

SCRIPTURE



How the Spirit Acts

In the sacrament of confirmation a bishop seals the Christian with the gift of the Spirit of God. The Spirit who acts in us is the same Spirit who in the beginning stirs nothingness into life. This is the same Spirit who raises up leaders and speaks through prophets in Israel and who moves Jesus to begin his mission.

With new brainpower in the high school years comes increasing ability to name our experience. We put experiences and goals into words. What we can't put into words we may be unaware is happening. The work of finding words to describe our experiences—of naming our feelings, longings, gifts, and dreams—goes on throughout our lives.

The Old and New Testaments hold memories of how the Spirit has acted in the lives of our ancestors in faith. We inherit their stories to help us name the Spirit's activity in us.

From our ancestor Jacob we learn that we must wrestle with God and

struggle with ourselves to become the persons we want to be.

Jacob is a younger twin with no right to inherit his father's land or receive his blessing. But Jacob is shrewd. He gets his twin, Esau, to sell his birthright for a meal of lentil stew. Later with his mother's help Jacob tricks his nearly blind father into blessing him instead of Esau. Jacob's name means *he supplants, he tricks*.

Jacob goes north to find a wife. He sees a young woman named Rachel, bringing her father's sheep to a well. To marry her, Jacob works for Rachel's father seven years. But the trickster gets tricked. Rachel's father gives Jacob her older sister Leah to marry and demands that Jacob work seven more years to marry Rachel.

Jacob has twelve sons and a daughter with his wives Leah and Rachel and their serving women, Bilhah and Zilpah.

To support his large family, Jacob tricks his father-in-law. As wages, Jacob asks for the spotted and striped goats and the black sheep. Then he carefully breeds the flocks so his animals multiply and grow strong.

When God urges Jacob in a dream to return to his home in the south with all his flocks, he sets out. His father-in-law chases

Jacob and accuses him of stealing his daughters and flocks. Jacob insists he has worked 20 years for all he has. They work out a peaceful covenant.

Jacob must still face his brother. Messengers bring news that Esau is coming with 400 men. Jacob prays and reminds God, "You said, 'Return to your country.' ...Deliver me from the hand of my brother." Jacob sends droves of sheep ahead as gifts to his brother and has his family cross the river to camp for the night. Then:

Jacob was left alone. A man wrestled with him until daybreak.

When the man saw that he did not prevail against

Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and

Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled

with him. Then he said,

"Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said,

"I will not let you go unless you bless me."

So he said to him, "What is your name?"

And he said, "Jacob."

Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel,

for you have striven with God and with humans and

have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your

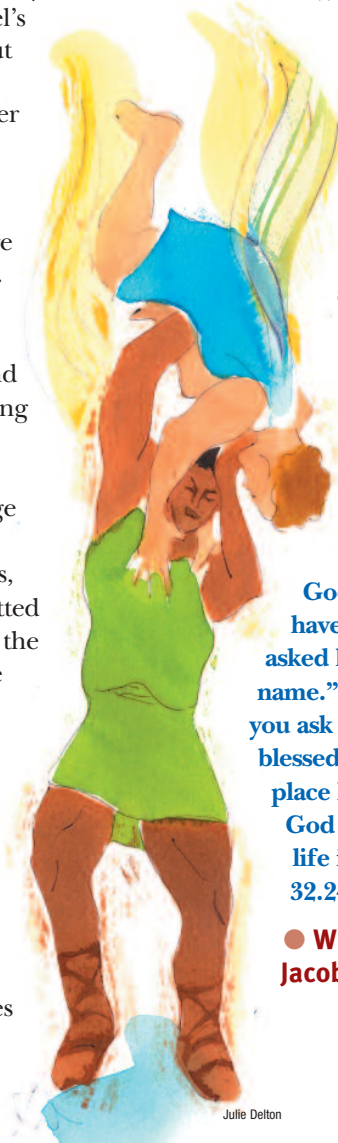
name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he

blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "I have seen

God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (Genesis

32.24-30).

● **What does this story about Jacob tell you about yourself?**



The HOLY SPIRIT...

