

Feast of Pentecost

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Feast of Pentecost is the birthday of New Testament Church. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came down from heaven, rested upon and filled a group of 120 people, which included Mariam, Yoldath Aloho, Holy Apostles, the Seventy and close disciples of the Lord. They spoke in tongues (foreign languages hitherto unknown to them), which evoked special interest in those who heard from outside. They were skeptical, that the group of 120 was drunk with wine. Then Peter rose up and explained them and they were more than convinced that led to instant conversion and baptism of 3000 souls on same day. Thus what is now known as Universal or Catholic Church had a humble beginning and that was on the Day of Pentecost. In the Orthodox tradition it is "Sunday of the Trinity." For Malankara Orthodox, it is "Sunday school Day" also.

Pentecost is originally a Hebrew feast. The Hebrew word, "H'missim Yom" and Greek equivalent "Pentekonta hemeras" means "Fiftieth Day." It is linked to "Passover Feast." Passover was the most important festival of the Hebrews. It was the memorial of the great deliverance of Israelites from Egyptian bondage by the mighty hands of Yahweh. Both farming and shepherding communities observed it with great fanfare. Hebrews offered to God the first sheave of grain harvest, Lev 23:10. The priest will offer it on next day of Sabbath. Seven weeks following Passover were harvesting days. The fiftieth day they observed as feast of harvest, Lev 23:15-16.

Feast of Pentecost was known in many names. (1) 'Feast of the weeks' because they counted seven weeks from the day of Passover, Ex: 34:22, Dt: 16:9-10. (2) 'Feast of Harvest' because these were harvesting days, Ex 23:16. (3) 'Feast of the first fruits,' Ex: 34:22, Num 28:26. Pentecost was a feast of thanksgiving to God and rejoicing, counting the mercies and blessings of God. All the Israelite males were obligated to appear before God in the holy sanctuary three times a year; on Passover, Tabernacle and Pentecost, Ex: 34:23. It was also a day reconciling with God, by sin-offering. (4) It was anniversary of Law giving by God when they renewed the covenants.

The New Testament Pentecost has wider meanings. (1) Story of Babel in Genesis chapter 11 explains the origin of many languages, races and nations. Babylon was the center of ancient civilization after the great deluge. Hanging garden of Babylon was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. They were renowned architects; some of the monuments are still extant. Hebrews hated them for their idolatry. Construction of Babel tower was rebellion against God. The first Babel was the symbol of self-exaltation, pride that challenged God and ultimate failure of Godless human endeavor. It was not unreasonable to make a great tower but the intent was to challenge God, a fortress where according to human imagination God could not reach, a safe haven to defeat God. The chief aim was human solidarity without God. The result was dismay. The word 'Babel' means confusion. The tower never completed, solidarity never attained and they were scattered all over the

earth. Until then they had only one language. Language is the basic unifying medium of humanity. By confusing and emerging many languages man lost his basic intent of holding together. Man paid a heavy price for his pride. The lessons; limits of human wisdom, futility of human achievements, failure of the pride, supremacy of the One and only God over all the inhabitants of the earth are more relevant for the present generation that is infatuated with pride and self-conceit. Rebellion to God is the root of all malice and discord.

It was but necessary to weave the fragmented humanity into one global web. Gospel of Salvation was the primary means to reach the message of redemption through the blood of Christ to the lost humanity. The confusion of the first Babel took place in an open place but the erasing of confusion now took place in a closed door setting. The unity and solidarity the first Babel lost with language was now regained by means of the same medium of language. What they lost due to pride and conceit was restored through waiting in submission. While the first Babel is the symbol of disharmony, discord and disunity, the second Babel which housed the 120 is the symbol of harmony, concord and unity. While the human intellect caused the fall of first Babel, God used the lowly and illiterates to build the New Israel. The same God who caused confusion in the first Babel, now in the form of fire-tongue caused unity of the whole creation in Christ, Col 3;11. "Today by the descent of the Comforter, the Upper Room has become the second Babel, not as a punishment as it was in the confusion of tongues, as in the first one, but rather, by the power of the Holy Spirit, it has been enlightened by the light of grace so that the apostles might become wise for the preaching of the truth," Sedro, Kaumo II.

(2) Harvest festival begins with Passover when the sickle is laid for the first time to cut the first sheave of grain. It was the shadow of crucifixion. St John says; Jesus was crucified at the same time when the sacrificial Lamb was slain, Jn 19:31. The Pentecost is the culmination of the feast of harvest. The harvest is the conversion of the unbelievers which took place on the fiftieth day of resurrection when 3000 souls converted and baptized, to form the New Israel, Acts 2:41.

