

# **A Celebration of Pentecost**

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“The sun has got his hat on” - or will he this summer? After two fairly cold, wet versions, no one could blame us for being a bit cautious about planning events in the open air. The further north you live, the less accommodating the weather is. Nonetheless, there is something so liberating about living out-of-doors and eating al fresco that we Brits keep trying to persuade ourselves that it must be possible to have barbecues, treasure hunts, picnics and pageants. And let’s keep trying. As long as in the name of flexibility and spontaneity, not to mention good common sense, we build in alternative arrangements in the event of the liquid variety of sunshine.

Apart from Pentecost, there aren’t many summer festivals, which is a shame at this lovely, joyous time of year, so I’m going to adopt and adapt a relatively modern Jewish feast that welcomes the rebirth of creation. We so rarely remind ourselves of our responsibility as stewards of creation, and when better than when it all comes alive again?

### **Tu B’shvat - A New Year of Trees**

Tu B’Shvat literally means the 15th of Shvat - the date of the holiday. It usually falls in February when the almond trees blossom, a sensible time to celebrate creation in the Middle East - but not in the UK, still under a layer of ice and snow, with howling gales to come. So for our purposes, let’s move it to May or June.

A blast of trumpets will summon schoolchildren from their classes to come and plant trees in a garden or on nearby waste land. Trees are highly significant in the Scriptures, and very symbolic - especially the fig, olive, myrtle and almond. That tree outside our house - is it just an annoyance that gets in the way when we’re parking the car? Or, a symbol of the faithfulness of God, still there long after we have moved, or departed forever?

We need a family festival that celebrates the gift of the land God has given us - however tiny a patch. We all enjoy the benefits of the forethought of previous generations in planting trees - in gardens, streets and parks. And we should do the same for the next generations - even if we won’t live to see them.

### **Ideas for a Celebration of Creation**

- Give the gift of a tree where it is really needed, and plant it together - either in someone’s garden, or somewhere in the community - a park, hospital or school (check with the relevant authorities first of course, and think ahead. Be sure it won’t grow too big for the spot). Follow it with a short celebration.
- Plant some tree seedlings at home. Try growing an avocado tree as a house plant. Even if you only manage one fruit, make a meal of it.
- Have a tree Bible study! How many reference to trees can you find? (You’ll need a concordance. The list is almost endless!) How are they valued? Why are they so important? What symbolic significance did they have (for example, for Jesus?)
- Make a miniature Bible garden - either with actual branches stuck into oasis, or plasticine or playdough, or out of cardboard.

- Create a meal incorporating as much fruit from trees as you can, and thank God for each - stuffed avocados, nut loaf, salade nicoise, banana bread, cherry pie.

## **Pentecost**

I have often wondered why we give the birthday of the church such scant regard when the birth was such a momentous occasion?

It was a tradition in the Manchester area for an entire church community, all dressed in white, to process through the streets in what were known as “The Whit Walks”. The name “Whit” evolved from the practice of wearing white for the dozens of public christenings that used to take place. In 2004 the tradition was reborn and Manchester Evening News reported “A spectacular display of colour and music ..... as thousands of churchgoers from Manchester and Salford mingled with Bank Holiday crowds. They carried banners through the city centre streets from three locations to an open-air service outside Manchester Town Hall. Crowds young and old lined the streets to clap and cheer the parade, led by brass bands, on their way to Albert Square. Children waved flags in the breeze, as parents pinned red roses to their suits to celebrate the event.” Now that sounds much more colourful and fun than an open air Carol Service.

Pentecost began as Shevuot, the Jewish Feast of Weeks - a firstfruits festival which now commemorates the giving of the law at Sinai. The purity of the law is symbolised by the colour white. The traditional Christian colour for Pentecost is red - like the tongues of fire that rested on the disciples.

You may not be able to rise to a community pageant or carnival, but here are some ideas for celebrating this special festival within your family and community groups.

## **Ideas for Celebrating the Birthday of the Church**

- Share a birthday lunch on either the Sunday or the Bank Holiday Monday. Encourage everyone to wear red and white.
- Decorate the room or table with red and white flowers, and flame decorations or balloons.
- Make a table centre out of a dozen red roses on a white tablecloth. Surround it with twelve tea lights, representing the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit, and seven flame-shapes cut out of red paper, each labelled as one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Make a Pentecost birthday cake. Cover it with white icing. Have a large, central large candle to represent Christ our Light, and twelve red birthday candles, (the fruits of the spirit). Serve the cake with vanilla ice cream and strawberries or raspberries to maintain a red and white theme.
- Invite friends and visitors from overseas to read the passage from Acts simultaneously in different languages
- Then read the story interactively - using wind and fire sounds, and lighting sparklers
- Encourage testimonies about the gifts God has given to people and how they have used them to make known the Kingdom of God.
- Renew your baptismal or christening vows together.

- Have a kite-flying session in the afternoon, making the point about the Spirit blows where he will.
- Or make paper doves and see how far they fly - either in or outside the house.

## **Resources**

Cherishing the Earth - Martin J Hodson and Margot R Hodson, Monarch

The Heavenly Party - Michele Guinness (Monarch)

Top Tips on Encouraging Faith to Grow - Ruth Hassall and Piers Lane (Scripture Union)

Messy Church - Lucy Moore (BRF)

Excellent website: <http://www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk>

Tap on “ideas” at the top of the page, then “Christian year”, for games, readings, prayers and dramas for Pentecost for the under elevens.

## **A Luscious White and Red Pentecostal Trifle**

Fill a bowl with either home-made sponge cake or bought sponge fingers.

Pour over a little Cassis (blackcurrant liqueur) or sweet sherry.

Cover with a generous amount of summer fruits chopped and mixed with two heaped tablespoonfuls of blackcurrant jam, which has been softened for a few seconds in the microwave or a pan.

Now cover the fruit with a custard, made from 150g white chocolate, (melted over a pan of boiling water), a carton or tin of best quality vanilla custard, and 2 tablespoons of a 300ml tub of crème fraîche.

Allow to set, then cover with remaining crème fraîche, mixed with 2 teaspoonfuls of sugar.

Decorate with some chopped strawberries and raspberries.

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