



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Gospel According to St. John

## Chapter 3

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# Introduction

- None of the chapters of the New Testament is as difficult as chapter three in the Gospel according to St. John
- In spite of that, it has attracted many unbelievers to convert into the Christian faith
- Within the same framework of teachings, that assure a new Messianic life and together with the revelation of a new wine and a new temple, it now becomes necessary to reveal the new birth



# Introduction

## Chapter Outline:

- The New Birth 1-21
- John the Baptist Exalts Christ 22-36



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- As we have mentioned in the last chapter, some scholars consider that St. John selected from the works and sermons of the Lord Jesus Christ seven miracles that He performed throughout seven different stages
- The First Stage: The New Beginning (Ch 2-4)
- The Gospel of St. John is called The New Gospel and it is called the Book of Genesis
- This is because the Gospel according to St. John presents powerfully to us the story of the renewal of the creation



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- In this stage we find that the Lord Jesus Christ is present at several meetings where His message focuses on renewal
- The first meeting occurs at Cana in Galilee and there He presents a joyful and new Messianic life
- The second meeting occurs in the Temple and there He speaks of a new and resurrected Temple
- The third meeting occurs with Nicodemus



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- Nicodemus is a Jewish name means 'the conqueror of the people'
- He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest council for the Jewish nation
- The Pharisees truly displayed a hostile and rebellious spirit towards the Divine truth
- However, there were some among the scholars who yearned to meet with the Lord and they found His door opened



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- Every time St. John the Evangelist mentions the person of Nicodemus, he presents him in connection with his visit to the Lord at night
- This is repeated three times in this Gospel, 3:2, 7:50, 19:39
- Why did Nicodemus come by night to visit Jesus?
- There are several possibilities
- Perhaps Nicodemus was drawn to Christ but was hesitant to come to Him in the daylight when he could be recognized because he is a man of such importance and was afraid that this would be reported to the chief priests



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- Another view says that he is being sent as an official of the Sanhedrin to test Jesus and to try to gain evidence against Him
- Since night/darkness Gospel according to St. John symbolize the realm of evil, untruth and ignorance it is unlikely that Nicodemus' reasons for coming to Jesus at night are positive
- This is supported by Jesus statement when He points out to Nicodemus that he does have a choice to come out of the darkness and into the light, verses 19-21





# The New Birth 3:1-21

- Perhaps he had the desire to have Jesus alone, as he found Him all the day dealing with the multitude; so that it was impossible for him to get an opportunity to speak fully on those weighty affairs concerning which he intended to consult him
- However, we may take it for granted that he had no design at present to become His disciple; as baptism and circumcision, which were the initiating ordinances among the Jews, were never administered in the night time



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- The Lord Jesus Christ did not ask Nicodemus any such questions as why he came at night and did not even rebuke Him, for the prophet says: “A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoking flax He will not quench” Isaiah 42:3; Matthew 12:19-20
- *Rabbi*, The customary title of reverence for a teacher but given here by a technically trained Rabbi to One who had no formal title to it, John 7:15



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- *we*, it could be that he came with another person or more of his students, or that he came to speak on behalf of some Pharisees who had admitted what Nicodemus confesses in this passage
- However, none of them dared to speak openly or to meet with the Lord secretly
- It is possible, however, that *we know*, signifies no more than, it is known, it is generally acknowledged and allowed, that You are a teacher come from God



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- *No one can do these signs*, It is on the evidence of Your miracles that I ground my opinion of You
- No man can do what You do, unless the omnipotence of God be with him
- “Nicodemus was one of those who (believed in His name yet He did not commit Himself to them [2:23-24]. Nicodemus came to the Lord, but he came at night. He came in the darkness even though he came to the Light” St. Augustine



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- *“Most assuredly,* The words are in the decisive tone of authority and certainty
- The Lord Jesus Christ gently reprimands Nicodemus and reveals to him that it is not enough for a person to believe that Jesus Christ is a divine teacher; neither is it enough to admire His miracles and consider them real and unique
- The Greek word Jesus uses for “again” is a word that has a double meaning
- It can mean "from above" or it can mean "again"



