowledge it, or because it's not memorable, or a third reason?*

5. Christmas and Easter are popular holidays to the point that they're even celebrated outside the Church. Why do you think we don't celebrate Pentecost in secular settings?

*There's no wrong answer to this one. You may wish to point out that Pentecost has been celebrated by the church as a major holiday from the earliest years of Christianity, yet Christmas and Easter are far more widely accepted. Don't let this conversation shift into musing about secularization of Christmas and Easter; the goal is to think about Pentecost and how we celebrate it or don't.*

### EXODUS 12:26-27 / JOHN 19:14-16

1. According to Exodus, what does the Passover celebration signify?

*The day the Lord “passed over” the houses of the Israelites and struck down the Egyptians, thus enabling the people of Israel to escape their captivity*

2. According to John, what event occurred around the time of the Passover?

*The crucifixion of Jesus, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, the Resurrection of Jesus, etc.*

3. What are some reasons we connect the events that took place at the Passover with the events that took place at Pentecost?

*This is a pretty open ended question. One answer is that the Church came into being to proclaim the events that occurred around the Passover—Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Others may point out the importance of Christ's death and resurrection as connected to the idea of sacrifice that we find at the first Passover. In the leader's background material, some sources use the “harvest” imagery as a metaphor for the work of the Church.*

# WHAT IS PENTECOST? HANDOUT



## Acts 2:1-4 (NRSV)

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to the video, what does the word "Pentecost" mean?
2. Why does the celebration bear the name Pentecost?
3. What happened at Pentecost?
4. Do you remember celebrating Pentecost in the past? If so, how did you celebrate it?
5. Christmas and Easter are popular holidays to the point that they're even celebrated outside of the Church. Why do you think we don't celebrate Pentecost in secular settings?

### GROUP ACTIVITY

Come up with three new ways your church could celebrate Pentecost. Then, rank them in order of how likely our confused cartoon character, Josh, is to understand them.

## Exodus 12:26-27 (NRSV)

"And when your children ask you, "What do you mean by this observance?" you shall say, "It is the passover sacrifice to the LORD, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses." And the people bowed down and worshipped."

## John 19:14-16 (NRSV)

"Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified."

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to Exodus, what does the Passover celebration signify?
2. According to John, what event occurred around the time of the Passover?
3. What are some reasons we connect the events that took place at the Passover with the events that took place at Pentecost?

### GROUP ACTIVITY

Construct a definition of the Passover that would help Josh understand the holiday and its relationship to Pentecost.

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