

**The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Conception,
Baptism and Temptation of Christ:
Implications for the Pentecostal Christian
Part I**

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Introduction

I am grateful to be an heir of the Pentecostal movement. We Pentecostals believe that the purpose of being baptized by the Holy Spirit is to enable us to participate in God's mission. The Statement of Fundamental Truths by the General Council of the Assemblies of God says: "All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . with it comes the endowment of power for life and service, the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry."¹

God has called every Christian to proclaim the good news to the world. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit can we to move forward as missionaries, pastors, and church leaders. This is the center of the Pentecostal teachings. However, according to my observations via various conferences, preaching and teachings, sometimes Pentecostals center on "the power" too much.

In talking about "mission" and "Holy Spirit," many of us focus on the Book of Acts. Through this book, we can see how the promised Holy Spirit was poured out unto Jesus' disciples and the apostles to be witnesses of him. I believe that it is important for Pentecostals to learn the Book of Acts; for without it, Pentecostal theology could not have been established. But often, many of us do not really pay attention to the giver of the Holy Spirit—Jesus Christ. Not only was Jesus the giver, he had his own uniqueness as the Son of God.

¹The General Council of the Assemblies of God, USA Statement of Fundamental Truths. http://agchurches.org/Sitefiles/Default/RSS/AG.org%20TOP/Beliefs/SFT_2011.pdf (accessed February 11, 2015),

The Holy Spirit formed Jesus in Mary's womb. When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, the Spirit came to him like a dove and remained on him for the rest of his life. When Jesus received the temptation from Satan, it was the Spirit that led him to the desert. As Pentecostals, we should know how the Holy Spirit was engaged in the life of Christ in order to understand the Spirit in a deeper and wider way and to appreciate more of this precious gift in our lives.

In this paper, I will present three stages of the life of Christ—his Conception, his Baptism, and his Temptation—and attempt to show how each stage was associated with the Holy Spirit. My hope is that, by learning this, a Pentecostals' understanding of the Spirit will be expanded. This being a Greek exegesis paper, I will examine these three stages of Jesus' life by exegeting on several significant passages in the Gospels.

Part I of this paper will discuss the work of the Holy Spirit in the conception and baptism of Jesus. Part II will present the work of the Holy Spirit in the temptation of Jesus and my conclusions. Both parts will look at the implications of the Holy Spirit's work for Pentecostal Christians.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity. Many Bible passages that talk about God are interchangeable with the passages about the Holy Spirit (e.g., Acts 5, 1 Cor. 3:16-17). Also, the Holy Spirit has the attributes of God, being omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent (Lk.1:35, Ps.139:7-13, 1 Cor. 2:10-11, John 16:13). The Spirit was involved in remarkable events, such as creation work (Ps. 104:30), regeneration, the transformation of believers (Titus 3:5), and eschatological renewal (Isa. 44:3-5).² Through these passages, we can prove that the Holy Spirit is God.

In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is symbolized as a dove, oil, living water, wind, and fire (e.g., Ex. 29:7, John 7:37-39, Matt. 3:16, Acts 2:2). Furthermore, the Spirit is described as not only "the Holy Spirit," but also the "Breath of God" (Job 27:3), the "Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:11), the "Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7), the "Eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14), and so on.³

²Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 875.

³Elmer L. Towns, *The Names of the Holy Spirit: Understanding the Names of the Holy Spirit and How They Can Help You Know God More Intimately* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1994), 196.

All of these terms refer to the same Holy Spirit.⁴ But since the Holy Spirit carries the name “Spirit” (and it has various symbols), the Spirit has been misunderstood as being only some kind of power or force.⁵

However, the Holy Spirit has personality. One piece of evidence of this is seen in John 16:13-14. The word Holy Spirit in Greek is “πνευμα.” The gender of this word is neuter; but when John in verse 13 referred to the Holy Spirit, he used a pronoun “εσκεινο,” the meaning of which is “he,” not the neuter form “it.” Some scholars argue that this is John’s grammatical mistake—but it was not. As Millard Erickson suggests, John made this change intentionally to tell his readers that the Holy Spirit has personality.⁶ The translations of the King James version are not correct in this sense, because this Bible describes the Spirit as “it.”⁷ Francis Chan called the Holy Spirit “the forgotten God” because of such misunderstanding. The Spirit indeed is powerful; but if our focus is on only the power side of the Holy Spirit, we too are apt to make him the “forgotten God.”⁸

The Holy Spirit in the Conception of Jesus

The Synoptic Gospels

I will deal with the story of Jesus’ conception in Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38. One problem here is that these two accounts are not in parallel. Kurt Aland, in his *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, places Luke 1:26-38 as a unique account in Luke only, while placing Matthew 1:18-25 with Luke 2:1-7.⁹ According to Keith Nickle, Matthew obtained his materials from the Gospel of Mark, Q, and M; whereas Luke used the Gospel of Mark, Q, and L. Matthew 1 and 2 are from Matthew’s own material—M, which Luke had never possessed, and Luke 1 and 2 are from Luke’s unique material—L. This is why many scholars do not place these two stories of Jesus’ conception in a parallel form.¹⁰ However,

⁴Keith Warrington, *The Message of the Holy Spirit* (Nottingham, UK: Inter Varsity Press, 2009), 16.

