**Born of Water and Spirit**

Based on [John 3:1-17](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn3.1-17)

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The Holy Trinity

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This gospel is about coming to Jesus, coming to faith, baptism, The Holy Spirit, the cross, and the universal love of God. It is about earthly and heavenly teaching, and appropriate for today, it is also about the three persons of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews came to Jesus at night seeking understanding from Jesus, as many do. And Jesus teaches him that first he needs to be baptized. Jesus answered him, “**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Sprit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**”

The kingdom of God is the place where God is king. He is king of the whole universe, but not everyone acknowledges his reign. Sinful men are illegal aliens in creation, foreigners and squatters who don’t know the language and fail to understand the law of the land. God is still king, but he is not respected by them. They take advantage of the goods he provides to all, but they do not honor him, nor can they understand his ways. And it is only a matter of time before the king enforces his law, and casts out from his kingdom those who don’t belong.

Sinful man does not have citizenship in the kingdom of God, and that is all men born of the flesh. But Jesus teaches Nicodemus that there is a way to gain legal entrance to the kingdom of God, to live there rightfully and actually belong. “Flesh gives birth to flesh, Spirit gives birth to spirit”, you must be born again of water and Spirit. To have citizenship in the kingdom of God, you must understand heavenly things, to understand heavenly things you need the Holy Spirit; in order to have the Spirit, you need to be Baptized.

Nicodemus had trouble understanding Jesus’ teaching on Baptism. And by understanding, the Scripture simply means believing or “receiving” the teaching. Jesus says, “We--[Jesus is numbering himself with John the Baptist and likely the witness of the OT prophets as well]—We speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.” The problem is not that Jesus’ teaching is hard to understand, it’s just that they--Nicodemus and the Pharisees--do not receive it.

Practically speaking, there really isn’t much to understand about baptism. The Pharisees had seen John Baptize, and however he did it. Applying water to a person is an earthly thing, easy to understand, but Nicodemus did not. “How can these things be?”

Pretty much all Christians today that aren’t Roman Catholic or Lutheran have the same problem as Nicodemus. Reformed, Calvinists, Mennonite, Evangelicalism, Pentacostal,. It is simply incredible to them that pouring water on someone can give them a new birth. “How can these things be?” So instead they teach that baptism is an outward sign of an inward faith. Some say that when Jesus says you must be born of water and spirit, water means natural birth, like when a pregnant woman’s water breaks before delivery. Others say “Water” means the Old Testament and “Spirit” means the new. They begin by assuming Jesus can’t possibly mean what he literally says, and proceed to teach what he doesn’t.

Jesus says, “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things.” If I tell you must be born of water and spirit and you conclude that he must not mean baptism, you’re not off to a good start as a student of Christ. If your doctor says, go home and lay off the fatty foods, and you conclude that he must not mean French fries and milk shakes, you’re not listening to your doctor. If your wife asks you to pick up a jug of milk and you come home with a six pack of beer instead, you can assume that communication is a problem in that relationship. Same with a relationship with Jesus Christ.

All this to say that Jesus teaches a very simple earthly thing, be baptized and you will be born again, and this is necessary to enter God’s kingdom. The Pharisees then, and Protestant Christians today don’t understand because they don’t want to. Because it sounds strange to them and foolish. Because it doesn’t jibe with what they already think they know. If they have trouble with simple earthly commands, how will they handle the greater mysteries of God? Simply put, faith believes everything Jesus teaches, earthly and heavenly; water and spirit; visible and invisible; sight and faith.

And Jesus points to a few of these mysteries. He points to the earthly teaching that God sent his son to suffer and die on a cross in order to save the world. How does one death give life to all? Later on Peter would have trouble with this one. When Jesus said he must suffer and die Peter said, “No that can’t be.” Peter thought he already knew how salvation should come, by Jesus living and conquering, not by suffering and dying. Suffering and dying, this was the earthly thing that he did not understand; Atonement for the sin of the world was the heavenly thing.

Today we will recite together the Athanasian Creed, which is a thorough revelation of the heavenly teaching of the Holy Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three persons, yet only one God. All three persons are mentioned by Jesus in today’s Gospel. The Father so loved the Son. The Spirit gives new birth. It is a heavenly thing to understand, which means we can only know the Trinity by faith.

Confessing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is simple enough, confessing them in words is an earthly thing. The heavenly thing is understanding them all to be one God. For all practical purposes, we talk and behave as though we have three gods who are in perfect harmony with one another. But we say they are one essence, and they are one essence, one and the same God, because scripture requires it. The First Commandment “You shall have no other gods before me.” And yet Jesus comes and Scripture calls him the Eternal Word, saying “The word was with God, and the word was God”. Jesus teaches you should only worship God, and that his Father in heaven is God; and yet he receives Thomas’s words to him calling Jesus “My Lord and my God.”

The teaching of the Holy Trinity is a heavenly thing that can only be understood by faith, and without receiving it, one cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Your sins have been atoned for in the fact that God the Father, sent God the Son do die on the Cross. And you believe this not by your own earthly understanding, but by faith which is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The Father sent the Son who sends the Spirit who are all one God, because they share the one Name into which you have been baptized with water, and given citizenship in the kingdom of God.

“Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

p. 319 – ATHANASIAN CREED