

Readings: *Acts 10: 25, 26, 34, 35, 44 – 48; 1John 4: 7 – 10; John 15: 9 – 17.*

Today's reading from the *Acts of the Apostles* is a much-abbreviated account of one of the most important events recorded by Saint Luke in his account of the growth of the Church.

I recommend that you read the whole of chapter 10 to gain an understanding of the vital part that the baptism of Cornelius holds in the spread of the Christian community.

Verses 1 – 8: tell us of an angel's visit to Cornelius, a centurion who, like many Gentiles, was a 'God-fearer' – sympathetic to Judaism and its way of life, but not becoming a Jew.

Verses 9 – 16: Peter's vision and its message, *What God has cleansed you must not call common.*

Verses 17 – 22: Messengers from Cornelius tell Peter of the angel's command to fetch him.

Verses 23 – 33: Cornelius tells Peter of the angel's message.

Verses 34 – 43: Peter, recognizing that *God does not have favourites*, preaches about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Verses 44 – 48: The Holy Spirit *came down on all the Gentile listeners*, and on Peter's order they are baptized.

This was a transforming event in the life of the apostolic Church, leading to the fulfilment of the command of Jesus (which we shall hear on Ascension Day) that the apostles will *be my witnesses, not only in Jerusalem, but throughout Judea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth.*

From this point onwards *Acts* is more and more concerned with the preaching of the Gospel to Gentiles. After the account of the so-called 'Council of Jerusalem' in chapter 15, Luke's narrative is all about the mission of Paul and his companions, first in Syria and Asia Minor, then on into Macedonia and Greece. Eventually Paul's appeal to the Emperor led to his journey to Rome. Luke ends his account by writing that Paul *lived there the whole of the two years in his own hired dwelling and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus quite openly and unhindered.*

The task begun by Peter, Paul and the other apostles is our task today.