

Birds, birthdays and God

These are two lovely activities you can try over summer to help your child begin to think about God's Holy Spirit - the part of God that lives in our hearts today, filling us with God's power and love.

1. Happy Birthdays

Are you going to a birthday party this summer? Think about why birthdays are happy events and how we celebrate them.

When you go to a birthday party, you can think about how we celebrate the beginning of each life with joy, by singing, eating together, and playing games. Birthdays are a nice time to pray too - you can say thank you to God for starting the new life of the birthday boy or girl.

There is a time of year when the church celebrates its 'birthday' too. It is called Pentecost (or Whitsunday) and falls fifty days after Easter Sunday.

Churches celebrate this day because after Jesus rose from the dead, he spent forty days with his friends, and then he went up to heaven. Before he went, he promised to send God's spirit to live in people's hearts and help them live as followers of Jesus.

Ten days after that, Jesus' friends were gathered together. Suddenly they felt a rushing wind, and saw an amazing light above everyone's heads! The Bible described this as 'tongues of fire' because that is what they looked like.

Jesus' friends realised this must be God's Spirit that Jesus had promised and they all then went out into the streets and started telling everyone the good news that Jesus was alive and had defeated death.

This is the day Christians believe God's Holy Spirit came into the world.

2. Birdwatching

See if you can find a bird's nest near your house and spend some time watching it with your child. Take care not to touch or disturb it, but encourage your child to spot the mummy and daddy birds, and what they are doing to care for their babies in the nest.

Ask your child how the babies might feel in the nest, and what they need. Could they survive without their mummy and daddy? Maybe you can even take pictures of different nests and find out about the birds that live in them.

As you watch the birds, you and your child can wonder together about how God's Spirit might be like a bird, feeding and being there for their babies, keeping them warm and keeping busy for the sake of their baby birds, even though the babies don't know it.

Sometimes in Christian art and stories, a dove is used as a symbol of God's spirit. It is a pure white bird about the size of a pigeon. It appears in the story of Noah's Ark and also in the story of Jesus' baptism. **You might see a picture of a dove inside your local church somewhere. See if you can find one the next time you go.**