

Holy Spirit Bear us Anew

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Year A: Lent 2 – John 3:1-17

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God births us into a new family through Water and the Holy Spirit. With both we see the Kingdom of God around us. With both God continues to bear us anew each day. We can assist the Holy Spirit as we practice our Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting, and sacrificial giving.

Years ago, when I had a weekend off, I worshipped at a Presbyterian Church, USA in rural Colorado. The service didn't begin with confession and forgiveness. It began with a prayer to the Holy Spirit. In unison, the congregation thanked the Holy Spirit for being present. They asked the Holy Spirit to inspire their worship and give them new insights. They praised God for this third person of the Trinity which united them in mind and body.

Such a different way to begin worship! As we know, our Presbyterian brothers and sisters take the work of the Holy Spirit seriously. We Lutherans tend to color with only two crayons in the crayon box. We worship God, focusing on God the Father and God the Son. Presbyterians are certainly polychromatic; allowing all three persons of the Trinity space and room in their worship.

And so, to honor them and our God and Nicodemus, I invite you to sing with me in prayer....**Holy Spirit, come to us, Holy Spirit, come to us.** (ELW 406 from the Taize community)

It was the Holy Spirit who prompted Nicodemus to seek out Jesus in the dark of night. Something wasn't quite right. Or maybe it was right, but he simply couldn't put his finger on it.

As a Pharisee, a teacher of the Law, Nicodemus was a guardian of the Law of Moses and its interpretation. Pharisees had support of the common people as opposed to the more elite Sadducees. Nicodemus decided he had clear up these conflicting experiences of Jesus doing these miraculous signs and the theology in his head. His colleagues were rejecting Jesus, but Nicodemus was curious. Or maybe confused. Or felt convicted?

“You're telling me I have to be born again?” he says to Jesus.

Jesus replies, “You’re not listening. Let me say it again. ...when you look at a baby, it’s just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can’t see and touch – the Spirit – and becomes a living spirit. Don’t be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be ‘born from above’ – out of this world, so to speak. You know how the wind blows this way and that...that’s the way it is with everyone ‘born from above’ by the wind of God, the Spirit of God.” (The Message. Pg 224)

It blew Nicodemus’ mind!

The Judaism which both Nicodemus and Jesus understood focused on one’s birth status. You had to be born into the right family. (As if any of us really has any say about it!) But in a Jewish culture, it was important that one be a child – a descendent of Abraham.

The birth certificate gets framed and put on the wall. But if there isn’t a direct line back to Abraham, well then it got put in the bottom drawer out of sight.

Now, Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, God gives birth to all people into a new family. God gives birth to anyone and everyone....because anyone and everyone is born of God’s spirit. Familial status doesn’t matter. God’s Holy Spirit status matters!

(SING) **“Holy Spirit come to us. Holy Spirit come to us.”** (ELW 406)

Familial status doesn’t matter. Through Water and Spirit, we are born into God’s family. A year ago, many of you brought or took pictures of your own baptismal certificates. It was a joy to celebrate all the congregations who received you in love and pastors who washed your heads with Water and the Word. On each of those dates, you were promised and proclaimed as beloved Sons and Daughters of God.

In Baptism, we join a new family with many new sisters and brothers that aren’t related by blood. Instead, we are related by those drops of water and God’s claim upon our lives. Together, we are aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, cousins connected forever by a watery birth at a font. Jesus was right, we have a whole new family even if we come from different sides of the tracks or opposite ends of the world.

Perhaps I've shared with you my own confusion when my Mother presented me an envelope that contained two Baptismal certificates, both signed by different pastors and with different dates on them. I remember exclaiming, "What?! Did you have me done twice?"

Jesus is saying the same thing to Nicodemus. One baptism with water isn't enough! God gives us this double baptism. Once into God's family through a watery baptism, and another baptism through the Holy Spirit born in us forever.

Which means that we must not think about our Baptisms as 'one and done!' Check the box. Hang the certificate. Remember it fondly when we get out the faded pictures. Forget about it most days.

No! One baptism isn't enough. There are two. Baptized in water and born into God's family. Then we are baptized with God's spirit born anew by God each and every day of our lives.

Born is the past tense of the verb 'to bear.' Our mother's had to bear us into this world. We as babies didn't do that work. With each contraction, our mothers did the work of bearing us from one world into the next. We were born without our own efforts.

Likewise, God's Spirit bears us anew every day. Just as our physical bodies never stop growing, God's Spirit keeps pushing and laboring upon us to grow deeper into God's spiritual realm.

(SONG) Holy Spirit come to us. Holy Spirit come to us. (ELW 406)

God does the work of birthing us anew. God labors upon us. As Jesus clearly says, "No one has ever gone up into the presence of God except the One who came down from that Presence, the Son of Man....This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son....so that no one need be destroyed; by believing anyone can have a whole and lasting life."

Women aren't the only Ones to bear children. God bore God's own Son, by giving that Son to us, all of humanity. God bore God's own Spirit into our lives that we might believe.

We hear this passage in the middle of our Lenten season. This week as we practice our Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting, and sacrificial giving, listen for the Holy

Spirit moving within. Could it be that as Holy Spirit moves us to pray, moves us to fast or give, that labor of love will give birth to new life within?

As a Pharisee, Nicodemus would have understood the spirit as Divine Inspiration. He would've known a divine voice to be an ongoing partner in dialog with the scriptures, the Torah. Jewish thought knew 'spirit' not as part of the Trinitarian Godhead like we do, but certainly as an intimate connection with God continuing to bring understanding. It was Ruah haKodesh, the Holy Spirit. (www.beth-elsa.org/Worship/Sermons/Guest_Speakers/Do_Jews_Believe_in_the_Holy_Spirit_01_15_10)

We too know an intimate connection with God. A wise person once said, "If you have any inclination towards God, any whisper from the Holy Spirit, lean into it. Go towards it." God labors and pushes us towards God all the time. Holy Spirit is an ongoing dialog partner with us in life; moving us to grow in faith and life!

And so we pray.... **Holy Spirit come to us. Holy Spirit come to us.** (ELW 406)
And all God's people said,
Amen!