Exploring the Meaning of Pentecost:
Pluralism, Unity, and Christian Faith

Study #2: Good News for All People

Scripture Texts:

Acts 2:1-12 (NRSV)
2 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

Luke 2:8-14 (KJV)
8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 14 “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward all people!”
Notes
Thesis: The expression of biblical and orthodox Christian faith is inherently and irreducibly pluralist

The plurality of the Christian faith is not a problem to overcome; Scripture both reflects and anticipates the plurality and diversity of the historic Christian faith community; this plurality is the blessing and intention of God; this Pentecostal Christian plurality is paradigmatic not only for the church but for the world.

However, God’s intention is not simply plurality but pluralism. The call to unity and solidarity is a call to move beyond the given reality of Christian, religious, and ideological plurality to pluralism.

Plurality is a fact; pluralism is an achievement

Pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity

Pluralism is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference

Pluralism is not relativism, but the encounter of commitments

To that end, the next three sessions of this series will briefly sketch out a theology of Christian pluralism for the sake of an inclusive unity in the midst of the irreducible diversity of the human experience.

In other words, the event of Pentecost is another phase in God’s peace mission to the earth (the covenant with Abraham, the life and death of Jesus, and the work of the Spirit) that brings “tidings of great joy which will be to all people.”

Questions for Reflection

What does it mean to you when the angel announces that the birth of Jesus birth brings “good tidings of great joy which will be to all people”?

As you reflect on your own experience and awareness of Christianity, has it been faithful to the message of joy to all people? Why or why not?

How do you understand the difference between plurality and pluralism? Does it make sense to you? Why is the distinction important?
What do you think of the idea of Christian pluralism? What does it mean to you? What challenges and opportunities might it present for the church?

What connections do you see between the story of Pentecost and other parts of the Bible? How might it relate to Israel, Jesus, and the church?

What is particularly significant to you in this study?

What questions do you have?