



# The Spirit Unleashed

**Goal:** To celebrate the Holy Spirit and the birthday of the church.

## RECOGNIZING GOD’S GRACE . . .

### . . . In Acts 2:1–13

In the Old Testament, Pentecost is an important festival celebrated fifty days after Passover. Also called Shavuot, it was a time of giving thanks for the spring harvest. The church observes Pentecost, sometimes called “the birthday of the church,” as a celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit to be with us always. The Spirit is unleashed on the church to be God’s presence with us in every time and circumstance. The ongoing presence of the Spirit assures the church, and us, of being led into God’s will and work.

The events of Pentecost—sound of a fierce wind, flames of fire, speaking in other languages—are extraordinary and strange to us. Dramatically, they indicate the special nature of this experience. The Spirit is the church’s constant and permanent companion.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is given to all who follow Christ. The Spirit comes by God’s grace, and we are grateful we are not left to face life on our own. The Spirit empowers the church to share the message of Jesus Christ, live in ways Christ commands, and be the people Christ intends us to be. In ways both great and small, the Spirit is active. As the good news of Jesus is communicated to all people, we see the Spirit at work.

### . . . In Your Children’s Experiences

Children know about superpowers from cartoon stories. Imagining what superpower you would choose is a fun game to play with them. The story of Pentecost and God’s gift of the Spirit might seem a bit tame to them in light of the culture in which they live, where being powerful and strong is a high value.

The Pentecost story invites children to see power in new ways—the power to live with those who are different from us, who speak other languages, and who eat different kinds of food; the power to love as Jesus loved; and the power to do good in this world, in Jesus’ name.

Is the Pentecost story familiar to your children, or will it be new to them? Is there a variety of cultures and languages present within your group or community? If so, how do the children interact across these differences? If not, how will you help the children experience the miracle that takes places in verse 4?

### . . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Have you ever taken a dog off a leash and let it run free? It’s beautiful to watch that sense of joy, freedom, and agency. That same spirit is what the followers experienced at Pentecost. You are called to tend and nurture that same Spirit in the children you are leading.

Children are full of natural energy and approach the world with both curiosity and confidence. Notice their language, the things they say. Help them name their actions in the world, actions that allow the Spirit of God’s amazing love to be present and active.

*Holy Spirit, give me Pentecost joy so I may  
share your joy with my children. Amen.*



## Supplies

**Music & Melodies**  
(MM) 2021–2022

**Stories, Colors & More**  
(SCM) i–iv, 1

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

blanket or mats

snack (see “Guided Play” choice 2)

red stickers

## Guided Play

choice 1: **Grace Notes**  
(GN) 1, red paper, yellow streamers

choice 2: red, orange, and yellow sprinkles or small candies, undecorated frosted cupcakes

choice 3: bubble solution and wand

## Exploring

choice 2: copies of **GN 2**

choice 3: poster board, ink pads (various colors), damp paper towels for cleanup

choice 4: copies of **GN 3**

## GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

### Before the Children Arrive

Designate a story corner and lay out a blanket or individual mats for the children so their backs will be to the door.

Post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule.” Cut out and glue the arrow marker onto a clothespin. Use the schedule to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

Select the activities that will work best for you and for your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

Wear red, the color of Pentecost.

Provide undecorated frosted cupcakes to decorate in “Guided Play” choice 2 and eat at snack time.

“Exploring God’s Grace” choices 1 and 3 require more prep.

### Welcoming and Guided Play



Greet children as they arrive and say, “The grace of Jesus Christ be with you.” Prompt them to respond, “And also with you.”

Introduce yourself to parents/caregivers whom you do not know personally. Explain to the parents/caregivers that the children will hear a story about the Holy Spirit and the birthday of the church.

