

## Trinity Sunday

### OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 6:1-8

**In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”**

**Ch 6** Isaiah’s vision is the climax of his message in chs 1–5. This glimpse of God’s glory (vv 1–5; Jn 12:41), validates his message from God in this Book. (TLSB)

**6:1** *the year that King Uzziah died.* † 740 B.C. Isaiah’s commission probably preceded his preaching ministry; the account was postponed to serve as a climax to the opening series of oracles and to provide warrant for the shocking announcements of judgment they contain. The people had mocked the “Holy One of Israel” (5:19), and now he has commissioned Isaiah to call them to account. Uzziah reigned from 792 to 740 and was a powerful king. When he insisted on burning incense in the temple, however, he was struck with leprosy and remained leprous until his death (2Ch 26:16–21). He was also called Azariah (2Ki 14:21; 2Ch 26:1). (CSB)

Also called Azariah. Powerful king of Judah (792–740 BC; 2Ki 15:1–7; 2Ch 26). Human monarchs come and go, but God always reigns. (TLSB)

“In the year that King Uzziah died.” Because of the difficulty in determining biblical chronology exactly, dates ranging from 757 BC to 740 BC have been suggested for Uzziah’s (Azariah’s) death. Despite the difficulty in determining this date absolutely, Isaiah’s vision is firmly grounded in a definite historical event. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

This is a turning point in Israel’s history. They had become complacent and it would be Isaiah’s job to confront them about their lacks worship and living habits.

Second Chronicles 26:22 tells us that Isaiah was the recorder of the events during the reign of King Uzziah. Isaiah dated this chapter and its vision carefully. During the reign of Uzziah (also called Azariah; see 2 Kings 14:15) and his son Jotham, Judah extended her boundaries to their ancient frontiers. Commerce and agriculture flourished. The age created a sense of national pride. It was a time of prosperity and peace. (PBC)

Israel, Judah’s neighbor to the north, also experienced a period of national independence and power. Under Jeroboam II, Israel asserted itself and achieved military dominance in the area. Jeroboam II died several years before Uzziah. When he died, the Northern Kingdom, Israel, plunged into an age of chaos. Four of Israel’s last six kings were assassinated. Zechariah ruled only six months when Shallum assassinated him and succeeded him. Menahem assassinated Shallum and after one month and ruled for ten years. Assyria invaded during his reign and demanded tribute. The end was fast approaching. Pekahiah succeeded Menahem, but after two years, one of his chief officers, Pekah, assassinated the king and became king of Israel. All this was past history when Uzziah died during the reign of Pekah. (PBC)

Just as the death of Jeroboam II became the sunset for the North, the death of Uzziah marked the beginning of the end for Judah. Assyria had already begun to dominate the region, exacting tribute from Israel. Judah and Jerusalem fell under the shadow of the great superpowers to the northeast – Assyria and later Babylon. Peace and prosperity would soon disappear. (PBC)

All this has spiritual implications. God had sent prophets to warn of the judgments that He would send to Israel. The nation had turned away from Him. The judgment that would come less than 50 years after Uzziah's death slowly moved onward like an enormous millstone. God had set in motion and warned of its coming, but its momentum could not be stopped except by God Himself. If He did not stop it, the war machine of Assyria would grind Israel to dust. Israel refused to listen to the Lord's call to repent; the judgment continued to roll toward Israel. In spite of the warnings, God's people remained ignorant of the scope of the disaster. Worse yet, they were defiant, believing they could withstand the Assyrian forces. Samaria fell to the Assyrian invaders in 722 B.C. (PBC)

At Uzziah's death, Judah also stood in the path of God's judgment – a different judgment, but one just as certain. God had started another great stone moving. Babylon would follow Assyria as the dominant military power in the region. The judgment on Judah and Jerusalem came because God's people there had also forsaken Him. The Assyrian army destroyed the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C. and ravaged the Judean countryside, but it could not conquer Jerusalem. Over a century later, in 586 B.C., the Babylonians ground Judah to dust and carried the Southern Kingdom into captivity. During the years between the end of Israel and the captivity of Judah, God sent prophets to Judah to call them to repentance. But the people persisted in their rejection of the Lord and His promises. The death of Uzziah signaled the beginning of a new era for Judah. Prosperity and peace would disappear. Judgment was on the way. One strange irony of history pointed to a future judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem. About the year Uzziah died, Rome was founded. (PBC)

