

26 LED BY THE SPIRIT

What if someone appeared before your church claiming to be the Holy Spirit? This happened in the year A.D. 156, when a man named Montanus began preaching that the Holy Spirit had chosen to live in him. You will see in this session that the Holy Spirit lives within all believers, but that is not what Montanus meant. He claimed that he was the Holy Spirit. He spoke as though the words coming out of his mouth were not his, but the Spirit's. That meant no one should argue with him—not even ministers of the church quoting the Bible. Montanus was joined by two women, Prisca and Maxilla. Together they told believers that the end of the world was coming very soon. Everyone was to give up possessions and join the followers of Montanus waiting for the return of Jesus.

Though his claims were not quite as radical, Thomas Münzer lived at the time of Luther and claimed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. At first he agreed with Luther, but later decided Luther was too much a man of the Bible. Münzer thought the words of the Spirit that came through him and other prophets from the city of Zwickau were superior to the Bible. Luther once said to these so-called prophets, "I slap your spirit on the snout." He did not believe the Spirit would speak in ways contrary to the Bible. Münzer helped start a revolt of German peasants; he was caught and beheaded.

The prophets of the Old Testament and the New Testament did speak words of the Holy Spirit. The idea itself is far from wrong. But Montanus and Münzer are examples of what can happen when people make claims about the Spirit that are not true.

3 STATEMENTS

- The Holy Spirit is God's gift for every believer.
- The Holy Spirit gives Christians power to live as witnesses for Jesus.
- The Holy Spirit works differently in different people.

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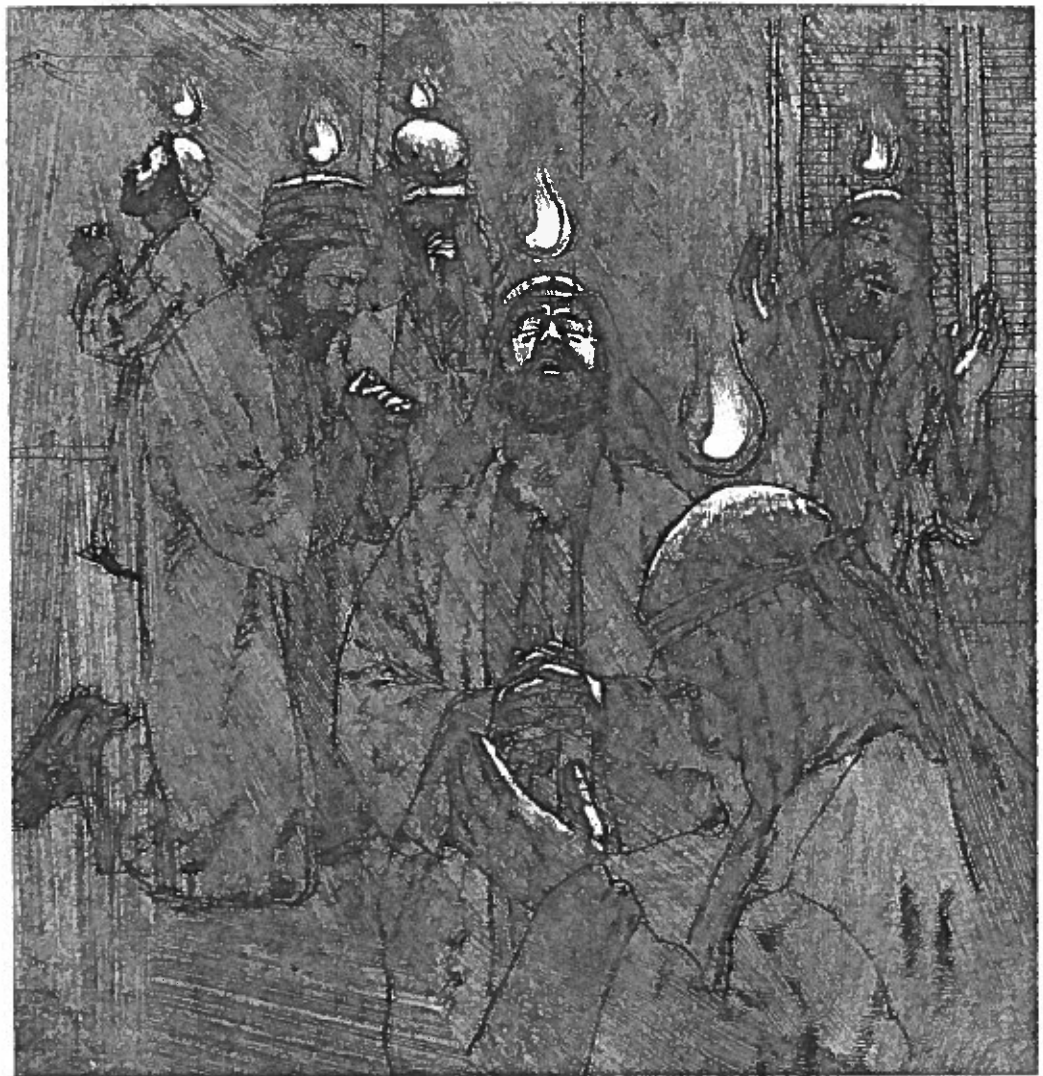
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THE DAY OF THE LORD'S COMING

