

In the Name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit

One God Amen



The Gospel According to Saint John the Evangelist Chapter 3

1 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. **2** This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." **3** Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." **4** Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" **5** Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' **8** The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." **9** Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" **10** Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? **11** Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. **12** If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. **14** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. **16** For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. **17** For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. **18** He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. **19** And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. **20** For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. **21** But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." **22** After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. **23** Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. **24** For John had not yet been thrown into prison. **25** Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. **26** And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified--behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!" **27** John answered

and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. **28** You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' **29** He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. **30** He must increase, but I must decrease. **31** He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. **32** And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. **33** He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. **34** For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. **35** The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. **36** He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

General Interpretation:

Nicodemus, one of the Pharisees was impressed by the miracles and the wonders Jesus was doing. And as a Jew he rightly related Jesus' supernatural powers to His holiness and righteousness. But one thing Nicodemus felt about our Lord that was different than any of the other teachers or holy men he might have met; he knew that Jesus was somehow heavenly taught, from God Himself. and hence inquired on how to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus right away directed him to the only path that would lead to heaven; that is the new birth.

Nicodemus, however, was fixated on the earthly birth and hence was puzzled. Again, Jesus confirmed what He said before and explained further that the only way one could enter heaven is through this new birth. This matter is not for negotiation; just because one cannot understand how he can be born again does not mean it cannot be done, for the flesh understands what is for the flesh and the spiritual understands what is for the spirit.

Jesus gave an example of the wind when it blows; no one knows where it comes from and where it is going but that does not mean it does not blow. The same is true with the Holy Spirit, for through it along with water, one is born again.

Still Nicodemus was baffled and could not understand even the wind example. At this point, Jesus admonished Nicodemus for being a teacher of the Law who could not understand all the symbols of the new birth mentioned in the OT. Furthermore, he could not even comprehend the parable of the wind, let alone understanding the new birth. Accordingly, Jesus turned Nicodemus' eyes to His divine person and bluntly told him that no one can enter heaven except through the One who fills the heaven and earth with His divinity.

After Jesus pointing to His divinity, He started explaining the symbol in the Torah, which refers to Him and His crucifixion. Only through the cross and through the act of redemption one can have eternal life. Just as Moses lifted up the bronze serpent, so does the Son of Man must be lifted onto the cross, so that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.

Our Lord Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that belief in the Son of Man is essential to avoid condemnation. This was necessary as Nicodemus still was not aware to whom he

was speaking, so Jesus explained that He was the light coming to the world and those who accept and receive the Light would be honored.

John the Baptist's disciples dissension with Jesus Mission:

After talking with Nicodemus, Jesus and His disciples left for the land of Judea where He stayed for some time. His disciples started baptizing there and their work started attracting attention that the Baptist's disciples were unhappy that their master was losing his followers to Jesus. Apparently these disciples were other than those who left John for Jesus in chapter 1. However, John was honest with them and testified that Jesus is the real Bridegroom and that he was only a friend of Him. Then he went on to say that Jesus is the Son whom God sent to the world so that all who believe in Him would have everlasting life. John warned his disciples that he was merely from the earth but Jesus is from heaven and speaks heavenly words and to Him they should listen.

Spiritual Interpretation:

Nicodemus was a scholar in the Mosaic Law and was entrusted to teach and interpret God's rules and commandments. Yet, he did not feel ashamed to inquire and learn from someone who could be his son's age. He probably knew that nighttime was when he could be alone with Jesus and have Him all to himself.

He felt something that is different about Jesus and his teachings. He was taken by the signs and wonders he saw and heard about. The teachings were, as John witnessed, "the words of God" delivered with authority as if the deliverer is their owner, and in this he was correct. Jesus knew what was in Nicodemus' heart and addressed his worries right away through directing him to the new birth. Unfortunately though, Nicodemus' mind was tangled with earthly matters that he could not understand the idea of the new birth. He represents the human nature that is deep rooted in its carnal lusts that in no way could fly along with the spirit towards its heavenly origin. And for that reason Jesus said to Nicodemus (in verse 6): "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The Son of man came to the world to renew the human nature and lift it up to heaven through water and the Holy Spirit.