⁵Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 863.

⁶Ibid., 876.

⁷D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossways Books, 1997), 9.

⁸Francis Chan, *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* (East Sussex, UK: David C Cook, 2009), 18.

⁹Kurt Aland, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels: Completely Revised on the Basis of the Greek Text of the Nestle-Aland 26th Edition and Greek New Testament 3rd Edition: the Text Is the Second Edition of the Revised Standard Version* (Swindon, UK: United Bible Societies, 1985), 3,7.

¹⁰Keith Fullerton Nickle, *The Synoptic Gospels: An Introduction* (Louisville, KY:

both accounts have much in common. Thus, I will focus on the similarities, particularly the conception through the Holy Spirit.¹¹

Matthew 1:18, 20

Verse 18 starts with the phrase Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ ἡ γένεσις οὕτως ἦν (“Now the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, took place as follows”). There is a textual issue in this phrase that is caused by the word γένεσις. The majority of textual witnesses support the original reading, but some minor textual witnesses support “γέννησι.” According to Bruce Metzger, both γένεσις and “γέννησι” have the same meaning—birth. However, more precisely, γένεσις means creation, generation, and genealogy, while “γέννησι” means engendering. Some scribes might have thought that using this word is more proper. Also, it was used in patristic literature later to refer the Nativity story; but that reading is not acceptable.¹²

As the majority of textual witnesses support the original reading, I do as well. The word γένεσις is the same word used in verse 1—Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ (“This is the book of genesis of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham”). It seems that Matthew emphasizes “new creation” and “new genesis,” which had not happened since God created Adam. Verse 18 does not have its connection only with verse 1, but also with verse 16. The grammar in verse 16 is unusual. Up until that verse, Matthew, in his genealogy, uses the word ἐγέννησεν (“he begat”); but in verse 16, he uses the word ἐγεννήθη (“he [Jesus] was begotten”). This shows that the Messiah’s birth is different from the other birth stories in previous verses and any other birth stories in the world.¹³

Matthew does not mention Jesus’ father. Joseph is simply mentioned as Mary’s husband (τὸν Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας). Thus, Matthew intends for his readers to notice how the birth of the Messiah was unusual in verse 16 and starts explaining how different it was from verse 18 by using the word γένεσις again. In verse 18, Jesus the Messiah is in genitive form, and it appears at the beginning of the verse (Τοῦ δὲ

Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 95–97, 130–135.

¹¹R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 42–43.

¹²Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart, Ger: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 7.

¹³Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), 14.

Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ). This is Matthew's emphasis to show that this story is the Messiah's genesis and that he is the center and purpose of the book.¹⁴

The word μνηστευθείσης ("after she was engaged") is used in both Matthew's and Luke's accounts. It is a participle in the aorist tense, showing that this engagement had already taken place when Mary and Joseph came into this story.¹⁵ Mary was found to be with a child before they came together (συνελθεῖν). Matthew emphasizes that Mary was already Joseph's wife, but they had not stayed in the same house nor did they have a sexual relationship.

The concept of an engagement at that time was totally different from today. Betrothal or engagement in ancient Judaism usually took place at an early age, most likely 12 to 13½. After the engagement, it would take a year to have the wedding ceremony, and then the actual marriage would take place. But as already mentioned, the couple was considered husband and wife even before the actual marriage. This is why, in order to break off an engagement, they needed to go through the process of "divorce"¹⁶ and why, if the wife had committed adultery, she would be punished by death, according to Jewish law.¹⁷

Matthew shows that Joseph and Mary were husband and wife; but since they had not yet come together, it was impossible that Mary had become pregnant by Joseph. She became pregnant by the Holy Spirit (ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου). The word ἐκ has many meanings; but here in this context, it denotes "the origin, the cause, the reason for something . . . more precisely, the effective cause by which something occurs or comes to be."¹⁸ In verse 20, this word is used as follows: "For that the one which was conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit" (τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἁγίου). The phrase γεννηθὲν ἐκ was a common Greek usage to explain from whom a person was begotten—e.g., "I was born of Jacob."

Usually, "Father's name" follows after the word ἐκ, as I showed in the above example. But in both verses 18 and 20, there is no mention of the father's name, only "the Holy Spirit" (ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου). It does not mean that the Holy Spirit was the father of Jesus. If we consider the Holy Spirit as Jesus' father, it destroys the doctrine of the Trinity, as well

¹⁴R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel 1-14* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1964), 35.

¹⁵Ibid., 40.

¹⁶Dale C. Allison, *Matthew: Volume 1: 1-7* (Edinburgh, SCT: T&T Clark, 2000), 199.

