**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 1**

In the topic **‘Holidays and Holydays’** the children will explore how holidays are happy times, times to relax and do something different. You can tell them that the word holiday comes from *holyday.* In times past the only holiday anyone had was a saint’s feast day or important feast days like Easter and Christmas. Some days of the year are ‘holy days’, when we celebrate these special times in the Church’s year. They will hear what happened on Ascension Day and the promise of Jesus to send the Holy Spirit. They will go on to explore Pentecost as a holy day, a day to celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised his friends. It is also a holy day to celebrate the birthday of the Church.Holy days are special times for Christians of thinking about the life of Jesus and about God the Creator’s love and care for us. This is Good News. The Holy Spirit guides us and gives us strength and courage to share that Good News. Christians are called to share this Good News with everyone.

**Week 1**: Exploring holidays: talk about holidays you have enjoyed together, whether at home or away. Children can draw holiday activities such as playing outside, picnics, travelling

**Week 2**: The story of the Ascension

After his Resurrection from the dead, Jesus appeared to the disciples and made a promise to send them a helper, the Holy Spirit to them. The holy day, Ascension Thursday, celebrates Jesus’ return to his Father.

Jesus’ friends were delighted that God had given Jesus new life. But they remembered that he had said he was going back to his Father. The thought of that made them sad again and they worried about how they would manage without him. They remembered his promise to send a new helper.

“I shall be with you only a little longer. Don’t worry. I will not leave you all alone. I will ask my Father and my Father will give you another friend to be with you forever. This friend, the Helper, the Holy Spirit, will help you to remember all the things I have done and everything I have told you.”

Based on John 13:33; 14:18

What was Jesus’ promise to his friends?

Fill the speech bubble on the template.

**Week 3** The story of Pentecost

Explain how the disciples were afraid when Jesus had left them and they had gathered together in one room. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost changed them. It is a holy day because this gift of the Holy Spirit is very special. The Holy Spirit helps and guides us in our lives just as happened to the disciples. The Holy Spirit appeared to Mary and the disciples like tongues of fire, giving them strength and courage to serve others.

See The Story of Pentecost <https://missiontogether.org.uk/pentecost/>

Google images of Pentecost – there are many paintings of this story.

After Jesus had gone back to his Father, his friends stayed together with Mary, Jesus’ Mother.

Peter was there and James and John and all the others.

They missed Jesus very much.

They felt weary and lost.

They couldn’t get up and get on with their lives.

They didn’t know what to do.

They talked about their time with Jesus,

and wondered about his promise, ‘I will not leave you alone’.

Then on Pentecost day everything changed.

It was as if they had been made new, re-created.

They were different people.

They were filled with life, joy, peace and happiness.

They knew that Jesus had kept his promise to send the Holy Spirit, who would be with them always.

They wanted to share this happiness

and they got up straight away to go out to tell everyone.

Draw the faces of some of the Apostles before the coming of the Holy Spirit and after. How different are they? Why are they different? Add some speech bubbles. See template.

**Week 4**: Celebrate the story of Pentecost – what can you remember about the story?

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>