



# St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The Feast of Pentecost, commonly called Whitsun, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012

*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may dwell with you forever; even the Spirit of truth...*

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son  
and of the Holy Ghost Amen.**

Pentecost was an ancient Jewish Harvest festival. It was one of three Holy festivals that God, in the book of Leviticus, commanded the Jewish people to observe. Fifty days after the Passover the first fruits of the New Year was to be offered to the Lord. Jewish pilgrims from all around the world came to Jerusalem to observe it, "There was dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven" says today's Epistle lesson.

At Pentecost, devout Jews presented material offerings of lambs, kids, and loaves of bread at the Temple. Those who offered them knew that God had no

need to receive such things. Rather the people had the need to offer them. Psalm 51 says: "...thou desirest no sacrifice, else I would give it thee, but thou delightest not in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a troubled spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." The material gifts were signs and tokens of the spiritual offering of the gratitude and faithfulness of God's people. Pentecost was a festival in which God was worshipped as "the author of every good and perfect gift" above all the gift of his Spirit, inspiring the prophets, enlightening the sages, filling the human

spirit with hope and faith in God's promise in the Book of the prophet Joel: "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions,"

In this setting of thankfulness and expectation on the Festival of Pentecost, the small band of Christ's disciples awaited the fulfillment of the prophets' visions in Jesus' promise of the coming of the Comforter. "And suddenly, there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind...and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire and it sat upon each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." Overwhelmed with a sense of the very presence of God, they spoke the language of religious ecstasy; the language of dreams and visions; not that of rational thought.

But Pentecost is not just the overwhelming, ecstatic reaction to the

sudden awakening to a truth they had long been prepared for but did not fully grasp until that moment. The Spirit of God is the spirit of order not of chaos. The disciples, baptized by wind and fire by the Spirit, find its best expression in continuing "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking bread and in prayers."

God's Holy Spirit is in us by our Baptism and Confirmation – ready to help, strengthen, and save. If we consistently, continually call on him for help, he will by degrees, step by step, make us better persons, growing into closer relationship with God. The Holy Spirit brings order to our lives, peace and happiness, and humility.

Saint Paul makes it very clear that the greatest gift of the Spirit is love. The measure of growth in the Spiritual life is growing in love for God and our neighbors.

*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*