

Born of Water and the Spirit

What We Found

- The Lord's own sentence gathers the whole study: *unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God* (John 3:5): one birth, from water-and-Spirit joined, the pairing we have counted since Genesis 1:2.
- Nicodemus's *how can a man be born when he is old?* was answered in advance by Naaman, who dipped seven times in the Jordan and whose flesh was restored like a little child's (2 Kings 5:14).
- Jesus expected Israel's teacher to recognize the promise (John 3:10), a rebuke the Church has always heard against the background of Ezekiel 36's water, new heart, and Spirit.
- The context answers the controversies: after this conversation, Jesus went into Judea, where his disciples baptized (John 3:22; 4:2).
- The Church's Tradition has consistently received the verse as baptismal: one of the earliest surviving accounts of Baptism (St. Justin, mid-second century) already appeals to the Lord's new-birth saying, and the Catechism says Baptism *signifies and actually brings about* this birth (CCC 1215), while God himself remains free beyond his sacraments (CCC 1257).
- Entry is by birth, not achievement: the new birth, like the first, is received.

Voices of the Church

St. Justin Martyr • *First Apology, ch. 61*

St. Justin, writing one of the earliest surviving accounts of how Christians baptize (mid-second century; the Didache's brief instructions are earlier still), teaches in substance that candidates are brought where there is water and are regenerated there, born again as we were born again; and the warrant he gives Rome's pagan readers is the Lord's new-birth saying, in the compressed form Justin cites, that unless you are born again you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

St. John Chrysostom • *Homilies on the Gospel of John*

St. John Chrysostom, preaching through this chapter, teaches in substance that in the font the water becomes to the believer what the womb is to the child: in it the new person is fashioned and formed, and what the Spirit works there is a true generation, not a metaphor for one. For Chrysostom, Nicodemus's mistake was not taking birth too literally but taking God too weakly.

St. Ambrose of Milan • *On the Mysteries*

St. Ambrose, catechizing at the font where this study began with him, teaches in substance that the Lord's sentence binds the two together: not water without the Spirit, and not the Spirit without the water, for the one birth is of water and the Spirit; whoever would divide what Christ joined must answer to the plain shape of his words.

Live It This Week

- Memorize John 3:5 completely this week; it is the study's namesake and the shortest summary of everything we have traced.
- Pray for one Nicodemus you know by name: someone circling the faith cautiously, at night. Ask for the chance to be safe daylight for them.

- Read the whole Nicodemus arc in one sitting (John 3:1–21; 7:45–52; 19:38–42) and write one sentence about what changed him.

Memory Verse

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

John 3:5 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read Romans 6:1–14.

Catechism references: 1215, 1225, 1257