

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 3:1-16

***"The Son of Man"***

Today's Holy Gospel introduces us to an important man – one who would play a significant role after the death of Jesus. His name is Nicodemus – an orthodox member of the Sanhedrin, or the ruling party of the Temple in Jerusalem. Nicodemus was an important Jew, a respected teacher and religious leader – who did not want to jeopardize his position by getting caught talking to Jesus, because the High Priest and the Pharisees were so opposed to Jesus that they wouldn't take kindly to one of the Temple leaders going to talk privately with Jesus, and so Nicodemus snuck out at night to come and talk with Jesus. He had questions that he felt only Jesus could answer. He was so transformed by His time with Jesus that he and another leader of the Temple, Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus down from His cross so that He could be prepared for burial. It was these two men who laid Jesus in Joseph of Arimathea's garden tomb to rest.

You may have heard the old expression "born with a silver spoon in his or her mouth." This usually refers to someone being born into a wealthy or very fortunate family – usually one with an inheritance – what might be referred to as a "birthright." The Judaism that Nicodemus and Jesus both knew had a good deal to do with being born into the right family. What mattered most was being a child of Abraham! Of course, there were other things mattered too, but being from the family of Father Abraham was the basic necessity. Now, Jesus is saying, God is starting a new family in which this ordinary birth isn't enough. You need to be born all over again, born 'a second time.' The new birth Jesus is talking about is the same thing that has been spoken of in John 1:33 where John the Baptist said "*I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'*" 'Water and spirit' here must mean the double baptism: baptism in water, which brings people into the kingdom-movement begun by John the Baptist and continued by Jesus' disciples, and "baptism in the spirit," the new life, bubbling up from within, that Jesus offers, which is the main thing that the New Testament is about. Having a relationship with Jesus that transforms.

These two baptisms are closely joined. This double-sided new birth, which brings you into the visible community of Jesus' followers (water-baptism) and gives you the new life of the spirit welling up like a spring of water inside you (spirit-baptism), was now required for membership in God's kingdom. The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17 a clear example of this new birth: "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*"

I ask you to please open your pew Bibles to page 1650 – to John Chapter 3 so that we can examine these important verses together. As Jesus says in verse 3, without it you can't even see God's kingdom; Jesus replied "*Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.*" The Spirit of God is on the move, like a fresh spring breeze. Look at verse 8 "*the wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes*

*from or where it is going.*” The word for ‘wind’, in both Hebrew and Greek, is the same word you would use for ‘spirit’), and no human family, tribe, organization or system can keep up with it. Opening the window and letting the breeze in can be very inconvenient, especially for the people like Nicodemus of this world who suppose they have got things all tidied up, labelled and sorted into neat piles. But unless we are prepared to listen to this very dangerous message we aren’t ready to listen to the Gospel at all!

In verses 10– 13 we have the first of many passages in which Jesus speaks about a new knowledge and order – which is in all truth a new sort of knowing. It’s a way of knowing that comes from God, from heaven. (John 3:10-13) *"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?" "Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony." "I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?" "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven-- the Son of Man."* It’s pretty humbling for Nicodemus to have to be told this. He is, after all, a very well respected and senior teacher in the Temple. But this way of knowing, and the new knowledge we get through it, is given by the mysterious ‘Son of Man’. It is easy for us to say well – that is Jesus – but this was all new to Nicodemus. He had never been told in this manner before. As a teacher of the scriptures – he was probably familiar with the term from Daniel 7:13 – but I am sure that this thought of being “born again” had him a little rattled. If we want to understand not only the heavenly world, but the way in which God is now joining heaven and earth together, we must listen to Him, and walk with Him on the road He is now to take.

Jesus then tells Nicodemus that as Moses lifted up the pole with the image of a snake on it in the wilderness (Numbers 21:8-9 – there had been snakes all over and people were getting bitten like crazy- and they were dying. Moses went to God and God instructed Moses to build a pole with the image of a snake on it. Anyone who looked at the snake – not just a glance – but really looked at it would be healed and live) to save the people who were bitten by the snakes that the Son of Man had to be lifted up as well and as we see in verse 15 on page 1651 *“that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.”* Nicodemus is about to have the identity of the “Son of Man” revealed to him - in fact – he will see that he is talking right to Him! The words that come next are some of the most famous in all of Scripture (you may have seen it in the end zone of a football game – holding up a sign with the verse number on it) and I would like you to read them with me: (John 3:16 NIV) *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* Right here Jesus sums up to Nicodemus and the whole world – that God’s invitation is open – to EVERYONE – to BELIEVE and be saved by God through His Son. It is not a closed or exclusive club – but **this invitation is open to the whole world that God created and loves** – but there are some – far too many - who reject the offer – to go their own way – and do their own thing. If that makes you sad – consider how God feels! How would you feel if you went to someone’s house and knocked on the door or rang their bell, because you wanted to tell them something, and they slammed the door in your face? That is what everyone who rejects Jesus does.

Let's do some more reading on page 1651– and let's see how God feels about this: (John 3:17-18 NIV) "*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to **save the world through him.***" (Now here is God's response to the door being slammed in His face) "***Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.***" Why don't we hear those words whenever we hear John 3:16? I would venture to say that these words are unspoken because they would not be very popular in the media, in many circles of industry or commerce – because these words of faith, of truth make non-believers very uncomfortable. You might hear them say things like 'how could a loving God not accept other beliefs or other religions?' Our answer to them should simply be – God loves you and wants you to accept His invitation, plain and simple. You don't show up at a "Black tie formal" in your underwear, or in your shorts and a T-shirt, do you? You accept the conditions of the invitation - or you don't go. Doesn't that make sense? That is what God is saying – accept the conditions of the invitation --- or you don't go!

Let's go a little further on that same page – 1651 (John 3:19-21 NIV) "***This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.***" "*Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.*" "*But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.*" Wow! You mean that time when you were a child and you took that extra cookie – God saw it? I won't even begin to say other things that we have done in our lives that God has seen. BUT --- He forgives! **We are treading on some very unpopular words – words that have caused some religious leaders to claim that there are other ways than Jesus to the Father.** I believe every word that Jesus said to Nicodemus – words that have been swept under the rug – because the Bible doesn't fit someone's agenda. **Agendas and cultural changes should not dictate to the Bible – but we need to get back to where the Bible dictates who's agendas and culture should change to be in accord with the Word of God.** Jesus said in verse 14 of chapter 3 in John's Gospel – that the Son of Man must be lifted up – and that "*everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.*" Nicodemus was convinced of what Jesus told him - that he became a believer – and was there for Jesus at the very end of His earthly life. My brothers and sisters – it is clear – **believe in Jesus as Lord – and He will be there at the end of your earthly life** - to welcome you to His Kingdom. Jesus – the Son of Man is THE "*way and the truth and the life.*" (John 14:6)