

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AT CHRISTMAS

Luke 1: 13-17, 34-38, 39-45, 63-69, 2: 25-30, and 4: 1-2, 14-19

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Little is said at Christmas about the Holy Spirit. In His work at Jesus' incarnation, it is remarkable carols are strangely silent about Him. We sing of the Christmas spirit, but rarely is there a mention of the Holy Spirit as we sing of Jesus' birth. Christmas centers on God's love come down in a baby, a 12-year-old boy in the temple, a man, our suffering, healing Savior, our Redeemer, dying for us, then our risen Lord, ascending for us, yet to return as King of kings and Lord of Lords. Have we missed the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, as we ponder Jesus' birth? Mary was overshadowed, by the Holy Spirit so that she conceived Jesus, God come in the flesh. Francesca Battistelli wrote words to a song I love, showing the place of the Holy Spirit. "There's nothing worth more, That could ever come close No thing--can compare You're our living hope Your presence, Lord I've tasted and seen Of the sweetest of loves Where my heart becomes free And my shame is undone Your presence, Lord Holy Spirit, You are welcome here Come flood this place and fill the atmosphere Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for To be overcome by Your presence, Lord Your presence, Lord."

When our Creator came incarnate to be our Redeemer, the Holy Spirit was just as present as when God the Father and God the Son created the world. We read in Genesis 1: 1-3 these amazing words, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." In the Genesis account, we see God the Father and God the Holy Spirit present. Where was God the Son? Hebrews 1:1-3 shows us Jesus was there directing creation Himself as the second member of the Trinity. We read, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son, (that's Jesus) through whom also He created the world. He (that's Jesus), He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power." Who is this Jesus? He shed His blood for us. How do we know? We know about this from the inspiring Holy Spirit, breathing the Word of God into the text. Jesus is given pre-eminence by the Holy Spirit. We must never forget the work of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was on earth, He promised to send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. He said of Him in John 16:14, "He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you," The ministry of the Holy Spirit from all eternity is to self-effacingly point away from Himself to the wonder of Jesus, God the Son. When we are yielding to the move of the Holy Spirit in our lives, it means we are being filled with a fresh new love for Jesus. When the fullness of the time came (Galatians 4: 4) for the eternal Son of God to be sent by his Father into the world, the Holy Spirit stayed in the background, but He quietly did what was needed to be done, what was physically impossible to be done in a human being, to bring Jesus into this sin-cursed world, born impossibly by a virgin. The work of the Holy Spirit was quiet,

but effective. Through the Holy Spirit, (Luke 1:35) Jesus began growing in the womb of Mary, a sexually pure virgin. It was physically impossible for Mary, a virgin, to be pregnant and to carry a child as a virgin. Yet, miraculously, through the Holy Spirit, the Father caused the Son to be conceived in Mary who was a virgin. From all eternity, the prophecy of Christ's incarnation in Genesis 3:15 as the seed of the woman, was prophesied to come, and that work by which Christ came, was performed by the quiet intervention of the Holy Spirit.

We need to welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. What part did the Holy Spirit play in the incarnation of our precious Lord Jesus Christ? The prophecies of Christ's coming in Genesis, Psalms, Isaiah, Micah, and the other prophets, were made under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. II Peter 1:21 states, "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy-Spirit." Paul adds in II Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is breathed out by God," speaking of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to his disciples and He said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you." Then we read in John 20:19-22, Jesus breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." This was a pre-Pentecost breathing out of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus' disciples by Jesus Himself. Jesus gives us the indwelling Holy Spirit when we receive Him as Savior. Rejoice that the self-effacing third member of the Trinity was assigned the delicate, wonderful, miraculous, and mysterious work of causing the virgin Mary to conceive Jesus--the One whose greatness the Holy Spirit will magnify forever. It's so beautifully appropriate. Let's examine the passages surrounding the incarnation, the virgin birth of Jesus to find 6 precious clues to help us understand the place of the Holy Spirit in the birthday of our King. Clue # 1:

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKED IN THE BIRTH OF JESUS' FORERUNNER.**

(I.) God assigned a role to the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus' forerunner, to fill him with the Spirit from his mother's womb. Turn to Luke 1:13-17. Notice the Holy Spirit was to fill John the Baptist with Himself, so John would point the way to Jesus, not to himself. God still assigns us with roles to fill that do not give glory to us. When we accept these assignments or roles, the Holy Spirit designs us to point others to Jesus. John Piper well said, "The Holy Spirit is self-effacing. When we look toward Him, he steps back and pushes forward Jesus Christ...In seeking to be filled by the Spirit, we must pursue Him indirectly—we must look to the wonder of Christ. If we look away from Jesus, seeking the Holy Spirit and His power directly, we end up in the mire of our own subjective emotions. The Spirit does not reveal Himself. The Spirit reveals Christ. The fullness of the Spirit is the fullness He gives as we gaze on Christ. Many of us have cried out to the Holy Spirit for joy and power and experienced nothing. When we devote ourselves to earnest meditation on the glory of Jesus Christ, then are filled with the Spirit."

