

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit

Genesis 1.1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19.1-7; Mark 1.4-11

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During the depression in the USA in the 1930's Mr. Yates had a sheep ranch in West Texas. He wasn't able to make enough on his ranching operation to pay for his mortgage, so he was in danger of losing his ranch. Day after day, as he grazed his sheep over those West Texas hills, he was greatly troubled about how he would pay his bills.

Then a seismographic crew from an oil company came into the area and told him there might be oil on his land. They asked permission to drill a well, and he signed a lease contract.

At 400 meters deep they struck a huge oil reserve. The first well came in at 80,000 barrels a day. Many subsequent wells were more than twice as large. And Mr. Yates owned it all.

The day when he had purchased his land, he had received the oil and mineral rights. Yet, he had been living on relief. A multimillionaire living in poverty. The problem? He didn't know the oil was there, even though he owned it.

As Christians we so often live in spiritual poverty. We have the Spirit of God in our life; we are entitled to his gifts and his energizing power, but we are not aware or we do not dig deep enough to use our birthright.



1. Creation

Today and in the weeks ahead we will focus on the person and the work of the Holy Spirit. We will explore the terrain and drill, to see what the Holy Spirit means for us and what He does for us.

To begin with, the Holy Spirit was deeply involved in the creation of our world and of humankind. God created our world not as some external neutral force, but in a deeply personal manner. He personally created humankind and blew the breath of life into us.

In Genesis 1, we read that God says, 'Let us make humans'. He made you and me. But interestingly, the Hebrew text says that God speaks of himself in the plural. Let "us" make humans.

Keep in mind that the Hebrew language did not make use of the majestic plural. The queen of England can say, 'We, Elisabeth', but Hebrew did not know this grammatical construction.

So if God says, 'Let us create man', something strange is happening.

Even the first verses of the Bible point, in a mysterious way, to God being a Trinity. The idea is not something the church invented.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. [...] And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light".

We see God speak; his Word is powerful. In the New Testament the apostles unpack this idea of the speech, the Word of God. They say that this Word of God who created the world eventually became human in Jesus Christ.

But at the time of creation we also see the Spirit of God at work in Creation. The Spirit is presented to us as the wind, the breath of God.

And this Spirit of God is not only hovering over the waters in a general act of creation, but he is also blown by God into humankind as the breath of life, the life-giving Spirit.

We have, I say this carefully, we have something divine in us. Something that separates us from the animals. This divine aspect is the Breath of God.

In the book of Job, Job testifies to his friends:

The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. (Job 33.4)

And in our Creed we remind ourselves each week:

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.

The Holy Spirit is entitled to the same worship and glory that we give to the Father and the Son. He is, after all, the Lord, the giver of life - not just some impersonal power.

In my younger years I sometimes had major disputes with Jehovah's Witnesses when they tried to convert me. In contradiction to the whole church throughout the ages, these people deny the reality of the Trinity. For them, the Holy Spirit is "God's power in action, his active force, not a person", as their literature teaches.

I once made one of those JWs really angry because I insisted that the Holy Spirit is a person. I pointed the man to Ephesians 4:30, where Paul says, 'And do not grieve

the Holy Spirit of God', and I asked him, 'Can we grieve electricity, or dynamite?' Of course not. Only a person can be grieved, someone with a will, with a mind, with feelings.

I realize, we must be careful to not ascribe humanness to God, but the Spirit of God is someone who can be grieved. He commands, he has a will, he teaches. He is a person.

And the Holy Scriptures also present him to us as omniscient - that is, he knows everything. And He is omnipresent - that means, present at the same time everywhere. And He is also called eternal. These are characteristics of God alone.

2. Baptism of Jesus

At the time of creation we see waters, we see God, we see the Spirit. When Jesus is baptized we see waters, we see God, we see the Spirit.

In the Genesis-story, the Spirit played a role in creating the world. With the baptism of Jesus, God began the recreation of the world - and the Spirit is the active agent of God, for our re-creation. For our renewal. Imagine how important the Holy Spirit is for us!