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- “It is possible to rephrase the Lord’s words as follows:” If you are not born again and if you do not receive fellowship with the Spirit within the baptismal font of renewal then you cannot possess the right thoughts concerning Me. This is because your concept about my body is not spiritual (Titus 3:5) ...the word ‘again’ (or from above) is interpreted by some to mean ‘from heaven’ while others find it to convey the meaning of ‘from the beginning.’” St. John Chrysostom



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- Jesus' answer is meant to show Nicodemus that He has not come from God in the sense that Nicodemus thought, as a man who is simply "approved" by God, but instead has come in the unique sense of having descended from God's presence to raise men, like Nicodemus, to God
- Nicodemus understood that the words of the Lord were an invitation to a 'new birth', and this puzzled him
- How could a fully grown adult enter into his mother's womb and be born again?



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- Nicodemus was shocked by the Lord's words about the new birth
- Like all other Jews, he took pride in being the son of Abraham
- They all felt they were God's chosen people and that they were blessed by the prophets and the divine promises
- So Nicodemus is not only an Israelite but a Pharisee as well





# The New Birth 3:1-21

- What better birth could the Lord wish to give him? The Jews expected that when the Messiah would come, the nations would accept the faith and be born again, but as for them this did not apply
- For they felt there could be no other birth more honorable for them than their current status
- “Just as there can be no repetition of the birth from the womb, so there can be none other from Baptism.” St. Augustine



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- “Nicodemus came to the Lord Jesus Christ as though he were coming to an ordinary person. He then heard of sublime matters that could not come from any person... In moments, Nicodemus tried to rise quickly to such heights but his understanding was darkened. He became unsteady and failed in his faith constantly as he leaned on his own potentials. As a result, he insisted on confirming the impossibility of the Lord’s words. It is as though he challenged the Lord to clarify His teaching by saying to Him: “Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” St. John Chrysostom



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- The Lord repeats again what He had said earlier in order to proclaim that this truth cannot be overlooked or taken lightly
- The Lord insists on the need for a new birth in spite of the inability of Nicodemus to comprehend it
- For there is no other way to see and enter the kingdom of God except by going through a second birth
- “Baptism washes all our faults away. It makes us become the holy temple of God and restores to us fellowship with the divine nature through the Holy Spirit” St. Clement of Alexandria



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- Verse 6 underlines the mystery or sacrament of baptism
- Through baptism, we have been granted adoption
- Hence, we have become sons of God and rightful heirs to His kingdom, Romans 8:15
- When Nicodemus expressed his desire to comprehend what appeared impossible to him, the Lord revealed to him the meaning of a new birth



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- It did not involve a physical birth achieved by re-entering into the mother's womb
- Rather, it meant a spiritual birth achieved by the power of God's Holy Spirit
- We are flesh not only because of this physical component but also in the sense that our bodies have become corrupted, Genesis 3:5
- Since our souls become one with the body, the soul consequently becomes enslaved to the dictates of the lustful body



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- Now how can a union be achieved between that which is entirely flesh and God Who is a Spirit?
- This is what demanded a new birth so that the entire human being might carry the feature of the Spirit
- Consequently, the flesh would find its pleasure and joy in the Spirit rather than in the lusts of the flesh
- The Lord gradually opened before him the hidden matters of this mystery



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- It is as though the Lord is telling him: ‘We are not speaking about the flesh, but about the spirit, O Nicodemus!’
- “That which is powerful will definitely dominate that which is weak. Therefore the power of the spirit will devour the weakness of the flesh. In such a case, that person is no more a mere physical vessel for he/she has become spiritual due to the fellowship with the Spirit.” St. Iranaeus



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- By saying, *Do not marvel*, the Lord reveals the troubled state of Nicodemus
- He leads him to something easier to understand
- Indeed, the Lord moves away from all that relates to the flesh when He says, *that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*
- As Nicodemus could not comprehend that which is born of the Spirit though He is a spirit, the Lord presents to him another example





# The New Birth 3:1-21

- Though the manner in which this new birth is effected by the Divine Spirit, is incomprehensible to us, yet we must not, on this ground, suppose it to be impossible
- The wind blows in a variety of directions, we hear its sound, perceive its operation in the motion of the trees, etc., and feel it on ourselves, but we cannot discern the air itself
- We only know that it exists by the effects which it produces
- So is every one who is born of the Spirit



