

GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

03



CHRYSOSTOM

Read St. John Chrysostom's homilies on John chapter 3.



PRACTICE QUIZ

Take a quiz to test your knowledge of John chapter 3.



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Chapter three begins with an interesting scene: St. Nicodemus, a leader of the Pharisees (who soon became bitterly opposed to Christ) came to visit Jesus during the night (3:1-2). He proclaims that Jesus is a teacher come from God (3:2), but Jesus responded that a person cannot see the kingdom of God unless he is born again (3:3).

St. Nicodemus experiences the same confusion that most of us would have felt at this answer: surely Jesus doesn't mean that a person needs to crawl back into his or her mother's womb for a second trip to the hospital! No, Jesus clarifies, being "born again" means being "born of water and the Spirit" (3:5). Christ is here referring to Holy Baptism, which St. Titus of the Seventy describes as "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5).

Blessed Theophylact—repeating an explanation by such teachers as St. Gregory the Theologian and Cyril of Jerusalem—states how water and the Holy Spirit work together in baptism: "Man is a two-fold being, consisting of

soul and body. Spiritual birth is likewise two-fold. The water of Baptism, visibly perceived, cleanses the body; the Spirit, invisibly working together with the water, regenerates the invisible soul."

St. Cyril of Jerusalem also explains that Holy Baptism is an essential part of being perfected through our relationship with God, "Having been baptized into Christ, and having put on Christ, you have been conformed to the Son of God, for God predestined us to be adopted sons and made us to share the likeness of Christ's glorious body."

Despite our Lord's teaching, St. Nicodemus remained confused (3:9). Our Lord replied that if he did not believe Him after being told earthly things—which the Church Fathers say is the witness of the Old Testament concerning the work of God among His people—then he naturally cannot believe what Christ has just told him about baptism (3:11-12). Christ then moves on to give His authority for such teaching, as Blessed Theophylact paraphrases, "Do not imagine that I am an earthly prophet sent by God. I came down from heaven as the Son of God" (see 3:13).

The entire subject of belief is then shown to be rooted in Christ: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (3:16). Jesus Christ is light (3:19; look ahead to 8:12, where He says He's "the light of the world"), and those people who believe in Him and follow His light will be saved (3:21). Some people, however, prefer

the darkness of life apart from Christ, and will therefore be condemned (3:19-20).

The chapter concludes by returning to St. John the Forerunner. The Forerunner's disciples are disturbed by the popularity of Jesus and His ministry (3:26), but St. John reminds them that he was the one sent before the Christ (3:28). He is the friend of the bridegroom, who rejoices to see that the bride (i.e., the people) is now uniting herself to the bridegroom (3:29).

Blessed Augustine explains the significance of the Father giving all things into the Son's hand (3:35): "Therefore, having deigned to send us the Son, let us not imagine that it is something less than the Father that is sent to us. The Father, in sending the Son, sent His other self."



LIFE TIP

St. Symeon the New Theologian says that baptism is only the beginning of your spiritual life: "After baptism it is in our power either to persist willingly in the practice of the commandments of Christ, into Whom we were baptized...or to deviate from this straight way and to fall again into the hands of our enemy, the devil."

