

Breath of life

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With every cycle of our respiratory systems, we are sustained by the same intimate inspiration God exhaled into Adam's muddy lungs. That breath permeates every cell of our being, nose to toes, invigorating our bodies and minds and souls until it is ready to be released, silently, from the same nostrils through which it came.

This is as ordinary as oxygen and carbon dioxide, and as extraordinary as spirit and miracle. We rarely even think about it, this involuntary and essential process, unless our breath is shortened by illness or atmosphere. Then we remember again that without the breath of life, we perish.

I lost count of how many nights I, as a new mother, tiptoed into the nursery to peer over the edge of the crib for reassurance. I waited until my eyes adjusted to the darkness well enough to see the telltale signs of life: my daughter's tiny chest, rising and falling.

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends upon the believers with flourish and pizzazz. It is a gift from God to the church on the occasion of her birth; it is, after all, the gift that gives the church life. And just as a baby wails in surprise at his first breath, the newborn church inhales deeply of that intoxicating spirit and lets out a resounding holler. Tongues of fire guide the people's awestruck tongues to speak in the languages of every nation under heaven.

The believers are no longer cloistered, set apart from the world. They are thrust into the public, equipped with the divine power to communicate the gospel with anyone and everyone who needs to hear it. They are suddenly *church*: people with a

mission, unified and empowered by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

I have another baby now, and despite promises that motherhood would be less fraught the second time around, I still find myself hovering, night after night, for a sigh or tremble to prove that she continues to breathe.

Perhaps God too checks in on the church like a nervous mother, searching for a sign of vitality. With tender breath and gusting winds, God sends the Spirit to dwell among us, to give the church life and purpose. Are we still praying? Are we faithfully sharing the good news with our actions and our words? Are we so enthusiastic in our desire to speak the name of Jesus Christ that tongues of flames dance over our heads and the neighbors wonder if we might not be drunk?

The Holy Spirit is every bit as real and wild and present for us as it was for those early Christians. Are we still filling our lungs and our lives with it?