

Study

Why do people sometimes fear being saturated in God's Spirit? What could help?

Acts 2:2-4; 8:15-17; 10:44-47. What does this teach about the nature and purpose of second experiences of God's Spirit?

Romans 8: 4-11. What does this teach about the necessity, the beauty, and the amazing power in being filled with God's Spirit?

1 Cor 12: 7-11. What's the purpose of being filled? Which gifts excite you? Why?

1 Thess 5: 19. How could we quench the Spirit?

Living it out (Application):

What do you need to ask God's Spirit to do for you?

Coming Up at St Mark's

The **Alpha Course** Mondays, from 10-11.30am (running fortnightly)
Trip to the Holy Land. March 2015. Details are in the narthex or on the website. Please let the office know if you are interested.

Rowan Williams. Saturday 1st Feb (morning). Harrogate School of Theology and Mission. John's gospel revisited.

prayer

Please pray for...

Give thanks for our **daytime Alpha course** with 11 participants, and pray for the leaders and those on the journey...

Give thanks for the appointment of **Michelle Hayes** as Kingdom Life Director, and **Alison Glover** as Pastoral Director. They will be starting in March, and there will be more information on its way about what they will be doing.

Continue to pray for the peoples of **Syria and South Sudan**, asking for peace in those countries.

On March 1st we will be hosting a prayer event for those addicted to pornography, with Ian Henderson from Naked Truth. Pray that we can bear witness to the beauty of God's gift of sexuality, and for those who struggle with brokenness in this area.

Mission Partner Prayer Focus:

Pray for Bellary – particularly for wisdom in decisions about building a new school – and for Bishop Niranjan who has much to balance.

Please do take the opportunity for more prayer requests/feedback - it's a wonderful way of sharing.

Thank you for your prayers for this church community!

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 26th January 2014

Worship/reflection:

What's your reaction to the words "Holy Spirit"? Why? Be still and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you, making you aware of God's presence. Pray for a heart that can surrender control.

Luke 3: 10-20. Baptism in the Spirit

Do you feel more comfortable doing things for others, or letting others do things for you? Giving a gift or receiving it? Controlling things, or being controlled? **The answer to this lies at the core of what John said Jesus would do**, and the kind of people he is looking for. The kind of followers he wants. But let's review a bit...Uncomfortable man, John the Baptist. John was pretty clear **it wasn't people's religious credentials that counted – it was their hearts**. God wanted them to take off their crowns, bow the knee, and give their lives to Him. Only then would their lives bear fruit – in justice and generosity. **Only when you have surrendered to the King will your fruit have integrity**. Turn your hearts to God. Give up power. Let Jesus the Messiah be everything. And the natural result and desire in you will be to change.

In the passage we read this week John gives some fairly down to earth examples of what this change will look like. He also says Jesus will sort out the wheat from the chaff – what reflects God's beauty will remain forever. As a side note: when John talks about Jesus burning away the chaff with unquenchable fire, **he doesn't mean that the fire is everlasting – he means that the fire is so strong that it will do its job**, and nothing will be able to stop it. But this is not his main focus. His main focus is that **Jesus is the Messiah who will baptise us with the Holy Spirit and with fire**. The first description of Jesus in Luke is that He is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit. This is yet another uncomfortable thing from John, isn't it? It goes right to the heart of our original question: **do we like being in control, or are we willing to be controlled?**

A young man who went to work for someone who made the most beautiful stained glass in the world. The young man wanted to be as good as the master, but as hard as he tried he

just couldn't do it. So he borrowed the master's tools, thinking that was the answer. After several weeks the young man said to his teacher, "I'm not doing any better with your tools than I did with mine." "The teacher replied, **"It's not the tools of the master you need, it's the spirit of the master."**

I think we would sometimes prefer to hear John superficially. In a way, I quite like someone telling me to get my act together. Someone telling me to do good things. I'm quite driven to prove myself. I feel better when I have done a good deed. I don't know how many people at St Mark's have told me, "I'm a do-er." We like our credentials. But what would John say? Maybe something a little more scary like, "Can you surrender control? Can you give your heart?" And, "Will you let yourself be baptized in the Holy Spirit?" Because, from the way John is talking, that's what Jesus really wants to do.