¹⁷William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 130.

¹⁸Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and The Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1991), 70.

as misleads people (especially non-Christians) into myths. In ancient Greek and Roman mythology, there are numerous stories of “gods” having sexual intercourse with human women and giving birth to “demigod heroes.” Because of this sexual encounter, it was impossible for a woman to claim that, when she conceived, she was still a virgin. In human history, the virgin birth occurred only once—on the day that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary with supernatural creative power to create new life in her womb.

Jesus’ conception by the Holy Spirit strongly reflects the OT concept of the Spirit of God in creation and in the giving of life (Gen. 1:2, Ps. 33:6, Isa. 32:15, Ezek. 37:1-14).¹⁹ Jesus’ conception happened totally by divine initiative. Some people, even preachers, say that the main point of the virgin birth is that Jesus would not have sin, which had been carried from generation to generation since Adam—but that is not the main point. Rather, the virgin birth shows God’s divine direct intervention into a sinful human world in order to open the way of salvation for us. David Ewert explains this well:

The virgin birth proclaims that great truth that God, not man, brought the Savior into the world²⁰. . . For early Christians the coming of the Spirit was the sign of the new age; therefore, the conception of Jesus by the Spirit was clear evidence that the new creation had begun, just as the Spirit of God was active at the beginning of the new creation.²¹

As I have already mentioned, Matthew’s intention in using the word γένεσις becomes clearer here.

In verse 21, the angel of the Lord commanded Joseph to name the child to be born “Jesus.” Jesus is the Greek form of the name “Joshua,” and it means “Yahweh is salvation” or “Yahweh saves.”²² Joshua is not a unique name, as this name is seen in the OT. However, as Craig Keener points out, if God is the one who named the child Jesus, it has a special meaning in it.²³ Jesus’ mission was mentioned by the angel—γὰρ σώσει

¹⁹France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 50.

²⁰David Ewert, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), 49.

²¹*Ibid.*, 50.

²²D.A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: With the New International Version of the Holy Bible. Matthew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 76.

²³Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 48.

τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν (“because he will save his people from their sins”). The word αὐτοῦ is Matthew’s emphasis, so it is more proper to translate this sentence, “because he is the only one who will save his people.”²⁴

In verse 23, Jesus was given another name—“Immanuel,” meaning “God with us.” This clearly fits the theme of Matthew’s Gospel. He also ends his book with the same word...“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”²⁵ Although Judea at that time was dark, hopeless, and oppressed, God was nevertheless with them—and will be with us forever. All these things happened so that the prophecy and God’s ancient promise would be fulfilled (verse 22).

Luke 1:35

According to Aland and Nickle, Luke 1:26-38 has no parallel.²⁶ This account was based on Luke’s own material (L), and he wrote it through the perspective of Mary; while Matthew wrote his account through that of Joseph.²⁷ The angel Gabriel was sent by God to Nazareth to bring amazing news to Mary. In verse 28, Gabriel greeted her saying, Χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη (“Greetings, you who are highly favored!”). The word κεχαριτωμένη causes a great issue among Protestants and Catholics. According to *BDAG*, χαριτώ means “to cause to be the recipient of a benefit,” “bestow favor on,” “favor highly,” “bless.”²⁸ Because χαριτώ originally comes from the word χαρῖ, Catholic Christians translate it as “gratia plena” (“full of grace”). “Gratia plena” became a typical phrase when Catholic Christians pray to “Holy Mother” Mary. However, this translation is not correct because, as Greek grammar suggests, Mary is the recipient of God’s favor and grace, not the one who bestows grace to others. Although her name suggests “excellence”²⁹ (e.g., thoughtful [v. 29], obedient [v. 38], worshipful [v. 45]), all of these virtues did not make her the recipient of God’s grace. She was simply the recipient of God’s graciously provided goodness.³⁰

It can be dangerous to emphasize Mary’s character in telling the Christmas story because it has a potential of reducing God’s gracious act

²⁴D.A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 76.

²⁵Allison, *Matthew*, 213.

²⁶Aland, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, 3.

²⁷Nickle, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 134.

²⁸Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd Edition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1081.

²⁹Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 41.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 40.

upon this world as one given through her. As already noted, the point of the virgin birth is to show God's gracious initial act; and, as Matthew does, Luke also emphasizes this aspect in his account. In the OT period, the phrase ὁ κύριος μετὰ σοῦ ("The Lord is with you") was a typical phrase of encouragement to God's people who will be involved in God's divine service. It proves that the Lord will help them accomplish given tasks.³¹

In verse 34, Mary asked Gabriel how she can become pregnant. In answering her (v. 35), Gabriel said, Πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ, καὶ δύναμις Ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι ("The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you"). Darrell Bock feels that this passage is among the most christologically significant ones in Luke's Gospel.³² Via structural analysis, these two phrases are in a parallel and even more than that. According to some scholars, such as Robert Stein, they stand in synonymous parallelism. As for Πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ, the word ἐπελεύσεται ("will come upon") is also used in Acts 1:8 and nowhere else.³³

