

First Christmas: A Pentecost Moment

Some Christians are notorious for downplaying the Holy Spirit. Many churches lock Him in a box of tradition or just ignore Him. Others treat the third person of the Trinity as if He magically appeared in the book of Acts like a genie from a bottle and then disappeared after the early church was established. And strict cessationists completely deny that the Spirit works in miraculous ways today.

Yet Luke, who recorded the account of Pentecost in the book of Acts, paid close attention to the work of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel that bears his name. That's why the book of Luke is sometimes called "the Pentecostal Gospel." Regent University theologian Graham Twelftree says Luke "has more to say about the Spirit than any other biblical writer does."

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Luke did not limit the Spirit's activity to the miracles of Jesus or the divine interruption of Pentecost. He made it clear in his account of Jesus' birth that the Christmas story was initiated by the Holy Spirit and fully bathed in His power. We should pay closer attention to the Spirit's work. There would be no Christmas without the Holy Spirit.

First, consider Zacharias, John the Baptist's father. Zacharias has been criticized because he doubted God's ability to give his barren wife a child. But Luke reminds us that after Zacharias was struck dumb, he was filled with the Spirit when he first saw his infant son (see Luke 1:67). At that moment he began to prophesy. Humbled and chastised by God, Zacharias gained new strength from the Spirit and uttered one of the richest Messianic promises in Scripture. He made a

mistake in the beginning, but he finished well!



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Second, look at Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother. She never appears in typical nativity scenes, and she is viewed as a minor player in the story. Yet Luke declares that she was filled with the Holy Spirit when Mary came to visit her (see Luke 1:41). Immediately the Spirit's power was displayed. Luke says Elizabeth "cried out with a loud voice" (Luke 1:42, NASB) and announced that Mary was carrying the Christ child. Her prophetic encouragement was crucial in Mary's life.

Third, consider the infant John. According to Luke 1:15, He was filled with the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb, :15. This was exceptional! I've never met a baby who was filled with the Spirit, much less an unborn child who experienced such an infilling. Yet because John's task was so great—calling a wayward Israel to repentance and prepare the way for Jesus—he needed exceptional power.

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