

An Essay on the Holy Spirit's role in the Annunciation and Birth of Jesus

A. Introduction:

This essay introduces an alternative method of undertaking biblical studies. After selecting an event in the life of Jesus (*kairoi*), the research follows the regime of this alternative method, and concludes with a practical application for the good of the community at large and of faith believers.

Definition of Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS) and a statement of the hermeneutics used.

The purpose of such a study is to add current value for the good of the faith community. The approach is one of many, which could be employed by biblical analysts.

TIS (Biblical texts) can best be understood as a method of providing a theological (God-view) of contemporary issues and approaches about biblical interpretation with a view to assessing how they enable the church better to hear what God is saying to church and world today¹.

The principal thrust of the TIS approach is to direct the interpreter's attention to the subject matter of Scripture, which is God; (the acts of God in history, and the gospel), rather than to a particular theological tradition or some other approach (like text history, or structure). It also leads to considering Scripture through findings from a study of the more traditional boundaries such as Old and New Testament studies,

¹ Vanhoozer (ed), *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, 19-25.

biblical studies and systematic theology, Eastern and Western, and Protestant and Catholic traditions.

Author, Keith Johnson² suggests the following four concerns are being addressed by the use of this TIS approach to study scripture:-

- *“a desire to attend to the subject matter of Scripture – namely the triune God,*
- *a desire to read Scripture canonically as a coherent dramatic narrative,*
- *a desire to read Scripture both within and for the church, and*
- *a desire to read Scripture under the guidance of creeds”*

These points are confirmed in Antony Billington’s³ blog pages on the subject of TIS.

The hermeneutic employed here is a retroactive analysis of the scripture text, followed by a consideration of the view contributed by the various range of traditions and creeds.

² Johnson, “Augustine's "Trinitarian" reading of John 5: A Model for the Theological Interpretation of Scripture,” 799.

³ Billington, “Introducing Theological Interpretation 1.”

B. Christological *kairoi* defined and the selection of this author's chosen *pericope* identified and defended.

Christological *kairoi* are key aspects of Jesus life as described in the Gospels. There is no special significance between which aspect might be selected and studied, but together they might compile a picture of Jesus identity from His life, words and deeds.

Typical *kairoi* might include Jesus birth, baptism/anointing, ministry, death and resurrection. Any specific aspect of His ministry might be selected for analysis and review, at the behest of the author.

This essay has selected to analyse and review Jesus conception and birth⁴.

From a *Logos* Christology viewpoint, any examination would normally concentrate on the tradition and doctrine of the Incarnation. The approach would major on such scriptural verses as “*You are my son, today I have become your Father*”⁵ and The “*Word made flesh and made His dwelling amongst us*”⁶.

From a Spirit Christology viewpoint, however, the research will concentrate on the works of the Holy Spirit in Jesus conception and birth. The work must be viewed as being complementary to the *Logos* tradition of the Incarnation, it does

⁴ The Annunciation and Incarnation

⁵ 1 Jn 14

⁶ Ps 2:7, Heb 1:5

not replace. Both approaches speak of the divine origins and divine intervention in human history.

The reasoning for selecting this aspect of Jesus life is because this event captures a supernatural and significant moment in the history of the created world, and it marks a significant moment in the economy of the Triune God. God became man in Jesus, further, with the mediation of the Holy Spirit, humankind (Jesus and beyond) also partakes in divinity.

For the writer, this event represents the actual commencement of a life that was designed to free humanity from sin and death. While a consideration of His passion, death and resurrection might be traditionally viewed as the flag-bearer for creation's propitiation for sin, nevertheless, sin was also dealt with throughout Jesus ministry life, e.g. through His obedience to His Father, and also through His overcoming of the Satanic temptations in the desert.

All of the benefits of His life are available for us through the life of Jesus who was God, made man like us in all ways, except for committing sin⁷. These gains for us creatures come from Jesus earthly beginnings, His conception and his birth (leading to His life), through the work of the Holy Spirit, at the Father's behest. The benefits from His birth continue to this day for us, through His exaltation on throne, interceding with the Father.