Before Jesus went back to heaven, He gave the following promise to His disciples: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." For we Pentecostals, this is quite significant. Luke uses the same phrases—ἐπελεύσεται ("come upon") and δύναμις ("power")—in the Jesus' conception account and in Jesus' promise to his disciples. Pentecostal scholar James Shelton considers Luke 1:35 and Acts 1:8 as a parallel³⁴ He notes that the Holy Spirit coming upon Mary in Luke 1:35 has a double effect—one to cause the baby Jesus to be called Holy and the other one to empower Mary.³⁵ Shelton concludes that the empowerment of Mary and the empowerment of the disciples are parallel events. Luke pays attention to the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon ordinary Christians to accomplish God-given tasks. The same Holy Spirit who came upon Mary to enable her to bear the Messiah and utter the Magnificat also enabled Jesus' disciples to become powerful witnesses of the gospel years later.³⁶

Although δύναμις Ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι ("The power of the most high will overshadow you") is in synonymous parallelism with the

³¹I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Kingstown, UK: Paternoster Press, 1978), 65.

³²Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 1:1-9:50* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 123.

³³Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1992), 85.

³⁴James B. Shelton, *Mighty in Word and Deed: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 21.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

previous phrase, the word πνεῦμα has in view the character of divine action and the word δύναμις its effectiveness.”³⁷ The word ἐπισκιάσει (“overshadow”) is used in Exodus 40:35, when God’s presence appeared in the tabernacle to protect His people Israel while they traveled to the Promised Land.³⁸ By examining these two phrases in Luke 1:35 and Acts 1:8, Luke indicates that, when the power of the Holy Spirit comes upon his people, He empowers them to change the world and something new begins. In the case of Acts 1:8, the Spirit empowered Jesus’ disciples to be His witnesses; whereas in the case of Luke 1:35, the Spirit empowered Mary and created the human Jesus in her womb. It was the beginning of a new age.

Jesus is unique because He is God and the only one who was born by the Holy Spirit, but thankfully He still calls us His brothers and sisters because we believe in Him and are born again by His Spirit (John 3:5). For those who passionately wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Jesus will send Him to come upon them in power in order to be his witnesses to impact the world.

The phrase διὸ καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται, υἱὸς θεοῦ (“Therefore the one to be born will be called holy and the son of God”) causes a lot of arguments among scholars in terms of translation, of which there are possibly three. The first one is “Therefore the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God;” the second is “Therefore the one to be born will be called the holy son of God;” and the third is “Therefore the one to be born will be called holy and the son of God.” I agree with this third one. The first translation takes the word τὸ γεννώμενον (“the one to be born”) as substantive and ἅγιον (“holy”) as its attribute; but this usage has no example in the Greek, according to Reiling. The second translation is not right because ἅγιον (“holy”) and υἱὸς θεοῦ (“the son of God”) cannot be in apposition “since the title υἱὸς θεοῦ (“the son of God”) does not explain or extend the statement about the nature of the child expressed by ἅγιον, but rather introduces something new.”³⁹ So syntactically, the third translation is the best one.

What does it mean when Luke says that the child to be born will be called holy (ἅγιον) and the Son of God (υἱὸς θεοῦ)? Hawthorne raises the issue that some people interpret this passage as follows—Because Jesus was born by the Holy Spirit’s creative work, He was proven as the Son of God. But Hawthorne does not really agree with this view by

³⁷J. Reiling and J. L. Swellengrebel, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Luke* (Broadway, NY: United Bible Societies, 1987), 59.

³⁸Hawthorne, *The Presence and The Power*, 72.

³⁹Reiling and Swellengrebel, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Luke*, 60.

showing the other way around—that because Jesus is the eternal Son of God from the beginning, his conception is miraculous and unique.⁴⁰ To my way of thinking, both views are right, it being a matter of Christology (Christology from above and Christology from below). Luke prefers the Christology-from-below approach. The point here is that Luke’s intention was to show that Jesus is the Son of God because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Bock notes that whenever Luke uses the words “Son of God” in his Gospel account, it has a messianic thrust, illustrating Jesus as the Davidic deliverer, the regal and messianic Christ and here in this passage too.⁴¹ At that time, the Jewish people were waiting for the Messiah whom God promised through the prophets. They knew that Messiah would come from the royal line of the house of David but did not know that he was the Son of God and what his real task was.⁴² This is proved by taking a look at Greek grammar. The future tense κληθήσεται (“he will be called”) indicates that, although Jesus was already born, only a very few knew that He was the Son of God.

