

## **The Spirit Descends**

New Year, New Outlook: Part 2 “The Spirit Descends”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – January 16, 2022

Epiphany Sunday

**Readings:** Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17,21-22

**Reflection:** Psalm 29

**Greeting:** In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, full of grace and truth. (*John 1*)

**Prayer:** Eternal God, you have given us the greatest of joy through the birth of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Your light has broken into the darkness and your love has been made known to us. Let us sing your praises and glorify your name. Let your hope guide our hearts in all that we are and all that we do, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 29

*Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name; worship the LORD in holy splendor. The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say, “Glory!” The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever. May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace! (Psalm 29 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 29 and hear of God being everywhere. That we see God above all things and more powerful than we can imagine. We also hear a call for God to bless his people with peace and strength. How do you seek the peace of Christ in your life? How do you bless others with peace? Do you find strength in following God? Do you pray for guidance by the Holy Spirit? How do you use the strength you find in the Holy Spirit to help others? How do you share in the joy of God’s gifts for you?

**Prayer:** O Lord, we celebrate the home we have in your gracious love. Let this new year be a time we reflect on your mercy and grace, of your gift of salvation. May we be blessed by the Holy Spirit in all that we do. We are thankful that we may lift up our prayers to you on this day, knowing that you hear the earnest plea of our hearts. We pray that your light and love bring peace to the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Acts chapter 8 verses 14 through 17.

*Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-17 NRSV\*)*

Our last reading for today comes from Luke chapter 3 verses 15 through 17 and 21 through 22.

*As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:15-17,21-22 NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week, we look at baptism and the Holy Spirit. And our main reading is Luke's account of Jesus' own baptism by John the Baptist. It's an interesting thing, and I think one of the reasons that I find it so interesting is that there's a lot of questions about why Jesus was baptized at all. And one might not think it's such a big question, but there's a lot of explanation from scholars and such that discuss this. We can see some tension in the text from this issue. One of the reasons is that when we think about baptism, we hear about a call for repentance of sins. And John talks about how much greater Jesus is than he is. In our reading today, John says that he's baptizing with water, but one more powerful than he is, is going to come and he's not worthy to even untie the thong of his sandals. That he will baptize with the Holy Spirit. But then John baptizes Jesus. One could ask why John would need to baptize one that is greater

than him. And there's a lot of different explanations out there and many words have been used to discuss exactly that. But honestly, I think the one that really stands out for me is a rather simple explanation. He was setting an example. We could explain it many different ways but the easiest is to say Jesus wanted to be baptized just like everyone else to show his dedication. To show that even he would go and be baptized, to show that it was what needed to be done. After his baptism they're praying, and the heaven was opened the Holy Spirit descends like a dove. A voice comes from heaven saying "you are my son the beloved. With You I am well pleased." In Acts we see the baptism of the Holy Spirit when Peter and John go to Samaria. They go there to bless those who have accepted the word of God. They lay hands on them, and they receive the Holy Spirit. They had been baptized with water and now are baptized in the Holy Spirit as well.

All of this got me to thinking about baptism and the Holy Spirit. The biggest question was what it means to us now. There's a lot of different directions we could go, but this question seemed to be the main one that came to mind. Especially thinking about what the baptismal promises are. We talk about renouncing wickedness, repenting of sin, resisting evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they take. We promise to dedicate our lives to Christ. That we'll do all that we can to follow Christ in all the ways that he taught us. To help one another. But it raised an interesting question as well. Because the question becomes "what does it mean to you to be a Christian?" And that question matters a lot. I don't know that it's one that we contemplate nearly as much as we should. Because the answer should guide us in everything. It should be the driving force behind whatever it is we do, whatever it is we say, whatever it is we don't do. It made me think about how little we may actually think about what baptism means to us. It made me wonder how often we think about the Holy Spirit as a guiding and leading force in our lives. As I was thinking about all this, I started thinking about this new outlook in this new year. And I realized that if we don't have good answer for what it means to us to be a follower of Christ, to be a Christian, then we're not going to be able to show others why they would want to live a life in Christ.