Invite the children to choose a guided play activity:

**1. Flames**—Provide each child a flame from **GN 1** and invite them to color the flame with red, yellow, and orange crayons. Help the children cut out the flame and staple a short piece of yellow streamer to the center of it. Glue or tape the flame and streamer to a craft stick. Be sure that the streamer can still move when waved. Write each child’s name on his or her stick. Set aside for use in “Transitioning to Story Time” and “Hearing the Story.”

**2. Preparing a Snack**—Explain that we will celebrate a birthday today. Give each child a plain frosted cupcake. Invite the children to decorate their cupcakes with sprinkles or other small candies. Wonder together whose birthday it might be. Set aside for snack time.

**3. Counting**—Provide a bottle of bubble solution and have a helper blow out twelve bubbles, one at a time. Encourage the children to count the bubbles as they pop them. Lead the children in counting. Tell them that there were twelve disciples and that the Holy Spirit came to help them. Repeat the counting exercise several times. Let children take turns blowing bubbles.

**FA** Be aware of children with food allergies such as peanut, milk, egg, wheat, or gluten. Alternative treats can be made or purchased.



## Transitioning to Story Time

MS D T L

When you sense the children are ready to move into group time, go from child to child—have them bring their flame sticks—and invite them to line up behind you one by one, holding onto a shoulder with one hand and waving their flame sticks with the other (like a conga line) as you sing a song to the tune of “Happy Birthday”:

It’s a **day** to wear **red**.  
It’s a **day** filled with **joy**.  
Come and **join** in the **singing**  
for God’s **gift** to the **church**.

Continue around the room after all children have joined the line. End in the story area. Note the children wearing red, and explain that red is the color for this special day. If you wore red, point that out. If not, put a red sticker on yourself. If a child is not wearing red, offer a red sticker so that everyone has some red today.

*Spirit* means “breath” or “wind.” Doing breathing exercises can help us become calm, focused, and aware of God within us.



Today’s story can be found in *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), [pcusastore.com](http://pcusastore.com).

## Breathing Exercises

MS L

Do one or more of the following exercises with the children:

- ▼ **Basic Breathing:** Sit in a comfortable position. Relax your shoulders, arms, and neck. Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. Encourage slow, even breaths by saying, “Breathe in . . . breathe out.”
- ▼ **Noisy Breathing:** Breathe in through your nose and then blow out through your mouth. Blow out as much air as you can, then take a deep breath in through the nose. It’s OK to make noise as you breathe in and breathe out.
- ▼ **Belly Breathing:** Lie on your back on the floor in a comfortable position. Lightly rest your hands on your belly. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Be aware of the rise and fall of your stomach. Rest a small stuffed animal on your stomach and watch it rise and fall with your breathing.

## Hearing the Story

B L C

Open the Bible to Acts 2 so that children know that the story comes from the Bible.

Tell the children that today we will celebrate a holiday called Pentecost. Practice saying the word *Pentecost*. Read **SCM 1**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, “Amen.”

Ask the children what sights they imagined and what sounds they heard in the story. Have them help you tell the story by adding sounds and movements. Give them the following directions:



- ▼ Make a swooshing sound and sway arms overhead whenever the word *wind* is said.
- ▼ Wave the flames (made in “Guided Play” choice 1) when the word *fire* is said.
- ▼ Touch thumbs and wiggle fingers to signify a dove flying when the word *spirit* is spoken.

Practice the words and movements and then read the story again.

Tell the children that Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came to the disciples, is often thought of as the birthday of the church. Wonder together why that might be. Suggest that a birthday celebrates a new life, and Pentecost was the beginning, or new life, of the people who would be followers of Jesus, or Christians, all over the world.

Comment that the Holy Spirit is a gift or a present. God gives us the Holy Spirit because God loves us. Comment that this is happy news for all of us. God loves us and is with us all the time, in good times and in sad times. The Spirit is for anyone who loves and trusts God—for people all over the world.