The word ἅγιος means, primarily, “reserved for God and God’s service” (according to *BDAG*).⁴³ Luke 1:35 also has the same meaning to describe Jesus, who was set apart for a special mission of God—to save the world. However, ἅγιος is used to describe not only Jesus, but also other prophets in the Bible. For example, when Hannah was given the word from an angel of the Lord regarding the birth of Samson, she was told that he would be God’s holy one (Judges 13:7). The usage is the same. However, for Jesus, He is unique, set apart for a special mission; but at the same time, he was holy . . . “because he was formed in his mother’s womb by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit made him holy in the sense that the Holy Spirit singled him out and set him apart for a unique ministry for God.”⁴⁴

Summary: The Holy Spirit in the Conception of Jesus

Matthew writes his account through Joseph’s perspective and Luke through Mary’s. While both authors had their own theology and readers in mind, one commonality in these two accounts is that Jesus’ conception was miraculous and unique from any other because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Thus, he was truly the Son of God. Both Matthew and

⁴⁰Hawthorne, *The Presence and The Power*, 75.

⁴¹Bock, *Luke*, 1994, 124.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 123–124.

⁴³Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Edition, 10.

⁴⁴Hawthorne, *The Presence and The Power*, 82.

Luke emphasize that the virgin birth is to show God's gracious act to the world. Jesus' conception did not have human causes at all but only the Holy Spirit.

Also, both accounts clearly indicate the creative work of the Holy Spirit, as when God created the heavens and the earth in Genesis. Jesus' conception is the start of a new genesis and a new creation that will give humans the hope that God is with them. When the Holy Spirit comes upon his people, something both extraordinary and new will happen. When Jesus was born, only a few people knew that He is the Son of God; and when Jesus died on the cross, again only a few people thought He was the Son of God. But after His resurrection, many came to know the truth. Then on the day of Pentecost, the new witnesses were created—witnesses who were persecuted as Jesus was and executed as Jesus was. However, the gospel these witnesses brought was now about to reach the ends of the earth, with more people coming to know the truth. The Holy Spirit, who came upon Mary and created the human Jesus in her womb, then came upon Jesus' disciples and empowered them to become his witnesses. Now we, the Pentecostals who received the same power, can impact the world as well because that power came upon us through Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit in the Baptism of Jesus

Why Was Jesus Baptized?

Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit. Although the Bible does not record much of His childhood, Luke does report that Jesus was growing up and growing strong, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him (Lk. 2:40). Then finally, Jesus appears in public at the Jordan River. Matthew, Mark, and Luke in their Gospels include the account of his baptism; John in his Gospel does not, but he does mention the descending of the Holy Spirit (see Matt. 3:13-17, Mk. 1:9-11, Lk. 9:35, John 1:29-34).⁴⁵

The account of the baptism of Jesus has caused some arguments among churches for a long time. The Bible says that John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mk. 1:4). Although Jesus was sinless, he came to the Jordan to be baptized by John. Many people have thought that early Christians made up this story because they could not understand and accept that Jesus, the highest one, needed

⁴⁵ Aland, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, 16.

to accept baptism from someone who was at a lower status than he.⁴⁶ However, these people missed the point that the baptism of Jesus was actually for them and all the people.

In this section, I would like to exegete the account of Jesus' baptism, dealing first with Matthew's account in detail and then with some theologically and exegetically important passages from Mark's, Luke's, and John's accounts to know how the Holy Spirit was engaged in the baptism of Jesus.

Matthew 3:13

All four gospels introduced John the Baptist before the account of the baptism of Jesus. John baptized people for repentance and forgiveness of their sins. When Jesus appeared at the Jordan, he was about 30 years old (Lk. 3:23). According to Hawthorne, this was a mature and important age in Jewish culture because it was considered "the time of life when a man could rightfully take his place among the leaders of Israel."⁴⁷ Matthew 3:13 says, *Τότε παραγίνεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰορδάνην πρὸς τὸν Ἰωάννην τοῦ βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ* ("Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John"). The adverb *τότε* is Matthew's favorite word to show the beginnings of new sections in his Gospel; and here it shows that Jesus came to John when he was at the full height of his activity.⁴⁸ In this account, Jesus now becomes the main character and John fades away. The word *τοῦ* with the infinitive shows a clear purpose—in this case, "to be baptized by John (*τοῦ βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ*). Among the four Gospels, only Matthew tells his readers why Jesus came to the Jordan and that this event was significant for Him.⁴⁹

Matthew 3:14

Verses 14 and 15 are unique in Matthew's account. When John saw Jesus coming, he stopped him. The word *διεκόλυνεν* ("he was preventing") is a conative imperfect. John's words *Ἐγὼ χρεῖαν ἔχω ὑπὸ σοῦ βαπτισθῆναι, καὶ σὺ ἔρχῃ πρὸς με;* ("But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'") showed

⁴⁶Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 131.

⁴⁷Hawthorne, *The Presence and The Power*, 121.

⁴⁸Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel 1-14*, 122.

