

Salvation to the Ends of the Earth
A Curriculum for Orthodox Christian Sunday Church Schools
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Education Ministry

Feedback on this lesson plan is welcome and encouraged [HERE](#).

Title of Lesson:	Lesson Number:	Key Verse(s)	Grade Level
Pentecost, the Birth of the Church: As Christ Ascends, The Holy Spirit Descends!	12	Acts 1:9-11, 2:1-13, 2:37-47 Teacher Note: Carefully read all of Acts Chapters 1 and 2 so you can contextualize these key verses!	PreK K-1st Grade 2nd-3rd Grade 4th-6th Grade Junior High ✓ Senior High

Lesson Length: 30 minutes (main) + 15 minutes (extension)

Key Ideas in this Lesson:

- Ascension is the completion of the resurrection.
- Pentecost makes Christ Himself, and everything He accomplished for us, accessible by the Power of the Holy Spirit Who descended upon and indwells the whole Church.


Key Vocabulary in this Lesson:

- Casting Lots - Reveals the Apostolic belief in the Sovereignty of God; God is in control. Acts 1:21-22 indicates both candidates to replace Judas Iscariot as the Twelfth Apostle, Justus and Matthias, were equally qualified having been with the disciples from the baptism of John through the Ascension. The act of Casting lots is mentioned seventy times in the Old Testament and seven times in the New Testament. Nothing is known about the actual lots; they could have been sticks of various lengths, flat stones like coins, or some kind of dice; but their exact nature is unknown. The closest modern practice to casting lots is likely flipping a coin.
- Mighty Rushing Wind - In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for “Spirit” is the same word as the word for “Breath.” It would have been abundantly clear to the Apostles and disciples what was happening when “...there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty rushing wind,...” (Acts 2:2).
- Tongues of Fire - The fire represents the grace and power (i.e., fire) of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist said, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I,...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Matthew 3:11)
- Speaking with other tongues - “...they began to speak with other tongues...” (Acts 2:4), and “...everyone heard them speak in his own language...” – On the day of Pentecost, there was a miracle of both speaking and hearing at work. NOTE: This is different from what is mentioned elsewhere in the scripture as “speaking in tongues;” there is much difference of opinion about speaking in tongues in the Orthodox Church, but it is generally viewed as less significant than other miracles because of its potentially disruptive nature. Writing on this matter, St. Paul says, “...yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.” (I Corinthians 14:19)
- The Apostles Doctrine - From the very beginning, the Church sought to follow the teaching of the Twelve Apostles, and it rejected any teachings not consistent with their doctrine.
- Breaking Bread - A reference to the Sacrament of Holy Communion, the Eucharist, or the Lord’s Supper.
- The Prayers - In the Greek text, “prayers” is preceded over and over in Acts by the definite article “the”

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(“the prayers,” not just “prayers” as seen in many English Translations). These were not just spontaneous prayers, but liturgical prayers found in the scripture (particularly from the book of Psalms) and as given by the Apostles.

To prepare for this lesson, you will need:

Audio/Visual	Printed Materials	Craft/Activity Materials
Computer, tablet, or phone to display: Troparion of Pentecost, as sung by Gigi Shadid: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lq1xILZdOvY 	Bibles Icons of the Feast of Pentecost included in this lesson packet, one copy printed in color for every 2-3 students Acts Chapters 1 and 2 worksheet, one copy per student	Pens/pencils.

Opening Prayer:

Suggestions for opening include **The Lord’s Prayer** or the **Prayer Before Reading Scripture** and facing an icon(s) in the classroom. **Example:**

Instructor: +In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Illumine our hearts, O Master Who loves mankind, with the pure light of Your divine knowledge. Open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of Your gospel teachings. Implant also in us the fear of Your blessed commandments, that trampling down all carnal desires, we may enter upon a spiritual manner of living, both thinking and doing such things as are well-pleasing unto You. +For You are the illumination of our souls and bodies, O Christ our God, and unto You we ascribe glory, together with Your Father, Who is from everlasting, and Your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Opening Activity: (5-10 mins)

Distribute copies of the sheet showing the two different versions of the icon of the Feast of Pentecost, the Descent of the Holy Spirit.

