

The Rev. John Sampson, Pastor  
Glen Ridge Congregational Church



Sunday, March 1, 2026  
John 3:1 - 17

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

All hail Nicodemus!

The saint of all of us who have grown up in the shadow of the Enlightenment, in an age that privileges science, and empiricism. In an age that stresses materialism and the physical.

All hail Nicodemus!

Who comes to Jesus in the night, out of his own darkness, and out of the darkness of the world, a world which is at war this morning. He

comes to acknowledge his understanding that Jesus has come from God, and he comes to learn from our Rabbi.

And, unexpectedly, Jesus tells him that no one will be able to be a part of his community, of his sacred communion, if they are not born from above.

And Nicodemus balks.

Just like we may balk.

Because Nicodemus doesn't fully hear Jesus's words and thinks that the rebirth Jesus is talking about is a physical rebirth, because he can't imagine anything other than the material world he was born into. Perhaps we too can't understand any other world than the physical world that obeys its seemingly inviolable laws of nature.

But the rebirth Jesus speaks of this morning, in the struggles of our lives, and while the Middle East is visited once again by war, and bombings and death, is not a physical rebirth, it is a birth from above. It is a birth that welcomes God's Spirit to live within us, and promises to transform us beyond our animality, and the inertia of our instincts, into becoming fully human. It is a rebirth that uses our physical selves as the foundation for a greater spiritual evolution.

The one who comes from intimacy with God tells us that this transformation is enacted through water and Spirit. He tells us that we are able to embrace the full potential of what it means to be human, only if we are washed again in water, and anointed by the Spirit. We become citizens of his Kingdom only when we reenact, in our lives, his actions and experience in the Jordan River.

The sacrament of baptism is an outward and visible sign of the grace of God. Baptism with water and the Holy Spirit is the mark of our acceptance into the care of Christ's church, the sign and seal of our participation in God's forgiveness, and the beginning of our growth into full Christian faith and discipleship.

For many of us, we don't remember our baptisms because we were babies, or very young children when our parents, or guardians, had us baptized. We may not remember being washed in water, or anointed with Spirit. We may not remember the pledges that our parents, or guardians, made on our behalf.

On this day when we are at war, on this day when we continue to travel the Lenten road to Jerusalem, and to the cross, let me share with you again the promises that were made. And as I do so, I invite you to open your hearts and souls and think about how you would like to respond to these questions today. Think about where you stand in your life. Think about what is going on in our country, what is unfolding in the Middle East. On this day do you desire to be born from above, born again in Christ's love. Or are you satisfied with how things stand?

Hear again the promises that were made, and the promises you may wish to make again:

*Will you renounce the powers of evil and receive the freedom of new life in Christ?*

*If so, within your heart say, "I will, with the help of God."*

*Will you profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?*

*If so, within your heart say, "I will, with the help of God."*

*Do you promise, by the grace of God, to be Christ's disciple, to follow in the way of our Savior, to resist oppression and evil, to show love and justice, and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ as best you are able?*

*If so, within your heart say, "I will, with the help of God."*

*Do you promise, according to the grace given you, to grow in the Christian faith, to be a faithful member of the church of Jesus Christ, by celebrating Christ's presence, by furthering Christ's mission in all the world, and by offering the nurture of the Christian church so that you may affirm his baptism?*

*If so, within your heart say, "I will, with the help of God."*

Today, just like Nicodemus, we come to the Christ out of the parts of our lives which are shrouded in darkness. We stand in a world gone dark with war and violence, and he asks us if we desire to be born from above. Not born again through a second physical birth, but to be born again in water and Spirit, in love and in light. He asks us if we will accept his invitation to inner transformation so that we may join him in his salvation of the world, a world he loved even beyond the cross.

And I hope we will say together, within our hearts, "I will, with the help of God."

Amen.