

# Echoes of Scripture

Lent 2a ~ John 3:1-17

## Summary of John 3:1-17

A leader of the Pharisees and member of the Sanhedrin, named Nicodemus, whom Jesus calls “*The Teacher of Israel*”, visits Jesus at night and Jesus explains how one must be born of God in order to see the Kingdom of God and have eternal life.

## Suggested Course of Study

- Read the Prologue to John’s Gospel – John 1:1-18.
- Read the assigned reading – John 3:1-17 – and listen for echoes of John 1:1-18 within it.
- Look to see where else Nicodemus appears in the gospel of John (see John 7:50 and 19:38-42).
- Look to see where else you can find the notion of being born from above (see John 1:12-13).
- Look to see where else Jesus talks about “eternal life” (see John 5:24 and John 17:3).
- Read the story about Moses and the Bronze Serpent (see Numbers 21:1-9) and consider how this story connects with the story of Jesus being lifted up on the cross.

## Immediate Context

John 1:1-18 The Prologue

John 1:19-34 John the Baptist and Lamb of God

John 1:35-51 Jesus calls the first disciples

John 2:1-12 The Wedding at Cana

John 2:13-25 Jesus Cleanses the Temple

**John 3:1-21 Nicodemus visits Jesus**

John 3:22-30 Jesus and John the Baptist

John 3:31-36 The One Who Comes from Heaven

John 4:1-42 Jesus and the Woman of Samaria

John 4:43-54 Jesus Returns; Heals Official’s son

## Key Words

**NICODEMUS** – Νικόδημος the name means “Innocent Blood” or “Conqueror of the People”. He was a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin whom Jesus calls “The teacher of Israel”. He appears in John 7:50 and John 19:38-42 as sympathetic to Jesus.

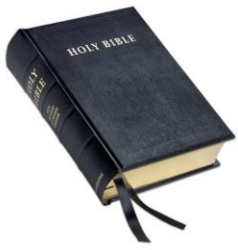
**NIGHT** – Light and darkness are key themes in John’s gospel. See John 1:3-9; John 3:19-21; John 8:12; John 11:9-10.

**SIGNS** – In the gospel of John, the miracles of Jesus are called “signs”; they are signs that he has come from God; that the presence of God is with him. See John 2:11, 18, 23; 4:48, 54; 6:2, 14, 26, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18, 37; 20:30.

**KINGDOM OF GOD** – Appears only in two places in John’s Gospel (also in John 18:36). John prefers to use “eternal life” when speaking about the kingdom of God.

**FROM ABOVE** – ἄνωθεν meaning either “from above”, “anew”, or “again”. The intended meaning must be “from above” based on what we find in the prologue of John’s gospel (see John 1:12-13). The same word is found in John 3:31; 19:11; and 19:23 and in each place it means “from above”. Also, see 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, and 18 for the notion of being born of God.

**BORN OF WATER** – The phrase “born of water” reminds us of baptism; John in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord calling Israel to repentance. Ceremonial washing was common among the Jewish people.



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They built *Mikvehs* (pools of ritual purification) outside their temples and synagogues where they ritually cleansed their hearts before worship. Recognizing their needs for God's cleansing, they used only "living water" (flowing from nearby springs) and not "dead water" (muddy water from cisterns or stagnant pools poured by human hands). It also reminds us of the Israelites as they were led out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Both times they had to pass through the waters (of the Red Sea, Exodus 14 and of the Jordan River, Joshua 3). See also John 7:38-39.

**BORN OF THE SPIRIT** – Reminds us of the Genesis story where the Spirit of God (רוח *ruah* in Hebrew, πνευμα *pneuma* in Greek meaning wind, breath, spirit) blows over the waters to bring order out of chaos. Also reminds us of the story in Ezekiel about the Valley of Dry Bones (see Ezekiel 37:1-14). See also Isaiah 44:3 that talks about both water and the spirit being poured out. See Acts 2:1-4 for the Pentecost story. For Spirit, see also John 6:63; 7:39; 14:17-27; 15:26-27; 16:13; 20:22 (where Jesus breathes on the disciples and gives them the Spirit).

**YOU** – The second "You" in verse 7 is plural and should be translated "Y'all". *"Don't be astonished that I said to you (singular) that 'Y'all (plural) must be born from above.'" It is also plural in verses 11 and 12.*

**LIFTED UP** – The story of Moses and the bronze serpent is found in Numbers 21:1-9. God takes something that is meant for death and turns into something that brings life and health. Just like the cross; something meant for suffering and death becomes something that brings health and life. See Genesis 3:1-19; Exodus 4:1-9; and Exodus 7:8-13 for more snake/serpent stories.

**ETERNAL LIFE** – Referred to usually in the present tense. See John 5:24. Jesus defines "eternal life" in John 17:3. Pay attention to what Jesus says about the Pharisees as he argues with them in the temple in John 8.

**GOD'S LOVE** – See 1 John 4:7-19.

**WORLD** – From κοσμος. See John 1:9-10, John 1:29, John 7:4-7, John 12:19, 25, 31, 46-47 and John 17.