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The Feast of Pentecost

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Come, Holy Spirit”

Text: John 7:37-39; Acts 2:1-21; Numbers 11:24-30

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

His name was Joseph. His father had named him after the great Old Testament Patriarch. It was a good, venerable Jewish name, and he was a good, venerable Jewish man. He lived a bit north of Jerusalem, but at this time every year, he made the trip to Jerusalem for the festival. *And it was quite a festival!* Because it was the end of the harvest season; the end of a long year's hard work. And so it was time to rejoice, and to remember and praise the goodness of the Lord who had provided for them. And so they gathered in Jerusalem, people from all over Israel, to celebrate for eight days.

They called it the Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths. They called it that, Joseph knew, because every festival in Israel was not only concerned with the present, but also looked to the future, and remembered the past. And during this feast, they would remember when the people of Israel weren't as fortunate as they were now; when Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, living in booths, or tents. But God was with them and God sustained them, even as He was doing for Joseph and his family today.

There was always so much going on at the festival - Jerusalem was packed! Families getting together, friends catching up, much food and celebration. Joseph enjoyed it all. But his favorite part was going to the Temple each morning to watch the water ceremony. For each morning, a priest would fill a golden pitcher with water and pour it out at the base of the altar while the choir sang from Isaiah chapter 12 - Isaiah's great salvation chapter - ***“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”*** Whenever he heard those words, Joseph would always take a moment to reflect and remember what his father had taught him: to *look forward* to the joy of God's promised eternal salvation, to *look back* to the joy of the people in the wilderness, when God had provided water for them from a rock. And that it wasn't just a rock, you know! It was God with His people, giving them the water of life.

And Joseph would sometimes wonder: did the people realize what was happening? Did they know that rock was God among them, watering them, caring for them, keeping them?

Well, it was the last day of the Feast, the great day, as they called it. Joseph went up to the Temple in the morning, as usual. And this day was special because on this day, the priest would perform the water ceremony not just one time, but seven times! Tomorrow would be the journey back home, but he would enjoy one more day . . .

But suddenly, something caught Joseph's attention. After the choir had finished singing from Isaiah, a man stood up and proclaimed loudly: ***"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"***

Joseph knew who that was. It was Jesus of Nazareth. He had heard and seen Him before. He had passed through Joseph's town. He taught with authority, not like the rabbis. He healed people and cast out demons. There was a lot of talk about Him, that perhaps *He* was the promised prophet greater than Moses; that perhaps *He* was the Christ. Joseph didn't know, but knew He was no ordinary man - that was for sure! But now He was saying that we should drink from Him! That He would provide living water, *just like that rock in the wilderness* . . .

Joseph was lost in his thoughts. He didn't even notice the commotion around him. *Did the people in the wilderness know that God was the rock that was watering them? Am I making the same mistake? Is Jesus saying He is the rock that is watering us now? That He is God among us?*

Joseph went home the next day. But he couldn't stop thinking about all this . . .

Well, not too long after this, Joseph found himself back in Jerusalem, but this time for a much more solemn festival: the Passover. He brought a year old lamb without blemish to be sacrificed at the Temple, to shed its blood for him and his family. They would remember how God saved the people from death in Egypt through blood and brought them out of their slavery.

But as he was walking into Jerusalem one afternoon during this eight day festival, he saw a commotion up on a hill top just outside Jerusalem. He couldn't really see what was going on, because it was dark for some reason, even though it was the middle of the day. It was eerie. So he walked a bit closer and saw that it was a crucifixion - but why would the Romans do that during the Passover? That was highly unusual. It must be very serious. He was curious, so he walked closer . . . and then his breath was taken away! It was as if someone had punched him in the stomach. It was Jesus on the middle cross! What had He done? Why such a horrible death? A great sadness came over Joseph, and he sat for a while to gather himself . . .

When he looked up again, he saw the soldiers with their heavy club, breaking the legs of the victims on either side of Jesus. He heard the screams of pain from them as their legs bones shattered from the blows. They did this, he knew, to hasten death, to suffocate them. But they didn't do this to Jesus - He must already have been dead. He saw a soldier pick up a spear instead and thrust it into Jesus' side. He didn't move at all. Dead for sure. . . . But what was this? *Water* came out from His side, and blood. And not just a trickle . . . it was like . . . like a stream! And Joseph remembered: ***Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'***

Joseph suddenly felt very cold . . .

Seven weeks later, Joseph was back in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost - the beginning of the harvest. He brought the firstfruits of His harvest to give to God. But these last seven weeks had been a very eventful seven weeks! Joseph couldn't get the image of Jesus on the cross out of his mind - it almost haunted him. But rumors were going all throughout Israel *that Jesus had risen from the dead*. A not just a few people reported seeing Him alive - at last count, it was over 500 who said they saw Him. That would be overwhelming testimony in *any* court of law! And Joseph kept remembering His words: ***come to me and drink . . . whoever believes in me . . .*** Did he, Joseph, believe?

