

**Day of Pentecost
Principal Service
Cycle C RCL
Revised**

Acts 2:1-11

The word “spirit” in Greek (*pneuma*) also means “wind.” The speech of John the Baptist in Luke 3:16 promised that the one who came after John would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. These images have all been combined in the account by the author of Luke-Acts of the Day of Pentecost. The Hebrew Bible’s association of the Spirit with the speech of the prophets provided an explanation for the ability of the apostles to speak in many foreign tongues. This gift of tongues seems to differ from the gift of tongues that divided the Corinthian Christians from one another (1 Corinthians 12). The strange utterances of the Corinthians were taken to be in the language of heaven (1 Corinthians 13:1), whereas the “tongues” of Acts 2 are actual human languages.

The festival of Pentecost (Greek: “fiftieth”; Hebrew: *shavuot*, “weeks”) is described in Exodus 23:16; 34:18-24; Leviticus 23:15-21; Deuteronomy 16:9-16; and 2 Chronicles 8:13. It is mentioned by its Greek name in Tobit 2:1 and 2 Maccabees 12:32. Pentecost was originally an agricultural festival, but in the first century of our era, the agricultural meaning had been largely lost. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus counted the fifty days of Pentecost from Passover rather than from the beginning of the spring wheat harvest as directed in Deuteronomy 16:9. By the time of the events described in Acts the festival had become a celebration of the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

or

Genesis 11:1-9

The Yahwistic writer (J) portrays the Lord as not wanting human beings to be like the gods, yet the first man and woman ate the fruit of omniscience (“good and evil”), thereby acquiring one of the divine characteristics, omniscience. So that the couple would not gain the other characteristic of divinity, immortality, the Lord cast them from the Garden where the Tree of Life grew (Genesis 3). We find that theme elsewhere in Genesis. In Genesis 6:1-4, human beings have their lifespan limited to 120 years because the “sons of the gods” took human women to wife and had children with them. Arguably, these offspring might be god-like in some respects. Consequently, humans must be limited in lifespan so they do not have an opportunity to exploit this aspect of divinity.

Page 1 of 2Page 1 of 2The name “Babel” is the Hebrew name for the city of Babylon; and except for Genesis 10:10 and Genesis 11:9, it is otherwise translated Babylon. The English translators used the translation “Babel” instead of “Babylon” because they know that the text was making a play on the Hebrew word “Babel”: “For there the LORD confused (*baval*) the speech of the whole land (11:9).

Psalms 104:25-35, 37b

This is a *hymn* that particularly celebrates God’s creative act. It was perhaps used as part of the New Year’s celebration in the Temple of Jerusalem. Still, it also has some features of the *wisdom psalms* as well. The role of “wisdom” (*soxmah*) in creation (104:25) anticipates the role of Dame Wisdom in Proverbs 8, Job 28, and Sirach 24. The dreadful sea-monster Leviathan, who some

Hebrew myths had the Lord defeat at the beginning of creation (*cf.* Psalm 74:13-14, Job 3:8; 26:12-13; 41:1-34), is here just a figure of comic relief, and a creature like other creatures. (Readers may note that the *Book of Common Prayer* has renumbered the verses of this psalm by dividing verse 14 into two separate verses and by turning the last verse into two. The result is a psalm of 37 verses instead of the 35 verses in the Hebrew, Greek, and English Bibles.)

Romans 8:14-17

The Community Rule from the Dead Sea Scrolls, dating from the second century BCE, requires that new converts to the Qumran sect be instructed about the two spirits created by God—the “spirit of truth” and the “spirit of deceit.” (1QS III.13-IV.26) The members of the sect, the “sons of light,” are pitted against those who are called “sons of darkness.” Paul gives us a similar “two spirits” view of human life here, asserting that his readers are those who have received a spirit of adoption rather than a spirit of fear. Adoption may play the same role in Romans as the idea in the Community Rule that God appointed each person to walk in one spirit or the other. We are not in charge of our own salvation. The adoption metaphor leads to a family metaphor for the relationship of the redeemed to their God.

The Aramaic word *'abba'* (verse 15) means “father,” and because of the sign of the emphatic (*-a'*) at the end, we must understand the expression as a formal and respectful form of address, “O Father!” Although *'abba'* has been taken over into Modern Hebrew to mean “daddy,” Aramaic in the time of Jesus would have accomplished such a familiar address with an expression like *'avi'*, “my father.”

or

Acts 2:1-11 (See above.)

John 14:8-17 (25-27)

This chapter begins the so-called “farewell discourse” of the Fourth Gospel, a long speech Jesus gives his students at their last meal together before the crucifixion. Farewell discourses are common in Greco-Roman literature as well as in biblical and apocalyptic texts and have as their literary aim the description of the situation of the students after the death of the master. The intended irony of the discourse in John is that Jesus’ death is the beginning point of a more intense relationship between him and his followers than was possible during the years of his ministry in Palestine.

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