It is clear from the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus that the three persons of the Holy Trinity are in agreement to recreating man again:

- The Father sent the Son so that whoever believes in Him should have everlasting life. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (16,17)
- The Son is willing to be lifted up onto the Cross to bestow life to man. "Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (14,15)
- The Spirit renews man's creation "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (5,6)

The task of each person of the Holy Trinity echoes the creation of Adam in Genesis when the three persons said "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). It was His will to create us to live forever with Him. But when sin interfered and death overcame man, the Holy Trinity came to the rescue; to restore man's everlasting life. This what Jesus explained to Nicodemus saying: "We speak what We know and testify what We have seen" (verse 11). New birth is essential to receiving everlasting life and it is the economy by which the Holy Trinity created mankind once again.

John the Baptist's disciples dissension with Jesus Mission:

John the Baptist's disciple were jealous that their master was losing his audience to another, just like the Pharisees said: "Look, the world has gone after Him" (John `12:19). They saw from afar the wedding in which the bride, or the soul, is going after her bridegroom, her creator, following Him and forgetting what the daughters of Jerusalem said: "We will run after You" (Song of Solomon (1:4). They looked at the wedding from afar and refused to enter, their ego stood in the way. They cared more for their status than for their salvation and even resisted their teacher's testimony.

John, on the other hand, with all humbleness exalted Jesus, for he cared for nothing of this material world. He knew exactly what his mission was and executed it honestly. In a beautiful hymn he compared himself to Jesus saying:

<u>Jesus</u>	<u>John</u>
<i>The Truth</i>	<i>Witness to the Truth</i>
<i>The Bridegroom</i>	<i>Friend of the Bridegroom</i>
<i>Must increase</i>	<i>Must decrease</i>
<i>Heavenly</i>	<i>Earthly</i>

Then he warned those who resisted the Bridegroom saying: "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (verse 36)

Word Meaning:

- *Rabbi:*
Means "teacher" and literally "great one"
- *Aenon:*
Is a Greek word coming from a Hebrew term "ay-yin". It means "spring" or "natural fountain", and was a place near Salem (or Salim, or Salamias) where John the Baptist was baptizing (John 3:23).

Spiritual life Applications

This whole chapter revolves around the new birth that the Son of God came to the world to offer. Jesus told Nicodemus plainly that without this new birth, one shall not enter the kingdom of God. Those of us who are baptized would not have a problem with the new birth condition having received baptism as infants.

However, reading this chapter closely we would find an obstacle that had prevented mankind since creation to be with Him. This is the self ego which if prevails, man starts worshipping himself rather than God.

In this chapter, we see two striking different personalities, Nicodemus and the disciples of John the Baptist:

<u>Nicodemus</u>	<u>The Baptist's disciples</u>
<i>Ruler of the Jews and teacher of Israel</i>	<i>Disciples to John the Baptist</i>
<i>Came to the Bridegroom</i>	<i>Refused to associate with the Bridegroom</i>
<i>Acknowledged Jesus' authority</i>	<i>Denied Jesus' mission</i>
<i>Praised Jesus</i>	<i>Accused Jesus</i>
<i>Sought to learn from Jesus</i>	<i>Rejected to have Jesus as their master</i>
<i>Was convinced by what he saw</i>	<i>Discarded the Baptist's witness</i>
<i>Looked for the Kingdom of Heaven</i>	<i>Preferred the Mosaic Law</i>

Let us be aware of our ego and not let it stand in the way between us and Christ for we cannot worship two gods. It was the ego that destroyed Satan and after that Adam. We need to always be aware that Satan uses the ego to prevent us from coming to Christ as he did with mankind since the beginning, and as he did here with the disciples.

The Baptist's disciples were afraid that their master was losing his status in Israel and therefore their own status. Nicodemus on the other hand, though he was a scholar in the Torah and was a teacher of Israel, he knew he was still lacking something and sought to fulfill it.

Let us not forget that all the heretics that rose against the Church were driven by their ego; refusing to listen but only to themselves. No matter how knowledgeable we are, or how many academic degrees we may hold, humility is the key to heaven "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3).

Theological Aspects

- *Roles of the Holy Trinity in our salvation*

In this chapter we can see clearly the role of each of the persons of the Holy Trinity as explained in the Spiritual Interpretation section.