Explain that in the moments preceding the Descent of the Holy Spirit, St. Luke writes in the Book of Acts, “*And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty)...;*” (from Acts 1:15)

Affirm that the 120 names included men and women, and then ask, “What is the main thing you notice that is different about these two icons?”

Answer you are looking for: one Icon includes the Theotokos, the other does not.

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Ask: "When Mary, the Theotokos, is included in the icon, what do you think is being revealed to us?"

After students have answered, share the following:

- Mary represents the 120 disciples, a number which includes not only the Twelve Apostles shown, but also the whole Church. Although the number "120" is meant literally, allegorically it represents the Twelve many times over!
- When Mary is included in the icon, the emphasis is on the fact that the Holy Spirit was sent to indwell the whole church from the very beginning.
- The majority of the more ancient icons of Pentecost included the Theotokos.
- Read Acts 2:1-4, making the point that when it says "they were all filled" in verse 4, the 120 were still together, it wasn't just the Twelve.
- Both versions of the icon are part of the Orthodox Church's tradition. When Mary is not included, the emphasis is on the universal proclamation of the Gospel which began with the Twelve Apostles. Anyone who hears the Word of God and believes, will also receive the Holy Spirit. Point out that the figure at the bottom of both icons, wearing a crown, is "Cosmos" or "The World." The twelve scrolls he is holds represent the fact that the gospel has gone into all the kingdoms of the world (the crown represents kingdoms). Anyone in the world who chooses to receive the Word and believe, will also receive the Holy Spirit. Also note the "tongues of fire over everyone in both icons.

Lesson Instruction: (15 mins)

A. Initial part of the lesson

Distribute Bibles, worksheets, and pens, then share with the students that there are three major themes to focus on in this lesson as they complete the worksheets:

1. The Ascension of Christ
2. **Pentecost (the primary focus)**
3. The impact of Pentecost on the those who believed (i.e., the Church).

Starting with The Ascension of Christ:

1. Have a student read Acts 1:9-11.
2. Recite, "...ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father. And He shall come again with glory..." and ask the students to identify where that comes from?
 - a. Answer: the Nicene Creed, which we recite each Sunday. As we can see, this is simply summarizing what Luke has stated in the scripture.
3. Summarize: God the Father did not just raise His Son, Jesus Christ, to dwell in the earthly Jerusalem forever. Forty days after the resurrection, Christ continued to rise, to the New Jerusalem, in His glorified humanity, and He is seated at the right hand of the Father. In a nutshell, the point of this is to reveal "Mission Accomplished"; the goal of Christ becoming a human being was to get humanity back into the presence of God the Father. In Christ's Ascension, the completion of His earthly ministry is accomplished! Many of the Church Fathers would marvel in their writings saying, "There is a Man in Heaven!"

Moving on to Pentecost (the Primary Focus):

1. Have a student read Acts 2:1-13
2. Recite, "...I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified..." and ask the students to identify where that comes from?
 - a. Answer: the Nicene Creed. Orthodox Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is God, one of the Holy Trinity. We call Him Lord, as the scripture states, because He is God. (see 2 Cor. 3:17, "Now the Lord is the Spirit...")
3. Emphasize that the disciples knew this was the promised Holy Spirit (The Comforter) Whom Jesus said He would send. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit was manifested by a "mighty rushing wind" and with "tongues of fire." At this moment, the Church was baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire as John the Baptist prophesied saying, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, ...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matthew 3:11)

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4. Summarize: The purpose of Pentecost, the job of the Holy Spirit, if you will, is to unite believers to the Man in Heaven, Jesus, Who Ascended and is seated at the Right Hand of the Father. When we are baptized, the Priest calls on the Holy Spirit Who then descends upon the water. When we enter the water, we are united to Christ's glorified humanity, His death, burial, and resurrection; all by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we come out of what, we are chrismated with the Oil of Chrism, the sign and seal that we have been inhabited or indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is our personal experience of Pentecost. It is our baptism with the Holy Spirit and with Fire! At that moment, *we are not what we once were*, we are united to the Ascended Christ, the Man in heaven Who is seated at the right hand of the Father! It is also the Holy Spirit Who makes the bread and the wine the very Body and Blood of the glorified Christ.

And lastly, the Impact of Pentecost on Those Who Heard and Believed:

1. Have a student read Acts 2:37-41.
2. Explain that the elements of conversion always include:
 - a. repentance,
 - b. baptism for the remission of sins,
 - c. receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (which includes union with Christ, the power to live the Christian Life, and the constant presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives).