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- The effects are as discernible and as sensible as those of the wind; but itself we cannot see
- But he who is born of God knows that he is thus born
- The Spirit itself, the grand agent in this new birth, bears witness with his spirit, that he is born of God, Romans 8:16
- For, he that believes has the witness in himself, 1 John 4:13, 5:10; Galatians 4:6



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- The Spirit works secretly and mysteriously yet its influence is clear in the life of the believer who experiences His presence each day
- “The Lord is asking why, if you cannot explain the movement of the wind and its course and this is something you comprehend through your sense of touch and hearing, then why are you so troubled by the work of the divine Spirit?” St. John Chrysostom



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- Nicodemus was unable to comprehend spiritual matters as they are inconceivable to the ordinary man
- He was unable to understand divine matters by depending on human wisdom
- In verse 2 Nicodemus attempted to flatter Jesus by calling Him a man *come from God as a teacher*
- The Pharisees present themselves as knowing everything about the Law and Sacred Scripture
- Jesus is rightly chastising Nicodemus by putting the proud Pharisee in his place



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- If Nicodemus knew the Scriptures then Jesus' teaching about the Spirit of God coming *from above* should have made him recall that the pouring out of the spirit of God was an important prophecy in the Old Testament picture of "the Last Days" also called "the Day of the Lord"
- In Isaiah 32:15 Isaiah prophesizes that Israel will not be restored to God *until the spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes fruitful field*
- Also Joel 2:28; Ezekiel 39:29



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- “What do you think, my brothers? Do you believe that the Lord wishes to reprimand the teacher of the Jews to ridicule him? The Lord knew exactly what He was doing for He desired that this man would be born of the Spirit, and no one can receive this blessing unless he becomes humble... Being a teacher made Nicodemus extremely self confident ... The Lord diminished his pride in order to offer him the new birth. He reprimanded him as though he were an ignorant man.” St. Augustine



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- Here the Lord uses the plural probably to indicate that He is speaking in the name of the Holy Trinity Who yearns for the new birth of mankind
- It is the only Son of God, who is here speaking, showing us how the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father
- Because it is hard for a normal person to comprehend the new spiritual birth, the Lord Jesus Christ presents His testimony and that of the Father
- He explains their heavenly concept of that astonishing birth granted from above through the work and action of the Holy Spirit within the waters of baptism



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- *you do not receive Our witness*, “you Jews” the teachers, of whom Nicodemus was one, the representatives of His own who did not received Him, John 1:11
- This attitude of the mind which refused to accept the evidence of witnesses as to things they had known and seen was of the essence of unbelief, and made further revelation impossible
- When the will closed the sense of faith, it did not leave any open access for fuller spiritual truth





# The New Birth 3:1-21

- “Some consider that the expression ‘earthly things’ refers to the wind to imply that ‘if I have given you an example of earthly things and yet you have not believed even that, then how can you learn of heavenly matters?’ ... The Lord does not say: ‘You do not understand’ but rather ‘You do not believe.’ This happens when a person is inclined to misinterpret certain matters that are logically conceivable and is truly unwilling to accept them. In this case it is possible to accuse him of lack of understanding. However, when that person refuses to accept matters that cannot be comprehended with the mind but by faith only, then the accusation against him would be that he lacks belief rather than understanding.” St. John Chrysostom



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- *No one has ascended*, This seems a figurative expression for, no man has known the mysteries of the kingdom of God
- Our Lord probably spoke to correct a false notion among the Jews that Moses had ascended to heaven, in order to get the law
- It is not Moses who is to be heard now, but Jesus
- Moses did not ascend to heaven; but the Son of man is come down from heaven to reveal the Divine will
- *came down from heaven*, The incarnation of Christ, coming down from heaven, to dwell upon earth



