

**Luke 1:57-80**  
**(Isaiah 59:1-2, 15b-21; Romans 8:12-17)**  
**“Filled with the Holy Spirit”**

### **Introduction**

It is striking how often in the opening verses of this gospel Luke ascribes the main action to the Holy Spirit: It is God’s Spirit at work filling Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary with the power to worship God from the heart and to witness to God’s goodness in fulfilling his ancient promise to send a Redeemer who would save us from our bondage to sin and death. Why do I say that this is this striking? Many people think that the Holy Spirit first appeared at the Pentecost celebration following Jesus’ death and resurrection, the great event recorded in Acts 2. Some teach that the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament are about God the Father, the Gospels about God the Son, and the rest of the New Testament about God the Holy Spirit. But in fact, the second verse of the Bible tells us, “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). It was the Holy Spirit of God who acted on the hearts of the patriarchs and prophets, revealing God’s will to them. It was the Holy Spirit who, in Moses’ wonderful expression, “circumcised the hearts” of the people of Israel, making them people with hearts for God. It was the Holy Spirit who anointed Jesus with power at his baptism. So it actually should not surprise us that the gospel of Luke opens with the Holy Spirit preparing God’s people for the coming of the Messiah.

Last week we saw in Mary, the mother of Jesus, perhaps the supreme example – next to that of our Lord himself – of one who submitted to the word and will of God and so knew the overshadowing and overpowering of the Holy Spirit of God. We found in her response to God five challenges that each of us needs to take up if we would know the new life that Jesus came into the world to bring. *But this morning I want to speak especially to those of you who may have given up hope that God will ever work mightily in your lives.* You may not be young like Mary, or good and true like Mary. I’m not suggesting that Mary was sinless, but she was clearly a lovely young woman of impeccable reputation, and you and I who have lived long and perhaps have lived hard may find it difficult to relate to Mary’s situation.

Or, it may be that we have walked a long time in hope of God’s acting in our lives and have finally given up that hope. We still believe that Jesus is the Christ and still believe that he may do great things in the lives of *other* people. But for ourselves, we stopped long ago getting our hopes up. We are at peace with who we are: spiritually childless, perhaps, but moderately religious, relatively faithful in the disciplines of the spiritual life. If you tell us we should fast and pray, we’ll fast and pray, with little or no expectation of anything much happening. We are like Zechariah: when it’s our turn to work in the Temple, to enter the Holy Place and light the incense, we are happy to do it. It seems the least we can do. But there is no great expectation of God

showing up and calling us by name. And if he should do so, we probably would not really believe it.

How does God work with those of us who have simply been around the things of God so long that we think we have it all figured out, and are certainly not going to get ourselves all enthusiastic hoping for God to do something extraordinarily wonderful in our lives? How does he prepare us to receive a great outpouring of his Spirit when we don't expect or pray from the heart for such an outpouring?

Zechariah serves as both a warning and a reason for hope. The things that we should always be doing in order to seek the Lord were basically forced upon Zechariah because of his unbelief. He did not expect God to do anything wonderful, and refused to believe when God showed up in power. So in love and mercy, God disciplined him to prepare him to receive the gift that God would give him. God still disciplines those he loves, and I would encourage you this morning to heed this lesson and pursue these disciplines on your own that you might be prepared for a mighty outpouring of God's Spirit in your life, and for God to graciously use you beyond what you might ask or imagine.

## **Body**

- 1. If we would hear and understand God's word, we must first become deaf to the demands of the flesh and to the enticements of the world (1:62).**

*Until we learn to tune out both the imperious demands of our selfish hearts and the seductions of the surrounding world, we will not hear God's Spirit speak or understand his word.*

- 2. If we would speak God's word, we must first come to an end of our words, to an end of merely human wisdom (1:64).**

*Until we learn to silence our own boastful voices and stop demanding that our views be heard, we will not speak God's truth in the wisdom of God's Spirit.*

- 3. If we would take our place in the gospel story, giving flesh to God's word and living in the power of his Spirit, we must first come to an end of our own resources (1:67f).**

*Until we have come to an end of ourselves and realize that in our flesh – that is, in our natural way of doing things – we can accomplish nothing redemptive, nothing of eternal value, in other words, until our pride is humbled, we will not know God's power flowing through us, joining us to Christ and making our lives something beautiful for him.*

## **Conclusion**

What is the one great sign of the Spirit's filling? When God's Spirit fills us, we open our mouths and praise the living God from the heart: "And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people'" (1:68). Our hearts will overflow with praise and thanksgiving to God for fulfilling his promises to his people, for sending the promised Redeemer, for pouring out his Holy Spirit upon us so that our eyes may be opened to recognize the light shining in the darkness, guiding our feet into the pathway of peace.

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