Raises UP Leaders

When the judge Samuel anoints the shepherd boy David with oil to make him Israel's king, "The Spirit of God came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16.13-14). David leads his people in battle and worship, unites the 12 tribes, writes psalms of praise we still pray, and repents when he sins. God promises to be with David's descendants as a royal house forever (2 Samuel 7.9-17).

None of his descendants reign as mightily in the Spirit as David. The prophet Isaiah laments the faithless rulers of his day. He also trusts God will never give up on Israel but will someday send a leader greater than David—the messiah. The Spirit will anoint this leader with gifts for making wise and fair decisions.

The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and courage, the spirit of knowledge and awe in God's presence. His delight shall be awe in God's presence.

Isaiah 11.1-3



In the sacrament of confirmation the bishop prays that these same seven gifts of the Spirit will come upon each Christian. These gifts help us name and discern the stirrings of the Spirit within our spirits; they help us make wise and fair decisions.

Read below about each of the Spirit's seven gifts. Then think of a challenge you face in your life, such as choosing what college to attend or helping your class or youth group deal with an issue. Write in the spaces ways each gift of the Spirit can help you.



Wisdom is a gift people build up through practical experience. A wise person knows what to do in many situations and can place happenings in the big picture. A wise believer sees the people and events of human history fitting together in the large plan of God's love for us.

How can the gift of wisdom help me?



Understanding is the gift of thinking and reflecting on experience. People with understanding think things through for themselves and act on their experience and insights.

The gift of understanding?



Right Judgment is a willingness to consider the insights and understandings of others about a problem and to plan with them.

The gift of right judgment?



Courage is the strength to do what isn't always easy, to stand up for the unpopular, to speak the truth, to put one's self on the line to do what is right.

The gift of courage?



Knowledge is a gift for seeking out the facts and information necessary to make wise and fair decisions and for developing practical and technical expertise.

The gift of knowledge?



Reverence is a gift for honoring God and others. The pious person reveres and worships God. The pious person respects every neighbor with the respect we want for ourselves.

The gift of reverence?



Awe in God's Presence is the gift of revering God, not fearing God. It is the gift of awe at God's life-giving and life-sustaining presence in creation and in us.

The gift of awe in God's presence?

Anoints Jesus for Ministry

In Mark's gospel the Spirit rips open the heaven to come upon Jesus at his baptism. A voice from heaven claims Jesus is "my Son." This scene pictures Jesus blessed with the Spirit and beloved by God. It shows us Jesus living in communion with God. In Jesus God becomes one of us to make known with a human heart and human hands that God is love.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn open and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. A voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Mark 1.9-11

The baptism story has three symbols—a tear in the heavens, a dove, and a voice. A symbol points to something else, making visible an invisible reality. A flag symbolizes the spirit of the people of a country.

● **What do you think the tear symbolizes? The dove? The voice?**

Mark's gospel echoes stories from Israel's holy writings to express who Jesus is.

● **See 2 Samuel 7.14 and Psalm 2.7-9 to find whom God addresses as "my son." See Genesis 22.2 to find a beloved son. How is Jesus like this son?**

● **See Isaiah 42.1 to find someone in whom God is well pleased. If Jesus is like this person, who is he?**



Anoints Jesus for Prophecy

In his gospel Luke sees the Spirit of God at work in Jesus from beginning to end. In Luke's first chapter Mary asks the angel how she will conceive a child when she knows no man. The angel answers, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1.35). Only Luke has Jesus say as he dies on the cross, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23.46).

In chapter four Luke pictures Jesus as God's prophet anointed to bring good news to the people. In this scene Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah and then identifies himself as the one who fulfills these words—

When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Spirit has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of the God's favor."