- *Necessity of belief in the Son of God to everlasting life*
- *Necessity of Baptism to entering the kingdom of heaven*
- *Son of Man is God (Jesus words to Nicodemus and John the Baptist testimony)*

Church life Application

- *The Orthodox Church practices baptism as a sacrament, which a member must undertake and is one of four sacrament essential for salvation.*
- *The Church of Alexandria considers Nicodemus a saint and mentions him in her Synexarium and her hymns.*
- *The first part of this chapter is read during the administration of baptism.*

Early Christian Writers:

Following is just an example of how the early Christian Writers reflected and interpreted the Holy Bible. The following is just a sample of what John Chrysostom wrote regarding the fourth verse.

"Can a man," he says, "enter into his mother's womb, and be born?"

"Do you see how when one commits spiritual things to his own reasoning, he speaks ridiculously, seems to be trifling, or to be drunken, when he pries into what has been said beyond what seems good to God, and admits not the submission of faith? Nicodemus heard of the spiritual Birth, yet perceived it not as spiritual, but dragged down the words to the lowness of the flesh, and made a doctrine so great and high depend upon physical consequence. And so he invents frivolities, and ridiculous difficulties. Wherefore Paul said, "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit." (1 Cor. 2:14) Yet even in this he preserved his reverence for Christ, for he did not mock at what had been said, but, deeming it impossible, held his peace. There were two difficulties; a Birth of this kind, and the Kingdom; for neither had the name of the Kingdom ever been heard among the Jews, nor of a Birth like this. But he stops for a while at the first, which most astonished his mind.

Let us then, knowing this, not enquire into things relating to God by reasoning, nor bring heavenly matters under the rule of earthly consequences, nor subject them to the necessity of nature; but let us think of all reverently, believing as the Scriptures have said; for the busy and curious person gains nothing, and besides not finding what he seeks, shall suffer extreme punishment. You have heard, that (the Father) begat (the Son): believe what you have heard; but do ask not, "How," and so take away the Generation; to do so would be extreme folly. For if this man, because, on hearing of a Generation, not that ineffable Generation, but this which is by grace, he conceived nothing great concerning it, but human and earthly thoughts, was therefore darkened and in doubt, what punishment must they deserve, who are busy and curious about that most awful Generation, which transcends all reason and intellect? For nothing causes such dizziness as human reasoning, all whose words are of earth, and which cannot endure to be enlightened from above. Earthly reasoning are full of mud, and therefore need we streams from heaven, that when the mud has settled, the clearer portion may rise and mingle with the heavenly lessons; and this comes to pass, when we present an honest soul and an upright life. For certainly it is possible for the intellect to be darkened, not only by unseasonable curiosity, but also by corrupt manners; wherefore Paul has said to the Corinthians, "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto you

were not able to bear it, neither yet now are you able, for you are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal?" (1 Cor. 3: 2) And also in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and in many places, one may see Paul asserting that this is the cause of evil doctrines; for that the soul possessed by passions cannot behold anything great or noble, but as if darkened by a sort of film suffers most grievous dim sightedness.

Let us then cleanse ourselves, let us kindle the light of knowledge, let us not sow among thorns. What the thorns are, you know, though we tell you not; for often you have heard Christ call the cares of this present life, and the deceitfulness of riches, by this name. (Matt. 13:22) And with reason. For as thorns are unfruitful, so are these things; as thorns tear those that handle them, so do these passions; as thorns are readily caught by the fire, and hateful by the husbandman, so too are the things of the world; as in thorns, wild beasts, and snakes, and scorpions hide themselves, so do they in the deceitfulness of riches. But let us kindle the fire of the Spirit, that we may consume the thorns, and drive away the beasts, and make the field clear for the husbandman; and after cleansing it, let us water it with the streams of the Spirit, let us plant the fruitful olive, that most kindly of trees, the evergreen, the light-giving, the nutritious, the wholesome. All these qualities has almsgiving, which is, as it were, a seal on those that possess it. This plant not even death when it comes causes to wither, but ever it stands enlightening the mind, feeding the sinews of the soul, and rendering its strength mightier. And if we constantly possess it, we shall be able with confidence to behold the Bridegroom, and to enter into the bridal chamber; to which may we all attain, through the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, for ever and ever. Amen."