After his resurrection, Jesus told the disciples to remain in Jerusalem. They waited as one day turned into another. Fifty days they waited until the festival of Pentecost.

Like Passover, it was another day to celebrate for the Jews. Pentecost was a holy day that also brought people from many lands. In cities all over the ancient Mediterranean world there were groups of Jewish people who built synagogues, worked, and worshiped, far away from the Temple. Many of these people loved the Temple, and traveled great distances to see it, especially during a religious festival.

Pentecost, as the name implies, is a 50th day. Tradition had it that Moses received the Law on Mt. Sinai 50 days after the first Passover in Egypt. For all the members of this religion of the Law, there was cause to celebrate, indeed! But this year foreigners heard news they never could have expected. This



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year people were talking about what had happened to Jesus of Nazareth, and how people were saying he was alive again! Though the priests denied it, they could not produce a body, nor put forward any other reliable explanation for this mystery.

Read Acts 2:1-4. As you read, you will find two unusual events the disciples experienced on Pentecost.

1. What was the first unusual event of the day?

2. What image does "violent wind" bring to your mind?

3. In Hebrew, the same word *ruach* (REU-ach) is used for the words spirit, wind, and breath. How do you think the sound of this mysterious, vi-

olent wind must have made them think of the Holy Spirit?

4. What was the second unusual happening of that day?

5. What does fire make you think of?

6. What do you think the disciples thought as they saw flames, tongues of fire, hovering over each other?

The next unusual event of the day was the disciples speaking in different languages. The purpose of this speaking in different languages was so that people from all over the world could understand what was going on. It was all so unusual, so strange, that it demanded an explanation.

"They're drunk!" said one. But Peter spoke up as leader of the disciples. Read Acts 2:14-21. Peter appealed to all to listen carefully and pointed to the Bible to explain the events of the day. It isn't every day that a prophecy is fulfilled! This was one of those days! A new era was beginning in the story of the world. The prophet Joel had foretold it.

Read Luke's quotation of Joel 2:28-32 in Acts 2:17-21.

7. What is similar here to the events of Pentecost?

8. What do you find in the prophecy from Joel that is yet to come?

9. What is your opinion about what these strange things mean?

Peter did more explaining. That day he preached the first Christian sermon. He spoke about Jesus openly, by the power of the Holy Spirit. That was the difference between this day and all those days before. Now the Spirit had come to the disciples—the same Holy Spirit that had been with Jesus! The wind, the fire, the different languages all testified to this.

Read Acts 2:38-39. The bystanders asked what they should do in view of the wonderful happenings of the day. The answer is like a blueprint for all people to follow.

10. What are the two things the people are to do in order to receive the gift of salvation?

Peter said that everyone who did this would receive the gift of the Holy

Spirit. *The Holy Spirit is God's gift for every believer.* God made a promise and that promise was for people from all over the world and for all generations to come. The promise is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the personal, powerful presence of God in our lives who makes us new people and keeps us faithful to Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit gives Christians power to live as witnesses for Jesus.

THE GIFT OF FAITH

The Holy Spirit gives Christians power to live as witnesses for Jesus. The first and most important work of the Holy Spirit in the life of anyone is to create and sustain faith in Jesus Christ. It takes the Holy Spirit working within us to overcome our selfishness so we can love and put our trust in God. God is the giver of the faith we need.

In the explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, Martin Luther wrote the following.

"I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith."

God gave the disciples the faith they needed to believe in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit came to the disciples. Like the disciples, we have no power over the Spirit. God sends the Spirit when and to whom it pleases God. The gifts of God's Holy Spirit are gifts. They are not possessions we have earned because we are so sincere. It is the Spirit who creates the faith God demands. This gift of faith is created through the hearing of God's Word and through the sacraments. The gift comes from outside of ourselves, unlike the gifts claimed by Montanus and Münzer. So, even the faith we claim as ours is not really ours. It is a gift of God.

