

**Introduction:** *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (3:16).* Eternal life. God created us to live eternally, but the question is where we will spend eternity. Will we spend eternity apart from the Holy Trinity, apart from everything good that God creates and gives? Or will we enter the kingdom of God and receive the life that flows from the crucified and risen body of Christ? The kingdom of God is, itself, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The kingdom of God is an eternity to receive the good things that God gives us, starting for us in being born with the waters of Holy Baptism.

Jesus tells Nicodemus, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (3:3).* We can understand Nicodemus’ confusion: *“**How can** a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (3:4).* Well... no—not even with today’s technology, emancipation, and surgery—could we be born again.

So why the confusion? Jesus uses the Greek word *ἄνωθεν*, which can have two meanings: “again” as well as “from above.” Nicodemus is partially misunderstanding Jesus, thinking that Jesus speaks of earthly birth and earthly family. But Jesus clarifies for Nicodemus, of course, when he says *“born of water and the Spirit” (3:5),* so to be born from above, *ἄνωθεν*, is to be baptized, from above, to be given birth into God’s name and begotten from our Heavenly Father, through His Son, in the Holy Spirit.

It is for this reason that the famous John 3:16 speaks of God’s only Son, the one who is begotten of the Father from eternity; the one who is begotten, not made; the one who sent His Holy Spirit at Pentecost; the one who promises eternal life through water and the Spirit. There are not three Eternals, but one Eternal. The Son is of the same nature as the Father, and just as the Father gives all things to the Son, it is God’s very nature to give **us** everything good, including creation: human birth into the image of God, including justification: eternal life from above, by faith alone through Jesus’ blood alone.

The Father’s only Son is begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages, meaning: in eternity before God created time itself. He is true man, born from the substance of His earthly mother. Jesus is begotten from above, from His heavenly, eternal Father, and He now gives that same gift to us, because He shares our earthly substance, our flesh. At His Baptism in the Jordan River by the prophet John, the Holy Trinity Himself testified the way that He would make us holy like Himself: birth from above, after God’s own image and with God’s very substance.

The three-in-one God, the *“Holy Holy Holy”* LORD, Yahweh Himself, became human flesh, conceived in the Virgin Mary’s womb (Is. 6:3). God is the same flesh lifted

up on the cross and ascended into Heaven: *“He who descended from heaven [above], the Son of Man”* (3:13-14): Not so that we would perish, but so that, by the flesh of Jesus, we too would be born from above, from Our Father who Art in Heaven, above. He gives us eternal life through the flesh and blood of Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

Nicodemus thought Jesus was *“a teacher come from God,”* only able to do signs and miracles because God was with him (3:2). On the contrary, Jesus is God Himself, who has sent God the Spirit to His Church, that pastors would do signs and miracles with water and the Word, in the stead and by the command of God, just as Peter preached on Pentecost Day: *“Hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst”* (Acts 2:22). Doesn't it sound like what happens here, every Sunday? The Church of the Resurrection continues the same work that Jesus Himself did, does now, and will continue such good deeds of receiving the Lord's Body and Blood until the Last Day.

We confess in the Athanasian Creed that, at Jesus' coming judgment, “all people will rise again with their bodies and give an account concerning their own deeds.” How terribly sad that so many hurt and harm their own body as well as the body of others, the bodies for which Christ earned resurrection and eternal life. Your bodies.

Sinners despise their bodies with discontent, and slanders their looks and abilities, even though they are created in the image of God. And so many, by word and deed, desire to change the way God has created them, born from their earthly mother.

What the disdain of this world needs to hear is the gift of the bodily resurrection. They need to hear that Jesus Christ, who they wish dead: just as Peter's hearers wished Him dead, that Jesus has risen from the dead, in the body. You need to hear the bodily resurrection, and so does the world, because it has to do with God's good creation of the body, that your body is in the image of God. Jesus is born from His Father above, and He has risen to His Father above. So too will all who believe in him (3:17).

To receive such birth from above makes you part of the Church, part of Christ's Holy Bride, and like any other family, God's family on earth receives bodily sustenance at the Father's Table. Both the world and you need to hear that you are born from above into the Kingdom of God, into the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, into the eternal life of the good things that God gives us, and it starts for us in being born with the waters of Holy Baptism. **For the Father so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that by the gifts that the Spirit brings, whoever believes in Jesus should not perish but have eternal life. Amen.**