

We call today in the church the celebration of Pentecost,

When the day of Pentecost had come we read in the new Testament at the start of the story. But don't think this is the first day of Pentecost, there had been many before it. So what is the history of this strange sounding word?

The word Pentecost is Greek and means fiftieth-it's a name for a fraction and originally meant a tax on things. A fiftieth or 2% of the value. Some think it originally began in the days when the main method of buying things was with cows not pound coins or contactless cards. Back then, centuries before Jesus was born, cows were apparently driven in herds of 50 animals and so it was quite easy to work out how many cows made up a fiftieth of all your animals. If you had one herd of 50 cows you paid one cow in tax. Later the same proportion was applied to all other goods bought and sold between countries.

In the Old testament we don't really find the word Pentecost. What we do find is the festival of weeks in Exodus. This was a harvest festival that celebrated the first fruits of the wheat harvest. According to the book of Deuteronomy seven weeks after putting sickle to the grain, part of the new harvest to represent the whole harvest, the gifts, are given to God in the Jerusalem temple. IN Leviticus we are told that the feast is held on the fiftieth day.

The gifts are given to Yahweh, God, as an expression of thanks for causing the harvest to ripen. The feasts of weeks is not nearly as important in the Old Testament story as the feast of the Passover or the feasts of the tabernacles. So presumably it was not so important in the lives of the people as other annual festivals.

It is only much later in Judaism that the date of the festival becomes fixed as the 50th day for the Passover. Since the date was worked out from the first day of Passover and so Pentecost was related to the feast of the Passover and unleavened bread at this time. It was in later Judaism regarded as the closing feast of the Passover.

So what comes to be known as Pentecost was actually a harvest festival. The book of Ruth has a harvest setting and is often read at Harvest and still is in the church of Scotland lectionary to be read every third year at Harvest. Slowly though it lost its independent meaning and became an add on to the feast of the Passover.

Over time Israel historicised the agricultural festivals linking them to their history. So the feast of the Passover was the feast on which the exodus was celebrated. The time of liberation from slavery in Egypt and Pentecost was a feast in memory of the 10

commandments given on Mount Sinai, fifty days later. Israel received these, the Holy Torah, out of the hands of Eternal God.

So a festival of a Passover grew from an ancient harvest festival.

AS we move into the New Testament in search of the word Pentecost Paul writes in around 54 AD, before Luke's gospel was written down, to the church in Corinth. He says he will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost. We're not sure whether or not at this point a Christian Pentecost was celebrated or not. Maybe Paul just expected to see a lot of brethren in Jerusalem on a feast day.

Luke writing later than Paul says in his account of the spirit coming down at Pentecost When the promised day of Pentecost had come. Luke seems to make his story rhyme with the the story of Canaan of Promises fulfilled.

This time it is the promise made by Jesus at his ascension to his disciples and the whole people were gathered to witness it. This story of Pentecost is intentionally a picture of life in a community.

In the early church, as early as the 2nd century maybe, Pentecost is used to describe the 50 days of rejoicing which began at communion on Easter Eve. Since Easter was always a Sunday, seven weeks later, Pentecost was a Sunday too. This whole period of seven weeks was seen as a feast.

Christians rejoiced because their Lord rose again and gave the gift of the spirit to his church and it was expected that the Lord who had ascended into heaven during the Pentecost season would come again as the same season.

In Pentecost, those seven weeks of rest and peace, Christians set their thoughts on the future resurrection.

The last day of Pentecost, as the end of the great feast eventually took on an increasingly independent significance.

Thus Pentecost came to be used not for the 50 day feast, but for Pentecost itself and so was detached from Easter. As a Christian festival in its own right it was devoted exclusively to commemoration of the outpouring of the Spirit.

Pentecost it does seem is an exciting word today, but an exciting word with quite a story to tell of its own.

Happy Birthday Christian church

Peace be with you,

Amen