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- *who is in heaven*, Lest a wrong meaning should be taken from the foregoing expression, and it should be imagined that, in order to manifest Himself upon earth He must necessarily leave heaven
- Our blessed Lord qualifies it by adding, the Son of man who is in heaven
- Pointing out, by this, the omnipresence of His nature
- It is a character essentially belonging to God; for no being can possibly exist in more places than one at a time, but He who fills the heavens and the earth



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- Nicodemus spoke with the Lord as he perceived Him to be a prophet from God
- It would have been fitting for him to perceive that the Lord is greater than a prophet
- By His incarnation He descended from heaven, and by His Divinity He reigns in heaven
- He is the Lord come from heaven, 1 Corinthians 15:47



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- “If you asked: ‘What is the link between these words and what was said?’ My answer would be: ‘They are closely linked because when Nicodemus told the Lord: *“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God...”*’; the Lord wanted to dismiss that same statement and said something that would communicate the following: ‘Do not think that I have come to fit the role of a teacher like many other prophets who are here on earth. Rather I have come from heaven while I live there as well.’ Have you grasped how the Lord Jesus Christ is not in heaven only but that He is present everywhere and fills all His creatures?”  
St. John Chrysostom



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- He shows the reason why He descended from heaven, that He might be lifted up, i.e. crucified, for the salvation of man
- It is, by the appointment of God, as certain a remedy for sinful souls as the bronze serpent elevated on a pole, Numbers 21:9, was for the bodies of the Israelites, which had been bitten by the fiery serpents in the wilderness
- As the serpent was raised up, so shall Christ be lifted up
- As the people who were stung by the fiery serpents were restored by looking up to the bronze serpent, so those who are infected with and dying through sin are healed and saved, by looking up to and believing in Christ crucified



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- “You might wonder: what was the purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ in not stating clearly that He will be crucified and just hinted to His hearers by mentioning an old symbol (the serpent)? My answer is as follows: First in order to let us know that the sayings of the Old Testament agree with the New Testament, the first is not in contradiction to the second; Secondly: so that we may know that the Lord did not come unwilling into the world. Besides, so that these sufferings constitute for many a source of salvation.” St. John Chrysostom



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- St. John Chrysostom continues and says, “Indeed, no one should say: How can those who believe in the Crucified be saved if He Himself was caught by death? That is why the Lord reminds us of the old story. Moreover, if the Jews have escaped death by looking at a bronze serpent then how much more will believers in the Crucified enjoy greater benefits with good reason? The crucifixion was not achieved due to the weakness of the Crucified or due the overruling power of the Jews but because “God loved the world” [16]. Therefore His living tabernacle (His Body) hurried towards the Cross.”





# The New Birth 3:1-21

- Our Savior makes use of these words, *the Son of man must be lifted up* or exalted; (*exaltari*) by which form of expression He would teach us, that He does not consider the cross as a disgrace, but as a glory
- *That*, v 15, The eternal life of believers is the purpose of the 'must' in John 3:14



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- In this chapter, the focus is on the glory of the Cross
- On it the Son of Man is lifted up in order to attract and deliver all mankind
- This is repeated four times, 8:28; 12:32-34
- Divine love is the dynamic element constantly working to offer the world the joy of salvation
- In his article on repentance, St. Ambrose draws our attention to significance of faith which enables a person to enjoy eternal life
- Therefore how can we stop praying for unbelievers so that they may receive the divine gift of faith and so attain eternal life?



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- *Gave His only begotten Son*, He was then His Son, His only begotten Son, before He sent Him into the world
- He was not, therefore, His Son, only by the incarnation, but was His Son *from the beginning*, as He was also His *word* from all eternity
- This was the constant doctrine of the Church, and of the Fathers, against the heresy of the Arians
- *The world through Him might be saved*, “He has come like a good physician, effectually to save mankind. The man, therefore, destroys himself, who refuses to follow the prescriptions of his physician.” St. Augustine



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not a mere theoretical belief
- It is a practical union and fellowship with Him
- *“there is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”*  
Romans 8:1
- The Lord confirms again in chapter 5 *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life”* John 5:24



