Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today’s narrative is about Nicodemus, a Pharisee a respected leader and member of the Sanhedrin, the supreme judicial, ecclesiastical and administrative council of the Judeans. They had sole authority to try a king, expand the boundaries of the Temple and Jerusalem and the final word in matters of law. Mary and I liked the role Nicodemus played in the New Testament. In fact, our dog is named after Nicodemus which for obvious reason we simply call him Nico. What we like about Nicodemus is his transformation and growth to become a disciple and follower of Christ.

Only John mentions Nicodemus. He does not appear in the other 3, the synoptic or similar gospels. He is first mentioned in today’s narrative which occurs right after Jesus turned over the money changers tables in the Temple. and when he comes to meet Jesus at night. He comes in the flickering light of torches at night to ask Jesus, who he refers to as teacher, about his teachings. Because of Jesus miraculous signs, which other call miracles, Nicodemus and others recognized Jesus is a teacher who comes from God. Coming privately at night indicates he has a level of shame since a scholar at his level would not want to go to another to learn. Additionally, he would be afraid of what the other members of the Sanhedrin would do if they saw him meeting with Jesus.

Jesus responded by telling him no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. Nicodemus then asks how someone who grow old can be born. Do they enter into the womb a second time to be born? His physical explanation is are quite challenging to all of us. It is hard to wrap our head around the thought of a grown person entering their mother’s womb to be born again. Some scholars point out in teaching Rabbis such as Nicodemus would state the most extreme outcome so they could then discard that possibility. But Nicodemus is caught up in the physical world and is not considering the spiritual world. This is a shortcoming of the Pharisees throughout their encounters with Jesus.

We often also have that difficulty, seeing things from the physical world, from our experiences and worldview that doesn’t include the spiritual world. Jesus pointed out to Nicodemus that he is a teacher of Israel yet he doesn’t understand these spiritual things. Nicodemus understands Jesus is talking about a second birth. Then Jesus explains what it means to be born again to enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus tells Nicodemus and us to enter heaven we need to be born of water and the Spirt. John the Baptist proclaims baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin, and says another will come after him who will not only baptize with water, but with the Holy Spirit. Our Holy Baptism is a new creation where we die with Christ but will join with Christ in his glorious resurrection. It is the Word of God, a commandment of Jesus (go baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirt) The dove that came from heaven at Jesus baptism where God said “This is my Son with whom I am well pleased” represents the presence of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirt that is present in our baptism through the light on the candle. The same Spirit that will nurture us and our faith community as we follow Christ.

Jesus discusses the dichotomy of being born in the flesh as opposed to being born of the Spirit. Our physical bodies are perishable but our spiritual bodies will live forever. The Spirit Jesus is talking about is like the wind which will blow where it wants and is not controllable. We can not control it but we can call upon it when needed “Come, Holy Spirit, come, “to help us to be nurtured and discern to carry out God’s mission in the world.

 Jesus talks about God’s love for the world, for everyone, lest we forget, that God gave his only begotten Son so that those who believe in him will have eternal life. That’s the good news. Jesus is claiming himself as the Messiah while laying out fundamental Christian theology - the god news which we are to share with others.

Like Nicodemus Jesus will transform your life. The second time Nicodemus is mentioned he reminds his colleagues in the Sanhedrin that the law requires that a person be heard before being judged. Their actions are contrary to the law and he is standing boldly in the light of day to make sure Jesus is being judged fairly but unfortunately to no avail.

Finally, Nicodemus’s transformation as a disciple and follower when appears after the Crucifixion of Jesus to provide the customary embalming spices, to assist Joseph of Arimathea to bury Jesus. No longer does he hide in the dark or feel ashamed to be a follower of the Messiah. We too should embrace Jesus whole heartedly and share with others the Good News. Go and do. Amen.