

Question: Can you explain the differences in the accounts of Jesus' baptism? (See Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32-33) John the Baptist saw the Holy Spirit come down on Jesus like a dove and remain on Him. says, "like a dove lighting on Him," in we read, "Spirit descending on Him like a dove," and says, "the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove." Just prior to this in Matt 3:15, when John is telling Jesus He should baptize John, Jesus said, "it is proper to fulfill all righteousness." Then, in Isa 11:2; 42:1, I read what appeared like a very detailed list of what the Holy Spirit gave to Jesus at the baptism. What is going on?

Answer: The idea may be that some physical manifestation was given and the descent was like a dove landing. The imagery of a dove is fitting, as Scripture refers to the innocence and peacefulness of doves (Ps 68:13; Song of Sol 6:9; Matt 10:16). These characteristics mark the Holy Spirit. Scripture also establishes doves as appropriate sacrifices for guilt offerings if one could not afford a lamb (Lev 5:7), and for this reason doves were sold in the temple for sacrifices (Matt 21:12; John 2:14). An offering of a pair of doves was presented in behalf of Mary and Jesus (Luke 2:24), according to the Law (Lev 12:8).

Whatever else the descent of the Spirit on Jesus meant; it clearly indicates His anointing and empowerment for ministry. Jesus Himself proclaimed this anointing in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:18; cf. Isa 61:1) when He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me."