

There Would Be No Christmas Without the Holy Spirit

J. Lee Grady shares how the birth of Jesus was a Spirit-filled event. I pray your Christmas will be filled with the Spirit, too.

We Christians are notorious for downplaying the Holy Spirit. Many churches confine Him in a box of tradition or just ignore Him. Some Christians treat the Third Person of the Trinity as if he magically materialized in the book of Acts, like a genie out of a bottle, and then vanished after the early church was established.

But the Holy Spirit is first mentioned in the second verse of the Bible! The same Spirit who brooded over the waters at Creation (see Gen. 1:2), inspired the Old Testament prophets and empowered the first disciples at Pentecost also was involved in every step of the Christmas story. We should pay closer attention to the Spirit's work in the miracle of the incarnation.

Luke, the author of the book of Acts, pays close attention to the work of the Holy Spirit in his gospel. Luke's account of the birth of Jesus is the most detailed, and he highlights the Holy Spirit's activity in the lives of five people in the first two chapters.

We tend to look down on **Zacharias**, John the Baptist's father, 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 his son was born (see Luke 1:67) and 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!

Zacharias reminds me that the Holy Spirit refines and corrects us, and ultimately uses us in spite of our failures and weaknesses. We must never grow weary of God's discipline—because in the end, we will emerge with a message from Him.

Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother, never appears in Nativity scenes. She seems like a minor player. Yet Luke tells us that she was filled with the Holy Spirit when Mary came to visit her (see Luke 1:41). How was the Spirit's power manifested in her life? Luke says she “cried out with a loud voice” and announced that Mary was carrying the Christ child. Her prophetic encouragement was crucial in Mary's life.

Elizabeth reminds me that the Spirit is an Encourager and a Comforter, and that I cannot make this spiritual journey without His help. I must also recognize that God sometimes brings people into my life to provide words that will sustain me.

The baby **John** was filled with the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb (see Luke 1:15). This was an exceptional miracle—I've never met a baby who was filled with the Spirit! But because John's task was so great—to call a wayward Israel to repentance and prepare the way for Jesus—he required exceptional power.

John reminds me that if I am to attempt any task for God, I must do it in the power of the Spirit. I cannot just come up with a good idea and ask God to bless it. It must be God's idea, and it must be soaked in the Holy Spirit's anointing from the moment of conception!

When the young **Mary** asked Gabriel how she would be able to conceive the Messiah as a virgin, the angel said: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (see Luke 1:35). Commentator Matthew Henry speculated that Mary may have conceived after she arrived at

Elizabeth's house, perhaps even at the moment when Elizabeth felt the baby John leap in her womb. At that moment Mary praised the Lord extravagantly, and extolled Him for His mercy, power and faithfulness.

Mary reminds me that one of the key manifestations of the Spirit in our lives is extravagant praise and worship. Being filled with the Spirit automatically unleashes praise. If my praise is subdued, casual or restrained, then I need a fresh infilling.

Luke also introduces us to an elderly man named **Simeon** who had been praying for the coming of the Messiah for many years. The Holy Spirit was "upon" this man (Luke 2:25), and the Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen Jesus. As it turned out, Simeon held the baby Jesus in his arms, spoke a blessing over the child and prophesied to his mother.

Simeon reminds me that the Spirit will give me the power to hold onto God's promises, no matter how many years it takes to see their fulfillment.

This holiday, I pray you will not be so focused on the decorations and distractions of the season that you miss what the Holy Spirit wants to do in and through you. May you be renewed in the Spirit during this Christmas season.

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