

Show video clip – The Spirit of Christmas Past, *Disney's A Christmas Carol* (2009) 33:44-37:12

That video clip is of Ebenezer Scrooge & The Spirit of Christmas Past from *Disney's A Christmas Carol*. It kind of illustrates something that makes Christmas special to us, I think.

Title slide – The Spirit of Christmas

One of the reasons Christmas is so special is because every year we remember the Christmases of our childhood, the Christmases of our past.

We remember and relive those good ol days and even the Ebenezer Scrooges among us have some warm memories of good Christmases.

So, Christmas comes with this fond longing for the good Christmases of yesterday. Of friends and family and of simpler times.

It also holds some sad longings, then too, for the good things we have left behind, And for the loved ones we see no more and miss. And for the wrong choices that were made.

Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* rightly places that mixture of warmth and longing in the memory of Christmas past.

And through the Spirit of Christmas Present and the Spirit of Christmas Future *The Christmas Carol* also calls us to look at Christmas and our lives with hope and the possibility for joy and goodness and transformation.

With its three-fold focus on Christmas past, present, and future, *The Christmas Carol* embodies the spirit of Christmas that we are called to remember in Advent.

Advent is the season of 4 weeks before Christmas where the church traditionally calls us to *not only* celebrate Christmas present, but also to remember the first coming of Jesus in Christmas past, and **to long for** the future advent of Jesus in his Second Coming.

This year, each week, as we go through the season of Advent,

- I propose to use a Spirit of Christmas from Dickens' *Christmas Carol* in the message to bring a little warmth to our remembering.
- We will also look at **the True Spirit of Christmas** in the biblical story of Christmas. The true Spirit of Christmas is not a ghost of Christmas past, present, or future, He is the eternal Holy Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit is active in the Christmas story.
The Holy Spirit of God was working in the first Christmas event.

We will look at how He worked in the lives of the characters in the Christmas story.

And we will look at how the Holy Spirit worked in their lives and in their characters and virtues.

- And then we will look at how the Holy Spirit of God can indwell and empower us with those same virtues and character traits, so we would possess and share the true Spirit of Christmas.

To guide that application of the Spirit in our lives today we will be looking at how God's word says the Spirit manifests Himself in us in

Galatians 5:22-23 where the Bible says

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

The "fruit" of the Spirit means the produce of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit produces these things in the lives of those He indwells and empowers – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

So three parts: The Spirit of Christmas in Dickens, the Spirit of Christmas in the Bible, and the Spirit of Christmas in us.

We've already done the Dickens.

So the Spirit of Christmas in the Story of Christmas in the Bible.

Today we begin with a look at John the Baptist.

We will begin John's story at his birth, which is part of the Christmas story in the Gospel of Luke

Luke 1:8-17, 39-41

Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and **he will be filled with the Holy Spirit** even from birth. ¹⁶ Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, **in the spirit and power** of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

(Then skipping ahead in time in the story. Verse 39 ...) ³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, **and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.**

The Holy Spirit is active in the Christmas story.

Elizabeth was the relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus, probably a niece or cousin.

When Mary came to visit Elizabeth the baby that leaped inside her belly was John the Baptist.
That makes John the first one ever to recognize Jesus for who He was.

And that makes John the Baptist the cousin of Jesus.

Zechariah was Elizabeth's husband.

The angel told Zechariah that his son John would be filled with the Holy Spirit of God, even from birth.
And that John would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah.

This fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy in Malachi about Elijah's return.
But it also means that Elijah was the highest example of a prophet to the Jews in this day.
His miracles were outstanding among prophets.
John would have the Holy Spirit and speak for the Lord in the same way Elijah did.

And he would make ready a people prepared for the Lord.
That's what John the Baptist did for Jesus.

After he grew up, John went out to the Jordan river and began to call the people of Israel to turn their hearts back to God.

"Repent, for the kingdom of God is near," he cried.
And he baptized people as a sign of their desire to be clean and return to a right relationship with God.

We read in the gospels of the time that Jesus came to John and Jesus asked John to baptize him.

John protested, but Jesus insisted.
And God cracked the sky and said of Jesus "This is my Son, whom I love."
And the Holy Spirit fell on Jesus like a dove confirming for John what God had told him about Jesus.

But after that, things don't go so well for John.

He had a problem with the Roman's puppet king Herod because Herod married his brother's wife.
Herod threw John in prison for speaking out against his marriage.

