

An Advent Lutheran Church Jubilee 2026 Celebration Devotion

PENTECOST—God of Tempest, God of Whirlwind

By Pastor Debra Loudin-McCann

(Former Director of Music Ministries at Advent and ministerial daughter of the congregation.)

*“... Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,
O still small voice of calm!”*

HYMN - *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*
text by John Greenleaf Whittier



God of Tempest, God of Whirlwind, God of Blazing, God of Burning ...

*“God of earthquake, God of thunder, shake us loose from lethargy
Break the chains of sin asunder, for earth’s healing set us free.
Crumble walls that still divide us; make us one in Christ our Lord,
make us one in Christ our Lord!”*

HYMN – *God of Tempest, God of Whirlwind, ELW #400*

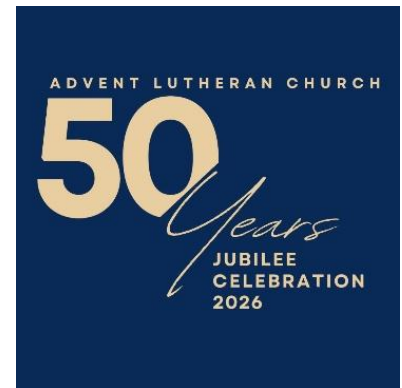
What image comes to mind when you think of The Holy spirit? Most of us probably think first of the tongues of fire that appeared over the heads of the apostles in the Bible story. How about a Dove descending from the breaking Heavens as in the story of Jesus’ Baptism? In one of the Creation stories in Genesis the Holy Spirit is described as a dove that “hovers” over the chaos of the waters and brings order to earth’s form. To bring order from chaos is to bring peace from disturbance. The Dove is the sign, the harbinger of Peace.



The Holy Spirit moves in the sound of rushing wind present at Pentecost. That same wind is the Breath of Life, the Spirit of God breathed into Adam that transforms the clay and spit into a living being. These are all *vital* symbols – *vital* as in *VITA*, the Latin word for *LIFE*. These are symbols of creation and enlivening, positive, and constructive.

But the Holy Spirit is also depicted and employed as a symbol of *Power*, dynamic and forceful, able to overpower and destroy. A powerful wind can sweep away everything in its path as we who live here in Texas know all too well from tornadoes to hurricanes. Fires gone wild and out of control consume everything in their paths as well, yet they are necessary as part of the cycle of growth and renewal in Nature. There are even some trees whose seeds cannot germinate to sprout new trees if they are not subjected to the purifying heat

of fire. This is paradox, Yes? This kind of mixed analogy confuses us. How can we reconcile the essential differences to understand this? Perhaps it may help to think in terms of Energy. The Holy Spirit is the powerful, vital energy of the Holy Trinity. We can picture God as The Father (and Mother) and we can picture Jesus Incarnate, The Son of Man. The Holy Spirit, though, is hard to IMAGine, hard to assign an image as a “person” of the Trinity; Father, Son and *Holy Spirit* ... Hmmmm.



What do you think of when a church, a congregation, is described as being “full of the Holy Spirit” ???

I grew up in the Baptist church, so for us that was coded language for a “charismatic” church where they spoke in tongues, like the denomination known as the Pentecostals. When I first came to Advent in 1989, I remember hearing about a local Lutheran church that had split over the issue of the Pastor becoming charismatic. It was spoken of in whispers, a kind of scandal! THAT kind of Holy Spirit seems to scare most Lutherans I know. But wait a minute! Remember our NTNL Synod’s mission campaign “*Spread the Spirit’s Fire*” ??? Isn’t there a beautiful banner that adorns the worship space proclaiming that Advent is “*ALIVE in The Spirit*” ???

I always loved the Pentecost Festival worship services at Advent; a room full of people dressed in red, doves and tongues of fire hanging from the ceiling, a joyfully jingling ribbon banner flowing with the fiery colors in reds, yellows, oranges and gold, the readings done in multiple languages, hymns sung from around the globe. Pentecost services were (still are?) a feast for the senses.

There were times now and then in Advent’s fifty years when there may have been some other kinds of *spirits* at work, spirits that were less than holy. It happens. Life, the world, and so of course also the Church, have experienced and survived outbreaks of spirits of division, confusion, fear, and apathy, and even mean-spiritedness. Think of how the work of one man, Martin Luther, was able to shake the religious foundation of the Western world bringing about The Protestant Reformation. Sometimes we have to let the Holy Spirit shake us up, cause walls to crumble and break us open, blow away the dust, even subject us to “The Refiner’s Fire.” God does indeed “speak through the earthquake, wind and fire” and eventually, in God’s own good time, The Dove of Peace descends on the Beloved Community, and we rise up, move forward, cleansed, alive with renewed purpose and energy, and we RE-MEMBER. We come together again, Many Parts – One Body, The Body of Christ. We remember WHO we are, and WHOSE we are. We are God’s Pentecost People, Alive in the Spirit poured out upon us in our Baptisms, marked with the Cross of Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit ... FOREVER.

“ ... Blaze, Spirit, Blaze! Set our hearts on FIRE!”

HYMN – *Shine, Jesus, Shine* ELW #671

