

Symbols & Emblems of the Holy Spirit

Concord Community Church

June 2, 2024

The Holy Spirit as a Dove



Bible readings: Genesis 8:6-12; Gen15:7-14, Matt 3:16-17; John 1:32-34

Introduction:

In religion, external objects were used to symbolise the presence of God, in representative or conventional manner. For example, the rainbow was accepted as the assurance that God's wrath had passed and that He would remember His covenant. In the New Testament, symbols are represented in the things that Jesus did or spoke such as when He took the bread and grape juice and gave them to the disciples in Luke 22:19-20. It reads "And He took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to them, saying "This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."

In this pericope (Bible passage), Jesus was not simply exhorting them to good fellowship, but giving them a sacrament by which they could symbolise His presence eternally with His Church. As we study the Bible, we would soon discover that it contains the mind & will of God as communicated to humans in everyday language that they can readily understand. By symbols & metaphors (figure of speech) it pleases God to reveal Himself to our hearts. Types, parables, symbols & emblems illustrate the work of the Father, Son, and the Spirit as well as the Bible's own nature and ministry. Here is a list of few symbolic objects, symbolic creatures, and symbolic actions.

Symbolic Objects:

The rainbow: a symbol of God's covenant (Gen 9:13; Eze 1:28; Rev 4:3)

A stairway: a symbol of the way to God (Gen 28:11-13; Jn 1:51)

Thunder, lightning, cloud, and smoke: symbol of God's majesty (Ex 19:16-18; Ps 97:2 & 4; Rev 4:5; 8:5 ;11:19)

The pillar of cloud & fire: a symbol of guidance (Ex 13:21)

Dry bones: a symbol of spiritual death (Eze 37:1-2, 11)

White hair: a symbol of wisdom (Dan 7:9; Rev 1:14)

A signet ring: a symbol of authority (Est 8:10; Hag 2:23)

A sceptre: a symbol of God's rule (Ps 2:9; Rev 2:27 & 19:15)

Grass: a symbol of human frailty (Ps 90:5-6; 1-Peter 1:24)

Symbolic Creatures:

The serpent: a symbol of Satan (Gen 3:1; Rev 12:9 & 20:1-3)

Locusts: a symbol of God's judgment (Ex 10:12; Joel 1:4; Rev 9:3)

Beasts: a symbol of earthly kingdoms (Da 7:2-7, 17 & 8: 20-22)

A Dove: a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10; Lk 3:22)

A Lamb: a symbol of Jesus Christ's sacrifice (Rev 5:6)

Symbolic Actions:

Breaking of jar: a symbol of the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer 19:10-11)

The cursing of a fig-tree: a symbol of judgement (Mt 21:18-19; Mk 11:12-14)

Washing hands: a symbol of innocence (Mt 27:24)

Baptism: a symbol of salvation in Jesus Christ (Ac 22:16; Ro6:3-4; 1Pe3:21)

The Lord's Supper: a symbol of union with Christ (Mt 26:26-29; Lk 22:19-20; 1-Co1:23-26)

Anointing: a symbol of empowering by God's Spirit (1Sa16:13; Lk 4:18; Isa 61:1)

Tearing garments: a symbol of anger & sorrow (Ge 37:29,34; Jos 7:6)

Lifting of hands: a symbol of prayer (Ps63:4; 1Ti 2:8)

Covering of head: a symbol of submission (1Co 11:3-10)

Spitting: a symbol of contempt (Isa 50:6; Mt26:67; Mk14:65)

Now let's explore the symbolism of the Holy Spirit as a dove, a profound image that appears in several key moments throughout the Bible. This gentle and powerful symbol reveals much about the character and work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

I. The Holy Spirit Descending as a Dove (Matthew 3:16-17)

- **Context:** At Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, the heavens opened, and the Spirit of God descended like a dove and alighted on Jesus. A voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."
- **Symbolism of the Dove:** The dove represents purity, peace, and gentleness. The Holy Spirit coming as a dove signifies the purity and holiness of Jesus, His peaceful mission, and the gentle yet powerful nature of the Spirit's work.

- **Application:** The same Spirit that descended on Jesus at His baptism is available to us. We are called to live lives of purity, peace, and gentleness, embodying the characteristics of the Holy Spirit.

II. The Dove in the Story of Noah (Genesis 8:6-12)

- **Context:** After the flood, Noah sent out a dove to see if the waters had receded. The dove returned with an olive leaf, signalling that the earth was becoming habitable again.
- **Symbolism of the Dove and Olive Leaf:** The dove with the olive leaf represents hope, new beginnings, and God's peace after judgment.
- **Application:** The Holy Spirit brings us hope and new beginnings. No matter our past, the Spirit offers us a fresh start and guides us towards God's peace.

III. The Gentle Servant (Isaiah 42:1-2)

- **Context:** This prophecy describes the Messiah as a gentle servant, filled with the Spirit, who will bring justice without shouting or raising His voice.
- **Symbolism of Gentleness:** The dove's gentle nature reflects the Spirit's work in Jesus' ministry, characterized by compassion, humility, and a quiet strength.
- **Application:** We are called to reflect the gentleness of the Spirit in our interactions with others. Our mission, like Jesus', is to bring justice, peace, and healing without harshness or violence.

IV. The Baptism of Jesus (John 1:32-34)

- **Context:** John the Baptist testified that he saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Jesus. This was a sign that Jesus is the Son of God.
- **Significance of Remaining:** The Spirit not only descended but remained on Jesus, signifying the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in His life and ministry.
- **Application:** As believers, the Holy Spirit resides within us permanently. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, called to live lives that reflect His presence and power.

Conclusion: The imagery of the Holy Spirit as a dove is rich with meaning. It speaks of purity, peace, hope, new beginnings, gentleness, and the abiding presence of God. Let us invite the Holy Spirit to fill us, guide us and empower us with His attributes, and mentor us in our daily walk with Christ.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Help us to embody the purity, peace, and gentleness of the Spirit in our lives. May we be instruments of Your peace and bearers of hope in this world. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.