⁴⁹Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 55.

how much he struggled in his mind that he needed to baptize Jesus. The words Ἐγὼ (“I”) and ὑπὸ σοῦ (“by you”) are emphatic. Moreover, Matthew places the infinitive form of βαπτισθῆναι (“to be baptized”) after ὑπὸ σοῦ. This structure is unusual because it’s supposed to be the other way around,⁵⁰ showing John’s great confusion and struggle.

In Matthew’s account, the irony of the situation is highlighted. John refused to baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees because of their sinful attitude and not bearing fruit in their daily lives; then in contrast, he refused to baptize Jesus because of His sinlessness.⁵¹ Jesus’ great humbleness makes a stark contrast between himself and this “brood of vipers.” Jesus was born to save his people from their sins (see Matt. 1:20). Although the Son of God, he humbly came to the earth and even received John’s baptism.

Matthew 3:15

In verse 15, Jesus said to John, Ἄφες ἄρτι, οὕτως γὰρ πρέπειν ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην (“Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness”). This is the reason Jesus needed to be baptized by John; but it’s still unclear what that means. The key word in this verse is righteousness (δικαιοσύνην). Jesus said that this event would fulfill all righteousness. According to *BDAG*, δικαιοσύνη means the quality or characteristic of upright behavior, uprightness. In more detail, it means the specific action of righteousness, in the sense of fulfilling divine expectation.⁵² According to the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, the meaning of δικαιοσύνη in Matthew primarily refers to obeying God’s divine will.⁵³ Other scholars, such as Keener⁵⁴ and Hagner,⁵⁵ agree with this. The baptism of Jesus is the Father’s will; and in this context, the baptism shows His messianic role as a servant of God. (With this view, Hagner⁵⁶ and Carson⁵⁷ agree).

Later, in verse 17, Matthew describes a voice (God’s) coming down from heaven saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel 1-14*, 122.

⁵²Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd Edition*, 247.

⁵³Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 413-414.

⁵⁴Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 132.

⁵⁵Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 56.

⁵⁶Ibid., 57.

⁵⁷D.A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12:108.

pleased.” This verse and verse 15 are influenced by several OT passages, one being Isaiah 42:1, which describes the Messiah is a servant.⁵⁸ Martin Luther says, “In this baptism, Jesus acted as our substitute. Loaded with the world’s sin, he buried it in the waters of Jordan.”⁵⁹ Jesus was baptized for us. Being perfectly obedient to the Father, he accepted his role as a servant and died on the cross, even for a “brood of vipers.”

Matthew 3:16

As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water (βαπτισθεις δε ο Ιησοϋς εϋθϋς ανεβη απο του υδατος). The aorist participle βαπτισθεις (“after being baptized”) coming before the aorist verb ανεβη (“he went up”) shows that action prior to the verb. So the event of opening heaven happened after Jesus was baptized by John and had gone back to the river bank. It’s important to know what this grammar suggests. The Father responded to the obedience of Jesus, who was baptized for people as the Messiah who would bear their sins on the cross, and now was the time for Jesus to be revealed and begin his mission.⁶⁰ All missions require obedience.

Jesus saw that the heavens were opened (ηνεωχθησαν). The aorist form indicates that this event was not a vision but actually happened.⁶¹ And He also saw the spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him (ειδεν πνεϋμα θεου καταβαινον ωσει περιστερων ερχομενον επ’ αυτον). So what does it indicate? In verse 15, I mentioned that there was an influence from Isaiah 42:1, which illustrates Jesus as a servant of God—“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.” As this verse says, God put the Spirit upon Jesus to start his messianic task. In Matthew’s mind, the descent of the Holy Spirit was to let Jesus know that this was the time to start serving. Thus, it is not right to say that this was Jesus’ first time to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He was born of the Holy Spirit, so this event is Jesus’ “formal inauguration of his ministry.”⁶²

⁵⁸Ibid., 109.

⁵⁹Martin Luther, Helmut T. Lehmann, and John W. Doberstein, *Luther’s Works: Sermons 1*; Edited and Translated by John W. Doberstein; General Editor Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 318.

⁶⁰Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel 1-14*, 130.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 57.

Matthew 3:17

A heavenly voice said, Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα (“This is my beloved Son with him I am well pleased”). Mark’s and Luke’s accounts focused more on Jesus by using σὺ εἶ (“You are”) instead of οὗτός ἐστιν (“This is or he is”). Matthew edited this declaration for his readers to show who Jesus was. That declaration also had an influence from Isaiah 42:1 and probably from Psalm 2:7. As the previous verses emphasize, Jesus is the servant of God, but his nature is as God’s eternal Son—and also as his beloved Son (ὁ ἀγαπητός). The word ὁ ἀγαπητός has a passive meaning. The Father loves his son with the highest degree of love that normally humans cannot hold.⁶³ According to *BDAG*, ἀγαπητός here is love “to one who is in a very special relationship with another, only, only beloved.”⁶⁴ As already mentioned, according to *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, the word “Son of God” in Matthew is used in connection with Jesus’ obedience.⁶⁵ However, here Matthew points out that this servant is also greatly loved by God because he is the eternal Son of God, is God’s only son, and came from God’s heart to save the world.