⁷ Heb 1:1-4

C. Jesus birth was unique and divinely orchestrated.

The uniqueness can be directly attributable to the Holy Spirit.

Old Testament prophets predicted Jesus birth.

In Genesis, after the narration of the fall of man, God warned the serpent that he would put enmity between him and the woman whom he had tempted. That there would be one who would crush the serpent's head and in return receive a "bruised heel" for His efforts⁸.

In this statement, the Lord God, within the Garden of Eden and the context of mankind's sin prophesied that one would come who would defeat the rule of Satan (crush his head), on behalf of all of mankind – and he would suffer in so doing.

The Holy Spirit prompted the prophets Hosea, Nathan, Isaiah, and Micah to announce specific aspects of the pending arrival of Jesus, the Messiah.

While not all relevant prophecies are enumerated here, Their prophetic words promise a redeemer, from the line of David^{9,10}, born to a virgin¹¹, in Bethlehem¹², with anointed qualities, and who would suffer dislocation from shortly after His

⁸ Gen 3:15

⁹ Luke 3:21-37

¹⁰ 2 Sam 7:12

¹¹ Isa 7:14

¹² Micah 5:2

birth¹³. These prophecies and the outworking of them in the *kairoi* under consideration can be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit – introducing the Messiah, the God of Israel¹⁴.

The Spirit who “hovered” or “brooded” over the cosmos at creation¹⁵ effected Jesus conception.

In the Scripture, the Angel announces to Mary that the Spirit would “overshadow” her. The Greek word used in the Scripture is *episkiazo*. This is not used in the Genesis creation story, but in the narration of the transfiguration¹⁶ this same word is used to describe the cloud overshadowing. The word is also used in the Old Testament to describe the cloud overshadowing the tent of meeting of Moses, where the Glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle¹⁷. Luke in Acts also uses the term when he describes the shadow of Peter falling on the onlookers and their being healed¹⁸. *Episkiazo* is used in scripture in relation to God’s power and His glory.

Jesus birth was accompanied by significant spiritual (angelic) activity and joy (ecstasy –including “party”).

¹³ Luke 2;14-15, 19

¹⁴ Question is – How come the Jews did not recognise and accept and hail Jesus at His time? – which is regrettably beyond the scope of this essay- refer Luke 4:14-30 for a good example of the Jews not recognising Jesus as Messiah.

¹⁵ Gen 1:1

¹⁶ Mark 9:7 and Luke 9:34

¹⁷ Exodus 40:35

¹⁸ Acts 5:15

This activity suggests both the joy of heaven at the event and the hand of the Holy Spirit in the event.

Joy was prominent as the Holy Spirit presented the fullness of the Trinity, in accordance with a self-revealing God, and joy as the Trinity incorporated¹⁹ humankind into fullness of the Godhead, as the bride of Christ.

His impending birth was heralded to Mary by an angel. She was to conceive in her womb and bear a son, and He would be named Jesus the Son of the Most High. On being questioned how this could happen, the angel replied that “*the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you and he will be called Son of God*”²⁰.

An Angel in a dream reassured Joseph that the child was indeed conceived by the Holy Spirit, and that he should not be afraid to take Mary as his wife²¹.

At the moment of Jesus birth the Heavens opened and the heavenly hosts began praising God and saying “*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those who he favours*”²².

An angel also heralded His birth to shepherds in the fields. They announced, “*Do not be afraid; I bring you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is the Messiah, the Lord*”²³.

¹⁹ Doctrine of “incorporation” – borrowed from Financial circles

²⁰ Luke 1:29-29

²¹ Matt 1:18-25

²² Luke 2:13-15

The family was visited by “wise men” who came from the east, after following a star which resided over Bethlehem. *“They entered the house and saw Mary with the child and knelt down and paid him homage. Then opened their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh”*²⁴.

Finally, within the “new-born” period prophet and prophetess Simeon and Anna met the family within the temple. Simeon had been assured that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. *“Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, for salvation for the gentiles and glory for the people of Israel”*. Anna came and *“began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem”*²⁵

From a Spirit theology view, these accounts describe a scenario of heavenly partying. This is very interesting.

