

May 23, 2010 10:30 AM  
St. James Episcopal Church  
The Rev. Kathy Crary  
Pentecost Sunday

First thing, in Genesis 11, God observes the architectural, technological and engineering successes of the Israelites. Fearing they would build so high as to challenge the realms of God, their tower of Babel was destroyed and the confusion of languages meant communications were harder than ever. This would keep the peoples of Earth from approaching the dominion of God. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of Acts is the reversal.

Second thing, Happy Shavuot! Did you know the Jewish faith has a holiday today? Shavuot means the weeks. In this case, it is a festival about receiving the Torah from God fifty days after the Exodus from Egypt. It is seven "WEEKS" later.

I am sure many of you have heard the story of Moses on Mt. Sinai, the golden calf, the breaking of the first stones which were etched with the Ten Commandments, the second set of stones, and so on.

Moses has received instruction from the Lord, and the details including rules for the people at the foot of the mountain as well as instructions for Moses himself: Here is a reading from Exodus: 19, beginning at verse 16:

**16** On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled. <sup>17</sup>Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

<sup>18</sup>Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently. <sup>19</sup>As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder. <sup>20</sup>When the LORD descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the LORD summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

Here is part of the first reading from today's lessons from the 2d chapter of Acts:

When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Is this intentional? Oh, I think so. Both of these events are cast in the fire that purifies and the presence of God in the gathering of God's people. Here is God approaching the creation in a whole new way and with an aura meant to etch God into the hearts and memories of those who are present at these events.

We cannot deny our Jewish heritage on a baptism day. The water and the rituals around the water ripple with the stories of our spiritual ancestors. In the prayer to bless the water, I will read of three instances of water that seem especially appropriate to the rituals of Christian baptism. The first is the spirit that hovers over water at creation. The second is the parting of the sea that is part of the Exodus story as the early Israelites leave Egypt, setting their hearts on a Promised Land. The third is Jesus' own baptism by John the Baptist, a baptism advertised as a ritual of repentance and commitment.

Today, Matthew David Harvey is made a member of the tribes of Israel, the wandering Jews in a quest for a promised land. Today this child, named for a disciple of Jesus and a great king of Jewish history, will become a child of this parish and a member of the St. James' family along with his heritage as a Christian with two millennia of ancestors who have believed.

I pray for him, and for all people baptized on this feast day, to be granted the three gifts the blessing of the water implies, a gift of a creative spirit and a chance to be creative, a child of freedom and a chance to free the captives of his own day and age, a child of redemption wherein the Spirit will dwell in great abundance and with great grace.

Matthew David Harvey, we pray that you will be in this family a long time. We welcome you as one of our own children, and we hope that if you have years of wandering, not unlike that of our ancestors and many of us, you would find your way home to our tribe of believers who work for justice, pray for peace and await the coming Kingdom of God.