

We're back at it this morning, in our Advent series this year, titled "The Spirit of Christmas," looking at the first chapter of Luke, and how the 'Spirit of Christmas,' in other words the Holy Spirit, is active and at work, orchestrating this whole event.

Because our hope in this season, as I've mentioned in previous weeks, has been to focus specifically on what the Holy Spirit is doing in these passages *so that* we can be more aware of and attentive to the Holy Spirit at work in our own lives in this Christmas season.

Because the 'Christmas Spirit' isn't a feeling or a mood. In fact, the more I hear that phrase tossed around—on TV, and advertisements—the more it bugs me. Because it completely distracts us from the importance of the *Holy* Spirit's activity at this time of year. It's looking for the wrong thing.

The Holy Spirit is active and moving all over the pages of these early scenes in Luke 1; and the Spirit wants to do the same today as we also anticipate the coming of Immanuel, our God-with-us.

The Holy Spirit seeks to bring this 'God-with-us' reality *to us*. Because the Spirit is God's power living among us and within us.

And as I mentioned last week, the way that the Spirit moves through these passages is intentional—because each story builds on the last. The way that that Spirit moves in one story *prepares us* to grasp how the Spirit will move in the next.

We often glaze over these passages, but we can't miss this. Our Christian forebears living in the first century would never have missed this.

Because they were experiencing the Spirit for the first time—and so nothing was 'old news' to them.

Because God was doing something that they had never seen before. God is always doing something. We just need to be prepared to receive it. **Read Luke 1:39-45.**

Okay, so if you were here or tuned in last week, you'll remember that Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel, who gave her the message that the Holy Spirit would come on her, would overshadow her, and conceive within her a child.

Prior to that, the angel Gabriel had approached the priest Zechariah in the temple, and had given him the message that he too would have a son with his wife Elizabeth, despite their old age.

Two biological miracles in two stories that build on one another. Because in one, the Holy Spirit is filling a child before the child is even born, and in the other, a child is being formed only *because* of the Holy Spirit.

Now, believe it or not, that's not all. The Spirit has not yet checked all of the boxes on His to-do list. There is more yet to come.

Here in this next scene, we see Mary rushing off to go and find her cousin Elizabeth, a woman who—she has been told by the same angel (v. 36)—is also experiencing a miraculous situation.

And considering the situation, it may seem to us pretty obvious why Mary would so quickly decide to run to her relative. But let's think about this for a minute.

Mary doesn't run to her parents (maybe she didn't have any?). She doesn't run to Joseph. She doesn't run into complete solitude out of fear of what others will say. She also doesn't start buying baby clothes at Carter's and looking up nursery furniture on Pinterest.

Mary is shaping her response—to run to Elizabeth—*based entirely on what the angel has told her*. In other words, she got the hint.

Gabriel intentionally told Mary about Elizabeth, not just to assure her that everything she's experiencing is part of a master plan that God has orchestrated, but *also* so that Mary can know *where she can run to*—in this rather unconventional situation—and be comforted by someone *who's going through the exact same thing that she is*.

We all know what it's like to be going through something difficult and to find people who have been there, who understands, who can walk through it with you.

Here are two women who have been given the gift of conception and naturally would have had all sorts of reasons to feel joyful about it.

But there were also, of course, several reasons why they also would have struggled with this news. Possible shame, shock, embarrassment, rumors (we all know how awful rumors can be), humiliation. For Mary, possible divorce and public scorn. Maybe even death.

God knew that these women would need each other to walk through this season. Henri Nouwen once said that self-understanding and spiritual depth is encouraged by having a sturdy spiritual companion walking with you, and that's exactly what these women are for each other.

So Mary takes the hint and runs to Elizabeth. She bursts into Elizabeth's home—snotty-nosed, mascara running, dress stained with mud and tears—completely overwhelmed and looking for someone who might actually believe the absurdity of her situation.

And she doesn't even have to say anything before she's assured, on the spot, that Gabriel gave her the right person to run to.

V. 41 – “*When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed, ‘Blessed are you among women! And blessed is the child you will bear!’*”

It’s just a beautiful moment—this whole story. And we’ve probably gotten so used to reading it a certain way that we miss what’s just happened.

What’s strange about what’s just happened? Did you notice anything?

Think about how the Spirit has moved in the last two scenes. Gabriel told Zechariah that the *baby* would be filled with the Holy Spirit. Their soon-to-be-born son, who they are to name John, “*will be filled the Holy Spirit even before he is born,*” (v. 15).

Great. There’s nothing there about Elizabeth.

But someone has now walked into her home *carrying the presence of the Holy Spirit*. Because the angel told Mary that the Holy Spirit will overshadow her (v. 35). So Mary is now also carrying the presence of the Holy Spirit.

So if you think about it, Elizabeth’s basically getting sandwiched by the Spirit in this moment. Now, that’s not a theological term, but I think it’s still true nonetheless. She’s got John inside of her who’s been filled by the Spirit, and she’s got Mary walking in who’s also been filled by the Spirit.

And now look! Vs. 41, Elizabeth too is filled by the Holy Spirit. It’s like He’s contagious or something. She gets a holy kick from her prophetic son who is still being formed and prepared by the Spirit for the work that he will do in making ready a people prepared for the King.

And already now, the Spirit is inspiring him to let his mom know that that King is in the room.

And I know that you can probably already guess—because we were at that point in the sermon—what I’m now going to ask you.

Are *you* willing to get a kick from the Holy Spirit today, declaring to *you* that the King is in the room? That He is in this place? That this isn’t just a nice thought but an actual reality?