## EXPLORING GOD’S GRACE



### 1. Stop and Go

MS B

*Before the session, prepare ten index cards, five cards with a red circle and five cards with a green circle. On the back sides make a red mark and a green mark to designate these as color cards. Prepare an additional ten index cards, five cards with the number 1 and five cards with the number 2. On the back sides write several 1s and 2s to designate these as number cards.*

Tell the children that, after Jesus died and then rose on Easter, he visited with his disciples. He wanted them to go and tell everyone about him and God’s love, but first they had to stop and wait for the Holy Spirit to come and be with them. So the disciples had to STOP and then GO. Tell the children that they are going to play a stop-and-go game to remind them of the disciples waiting for the Holy Spirit and then going and telling others about Jesus and God’s love.

Line up the children on one side of the room against the wall. Tell the children they are going to walk to the other side of the room, but sometimes they may have to STOP and wait and other times they will be able to GO.

Shuffle each stack of cards and hold them facedown on your palms. The first player draws one of the color cards and one of the number cards. If they pick up a green card, they can go the number of steps showing on the number card they drew. If they pick a red card, they stop where they are and say, “I’m waiting for the Holy Spirit.” After five draws, shuffle the cards again.



As each child reaches the other side of the room, tell them to say something they know about Jesus or God's love, such as "God loves you!" or "Jesus told stories."

The game will end when all have reached the other side of the room. Encourage those who finish early to be cheerleaders for the others.

## 2. Pentecost Cards



Talk with the children about birthday gifts and cards. Ask them how it feels to receive a card or gift from someone. Tell the children that they are going to make special cards for members of the church to help celebrate the church's birthday and share God's love. Invite them to decorate Pentecost cards for homebound and hospitalized members of your community. Hand out copies of **GN 2**. Instruct the children to cut out the card. Assist with cutting as needed. Have them fold the paper in half. Cut flames of red, orange, and yellow tissue paper, and invite the children to glue a few on the front of the card. Let the children sign their names. Deliver the cards to people you have identified or give them to your caring ministry team to deliver.



## 3. Fill the Church with People



Remind the children that Pentecost is the birthday of the church, the day we remember God's gift of the Holy Spirit. Comment that without God's Spirit, there would be no church because that is what gave the disciples the power and courage to go and tell the good news of Jesus' and God's love.

Draw an outline of a church building on poster board. Ask the children what could be added on the poster board to represent the Holy Spirit (*flames, wind*). Have them add flames with red, orange, and yellow crayons and add wind with swirls of light blue crayons.

Ask the children who received the Holy Spirit (*the disciples, followers of Jesus, people*). Tell them that they will add people to the church by making fingerprint people. Show the children how to make fingerprints by pressing one finger on the ink pad and then transferring the print to a piece of paper. Have the children try this several times. Then show them how the fingerprint can be drawn to represent a person by adding eyes and a smile for a face and stick legs and arms.

Invite the children to draw people on the poster board to fill the church. Different fingers create varying sizes of people, so encourage them to make big people and little people. Display the drawing in your space as a reminder that the church is made up of many different kinds of people and that the Holy Spirit gives the church life.

Most young children, especially three-year-olds, do not yet produce representational art. They will probably enjoy making the fingerprints but might not be interested in turning the prints into people.





Use “wonder” questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wondering questions help a child think aloud. Answers are neither right nor wrong. They help teach children to speak from their hearts.

#### 4. Coloring Page



Hand out copies of **GN 3** and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture. Engage the children in conversation as they color by using the following wondering questions.

- ▼ I wonder, “What did the disciples think when they saw flames dancing on their heads?”
- ▼ I wonder, “What did the wind feel like?”
- ▼ I wonder, “What did they do next?”

**T** *Transitions can be difficult. This may be a good time for some quick physical activities, such as squeezing your hands together, stretching, and so forth.*

### LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Encourage the children to help clean up the space. Have each child put away one toy or object. Invite everyone to sit around a table or on the floor.