TOGETHER IN CHRIST

The Holy Spirit works differently in different people. Part of the richness of the church is that its members are different. We all share one faith in one Lord. We all have received one Baptism. But from person to person there are important differences.

Paul wrote about this in 1 Corinthians 12:14-31. Read these verses. He compared the members of the church to various parts of the human body.

Based on what you have read, discuss some of the following questions.

- Why do you think Paul used the image of a body as a comparison for the Christian community?
- What would the Christian community be like if everyone had the same gifts of the Spirit?
- Are some gifts of the Spirit more important than other gifts? Why or why not?
- Which gift or gifts of the Spirit do you think God has given to you?
- In what ways can the gifts of the Spirit Paul described be used to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord?

The Holy Spirit works differently in different people.

Shaping life

COURAGE TO ACT AND SPEAK

You may have some doubts about the presence of God's Spirit with you and for you. Almost everyone does. But God's decision to be with you and for you is not dependent upon how you feel. God is not dependent upon how strong you feel your faith is. In Holy Baptism God has said, "This one is mine. I will be with my child forever."

To be sure you know that, God has sent the Holy Spirit to live within you. Now if the Holy Spirit lives within you, two things happen.

The first thing is that God creates and builds your faith through the work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit continues to bring you to daily repentance and new birth.

The second thing the Holy Spirit does is to strengthen you for work in God's way of living. The gift of faith and

FURTHER

opportunities

Mishna minutes

Trying to figure out how the Spirit of God gives the gift of faith and empowers for service is not something new. In the gospel of John, Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, came to Jesus at night seeking understanding. Read John 3:1-21 once each day for a week. As you read, stop when a verse or phrase raises a question or thought for you. Think about what it means for you. You may need to study a commentary about this passage to understand what is going on here.

The key to understanding the purpose of the Spirit's coming is in John 3:16-17. Memorize these two verses that have been called the "gospel in miniature."

Activity 1

Paul wrote another list of gifts of the Spirit in Romans 12:3-9. Read this passage. Make a list of the ways these gifts may be used within your community to build up the body of Christ.

Activity 2

Cut pictures from newspapers or magazines that represent the gifts of the Spirit that Paul listed in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. Make a collage of these pictures.

Hang this poster somewhere in your home as a reminder of the many gifts God has given to God's people.

Activity 3

Find out from your teacher or pastor the name of a missionary living overseas. Pray each day this week for that person.

the many varied gifts Paul talked about were not for personal use only. Gifts of the Spirit are for use by the community of believers for the sake of believers and for those who do not believe.

1. In the space below, make a list of the gifts of the Holy Spirit you have that can be used for the good of others.

2. Now think of a friend of yours and list the gifts that person has that can be used for the good of others.

3. Was it easier to list the gifts of your friend than to list your own? Why or why not?

4. Why do you think it is sometimes easier for others to see the gifts in you than it is for you to see them in yourself?

It is important for you to know your gifts of the Spirit. Your church needs your help. Like anything else, to use your gifts, you must be fully aware of them. The problem is that we often may not recognize the gifts within ourselves.

Following are some spiritual gifts Paul listed in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. On newsprint or chalkboard, brainstorm together about ways these gifts can be used in your congregation. Also, think about how you can help those who have gifts to use them better.

- Wisdom
- Healing
- Prophecy (speaking messages from God)
- Knowing and speaking other languages

FOCUS

ON THE GIFT OF TONGUES

One question people ask after they have read Acts 2:1-13 is, "What was speaking in tongues?" The wording of the question should be changed slightly to "what is," rather than "what was," because it still is practiced today among Christians, though not by all.

The first instance of speaking in tongues among Christians was Pentecost, when Jesus' disciples were able to speak languages they had never learned. This ability came from the Holy Spirit. Visitors to Jerusalem heard about Jesus in their own languages (tongues) as the disciples spoke out in public. Speaking in tongues was first a way to let people from other nations know about Jesus so they could believe in him. It was part of God's great plan for the gospel to spread around the world.

We hear of speaking in tongues also among the church in Corinth. Here the gift was not of benefit to outsiders, because the words could not be recognized as any language of earth. The people considered their speech to be the language of angels, and someone with a matching gift, the gift to interpret, had to make sense of the words. Speaking in tongues had great potential for harm. Outsiders might be frightened rather than attracted by people speaking eerie syllables. Also, people who spoke in tongues might be inclined to think of themselves as better than people who had other gifts.

Christians who speak in tongues say it gives them strength. They believe it is a true and helpful gift of God.



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