

The Spirit Speaks the Promise of Christ's Coming

Advent season is upon us. Once again our attention is focused on the coming of Christ. We are asking this Advent season: what does the Holy Spirit have to do with Christ's coming, with Advent? We easily think of the way in which God the Father and God the Son relate to Advent. God the Father had the plan to send the Son. That plan is fulfilled when God the Son comes into the world. But where is the Holy Spirit in this? Indeed, the God we worship is triune, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So it would be appropriate to think that the Holy Spirit has something to do with God's plan of salvation in Christ.

In addition, we are also asking our question of the Creeds. The Creeds answer back. They tell us that the Holy Spirit "spoke by the prophets;" (2) that Christ was "conceived by the Holy Spirit;" and (3) that the Holy Spirit is "the Lord and giver of life," or we could just say the "Life-giver." Today we focus on the Creedal response that tells us that the Holy Spirit "spoke by the prophets."

This Creedal testimony has two important parts. One part is "who spoke." The other part is prophets.

"Who spoke." In those words the Creed teaches us and we confess that the Holy Spirit speaks. He is not silent. He speaks.

This is important because it may be tempting to think of the Holy Spirit in vague spiritual terms, like power and force and vague movement in humans and human society. Certainly, the Spirit is power. He can also cause movements among people, like the church. But power can be impersonal. Then it is not the Spirit. There can be movements among people. But how do you know the Spirit is behind it?

No, the Spirit speaks. He speaks truth with words He chooses. He speaks promises about a specific Savior who brings a specific salvation. The Spirit speaks the promise of Christ's coming. He says, "Christ is coming. He is coming to redeem, to save, to judge. He is coming to die for others and to live again in indestructible life. He is coming again to reveal Himself to the world as the one the Father has made Lord and Christ; the one Name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

The second part of the Creedal statement, "who spoke by the prophets," answers another question: by whom does the Spirit speak? The answer: by the prophets. Here again, the Spirit does things specifically, not vaguely. He inspires specific preachers. He, the preaching Spirit, gives preachers specific words to speak. He spoke by the prophets.

The Apostle Peter tells us this in the reading from his second letter that was read a few moments ago.

"And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:19-21).

The prophets did not speak by their own will. They spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Carried. They spoke the prophetic word; the word that promises Christ's coming.

We are thinking here of the Old Testament prophets. They were sent by the Word of God and empowered by the Spirit to speak and write. They proclaimed the promise of Christ's coming.

Is that it? Did the Spirit only speak through Old Testament preachers? No, there is more. God sent John the Baptist when the promise of Christ's coming was being fulfilled. He was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15). The Holy Spirit caused John to preach about the One greater than he whose sandal straps he was not worthy to untie. John proclaimed the one in whom God's purposes would be fulfilled to make ready a people prepared for the Lord's coming. He proclaimed that One, the Christ, as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Then Christ came. Jesus came into Galilee preaching the kingdom of God. He called disciples whom He later called apostles. The apostles Peter, James, and John were with Christ on the holy mountain, as Peter tell us. They heard the voice from the Father in heaven declare Jesus to be His Son, His beloved. They witnessed Christ's betrayal and death. The apostles saw Him alive in resurrection glory, the first-fruits of the new creation. The Holy Spirit caused them to proclaim and write this good news in Jesus, whom the Father made Lord and Christ. By the Spirit they proclaimed that this Jesus would come again. People repented and believed. They were prepared for the Lord's coming.

The Spirit still speaks. In light of how the devil and the world have tried over the centuries to stomp out the good news of Christ, we may wonder how the Gospel has survived. We may wonder how the testimony about Christ has never been defeated. We hear the words of the Creed, "who spoke by the prophets." We find there the reason why the Gospel has survived. The Holy Spirit has seen to it.

The Spirit causes the Gospel of Christ to be proclaimed, even today. The Spirit speaks through the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, His own written word. Through the Scriptures, the Spirit speaks through faithful pastors and teachers. Through the Scriptures, the Spirit speaks through Christ's people. The Spirit promises that Christ will indeed return to give us the salvation Christ has prepared for us. The Spirit still prepares a people made ready for the Lord.

May He cause us to be a people prepared for Christ's coming through repentance and faith in Christ Jesus, our forgiving, merciful, and mighty Lord. Amen.

By Rev. Charles Westby
Delivered at Church of the Reformation – Lutheran, Affton, Missouri
First Wednesday in Advent 2014