**Background Notes for Parents**

**About the Theme**

**Pentecost**

In this theme the children learn about the gift of the Holy Spirit and serving as a way of life.

**Easter Sunday** is the beginning of the **Easter Season** which lasts for 50 days. The celebration of the **Ascension** and **Pentecost** completes the Easter story.

**Ascension**

Forty days after Easter, the Church celebrates the feast of the Ascension of the Lord. Jesus appeared to his disciples after the Resurrection and told them that he was going back to his Father in heaven. Before Jesus leaves them, he gives his followers a mission. Jesus tells his disciples to be his witnesses. They are to "Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to everyone.” (Mark 16:15, 16)

The disciples cannot carry out their mission of spreading Jesus’ message to the ends of the earth without help. Therefore, Jesus tells his disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they receive power from God. This power is God's Holy Spirit, who Jesus says will come after he goes away. After Jesus ascends into heaven, the disciples wait for the promised Holy Spirit.

**Pentecost**

Pentecost (or 'Shavuot' as it is called in Hebrew) is a Greek word meaning ‘fiftieth’. The Jewish ‘feast of weeks’ was held fifty days after the beginning of the grain harvest. It was a thanksgiving feast, celebrating the end of the harvest and commemorating the day God gave the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Jesus had told his disciples that it was important that they carry on his mission after he was gone. He promised he would give them the strength of his Spirit to do this. At Pentecost the Church celebrates Jesus fulfilling that promise to send the Holy Spirit to guide and help his disciples to understand all that he has taught them. It is celebrated 50 days (7 weeks) after Easter Sunday and brings the Easter season to an end.

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost changed the frightened disciples into witnesses who could speak out with courage. The Holy Spirit strengthens the Church today in its mission to continue the work of Jesus and proclaim the gospel to the whole world. Christians are called each day to accept and live lives of joyful service through the power of the Spirit in their lives.

Christians believe that the Spirit of God is active in each person and, in a special way, in the community of believers, which is the Church. It is the work of the Spirit to help people to hear God’s message and to live Jesus’ way of service. The Feast of Pentecost is the celebration both of the gift of God’s Holy Spirit and the trust God places in people to be witnesses in the world. It is sometimes called ***the birthday of the Church*** because, filled with courage given by the Holy Spirit, the disciples went out among the people and began spreading Jesus’ message, thus marking the beginning of the Church.

**Year 6**

In the topic ‘Witnesses’ children learn that Christians believe that the spirit of God is active in each person and in a special way in the community of believers which is the Church. The Feast of Pentecost is the celebration both of the gift of God’s Holy Spirit and the trust God places in people to be witnesses in the world.

**Week 1**: Help your child to think about times they might have been in a situation when they saw something happen which was unusual, strange or even wrong and they knew they needed to tell someone. Maybe they thought people would laugh at them, not believe them, or they might get into trouble. Direct your child to the storyboard template to think about what a Christian would do in that situation and give reasons why.

**Week 2**

Remind children of the story of Pentecost (they have studied this story in previous year groups) as the celebration of the Spirit’s transforming power. In this topic the children learn about the courage needed to be a witness. They learn that through Pentecost the Holy Spirit enables people to witness to the Resurrection. In this topic the children will need to explore three pieces of Scripture (below) in which Jesus appears to the disciples after the resurrection.

1. Luke tells how, after his Resurrection, Jesus reassures his disciples that they will not be alone.

*Then Jesus said to them “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled”. Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures and he said to them, “Thus it is written that the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so, stay here in the city until you has been clothed with power from on high.”*

Luke 24: 44-49

1. In Matthew, Jesus is not only reassuring the disciples but telling them of their future mission.

*The eleven disciples went to the hill in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him even though some of them doubted. Jesus drew near and said to them, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go then to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples. Baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And I will be with you always to the end of the age.”*

Matthew 28: 16-20

1. In Acts of the Apostles the disciples are witnesses to the ascension of Christ.

*So, when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

*When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”*

*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus.*

Acts 1: 6-14

**Christian belief**

These scripture passages have helped Christians today to understand that, like the disciples, they too are called to witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the new life he brings. They believe in his unseen presence and they can pick out the signs of his activity.Wherever there is love, there is God. To be a witness, Christians must have the courage to talk to others about this belief and announce his presence to the whole world so that they can share their joy. Christians are called to announce the Good News of the happiness prepared by God in Jesus so that all people may discover God’s love and know a hope that is stronger than death. Talking about Jesus however, is not the only way to be a witness. In fact, the best way is to practice the gospel. Christians must practice what they preach and be sure that their actions show God’s love.

After your child has looked at these Scripture passages in detail, direct him/her to the template to complete with their ideas.

**Week 3:** Having heard the message of the Scripture , help your child to think about someone living now or in living memory who lives or has lived their life as a witness to Jesus. They can write about them, find images or create a simple PowerPoint

**Week 4:** Celebrate the story of Pentecost – what can you remember about the story? What message does it have for Christians today?

Mission Together and CAFOD have Pentecost liturgies you can download and celebrate.

<https://missiontogether.org.uk/pentecost/>

<https://cafod.org.uk/Education/Primary-teaching-resources/Pentecost-primary-resources>