

Baptism and the Holy Spirit

Luke 3: 15-22 & Acts 8: 14-17

Do you ever have days when the alarm clock goes off and you just can't face getting out of bed and greeting the world? Despite going to bed early the night before it feels as if you've got no energy or desire to go beyond your bedroom door until tomorrow morning...Blank faces – maybe it's just me that feels like this sometimes then!

All of us need things that energise and excite us to get us through the week, the month or the year – a job, a hobby, a sport, or a church. If we're not energised by what we do then we eventually give up and crawl back under our duvet covers.

Spiritually – it's just the same. Our spiritual lives need energizing to give us the strength to carry on and keep going. We need to find things to do that encourage us spiritually and that keep us aware of God's presence with us through the day. Today – at the beginning of the year and the beginning of a new decade, each one of us has the chance to have our spiritual batteries recharged.

Both of our Bible readings this morning are to do with the Holy Spirit – one tells us how Jesus was baptised and filled with the Spirit, the other tells us about a group of people, from what was considered a second rate country – who were filled with the same Spirit as Jesus was. We'll look at these in a minute.

But first – What or Who is the Holy Spirit? How would you describe what the Holy Spirit is or does? Anyone like to call out? Put simply, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. It's the presence of God in our world and in our lives today. The Holy Spirit is God coming and changing me and you into followers of Jesus by revealing what God's like to us. To be a Christian, we need the energizing power and life of the Holy Spirit because otherwise our Christianity is just an academic exercise that's dry and lifeless.

What does the Holy Spirit do? The Holy Spirit gives the followers of Jesus who make up the Church the power to be God's hands and feet in our community and our world. If you bring to mind a Christian who you really admire and respect, a Christian who's done great things in the world – the reason that they've brought such change is because they were filled with God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us power to do the things Jesus did and to change situations by taking God's presence into them.

In the New Testament the word for Spirit is translated from the Greek word *pneuma*, which means 'wind'. We all know how powerful wind can be, anyone who's sat next to Ray after he's been out for a curry the night before can testify to that! The Holy Spirit's a different sort of wind! He's like the wind of God's presence, which comes and sweeps over the earth touching individuals and communities alike. The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to achieve our passion and desire for more of God's presence. He breathes the life of God into our spiritual lives.

Demonstrate with a balloon – without air it's limp and lifeless. The same is true of our spiritual lives. Without the Holy Spirit we're weak and ineffective in our Christian walk. However, when filled with air, the balloon takes shape and fulfils its purpose. As human beings, when we're filled with God's Holy Spirit, we become energized and full of life – able to do things in Jesus' name and bring change in the world.

In our Gospel passage on p972 we see Jesus, right at the beginning of his recorded ministry – when he was about 30 years old, getting baptised in the River Jordan. People were wondering who God's Son, The Messiah, was. Some were thinking it was John the Baptist but John knew differently. He knew it was someone much more powerful than him – someone who would send the Holy Spirit down on all people. Jesus must have heard all of these rumours and the expectation that he must have felt for himself was great. So you can imagine how affirming it must have been for Jesus when he came out of the water after his baptism to see the Holy Spirit come on him and hear the voice from heaven saying 'You are my son, whom I love and am well pleased with'. That voice from gave Jesus a sense of call and vocation and the feeling that God's presence would go with him through the Holy Spirit.

When we become Christians today, it's most unusual for us to hear a voice from Heaven saying that God is well pleased with us. But one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to encourage us and to give us inner strength. This strength helps us to believe that we're loveable, acceptable to God as we are and able to know God for ourselves. The

Holy Spirit also empowers us to fulfil a role for God – our own vocation. All of us are called to follow Jesus and to try and live like he did. All of us are also called into a spiritual vocation where we use the skills and talents that we've been given in God's service – whether that's accountancy, cleaning, being a Church Warden, managing the building upkeep – the Holy Spirit gives each of us a ministry that is intended to help energize and fulfil us. And we do this vocation alongside our ordinary jobs and family life. If we're too busy to do this – then we have our priorities wrong and need to spend a bit of time thinking about what's really important.

If you turn now to Acts 8 on p1039, we come across a brand new group of Christians from Samaria – a country that was historically hated by the Jews. But surprise, surprise – God loved the people of Samaria and also called them to follow Jesus. The Church sent some of its leaders to check what was going on and found that the Samaritans had definitely become followers of Jesus but for some reason, they hadn't been filled with the Holy Spirit yet. The church leaders prayed for them and the Holy Spirit came upon them.

One of the things I've wondered is how did they know that the Holy Spirit had come. Perhaps there was some visible experience and I guess their lives must have changed in some recognisable way.

I remember when I became a Christian – the language that I used changed overnight. I didn't make a conscious effort to change it – I just stopped swearing. I put this down to the fact that when my life was

open to God's Spirit, some of the things that might have offended God went away. Obviously, I still had some pretty big issues to sort out – but I could face them knowing that God was there to help. That's true for all of us. If you're here today and you don't know what it's like to experience God's help in your life – come and speak to me after the service and we can talk more about what it's like to follow Jesus.

What the passage from Acts implies to me, is that it's normal for all Christians to be filled with the Holy Spirit – whether it happens when we're baptised or subsequently. This means that if you're here today and you're trying to follow Jesus, then you should be filled with God's Spirit too.

The problem that I've found, is that although we may have been full of God's Spirit in the past – we leak! We need to keep coming to God and asking again to experience his presence and his power in our lives. At the beginning of 2010 ask yourself – do you need to be filled afresh with the presence of God? Do you long to experience God's love in a new way for yourself? Do you find that your spiritual life isn't as energized as you'd like it to be? If the answer to any of those questions is yes, then we need to stand together as a church family and seek God's presence together. After the service, I'll wait around at the front of the church for a few minutes and if you'd like me to pray with you for a new encounter with God then come and grab me there.

Remember the illustration of the balloon. Let's all resolve not to allow our spiritual lives to become limp and ineffective. Seek God, believe

that he loves you and ask for his help to live your life in the plans that he has for you this year.

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