

Sunday, March 1, 2026

Second Sunday in Lent

John 3:1-17

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

My friends,

Today in our Gospel Reading,
Nicodemus comes at night.

Who is this Nicodemus?

He's a Pharisee.
A ruler of the Jews.
He's learned.
He's the 'teacher of Israel.'
He's respected.
He's moral.
He's properly religious.

And yet, Jesus tells him something shocking.

*"Truly, truly, I say to you,
unless one is born again
[—from above—]
he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3).*

All that Nicodemus has and is isn't enough.

He must be born again.
Born from above in water and the Spirit.
That's the only way to enter God's kingdom.

You can't enter through improvement.

Instruction.
Effort.
Goodwill.
Or Good intentions.

Born.

Born again.
 Born from above.
 Born of water and the Spirit.
 That's the only way.

Today,

we'll see why a new birth is necessary,
 how God brings it about,
 and what it gives.

I. Why New Birth is Necessary

My friends,

Nicodemus represents the best of the best.

A Pharisee.
 A ruler.
 A teacher of Israel.

If anyone could enter God's Kingdom by effort,
 it would be someone like him.
 But Jesus says no.

Our natural birth is not neutral.

We do not enter the world with an innocently blank slate.
 We are born into sin and death.

Scripture is clear:

*"Surely I was sinful at birth,
 sinful from the time my mother conceived me."* (Psalm 51:5)

*"As for you,
 you were dead
 in your transgressions and sins."* (Ephesians 2:1)

God's Law only *"brings wrath."* (Romans 4:15).

*"For all have sinned
 and fall short
 of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23).

And so,
we can only
be "*justified freely*
by [God's] grace
through the redemption
that came by Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:24)

We are not just born spiritually sick.
We are born spiritually dead.

Dead people do not revive themselves.
I've seen Bondi Rescue.
And I tell you,
drowned people do not give themselves CPR.

Dead people do not revive themselves.
Dead people do not make decisions towards and for God.
Dead people cannot see the kingdom.

And we are born stone-cold dead.
Already ruined when we step from the womb.
The first birth is no good.
The birth from below is filled with sin.

That is why Jesus says:
"Unless one is born again/from above
*he **cannot** see the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3).
Not "might not."
But "cannot."

Because all your religious efforts cannot fix this.
Nicodemus had theology.
Morality.
Discipline.
Religious knowledge.

But in his flesh,
Nicodemus couldn't see where these things pointed.
They pointed to Jesus.

Information in and of itself cannot undo Adam's fall.
Striving to obey the Law
cannot outweigh your guilt.

We inherit sin.
We inherit condemnation.
We inherit death.
We are, by nature, by birth,
children of wrath.

We need a new inheritance.
We need a new birth.
We need life.

This is the Law:
There is no resource within you...
No moral effort...
No spiritual striving...
That can bring you into God's kingdom.

Sinful flesh gives birth to sinfulness.
And sin cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

II. How God Gives New Birth

And therefore, my friends,
 Jesus brings a new birth by the Holy Spirit.
 Where the first birth gave death,
 the second birth gives life.

Jesus says,
*"Truly, truly, I say to you,
 unless one is born
 of water and the Spirit,
 he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* (John 3:5).

This is not a metaphor.

God had already spoken of this birth of water and Spirit.
 God had already promised it in the Old Testament prophets.

*"I will sprinkle clean water on you,
 and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses...
 And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh
 and give you a heart of flesh.
 And I will put My Spirit within you..."* (Ezekiel 36:25–27).

*"For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
 and streams on the dry ground;
 I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring,
 and my blessing on your descendants."* (Isaiah 44:3)

Water and Spirit.

God acts.
 God washes with water.
 God pours out the Holy Spirit.
 God gives life.

*"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit,
 he cannot enter the kingdom of God."*

Jesus is speaking of Holy Baptism.

Holy Baptism is not human work.
 It is God's gracious work.
 It is not a human declaration.
 It is God's Word.
 Baptism is the washing of water with the Word. (Ephesians 5:26)
 Water and the Spirit.

Colossians 2:12 says,
*"you were buried
 with Christ
 in baptism.
 And in baptism
 you were also raised
 with Him..."* (Colossians 2:12).