And it's from this prison that John hears that Jesus' fame and ministry are spreading.
So he send his disciples to Jesus and he asks

Matthew 11:3

"Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

John must have found himself uncertain and wondering.

You can almost see the fog falling over the message of light John preached so confidently.
And you have to see the question implied in that question.
John is saying, "If you are the one, do you know where I am?"

Who among us hasn't struggled with a similar question?

After a life of calling others to see God at work among them,
it must have been disillusioning to suddenly find himself alone & questioning God's work in his own life.

Do you know what Jesus' reply sent back to John was?

Matthew 11:4-6

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

Jesus didn't offer a clear and certain answer.

Instead he invites John to answer his own question.

Do you think Jesus' response was frustrating to John? Maybe.

But I am guessing it was not.

Sitting within his quiet cell wondering why God was at work in the world while he sat alone and waiting,
John had something that the Holy Spirit from birth had given him.

I would like to suggest to you that John had something in him that the Holy Spirit produced in him
that enabled him to sit alone and wait – it was patience.

I think, we don't read of John's hot tempered reactions to his becoming less and Jesus becoming greater,
because John had ... patience.

I think, there is no record of John asking Jesus to come get him out of Herod's prison,
because John had ... patience.

I think John learned patience from a mother who learned it from years waiting for her son.

I think John learned patience from a dad who learned it from 9 months of muteness after he laughed at
an angel's message.

And most of all I think John had patience that came from being indwelt by and empowered by the Holy
Spirit of God.

This gave him patience.

Because the ...

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and
self-control.

How is your patience?

How is your patience today?

Could you use a little more in your life?

Speaking of patience and John's prison cell,

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Christian pastor in Nazi Germany who opposed the Nazi's and was imprisoned for it.

In his writings Bonhoeffer once compared Advent to a prison cell "in which one waits and hopes and does various unessential things... but is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened from the outside."

John the Baptist and Dietrich Bonhoeffer seem to have come to understand something we don't get by nature.

It is up to God to open the doors of freedom and change.

It is up to us to have patience when they don't open.

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The patience that the Holy Spirit produce in us when we are obedient to his leading, the patience that it seems to me that John the Baptist had, is not so much the I'll wait for the bus all day without complaining patience.

There are several words in the Bible that mean patience, that are synonyms.

There is endurance, steadfastness, longsuffering, perseverance, and patience.

One Bible commentator I read said they were all in the same semantic field. I like that idea.

The original Greek word translated *patience* in Galatians 5 is *macrothumos*.

This one means more of the steadfast.

It's an idea of strength and staying power, not passivity.

Macrothumos is the one that is more often translated as steadfastness or long suffering.

Macro is long. It is used for long in physical length, far, and for length of time.

Thumos is passion or heart or anger, depending on the context.

This gives *macrothumos* patience the idea of does not lose heart and long tempered.

It's most literal translation would be long tempered.

Do you know how we have the word short tempered?

The patience the Holy Spirit can produce in us is the exact opposite.

The OT frequently describes God this way.

Psalm 103:8

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

Slow to anger here comes from the Hebrew words long and nostril.

God is long in the nostrils.

He doesn't fume.

He doesn't snort his anger.
He is long tempered.

Someone wrote a nice little story in the Daily Bread once that I kept.

It went ... When I was a kid, my Mom liked to make breakfast food for dinner every now and then. And I remember one night in particular when she had made breakfast after a long, hard day at work.

On that evening so long ago, my Mom placed a plate of eggs, sausage, and very burned biscuits in front of my Dad.

I remember waiting to see if anyone noticed! Yet all my Dad did was reach for his biscuit, smile at my Mom and ask me how my day was at school. I don't remember what I told him that night, but I do remember watching him smear butter and jelly on that biscuit and eat every bite!

When I got up from the table that evening, I remember hearing my Mom apologize to my Dad for burning the biscuits. And I'll never forget what he said: "Honey, I love burned biscuits."

Later that night, I went to kiss my Dad good night and I asked him if he really liked his biscuits burned. He took me in his arms and said, "Your Mom put in a hard day at work today and she's very tired. And besides, a little burnt biscuit never hurt anyone!"

That's the kind of patience John the Baptist had.

That's the kind of patience the Holy Spirit can enable in us if we obey his leading.

Who needs that kind of patience?

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Long tempered patience is when you have a friend who keeps needing a ride to work and you are a faithful friend and you give it.

And then who asks to borrow your car because you have something that prevents you from driving them.

And then they get in an accident with the car and don't pay you for it.

So, 6 months go by as you wait for them to pay you the \$500 deductible it took to fix the car.