*I saw.* Probably in a vision in the temple. (CSB)

In a vision. Hilary of Poitiers: "Isaiah says that he has seen no God but Him. For he did actually see the glory of God, the mystery of Whose taking flesh from the Virgin he foretold.... He gazed upon the Divine glory, and men were filled with envy at such honour vouchsafed to his prophetic greatness. For this was the reason why the Jews [Judeans] passed sentence of death upon him" (NPNF 2 9:95). (TLSB)

*the Lord.* The true King (see v. 5). (CSB)

*throne.* The King of the universe is described in images of power and might. The ark of the covenant, kept in the Most Holy Place in the temple, was covered with two cherubim. God is "enthroned on the cherubim" (1Sm 4:4; 2Sm 6:2; Ps 80:1). (TLSB)

*high and lifted.*† The same Hebrew words are applied to God in 57:15, and similar terms are used of the suffering servant in 52:13. (CSB)

*train of his robe.* A long, flowing garment. Cf. the robe of the "son of man" in Rev 1:13. (CSB)

The long flowing trail of the royal garment in which the King of kings appeared to Isaiah was so large that it "filled the temple." (May refer to the smoke of the incense offering; cf vv 4, 6.) (TLSB)

This magnificent robe is symbolic of the divine "doxa," is Gods' majesty, the divine glory in which is reflected God's hidden essence. (Stoeckhardt)

*filled the temple* – This indicates the completeness of God’s rule and is a huge contrast to Uzziah. This would be of great comfort to Isaiah as he carried out his ministry

*temple*. Probably the heavenly temple, with which the earthly temple was closely associated. John’s vision of God on his throne is similar (Rev 4:1–8). (CSB)

Meant is the heavenly sanctuary, the place where God may be seen by angels and saints. This sanctuary is totally filled with the glory of the Almighty. (Stoeckhardt)

**6:2 Above**. Flanking the throne as an honor guard, much as the gold cherubim flanked the ark of the covenant. (TLSB)

*seraphim*. See v. 6; angelic beings not mentioned elsewhere. The Hebrew root underlying this word means “burn,” perhaps to indicate their purity as God’s ministers. (It refers to venomous snakes in 14:29; 30:6; see Nu 21:6.) They correspond to the “living creatures” of Rev 4:6–9, each of whom also had six wings. (CSB)

Hbr plural noun, occurring only here and in v 6 as a name for celestial beings. Hbr *saraph* suggests that they were glowing or fiery beings. Though their description is somewhat cryptic, the point of this vision is God’s glory, not the details of His attendants. (TLSB)

*Sərapim* (also in v 6), derived from *sarap* (to burn) in HALOT, but an earlier lexicon (Gesenius) suggests the word is related to an Arabic word referring to “princes, nobles of heaven.” The word as referring to a particular order of the angels occurs only here in Isaiah 6, where the seraphim have the specific duty of praising and serving God at his throne in heaven. At any rate, one cannot make a (verbal) connection with the “burning [or glowing] coal,” which is the single Hebrew word *ritsapah*. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

They are heavenly beings with certain human characteristics (face, hands, feet) and the capacity of speech. Their name means “burning ones”; fire represents holiness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

*stood ... flew*. “Stood” means positioned, as in “stood guard.” They did this by flying around the throne and praising God. Some rabbis held that angels were created on the fifth day of creation with the birds because they could fly. (TLSB)

*six wings* – Two covered their faces, for even in their perfection the surpassing brilliance of God was overwhelming. With another two they cover their lower body in modesty. The last two are used to serve the Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

*covered their faces*. Apparently they could not gaze directly at the glory of God. (CSB)

Seraphim covered their faces in reverence before God’s holy presence. They also covered their bodies in modesty. This is the antithesis of pagan worship that featured illicit sexuality. (TLSB)

