

In the gospel reading for today, Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews came to Jesus because he saw signs that he believed were from God.

In verse 2 he said to Jesus: **"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."**

shmei/on, ou n miraculous sign, miracle; sign, that by which something is known or distinguished, or means of confirmation, indication, mark, signal; portent, warning sign

So far, though chapter 3 in today's gospel, the Apostle John has mentioned only one sign in his gospel, the wedding at Cana, in which Jesus was present and turned ordinary water into wine.

The Apostle, St, John wrote in **John 20:30-31** "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Jesus told Nicodemus that seeing signs is not what is important in order to inherit the Kingdom of God, but rather one must be born again.

Verses 4-5: ⁴Nicodemus Responded: **"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"**
⁵Jesus answered, **'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'**

Baptism is truly God's work when he gives us the gift of faith through the Holy Spirit; our sins are washed clean and we have new life and everlasting life. Only Jesus working through the Holy Spirit causes a person to be born again.

In verse 8 Jesus says: **⁸The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.**

We indeed hear the blowing of the wind, but we do not know where it comes from or where it is going. In the same way when God's Word is heard no one knows what it will accomplish and where it will bring forth fruit.

Isaiah 55:11 "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

In verses 12-13, Jesus says to Nicodemus: **¹²If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?**

Jesus tells Nicodemus about the most important sign of all. In verse 14, Jesus says: **"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up."**

Because of their unbelief and grumbling as they were wandering in the desert, the Lord sent fiery serpents who bit the Israelites and many died.

Then the people came to Moses and admitted their sin, and Moses prayed to God, and God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it on a pole, and those who were bitten when they looked at it would live.

Just like the Israelites in the desert we have grumbled and complained against God. We have disobeyed God's Word and rebelled against God.

We do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things, but we give in to the temptations of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature. We have set ourselves up against the God who came down from heaven.

The Lord put down Adam and Eve by putting them out of the Garden of Eden. He cast down the Israelites with the serpents' bites. He beats us down with the preaching of His Law, for we too are full of sinful pride.

He, who has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts and has put down the mighty from their thrones, has brought us down to our knees, that we would repent of all our sins.

Christ says in verse 14 that the Son of Man must be lifted up upon the Cross and all those who believe in him will have eternal life.

In Luther's sermon on today's text, he tells us: "We too have been bitten by the deadly fang of the devil, which is sin. As St Paul says, sin is a fiery, poisonous bite, or sting. If the poison enters the conscience, there is never any rest. Sin hurls against us and sets upon us death; death drives man, causing him to feel that he is in a veritable hell..."

...And there is no help or redress. You may do as many works as you please, you are condemned, nevertheless, until the miracle of grace arrives for you; that is another serpent raised up which is not poisonous nor harmful and has only the form of a serpent."

¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

The Israelites when bitten by the serpents could find no remedy until Moses put up the bronze serpent on a pole and all those who were bitten looked at the statue in faith and lived, for they had God's promise of life attached to the bronze serpent.

We too have no way of saving ourselves from the sting of death, which is our sin. No works that we do can save us from ourselves.

We fail to trust in God's Word, and we continually break His Holy Law, namely the 10 Commandments.

This is sin, and the result of sin is the curse of eternal condemnation, for, as St. Paul writes later in Romans, "For the wages of sin is death."

Repent, and be drowned and die with all your sins and evil desires and that a new man should daily emerge to live forth in the Spirit, and as a result produce the fruits of the spirit, and love you neighbor.

John 3:5 "Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

This rebirth has begun; it began at the baptismal font. This rebirth is of water and of the Holy Spirit, as our Lord tells us in the Holy Gospel appointed for today.

This faith is a gift from God, the work of the Holy Spirit is to bring you to and keep you in the true faith, as He calls you by the Gospel, enlightens you with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps you in the true faith.

Since God has given you the faith to believe in His Son, He also gives you the promise that is the Gospel.

He gives the forgiveness of sins to all who come to Him in repentance and faith, forgiving us for the sake of His only-begotten Son, who died for our forgiveness and rose again for our justification.

Verse 13 in the Epistle: **“For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.”**

The healing of the Israelites did not mysteriously emanate from the bronze piece of metal, but depended on faith in the power of God’s Word. When faith looks to Christ crucified, God saves us from eternal death and the fatal venom of sin.

Christ was the once and for all sacrifice for our sins. He was lifted upon the Cross for the salvation for all people. He shed his blood that cleansed you from all your sins.

Jesus crucified is the greatest sign of all—the miracle of the Cross. It is the fulfillment of all the signs Jesus performed, the greatest demonstration of God’s power and glory of the kingdom.

Nicodemus would eventually see Jesus lifted up upon the Cross. Whether such a sight produced faith is not written.

But for those faithful believers, it is the greatest sign and miracle of all.

During this Lent, we see this greatest sign of Jesus lifted upon the Cross for us and our salvation. Amen.