

December 22, 2002  
AM Service – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent  
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

The Way And Prepare  
Luke 3:16

John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with *fire*.

Last week we showed how the OT predicted that the Messiah would give the gift of the Holy Spirit. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." (Ezek 36:26-27)

One sign of the coming of the Messiah is that He would give the Holy Spirit to all who believe. The Holy Spirit would change the heart of all who received Him and give them power to live a victorious Christian life – a witness of God's presence.

John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the Messiah by saying He would forgive sin and baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Luke records John as saying that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Fire is frequently used to symbolize the Holy Spirit, both in the OT and the NT. It is not the destructive but the vitalizing, transforming, energy of fire that is expressed.

Fire warms, lights, cleanses and fire is a source of energy – The Spirit brings to the human heart that receives Him warmth, illumination, cleansing from all sin and power to live for God. There are possibilities of grace, holy living, talents and gifts and other treasures that are useless until you are baptized with the Spirit.

It is a fire of holy enthusiasm, the warmth that gives a cold hearts zealous love. It is the fire for the melting of hard hearts. Water only washes the surface; fire pierces to the core.

The Holy Spirit ...

Warms:

I don't have a fireplace but I love fireplaces. When Jesse was first born we lived with Ann's parents. They had a den with a fireplace. We build a fire and there is something so warm, so friendly ... so comforting, even romantic. The HS is the presence of God. Through Him we have a personal relationship with God. He brings friendship with God. He brings comfort, guidance, direction, and help. He brings love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. We love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves.

John 14:16-18 - I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, who will never leave you. 17 He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world at large cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you do, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. 18 No, I will not abandon you as orphans--I will come to you.

Illuminates:

Fire illuminates. John 14: 17 call the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth. He illuminates our understanding. He opens our mind to discern spiritual truths and to learn the ways of God. 1 Cor 2:14 - The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

The Holy Spirit opens our spiritual understanding and teaches us the truths of God. The Holy Spirit also shines His light in our lives to show us what needs to be removed. He brings into our lives the Light of God which overcomes the darkness of sin. Darkness can't overcome the light but light can overcome the darkness. If you have a dark room and you bring a light into it or turn a light on the room is full of light and the darkness is expelled. But if at night you have a room that is light up you can't pull up shade to let the darkness of the outside come in to overcome the light. As long as you don't let the light go out or as long as you don't turn the light off the darkness can't come in. The Holy Spirit fills us with the light of Christ. It is a cleansing /purging of all sin. The Holy Spirit fills us with the light of Christ and the darkness of sin and satan can not over take it.

Cleanses (purifies):

He not only shows us what needs to be purged from our lives, He can purify us.

Titus 3:5b-6 -He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Acts 15:8-9- God, ... accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them,... he purified their hearts by faith.

Fire purifies. When I was a kid and had a splinter my mom would remove it with a needle. But before she would use the needle she would light a match to sterilize the needle. Now it was safe to use. Fire purifies.

Mal 3:2-3a

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver;

Precious metals are heated with fire to make them pure. The Holy Spirit makes us pure. Not only free from sin but holy. Holy means different. Holy means belonging. We are different because we belong to God. We are His and His only. All we think, say and do is to please God.

Heat can also be used to melt down precious metals to form them or transform them into something beautiful. The Holy Spirit is transforming our lives to make them something beautiful for God.

Empowers:

Fire also gives power. While it is obvious that a steam engine uses fire to provide its driving power, we should not forget that that same kind of power drives our trucks and automobiles as well. Although not as visible, spark plugs provide the "fire" needed to drive a combustion engine. The Holy Spirit gets us moving. By the fire of the Spirit we are empowered to trust and to serve God. Acts 1:8 - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses ...." People will see Christ in us. We will be His witnesses. The Holy Spirit is the power we receive to be like Jesus. Do you have this power? It is power to live as God wants us to.

This doesn't mean that we are perfect. Jesus has made the way but we must still prepare. We have to discipline ourselves to live a holy life. The Holy Spirit's baptism is just the start. But it is the necessary start. He declares us clean but a holy character has to be formed through continued, disciplined obedience to God. The Holy Spirit is your power. He changes us and helps us to be the person God wants us to be.

Fire is also symbolic of judgment. Verse 17 - His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Verse 17 mentions threshing. Threshing was the process of separating the grains of wheat from the useless outer shell called chaff. This was normally done in a large area called a threshing floor, often on a hill, where the wind could blow away the lighter chaff when the farmer tossed the beaten wheat into the air. A winnowing fork is a pitchfork used to toss wheat in the air in order to separate wheat from chaff. The wheat is the part of the plant that is useful; chaff is the worthless outer shell. Chaff is burned because it is useless; wheat, however, is gathered.

"Winnowing" is often used in the Bible to picture God's judgment. ... John spoke of repentance, but he also spoke of judgment upon those who refused to repent. Those who refuse to live for God are chaff, the useless outer husk of the grain. By contrast, those who repent and reform their lives are like wheat. Those who refuse to be used by God will be discarded because they have no value in furthering God's work. Those who repent and believe, however, hold great value in God's eyes because they are beginning a new life of productive service for him.

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The thing that determines whether a man is chaff or wheat is the yielding to or rejecting of the baptism which Christ offers. For while His gift is for all - we have the freedom to accept or reject it. We have a choice of either the purging fire of the HS or the fire of hell. By the way, We will all be judged by fire. Only the things done for God will last.

1 Cor 3:11-15

11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to

light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. 15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

God's plan is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27) - God planned to have his Son, Jesus Christ, live in the hearts of all who believe in Him.

Through the power of Christ, men and women have broken the chains of sinful habit. They have renounced selfishness. The ungodly have become reverent, the drunken sober, the wicked pure. Souls that have borne the likeness of Satan have become transformed into the image of God. The weak have found strength. The downcast have found joy. The fearful have found courage. The faithless have become faithful. Those in despair have found hope. Emptiness has been filled with peace and love. This change is in itself the miracle of miracles.

(A testimony from Pastor Nick)

The fact is that the only thing in this world which is for every person is Christ. The good news of Jesus is for every person. The love of God in Christ Jesus and the transforming power which can bring holiness into life is for every person.

#### The New Age

Every year at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, there is displayed, beneath the great Christmas tree, a beautiful eighteenth century Neapolitan nativity scene. In many ways it is a very familiar scene. The usual characters are all there: shepherds roused from sleep by the voices of angels; the exotic wisemen from the East seeking, as Auden once put it, "how to be human now"; Joseph; Mary; the babe -- all are there, each figure an artistic marvel of wood, clay, and paint. There is, however, something surprising about this scene, something unexpected here, easily missed by the casual observer. What is strange here is that the stable, and the shepherds, and the cradle are set, not in the expected small town of Bethlehem, but among the ruins of mighty Roman columns. The fragile manger is surrounded by broken and decaying columns. The artists knew the meaning of this event: The gospel, the birth of God's new age, was also the death of the old world.

Herods know in their souls what we perhaps have passed over too lightly: God's presence in the world means finally the end of their own power. They seek not to preserve the birth of God's new age, but to crush it. For Herod, the gospel is news too bad to be endured, for Mary, Joseph, and all the other characters it is news too good to miss.

Adapted from Thomas G. Long, *Something Is About To Happen*, CSS Publishing Co., 1987.