

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study

“MIRACULOUS BIRTHS: US!”

For individual study or group discussion

We turn our attention this week to John 3:1-15 as we continue our Advent series: **Miraculous Births**. John 3 is probably one of the more familiar Bible passages in the New Testament, and it begins with a conversation about birthdays. Not our first birthday, when we are born in a hospital to parents, but a second, miraculous birthday when we are born from above by the Holy Spirit.

The Absolute Necessity of a New Birth (vv. 1-6)

In John 3:1-15, a Pharisee named Nicodemus seeks out Jesus under the cover of night. It's interesting to note that in the preceding chapter, Jesus had caused quite a stir cleansing the temple (2:13-22). And now he is approached by a ruler of the Jews who affirms that Jesus is “a teacher come from God” (v. 2), despite the fact that other religious leaders are “seeking to destroy him” (cf. Luke 19:47). In typical Jesus style, he redirects the conversation to get to the heart of the matter. Jesus tells Nicodemus that “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (v. 3). And at the outset, Nicodemus is incredulous (v. 4).

- When you think of someone who claims to be “born again,” what kind of person comes to mind? Jesus tells Nicodemus, who is a wealthy, learned, elderly, and religious professor that he must be “born again.” Does Nicodemus fit your stereotype of one who needs to be “born again”?
- The Greek word for born again, *anōthen*, has a double meaning. It can mean both “again” or “from above.” What does Nicodemus understand the meaning to be and how does it make him skeptical (v. 4)?

The Extraordinary Nature of the New Birth (vv. 3-12)

Nicodemus is a religious leader and legal expert in the Torah. He is a son of Abraham, born into God's covenant community. Aren't those credentials enough for him to “see the kingdom of God”? Not according to Christ. Jesus wants Nicodemus to see that the framework of his religious community is fundamentally flawed. In verses 5-6, Jesus further clarifies *anōthen* by referencing the Old Testament prophets, with whom Nicodemus is very familiar.

- Read Isaiah 44:1-5 and Ezekiel 36:25-27. Discuss how the prophets described being “born of the flesh” and “born of the Spirit” (John 3:6).
- The extraordinary nature of the new birth is what Paul describes in Philippians 3:3-11. According to Paul, what is and what is not the source of our second birth? (cf. Titus 3:4-7)
- According to T.F. Torrance, “*Nicodemus was a deeply religious man, but it was precisely to him that Jesus spoke so strongly of the need for new birth from above.*”¹ In Matthew 21:28-32, Jesus tells the religious leaders that the tax collectors and prostitutes will enter into the Kingdom of God before them. Describe the type of people who are more readily able to recognize that their lives and loves are not aligned with God's. (See also Luke 5:31-32; 18:9-14)

The Essential Fruit of the New Birth (vv. 13-15)

In Numbers 21:4-9, when the rebellious Israelites were bitten by poisonous snakes, Moses was instructed by God to erect a bronze serpent onto a pole. All those who looked upon the fiery serpent would live. Like the children of Israel, we have been “snake-bitten.” We are dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), and the only antidote for us is the Son of Man on the cross. Look to him and live.

- Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Discuss the paradox of being spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins, yet physically alive. According to Paul, who gives us our second birth and what is the essential fruit that comes from being born again?



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
Presbyterian Church

DATE: December 31, 2023

SPEAKER: Frank/Wil

SERIES: Advent 2023

PASSAGE: John 3:1-15

Family Dinner Table

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Written by Charles Wesley in 1739, the Christmas carol *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* describes how the Son of God laid aside his glory in order to restore our broken relationship with God the Father. St. Augustine once wrote, “*Man's maker was made Man that He, Ruler of the stars, might be nourished at His mother's breast; that He, the Bread, might hunger; that He, the Fountain, might thirst; that He, the Light, might sleep; that He, the Way, might be wearied by the journey; that He, the Truth, might be accused by false witnesses; that He, the Judge of the living and the dead, might be brought to trial by a mortal judge; that He, Justice, might be condemned by the unjust; that He, Discipline, might be scourged with whips; that He, the Foundation, might be suspended upon a cross; that Courage might be weakened; that Healer might be wounded; that Life might die.*”²

During this Advent season as you meditate on the wonder of the incarnation, pray that it will point you to look to Jesus and the joy of his miraculous birth. Remembering that he was “*Born that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.*”

- Discuss why being “born again” is something we can never achieve on our own.
- Read 1 Peter 1:3-9 and rejoice with joy for the living hope we have through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS

East Lake Expression Engine,
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PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS

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¹T. F. Torrance, *When Christ Comes and Comes Again* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 74-75.

²Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons 184-229: Sermons on Liturgical Seasons* (Edmund Hill O.P. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1993), 191.1.