Paul talks about one of the characteristics or a fruit of the Holy Spirit is joy²⁶. Further, the joy of the Holy Spirit (partying) is shown again as characteristic at Pentecost²⁷, when Peter had to defend the actions and attitudes of the disciples as them *“not being drunk, it is only nine o’clock in the morning”*. In this episode, the disciples were overwhelmed with joy at what was to be the birth of the church, in similar fashion to the heavenly hosts at the birth of Jesus.

²³ Luke 2:8-12

²⁴ Matt 2:9-11

²⁵ Luke 2:25-38 – here the prophet clearly sees Jesus as Messiah, for Jews as well as Gentiles; he prophesied that the births was about salvation from sin, for us all!

²⁶ Gal 5:22

²⁷ Acts 2:14

Spirit Theology and tradition pertaining to Jesus conception and birth.

Two of the four gospel writers provide commentary on the conception and birth of Jesus²⁸. They both demonstrate the uniqueness and supernatural origins of the event. More important for this study, they both describe the role of the Holy Spirit. The Son did not acclaim in His own right, as part of the triune God, but chose to receive His humanity and His divinity through the Holy Spirit.

For *Catholicism*²⁹, John Paul II writes “*the conception and birth of Jesus has a pneumatological³⁰ aspect, since the mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished "by the power of the Holy Spirit." That Spirit with the Father and for the Son incarnated Jesus. The mystery of the Incarnation constitutes the climax of this giving, this divine self-communication of the Triune God*”³¹.

The Apostles' Creed³² professes: "*He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.*"

Similarly, the Nicene Creed (AD 325) professes: "*By the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.*" In the words of the same Creed, it is professed that Jesus is the Son, of the same substance as the Father:

²⁸ Matt 1-2, Luke 1-2

²⁹ Roman Catholic and associated groups of believers

³⁰ Spirit sourced

³¹ John Paul II, “On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World.”

³² A Catholic traditional creed – emanating about 5th Century – believed to have derived from the Apostles at Pentecost

"God from God, Light from Light, and true God from true God; begotten, not made."³³

He was made man by becoming "incarnate from the Virgin Mary."

The Eastern Orthodox Churches profess that Christ, from the very moment of conception, was fully God and fully man. This is in accord with Western creeds quoted above. Eastern Tradition does not accept fully the full equality within the Trinity; it describes more of a monotheism whereby all things emanate from the Father. Eugene Rogers in describing Eastern tradition describes the idea of *theologies*³⁴, which relates to the role of Mary who gave her body for the Word to become incarnate.

Trinitarian author Clark Pinnock³⁵ writes of a social economy within the Trinity, similar to the above credal professions, as the outcome of the Incarnation. This is referred to as the doctrine of *perichoresis*³⁶. This doctrine is professed categorically in the creeds above and in the Creed of the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.

The creeds also emphasises the concept of the hypostatic union³⁷ of Jesus Christ.

Pinnock clearly states the emanating work of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation, when he writes; "*The Trinity is also inferred from salvation, that God is the Father, revealed by the Son, through the Spirit. The story of Jesus yields the foundations of*

³³ *homoousios* - of one essence with the Father, of one substance with the Father, consubstantial with the Father

³⁴ *Theotokis* – or God bearer, a doctrine which Catholicism evolves into their various Marian beliefs.

³⁵ Pinnock, *Flame of Love; A Theology of the Holy Spirit*.

³⁶ Perichoresis, = The Father, Son and Spirit all in one, and one in all.

³⁷ Jesus was both fully human and fully divine in nature (but He accepted the human lifestyle choices and practices, in obedience to His Father, with the help of the Holy Spirit – for our sakes).

*Trinitarian thought – His relationship with God. The picture is of a transcendent society or community of three personal entities. Father, Son and Spirit are the members of a divine community unified by common divinity and singleness of purpose*³⁸.

