



Luke 3:21–22

21 When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’

Reflection

In the Old Testament the prophets spoke

as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. In Luke's Gospel so far we've seen the Holy Spirit come upon Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, Anna and John. Today he comes upon Jesus and anoints him for his ministry. Reading from today's passage, Luke 3:21–22,

21 When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

At this stage in his ministry, Jesus is just another face in the crowd. His cousin, John the Baptist, is on centre stage, preaching

a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and preparing the way for the Messiah. Messiah means ‘God’s anointed King’ – and is the subject of all the major strands of Old Testament prophecy on which Israel, as a subjugated people, have built their hope. And the return of Elijah – in the form of John the Baptist who walked, talked, dressed and ministered in the same region as the prophet of old – signals the imminent coming of the Messiah, Israel’s saviour. The last book of the Old Testament, written some four hundred years earlier, had prophesied about these days and John’s presence and preaching in the wilderness is announcing loudly to all who would listen that the day is finally here.

Thousands are coming out of Jerusalem,

Jericho , Capernaum and from all over the region to hear John preach and receive his baptism. Pharisees, Sadducees and teachers of the law; tax collectors and Roman soldiers, the high and the lowly alike have all come out to hear John and are cut to the heart by his urgent message of repentance. And in this, John is preparing the way for Jesus in the minds and hearts of all the people, because repentance always precedes faith.

Today, Jesus is baptised by John; which at one level presents us with somewhat of a problem. John's was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; and yet the Bible is very clear, Jesus never sinned (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22 et al.). So why is it that Jesus asked to be baptized by John? Luke's emphasis is elsewhere so he glides

over the problem, but in Matthew's Gospel John the Baptist himself puts words to the problem, in Matthew 3:14 we read,

14 But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?'

Even John the Baptist cannot understand why the Messiah, the very son of God, one who is without sin, must be baptised by him.

And I think Jesus' answer, at this point in time, is somewhat enigmatic. He replies,

15 Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.' Then John consented.

In Isaiah 53 it was prophesied that Jesus would be 'numbered with the transgressors' which is an older word for sinners. In order to fulfil his role as the Messiah, as the sin-bearer, it was necessary for Jesus to enter into our indebtedness before God. He had to become one with us, entering into our sin as the Lamb of God so that that he could be a full and sufficient sacrifice. Jesus would ultimately die the death that we should have died but first he needed to live the life that we should have lived so that he could be the perfect exchange and sacrifice for us. To be the only perfectly sufficient sacrifice for our sins he had to first walk a mile in our shoes – being tempted in every way and yet being found without sin (Heb 4:15).

And so in being baptised by John Jesus was numbered with the transgressors and at the commencement of his public ministry visibly enters into people's indebtedness before God. But this is not Luke's focus; he barely gives Jesus' baptism a sentence. It is what happens next that Luke would have us consider,

And as he was praying, heaven was opened 22 and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

Isaiah pleaded with God,

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, Isa 64:1

In today's passage God does tear the heavens open and tells us that he has come down.

‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’

These words echo famous Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament from Psalms and Isaiah. With these words God himself testifies that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, God's anointed king and suffering servant who will go on to lay down his life for the sins of the world and paradoxically reign on the throne of David forever. The how and the why will play out more clearly in the life and teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus but today one thing is clear, God the Father tears

heaven open to publicly proclaim of Jesus,

‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’

And if these words weren't enough God visibly anoints his son and Messiah with the Holy Spirit who descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove. We're just two and a half chapters into Luke's Gospel and already we've seen the Holy Spirit come upon Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, Anna and John. Today he comes upon Jesus and anoints him for his ministry.

Who is the Holy Spirit? What is his role in the life of Jesus and in ours? The Holy Spirit it is the presence and power of God who directed and empowered Jesus' ministry

on earth. He'll direct and guide and sustain Jesus' ministry to the end at which point Jesus gives him to us to carry on Jesus' ministry on earth while he reigns in heaven. The Holy Spirit is the gift of the new age, the guarantee and the foretaste, the pledge and the first instalment, of the glory that is to come when Jesus returns. And right now he's at work inside us, keeping us in the faith, maintaining our fellowship with the Father and Son, he's transforming us, reshaping us, and remaking us into the likeness of Christ; he's equipping us for worship and prayer and praise, he's convicting us of sin, he's the longing in us for heaven, and the certainty that heaven will come.

Just as he was for Jesus, so is he for us, the Holy Spirit is the supreme resource for

the church life and mission. Only by him being poured out will there be sermons that convict, only by him being poured out will there be speech that convinces, only by him being poured out will there be love that lasts; only as he's poured out will there be power, advancement, fruit in our church; and only through his power are such outpourings longed for, and effectively sought.

Think & Pray

Two thoughts for reflection and prayer this morning. Firstly, what does it mean for you that Jesus entered into all the temptations and difficulties of the human condition, that he can perfectly relate to all the suffering, temptations and difficulties that we go through? And secondly, what does

it mean to you that the same Spirit who empowered the mission and ministry of Jesus is alive an active in your heart too?