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- “You might say: ‘Since the Lord did not come with the purpose of condemning the world, then how is it that He has already passed judgment on those who do not believe and while the day of judgment has not come yet?’ The answer is: ‘The Lord could be declaring what will happen in the future. It is like the case of the murderer who is not judged according to the nature of the judge but according to his crime. Similarly, an unbeliever is condemned by the nature of his denial and blasphemy. Adam died the day he ate of the tree, for the pronouncement on that issue has already been pronounced, “...but of the tree of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17).’”  
St. John Chrysostom



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- In rejecting Christ one rejects salvation and eternal life
- This is what Peter preached in Acts 4:11-12 to the members of the Jewish Law Court, *"This is the stone which was rejected by you, builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other came under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"*
- *this is the condemnation*, That is, this is the reason why any shall be found finally to perish because they refused to receive the salvation which God sent to them



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- *light has come* , Jesus, the Sun of righteousness, the fountain of light and life; spreading His benevolent influences every where, and favoring men with a clear and full revelation of the Divine will
- *because their deeds were evil*, An allusion to robbers and murderers, who practice their abominations in the night for fear of being caught
- The sun is a common blessing to the human race, it shines to all, envies none, and calls all to necessary labor



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- If any one choose rather to sleep by day, that he may rob and murder in the night time, he does this to his own risk, and has no excuse
- His punishment is the necessary consequence of his actions
- So will the punishment of ungodly men be
- There was light and they refused to walk in it





# The New Birth 3:1-21

- They chose to walk in the darkness, that they might do the works of darkness
- They broke the Divine law, refused the mercy offered to them, are arrested by Divine justice, convicted, condemned, and punished
- Whence, then, does their condemnation proceed?
- From Themselves



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- The wicked love darkness when it is more convenient to do their evil acts
- They hate the light as it exposes them
- The Bible is frightful for the wicked world which considers it an enemy that rebukes and condemns
- *they have been done in God*, That they are performed according to the will of God, or perhaps by the assistance of God, and are such as God will approve



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- The actions of good people are performed by the influence and aid of God, Philippians 2:13
- “Hurry, my brothers, so that the darkness might not overtake you. Awake to your need of salvation. Awake while there is time...Awake while the day is here and it is shining. The Lord is the Day and He is ready to forgive sins but only to those who admit them. He is ready to punish those who defend themselves and those who boast of their righteousness and believe they are worthy while they are nothing.” St. Augustine



# The New Birth 3:1-21

- This is the end of our Lord's discourse to Nicodemus; and though we are not informed here of any good effects produced by it, yet we learn from other scriptures that it had produced the most blessed effects in his mind, and that from this time he became a disciple of Christ
- He publicly defended our Lord in the Sanhedrin, of which he was probably a member, John 7:50, and, with Joseph of Arimathea, gave him an honorable funeral, John 19:39, when all his friends had deserted him

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- Jerusalem itself, where Christ held the preceding discourse with Nicodemus, was in Judea; but the evangelist means that our Lord quitted the city and its suburbs, and went into the country parts
- The same distinction between Jerusalem and Judea is made, Acts 1:8; Acts 10:39; and in 1 Maccabees 3:34; and in 2 Maccabees 1:1, 10
- The Lord Jesus Christ did not baptize but His disciples did so through His authority and command, John 4:2

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- That is why they considered it as though He was baptizing
- Only from John's Gospel do we learn that Jesus' disciples were baptizing before His resurrection
- *in Aenon*, This place was eight miles southward from Scythopolis, between Salim and Jordan
- The Lord Jesus Christ began to baptize through His disciples before John the Baptist is put in prison in order to draw the disciples of the Baptist towards Himself
- In this way they would not get scattered after his martyrdom

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- Besides, this would insure that the cycle of work would not end with the Baptist's death
- “The Lord used to go up to Jerusalem during the feasts as He wanted people to benefit from His teachings and miracles. When the celebrations were over, He would go to Jordan as many would travel and go there. He always went to places where there would be crowds in order to offer the many the blessings inherent in Him. Indeed, He did not do so in order to reveal Himself or to seek Honor. Therefore St. John the Evangelist clarifies this and says: ‘(though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples)’, John.4:2).” St. John Chrysostom

