

Let's get straight into the text,

Here's how it begins: **When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.**

Pentecost: Fifty days after the Passover

A kind of harvest festival.

The 'they' mentioned here is the early Christian community,

So, if you go back a bit you read this,

About what happened after Jesus' ascension: **[The disciples] returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers... together the crowd numbered about one hundred and twenty people)... Acts 1**

One of the hall marks of the early Christian community is prayer.

And if you read the book of Acts you'll see that prayer

Precedes and accompanies the mission of the Church.

Well, it's this group of people who are together

On the day of Pentecost when the promised gift of the Spirit is given.

This is what we read: **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.**

As we will find out, the Spirit-given ability

To speak of what God has done in a way that is intelligible

To people from all over the world

Is a key part of what happens at the first Pentecost.

In fact, this is what we read: **Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?**

It's worth contrasting this with the Tower of Babel  
As we sometimes hear at Pentecost:  
At Babel human language was confused by God  
When human beings thought they could ascend to heaven  
By their own strength.  
Here God gives a unity of comprehension  
So that people from a great variety of language groups  
Can hear, not of their own triumphs,  
But the great things that God has done.

After St Luke lists many of the places from which people had come  
We then read these words: **All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'**

It's not unusual in the Gospels to find  
That people have different interpretations of the miraculous,  
With some attributing the miraculous to God,  
And others to nature, or, in this case, to human folly.  
But St Luke records the response of St Peter,  
St Luke records St Peter's *interpretation* of what is happening;  
And St Peter, following the example and instruction of Jesus,  
Uses the Old Testament to interpret what is happening  
As part of the ongoing ministry of Jesus.

This is what we read: **But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:**

**"In the last days it will be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...**

So, St Peter proclaims that God as work,  
And that, just as God had promised through his prophet,  
He is pouring out his Spirit on all his people  
As part of the saving work that was evident in Jesus:  
In his life, death, and resurrection.

In fact St Peter ends the introduction to his proclamation  
With these words from the prophet Joel  
Which, inspired by the Spirit, he uses to point people to Jesus:  
**Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."**

Let's pause here, because there is Good News for us.  
God's word says, and St Peter proclaims,  
That *everyone* who calls on the Lord's name shall be saved:  
Not those who are good enough, or well connected enough  
Or have enough money in their pockets  
Or brains in their head,  
Or who are of the right ethnicity or social class or gender:  
*Everyone*: Jesus' name is given to everyone  
So that they can call on it and receive healing and help from God.  
Later in Acts St Peter, when he is before the Sanhedrin,  
Makes the same proclamation when he says: **There is salvation in no one else,  
for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we  
must be saved.'** Acts 4:12

This also comes up in the letters of the New Testament  
St Paul writes in Romans: **For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek;  
the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For,  
'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'** Roman 10  
Again, the emphasis is on God's goodness, on God's generosity,  
And on the universal scope of the grace of God:  
No matter where people are from, God's salvation is a freely given  
In Christ Jesus, and as we call on his name  
We find out the goodness of God to us and to all.

I said before that St Peter ends the introduction to his sermon  
With the promise from Joel,  
But if you read on he then goes on to proclaim  
The culpability of the crowds or the death of Christ:  
That the one whose name they are to call on  
Is the one they have crucified.  
So, calling on the name of the Lord is not like reciting a magic formula,  
But it is part of acknowledging one's own need for forgiveness.

We know that St Peter is not simply saying  
That it's the Jews who killed Jesus,  
Or even that it was the Romans or some other specific group:  
We have *all* sinned, and all of us bear the guilt.  
This is part of our own Lutheran tradition  
And we have it in hymns like 'O Sacred Head'

Were we sing these word:

***What Thou, my Lord hast suffered  
Was all for sinner's gain;  
Mine, mine was the transgression  
But Thine the deadly pain.***

In Acts, when the people hear of their own complicity  
In the death of Christ, they learn what it means  
To call on the name of the Lord.

This is what we read: **Now when [the crowd] heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.'** Acts 2:37-39

When they recognise their own complicity, their own guilt,  
St Peter directs them to turn away from ignorance and sin,  
And to turn toward the mercy of God in Christ Jesus,  
And specifically to the gift that Christ gave in his resurrection:  
The gift of baptism, of washing in the name of Jesus.  
Did you notice that the scope of this gift is not simply  
To people from all nations, but all generations,  
And that the same gift of the Spirit  
That undoes Babel, that brings unity not by human striving,  
But by the gracious call of God  
Is given to those who receive this gift.

Dear brothers and sisters here at Bethlehem,  
We have confessed our sin,  
We have called on the name of the Lord,  
We have been baptised into Christ  
And have the gift of the Holy Spirit,  
Let's live with the confidence that God gives us in Jesus,  
Sharing in his Spirit of generosity on goodness,  
Letting all people know that  
Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus  
Shall be saved. In Jesus' name. Amen.