The First Church



Scripture Reference: Acts 2:42-47

Suggested Theme: God's church is a family that follows Jesus, not just a building where believers gather. Today, the church does the same things the early church did.

Memory Verse: "All of you together are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of that body." 1 Corinthians 12:27, ICB

Story Overview:

The early church was excited as they saw more and more people becoming Christians daily. Many people who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost stayed longer to be with the rest of the new Christians. The church devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread (Lord's Supper), and prayer.

Background Study:

Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts

The church began on the Day of Pentecost, when the Apostles preached the Good News about King Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. See the lesson Sermon at Pentecost. It must have been amazing to witness about 3,000 people in one day accepting and becoming followers of King Jesus through baptism.

Thousands of Jews were gathered in Jerusalem for the Pentecost Feast. The holiday was held 50 days after the Passover, so it makes sense that it was known, at that time, by the Greek word for 50, or "Pentecost." In Leviticus 23:15-22 it was called the "Feast of Weeks" but it is also known to Jews as "Shavuot" which is "weeks" in Hebrew. Pentecost was a week of celebration for the harvest but was also traditionally associated with the giving of Law. This feast explains why so many people were in Jerusalem. It also explains why so many could extend their stay in the city and enjoy the fellowship of their new brothers and sisters in Christ.

Just before He ascended to heaven, Jesus said that everything would begin in Jerusalem (Acts 1:7-8) but that it would spread out to "*every part of the world.*" Everything did, indeed, begin in Jerusalem. Here in Jerusalem, this new church group was very Jewish. The Apostles were Jewish, and these new Christians would have been Jewish.

But the Jews who heard the Apostles share the Good News had come from many places to celebrate the Feast (Acts 2:5-11). After becoming Christians, many enjoyed a time of beautiful fellowship before returning to their homes far away. As these Jewish Christians left Jerusalem, they took Jesus' message with them to places all around the known world.

The Jerusalem church in these early days can serve as a model of what a church should be like. They were an extremely diverse group, yet they came together in the church with devotion, sincerity and joy. In the

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second chapter of Acts, we learn about four areas of focus in the early church.

The Apostles' Teaching (Acts 2:42-43)

The Apostles continued to fulfil what Jesus had told them to do. *"Go and make followers of all people in the world. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have told you. You can be sure that I will be with you always. I will continue with you until the end of the world." Matthew 28:19-20, ICB*.
The Apostles proved the authority of what they were saying through wonders and miraculous signs. The church was filled with awe (Acts 2:43).

Fellowship (Acts 2:42, 44-47)

The new Christians continued to meet together every day in the temple courts. Many Jews would run out of food as they had probably come to Jerusalem only prepared to stay for the Feast of Pentecost. Those who had something to sell sold it to provide for others around them. They shared everything. Verse 47 records that they enjoyed favour with the people and that new Christians were added daily. As Jesus said earlier in His ministry, *"All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other." John 13:35, ICB.*

Breaking of Bread (Acts 2:42, 46)

They did not just meet in the temple courts. They also met together in homes and shared meals. The "breaking of bread" also seems to indicate that they shared the Lord's Supper in remembrance of the death of Jesus. We read later in Acts that Christians continued to meet on the first day of the week to *"break bread"* in the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). For more detail, refer to the lesson The Meaning of the Lord's Supper.

Prayer (Acts 2:42)

This time of gladness, fellowship and new life was also focused on God through prayer. Praying together was integral to the life of the church. Other scriptures on the subject of prayer:

- Romans 12:12
- Ephesians 6:18
- Philippians 4:6
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
- James 5:13

A church is not a building or institution. It is made up of people. The Jerusalem church met in the temple courtyard and homes but was still a church. Later, we will learn that the church is a body, with Jesus Christ being the head and followers of Jesus Christ being parts of the body (Colossians 1:17-18; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.). The church is also a family because God is our Father and we are His children. We have many brothers and sisters in Christ.

As we continue reading the Book of Acts, we learn that the church grew and spread to far regions. As the church later faced challenges such as persecution from without and disagreement from within, it continued to strive to function like this early church. No group of people is perfect, but even today, being part of a group devoted to one another and the teachings of Jesus Christ is a blessing like no other.

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Way to Introduce the Story:

Collect photographs of your family and your house and show them to the children. After you have shown the photos to the children, point to one of the house pictures and ask the children if this is your family. Of course, it is not. The house is only the building where my family lives. “Who is my family?” Let the children name the family members. Now, show a picture of the church building. Ask the children if this is the church. Explain that this is only the building where the church meets. “Who is the church?” Let the children name some members of the church. “This is our church family. We may not have the same Mother and Father, but we all have the same Heavenly Father- God. That makes us brothers and sisters in Christ. Our church is a family wherever we meet or go.”

The Story:

Amazing events had been taking place in the city of Jerusalem! For one thing, there was a big Holiday. Thousands of Jewish people from many regions and countries had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. This was when the Jews came to thank God for the food and grain He provided them in the harvest. They also thanked God for the Law and the Ten Commandments.