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- The subject of debate seems to have been, whether the baptism of John, or that of Christ, was the most effective towards purifying
- The disciples of the Baptist showed their respect for him by addressing him 'Rabbi'; and yet, on account of their love and jealousy for him, they showed disrespect to the Lord
- They did not even mention the name of the Lord but spoke lightly and referred to Him as *He who was with you*
- They believed that what the Lord was doing was an act of ungratefulness towards the Baptist who had baptized and witnessed for Him



# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- The Baptist was neither disturbed nor embarrassed; but proclaimed joyfully and with a glad spirit that what the Lord was doing is authorized by heaven
- He found this a good opportunity to confirm and clarify for a second time his witness for the Lord
- Rather than reprove and rebuke them harshly he told them that *a man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven*

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- As if he is saying, I have received, not only my commission, but the power also by which I have executed it, from above
- As I took it up at God's command, so I am ready to lay it down when He pleases
- I have told you from the beginning that I was only the forerunner of the Messiah, and was sent, not to form a separate party, but to point out to men that Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- *the friend of the bridegroom*, This term seems to have been more appropriate to Judea
- Biblical historians tell us that the Galilee did not have quite the same marriage customs as the Judeans
- In Judea it was the custom for two groomsmen to be in attendance upon the bridal couple, one for the bridegroom and the other for the bride
- Before the marriage they acted as intermediaries for the families of the betrothed couple

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- At the wedding the groomsmen offered gifts, they attended the bride and groom during the 7 days of feasting
- It was the duty of the "friend of the bridegroom" to present the groom to his bride at the wedding ceremony and after the marriage to maintain proper terms between the parties
- John the Baptist presents himself as fulfilling the same function for Jesus

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- This teaching of John the Baptist's can be compared to other teachings of Jesus, Mark 2:19-20 Jesus tells the Pharisees, *“Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.”*
- These wedding metaphors are common through Christ's teaching, Matthew 22:1-14, 25:1-13 and illustrate the continuing Biblical symbolism of God as the Bridegroom and the Church as His Bride

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- The servants of the bridegroom do not rejoice in the same manner as his friends, I am his friend, and I rejoice with very great joy, *because of the bridegroom's voice*
- *this joy of mine is fulfilled*, “indicates that ‘the task I had to do has been achieved and there is nothing more I can do in the future.’ The Baptist tells them what would take place in the future to prevent arousing intense physical emotions in the present as well as in the future. Therefore he affirms that events are proceeding in agreement with what he had said and done earlier on.” St. John Chrysostom

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- *must increase*, not in virtue and perfection, but in the opinion of the world, when they begin to know Him, and believe in Him
- And in like manner, I must be diminished, when they know how much He is above me
- *He must increase, but I must decrease*; “by which words the great forerunner demonstrates to the world, that not the least envy with regard to his divine Master rankles in his heart; but on the contrary, that he should be happy to see all his followers desert him, to run to Jesus Christ.” St. John Chrysostom

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- St. Augustine wonders, How might the Lord Jesus Christ increase? How does God increase? God neither increases nor decreases. If He were to increase then He is not perfect; and if He were to decrease then He is not God
- He continues, “Could that be a result of His willingness to become man when He became incarnate? He was a child, and although He is the wisdom of God, He lay in a manger as a newly born. Moreover, He sucked milk from his mother in spite of the fact that He is her Creator. Then the Lord Jesus Christ grew up physically and maybe that is why the Baptist said that”



# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- Before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, men used to glorify themselves
- He came as a person to reduce man's glory and to increase the glory of God
- St. Augustine says, "*He must increase, but I must decrease*, or in other words 'He will grant me good things and I will receive; He will be glorified and I will confess.' May every person become aware of his own condition and confess to God"

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- He continues, “... May God who is always perfect grow and increase in you for the more you comprehend Him the more He will appear to increase in you. As for Himself, He does not increase since He is the everlasting Perfection...This is also true of the inner depths of a person for he truly grows in the Lord God who appears increasingly in Him. However, the person himself seems to diminish when he falls away from his own arrogance and establishes the glory of God.” St. Augustine

