

# Come and See 2025

## Week 6: New Fire

The old shepherd made his weary way through the desert on the barren mountainside leading his flock to water. He had been this way before many times, but this day was different. His eye was caught by plume of smoke on the horizon. He drew nearer. A bush was burning at the side of the road. He came closer. Moses felt the heat on his face. He smelled the burning wood. He could hear the crackle of the fire and see the smoke and flames. But there was something else. The bush was burning but it was not consumed by the flames. Then out of the fire, God spoke.

*Moses, Moses.*

*Remove the sandals from your feet for the place on which you are standing is holy ground (Exodus 3.5)*

Welcome to this final part of Come and See as we explore the meaning of our baptism through the great images of earth, water, wind, and fire. We are fashioned from the earth: dust we are and to dust we shall return. We need to be forgiven and made new. God invites us to come to the water and be washed. God calls us to pass through the water, to die to our old selves and to rise to new life. God sets a spring of living water in our hearts bubbling up and overflowing to eternal life. God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit, God's very breath, to live within us, our companion, and our guide for this life and into eternity.

And we come now to our final image of the Spirit: the Spirit as fire. When John the Baptist is preaching to the crowd, he makes this promise:

*I baptise you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (Matthew 3.11)*

And as we know, this promise is fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost:

*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 (Acts 2.2-4)*

What does it mean to be so filled with the power of God, to be baptised with the Holy Spirit and with fire? This is what we pray for every Christian at their baptism and confirmation. This is what we pray for every Christian in times and seasons of renewal, and especially between Easter and Pentecost: that we too would be baptised, drenched, soaked, with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

The mitre every Bishop wears is meant to be a symbol of this holy fire: a tongue of flame resting on the head of the Bishop who prays for the gift of the Spirit in confirmation and ordination – but a symbol of the Spirit who anoints every Christian with power from on high.

The ancient Fathers of the Church found the image of the burning bush a powerful image of the Christian life and of God filling us with the Holy Spirit. Remember what is distinctive about the bush. The bush burns but does not burn up. The fire of God's presence and love fills our lives and sets our hearts on fire

with love but this is a fire of grace. This is such a key point. After every fire on earth, what is left behind in the grate or the forest is ash. Fire consumes. But the fire of God's Spirit does not overwhelm us or consume us but empowers us to be more like Jesus and to live God's mission in God's world. God's Spirit does not crowd out our own personality or gifts but enables us to be the people God is calling us to be, to live life to the full.

What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit and with fire? The image of the Spirit as fire conveys three different and interlinked ideas of passion; purity and power.

The first is that God's Spirit sets our hearts on fire with love for God and love for God's world. The two disciples on the Emmaus Road recognise the risen Christ in the breaking of the bread. Afterwards they look back on their journey and they say to one another:

*Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us (Luke 24.32)*

God calls us into a friendship, a deep relationship of love. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, described his own experience of conversion and being filled with the Holy Spirit in these words in his journal:

*In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ*

*alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.*

We should not be afraid as Christians of this experience of God warming our hearts and setting us on fire. Many, many Christians have had these experiences before us. They are an integral part of the Christian life. After the Day of Pentecost, the early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers. The gift of the Spirit draws us into worship and our hearts continue to be set on fire by that worship for the rest of our lives.

The second image of fire is purification. The fire does not consume us but the fire will transform us and burn up in us our past sins and our present habits. The prophet Malachi speaks of the Lord's messenger who will come in these words:

*For he is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver.... (Malachi 3.2-3).*

The New Testament speaks of our faith being tested and refined by fire (1 Peter 1.7). The image of fire reminds us that the Spirit is called the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit calls the people of God to holiness and gives us the grace to live out our faith. As we have been drawn to God's light and God's fire, so we are called to share that light with others through our lives and character and through our witness.

There is a powerful moment at the end of every service of baptism and confirmation when each of the candidates is given a candle lit from the Paschal

candle, which itself is lit on Easter Day. Every candidate is commissioned to bear their own tiny flame, this light, out into the darkness of the world in these words:

*You have received the light and peace of Christ*

*Walk in this light all the days of your life*

*Shine as a light in the world*

*To the glory of God the Father*

So the fire of the Spirit is a symbol of passion and purity but also then of power: the power and energy God gives to live out the Christian life.

As we have seen the way of the disciple is a demanding and costly way to live. Again at the end of the service, and after every renewal of baptismal promises, the whole congregation are invited to renew their commitment to this way in the words of the commission through six promises:

*Will you continue in the apostles teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers?*

*Will you persevere in resisting evil and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?*

*Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?*

*Will you seek and serve Christ in all people, loving your neighbour as yourself?*

*Will you acknowledge Christ's authority over human society by prayer for the world and its leaders, by defending the weak and by seeking peace and justice?*

*Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth?*

To each of these questions the congregation answer, **With the help of God, I will.** We cannot live the Christian way without the grace and help of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit empowers our discipleship and gives each of us gifts for ministry. We each have a part to play in God's mission and in God's church.

I hope and pray that everyone who takes part in Come and See this year will have the opportunity to renew these baptismal promises on Easter Eve, either in your own parish church or through sharing in the Diocesan service from Christ Church.

On this night the Church gathers, with candidates for baptism and confirmation and remembers the great story of salvation; the story of this Holy Week and the passion of the Lord. We remember that we are children of dust and feeble and frail. We remember that we are washed and forgiven and have put to death our old self and we are raised to new life. We have been blessed with a spring of living water set within us; the very breath of God lives now in us, and we have been anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit, the fire of God, to empower our service in God's kingdom.

As we gather in darkness, new fire is kindled. The Paschal candle is lit for another year. We proclaim the resurrection of the Lord. We gather around the font to renew our baptism for another year and our discipleship. We pray for a fresh outpouring and filling with the Holy Spirit. We seek God's renewal in the Church and in the world.

Thank you for journeying through this Lent. Join with us across the Diocese as we renew our baptismal promises on Easter Eve with all that means. Come and see.