We need him in our life. Without him as the breath of life, we would not live physically for a second. And without him as the one who renews our life spiritually, how could we ever be alive to God? When Jesus was baptized, we read that

He came up out of the water, [and] immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

The heavens were torn open, so that the Holy Spirit could descend on Jesus. In the Old Testament, God had promised his Spirit to all of Israel; Israel was God's firstborn son. But as Israel did not abide by God's covenant, The Spirit was not poured out on all flesh.

The only truly obedient human had to be supplied by God himself. The Word of God became a man, and only with this man, Jesus Christ, God could have full and perfect communion. He was, as it were, Israel. He was God's firstborn, his only Son. Finally someone God was truly pleased with. So finally God could pour out his Spirit - as He had promised long ago.

Now, finally, God could return to his temple. Heaven was torn open; the glory of God, the Holy Spirit, came to Jesus Christ. He was the perfect house for God to live in. This is what the world has been waiting for.



If ever the Spirit rested on someone, it was on Jesus. He was truly anointed, the Christ. Not only because the Holy Spirit empowered him for his ministry, but also because in terenity, He is one with the Holy Spirit in the life of the Trinity.

We celebrate Epiphany - the feast in which we think of the power of God being manifested in Jesus Christ. The Eastern churches celebrate Christmas now.

In those Eastern churches, throughout the centuries, on the evening of 6 January when the story of Jesus' baptism is read, a special hymn has been sung. It is called the Troparion:

When You, O Lord were baptized in the Jordan
the worship of the Trinity was made manifest
for the voice of the Father bore witness to You
And called You His beloved Son.
And the Spirit, in the form of a dove,
confirmed the truthfulness of His word.

At the baptism of Jesus we see the Spirit act together with the Father and with the Son. The Father speaks from heaven; The Son is baptized for ministry on earth; the Spirit comes to empower the Son for his ministry.

If Jesus needed the power of the Spirit to live a life for God, how much more do we need the presence and the work of the Spirit in our lives.

3. Baptism in the Spirit

But that is exactly the promise to us – given at the time of the baptism of Jesus. When John the Baptist wanted to express how much mightier Jesus is than he, John, he points to the fact that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was baptized, 'heaven was torn open' as if it was a curtain, and the Spirit came to him. These words 'heaven was torn open' remind me of what happened in the temple in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified.

At the very hour of His death, the curtain of the Holy of Holies, that symbolized heaven in the temple, was torn open from the top to the bottom. The perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ had opened the way, and God could be with the people. Not with Jesus only, but with all people.

God could now be present in the life of all who believe in Jesus Christ. This became clear on the first day of Pentecost. God was no longer hidden in his temple; He became present in our midst, even in us.

This is the most beautiful aspect of the Christian life, the capstone of God's blessings to us. Jesus received the Holy Spirit of God, and if we are by faith connected to Him, we receive the same Spirit of God.

This Spirit is promised to all those who follow Jesus Christ. This is the most fantastic promise.



The Spirit who created this world, the Spirit who has made us into living beings, the Spirit who empowered Jesus to live a life for God, this Spirit is also given to us.

The Spirit of God is with you, in you, around you, through Jesus Christ. He has made you alive before God; He renews your life; He drives you to live for God.

And think of this... The presence of the Spirit in your life connects you in a mysterious way, with the community of the Triune God himself. You participate in the intimate feast of love, peace and joy that exists within God.

One day we will live in full unity with our Lord and God. The apostle John says in his letter, that one day, "we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3.2).

But even today, with his Spirit He is present in your life and He offers you communion with Him – an aspect of the Christian life that we celebrate in our weekly worship services.

Conclusion

Because of his life and death and resurrection, heaven was opened for us - and Jesus could send his Spirit from heaven to those who follow him.

The power and support that Jesus received from the Father, enabling Him to live a life pleasing to God, has also been given to you and me.

God has given you enormous spiritual reserves - they come with faith in Jesus Christ and belonging to his Church-community.

And God challenges us to dig for those reserves.

You may often feel weak or spiritually poor, like Mr Yates on his farm in West Texas. But have you actually started digging for the treasures that you own?

+ Amen