Finally, author Myk Habets, summarises the current research findings well, when he writes: “*The promise of Jesus birth in both Matthew and Luke is intended to say that He is the messianic son of God and Lord of the messianic kingdom, not only since His resurrection and enthronement at Pentecost, and not merely since his baptism by John, but from his earthly beginnings in relation to the Holy spirit, and by His heavenly origin.*”³⁹

D. Conclusion

The key revelation of the Incarnation is Trinitarian. Through the actions of the Holy Spirit, the Father became a father in that He had a son, and the Son became a son and He had a father. The concept of hypostatic union is revealed, again, in its fullness⁴⁰. The divine triune God incorporates humanity, and humanity is caught up in divinity. This would be the main source of reflection and worship.

A review of this one *kairoi* in itself leaves many issues open. The full significance of this particular *kairoi* can only be appreciated and appropriated within a study of

³⁸ Mark 1:11, 14;36, and Mt 11:27, 12:28

³⁹ Habets, *The Anointed Son : A Trinitarian Spirit Christology*.

⁴⁰ The triune God was revealed in Creation – as John Paul’s encyclical referred to earlier suggests.

the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This leads to insights of the continuing role of the Holy Spirit within this life and beyond – to the present time⁴¹.

In the study presented here, the role of the Holy Spirit has been deemed paramount, in the most significant moment in world history. However, the Holy Spirit's role can be studied continuously throughout the life and works of Jesus. The Holy Spirit's role is continuing throughout the whole world, as He convicts, consoles, reminds, reveals, empowers, and transforms. His role is a story of hope for all creation, and transformation for us creatures.

The review of this *kairoi* in isolation presents rich opportunities for dialogue with non-Christians, (who might view Jesus as a good man, a role model, but not part of the will for mankind of the Triune God).

Dialogue could be conducted around the creation and new creation, the involvement of the Holy Spirit, and the sharing by God with his creatures in the earth (at creation) and His divinity (at incarnation). It was and is a “heavenly stooped down” event, and has a purpose – which could be fruitfully explored, with these groups of people (because it is the triune God's intention that they are included in the overall plan).

⁴¹ For example, In relation to Jesus subsequent baptism, Eugene Rogers Jr. ventures that the Holy Spirit did not just “rest” on the Son from the Father, but prefers the more active verb “alights”. For him, this includes, not just a befriending, but permits adjectives such as redeems, transfigures, elevates, and exceeds to be included as consequences of the “alighting” From Rogers, *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from resources outside the Modern West*.

The results of the study also provide a clarification of biblical studies, faith tradition, and work of the Holy Spirit. The outcome of this provides opportunities for fruitful bible study and dialogue amongst Christian faith groups.

Here dialogue (discussions, teachings, workshops) would encompass the role of the Holy Spirit, the inclusion of us as the bride of Christ in the economy of the Trinity, and the joy and angelic activity surrounding Jesus birth, (which also often surrounds our own rebirths in the spirit – and might need to be re-addressed). The most important aspect of any such dialogue would be to bring through the personal and the intimacy of the Trinity, which is opened to us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit and His work need to be recognised and appreciated.

From the outcome of this particular *kairoi*, the Annunciation and Incarnation, Christian believers should be presented with the prospect of continuing spiritual activity in the present times, and of personally and corporately exercising and delighting in hearing the Word of God, through the Holy Spirit, for their lives and the life of the church⁴².

The final concluding words have been selected from Clark Pinnock who writes,
*“The event of incarnation is the definitive word of everlasting love, by way of fulfilment.
It represents the continuity in the work of God as creator, and God the redeemer.
Redemption through Jesus is an action of the Spirit of Life actualizing the original*

⁴² Like Mary, Joseph, Anna, and Simeon – the prophets, the wise men –hearing and obeying is normal Christian life!

creative purposes of God. God has never failed to draw sinners to himself from the beginning of time. The history of grace reached its climax in Jesus Christ”⁴³.

This was achieved, in God’s grace, through the work of the Holy Spirit, and His presence is evidence of a continual and ever available working of hope for all creatures, even to the end of the earth.

The end.

⁴³ Pinnock, *Flame of Love; A Theology of the Holy Spirit*.

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