

## Pentecostalism



New Testament Church of God, Harehills, Leeds

Pentecostalism was founded in the first decade of the twentieth century in the USA. According to research published in December 2006, Pentecostals are the fastest-growing group of Christians in the UK. There are just under 1 million Pentecostals in the UK, and over 20 million in the USA. (March 2006)

Pentecostals believe that faith must be powerfully experienced, and not something found merely through ritual or thinking. Pentecostals believe they are driven by the power of God moving within them.

Pentecostal churches stress the importance of conversions that amount to a *Baptism in the Spirit*. This fills the believer with the Holy Spirit, which gives the believer the strength to live a truly Christian life.

The direct experience of God is revealed by *gifts of the Spirit* such as speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing.

### Denominations and a movement

Pentecostalism is not a church in itself, but a movement that includes many different churches. It's not always easy to see if a church is Pentecostal because many Pentecostal denominations don't include the word 'Pentecostal' in their name.

### Bible-based

Pentecostals base their theology on the text of the Bible which they believe to be the word of God and totally without error.

### The day of Pentecost

Pentecostalism gets its name from the day of Pentecost, when, according to the Bible, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus' disciples, leading them to speak in many languages as evidence that they had been *baptised in the Spirit*. Pentecostals believe that this was not a one-off event, but something that can and does happen every day.

### Beliefs and baptisms

#### Sanctification

A person is sanctified when their life is dedicated to God and they are separated from their past sinful life. When a person is sanctified, they are born again to Christ through the Holy Spirit and turn away from the bad behaviours and thoughts of their old life.

#### Water Baptism

Pentecostal churches follow scripture in practising baptism by immersion. For Pentecostals water baptism is a symbol of a conversion that has already taken place. It is the conversion that is essential; the water baptism is an additional element. *Infant baptism is not practised in Pentecostal churches.*

### **Baptism in the Holy Spirit**

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is the central event of Pentecostalism. The name of the movement commemorates the first baptism in the Spirit, of Jesus' disciples on the day of Pentecost.

Baptism in the Spirit is not a conversion experience; a person must already have been converted before they can receive baptism in the Spirit. A person who has been baptised in the Spirit is believed to have the Holy Spirit within them to empower and guide them for the rest of their life. As well as giving a new beginning to the believer, baptism in the Spirit gives them gifts of the Spirit which they are expected to use to bring others to faith, and generally to further Christian work.

### **Worship**

Pentecostal worship is less formal and more emotionally expressive than that of other Christian traditions. Participants worship with body, heart and soul, as well as with their minds.

Much Pentecostal worship is designed to bring about an experience of God's presence. In Pentecostal churches there is a great deal of active congregational involvement: the worshippers may dance and clap. Worshippers may share their own stories, and preaching may rely more on stories and less on the analysis of scripture.

Services can include healings, trances and speaking in tongues. The congregation is likely to respond actively to the sermon, with applause, or, in some churches, shouts of amen and hallelujah.

The result may well be that participants feel that the service is actually led by the Spirit. Consequently Pentecostals are able to see the church as a community of God's people working to create the context for a direct experience of God.

Some Pentecostals also use 'worship' to refer to their everyday life which they dedicate as a gift to God.