(3) The old Pentecost was the anniversary of God giving the Law. The New Pentecost marks the removal of the old Law and replacement with the new law of love and establishing the New Israel. There is semblance to both. In the Old, Yahweh in great glory, people felt it was fire, came down to Mouth Sinai and gave the Law, Ex 24: 16-18. In the New, the same God, Holy Spirit, came down in the same form of fire, in the Upper Room, the same place where our Lord established the New Passover with bread and wine and washed the feet of apostles to teach them humility, enlightened them with wisdom, courage and confidence and emerged the New Israel, the Church. It must be noted that this house is the first church of the New Israel and the apostles consecrated it in the name of Morth Mariam, Holy Ever-Virgin Mother of God.

(4) Pentecost is the day of anointing. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit in the River Jordan. The same Holy Spirit now anointed the apostles and gave them various gifts. John the Baptist predicted, "He who comes after me, shall baptize you with Holy Spirit and fire, Mat 3:11, John 1:33; that was

fulfilled in Pentecost. St Peter in the first proclamation of Gospel explained that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, Acts 2:16.

(5) God in his wrath judged the sinful mankind and said, "My Spirit shall not dwell with man for ever," Gen 6:3. God abolished that decree by Holy Spirit dwelling upon the 120 people.

(6) Pentecost is the time of renewal of body and soul, spiritual vigor and rededication. Imagine how the fragile, illiterate and cowardly disciples were changed into brave, brave enough to tell the hostile authorities, "We ought to obey God rather than men, " A5:29, vocal spokesmen of the Gospel! How, if not through righteous conduct, loving, forgiving and sharing burdens one another, shall we show to the world around us that we are anointed by the Holy Spirit? Therefore the practical application of Pentecost is holy living; a personal responsibility of each.

(7) We celebrate the feast of Pentecost with solemn preparations. 10 days from ascension are waiting period. According to instructions from Lord the disciples in one accord, waited in the Upper Room fasting and praying. "He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which he said, you have heard from me; For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with Holy Spirit not many days from now, Acts 1:4-5.

(8) Jesus said, "You will be my witness." On Pentecost day they first became so and thus it is "Witness Day." These days there are people who teach that witnessing is mere emotional citation, not knowing that "witness" is a legal term and what that word imports is boldly declaring to the world that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God, through Him we have life, there is no other way but Jesus to reach Father and this is possible only by righteous living.

(9) The special event of the day was speaking in tongues, which is much twisted and distorted subject; merits explanation. There are people who mumble during the so-called prayer some illegible sounds, which no languages or dialects in the world have and claim that they are "other tongue." The irony is that neither the speaker nor the listener knows what is being said. By the very reason that such sounds do not belong to any known dialect it is totally meaningless. It is the height of deception in the name of Gospel. The gift of tongue as took place on the Day of Pentecost was real words in the language known to the listeners. The group of 120 upon whom the gift of tongue was bestowed was all from the same local area and knew only local language. But the people gathered belonged to all nations, Parthian, Medes, and Elamites, of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Cyrene, Rome and Arab, A 2:9-11. They were amazed and perplexed as to how these local people could speak their tongue. It is written, "Everyone heard them speak in his own language. Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? How is it that we hear each our own language in which we were born?" v6, 7, 8. People started misusing this gift. St Paul discussed at length 'the tongues' and concluded sternly advising against it. "Tongues are for a sign not to those who believe but to unbelievers," 1C14:22.

We have special, long service in three Kaumos on Pentecost day in honor of three Knume namely; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, respectively of the Triune God. Bowl full of water with bunch of leaves (instead of hyssop) is placed in front of the altar. Arrangements are similar in all three Kaumos. Service starts with Prayer (Sluzo), Psalm 51, Hymn (Eniyono), Hymn in the form of semi-pros (Konunoyounoyo), Promeon, Sedro, Hymn (Kolo), Ethro, Readings from Old and New, Gospel and Intercessory prayers (Luthinia). At the close of each, the celebrant kneels down in front of the altar, bowl of water and prays silently (G'hentho) for the coming down of Holy Spirit (Kroitho d'Rooho). At this time the whole congregation kneels down in their own spots and says loudly, "Kuriyelaison" which means, "Lord, have mercy." This is the most awesome moment when the Holy Spirit comes down and broods over and sanctifies the congregation and water. The celebrant, chanting the hymn of epilogue and the whole congregation joining, takes the sanctified water and goes down to the congregation and sprinkles on them. The sprinkling of water recalls Holy Spirit anointing the group of 120 in the Upper Room and also serves a memory of the first baptism of 3000 souls. The first recorded baptism was by water sprinkling, not immersing. It is logical and sound to believe this because Jerusalem was a high altitude place, water was scarce and it was impossible for 3000 people to immerse at once. They did not leave the place and go to another spot just for immersing in water. Aren't we celebrating Birthday of the Church?

"We beseech and entreat you that you continually abide in us and that your divine operation be always shown in us in word, deed, conduct and in all good and perfect works. May we not be deprived off your grace, turn not away from us the goodness of your assistance; but rather, fill our hearts with power, wisdom, purity and your holiness. By your loving kindness, make us to become pure shrines for your ministry and holy temple for the dwelling of your glory so that we are proven to be clean and undefiled in your presence," silent prayer, Johnachen.