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- *is above all*, This blessed bridegroom, who has descended from heaven, John 3:13, is above all, superior to Moses, the prophets, and me
- *he who is of the earth*, John himself, who was born in the common way of man
- *speaks of the earth*, Cannot speak of heavenly things as Christ can do; and only represents Divine matters by these earthly ordinances; for the spirit and meaning of which, you must all go to the Messiah Himself

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- The words spoken by the prophets are simply the testimony of what God has delivered to them through different means
- *what He has seen and heard*, meaning is not by His senses, but what He knows for certain, having the same knowledge as His eternal Father
- As for the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, they are proclamations of what He has seen and heard for He is never separated from the Father and He is the Truth Itself

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- These following words to the end of the chapter, seem to be the words of St. John the Baptist, rather than of the evangelist
- The sense is, whosoever has believed, and received the doctrine of Christ, has attested as it were under his hand and seal, *that God is true*, and has executed His promise concerning the Messiah
- Earlier disciples, as Andrew and John, John 1:40, had passed from the Forerunner to the Great Teacher, and had heard in His words that which went to the divine in their own spirits, and had come from the short first meeting with the conviction, “*We have found the Messiah*”

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- They received the witness, and, as they heard it, they too became witnesses
- Just as a man sets his private seal—here, probably, the common Eastern stamp that affixed the name is thought of, and by it attests the truth of a document, so they attested, in the power which that witness had over their lives, their recognition of it as truth
- *does not give the Spirit by measure*, We have all received the work of the Spirit with measure and proportion but the Lord possesses the Spirit entirely and completely and without measure

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- “There is no measure for the Son as it is impossible to measure Him. He exceeds all measure as He is God. How could you measure the One Who cannot be measured or describe Him as lacking?” St. Cyril the Great
- St. John the Baptist draws a distinction between his mission and the Lord’s mission
- The mission of John the Baptist is a mission of God ordained to a human apostle who speaks and testifies within the capacity and grace he receives

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- As for the mission of the Lord, it is the mission of the Son of God and His Word Who is one with Him
- He alone sees the Father as He is and can witness for Him
- The Spirit of the Son of God is the Spirit of the Holy Father and therefore, unlike the prophets, apostles, or believers in general, He does not receive the Spirit by measure



# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- John purpose is to show that Christ was infinitely above every teacher, prophet, and Divine messenger that had ever yet appeared
- The prophets had various gifts; some had visions, others dreams; some had the gift of teaching, others of comforting, etc.; but none possessed all these gifts
- Christ alone possessed their plenitude, and is all things in all
- He is the only One who possesses everything and holds all in His hands

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- The Father loves John, loves Paul, yet he has not given all things into their hands. The Father loves the Son, not as a lord does his servants, not as an adopted Son, but as His only begotten Son; therefore has He given all things into his hands, that as the Father is, so may the Son be.” St. Augustine
- “Jesus says: *“I am the door...”* (John 14:6, 10:9); *“No one comes to the Father except through Me...”*; *“...no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him”* (Matt 11:27). Therefore if you deny the One revealed to you, you will remain ignorant.” St. Cyril of Jerusalem

# John the Baptist Exalts Christ

## 3:22-36



- “The Baptist does not say: ‘The wrath of God will descend on him’ but rather ‘the wrath of God abides on him.’ All those who have been born vulnerable to death and subject to the wrath of God. And what is the wrath of God other than the wrath first caused by Adam...from this genealogy the Son has come, without sin, and was covered with the flesh that is subject to death. If He has shared with us the wrath of God when He bore our sins, then why are we reluctant and slow to share with Him the grace of God? Therefore he who does not believe, the wrath of God abides on him.” St. Augustine



# Discussion

- List and explain at least 3 other passages about being born again, becoming a child of God, or receiving a new life.
- What two aspects of the new birth did Jesus identify in v5?
- How did Nicodemus show his confusion, and how did Jesus respond?
- Suppose someone claims that John 3:16 shows we are saved by faith; baptism is not mentioned, so it is not necessary to salvation. How would you respond?



# Discussion

- Some people claim that v36 proves one who believes “has everlasting life.” If we “have” it, then we can never be lost. How would you respond?
- Explain how John's reaction to his disciples in verses 27-36 show how good a man and prophet John was.