The phrase ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα (“In you, I am well pleased”) means “to take pleasure or find satisfaction in something,” according to *BDAG*.⁶⁶ Some scholars like Lenski say that the other translation, “to consider something as good and therefore worthy of choice, consent determine, resolve”,⁶⁷ is more proper,⁶⁸ But that translation misses an important point—i.e., since Jesus is the eternal son of God, he was not chosen suddenly to be sent to the earth to save the world. God’s plan to save the world was in his heart even before the world began (see Eph. 1:4). So the first translation is right in this context.

We can learn two things in verse 17—that Jesus was God’s beloved eternal son and that God sent this son for us. In other words, God loved us and desired to give anything and do anything just to save us. The same love (ἀγάπη) that God has towards his eternal Son Jesus He has towards us as well. He was delighted in Jesus but knew what Jesus’ mission was to be—i.e., to come to the world to suffer and die on the cross.

⁶³Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel 1-14*, 134.

⁶⁴Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Edition, 7.

⁶⁵Green and McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 773–774.

⁶⁶Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Edition, 404.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel 1-14*, 135.

Although his only son was going to die, God delighted in him, because he knew that his plan would save those who believe in him.

Well-known singer/songwriter Stuart Townend sings “How deep the Father’s love for us. How vast beyond all measure that He should give His only Son to make a wretch His treasure.” This is exactly what verse 17 says to us. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus as a dove to make him ready for his messianic task as a servant of God to obey, even unto the death on the cross. This is the meaning of the baptism of Jesus and the descending of the Holy Spirit.

Mark 1:10

In Mark 1:9-11, Mark describes the descending of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus in a unique way by using the word εἰς (“into”) in verse 10. Matthew, Luke, and John use ἐπὶ (“on”) instead of εἰς. They say that the Holy Spirit came “upon” him, but Mark explains that the Holy Spirit came “into” him. That tells the readers the Holy Spirit not only stayed on him, but also came inside him and never went back.

According to *BDAG*, the prior meaning of εἰς is “extension involving a goal or place, into, in toward, to.”⁶⁹ While various scholars hold that Mark’s use of εἰς is nothing special, Robert Bratcher, Eugene Nida, and also Hawthorne say that it is a special usage. It is true that the preposition εἰς has various meanings and usages, so we cannot easily conclude, just by looking at Mark 1:10, that this is unique in Mark and has some theological importance. However, by observing Mark’s use of εἰς throughout his Gospel, it is possible to prove. Mark places εἰς following verbs of motion with house (Mk.2:11, 3:20, 5:19), mountain (3:13, 9:2, 13:14, 14:26), region (7:24, 10:1), and road (10:17). By observing these usages, it’s natural to translate εἰς as “to” or “toward.” However, if used with the object “person,” the translation could be “into” (see Mk. 5:12, 13, 7:15, 18, 19, 9:25).⁷⁰

Moreover, Hawthorne says that Mark deliberately preferred εἰς to ἐπὶ because he wanted to show “the Spirit entered into Jesus and did not merely “come upon him” externally.”⁷¹ Again, it does not mean that Jesus was not filled with the Holy Spirit until this time because, indeed, he was conceived by the Spirit. However, this Holy Spirit coming “into”

⁶⁹Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Edition, 289.

⁷⁰Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (Broadway, NY: United Bible Societies, 1961), 29.

⁷¹Hawthorne, *The Presence and The Power*, 127.

him indicates that Jesus was now the permanent bearer of the Spirit and was filled with the Spirit more than ever.⁷² Because he was the bearer of the Holy Spirit, he can distribute this precious gift to everyone who earnestly prays and wishes to be a witness of him, as John proclaimed earlier saying, “I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mk. 1:8).

Use of “the Son of God” in Mark’s account of the baptism of Jesus has a unique aspect. Although indication of the phrase is the same as in Matthew (i.e., God’s servant), Mark keeps the fact that Jesus is the Son of God a secret from his readers until the scene where Jesus dies on the cross and the centurion declares, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mk. 15:39). Matthew and Luke also have this approach, but Mark much more. He continually describes the scenes in which Jesus instructs some people and evil spirits not to tell others that he is the Son of God (see Mk 1:43-44, 5:43).⁷³ Here the account of the baptism of Jesus has the same aspect. The Father declares *Σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα* (“You are my beloved son. In you, I am well pleased”). Unlike Matthew, Mark (Luke also) uses *σὺ εἶ* (“you are”) instead of *Οὗτός ἐστιν* (“This is” or “he is”). By using *σὺ εἶ*, Mark shows that this declaration was not public announcement to let people know that Jesus is the Son of God, but only that, by becoming the bearer of the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Spirit, Jesus is now ready for his mission.

