A Very Special Happy Birthday



Every child can relate to the idea of a birthday party. Try this interactive story-telling method to help children celebrate the beginnings of the church.

Background:

The “birth” of the church was long-anticipated and expected. From the beginning chapters of Genesis and onwards, we read how God, the Father, worked out a plan to redeem imperfect people back to himself. In the Gospels, Jesus speaks of building “his church”. Then, in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit ushers in a new age and the birth of the church.

Among the crowds gathered in Jerusalem, there were one hundred and twenty believers gathered and waiting just as Jesus had told them to do. By the end of the festival, specifically the Day of Pentecost, three thousand others had been added to this group of followers. The Day of Pentecost marks the beginning of an age when imperfect people could have their sins washed away in baptism and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was the beginning of the church.

Items to Gather:

- 12 cupcakes topped with soft icing or whipped cream
- A plate or platter for the cupcakes
- 12 candles
- Matches or a lighter
- “Sprinkles” or “Hundreds and Thousands” (or any tiny cake decorations)
- A gift box and wrapping paper.
- The following verse that you have transcribed on an index card or piece of paper:
  “Peter said to them, “Change your hearts and lives and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38 ICB

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Prepare:

- The words below are provided as a guide and are not meant to be read like a script. Keeping this in mind, read and become very familiar with the events of Acts 1:12-2:41 so that you are able to share the story with the children in a natural way. For additional help, refer to the lesson: Sermon at Pentecost.
- Place the verse card inside the gift box and wrap it like a birthday gift.

How to Tell the Story:

1. Introduction: Ask the children to share their experiences of birthday parties.
   As you and the children are talking about this, set out the 11 cupcakes and the gift box on a table in front of the children. (Keep the 12th cupcake hidden from view.)
2. The church had a beginning: Explain that birthday parties are a way of remembering and celebrating the birth or beginning of a person's life. "Today, we are going to talk about a different kind of beginning. It is not the beginning of a life of one person. This is the beginning of the church."
3. One hundred and twenty followers of Jesus: Just before his ascension, Jesus had told the apostles to go to Jerusalem and wait for a special gift to arrive. (Luke 24:49) Tell the children about the 120 followers who had gathered together with the apostles. Now, add a few sprinkles to the tops of the cupcakes. Ask the children to help you estimate 120 sprinkles in all.
4. Eleven Apostles: Ask the children to count the cupcakes and point out that there are only 11. Talk about how Jesus had chosen 12 Apostles, but after Judas betrayed Jesus and died, there were now only 11. Matthias was chosen to replace Judas. This is the time to bring the 12th cupcake out from hiding.
5. Arrival of the Holy Spirit: Have the children make sounds like the wind and then talk about how the apostles heard a sound like a mighty wind. Place a candle in each of the cupcakes and, as you light them, talk about the flames of fire resting upon the head of each apostle. The sound of wind and flames made it clear that the Holy Spirit was there that day. We cannot see the Holy Spirit, but we know he was there because of these things. Jesus said that the Spirit would give power. Explain the power these 12 men now had to speak in languages they had not even studied.
6. Peter's Sermon: The Holy Spirit also gave Peter the power to courageously preach a sermon to a huge crowd of people that day. Push one of the cupcakes in front of the others as you talk about the sermon content. Jesus wanted all of the Jews to have good hearts and turn to God. Peter told this crowd of Jews that, instead of following Jesus, they had crucified him.
7. "What should we do?": The people felt terrible (quietly blow out the candles and set them aside). They had done a terrible thing. How could they ever make it right? They asked Peter.
8. The gift for everyone: Peter knew that the Holy Spirit had given the apostles a special kind of power, but the Holy Spirit was also a gift that God wanted everyone to have in their life. Peter knew exactly what to say to the people that day. Now, you or one of the children can open the gift and read Acts 2:38.
9. Three thousand people were baptised: As you discuss this, group the cupcakes back together and bring out the sprinkles again. Remind the children that there were 120 believers at the beginning of this day. Begin adding more sprinkles to the cupcakes so that you cover them with what seems like 3,000. These may even spill over onto the plate. Talk about how 3,000 people were added to their number on that day.
10. Conclusion: This was the beginning of the church. In the book of Acts, we read that, from that day forward, more and more people began to follow Jesus and were baptised. And even today, when people are sorry for their sins and are baptised, God still adds them to the church as well. Some day, I pray that even you will be added to that number.

And now it is time to celebrate and eat those cupcakes!

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