

To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ: mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.

<sup>36</sup> *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”* <sup>37</sup> *Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* <sup>38</sup> *Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* <sup>39</sup> *For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”* <sup>40</sup> *And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”* <sup>41</sup> *Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.*

Text: Acts 2:36-41 A Pentecost 6/4/17 Acts 2:1-6, 14, 22-23 Luke 18:15-17 Ps. 48 Resp. Ps. 145  
Hymns: 16, 751, 235 (1-2, 6, 8), 231

### **GOD MAKES THE DIFFERENCE IN US**

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Ava is too little to tell us that she believes in Jesus. But we have God’s Word on it that she does. How can a little baby, or for that matter, any of us, believe in Jesus and be saved? As we’ll see from what happened on the first Pentecost, **God** makes the difference in us.

It was less than two months since Jesus warned Peter that he was going to deny Him. Peter had told Jesus, *“‘Even if I have to die with You, I will never disown You.’ And”* the Bible adds, *“all the other disciples said the same”* (Mt. 26:35). Later on, just as Jesus had said he would, Peter ended up denying Him three times (Mt. 26:69-75). All the other disciples were afraid to stand up for Jesus as well. After Jesus was crucified, and before the disciples knew that He had risen from the dead, they were in a room with the doors locked. They were afraid that since the Jewish leaders had Jesus crucified, they would persecute them and possibly put them to death, too. (Jn. 20:19)

Now, two months later, on Pentecost, how Peter and the other disciples had changed! They were out in public in their capital city of Jerusalem in front of thousands of their fellow Jews. Peter spoke to them about *“Jesus, whom you crucified.”* The disciples told them that Jesus **is** the promised Messiah, and that they were guilty of agreeing with putting their Messiah to death.

Very soon after Pentecost Peter healed a lame man, making it clear to everyone there that they healed him by the power Jesus gave them. Then Peter, and John who was with him, told them

about Jesus and salvation in Him. Peter and John were brought before the Jewish authorities, where they once again boldly spoke about Jesus. The Bible tells us that *“when [the Jewish leaders] saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus”* (Ac. 4:13). Peter and John saw Jesus die on the cross. After He had risen from the dead, they saw Jesus alive again with their own eyes and touched Him with their own hands. They knew that Jesus is the Son of God who had sacrificed His life on the cross and risen again to save all people. They told the Jewish leaders, *“We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard”* (Ac. 4:20).

As Jews from all over that part of the world gathered in Jerusalem on that first Pentecost listened to the disciples tell them about Jesus, Peter explained, *“This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ... I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and [My servants] shall prophesy”* (in this context, speak God’s Word to others) (Ac. 2:16, 18). As the Old Testament Prophet Joel had foretold, God had poured out His Holy Spirit on the disciples, taking away their fears and enabling them to bear witness to Jesus with power and conviction.

**God** had made the difference in the disciples! They were still weak, sinful human beings. But since Jesus’ death and resurrection God had caused them to grow in their understanding of His Word and of Jesus and the salvation He won for us all. And the disciples could not and would not keep Jesus to themselves.

When the people heard what Peter said about Jesus *“they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to **you** and to your **children**, and to **all who are afar off**”* (us Gentiles), *“as many as the Lord our God will call.”* ... *Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”* What an amazing change in those people! On that one day some three thousand of them went from rejection of Jesus and opposition to His followers, to faith in Jesus and joyful fellowship with His followers! **God** had worked the miracle of faith in their hearts. God had done for them what He says through His Prophet Ezekiel: *“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My [Holy] Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws”* (36:25-27). Through the Word of God Peter and the other disciples had spoken on that first Pentecost, God the Holy Spirit had worked in the hearts of many of those people. The Holy Spirit had convicted them of their sin, worked repentance in them, and brought them to believe in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. God had cleansed them from their sin and dedicated them to Himself through the water and Word in baptism (Ezek. 36:25-27; Eph. 5:25b-27). God in His grace had saved them!

We're told in the second chapter of Ephesians, *"You were dead in your transgressions and sins."* By nature we were spiritually dead. *"But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved"* (vv. 4-5). God in His grace rescued us from eternal death and has given us eternal life by bringing us to believe in Jesus. As Peter says, *"The promise"* of salvation *"is to ... your children,"* which includes Ava, *"and to ... as many as the Lord our God will call,"* which includes us all. **God** has made the difference in Ava, and all of us. Titus 3:4-7 says, *"When the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of rebirth and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."* Through Ava's baptism, and through our baptism, the Holy Spirit came into our hearts and gave us faith in Jesus and saved us.

The Bible says, *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"* (2 Cor. 5:17). We and our whole life have been changed for the better. Think of the difference Jesus made in the disciples and their lives from the time they first met Him, through His crucifixion and resurrection and Ascension, at Pentecost, and as we read about them and what they said and did in the books of the New Testament. Think of the difference God made in those 3,000 people and their lives who came to believe in Jesus on that first Pentecost, and as we read about them afterwards in the Bible (Ac. 2:24ff.). Think of the difference God has made in Ava, and in you and me! We know Jesus Christ, God's Son, as our God and our Savior, and the Lord of our lives. In Jesus, God has given our lives real purpose. Wherever we may go, whatever we may do, all through our lives, we're living by faith in Jesus, and we're living for Jesus, and we live to bear witness to Him. As Paul says, *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"* (Gal. 2:20). *"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain"* (Philip. 1:21). And that points out another big difference God has made in our lives. We know that after our life here on earth is done, Jesus has a better life waiting for us – a life of perfect health and joy and peace – forever in heaven. **God** makes the difference in us! Amen.