

Wednesday of Invocavit, A ✕ D 2009

John 3:1-8 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."

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

1 It's foolish to believe, silly even. Jesus should have had a better response to Nicodemus' straightforward statement. "Jesus, you are a teacher come from God. You do signs that only God could permit. Tell us something wise." And what does he get? This foolishness: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." If you want to see God, if you want to know God, if you want to enter the kingdom of God, you must be born again. So Nicodemus calls Jesus out on such a foolish notion: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" No, Nicodemus, being born again is not being born of an earthly mother but a heavenly one. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but Spirit gives birth to spirit. You must be born of water and the Spirit.

2 It would have been far less foolish if Jesus had only said, "You must be born of the Spirit." Then the charismatics would be right. If you want to be born again, you better pray for an elusive Holy Spirit baptism. But He didn't. He foolishly joined a spiritual rebirth to a physical element: water. It's silly to suppose something so ordinary as water could do something so significant as cause one to enter the kingdom of God.

3 It's foolish to believe, silly even. God should have had a better plan for dealing with humanity's sinfulness. He could have appointed some more impressive means to send His son into the world than ordinary human flesh. He could have conducted a more jaw-dropping

display of power, accompanied by impressive signs that swayed even the hearts of the most ardent skeptics. He could have led His people out of their slavery to sin with a coup de force over the devil and his minions and over worldly powers and principalities. But instead, “God chose what is foolish to shame the wise; God chose what is weak to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are” (1 Cor 1:27-28). He chose the cross.

4 The cross is pure foolishness. It’s silliness to our reasonableness. Why would God condescend, take human flesh, be humbled through His birth and life, submit Himself to a band of arresting soldiers, and permit Himself to be crucified? For this reason: through the foolishness of the cross, God paid for your sinfulness.

5 And through equally foolish means, God gives the benefit of this death on the cross to you. “Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s word.” Jesus Christ Himself commanded baptism, saying, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you”

6 Holy Baptism is the new birth of water and the Spirit Jesus told Nicodemus was necessary. “To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by men, but by God Himself. Therefore, although it is performed by human hands, it is still truly God’s own work.” Does Baptism save you? Of course. That’s precisely why it calls you to trust in someone else’s work, calls you to look outside yourself for confidence in your salvation. That’s divine foolishness. Your natural inclination is to look to yourself for salvation, so God appointed something outside yourself to be a means through which He makes you a disciple of Jesus and a beloved child of the Heavenly Father. It would be foolishness to look anywhere else for salvation than to your Lord alone. You have as much role in your rebirth, your second birth, as you had in your first birth. Your Lord has done it all for you and gives you the free gift of salvation in the waters of Holy Baptism.

7 He has staked His name on Baptism. No pastor baptizes in his own name, but only in the Triune name of God. So in the otherwise ordinary waters of Holy Baptism, when God mixes His name and the promise of His word into the water, it becomes a life-giving water, a water through which He marks you as His own, places His very name upon you. You have been born again of water and the Spirit. Amen.

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the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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