Well, Joseph went to the Temple to present his firstfruits, but yet again, he got more than he expected! Those who had followed Jesus were there, and preaching. What were they saying? He went closer . . . he heard: ***"And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh . . . And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness . . . And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."***

Pouring out . . . darkness . . . come to me and drink . . . whoever believes in me . . . Joseph kept listening as this man named Peter kept preaching. He seemed to open up the Scriptures; they suddenly made sense! The promises of God, the Messiah, Jesus, the crucifixion, the resurrection - it had all been foretold! How come he didn't see it before? How could he not have realized? He suddenly felt very warm and . . . joyous?

Then he heard someone cry out from the crowd: *Brothers, what shall we do?* It was the very same question he wanted to call out! And Peter said to them, ***"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our***

God calls to himself” (Acts 2:38-39).

And Joseph knew that he had been called. He had been going to Jerusalem all these years, but it had really been the Lord coming to him, and calling to him, and working in him. But not only was it for him - Peter said **“for you and for your children!”** Joseph ran to get his family. He told them of Jesus, he told them of the water, he told them of the cross, he told them of the Spirit, he told them of forgiveness, and then he scooped up his newborn son and herded the rest of his family down to the river, where Peter and the others were baptizing. And as he stepped into the river, he looked upstream *and he saw the rocks . . .* it looked like the water was coming right out from the middle of them! And as he closed his eyes and his mouth, he was baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And though his mouth was closed, he had been given the drink of living water, and would never thirst again.

And then he looked down at his son and saw him baptized. Which apostle had done it? It didn't matter. **The promise is for you and for your children . . .**

Would his son remember this day, Joseph wondered? Joseph would make sure that he did. As his father had taught him, he would teach his son. He would teach him of the rock in the wilderness, and that that rock was Christ (1 Cor 10:4). He would teach him of the Passover Lamb who hung on the cross to rescue us from our slavery to sin and death. He would teach him of the resurrection, and of God's promised eternal salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus. He would teach him to find Jesus all through the Scriptures, as he had heard Peter preach.

And he would teach him of the Holy Spirit, the living water of God, that now filled them both and gave them a new language to speak. No, it wasn't a foreign language, a strange tongue, like some that day were speaking. But yet, in a sense, it was a foreign language - for it was no longer all about the Law, but about the Gospel. It was the word of Jesus, His death and resurrection for us, His forgiveness given to us, and given us to give. It was just as Moses had wished, that **the Lord would put his Spirit on all people!** He had. Even poor Joseph and his son and all his family. And if them, then certainly it was for all people, of all times, in all places.

And Joseph suddenly felt very much at peace.

And so it is for you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. That peace is here for you.

For you, stuck in slavery to sin; stuck in the wilderness of sin. The sin you commit and the sin committed against you. The sin which comes crashing down upon you and rising up from within you.

For you who hunger and thirst for righteousness. A righteousness you cannot achieve or fulfill. The righteousness of being made right with God through the forgiveness of your sins.

The rock with living water is here for you. That you, too, may drink and never thirst again. That your sins be forgiven and you receive the righteousness of God, and not only be made right with God and set free from your slavery to sin, but also be made a child of God, with a home in heaven, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And you have. *For all that Joseph heard and saw is here for you.*

The water that flowed from the side of the rock on the cross now filling fonts in churches all over the world, forgiving sins, bestowing the Spirit, and giving birth to children of God.

The Body and Blood of the Passover Lamb, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins, now given to you here, that eating and drinking Him your hunger and thirst for righteousness be satisfied with His righteousness, His forgiveness.

And the Word of the Gospel that is proclaimed, that shows you Jesus and all that He is and all that He has done for you, gives you the peace of forgiveness which passes all understanding. A peace that this world cannot give. That come what may in this world and life - even death - your heart and mind can be at peace.

And with all this, and with the Holy Spirit poured out upon you and filling you as His Temple, you, too, have a new tongue to speak. A foreign language, so to speak - the words of the Gospel. Your old, sinful, unseemly words now replace with Spirit-filled words. Words that speak love, not hate; that speak forgiveness, not revenge; and which speak peace, not division.

Such speech is not a foreign language to you, but it is a new tongue to the world. A word many have, perhaps, never heard. But as this living water has been given to you and satisfied the thirsting of your soul, so are you privileged now to give it to others. That not only out of Jesus' heart, but now also out of yours, flow streams of living water, that all the world may drink. That all may know of Christ and His love and forgiveness. ***For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off.***

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love. (Introit Antiphon)

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.