



The Feast of Weeks: Pentecost

The Feast of Weeks was the festival celebrated at the beginning of the grain harvest. This was the feast at which the Hebrews offered their firstfruits of the harvest to the Lord at the tabernacle. It was

one of the three major Jewish feasts, along with the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Feast was celebrated for seven consecutive weeks beginning “the morning following the Sabbath day” of Passover. Thus comes its title, the “Feast of Weeks.” Later in the Old Testament this feast became known as “Pentecost” (“fiftieth”), since it was celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover.

The Jewish Feast of Pentecost was fulfilled as described in Acts 2. On this Day of Pentecost came the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Christ, as Christ Himself had promised. The descent of the Holy Spirit fulfills the Jewish Feast of Pentecost in a number of ways:

1. The reaping of the firstfruits of the grain harvest is fulfilled by the first harvest on the Day of Pentecost, which consisted of the Jews who believed and were baptized. St. John Chrysostom says the Holy Spirit “came down as the keen-edged sickle.”
2. The offering of the two “deposit loaves” of leavened bread (Lv. 23:17-18) is prophetic of the ingathering of both Jews and Gentiles (Bede). St. John Cassian says the preaching of the apostles on the Day of Pentecost was “the true bread of the first fruits...when five thousand men were filled with the gift of its food”

3. The fiftieth day—seven consecutive weeks following Pascha plus one day—indicates the fullness of time in a mystery, similar to the Christian understanding of the eighth day.

4. The giving of the Law to Moses by the Son of God is brought to completion by the giving of the Spirit to the Church.

The Orthodox services for Pentecost place their emphasis on the descent of the Holy Spirit in all His fullness. His descent means that the Mosaic Law, given by the Lawgiver and honored on the Jewish feast day of Pentecost, is now transcended: “The All-Holy Spirit, who freely distributes gifts to all, has descended and come to earth; not as He formerly had in the Law’s dark shadow, shining in the Prophets, but now in very truth, He is bestowed in us through Christ.” (Vespers, Thurs. after Pentecost)

The worship services for Pentecost repeatedly emphasize how Old Testament prophecies of the Holy Spirit are fulfilled on this day. Two of the greatest of these prophecies are found in the Old Testament readings for this Feast—Ezekiel 36:24-28 and Joel 3:1-5. St. Peter directly quotes the

passage from Joel in his exhortation to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). A third reading—Numbers 11:16-17, 24-29—relates how the Lord commands Moses to select seventy of the elders of Israel, who, when the Spirit comes upon them, prophesy at the tabernacle. The comment of Moses regarding this event, “Would that all the Lord’s people might be prophets when

the Lord would put His Spirit upon them” is prophetic of the Day of Pentecost.

A Hymn for the Feast of Pentecost declares, “Once, when He descended and confounded the tongues, the Most High divided the nations; and when He divided the tongues of fire, He called all men into unity; and with one accord we glorify the All-Holy Spirit.” (from the Orthodox Study Bible)