Then they don't call.

No emails. No friendship.

So, you have a lunch and they proceed to tell you the reason your friendship is no longer the same is because of the way you reacted when they got in the accident with your car.

And instead of blowing up and saying "The way I reacted!?! The way I reacted?!," by the grace of God and his Holy Spirit in you realize that will not make anything better and you take it and don't list all the things they didn't do or did wrong,

And maybe you even say they can forget about the deductible.

That's the kind of patience John the Baptist had.

That's the kind of patience the Holy Spirit can enable in us if we obey his leading.

Who wants that kind of patience?

In the Classic the Imitation of Christ, Thomas a Kempis described patience in these words:

“He deserves not the name of patient who is only willing to suffer as much as he thinks proper, and for whom he pleases. The truly patient man asks (nothing) from whom he suffers, (whether) his superior, his equal, or his inferior.... But from whomever, or how much, or how often wrong is done to him, he accepts it all as from the hand of God, and counts it gain!”
Thomas a Kempis

That’s the kind of patience John the Baptist had.

That’s the kind of patience the Holy Spirit can enable in us if we obey his leading.

Who here wants that kind of patience?

My son Wesley is in his freshman year of college. He’s taking chemistry.

He had two years of chemistry in high school.

He excels at it.

He took his first test and it had four essay kind of questions at the end of the test and the directions said choose two and complete them and put an X over the two you do not choose.

He completed two questions and forgot to mark the two blank ones with an X.

So guess what the chemistry professor did?

He graded the two blank ones and gave him zero points for the two he completed.

School calls for patience.

School is a very long suffering kind of experience sometimes. Right?

There are some books written in the time between the Old and New Testament.

We call them intertestamental writings.

They are not considered as inspired by God, but they give some insights into culture and language from that era.

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1 Maccabees is one of the books.

In it the Romans advance to world domination is ascribed to their macrothumos – their patience.

In the book Synonyms of the NT, the author says macrothumos there is

“that Roman persistence which would never make peace under defeat.”

I hope that’s how my son responds to his science professor.

He doesn’t make peace under defeat.

How about you?

With whatever is just too difficult in life right now?

With school?

With someone who is treating you unfairly or unkind?

With your work?

With your spouse?

That’s the kind of patience John the Baptist had.

That’s the kind of patience the Holy Spirit can enable in us if we obey his leading.

Who here wants that kind of patience?

In one of the other intertestamental books called the Testament of Joseph Joseph, Jacob's son, the one from Egypt and Potipher's wife, tells how he was *macrothumasa* in all his temptations. And how *makrothumia* is a great medicine.

Biblical patience, the Holy Spirit steadfastness can also be seen as helping us to control our passion or our anger. It is medicine for our temptation.

It seems that someone who could use a little patience in this way is Lindsay Lohan.

I haven't walked in her shoes and apologize for judging, but she just got accused of punching someone in the face at 5 am in a club.

She can't control her anger.

She doesn't seem to want to control a lot of her actions and desires and tempers.

That's the kind of patience John the Baptist had.

That's the kind of patience the Holy Spirit can enable in us if we obey his leading.

Who here wants that kind of patience?

God calls us to have patience and be patient.

Ephesians 4:2

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

1 Thessalonians 5:14

And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

Colossians 3:12

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Colossians 1:10-11

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience.

All of these come from the *makrothumos*.

That's the kind of patience John the Baptist had.

That's the kind of patience the Holy Spirit can enable in us if we obey his leading.

Who here wants that kind of patience?

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Last one.

According to a traditional Hebrew story, Abraham was sitting outside his tent one evening when he saw an old man, weary from age and journey, coming toward him. Abraham rushed out, greeted him, and then invited him into his tent. There he washed the old man's feet and gave him food and drink.

The old man immediately began eating without saying any prayer or blessing. So Abraham asked him, "Don't you worship God?"

The old traveler replied, "I worship fire only and reverence no other god."

When he heard this, Abraham became incensed, grabbed the old man by the shoulders, and threw him out his tent into the cold night air.

When the old man had departed, God called to his friend Abraham and asked where the stranger was. Abraham replied, "I forced him out because he did not worship you."

God answered, "I have suffered him these 80 years although he dishonors me. Could you not endure him one night?"

That's the kind of patience John the Baptist had.

That's the kind of patience the Holy Spirit can enable in us if we obey his leading.

Who here wants that kind of patience?

Title slide – The Spirit of Christmas

Let's pray