

“The Holy Spirit Poured Out”

Alright, time for a little word association. If I say “Christmas” – what comes to mind? Christmas tree, presents – Silent Night and candles – celebrating the greatest gift of all, the Christ-child born in Bethlehem?

If I say “Thanksgiving” – what comes to mind? Turkey and all the trimmings, football on TV – a house full of aunts/uncles/cousins – giving thanks to God for the bounties He has poured out on you, your family, and this country.

If I say “Easter” is it a new dress, lilies, hunting for colored eggs – the organ kicked up a notch and singing the great good news of the Resurrection of our Lord?

Okay, one more. If I say “Feast of Tabernacles” – what comes to mind? Nothing? This is the “feast” of which our text speaks: “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out ...” And with this feast – the gathered people of God had all kinds of things on their minds.

The Feast of Tabernacles was one of the High Holy Feasts for the Israelites. It was instituted by the Lord and was given to Israel on Mt. Sinai – and this weeklong celebration was to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come.

The feast was a time of great joy and abundance – recognizing and giving thanks for the Lord’s bounty. It was also a remembrance of how their forefathers had lived in booths (or tabernacles/tents) during their wandering in the wilderness – from the time they left Egypt, until the day they entered into the Promised Land.

For this feast, a pilgrimage was made to Jerusalem, where – for seven days – there were burnt offerings and grain offerings and drink offerings. Each day, as the morning sacrifice was being prepared – a priest, accompanied by a joyous procession of music, went down to the Pool of Siloam – and drew out water with a golden pitcher. The procession then returned to the Temple through the “Water Gate” – and up to the altar of burnt offerings.

There, at the altar, were two silver basins with narrow holes. Into one the wine of the drink offering was poured – and into the other, the water from the Pool of Siloam. Each day, wine and water poured out from these basins and flooded the altar.

As soon as the wine and water began to flow – the Temple music began – and the great “Hallel” of Psalms 113-118 were sung. God’s people would sing – “Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob who turned the rock into a pool, the hard rock into springs of water” --- “How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me? I will lift the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord” --- reaching its climax with, “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success!”

For the entire week the Israelites would live in booths (or tents), just like their forefathers in the wilderness – to remind them of how the Lord was “with them” – dwelling in the midst of Israel in the Tabernacle (tent) – and how He was present with them now in the Temple.

Life in the wilderness was hard – but they were free – free from the bondage of the Egyptians. The Lord who delivered them was “with them” always – daily pouring out His Bread from heaven and water from the Rock.

Now, in the Temple, the water pouring forth from the altar reminded them of the water in the wilderness that refreshed them and gave them life. And the Apostle Paul tells us that the Rock was Christ Himself.

This feast directed their faith BACK to the Lord who was “with them” in the wilderness – and – directed them FORWARD to the Christ who would pour out His gifts upon them. As Isaiah declares: “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” – this “joy” being the Holy Spirit whom the Messiah would pour out on Jew and Gentile alike --- harvesting them into God’s kingdom – a great harvest indeed!

With all of this on their minds, Jesus, on the last and great day of the feast – stood up and cried out – “If anyone should thirst, let him come to me, and let him who believes in me drink. As the Scripture said: ‘Rivers of living water shall flow from His side.’”

The Feast of Tabernacles is fulfilled in Jesus. All the prayers offered at the Temple were addressed to Him – He is the One to be thanked and praised – for, in Jesus, the God of Jacob “tabernacles” with them.

In Jesus, God is “with them” to give them rest – to quench their thirst for forgiveness and salvation – to pour out the Holy Spirit upon them so that they may believe in Him, and rejoice in His salvation.

Rather than wine and water pouring forth from the altar in the Temple – blood and water will flow from Jesus’ side as He hangs upon the altar of the cross – and with His death, the Holy Spirit proceeds from His mouth.

The Holy Spirit goes forth from the crucified Christ – in the waters of Holy Baptism and in the blood of the Lord’s Supper – to gather a harvest of believers, and to nourish and strengthen them for life in the wilderness of this world.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. The Holy Spirit is poured out on you today. Living water flows from the crucified Christ to wash away your sin – to deliver you and save you. You are free men and women – who live, and rest, in Jesus – united to Him by faith – sharing, and rejoicing in His salvation, freely given to you.

Rivers of living water flowing from the cross to you in Holy Baptism. The Holy Spirit flowing to you, and dwelling in you – so that you, the sinner, might be satisfied by Christ’s forgiveness – and, so that your neighbor, might be satisfied by your works of mercy.

Dearly beloved, on this Feast Day – with joy we sing our thanks and praise – coming into the presence of the Lord to draw water from the wells of His salvation – that we may drink of His life everlasting. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.