

Understanding Episcopal Liturgy

#50. What is the reason this day in our church calendar is called Pentecost?

Today we celebrate the Christian version of the Feast of Pentecost. Like almost everything in the Christian tradition, the day of Pentecost has its roots in the faith practices of the Jewish people. In Greek, the word Pentecost means 'fiftieth'. Fifty days after the first day of Passover, Jews from all over the ancient world travelled to Jerusalem, for the Festival of Shavuot, which was also called Pentecost, owing to the fact that it occurred fifty days after Passover. The Jewish observance of the Festival of Shavuot is the setting for our Pentecost reading from Acts 2. The eleven disciples were gathered in Jerusalem for the observation of the Festival of Shavuot, also known as Pentecost. Christians celebrate the events of Acts 2 using the same name as our Jewish forebearers, Pentecost, but the ideas attached to our celebration of Pentecost are somewhat different from the ideas of the original Jewish festival.