Because that is the Spirit’s favourite thing to do—to remind us over and over that the Lord’s presence is here. That we aren’t alone; we actually have the presence of Jesus among us.

And it should pain us, actually, that we so quickly take these efforts for granted. Because any story that I’ve ever come across of someone who didn’t formerly know Jesus and is now following Him, for that person the Holy Spirit was *everything*. Because He orchestrated the whole thing.

I recently came across the testimony of a woman named Lucia Thompson, who was formerly a Reiki Master. Reiki is a Japanese healing practice where the practitioner hovers their hands over the patient to channel a ‘universal life energy’, trying to push out bad energy and bring in good.

How she got there was that at the age of 17, she had gotten pregnant, and having grown up in an abusive home, she turned to partying and drugs as a means of coping. So by the time she was 23, she was looking for peace, any kind of peace, to help change her life.

Now, she had actually believed in “God” her whole life, but just didn’t know where to look for him.

And what I found both interesting and incredibly sad about this point in her story was that no one ever told her to try praying, or to try church, or anything like that. So she tried meditation. And what ended up happening was that she had a kind of out-of-body spiritual experience, and a friend told her that she had a gift of being able to tap into spiritual energies.

So she made her life practicing reiki, eventually adding on other occult practices—psychic mediums, card readings, etc.

But then life presented her with problems that these practices couldn’t solve. And around the same time, her own son, now 12 years old, by the grace of God met a Christian, became convinced that God was real and that Jesus was who he claimed to be, and Lucia started seeing words from Psalm 91 everywhere: *“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”*

Who is that shadow? The same shadow, perhaps, that overshadowed Mary.

In other words, the Holy Spirit was pursuing Lucia. And Lucia soon felt a compulsion, she said, a strong conviction that she couldn’t ignore and only later understood to be the presence of the Holy Spirit. Because there was no doubt in her mind that she had to leave her current lifestyle behind.

It wasn’t easy, of course; it was a spiritual battlefield for months. But now she co-owns a Christian café in Wales called ‘Open Heavens,’ with her now husband, the man who started the café and is passionate about people sensing the Holy Spirit when they walk in.

The two of them now spend their days together praying with people, looking for the presence of the Spirit in their lives, and seeing miracles on a regular basis.

What, then, is the source of Lucia’s joy *now*? The same thing that inspired the joy in John and Elizabeth. The Holy Spirit. The Spirit who makes it clear that God is *doing something*.

The Spirit who had been shared with *her* so that she could share Him with others.

Look again at what happens here in this scenario. Look at the chain reaction. When Mary carries Jesus into the room, who is being formed by the Spirit, that same Spirit then lets the Spirit-filled baby John know. And Baby John then lets Elizabeth know, who then is also filled by the Spirit and confirms with Mary that it is in fact a King whom she's just brought into the room.

Elizabeth is filled by the Spirit, and what does the Spirit do? *He reveals Christ to her.* Elizabeth knows that Mary is the mother of her Lord because the Spirit reveals this to her.

There is now no one in this story who doesn't somehow have the Holy Spirit operating within them. And I can't think of a more powerful example in Scripture that encourages us to ask:

If the Spirit did that then—this communal filling and exchanging of the knowledge of Jesus—can the Spirit still do this today?

And if the answer is yes—which I think Lucia's testimony confirms—then we would do well to consider the power that there is when we as believers come *together*, all of us carrying the presence of Jesus, making Holy Spirit sandwiches, and proclaiming to one another that the King is in the room?

Christ is in this space with us. It's not just a nice idea or a theological concept. He's here with us. And asking the Holy Spirit to deepen this reality for us dramatically reshapes our time and our worship together.

Just as a thought exercise, picture the Lord somewhere in this space. Maybe behind the piano, just loving every minute of this service. Or maybe sitting next to you, assuring you that He knows what you're going through. Maybe behind me at the cross, drawing all your gaze to His salvation work.

Honestly, who of us in this room doesn't need a Holy Spirit kick to be reminded that King Jesus is here? That His Holy Spirit wants to inspire us and transfer His joy and excitement for Jesus back-and-forth between us, and start mini chain-reactions like he did with Mary and Elizabeth?

Or that His Holy Spirit maybe wants to use you to transfer His joy to someone else? Did you know that that's even possible? That while you're speaking with someone and sharing the Christ in Christmas that you can also share with them the true *Spirit* of Christmas who reveals Christ to them?

There is no greater joy than this. And I say that with certainty, because look at the text in v. 44.

When Elizabeth tells Mary that the baby in her womb leaped for *joy*, the word there in the Greek isn't the typical word use for joy, but here actually means *extreme* joy and is often used in the context of exultation or worship.

Extreme worship-filled joy. That's what John is doing in utero. He leaps for joy, like how King David danced before the ark of the covenant.

He's worshipping.

And look at what immediately happens after. Mary now—inspired by the work of the Holy Spirit within her—does what?

She worships.

*“...My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant...”*

When the Holy Spirit is given space to move and be shared, exultant, joy-filled worship that draws attention to the presence and glory of King Jesus is the result.

And yes, Mary *was* called blessed, not just by Elizabeth, but by centuries of believers after her. Not because she had any merit of her own but because she was receptive to the work of the Spirit.

Blessed are you, too, when you are receptive to and overshadowed by the work of the Spirit who fills you with worshipful joy because the King is in the room.

Blessed are we—all of us—when the Spirit moves with power and is shared through each one of us, so that the whole space is filled with Him as a result.

So that when people walk in the door, they sense Him here.

Let yourself be kicked by the Holy Spirit this Christmas. Because many are looking for Him.

They just don't know where to look.