

St. Peter Lutheran Church
May 31, 2026
The Holy Trinity
John 3:1-15

The word “Trinity” is not a word from God to describe Himself, but a word man has used to describe God. It refers to the central mystery of the faith. God is one, but there are three persons in God. Reason will not understand this, earthly wisdom cannot comprehend it. Indeed, by our own reason and strength this is utter nonsense.

And so it goes with all things pertaining to God. To the natural man, they are crazy fables, incomprehensible nonsense, things only the simple-minded and gullible believe. True philosophers and masters know better. The truly educated, the wise of this world, they will not worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, for it makes no sense. The natural man is born of flesh—body and soul, reason and all our senses—but all of these faculties have been thoroughly corrupted by sin. Therefore the natural man born of flesh **does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.**

Nicodemus comes to Jesus as one who is wise in the eyes of the world. He is a ruler of the Jews and a pharisee—an elite in the Law of Moses—he is of those who by their reason and strength believe themselves wise and righteous and among those who supposedly know God and the righteousness of God. But Jesus will dismantle these ideas quickly, leaving no leg left for Nicodemus to stand on that comes from himself. Jesus will point Nicodemus outside himself—to the righteousness of God—and to the knowledge of this righteousness that comes only by the Holy Spirit.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, afraid to be labeled a heretic by associating with Jesus, and attempts to butter Jesus up, saying, **“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.”** Nicodemus believes He knows God—but He cannot truly know the Father without knowing His Son, Jesus.

Jesus immediately cuts short Nicodemus’ flattery. **Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** Jesus, in so many words, tells Nicodemus that he is blind, still in the dark, concerning God and righteousness.

Nicodemus, relying on his reason, hears only crazy talk in Jesus’ words. **Nicodemus said to [Jesus], “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”** Nicodemus is thinking in earthly terms, not spiritual, even as he looks to his earthly reason, strength, and his bodily keeping of the law. But true righteousness is not found in these things—in these things, God is praised with the lips while hearts remain far

from Him. Jesus is explaining to Nicodemus that the strength, glory, power, and wisdom of the flesh is not able to attain to the things of God, and even more, must be brought to nothing in order to see the kingdom of God. There must be an entirely new man brought forth who does know God, who is spiritually inclined, and who understands and receives true righteousness.

There must be another birth, one from above. And our Lord corrects Nicodemus' fleshly understanding of another birth and describes the birth from above. **Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, 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."** This also sounds absurd to our reason. Does God really take a child of Adam, conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity, and with water and His Spirit, put to death that old man and make a new man? Is this really the manner in which God delivers a child of wrath into the kingdom of God?

So still today, we have our Pharisees in the Church, who scoff at baptism and deny it's power of regeneration, degrading this heavenly washing to a mere outward sign with no power to affect what it signifies. Be gone with these Pharisaical teachers. Scripture plainly says, **"Baptism now saves you."** If it doesn't make sense, fine, for our human reason is altogether blind and dead apart from God. It is only the "new man" born from above who will believe these things. That which is born of the flesh is flesh—at enmity with God, unable to understand the things of God—groping about in darkness. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit—alive toward God, able to see and enter the kingdom of God, illuminated with the Light of Christ.

It is no surprise that Nicodemus is confused, for he cannot even truly understand earthly things, the very things in which he glories. Jesus says, **"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 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."** Can you even understand this Nicodemus? The patter of the wind? Where it comes from and where it goes? Can you explain the universe and all that is in it? Can you fathom the endlessness of space with your little mind? You can't. If you can't truly understand the earthly things, why do you think you understand the heavenly? **So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.** It's incomprehensible, but it's plainly evident.

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" And Jesus again attacks his understanding as a ruler of the Jews, saying, **"Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"** If he is the teacher of Israel, he ought to know that righteousness of our own avails to nothing, that by works of the law no one will be saved, and that we are altogether corrupt and in need of newness of life—another birth. And yet, the blind teacher leads the blind, and they all together fall into the ditch.

Jesus continues, saying, **"Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you don't not receive Our witness."** The words Jesus speaks He does not speak on His own, but the Father who sent Him gave Him a command, what He should say

and speak. And the Spirit also testifies—The Spirit testifies of Christ. This is the testimony of the Triune God. But Nicodemus is not listening to any of this testimony; he is not receiving their witness. But if he hasn't understood the wind, it's no surprise that he doesn't understand the Spirit of God and the birth from above.

Jesus continues speaking of heavenly things, not understandably by reason. He says, **“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”** The eternal Son of the Father came down from heaven and became man. And yet, the Father is in Him and He in the Father, so He remains in heaven. And to Him is given all authority in heaven and on earth—He is Lord of all, who again ascended into heaven after He rose from the dead, who again assumed all power and glory that He has together with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Only Christ has ascended to heaven—only He who came down from heaven. No one else ascends into heaven. Certainly not man who is dust and who returns to dust. Not man who has sinned and must therefore die. None of these will ascend to heaven. Certainly their reason, power, strength, and glory will fail. Only Christ has ascended to heaven.

And yet, heaven is open now to all of us who return to the dust. **As 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.** The eternal God was found in human likeness, the glory of God masked in weakness. Christ, when lifted up on a the cross, was to our eyes a condemned sinner. In the wilderness, when the Israelites were bitten by the poisonous snakes, their salvation was found by looking at the likeness of one of those snakes made of brass and raised up on a pole. The serpent, which bit and poisoned Israel is sin, death, and an evil conscience. And yet, the serpent on the pole bit and harmed no one—in fact, it brought life. Likewise, though we see Christ on His cross in the form and appearance of a sinner, as each of us truly are, He is in fact the Savior, the sinless Lamb of God. For He who was without sin became sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. He bears our sins in His body on the tree and goes to His death—so that His death brings us life. He atones for our sins and takes away from us the wrath of the Father.

And each of us poor, miserable sinners, can ascend to heaven with him, not by our strength, merit, works, or glory, but by His. God has given us a second birth from above—a birth of water and the Spirit, whereby we are joined to Christ in His death and promised a resurrection like His. What is old and sinful in us is crucified and put to death and we are made a new creation in Christ. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.

We have been born of the Spirit and have faith in Jesus Christ. Our works and all human power is useless, but faith in Christ has done it all—we have looked at the Son of Man lifted up and believed—so we have become one with Christ and have all that belongs to Him. We are in Christ beloved sons of the heavenly Father, lifted up above all things, lords of all.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.