

Happy Birthday

“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues¹ as the Spirit enabled them.”

Acts 2 v 2-4

Whose birthday is it? Shall we sing happy birthday? Shall we make a cake?

It is the birth of the church.

Isn't the birth of the church at Christmas?

No, Jesus was born at Christmas. We have heard the story of Joseph and Mary, going to Bethlehem. Mary was very pregnant and there was no room for them to stay so they ended up in a stable at the back of an inn. They had shepherds and wise men who came to visit. This story is retold every year, in schools with little children wearing tea towels on their heads and lots of children dressed up as animals.

This birthday is different

Why is this birthday different?

It isn't the birthday of a person, it is a birthday of the church, not just the Church of England, or the Baptists or the Catholics. It is the birthday of every church.

What happened?

Jesus was born at Christmas, he grew up and when he was about 30 he started going around teaching. He had 12 Disciples who were learning from him. They thought that he was going to change the world. The authorities didn't like him, he was betrayed by Judas and eventually he went on trial and was crucified. He died on Good Friday. This is far from the end of the story, Jesus came back to life three days later on Easter Day. People were shocked, some people did not believe it unless they saw Jesus himself. Some people thought that he was a ghost but he drank and ate with his friends, the disciples.

Jesus was on earth for 40 days and then he was taken up to heaven. The disciples were left alone, they no longer had the support and guidance of Jesus to look after them. They were frightened. People knew that they were supporters of Jesus so that meant that their lives were at risk too. They had been told to wait in an upper room. They had been waiting there for 10 days when it happened. This was 50 days after Jesus rose again and it is known as Pentecost. The disciples were sent a gift from heaven which was in effect the church's first birthday present, they were sent the Holy Spirit.

So the Holy Spirit coming to earth was the start of the church and not the birth of Christ?

Yes. The church started when people started to do God's work. The Holy Spirit allowed people to work on behalf of God. God was inspiring them and guiding them through the Holy Spirit.

But what is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God here on earth. It is God's breath, inspiring us and helping us to see God in creation. It helps us to do God's work. The Holy Spirit allows us to praise God.

What happened to the Disciples when the Holy Spirit arrived?

The Disciples were given the ability to do God's work. They were able to heal people. They were able to speak in different languages. They were able to do things that they had never done before as they had God, in the form of the Holy Spirit, living within them.

Does the Holy Spirit live in us?

Christians believe that at a Baptism, we are baptised in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit lives in us. At baptism, we ask for the Holy Spirit and as Luke 11 v 9 says "Ask, and it shall be given to you."

We have this as a gift from God. The Disciples received the Holy Spirit with the blowing of a violent wind and tongues of fire but we receive it at Baptism.

Pentecost, the Church's birthday is a time to celebrate this event. It is a time to have a party!

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