Remind the children that Pentecost is sometimes celebrated as the birthday of the church. Have cupcakes decorated in “Guided Play” as a snack and sing “Happy Birthday” to the church. Invite the children to repeat after you as you pray this echo prayer.

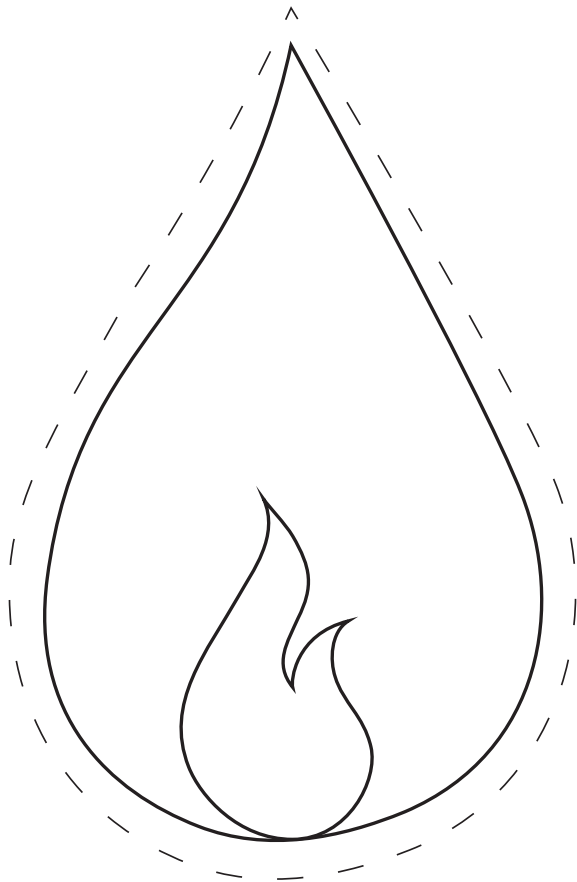
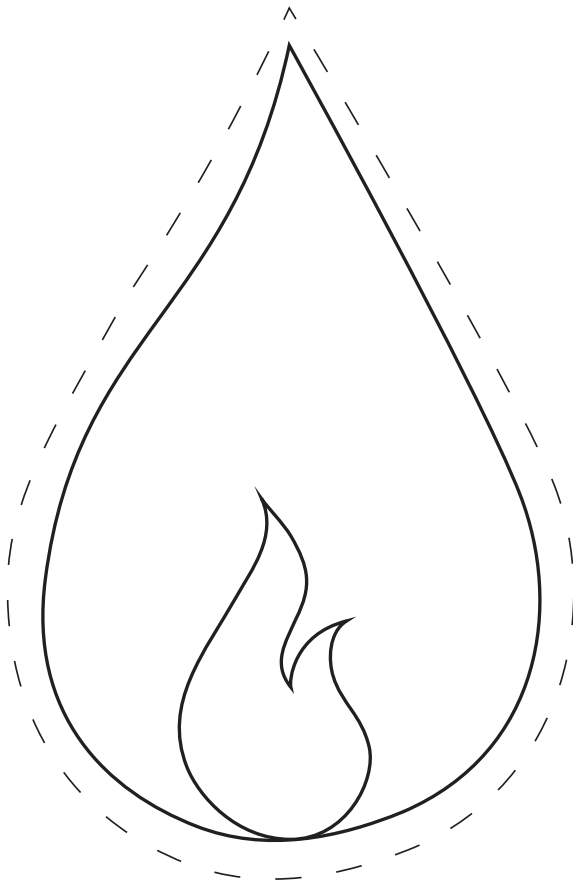
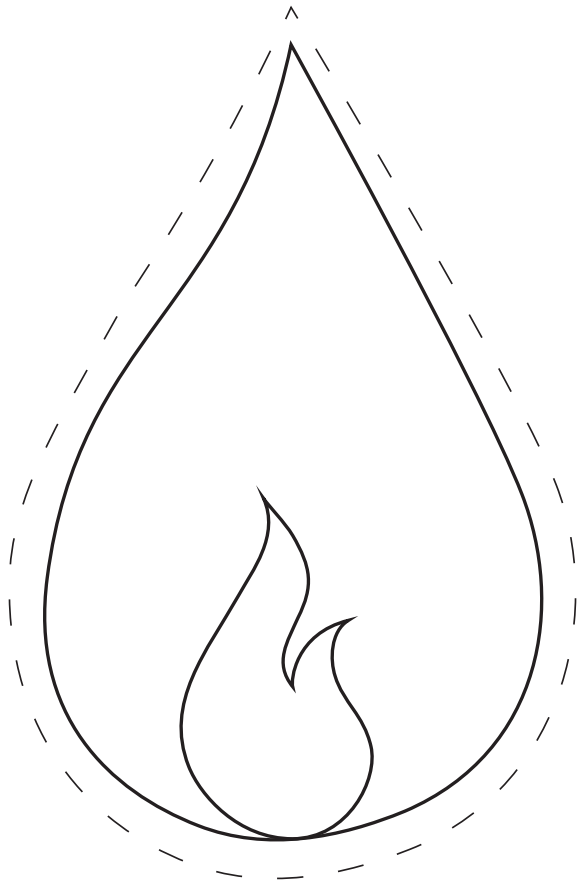
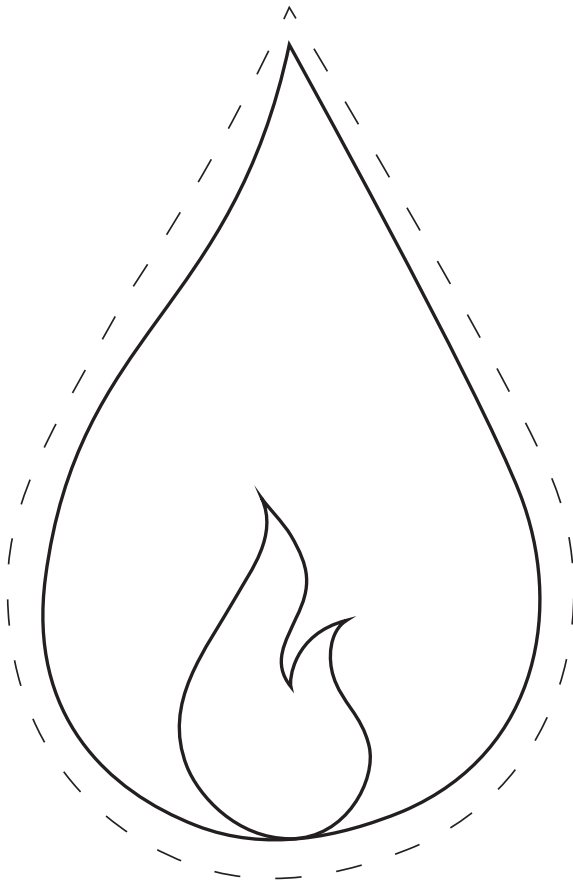
Dear God, /  
thank you for sending your Spirit /  
to be with us and help us. /  
Thank you for the church /  
and our church friends. /  
Help us to share your love /  
with all the people we know. /  
Amen. /

As you share the snack, ask everyone to name something that makes him or her happy about being a part of the church.

As the children leave, say goodbye to each one. Bless each person: “(Name), go and share the good news of Jesus and God’s love. The Holy Spirit is with you.”



Ask parents and caregivers for their e-mail addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit [gracesightings.org](http://gracesightings.org). Remind the parents and caregivers about the e-book and story audio (see p. vii).







The Holy Spirit  
is with you.



## The Spirit Unleashed



The Holy Spirit came to Jesus' disciples, just as he said.