For me, it came back to the idea of Jesus setting an example. That Jesus could have shown up in and had John tell him that he should be baptizing him. Jesus could have just said he was right. Jesus could have simply said he would be doing any baptizing going on. But instead, Jesus shows how his ministry will work through servant leadership. He shows his commitment to his teaching by being an example of what needs to be done. Not by saying that he's above such things, but by showing how we should all be. In being baptized by John, he shows the need for baptism by all. Not by telling people just to do as he says, but by showing what to do. And this is such a huge thing. It sets the tone for the rest of his ministry echoed throughout the Gospel. Not that Jesus is outside of everything, or above what we must do, but that he is right there with us. He's with the people telling them to watch what he does and to do likewise. And I think that's important because it's easy to get lost in all of the things that we say. It's easy to get lost in theological constructs. It's easy to get caught up in thinking the biggest

thing is saying “Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.” Because I don't think it's so much saying the words as it is to act on them. I'm not saying faith in Christ isn't important. I'm saying that showing that our words have meaning is important. It would be one thing for Jesus to say, “baptism is important.” It's another for him to be baptized to demonstrate how important it is. In the same way, it is important for us to speak of our faith in Christ but demonstrating it by following what he taught by loving one another is the way we show our faith is genuine.

When the Spirit descends, it descends because of faith. And it continues to move because of faith. But it some random thing that just happens. We see the Holy Spirit acting through people. We see the Holy Spirit moving through those who accept it. That when the Spirit descends, it comes to help us do all of those things we do to show our love of God and our commitment to following Christ. The Spirit helps us to show Christ to others. I have been thinking a lot about evangelism a lot for this coming year. Too often the idea of baptism that we have is we are brought into the church and that is it. We don't think about baptism as a current commitment that we have made. We don't think about the Spirit acting in our lives through our baptism. How often do we think about the Holy Spirit acting through us? How often do we instead look for it somewhere else instead of within? I started to wonder how well we can tell others about what we believe. How do you show people that you believe in God the Father? How do you show that you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son? How do you show that you believe in the Holy Spirit? Do you simply tell them? Or do we let our faith be known by showing it? Is our evangelism our words about Christ or is it that we demonstrate what a life in Christ is? I think the best effort we can make in evangelism is that we live in a way that shows our faith.

It's interesting to me that baptism is the beginning of Christ's public ministry. That Jesus is baptized by John and then goes out to begin teaching and doing all of the things that we read about it In the Gospels. We see this idea of this twofold baptism by water and the Spirit. Christ is baptized and then the Holy Spirit descends like a dove. In Acts, they baptized with water and Peter and John lay hands on them to bless them with the Holy Spirit. They go and do so that others are empowered to go and do. The Spirit will be there to help them to guide them, to lead them, to give them the strength they need to help them remain strong in their faith. Because it is a sign of commitment. But it only means something if it is active. Too often we think the Holy Spirit will be there and we'll just wait for what comes next. That we'll wait for him to say, “go left” or “go right.” But we can't go left to go right unless we get up and move. And I think that's what one of the big lessons for me in all this. We cannot be standing still if we expect the Spirit to guide us. Too often the church is seen as being in a holding pattern, waiting to move. Waiting to go out and do. But the church isn't meant be holding still. The church is meant to be active. Our faith is meant to be an active faith.

So, in this new year, I encourage you to once again invite the Holy Spirit in. Remind yourself of what baptism means to you. What your commitment means by your actions. That we all work to make our commitment to God visible in our daily lives, doing all that we can to help others. Doing all that we can to show others why you have faith. Because when people

see it in you, you've given a stronger testimony to Christ than anything we could say. Because when people see it, they want to know why. They'll want the Holy Spirit in their lives when they see how it moves in yours. By being an example of the joy that we have in Christ, we open the door for others to want to share in that life. What it means to be baptized by water and the Spirit. What it means to follow our Risen Savior. Because words simply cannot contain everything that Jesus is for us. Everything that God means to us. All that we rely on the Holy Spirit for. We show it by doing and show it by being, so that we can show the Spirit moving in the world here and now. So that we can show that Christ is with us, forever and always. We become an act of evangelism by going and being the body of Christ for others and open the door to invite all to the table. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** O Lord, the God who saw fit to walk with us, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions. We know that we fall short, both in what we do and what we fail to do. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead. Help us to proclaim the Good News and to live it. Help us in our weakness and forgive us. May we remember your love and redemption are forever with us, born to call us home. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

**Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – New Year, New Outlook**

We follow up our Christmas series with a look at the new year and how we can reach out. What does evangelism look like? What should it look like?

January 9th – A Wise Gift – Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-15

January 16th – The Spirit Descends – Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

January 23rd – The Light of Home – Jeremiah 31:7-14; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18

### **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Jodie Bunch	Gene Laymon	Tom Finley	Family of Jim Nichols
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Sue & Bob Smyser
Family of Bob White	Family of Sonya Bickers	Laura Carlen	Judy McCellan
Adam McMechan			

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