

March 12, 2017
Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
John 3:1–17

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

John 3:1–17 (ESV)

¹ Now 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 him, “Truly, truly, 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, “Truly, truly, 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 its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ 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.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ!

Amen.

A child is born not only into a family, but also into a community, a people, a nation.

That is where the child belongs and is to have love, security, and acceptance. Jesus says that in order to be a part of God's people, you must be born again.

If you are to belong in God's kingdom, to live in His love, to enjoy His security and acceptance, you must be born again.

What is the evidence of this rebirth?

How can you be sure you are in the kingdom of God?

Is there a rebirth certificate? Using the wrong certification for assurance can cause self-righteousness, doubt, or despair.

In our text, Jesus gives us the answers:

Baptism is your assurance that you belong to God's Family and are in God's kingdom.

You could try to look elsewhere to assure yourself that you belong to God's family and kingdom.

To assure yourself of where you belong on earth, you could look at your birth certificate or adoption papers. These certify your family, community and nation. By reading them, you know where you belong and to whom. A. To assure yourself you belong in God's family and kingdom, you could look to your biological ancestry (vv 1–3).

In Old Testament times, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the earthly manifestation of God's kingdom. Nicodemus understood this and probably assumed he was already in the kingdom of God because of who his ancestors were.

We could fall into that same trap. We look back to our fathers and mothers ...our grandparents, great-grandparents and even further back. We look to their accomplishments and how they did things and our earthly, sinful minds seek to take or inherit credit for their actions.

I remember one time that I was delivering supplies to a customer in Austin and part of their order did not get loaded. I was afraid that I might lose this customer because he was usually grumpy even when I filled his orders correctly. But I knew another customer of mine who always kept extra's in his shop so I went by his shop first. His father knew my father growing up. He had gone to school with my older brother so when I asked if I could buy a couple of cases from him at cost he told me to just take them and replace them the following week.

It was not because he knew me, but he knew the reputation of my father & my brother, so I inherited his trust from them. So I could see how that might have worked in Nicodemus mind.

I could also understand the how the Words of Jesus confused him (vv 4–6). Jesus makes clear that ancestry is no assurance. Even if it were, most of us have the wrong ancestor. No matter how or good honest my father might be, he doesn't live perfectly, nor did he die for my sins. So there is no assurance in looking to your biological ancestry.

To assure yourself you belong in God's family and kingdom, you might look to your efforts, decisions, actions, and commitments to see whether you behave as if you belong in God's kingdom.

The trouble here is that you can never know whether you've done enough and done it well enough. If you are convinced you have, you are self-righteous. And honestly, you're not good enough for God's family. No matter what you might think.

You might look for evidence of his favor in your worldly fortunes. Your health, wealth, status, and other things may all be used as signs of God's favor to you.

But no level of these could ever make certain God accepts you. There is also great danger of being overcome by doubt and unbelief when health declines, wealth is spent, status is lost.

If you are sure your life shows that you cannot possibly be in God's kingdom or family, you see the truth, but do not despair!

There is assurance of belonging to God, of being His child, that in no way depends on you.

The Gospel in a nutshell of Jn 3:16 is that God has taken the actions necessary to give us a place in His family and kingdom (v 16).

God became the man Jesus in order to accomplish the salvation of the world ... to accomplish your salvation!

The Old Testament kingdom of God, Abraham's biological descendants, was used by God for the purpose of Jesus' incarnation. To be truly incarnate, Jesus had to be born into a family, a community, a people, a nation.

But His work of salvation is nevertheless for the whole world. His work of salvation opens God's kingdom to everyone. Jesus was lifted up on the cross because of the sin of the whole world (vv 14–15).

That sin was like snake venom, when the serpent, the old evil for satan, infected the whole world, robbing it of life, making it dead, undesirable, loathsome to God. Just as the snakebitten Israelites in the desert could not escape death by making themselves unbitten, so the sinful people of the world cannot escape eternal death by making themselves un sinful.

Jesus poured out His blood as the antivenom that takes away the sin of the world. With the poison of sin gone, the gates of God's kingdom are open to you.

No matter what you may have done, no matter how many times, with Christ as your Savior, you have the assurance that the gates are open. This is a fact shown when Jesus rose from the dead. The power of God lifted Him from the grave, showing that He accepted Jesus' sacrifice on your behalf, in your stead!

Unlike the cold, lifeless bronze serpent of Moses in the wilderness, Jesus is alive. (Num. 21:9) His resurrection means that the earthly mission of His incarnation has been accomplished.

Now there is life for everyone.

The assurance that this Gospel in a nutshell is for you is the Gospel in a scallop shell—the silver scallop shell that may have been used to apply water at your Baptism. The scallop shell is an ancient symbol of Baptism, just as the three drops of water falling from it represent the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son and holy Spirit.

The Gospel in the nutshell is the message of salvation, the scallop shell reminds us that this salvation is yours!

It is one thing to know the gates of the kingdom are open and God is bringing people in; it is quite another thing to know whether they are open for you and whether God has brought you in. The Gospel is not that God has a family. The Gospel is that God has made *you* a part of His family.

You do indeed belong to Him and his kingdom. And nothing nor no one can ever take you away from God. *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Rom. 8:38-39)

In speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus said, *“You must be born again”* (v 7).

You are born again; born of of water and the Spirit.

It is a washing of rebirth and regeneration. You are born again through Baptism into God’s family, God’s community, God’s people, God’s nation.

As a father puts his name on his child, so God put His name on you in your Baptism. As you belong to the nation of your parents, so through Baptism you belong to God’s kingdom.

Your Baptism, therefore, is your assurance you belong to God’s family and are in God’s kingdom. No matter what the devil or any of his evil minions, nor anyone in this world says.

When you were baptized, you were baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. That means when you were baptized, God was doing what He promised to do: forgive your sins, rescue from death and the devil, give eternal salvation, and give the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Because God is faithful to His promises and because He was working those promises in your Baptism, your Baptism *is*, your assurance you belong to God's family and His kingdom.

There is no controversy—no question—about your being born into the family, the community, the people, the kingdom of God.

By your Baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection, by that scallop shell, if you will, of water with the Word, the Gospel in a nutshell, everlasting life *is* yours!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and mind through Christ Jesus!

Amen.