The Holy Spirit's role centers on glorifying our Lord Jesus. The angel Gabriel promised Zechariah that the Holy Spirit would fill John the Baptist while inside his mother, Elizabeth's womb. John the Baptist was being more than groomed as Jesus' forerunner. The Holy Spirit was quietly filling him, anointing him, and

preparing him to prepare the way for Jesus, Messiah to be received by those who would believe. On Mary's visit to Elizabeth, John leaped in Elizabeth's womb. It was not John the Baptist's greatness, but the power of the Holy Spirit in him, that led him to point away from himself to Jesus, in John 1:29 and say, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" The Holy Spirit leads us to be accompanists, not leaders, so we give Jesus the glory. John the Baptist said in John 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease." A second clue...

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKED IN MARY SO SHE COULD BEAR JESUS. (II).**

God chose the young virgin Mary who knew the Lord to conceive God the Son in her womb. See Luke 1:35. And the angel answered Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." Mary now knew the Lord, and that the Holy Spirit's plan for Jesus would be fulfilled in her, and her knowledge was echoed by her response, in Luke 1:38, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. let it be to me according to your word." Are we willing servants? When the Holy Spirit chooses to use us, it is not because of our years of knowing Jesus, our popularity, logical minds, reputation, knowledge of God's Word, or our perfect lives, because none of us, including Mary, are perfect. All of us are sinners. Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1:46-47 is clear that she too was a sinner as she praised the Lord, saying, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior." So, when does God choose to use us? Only He can give His own reasons, but as a prerequisite, He must first have our willingness to be His humble servants.

This announcement to Mary by the angel Gabriel that she would conceive in her womb and bear a son whom she would name Jesus, this news was overwhelming and incomprehensible to this teenage virgin. Yet, unlike Zechariah who doubted the word of angel Gabriel, Mary believed the angel. She never asked for a sign to prove the truth of the angel's announcement, but she did long for understanding, more information. She believed what she was told would happen, but she had no idea how this truth could be realized. That's why Mary said, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" Mary didn't doubt the word of God to her, but she inquired wisely as to the manner in which she would become a mother as a virgin.

The answer from heaven by the angel dealt with one of the deepest and holiest mysteries—v. 35. The angel's answer to Mary's question of how this could be since she was a virgin, was: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." Details the angel never gave. Information Gabriel did give. Notice, the tenderness, and the holy words given to this young virgin. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power or the Most High will overshadow you," which made this child God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. He would be called the Son of God—free from all sin or the taint of sin, and this Holy One, was conceived of the Holy Spirit. The lesson for us here is that God speaks to us in our spirits by His in-dwelling Holy Spirit. God is sometimes willing to answer our information questions, when we ask as Mary did, but we grieve the Holy Spirit when we doubt the truth of His promptings, as Zechariah did, and thus

we prove our doubts and lack of faith, by our reluctance to act in obedience to God's designs and desires. God can work in our lives as in Mary's life, if we are willing as servants to do whatever God call s us to do. A 3<sup>rd</sup> clue:

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKED IN ELIZABETH TO CONFESS JESUS. (III.)**

God filled Elizabeth, the mother of Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist, with the Holy Spirit and the joy of feeling her son leap in her womb when expectant Mary entered her presence. Elizabeth by the Holy Spirit confessed Mary's faith in what God told her by the angel Gabriel. Elizabeth confessed Mary was the mother of her Lord, and she blessed the fruit of Mary's womb. Notice Luke 1:39-45. The Holy Spirit still fulfills His role in us when we leap and rejoice in the presence of Jesus. Here again we find the Holy Spirit giving pre-eminence to Jesus when Mary greeted her cousin, Elizabeth. The Holy Spirit whose mission and purpose was in filling John the Baptist from his pre-natal days in the womb, to glorify Jesus, the Spirit did just that now in Mary's presence. The Holy Spirit was as it again inside Elizabeth's womb as John the Baptist (6 months along) was jumping up and down inside his mother's womb, when obedient Mary came in the house.