John 1:33

In this verse, John describes the descending of the Holy Spirit in a unique way but shares the same point as Mark. John writes, *Ἐφ’ ὃν ἂν ἴδῃς τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαῖνον καὶ μένον ἐπ’ αὐτόν, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ βαπτίζων ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ*. (“The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit”). The word *μένον* (“remain”) is unique in John. The Spirit not only descended on him, but also remained on him permanently so that Jesus was equipped to baptize others with the Holy Spirit.⁷⁴

Luke 3:21-22

Unlike the other Gospel writers, Luke emphasizes the descending of the Spirit upon Jesus more than the water baptism of John, as evidenced

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Green and McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 772.

⁷⁴D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 152.

in verse 21. While Matthew and Mark include the account of John's imprisonment much later, Luke includes it before the account of the baptism of Jesus. And while Matthew and Mark identify John as the one who baptizes Jesus, Luke does not.⁷⁵ Furthermore, at the beginning of verse 21, Luke uses the word Ἐγένετο ("it came") with temporal infinitive constructions in describing the specific circumstance for the event to follow.⁷⁶

From the above evidence, Luke intentionally does not put John the Baptist in the spirit-descending narrative and make this story more important than the previous one. Why? Because Luke's intended focus is on the Holy Spirit, which is a central theme in his books, to show his readers that the time of John the Baptist is over and Jesus now becomes the primary baptizer of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁷ Roger Stronstad points out: "Indeed, as Luke portrays the public ministry of Jesus from His baptism until the day of Pentecost, the presence and power of the Spirit is concentrated exclusively upon Him. In Luke's theology, Jesus has become the charismatic Christ—the unique bearer of the Spirit."⁷⁸

What Stronstad is saying is that Jesus was the unique bearer and baptizer of the Spirit, which is why Luke puts more focus on the descending-of-the-Holy-Spirit story. In Acts 10:38, Luke clearly states the meaning of the descending of the Spirit on Jesus at the Jordan: ". . . how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil because God was with him. We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem" (NIV).

It was pneumatic anointing—i.e., divine empowerment from God to Jesus for His messianic task.⁷⁹ Mark and Matthew also indicate that the descending of the Holy Spirit was to let Jesus be ready for the messianic task as God's servant. But Luke says it more clearly—that it was an "anointing." Shelton and Stronstad see the descending of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus in a connection with the event on the day of Pentecost. Both Luke's Gospel and Acts have a so-called "inauguration" narrative—the inauguration of Jesus' ministry (in Luke) and the inauguration of the church (in Acts). In both narratives, the Holy Spirit plays a key role in

⁷⁵Shelton, *Mighty in Word and Deed*, 47.

⁷⁶Martin M. Culy, Mikeal Carl Parsons, and Joshua J. Stigall, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 117.

⁷⁷Shelton, *Mighty in Word and Deed*, 48.

⁷⁸Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke: Trajectories from the Old Testament to Luke-Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), 39.

⁷⁹Robert Menzies, *Empowered for Witness* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 137.

that he was the agent of anointing. The Spirit anointed Jesus and the same spirit anointed the disciples to equip them for their ministries.⁸⁰ Leopoldo A. Sánchez explains this well: “After the coming of Christ, it seems that such a universal outpouring of the Spirit through baptism could not have taken place for us unless Christ Himself had first been anointed with the same spirit at the Jordan.”⁸¹

Jesus’ anointing and empowerment in the Jordan was, of course, for himself as he starts his messianic task, but it was also for us.

Summary: The Holy Spirit in the Baptism of Jesus

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all have their unique perspectives and emphases in their Gospels. The meaning of the descending of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus cannot be separated from the baptism by John. Through Jesus’ perfect obedience to the Father’s will, we get a glimpse of the picture of the servant who died for us. After his baptism in water, the Holy Spirit came down upon and inside him and remained on him for the rest of His life.

By exegeting the passages from each Gospel, there are two meanings of the descending of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus—one is for him, the other for us. By receiving the Holy Spirit, Jesus was anointed for the inauguration of his official ministry as the Messiah and God’s servant. He became the permanent bearer of the Spirit, which anointed and empowered him for this task. However, this descending of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus was also for us. Jesus was anointed with and being filled with the Holy Spirit so that he would be the baptizer of the Spirit for his witnesses in the future. Although we Pentecostals receive the Holy Spirit for empowerment, we tend to neglect thinking about where the Spirit comes from and who the original sender is. It is Jesus who sent and shared this precious gift with us.

In Part I of this article, I have discussed the work of the Holy Spirit in the conception and baptism of Jesus, along with implications for Pentecostal Christians. Part II will present the work of the Holy Spirit in the temptation of Jesus and my conclusions.

⁸⁰Shelton, *Mighty in Word and Deed*, 47.

⁸¹Sánchez, Leopoldo A. 2006. "A missionary theology of the Holy Spirit: the father's anointing of the Christ and its implications for the church in mission." *Missio Apostolica* 14, no. 1: 28-40. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed February 23, 2015).