SCRIPTURAL SYMBOLS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Great care must be used where symbols are involved. Scriptural context will determine whether a tree is representative of something else...or just a tree. It is also said by some that when multiple symbols are used to represent one thing/person, the differing symbols each relay a different quality.

For example:  **Christ**  
Tree – life  
Water – cleansing, renewal  
Rock – stability  
Bread – sustenance  
Shepherd – protector & provider

Likewise, the Holy Spirit is also represented in a variety of ways throughout Scripture.

**MOST COMMON SYMBOLS**

**DOVE – Gentility, Devotion, Peace, Innocence**  
One of the most quickly identified symbols of the Holy Spirit because of its specific tie to Jesus’ baptism, there may be additional reasons why this symbol is used to represent the Spirit. Doves are known as the “sheep of the bird world” because of their caring and soft disposition. Doves are devoted to their mates, and when domesticated, devotedly return to their owners. It could be said that the dove’s demonstration of gentility and devotion is similar to the Spirit’s attitude toward us.

Interestingly, doves were also used for sacrifice in the tabernacle, often named first before other birds. When the dove is listed as an option for sacrifice, it is usually for those who cannot provide the required larger sacrifice. As Jesus is the “Lamb of God” to symbolize His perfect, ultimate and atoning sacrifice, so the Holy Spirit is the “Dove of God” as a reminder that all – rich, middle class, or poor -- may approach the Almighty God to sacrifice praise, thanksgiving or receive forgiveness of sin.


**WIND/BREATHE – Invisible Presence, Power, Breath of Life**  
This symbol is fitting because “rauch” (Hebrew) and “pneuma” (Greek) both mean wind or breath. Both words are used for the Spirit throughout the Bible.

On the day of Pentecost, it was the sound of a mighty rushing wind as the Spirit filled the upper room and some theologians believe that the Spirit moving upon the face of the waters was akin to wind.

It was the breath of God that brought Adam to life and Jesus breathing upon the disciples that allowed them to receive the Holy Spirit

**WATER – Refreshing, Cleansing, Satisfaction, Fertilization**

The Holy Spirit is often described in the form of rain, dew, rivers and springs. Perhaps most descriptive of His cleansing and renewing work in us, the Spirit within should be allowed to overflow to the world around us. Likewise, the work of the Spirit is often compared to taking what was once desert and turning it into fertile land, with water being the key for that transformation.


**FIRE – Purifying, Refining, Presence & Power**

Fire leads to two things: destruction and/or purification. You'll see in Scripture that the same is true of the Holy Spirit, for He brings both destruction and purification in the believer’s life – destruction of worldly flesh and purification of the soul.

In the Bible, fire is often used to describe the power and presence of God. It was a pillar of fire by night that led the nation of Israel in the wilderness. God called to Moses from a burning bush. Fire consumed the animal sacrifices before the Lord. Again, it may be easy to state that fire is just representative of God, but the Bible also has direct connections between fire and the Holy Spirit.


**OIL – Fuel, Anointing, Healing**

Oil had multiple purposes in Biblical times, just as it does today. Oil was the fuel for lanterns, thus the source of light. Wounds were healed through the application of oil. Oil was used to pour on people being anointed and commissioned to positions of leadership and spiritual work.


**WINE – Joy, Uninhibitedness**

Though there are fewer symbolic references to the Spirit as wine, it is of note that on the day of Pentecost, those in the upper room were accused of being drunk on “new wine.” A close analogy is also given when Paul instructs to cease being drunk with wine, but rather filled with the Spirit.

While the world seeks stimulation and merriment from alcohol, it is the Holy Spirit who brings the Christian true joyfulness from the Spirit of God and enhancement of his/her natural abilities. Where alcohol provides a temporary lift followed by a let-down, the Christian’s life through the Holy Spirit can be inspired without desperation.

LESSER-RECOGNIZED SYMBOLS

CLOUD/GLORY – Presence
This symbol could easily be argued as representing God Himself rather than the Holy Spirit. But because the presence of God is often displayed through workings of the Holy Spirit, and the common references to fire and cloud together in the Old Testament, I believe the presence of the Holy Spirit is also represented. The New Testament uses the word “glory” more to describe a tangible presence of God, explaining why I’ve combined the two here.


CLOTHING
There is an interesting correlation between Genesis and Galatians referring to clothing, which is clearly symbolic of Jesus Christ, but also indirectly the Holy Spirit.

*Genesis 2:25
Genesis 3:8-11
Genesis 3:21

*Galatians 3:27
See also Romans 13:13*