

This week we are reading the mysterious third chapter of John. It begins with the atmospheric encounter of Jesus and Nicodemus “by night”.

Light and darkness are dominant themes of the Gospel of John; and by setting the arrival of Nicodemus in the dark, John is saying quite a lot. The other great nocturnal arrival will be the arresting party in the garden of Gethsemane, which has to bring artificial light of torches and lanterns, because their eyes and their minds are darkened. But Jesus says of himself, *I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*. He warns those who are contemplating discipleship, *Walk while you have the light; son the night will be coming, when no-one can walk safely*. Nicodemus in some way shares in the disability of darkness; but, however stumblingly, at least he has found his way to the light.

There is a graceful Italian phrase for giving birth: they say that someone has *given a child to the light*. Jesus speaks to Nicodemus of his need to be *reborn* if he is going to *see* the Kingdom of God. (This is the only place in the Fourth Gospel where Jesus mentions the Kingdom, or reigning, of God; in the other three Gospels it is a prime theme, especially in the parables.) *Coming out into the light* is a moral way of life: living in the truth is another way of putting it; St Paul calls it *inheriting the light*, and speaks of believers as *children of the light* and *children of the day*.

Like many of the people who listen to Jesus in John’s Gospel, Nicodemus takes some time to get onto the wavelength; he asks whether a physical rebirth is possible. Jesus speaks of being *born spiritually*, and being *born from above*.

We can find all these themes in the Prologue of the Gospel. Of the Word it says: *In him was life, life that was the light of men: the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot defeat it*. It goes on to speak of *the Word enlightening all men*: and the Word gives all who live a choice between light and darkness. *There are those created in him, who do not know him; there are those related to his own people, who will not accept him; but to all who will accept him, he gives power to become children of God - born not from human generation, nor urge of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God himself*. This is being *born from above*; and it is the result of a conscious choice of ours in *accepting the Word*.

We receive the Word because we see him, made flesh for us; *We saw his glory, the glory that is his as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth*. All who see him, love him and respond to him. As in the first Creation, the breath of God, the Holy Spirit, disturbed the waters of the deep, in the second Creation, the Word of God is breathed over the world; in those who are to be reborn, the Spirit blows where he will, and their lives are caught up in mystery, only to be resolved when we enter into the heart of God.