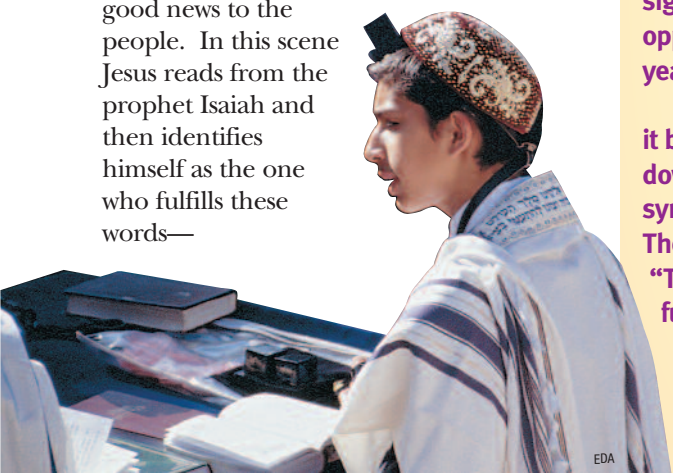
He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Luke 4.16-21

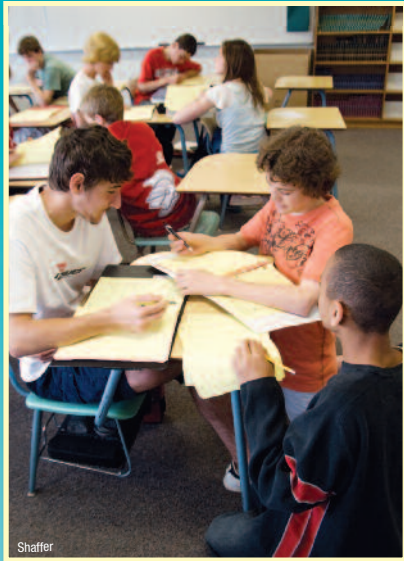


The Spirit acts in Jesus to bring the poor good news. If the Spirit acts in us the same way, the Spirit will urge us to identify people who need healing and justice and respond to them.

● **How can I expect the Spirit will act in me?**



Name Ways the SPIRIT Acts in Us



◆ What is an insight your classmates or family have appreciated you sharing?



◆ What is one way someone you know is held captive, for example, by drugs or fear or not knowing a language? What is one way you can help?



◆ What is one way you can be a prophet who works to end an oppression, such as child labor?

◆ What is one way you can bring good news to someone who is poor?

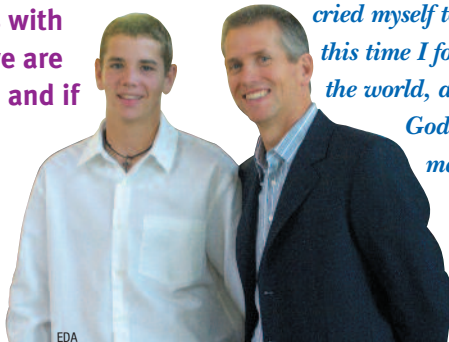


Who Are We?

The apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Rome about how the Spirit cries out in them. Read Romans 8.14-17 below. Then read Chris Morris's story at right.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!", it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

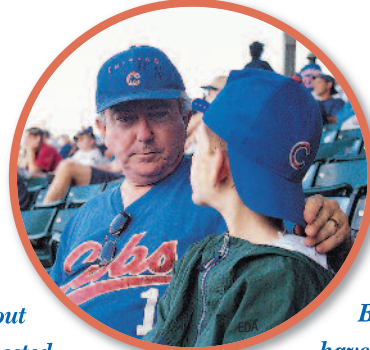
Romans 8.14-17



"My dad left when my mother was pregnant with me. My scout master, my pastor, friends of the family were role models for me, but you can't replace the father figure. I started to bond with my scout master, and I know he respected and liked me, but when his own son came around, I saw how differently he treated him. I had to deal with it.

"For nine months when I was 14, I cried myself to sleep every night. In this time I found the best father in the world, and that's Jesus Christ, God. I've turned to him many times.

"I went to Boy Scouts every Monday night. The guys in the troop might not have really



liked me, but they treated me as part of the group. I changed. A year later I had 10,000 friends. But I would not

have survived without God. I put my life in his hands.

"It's amazing how God works in my life. For some reason I told my weightlifting partner about my crisis at 14. It turns out that he was going through almost the exact same thing. His parents were both sick, and he had no one to talk to."

● How is what Paul writes to the Romans like Chris's experience? Like your own?