

THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHRISTMAS NARRATIVE



A PENTECOSTAL CHRISTMAS

from Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

Christmas cards, crèches, and storybooks are filled with the characters of the Christmas drama: Elizabeth, Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, angels, shepherds, magi, even Simeon and Anna. But the biblical account of Jesus' birth in the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke refers repeatedly to another participant in the Christmas drama, the Holy Spirit. Though often unnoticed and uncelebrated, it is the Holy Spirit who comes upon Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Simeon. Similarly, the Old Testament prophecies that foretell the inbreaking of God's kingdom frequently speak of the coming of the Spirit of the Lord, though these texts are strikingly underrepresented in most Advent worship services. The Holy Spirit is the forgotten participant in the Christmas drama.

This omission is seen not only in the Christmas card selection at Hallmark, but also in music for the season. There are dozens of shepherd carols, magi carols, angel carols, and Mary and Joseph carols, but precious few that acknowledge the work of the Spirit. This service features some of the sturdy few that do. Our goal is to challenge our imaginations to sense the dynamic work of Father, Son, and Spirit in the Christmas drama, and to recover our awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit in both the life of Christ and in us.

This perspective makes our understanding of Christmas more dynamic and personal: the same Spirit that came upon Mary, the same Spirit that anointed Jesus to preach good news to the poor and raised Him from the dead, has now been poured into our hearts. The same God who sent the Spirit to answer the waiting people of Israel is at work restoring creation and giving us hope. The Spirit makes us participants in the Christmas drama. (Notice how many musical settings tonight move toward prayers for and celebrations of our reception of the Spirit's work!)

It is true that many orthodox theologians have called the Holy Spirit "the shy member of the Trinity," because the Spirit always points us to Christ. Still, the biblical witness is clear in explicitly identifying the work of the Spirit, in part to reassure that our recognition of Christ, our coming to faith, and our sharing in Christ's anointing is not something dependent on our own striving, but rather is something we receive as a gift.

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us.

Hymn *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling/Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus*

Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heav'n, to earth come down:
fix in us Thy humble dwelling, all Thy faithful mercies crown:
Jesus, Thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love Thou art;
visit us with Thy salvation, enter ev'ry trembling heart.

Come, Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art;
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit into ev'ry troubled breast;
let us all in Thee inherit, let us find the promised rest:
take away the love of sinning; Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its Beginning, set our hearts at liberty.

Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
by Thine all sufficient merit, raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Opening Prayer

The Homily

THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

Mr. Howell

Matthew 1:18-25

Lesson I: The Spirit of God Forms and Renews Creation

Mr. Bart Harmon

Scripture

Genesis 1:1-4; Psalm 104:24-35
Pages 1 and 639 in the Pew Bible

Hymn No. 162

Of the Father's Love Begotten
(stanzas 1, 2, 5)

DIVINUM MYSTERIUM

Lesson II: The Trauma of Sin and the Promise of Comfort

Mr. Jason Button

Scripture

Genesis 3:14-15; Isaiah 40:1-5; John 14:15-17
Pages 4, 762, and 1146 in the Pew Bible

Hymn No. 211

God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen
(stanzas 1, 3)

GOD REST YOU MERRY

Lesson III: The Terror of Shadows and the Promise of Light

Mr. Bob Champion

Scripture

Isaiah 9:1-2, 6-7; II Corinthians 3:7-8, 17-18
Pages 729 and 1227 in the Pew Bible

Silence

Lesson IV: Isaiah Foretells the Coming of the Spirit-Anointed Messiah

Mr. Chet Moeller

Scripture

Isaiah 42:1-4; 61:1-3
Pages 765 and 789 in the Pew Bible

Hymn No. 332

Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove
(stanzas 1, 4)

ST. AGNES

Lesson V: Mary Is Found to Be with Child by the Holy Spirit

Mr. Tom Danielson

Scripture

Luke 1:39-45; Matthew 1:18-20
Pages 1088 and 1026 in the Pew Bible

Silence

Lesson VI: The Birth of Jesus of Nazareth/Simeon

Mr. Ken Williams

Scripture

Luke 2:8-14, 25-32
Page 1090 in the Pew Bible

Hymn No. 210

Silent Night! Holy Night!
(stanzas 1, 4)

STILLE NACHT

Lesson VII: The Sending of the Son and the Spirit of the Son

Mr. McRoberts

Scripture

John 1:1-4, 14; Galatians 4:4-7
Pages 1125 and 1238 in the Pew Bible

The Confession of Our Faith

The Nicene Creed
Inside front cover of the *Trinity Hymnal*

Hymn No. 198

Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates!

TRURO

Charge and Blessing

Minister: Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

All: *There is one body and one Spirit, just as we were called to the one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

Minister: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Alleluia! Amen!