

2. We're Expecting
The Announcement
Matthew 3:1-12

When a couple discover they are expecting, one of the most vexing concerns is when and how to announce it. Some announce it immediately. Others wait awhile. Some wait until the baby is born and then send out birth announcements.

Why do so many wait to announce the good news? Well, there is the concern about complications. But for most, I don't think that's the real reason. The real reason is they know that when they make the announcement, their lives will never be the same again. When a couple announce the birth of a child, they are saying, "Our lives are about to undergo a radical change." In fact, it's such a radical change that it will probably have an impact on all the people around them.

On Christmas Day, the birth of a child not only radically changed the lives of his parents, it changed the world. It was such a radical change that the world now measures time in terms of before and after that birth.

It was such a radical change that God waited thirty years to announce the birth.

But, boy, what an announcement! There are announcers, and then there are announcers. John the Baptist had to be the superstar of all announcers. He knew how to get attention. He dressed funny, he ate funny, and he acted funny, and I don't mean "ha-ha" funny. He was a peculiar man. He chose to be peculiar, because he knew that peculiar people get a lot of attention. Then, when he had their attention, he made the great announcement: The Kingdom of heaven is about to come on earth. The Messiah has been born. He is about to be revealed. And things will never be the same again. So, you better get ready.

There is a story about a family that included a grandfather, a father and a son, all with the same name and all living in the same house. As you can imagine, things sometimes got a little confusing. One day the grandmother answered the phone and the caller asked for John. The grandmother asked, "Which John do you want—the father, the son, or the holy terror?"

Well, John the Baptist announced that the Father had sent his Son to baptize us in the Holy Spirit.

That is the great change that took place when Christ came into the world. Up to that time, God was separated from us. There was a barrier which separated heaven and earth. This barrier separated people from God. That barrier was symbolized in the Temple by the curtain which separated the Ark in the Holy of Holies, which was the throne of God, from the people. It was a way of saying that they could worship God, but they could not enter into the presence of God.

However, God loved us too much to remain separated from us forever. Through the Law, God invited us to become holy enough to enter into God's presence. But that didn't work. People were not able to gain holiness by their efforts to obey the Law. When that failed, God left the place of holiness and came into this sinful world to be with us. God came to us in two ways: God came to us in the flesh, in the person of Jesus

Christ. And, through Christ, God comes to us in the Holy Spirit. Christ is the doorway between heaven and earth. The Holy Spirit passes through Christ and comes to us.

When we are baptized in the Holy Spirit, the presence of God comes over us and fills us. The Holy Spirit enables us to enter into fellowship with God.

Everyone says, “Oh, I want that. I want God to be real to me and to fellowship with God.” However, we must not forget that John the Baptist announced that Jesus would baptize us with the Holy Spirit—and with fire. We have to be careful here. We can read this passage to mean that Christ baptizes some with the Holy Spirit, and that he baptizes others with fire. No, he comes to baptize us all with the Holy Spirit and fire. It’s no accident that the Holy Spirit is symbolized by fire. On the altar we have two candles. The flames on those candles represent the Holy Spirit. Throughout the Bible we can find passages that compare the Holy Spirit with fire.

When we are baptized by the Holy Spirit, we are baptized by fire.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a lot like the birth of a child. I remember when our first child was born, we were so excited. As I told you last week, we waited and waited and waited, until we had almost given up. We wanted so much for our little baby to be born. We could just imagine what it would be like to see her and hold her. We had these romantic notions of playing with her and hearing her laugh. She would be like a doll and a pet all rolled up into one, but even better.

I’ll never forget the day we brought her home from the hospital. I gently led Becky from the car to the couch in the living room, as she carried the baby. She sat down. She and I looked at each other, and suddenly a feeling of panic came over us. All of a sudden it dawned on us that we would have the responsibility of caring for a human being, that required twenty-four-a-day, seven-day-a-week of constant attention. We realized that the arrival of this long-expected little bundle of joy would be a baptism of fire.

The same thing is true with Jesus. At Christmas we celebrate the birth of this perfect, beautiful, little baby. He is everything we expected our children to be, but weren’t. As one of the carols tells us, he is so perfect that “no crying he makes.” He just lies there warm and quiet, making no demands, just looking at us with eyes of love and appreciation. Who wouldn’t love baby Jesus?

And who would suspect that this baby Jesus would grow up to baptize us with the Holy Spirit and with fire? Christ baptizes us with the Holy Spirit to give us the strength to join him in standing up to the forces of evil in the world. Christ baptizes us to give us the courage to take up our crosses and follow him. Jesus did not remain a warm and cuddly baby, and when he baptizes us with the Holy Spirit, it is not all warm and fuzzy feelings.

Again, being baptized by the Holy Spirit is like raising a child. As our children were growing up, I discovered that raising children can lift you higher and bring you lower than you could imagine possible. Children bring you more sadness and more joy than you ever thought you would experience in your life. And, when it’s all said and done, you decide that it was all worth it, and if you had it to do over again, you would.

That’s what life in the Spirit is like. It’s painful, but exciting. It brings you great sadness and great joy. And, if you can hang in there, in the end, you discover that it was all worth it, and if you had it to do over again, you would.

Here's the announcement: Christ is coming. He is coming to you. If you are ready, he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Are you ready to walk with Christ?

Dr. Wesley Welborn
Senior Pastor