

20:20 Vision Ministries – Devotions by Roger Browning

Week 52 (December 20-26, 2015)

In this week's devotions, we will continue to study the role of the Holy Spirit in the birth, early life and ministry of Jesus.

Sunday, December 20 (read Matthew 1:18-25)

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 1:20b)

The Christmas story never gets old! This text is very familiar to most of us, but it is a good reminder that Jesus was born of a **virgin** girl named Mary. Denying the miraculous virgin birth, liberal churches teach that Mary was just a young girl. An illegitimate child of Joseph and Mary could not save anyone! Jesus had to be fully man through the seed of Mary in order to be tempted by sin (see James 1:13), but He also had to be fully God in the flesh in order to remain sinless while destroying the power of death (see Hebrews 2:14-15; 4:15). God always appears to Joseph in dreams (v. 20; see also 2:13, 19, 22), so you can imagine the faith he needs in order to trust the seemingly unbelievable story. He also shows great discipline by remaining pure until after the birth of Jesus (v. 25). Joseph and Mary are obedient to God, but the Holy Spirit is at the center of this entire miracle (v. 18, 20).

Monday, December 21 (read Matthew 3:1-12)

“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Matthew 3:11)

John the Baptist lives alone in the desert while God prepares him for his upcoming ministry (see Luke 1:80). He preaches “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (see Mark 1:4). (Sadly, the message of repentance is missing from many modern pulpits.) John bravely confronts the religious leaders who come to hear out of curiosity, and he reminds them that they will not be saved merely because they are children of Abraham (v. 7). God is seeking fruit from His followers, not mere words (v. 8-10). The prophet tells his audience that he is baptizing with water until the Messiah comes to baptize them with the Holy Spirit (v. 11). His message concludes with an urgent reminder that there are only two destinations for the soul: 1) Heaven (God's barn), and 2) Hell (unquenchable fire). John would not qualify under the rules of political correctness, but he is a giant under the laws of God!

Tuesday, December 22 (read Matthew 3:13-17)

As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. (Matthew 3:16)

I believe that today's preachers who are bold enough, like John, to confront false religious leaders while preaching the necessity of repentance and spiritual growth (fruit bearing) will also experience the first three words in v. 13, “Then Jesus came.” John is humbled by the thought of baptizing the very One for whom he has been waiting (v. 14), realizing that he needs the baptism of the Spirit that only Jesus can give (v. 11). The Lord replies, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness” (v. 15). Following His baptism, Jesus sees the Holy Spirit descend on Him “like a dove” and hears the voice of His Father saying, “This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased” (v. 17). All righteousness will also be fulfilled in us who, 1) repent of our sins, 2) are baptized in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 3) receive the Holy Spirit, and 4) are affirmed by our Heavenly Father as His sons (daughters). Are you safe in His care?

Wednesday, December 23 (read John 1:29-34)

Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Him." (John 1:32)

I do not believe that everyone who was present at the baptism of Jesus saw the Spirit descend on Him like a dove or understood the voice of the Father call out in affirmation of His Son, because the Spirit has not yet come upon them. Of course, Jesus saw and heard (Matthew 3:16-17), but today's text tells us that John did too, because he was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb (see Luke 1:15). In fact, this is the sign he had been waiting to see and hear for his entire ministry (v. 33). Up until this point, God's Holy Spirit would come upon people with power, but He could not remain because mankind was sinful. Only after Jesus paid the sin debt could the Spirit abide forever (see John 7:37-39; 14:17). In v. 29, John testifies that Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" In effect, He is turning His ministry over to Jesus for His glory. I pray that all of us in His work are actively doing the same thing.

Thursday, December 24 (read John 3:22-36)

To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven." (John 3:37)

In today's text, we read about someone (probably a Pharisee) who tries to cause division between Jesus and John (v.22-26). This is Satan's oldest and most effective trick, but it works only when the leader has not allowed his ego to be crucified on the cross of Christ. John testifies that he is limited to the role God has assigned to him (v. 37). This is a truth that can set us free (John 8:31-32)! Our job is to introduce listeners to Jesus and to allow **Him** to increase while **we** decrease (v. 30). Some of our converts may find safe pasture in another person's field. In addition to the fact that God's people often move to other geographic locations is the truth that no individual leader possesses **all** the qualities or knowledge a seeker may need to grow up in his/her faith. Our joy should be complete because we have allowed the Lord to use us to accomplish His plan (v. 29). Let's learn to, "Let go! Let God!"

Friday, December 25, Christmas Day (reread John 3:22-36)

For the one God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. (John 3:34)

John will soon be beheaded for the cause of Christ, but he makes sure all of his disciples know that he is only a human being chosen by God to lead people to the Messiah. God has now fulfilled all that He had called John to accomplish (v. 31-33). John the Baptist concludes his earthly teachings by glorifying the Spirit in v. 34 printed above. You can tell the difference in a man chosen by God and one who chooses to go into the ministry on his own by the power of the Spirit working within him. Since everything has been placed into the hands of Jesus (v. 35), our message becomes quite simple: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on Him" (v. 36). Don't allow anyone to make this wonderful truth more difficult than this! Merry Christmas!

Saturday, December 26 (read John 4:1-26)

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14)

The cross is God's greatest gift to us because it allows His Spirit to abide within us forever (see John 7:37-39; 14:17). Read the entire story of the woman at the well to see how Jesus has turned His earthly ministry over to the Holy Spirit, while He remains in heaven to intercede for us (Hebrews 7:25). The "gift of God" is the precious Holy Spirit abiding within every true believer (v. 10). You can never be disqualified because of your past if you are willing to allow Jesus to come into your life to forgive all your sins. If you think that you are not worthy, read carefully the familiar story in today's text and hear Jesus say, "I who speak to you am He" (v. 26).