

Explore the Bible: Anticipated

December 7, 2020

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Dec. 27 focuses on Luke 2:25-38.*

A focal point of our study this week is on the “righteous and devout” prophet Simeon who dedicates the 1-month old baby Jesus in the temple courts in fulfillment of the Old Testament Law. And the focal point of this poignant story is the prominent role of the Holy Spirit.

We read in this passage that the Holy Spirit whom Simeon met that day was “upon him.” Things had been revealed to him “by the Holy Spirit.” He was “moved by the Spirit” to go into the temple courts.

In the doctrine and theology courses I teach at Dallas Baptist University, one of doctrines my students struggle with the most is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, particularly the idea that the Holy Spirit is a “person.” They struggle (as many Christians do) with comprehending how spirit can be person. We talk about the Holy Spirit being the third “person” of the Triune Godhead. How can a spirit being be a person?

Not just a ‘Force’

A common misunderstanding is that the Holy Spirit is simply a force or power or energy. Certainly, the Holy Spirit comes to us forcibly, powerfully and energetically. But it’s interesting to note that when Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit to his disciples in John 14, 15 and 16, the translated pronoun used for the Holy Spirit is always a “he.” Jesus makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is a “he,” a person, not an “it.” “He” is not just a force, power or energy.

A big part of the misunderstanding of the “person” of the Holy Spirit is our

misunderstanding of what is meant by “personhood.” We tend to think of persons being physical, material, flesh-and-bones beings like we are. But theologically speaking, “personhood” simply means the possession of a mind, will and emotions. We are persons, and we certainly possess minds, wills and emotions. In the same manner, God the Father possesses a mind, will and emotions. God the Son possesses a mind, will and emotions. And likewise, God the Holy Spirit possesses a mind, will and emotions.

What are the Holy Spirit’s characteristics?

Consider the following “personal” characteristics of the Holy Spirit as seen in the New Testament:

- The Spirit teaches and reminds. (John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:13)
- The Spirit speaks. (Acts 8:29; Acts 13:2)
- The Spirit makes decisions. (Acts 15:28)
- The Spirit can be grieved. (Ephesians 4:30)
- The Spirit can be outraged. (Hebrews 10:29)
- The Spirit can be lied to. (Acts 5:3, 4)
- The Spirit can forbid or prevent human speech and plans. (Acts 16:6-7)
- The Spirit searches everything and comprehends God’s thoughts. (1 Corinthians 2:10-11)
- The Spirit apportions spiritual gifts. (1 Corinthians 12:11)
- The Spirit helps us, intercedes for us, and has a mind. (Romans 8:26-27)
- The Spirit bears witness to believers about their adoption. (Romans 8:16)
- The Spirit bears witness to Christ. (John 15:26)
- The Spirit glorifies Christ, takes what is Christ, and declares it to

believers. John 16:14

In light of all those action verbs that are used to describe the Holy Spirit's workings, it ought to be obvious that all of them point to a most "personal" being. The Holy Spirit does things only a person can do.

Pay attention to the pronoun

So, who was this Holy Spirit who "came upon," "revealed" and "moved" Simeon there at the dedication of the baby Jesus? The Holy Spirit was just that—a "who," not an "it." It was a "he," a person, whom Simeon met that day.

And here's a relevant application of this week's lesson for us this day. In those Holy Spirit passages of John 14, 15 and 16, Jesus uses the Greek word *parakletos* to describe the Holy Spirit. That word literally means "to come alongside of." It can be translated as Comforter, Counselor, Advocate or Helper. As we prepare to enter a new year, still in the midst of a pandemic and all its fears and uncertainties, how reassuring is it to know that we do not enter this new year alone. We have another Person right there alongside of us, with us, for us, and even in us. We have a personal Comforter, Counselor, Advocate and Helper. With him and his help, we can enter this new year with confidence and the expectation of thriving, not just surviving!

Simeon met the person of the Holy Spirit on that special day 2000 years ago. Have you personally met the person of the Holy Spirit in your life? If Simeon had the words to this familiar hymn chorus available to him 2000 years ago, he might have well sung them. Can you, will you, sing them today?

Spirit of the Living God/Fall fresh on me/Spirit of the Living God/Fall fresh on me/Melt me mold me/Fill me use me/Spirit of the Living God/Fall fresh

on me.

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