

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Pentecost Sunday, May 23, 2010

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Hymns: 224, 230, 226:1-4, 225, 231:1-4
Lessons: Ezekiel 37:1-14, Acts 2:1-21, John 14:25-27.
Sermon Text: Acts 2:4a and 1 Corinthians 3:16.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Quick: a trick question. When is the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost, first mentioned in the Holy Scriptures? Well, if you were to start reading from the beginning, you would not have to read very far. Let's start at the beginning: *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning--the first day."* Genesis 1:2-5. There it is: Verse 2 tells us *"the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."*

Phrases such as "Holy Spirit", "Spirit of God", "Spirit of the Lord" and "Holy Ghost" are found nearly 200 times in the scriptures, and there are other references, too, to the third person of the Triune God. As you read in the scriptures, you will find that the New International Version (NIV) capitalizes the word "Spirit" in many places where the word "Spirit" refers to the Holy Ghost – not all but many. The King James Version (KJV) often but not always translates his name "Holy Ghost." Today, on Pentecost, also called in the church year "the Festival of the Holy Spirit", let's talk about

THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE HOLY GHOST

- 1. Who is the Holy Spirit?**
- 2. Why do we call him true God?**
- 3. What does he do for us?**

In our first hymn today we sang "Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord! Be all Thy graces now outpoured On each believer's mind and heart; Thy fervent love to them impart." Other hymns today make it clear that the Holy Ghost has done and still continues to do his work in you who are hearing this sermon today and in all believers. The Bible is the Word of God, and has been given to mankind by the work of the Holy Ghost as we read in 2 Peter 1:21 *"For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."* That Word of God has been translated into about 2,400 of the 6,900 known human languages, reaching 98% of the people of the world in a language in which they are fluent.

Ten days after the ascension of Jesus into heaven, God sent the Holy Spirit in a very special way. The special gift of the Holy Ghost had been promised by John the Baptist when he said *"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."* Matthew 3:11. But even before that the Holy Spirit had been promised by the Old Testament prophets, including Joel, the typical Old Testament Lesson for Pentecost, as we read in Joel 2:28-29: *"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."*

Today as we look at the Holy Spirit, we find that he is one of the persons of the Triune God, usually spoken of as "the third person" because he is often mentioned last. In Matthew 28:19 we read of the command given by Jesus before he ascended into heaven: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* St. Paul speaks of the three persons in this way:

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." 2 Corinthians 13:14. At Jesus' baptism, Matthew records: ***"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'"*** Matthew 3:16-17.

Why do we call him true God? Well, we find such passages as Acts 5:3-4: ***"Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.'"*** That makes it plain that in lying to the Holy Spirit, Ananias lied to God, not just to men.

One of our sermon texts makes it clear that the Holy Ghost didn't only come upon the disciples of Jesus on Pentecost, but comes upon all believers. ***"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"*** 1 Corinthians 3:16. A temple is a building created and erected to honor a supreme being. Believers were called by the work of the Holy Spirit to believe in Jesus Christ as their only Savior from sin, and as long as they have faith, they are still God's temple. As long as they have faith, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God lives within them.

In Second Corinthians, Paul is even more specific about who the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of the almighty God is: ***"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."*** 2 Corinthians 3:17.

The Holy Ghost has divine attributes, such as knowing all things: ***"but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God."*** 1 Corinthians 2:10-11.

But most important to us today is what the Holy Ghost has done for us. We read in Titus 3:4-6: ***"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,"*** And we read in Romans 8:27: ***"And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."***

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 we read: ***"But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."***

1 Corinthians 6:11 tells us: ***"But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."***

Acts 2:37-39 speaks further of the gift of the Holy Spirit, namely that he comes into the hearts of believers: ***"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.'"***

Our Old Testament lesson today is an excellent example of the work of the Holy Ghost.

With Luther we learned in the explanation to the Third Article of the Apostolic Creed that the Holy Spirit calls me by the gospel. This is conversion, regeneration or rebirth – being born again. Many think and speak of being “born again” as a reference to turning themselves, or deciding to follow God and to become Christians. No one can decide to become a Christian. No one can turn himself. We are passive in our conversion as we read especially in Jeremiah 31:18, in the King James Version: ***"I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God."***

The Holy Ghost has enlightened me with his gifts, gifts such as forgiveness of my sins, peace, hope, joy, comfort.

By the working of the Holy Spirit, the Christian has been sanctified to do good works. I have been kept in true faith, just like every member of the Holy Christian Church – all its members – what we call the invisible church. It is invisible because we cannot see faith, we can only see fruits of faith! Then there is what has been called the greatest gift of the Holy Ghost, the forgiveness of sins.

So how does the Holy Ghost speak to you today? Some would have you think that the Holy Spirit makes his presence known today by giving to every believer special signs, wonders, or gifts, such as speaking in tongues. The speaking in tongues in our Epistle lesson was given specifically so that those gathered in Jerusalem around the house where they heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind – but there was no wind, just the sound of wind – could come and then hear the followers of Jesus speaking of the wonders of God in their own languages. “***We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.***” Acts 2:11. God does not need to give us gifts such as speaking in unknown languages or sounds because he has provided for us the complete, written Word of God. That is especially obvious, that the Word of God has been given in its entirety to mankind, by the words of St. John recorded in Revelation 22:18-20: “***I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Come, Lord Jesus.***” We are to add nothing to the Bible. We are to subtract nothing from the Bible. We are to proclaim it, to teach it, to tell it to others that they, too, may come to faith in Jesus Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit.

What about those who claim that the Holy Ghost is still giving to believers special emotional feelings that make them feel as though the Holy Ghost is working in them in such a way as to cause them to feel a certain way? Well, we are emotional beings. Jesus Christ himself, as a true man, had those emotions, for we read that he wept like all normal human beings. If you are stirred to feel a certain way when you hear the Word of God, or a particularly stirring sermon, or a particular Word of God, does that mean that the Holy Ghost is coming upon you directly? No. We have emotions, and God makes use of those emotions. We get excited about some things, and that may include feeling emotional about what God tells us, perhaps at Christian funerals for loved ones. Such feelings do not mean that we have never been Christians, but that our emotions are stirred up by sights, sounds, and pictures from the Word of God, including sometimes a familiar or even a striking not-so-familiar Word from Scripture which we may hear.

The Holy Ghost works through means, what we call “the means of grace”, that is, the Gospel as it is found in the Word – the Bible – and in the Sacraments – Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. It is the Gospel that does God’s work in us, and, we pray, is even doing God’s work in our hearts at this very moment. The Word of God shows our sinfulness, but it also shows our Savior. It is that Word of God that works faith in us, as we read in Romans 10:17: (NIV) “***Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.***” Romans 10:17: (KJV) “***So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.***”

For all those things we thank the Holy Spirit, the third person of the true God. May he do his work in all of us here today, and may we reach out to all who are not here with us this morning, that they, too, may have the truth of the Word of God in their lives each day, for there is no other way to be saved eternally. May God bless our reaching out with the Word of God. Amen.