



THE TIME IS NEAR

STUDY TWO



Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River by John. David Zelenka 2005

'Many people feel so pressured by the expectations of others that it causes them to be frustrated, miserable, and confused about what they should do. But there is a way to live a simple, joy-filled, peaceful life, and the

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a) The Spirit in Jesus and the disciples

(Read Mark 1:1-3,6-12; Luke 4:14-19; Matthew 10:1-8)

Mark emphasises that what follows in his gospel has strong connections with God's promises in the Old Testament and the bigger story of God's love for all of humanity. Malachi 3:1 talks of God sending a messenger to prepare the way before a coming day of judgement. John the Baptist fulfilled that role, recognising and baptising Jesus as he appeared, and watching as the Holy Spirit descended and God's word confirmed Jesus as 'my Son, whom I love'.

In chapters 4-9 of Luke's Gospel, the author deals with the question of 'Who is Jesus?' and introduces us to Jesus as a teacher, prophet, and healer, but ultimately as 'God's Messiah.'

Jesus' ministry began back home in Galilee, unrolling the scroll in the synagogue and revealing the ultimate truth of Isaiah's words, 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me...'. It is with this same authority that he later sends out the twelve apostles to minister to 'the lost sheep of Israel', knowing they will have all the spiritual strength and wisdom needed to fulfil this mission.

On the surface...

Does an image, verse or phrase stand out, and what does it say to you?



Digging deeper...

Is the question, 'Who is Jesus?' one that still needs answering in this world, and how would you frame your response if asked by a friend or stranger?

The words of John the Baptist are clear, that through Jesus, believers will receive the blessing of the Spirit. We see this in the apostles as they began their training. What does that tell us?

'Freely you have received; freely give'. A simple instruction from Jesus, but how easy is that for us in everyday life?



b) The journey continues

(Read John 20:19-23, Luke 24:45-49, Matthew 28:16-20)

The disciples had a lot to learn in their relatively short time following Jesus; listening, watching him at work, and getting to know him better in their quieter moments together. They struggled sometimes to understand the bigger picture, and toward the end of this period, Jesus began preparing them for what must follow, both before and after the Cross.

In the readings from John, Luke, and Matthew, he joins the final dots on the puzzle. Jesus' death and resurrection will lead to an evangelistic calling for the disciples, their lives empowered by the Holy Spirit, and he points to Scripture as confirmation. Matthew 28:18-20 was an announcement historically fulfilled at Pentecost.

It is apparent from Jesus' words that the Holy Spirit is more than just a decorative element for the future church, but rather serving as a conduit for the continuation of His work through the lives of believers.

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Digging deeper...

Put yourself in the position of one of those disciples. How easy would you have found it to work out what was happening, and its impact on your life?

It's not that long ago (Matthew 26:69ff) that Peter denied even knowing Jesus. From a training point of view, do you think these men were ready for what was to follow beyond Pentecost?

When Jesus first sent his disciples out, it was to the Jews. Now it is to the world. What does this tell us about God's bigger picture seen within the Bible as a whole?



c) And into Acts

(Read Acts 1:1-11)

Luke's introduction to Acts is a continuation of the one in his gospel, written to give an 'orderly account' of all that Jesus had begun, along with his teaching. Now Luke begins with a catch-up of where he left the disciples, with Jesus blessing them as he bids them farewell and ascends to heaven. But this repetition is important for Theophilus and his readers to understand because of all that follows.

The apostles were being given a commission by Jesus to witness about all that had happened on this amazing journey with Him, culminating in the Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension, and what that meant not just for Israel but the entire world. In a short while, the power of the Holy Spirit would enable this to happen.

Prior to that moment, the disciples were still confused, wondering whether all this was building up to 'the last days' as prophesied by Isaiah (2:2-4, 11:1-16), Jesus' response was that they should concentrate on the matter at hand, their commission to witness to the world, and not speculate about times and dates, as these are God's concerns. The heart of their message must be the living and ascended Jesus, who will return to complete what he has begun.

The description of Jesus ascending in verse 9 resembles the cloud enveloping him on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:7-11) and another which covered the tent of meeting in Exodus 40:34 when 'the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle'. The Hebrew term for this is 'Shekinah', the presence of God in a place.

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On the surface...

Does an image, verse or phrase stand out, and what does it say to you?

Digging deeper...



In his introduction, Luke suggests a period of intense teaching for the apostles in readiness for what was to follow. How important is Bible study for Christians, and if the answer is 'very', how can we encourage it?

The apostles had received some on-the-job training when sent out earlier on mission work. What does verse 6 say about their preparedness for the task that awaits them?

How does the Shekinah moment in Luke's story speak into our own Christian journeys?



'Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.'
(Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Q) How does this quote speak into the lives of all believers?



Praying together : Lectio divina

The traditional practice of Lectio Divina in Western Christianity involves reading, meditating, and praying with scripture to foster a closer relationship with God and gain a deeper understanding of His teachings. The pattern below is a simplified version using some verses from this study and can be used individually or within a group.

Lectio - Reading

Read twice, slowly and attentively, listening for the 'gentle whisper' that is God's word or phrase for today, using this or alternative verses.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's
favour."
(Luke 4:18-19)*

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Meditatio – Meditation (2-3 min)

As we think of those who first heard these words, and repeat them silently in our own minds, let them interact with our day, our thoughts and concerns... God's word becomes our word for today.

(Group – allow time for those who wish to share the word, image or phrase that has touched their heart.)

Oratio - Prayer

As we turn to prayer, so God invites us to respond to the word or phrase that has spoken to us. In the quietness or aloud we bring to Him those words, images or people that God has placed on our hearts, and how we might put those words into action.

(Group – allow time if possible for all who wish to share that which is on their hearts for prayer.)

Contemplatio – Contemplation

We spend a minute or two in silence, enjoying the experience of God's presence and love embracing us.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit,
Three in One. Amen.