

Today is a special day – particularly for Jacob and his family as he is baptised today. It is doubly special because it is a particular day in the church's calendar. Today the church was born – ten days after the Ascension – 50 days after the Passover (Pentecost means 50 days) – after Jesus's followers were told by him to wait. This day is special because the power Jesus promised has enabled the church to survive, and grow, and tell the story of Jesus for the two millennia that have followed.

When I say that 'the church was born', I want you to think carefully about what 'church' means. Not just the institutional Church of England, or even the PCC, tied up with laws and rules and standing orders. Of course, every human grouping needs to be organised, and what happened 13 chapters later in Acts is nothing more or less than a General Synod because they have to work out how to define this new movement, so rules aren't bad in themselves. It's not the institution that's born at Pentecost, nor even this building, fabulous as it is. Both are manifestations of the Spirit's work – in shaping and creating, but they are expressions of something far deeper.

What's born at Pentecost is the renewed people of God in Jesus Christ, empowered by the Spirit and living to the glory of the Father. Think about it. This gathering of frightened people, whose leader had been killed because of a plot between the Jewish authorities and the Romans, who might well be next for execution themselves, suddenly became a fearless group of street evangelists who were prepared to die for their Lord. A group who were in hiding and waiting and wondering are unleashed onto the streets, find themselves speaking intelligibly in the languages of the known world and in one day 120 people become 3000.

Have a look around at the people around you. I've done this before, but you need to be reminded what a funny bunch you are. The same power which transformed the disciples has transformed people like us down the ages to keep the story of Christ at the forefront of the world's agenda. The power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost changed a group of people with memories but no purpose into the Body of Christ, the Church of God, the messengers of Good News. That's what's born at Pentecost. The unstoppable overflow of the Holy Spirit, who enables frail humans to do things of stunning power and awesome service. What's born at Pentecost is the reason Jacob is here, and the reason Fiona will soon pray that he receives the Spirit's blessing and power.

So what can Jacob expect? What can we expect? The Power of the Holy Spirit is very hard to describe. In Acts the Spirit at work is said to be like wind and like flame. Both are powerful. You know when it is windy, and you know when something is on fire. But you can't put the wind in a bottle, or fire in a box. After the Spirit came some frightened people knew that they could shout about Jesus, whoever was listening. God gave them the ability to do so – just as if Jesus was standing next to them. In fact it was as if Jesus was inside them.

They had to open their mouths, but God did the rest. They had to be outside in the crowd, but God filled them with courage.

Kite / Petrol.

God asks us to be ready to be used by him – to be like the kite, or the petrol. He'll provide the wind and flame, if we ask, and wait, and pray – just like the disciples did. We can expect to be surprised and delighted and overwhelmed and strengthened – if we continue to wait and ask.

We can expect to be empowered, and we can expect to be sent, to be used, to be given to others. Knowing that Jesus was inside them meant that the disciples overflowed with joy – but they didn't keep this to themselves. The people in the crowd heard the disciples speaking God's words of power – and Peter then went on to tell them how they could know Jesus for themselves. It is certain that if you know Jesus for yourself, God will want you to tell someone else about him. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you. God gives words so that others can hear. That might mean learning another language. It might mean listening carefully to the way your neighbours talk, and using those words. But Jesus doesn't belong just inside you. Let God out.

We can expect to be filled with the Spirit, to speak the word of God, and to be drawn together with everyone else who has Jesus inside them. Jacob joins that family, that body, that organisation today. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us to follow Jesus, helps us to tell about Jesus, and helps us join in with other people from all over the world – we are members of a massive club now. Soon after Pentecost the new Christians started to learn together about all these things – and they did so by eating a meal together, the meal we call Holy Communion. In eating the bread and drinking the wine we remember Jesus in such a way that Jesus is with us – even though we can't see him.

When we eat bread and drink wine together we are joined together in one body – a new family around the table.

Today we welcome Jacob into the Pentecost life of God's people. Let his baptism remind you of what it is to follow Christ. And with him let's ask that the Holy Spirit will make us more like Jesus, give us courage to tell others about him, be members of the Body of Christ across the world, and live lives to God's glory. Amen.