

THE TIME OF THE CHURCH

Pentecost

The day of Pentecost is celebrated fifty days after Easter. After Jesus ascended to heaven to be seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, he sent his Holy Spirit upon the Church. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus lives and reigns and dwells with his people all over the world. No longer are God's people instructed to meet the Lord at one place where he has put his name (e.g., the Temple in Jerusalem); now the Lord dwells with his people as they gather in his name, where the word is preached, and where the sacraments are administered.

*Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord
May all your graces be out-poured
On each believer's mind and heart;
Your fervent love to them impart.
Lord, by the brightness of your light
In holy faith your church unite
From every land and every tongue;
This to your praise, O Lord our God, be sung:
Alleluia! Alleluia! (Christian Worship 176:1)*

The focus of our Pentecost worship usually focuses on the Holy Spirit and his work—to reveal God's truth, to impart faith through that truth, and to sustain the Church in that truth. The Holy Spirit reveals to us Jesus Christ, who reveals to us our loving Father in heaven, who demonstrated his love by sending his Son, Jesus, to redeem us, who demonstrates his love to us through the Holy Spirit, whom he sends to grant us new life as God's children. This is part of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, which is pondered on the Sunday after Pentecost.

*Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest,
And make our hearts your place of rest;
Come with your grace and heav'nly aid,
And fill the hearts which you have made.*

*Teach us to know the Father, Son,
And you, from both, as Three in One
That we your name may ever bless
And in our lives the truth confess. (Christian Worship 178:1,5)*

Sundays after Pentecost

The festival half of the Church Year repeats the life of Jesus Christ from his coming, to his death and resurrection, and concludes with his sending of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and the Church.

The remainder of the year (about half of it) is the non-festival part of the Church Year. It begins with Trinity Sunday, on which day we meditate on the mystery of the Holy Trinity. While we will never unravel this mystery, we ponder it since this is how God reveals himself to us—one God (Deuteronomy 6:4) in three persons (Matthew 28:19,20). This is the name into which we have been baptized.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
World without end. Amen. (Gloria Patri, Christian Worship, 273)*

On Trinity Sunday, we confess the Athanasian Creed (*Christian Worship*, pp 132-133), which defends the teaching that the one, true God is the Triune God.

The Sundays that follow Trinity Sunday make up the non-festival part of the Church Year. They are referred to as the Sundays after Pentecost or the Sundays after Trinity. These Sunday supplement the Gospels from the festival Sundays of the year. While the Gospel lessons on those Sundays testify to the words and works of Jesus, there is no way that all of his words and works could be contained in them. Therefore, the Gospels in the Sundays after Pentecost proclaim the words and works of Jesus which encourage the faith which is given to us and which is lived among us.

*Salvation unto us has come by God's free grace and favor.
Good works cannot avert our doom; they help and save us never.
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone, who did for all the world atone;
He is the one Redeemer. (Christian Worship 390:1)*

*My guilt, O Father, you have laid on Christ, your Son, my Savior.
Lord Jesus, you my debt have paid and gained for me God's favor.
O Holy Spirit, Fount of grace, the good in me to you I trace;
In faith and hope preserve me. (Christian Worship 393:5)*

End Times

As the Church Year draws to a close, we are mindful of the world also drawing to a close. It is the time of the year when we recall that the Day of Judgment is coming upon the world.

*Great God, what do I see and hear?
The end of things created;
The judge of mankind shall appear
On clouds of glory seated.
The trumpet sounds; the graves restore
The dead which they contained before;
Prepare my soul to meet him! (Christian Worship 208:1)*

We, however, need not fear. Our Savior has rendered his verdict upon us. He has paid for our sins and has washed us clean in Holy Baptism. He has cloaked us in his own righteousness and has declared us to be holy and blameless in the sight of God. While the entire creation will be shaken and destroyed, the word of the Lord stands forever. Upon this, our faith and our very lives are founded. And so, we shall stand at the Last Day; for our lives are hidden in Christ.

*My Savior paid the debt I owe
And for my sin was smitten;
Within the Book of Life I know
My name is surely written.
I will not doubt, for I am free,
And Satan cannot threaten me;
There is no condemnation! (Christian Worship 207:5)*

Our focus is pointed away from a dying and decaying world to heaven and life everlasting. For that reason, we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. “Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” (Philippians 3:20-21)