



# Accompanying Spirit

January 13, 2008

## Focus Scripture Matthew 3:13–17

Additional Scriptures

Isaiah 42:1–9

Psalm 29

Acts 10:34–43

Mighty God, fill us with the blessings of new life in you. Open our hearts and minds to receive your bountiful Spirit as our companion, directing our steps as we move into the world as witnesses to Christ's power and love. Amen.

The Spirit is at work in our lives to help us claim our identity as God's children and lead us in God's way. In this short Season after the Epiphany, the scriptures invite us to wonder about the many ways that God's Spirit brings change. This week, we hear the voice of God speaking new things into action, and consider the blessings and responsibilities that come with this gift of Spirit.

## Focus Scripture: Matthew 3:13–17

As noted before, the writer of Matthew strives to link the story of Jesus' life with the story of God's people as told in the Hebrew Scriptures. One of the major features of the stories of the Hebrew prophets is their call from God. In the focus passage today, the Spirit of God and a voice from heaven call to Jesus. They reveal Jesus' identity as the Son of God. In Matthew, this is the first direct statement of Jesus' divine identity.

In the words "with whom I am well pleased" in verse 17, the gospel writer creates a connection with the beginning verses of the Servant Song (Isaiah 42). In doing so, Matthew presents Jesus as God's beloved child and also God's faithful servant.

Jesus tells John that he must be baptized in order to "fulfill all righteousness." This phrase is used in Matthew's gospel to demonstrate the link between Jesus' life and ministry and the work and promises of God. *Righteousness* in this context means "doing the work that God has given one to do." John's work is to announce the presence of the Messiah and the coming reign of God. In baptizing Jesus, John's mission is fulfilled.

In verse 16, Matthew speaks of the heavens opening suddenly. This opening of heaven marked the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The coming of Jesus ushered in a new era that will not close until the end of all things.

To underscore the beginning of this new work of God, the Spirit of God rests on Jesus in the form of a dove. The symbolism may have reminded early Jewish Christians of the story of Noah. In Genesis 8:10–11, a dove marks the beginning of a new life for the earth.

It is interesting to note that God's pleasure in Jesus was announced as Jesus' ministry began. While obedience to the call of God is a continuing theme in Matthew, the blessings of God are freely given. Such grace is not contingent on behaviour. Rather, such grace is what makes it possible to follow God's way.

The voice from heaven that speaks at Jesus' baptism echoes the voice spoken in **Isaiah 42:1–9**. These words proclaim the mission of God's beloved servant to restore justice. The faithful servant will bring God's hope and healing to the world. Every age in human history has longed for someone like the servant described in Isaiah. It is easy to see how the first Christians would have associated Jesus with this figure.

God speaks at the beginning of creation and at the baptism of Jesus. In **Psalm 29**, the psalmist affirms that God's powerful voice creates, even in the midst of chaos.

The newness of God's reign was revealed to the disciple Peter as he travelled with Jesus. The Spirit that descended on Jesus at his baptism is the same Spirit that is poured out on believers in Acts. As the Spirit dwells with Jesus' followers, then and now, it enables the continuing of God's mission. In **Acts 10:34–43**, Peter proclaims the cosmic nature of God's plan in Jesus.

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God's Spirit-filled voice is heard above the chaos of daily living, revealing God's power to bring change in us and in our world. This accompanying Spirit plants God's purpose in our lives, and reminds us that we are God's beloved children. What does it mean to you to know that you are loved as God's child and also called to be God's faithful servant?

If you have Internet access, visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage. Use user name *spirit* and password *linking*.