Three months before his birth, this infant son, in utero, carried in Elizabeth's womb, started jumping in his mother's womb when Mary greeted Elizabeth. Why? Was it because Mary was a sinless virgin? No, she was not sinless, though she was a virgin. But as an obedient servant of God, she accepted God's plan to divinely conceive His only begotten Son in her virgin womb. That infant Son Jesus was only days into His microscopic development in Mary's womb, but Jesus was there, conceived by the Holy Spirit. This microscopic baby Jesus was the same Jesus, who big as life years later baptized by John, had the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove light on His shoulder and stay there. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you get happy in the Lord. We may not all leap like John the Baptist, but no Spirit-filled believer is a complainer, an accuser, a bitter, angry person, a haughty, superior acting person. No, when the Spirit fills us, there is an inward leap of love, joy, peace, and contentment that surfaces, and it is uncontainable. A fourth clue.

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKED IN ZECHARIAH TO NAME JESUS' FORERUNNER AND CONFESS JESUS' BIRTH TO BE OUR REDEEMER.**

(IV.) Zechariah, once a doubter of God's Word through the angel Gabriel, now was a mighty confessor and testifier of Jesus. (IV.) Notice Luke 1: 59-79. Notice that God was not in a hurry when He moved this once doubting believer's heart to prophesy and proclaim the salvation of Jesus. Whatever time it takes God to discipline us for our unbelief, when we, like Zechariah come to terms with God, that He means what He says, and that He does what He promises, and He intends to use us as we surrender to His will, then, and not till then, God the Holy Spirit fills us. **No Spirit-filled believer can doubt God or His word.** Jesus' disciple Thomas was no Spirit-filled believer when he said, "Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe." How wrong Thomas was, just like Zechariah who did not believe the angel's words that he and Elizabeth would bear a child in their old age. When Jesus appeared the next time and Thomas was

there—Jesus told him in John 20: 27, “Thomas, put your finger here, and see My hands, and put out your hand and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve but believe.” As Thomas looked to Jesus, the Holy Spirit inside him changed his mind entirely without Thomas doing any examination of Jesus’ resurrection body. Thomas cried out, “My Lord and my God.” Zechariah now as a surrendered man of God, prophesied that his son John was the forerunner of Messiah, and by the Holy Spirit’s power, he prophesied that Jesus was the Sunrise coming to visit from on high to give light to those seated in darkness and the shadow of death, coming to guide our feet into the way of peace. When will God’s disciplining hand be removed from us so we can believe God’s Word and prophesy of Jesus? A 5<sup>th</sup> clue:

**THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKED IN SIMEON TO TELL WHERE AND WHEN TO GO FIND JESUS AND PROPHECY OF HIM.** (V.)

The Holy Spirit confirmed to Simeon that the virgin born son of Mary was God’s promised Messiah. Look at Luke 2:25-35. See how God worked in Simeon’s life because of his faith in God’s promise of Messiah’s coming. The God of eternity will reassure us His promises are true, as well as where and when to go experience the confirming of His Word. The Holy Spirit not only prepared the way, but He also provided a fragile body for Jesus to come to earth, and He also prepared the way for us to come to the Savior. Paul declared this in I Corinthians 2: 12, saying, “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.” God the Holy Spirit prepared a body in a virgin maiden—Hebrews 10: 5 states, “When Christ came into the world, He said, “Sacrifices and offerings You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me.” The first gift of the Spirit is the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger—Luke 2: 12, but the second gift is the Holy Spirit guiding Simeon and then guiding each of us to know where and when to go to embrace the Lord Jesus. Today on Christmas Eve, God the Holy Spirit may have called you to come to His house, and today to receive Jesus into your heart. When Simeon held Jesus in His arms, led by the Spirit, he cried out and blessed God for Jesus. Paul tells us in Romans 8:14-16, that when we are led by the Spirit of God to Jesus and become adopted sons of God, we too cry out, knowing Jesus—we cry to the Father as God’s Spirit bears with our spirit, saying, “Abba, Father!” A 6<sup>th</sup> clue:

**THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKED IN GOD’S ONLY SON, CONFIRMING THAT JESUS WAS HIS PROMISED ANOINTED MESSIAH.** (VI.)

Notice Luke 4: 1-2, and 14-19. Jesus was moved under the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Do we move at the direction of the Holy Spirit by His Word and His promptings? Jesus, our example, after baptism, full of the Holy Spirit, was led to the wilderness to endure and overcome temptation as our example. Beginning His ministry in Nazareth, Jesus turned to the Word, in the prophet Isaiah with the Spirit of the Lord on Him. The Spirit led Jesus to speak the truth of who He was, despite consequences from the disbelieving crowd in the Nazareth synagogue seeking to throw him off the cliff outside of town. Regardless of the consequences of obedience to God the Holy Spirit, will we like Jesus be willing to be moved and directed by the Holy Spirit to proclaim who Jesus is and to do what Jesus did? Holy Spirit, breathe on us once again!