These don't always occur in this order, but they must all be a part of becoming a Christian. For example, an infant is baptized and chrismated thus receiving forgiveness and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. However, the infant will have to learn repentance in order to work out what God has done in their life by virtue of baptism and chrismation.

Note that at least 3,000 were baptized on the day of Pentecost, and this would have included men, women, children, and infants. This was not adult baptism only. No Jew would have entered into the waters of baptism and excluded their infant children. Infants were part of the Old Covenant, and now they are included in the New Covenant!

3. Read or have a student read Acts 2:42-47. Stress these points in summary:
 - a. Those who were baptized were not the same afterwards. Now they follow the apostles' doctrine, break bread together (the Holy Communion/Eucharist), are worshipping daily (the prayers) outside of the old synagogue / temple system), they let go of materialism and look after one another. They eat their food together (shared meals) and live simply.

Closing Activity: (10 mins)

Form teams and challenge the students to use the information from worksheet and scripture readings (Acts 1:9-11, 2:1-13, 2:37-47), to create trivia questions and play a review game to reinforce the information from today's lesson.

Worksheet answers:

1. earthly ministry
2. Man
3. mighty rushing
4. fire
5. united
6. indwells
7. gift
8. Chrismation
9. repent, baptized, Holy Spirit
10. apostles
11. Communion

To extend this lesson for additional time...

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Additional activity idea:

1. *Troparion of Pentecost*. The hymn of Pentecost gives us another confirmation that a person is not what they once were after receiving the Holy Spirit and being united to Christ. Note that the fishermen (the disciples) are now “most wise” having received the Holy Spirit. If you have Church Campers among your students, they may be able to sing this. If you are a singer, you could sing it or have a chanter or choir member join the class and sing it for the students. If time allows, this could be taught to the students. It is an easy melody and could be quickly learned.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lq1xILZdOvY>



Background Resources for Teachers:

- Teachers are encouraged to read the footnotes in the *Orthodox Study Bible* that correspond to Acts Chapters 1 and 2.
- Teachers may find Fr. Stephen De Young’s Whole Counsel of God blog post and podcasts on Chapters 1 and 2 of the Book of Acts very helpful. Here are the links:
 - a. Post: <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/wholecounsel/2019/02/11/pentecost-birthday-of-the-church/>
 - b. From podcast episodes:
 1. Acts 1: https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/wholecounsel/acts_chapter_1/
 2. Acts 2: https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/wholecounsel/acts_chapter_2/
 3. Acts 2, continued: https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/wholecounsel/acts_chapter_2_continued/
 4. Acts 2, pt. 3: https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/wholecounsel/acts_chapter_2_pt_3/
- Teachers may find *General Teaching Strategies and Classroom Considerations* included in the back of this packet to be a beneficial resource while preparing for this lesson.



Pentecost Icons from Antiochian.org

As Christ Ascends, The Holy Spirit Descends!

1. The Ascension of Jesus Christ (forty days after Pascha) is the completion of His _____.
2. Having ascended into heaven, fully God and fully man, Christ is now seated at the Right Hand of the Father. The Church Fathers often marveled saying, "There is a _____ in heaven!"
3. Pentecost (meaning Fiftieth) is 50 days after the resurrection when the Holy Spirit descended with the sound of a _____ wind.
4. Divided tongues of _____ sat on each of the disciples when the Holy Spirit descended. (The tongues of _____ were "divided" because the apostles would "*rightly divide the word of truth*" (2 Timothy 2:15) separating true teaching from false teaching.)
5. Through Baptism, the Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to be _____ to the glorified humanity of Jesus Christ.
6. The Holy Spirit _____ in the Church and in each one of us.
7. The _____ of the Holy Spirit is given to all who are united to Christ in Holy Baptism.
8. The Sacrament of _____ is the sign and seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.
9. To be a Christian, one must _____ and be _____ for the remission of sins, then they will receive the gift of the _____.
10. The 3,000 who were baptized on the Day of Pentecost continued steadfastly in the _____ doctrine, and were then forever changed with respect to worship, the prayers, and the community of believers.
11. The "breaking of the bread" refers to receiving Holy _____.