

EASTERTIDE: The Fifty Days

Eastertide embraces 50 days, from Easter Day to Pentecost, and includes Ascension Day - 40 days after Easter and so always on a Thursday.

These Great Fifty Days form a single festival period in which the joy begun at the Easter Vigil is sustained through seven weeks. This is the Church's celebration of the gloriously risen Christ and a season of joyful reflection on his resurrection.

Early Christians gave the name *Pentecost* (fifty days) to this whole span of rejoicing. Tertullian, a second century Church Father from North Africa, called it 'this most joyful period' (*laetissimum spatium*). The *Common Worship* naming of Sundays of Easter (rather than Sundays after Easter) reminds us of the unity of the season.

Light to the world

Christ is the Light of the World, a great theme which unites Christmas and Easter. Our Eastertide liturgy declares:

'He has broken the power of death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.'

In churches where the custom is to light the Easter candle at the beginning of Easter, the lit candle stands prominently through all Eastertide services.

Expressions of joy

The joy and brightness of Eastertide are also expressed in the use of white or gold vestments and decorations. Churches are often filled with yellow and white flowers and candlelight.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Alleluias may have been omitted in Lent, but now the great Hebrew shout of praise, which simply means 'Praise the Lord!', echoes through our Eastertide speech and song.

- ? In what ways could we use the Easter greeting at different points in our services throughout Eastertide?

*Alleluia. Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed. Alleluia.*

Eastertide readings

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Acts 2:32

One of the readings from scripture each Sunday in Eastertide must be from the Acts of the Apostles, and it normally replaces the Old Testament passage. If an OT reading is required the lectionary provides one - but if it is used, Acts must be read as the second reading. Gospel readings focus on the appearances of Jesus to his followers after his resurrection and on Jesus' words of preparation and farewell for his disciples.

A special liturgy

'Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us: so let us celebrate the feast' (Easter Anthems)

Liturgical texts specifically for use in Eastertide, including the period from Ascension to Pentecost, are provided in *Times and Seasons*. There are also seasonal texts for daily prayer in *Daily Prayer*. During Eastertide Morning Prayer begins with The Easter Anthems, a traditional collection of Pauline texts which can also be used during Sunday services.

Stations of the Resurrection

The Stations of the Resurrection, also known as the Stations of Joy, provide additional resources for the celebration of the Great Fifty Days. They emerged in the late twentieth century to complement the Stations of the Cross, which have long formed part of our Lent and Passiontide devotions. As with the Stations of the Cross, the congregation are led from station to station, reading an appropriate Bible passage and meditating on it. The Stations of the Resurrection use the resurrection appearances of Christ as a focus for meditation and reflection.

- ? How might we continue the joy of Easter through the hymns and music we choose, the liturgy we use, and the way we decorate our building?
- ? The week or two after Easter are usually in the school holidays. Could we give our worship a holiday feel, and involve all ages in celebrating the dramatic resurrection appearances?

Ascension Day

*'God has gone up with a shout,
the Lord with the sound of a trumpet'
(Liturgy of Ascension Day)*



Since the late fourth century, Christ's ascension has been celebrated on the fortieth day of Eastertide. At the time of his ascension, Jesus commissioned his disciples to continue his work, promised the gift of the Holy Spirit, and thereafter is no longer with them in the flesh. Christ's ascension, therefore, is closely associated with the theme of mission.

A special Liturgy of Ascension Day is provided in *Times and Seasons*. Its Introduction invites us to remember our joyful celebration of Christ's resurrection and his appearances to his disciples. It then asks us to recall how Jesus left this earth, ascended into heaven and reigns over all creation.

- ? Ascension Day is always a Thursday; how could we encourage more people of all ages to come to a service? Could it be outdoor? Or a deanery, village-wide or ecumenical event?

...and on to Pentecost

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8

After Ascension Day we start looking forward to Pentecost, in a period of expectation and prayer that we might be more deeply filled and renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost

There used to be three great feasts in the Church's Year - Christmas, Easter and Whitsun. Maybe the fact that Whit Weekend is no longer a bank holiday has played its part in reducing the awareness of Pentecost as a festival.

At Pentecost, the 8th Sunday of Easter, we celebrate God's sending of his Holy Spirit to empower the Church to perform the mission which the risen Christ had entrusted to it.

The name Pentecost is derived from the Greek *pentekoste*, meaning fiftieth; the name Whit Sunday comes from 'white Sunday', for it was

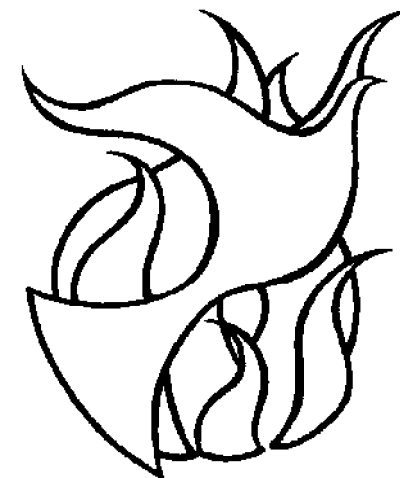
associated with baptisms and confirmations, and candidates wore white. But today the liturgical colour for the feast is Red, symbolising the fire of the Spirit.

Pentecost brings the Easter season to a glorious finale, completing and crowning the season. We celebrate both the Holy Spirit and the Christian Church. The themes combine in the liturgy with its emphasis on baptism, in which we are born again of water and the Spirit and sent out into mission.

The disciples were sent out of a locked room and went out into the world. Many churches reflect this transformation by holding part of their Pentecost service in public, and by encouraging the congregation to wear red and white to complement the liturgical colours of the day.

- ? Could we leave the Easter Garden in place until Pentecost? How could we use it during Eastertide, especially at Ascension and Pentecost?
- ? Could we make more of the colour of Pentecost, encouraging the congregation to wear something red or orange, or asking junior church to make flames on headbands for all to wear?
- ? At our next Pentecost service how could we make more of the movement from 'locked room' out into the world?
- ? Many people see Pentecost as marking the birth of the Christian Church. Could we incorporate this into worship, maybe by putting on a 'birthday party' for the church complete with party games, candles and cake?

The Christian Year



Eastertide

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