Baptism unites you
 to Christ's death
 and resurrection.
 St. Peter says in his first epistle:
*"[The God and Father
 of our Lord Jesus Christ]
 has caused us
 to be **born again**
 to a living hope
 through the resurrection
 of Jesus Christ
 from the dead."* (1 Peter 1:3)

In Holy Baptism,
 your sins are washed away
 in the forgiveness of the Gospel.
 Your sinful nature was circumcised from you.
 The heart of stone was cut out.
 And you were made alive with God.
*"You were buried
 with [Christ] in baptism..."*

And you,

*who were dead in your trespasses
and the uncircumcision of your flesh,
God made alive together with Him,
having forgiven us all our trespasses." (Colossians 2:12–13)*

In Holy Baptism,

you received the Holy Spirit.

*"I will sprinkle clean water on you...
And I will put My Spirit within you..." (Ezekiel 36:25–27).*

*"And Peter said to them,
'Repent and be baptized
every one of you
in the name of Jesus Christ
for the forgiveness of your sins,
and you will receive
the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)*

*"For in one Spirit
we were all baptized
into one body...
and all were
made to drink
of one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:13).*

This is the birth from above.

This is the birth in the Spirit and water.

You did not cause your physical birth.

You do not cause your spiritual birth.

The Holy Spirit blows where He wills.

Through water and the Word,
He joins you to Christ's death and resurrection.
That is how sinners enter the kingdom.
Not by climbing upward.
But by being reborn from above.

And notice what Jesus says next:

*"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
so must the Son of Man be lifted up."* (John 3:14).

Baptism is not magic water.

Baptism delivers the power of Christ crucified.
It connects you to the cross.

In the wilderness,

the Israelites were dying from snake bites.
Those who looked to the bronze serpent lived.
Likewise,
Christ on the cross
gives life
to dying sinners
who believe.

In Baptism,

the benefits of the cross
are delivered to you.

You are born again into Christ's death.

Born again into His resurrection.

Born again into His righteousness.

III. What New Birth Gives (Results)

My friends,

Why does God give this new birth?

*"That whoever believes in Him
should not perish*

but have eternal life." (John 3:16).

Being born from above,
we are given faith.

The Spirit creates trust in Jesus.

And by faith in Jesus,
we have eternal life.

Newborn babies are born with faith in their parents.

Born in God,
we have faith in God our Father.

Salvation is not earned.

It is received by faith.

By trusting the love of our Heavenly Father given in Jesus.

Romans 4 says

that Abraham was justified by faith,
not works.

Faith does not earn.

Faith receives a gift.

Nicodemus had to learn this.

We must learn this.

You do not save yourself.

You do not choose God.

You do not cooperate your way into heaven.

You do not add to Christ.

You believe.

John 3:16 is not a sentimental slogan.

It is a rescue.

*"For God so loved the world,
that He gave His only Son,
that whoever believes
in Him
should not perish
but have eternal life."* (John 3:16).

For God so loved the world.

Not the righteous.

Not the prepared.

God loved the sin-cursed world.

Dead in sin.

Hostile to God.

Condemned already.

And yet:

"He gave His only Son."

Not to condemn.

But to save.

So fix your eyes on the Crucified One.

The Israelites looked

to the bronze serpent raised for them.

We look to Jesus,

raised for us.

We do not look to our worthiness.

We only have unworthiness.

So dying sinners,

with the sting of death in their veins,

have only one hope.

Dying sinners look to Jesus.

Dying sinners are baptized into Him.

And they do not perish.

They have everlasting life.

Faith fixes its eyes on:
The Son lifted up.
The shed Blood.
The promise spoken.

Whoever believes in Him has eternal life.
Not **will** have.
Has.
Already born from above.
Already belonging to the kingdom.

The new birth from above gives us eternal life.
It gives us the kingdom.
It gives us Jesus Christ.
Whoever believes in Him
has eternal life.

*

My friends,
Nicodemus came at night.
He came in secret.
He didn't want
to be seen going to Jesus.

But later,
Nicodemus will come in the daylight.
He will go boldly to Jesus' tomb,
bringing far too many pounds of spices to be ignored.
He will honour the holy body
of our Lord
with proper burial.

Nicodemus didn't understand everything.
But He looked to Jesus.
The Holy Spirit was at work.
The Holy Spirit brought him
to faith in the crucified Lord.

The Holy Spirit is at work here.

You were once born into sin,
death,
and condemnation.

But through the water and the Word,
you have been born again from above.

You are born from above into righteousness,
life,
and God's favour.

Therefore,

do not trust your effort.

Do not trust your emotions.

Do not trust your performance.

Trust the Son.

Look to the crucified One.

Look to the One lifted up for you.

*"For God did not send His Son
into the world to condemn the world,
but in order that
the world might be saved
through Him." (John 3:17)*

And

"whoever believes in Him

shall not perish

but have eternal life." (John 3:16).

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ
Jesus. Amen.*