But that wasn’t the most important event in Jerusalem at that time. Everyone was talking about something new. Peter and the other Apostles were telling everyone Good News about Jesus and how He had become King. They preached about how Jesus had been killed on the cross but then came back alive. Jesus had returned to heaven, but before He left, He told the Apostles to tell everyone the Good News.

When people heard about Jesus, many said they wanted to follow Him. They said they were sorry for all of their sins, and they were baptised. More and more people decided to listen to the Good News and become Christians.

Do you know what a person becomes a part of when they become a Christian? He or she becomes part of the church. Being part of the church means following the church’s leader, Jesus. Being part of the church also means being part of a new family. The other people in the church are your brothers and sisters.

All of Jerusalem’s people who became Christians were now part of the church. It was a very big church! On the first day, there were almost 3,000 people in it. More and more people obeyed the teachings of Jesus and were added to the church every day.

What do you think a church should be like today? Do you think you can be a good example and help your church be like the church in Jerusalem?

The church listened to the apostles teach about Jesus.

Before He went back to heaven, Jesus said this to the Apostles. *“Go and make followers of all people in the world. Baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything that I have told you. You can be sure that I will be with you always. I will continue with you until the end of the world.” Matthew 28:19-20, ICB.* So, that is exactly what the Apostles did. They taught people about Jesus every day. Sometimes, people needed proof to show that the teachings were true, so the Apostles would perform miracles to prove it. The church was filled with awe.

In our time, Jesus’ teachings are written in the Bible. How can you help your church read the Bible and listen to people teach about Jesus?

The church had fellowship with one another.

They met together in the temple courts and their homes. They weren’t even worried about not having a big and beautiful church building. If a Christian brother or sister were hungry or needed clothes, then another

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Christian brother or sister would sell something and use the money to buy what was needed. They shared everything.

What can you do when someone in the church needs help?

The church shared meals and shared the Lord's Supper.

The church often ate food together. When the first day of the week came around, the church drank grape juice or wine and ate unleavened bread to remember Jesus in the Lord's Supper. They wanted to remember again and again all of the good things that Jesus had done.

What can you do to help when your church shares meals? What do you do when people remember Jesus by taking the Lord's Supper?

The church prayed together.

God listens when we talk to Him. The church in Jerusalem talked to God. Maybe they asked God to help them obey Him. Maybe they prayed for their Christian brothers and sisters who were sick. Maybe they prayed that more and more people would follow Jesus.

Do you talk to God? What can you pray about for your church? Let's bow our heads now and pray for the church.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- What are the four things that the early church devoted themselves to? (The Apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread (Lord's Supper), and prayer)
- Is the church a building? (No)
- What is the church? (People who are Christians are the church)
- What kind of family members are other Christians? (Brothers and Sisters)

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- Why are Christians brothers and sisters? (Because God is our Father and all of us are His children)
- How did the early Christians show each other love? (They sold their possessions so they could give other Christians food, clothes and other things they needed)
- What did the early Christians also do together? (ate food with happy and generous hearts, and worshipped God together)
- What does this story show you about people?
- What does this story show you about God?

Reflection:

- What would you have most enjoyed doing with other Christians if you were a Christian in the early church? (Remind them of the four things Christians devoted themselves to)
- What do you think the early church prayed about?
- Does knowing that people had the Lord's Supper so long ago change how you think about the Lord's Supper?
- The Bible says that many signs and wonders took place among the Christians. What kind of signs and wonders do you think could have happened?
- How do you think the early church and your church are similar?
- Does your church feel like a family? How could you help it feel more like a family? Who is it fun to think of as your brother or sister?
- Why do you think the early Christians sold their possessions and shared everything?
- How would you feel about selling your things and giving the money away to Christians who needed it?
- How do you think our church could be more loving towards each other or other people? How could we show Jesus we love Him more? Could you help this happen?
- What is something you wonder about in this story or about church?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- I'm in the Lord's Army Song
- I am a C-H-R-I-S-T-I-A-N (Song)
- ABC: Jesus Died for You and Me Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Make plans for the children to serve tea to the church after worship.
- Read the church bulletin and circle ways the church fellowships today.
- Make a church bulletin for the Jerusalem church.
- Plan a group fellowship event.
- Arrange to have the children help prepare the Lord's Supper for the church or watch those who prepare it.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Draw pictures of the church in the first century and the church today devoting themselves to bible study, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer.
- Have the children draw two boxes on a piece of paper. Write "church building" over one box. Write "church" over the other. Guide children in drawing or writing words in the first box related to a building (pews, pulpit, songbooks…). In the second box, have them write about or draw people listening to God's Word, fellowshipping, taking the Lord's Supper and praying. Discuss together as they draw. Video Instructions here or Print a worksheet.
- Use this simple drawing idea of Teaching Children About the Church to help children understand that the church is made up of Christians and is not just a church building.



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Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets (Calvary Curriculum)
- Video: Good simple explanation (2 minutes and 19 seconds) from Bible Theater: Acts – The Early Church – LifeKids.tv on Youtube
- Lesson: A VBS Lesson that has some good ideas for discussion (Eldr Barry)

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