So what does it mean to be baptized in the Holy Spirit? We know that God exists fully in three different ways – as Father – infinite Creator – as Son – God revealed to us in human form – and as Spirit – present among us, here and now, on earth, and in our hearts. He has always been like this, and always will be. At the beginning of the Bible we read about God's Spirit hovering over the waters. **Throughout the Old Testament we learn that God's Spirit comes upon specific people at specific times.** The first is Bezalel – who was an artist. But the OT looks forward to a time when **the Spirit will be poured out on all flesh, in the "last days", the ultimate time when God will act.**

And the **first thing John says about Jesus** is that he will baptise you in the Holy Spirit. John is saying Jesus is the fulfilment of the OT prophecies about the Spirit. Many people have heard of the term "baptism of the Holy Spirit" or being "filled with the Spirit", but some have been abused by it, and because of that quite a few are nervous. John is using a metaphor saying that **when Jesus brings his life and his kingdom you will be immersed, saturated in the Holy Spirit.** To John, this is not frightening – it is wonderful. And Jesus himself showed his disciples that they needed to be baptized. Do you remember how before he ascended he told them to wait in the city because "in a few days you will receive power...?" In other words, **don't try to do this on your own.** And so Pentecost is a time not of vague confidence, but an absolute pouring out where they are so joyful people think they are drunk, so bold that thousands come to faith, and they see amazing things happening. Men, women, rich, poor – on "all flesh".

We need God's Spirit because while we have a role to play in coming to the Lord, **the Bible says we are so spiritually broken and alienated from God, that without His help, we could never bow the knee.** So "no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit." 1 Cor 12:3. If you are a believer, it is thanks to God. And if you have surrendered your life to Him, the Bible says it's like you have been marked with a seal, a sign that you belong to God, a watermark that you put on something special and precious: "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit". Eph 1:13. **The fact is that none of us are here in our own power.**

And yet, there were times when the disciples believed in Jesus, confessed Jesus, but **he still told them to wait for power.** There is a difference between the work of God's Spirit bringing us to faith, and God's Spirit baptizing us, immersing us, pouring through **us to be agents of His kingdom.** In Acts 8 Peter and John visit some believers in Samaria: "When they arrived, they prayed for the **new believers** there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, **because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.** Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." Jesus once said, "How much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." He saw it as a wonderful thing to be filled with God's Spirit. **The best thing you can ask for.** Paul said, "Keep on being filled with the Spirit." It's not the case that you need to speak in tongues to show you have received the Spirit – though tongues is a liberating gift. It's not the case that you need to be extravert. Though joy and exuberance are encouraging! You don't even need to feel anything – though we shouldn't be scared of God's fiery love touching our emotions. So how do you know when you have been baptized in the Spirit?

You may well be familiar with the story about Blaise Pascal, the French philosopher. When he died, a piece of paper was found sewn into the lining of his coat which read: The year of grace 1654, Monday, 23 November.... From about half past ten in the evening until half past midnight. FIRE! God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of philosophers and scholars. Certainty, certainty, heartfelt, joy, peace. God of Jesus Christ. My God and your God. Thy God shall be my God. The world forgotten, and everything except God." Jesus is the one who baptizes with His Spirit, who is fire. **The only way to know when we are being filled with His presence is that there will be a dimension to your life there that takes you out of your own resources, and gives you a supernatural dimension to your life that is a fire.** John the Baptist tells us to get the world ready for God, to put His kingdom on display. Being saturated with the presence of God, baptized in His Spirit, **makes the difference between seeking the Kingdom from your own reserves, and letting it be out of a place of overflow.** I expect the early disciples were all ready to go, as they watched Jesus ascend. **But Jesus still told them to wait.** And when Pentecost came, we can see the difference. Baptised in the Spirit, they saw miracles, they preached with boldness...they could probably have done some good things without it. But how much God did not want them to be doing it on their own. **And how much God does not want us to be doing it on our own.** There is such a chasm between trying to earn your salvation by doing it on your own, or letting God fill you. You can be a believer and have the Holy Spirit, but there can still be nothing supernatural about you.

So, what do we do? Really, I think it comes down to **an attitude of heart,** and to **a decision to keep asking God to fill you.** Jesus said, "How much more will your Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him...." It's possible to be filled with the Spirit in one season, but not in another. We need to keep on being filled. It's all about seeking His presence. Asking. **But ultimately, about constantly surrendering control.** Not easy for "do-ers". I meet quite a few people who will say things like, "I like to do good things. I do Christian things. I may not go to church even, but I try to live a Christian life." Well, is that what the one who baptizes with Spirit and fire really needs? Without the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and fire, how do we really expect to serve God's Kingdom? Do you feel more comfortable doing things for God, or letting God's Spirit fill you?