This means that the angels worship God with such great reverence that they do not even look at God. The Jews on the contrary stood with head held high and neck stiff, that it would almost be up to God to fear them. Then the angels also covered their feet, because they would not want their walk and their endeavors to appear in the presence of God, as if they were pure before Him. In the Scriptures walking on foot means following some kind of life. John says (Matt. 3:3): “Prepare the way of the Lord,” that is, lead a

good life. Therefore these seraphim do not wish to boast of their wisdom and zeal of life, but they hide everything. What do we worms have to be proud about? (Luther)

**6:3** *one called to another* – Now the service the seraphim are rendering is described in greater detail. Above all else, their service consists in this, that they extol and praise God. In two choirs the seraphim hover around the throne of God, and the two choirs not begin an antiphony. (Stoekhardt)

Though God’s people today sing the words of this verse in the Divine Service, Isaiah does not necessarily indicate that the seraphim sang. (TLSB)

*Holy, holy, holy.* The repetition underscores God’s infinite holiness. Note the triple use of “the temple of the LORD” in Jer 7:4 to stress the people’s confidence in the security of Jerusalem because of the presence of that sanctuary. (CSB)

Refers to God in His totally separated state from humanity. In Hbr, repetition expresses a superlative; God is supremely holy. This threefold repetition is also evocative of the three persons of the Trinity. Ambrose: “They say it, not once, lest you should believe that there is but one; not twice, lest you should exclude the Spirit; they say not holies, lest you should imagine that there is plurality, but they repeat three times and say the same word, that even in a hymn you may understand the distinction of Persons in the Trinity, and the oneness of the Godhead and while they say this they proclaim God” (NPNF 2 10:151). (TLSB)

“Holy, holy, holy.” The song of the seraphim is prominent in both Jewish and Christian liturgies, underscoring its importance as a liturgical declaration about God. For the Christian, the threefold “holy” shows not only the absolute holiness of God, but also the three holy persons in one holy God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

The revelation of His presence, either in nature (Ps 19:1) or in history (1Ki 8:11; Jn 1:14). (TLSB)

“The whole earth is full of his glory.” ESV offers an alternative reading: “May his glory fill the whole earth.” This clause, like the preceding one, is a verbless clause, which would normally be read in the indicative. The clause is parallel to the preceding one, which is clearly indicative present tense. There seems, therefore, to be no reason to read this clause with a jussive force. The main text of the ESV is preferable. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

The holy angels confess that the Lord is holy, holy in an altogether different measure and sense than they are. God is holy, that is separated, set apart, infinitely exalted not only above the sins of men but above all creatures. The triple “holy” not only reinforces the concept holiness but points to the mystery of the Holy Trinity. There are three persons in the Godhead, and each one is God, is holy, in the same measure. (Stoekhardt)

The Lord of Hosts not only permits Himself and His holiness to be viewed, as far as it is possible for creatures to do so, by the heavenly hosts, but reveals Himself and His holiness also on earth, to human being on earth. (Stoekhardt)

kawdoshe – The Holy One, his eminence. This is used 39 times in Isaiah. He cannot tolerate sin and requires that his people be holy too.

*full of his glory.* In Nu 14:21–22; Ps 72:18–19 the worldwide glory of God is linked with his miraculous signs. (CSB)

All that he has done in creating, sustaining, redeeming, and sanctifying is evidence of his holy majesty and power. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

The whole earth is full of God’s glory. This, according to Scripture, for instance, Num 14:21, is the end of the ways and works of God on earth, that the whole earth is to be filled with His glory. (Stoeckhardt)

The angels in heaven take an interest in all that happens on earth, in what God does among and to men, and with all mankind praise God for what He does to the children of men. God’s great deeds and wonders on earth find their echo in heaven, in the song of praise of the heavenly hosts. (Stoeckhardt)

**6:4** *thresholds... shook ... filled with smoke.* Similarly the power of God’s voice terrified the Israelites at Mount Sinai, and the mountain was covered with smoke (see Ex 19:18–19; 20:18–19). (CSB)

*thresholds shook* – This description also emphasizes the majesty of God who will use a human being in the ministry of salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

The earth shook in the holy presence of the Lord, down to the bedrock of the Temple Mount. (TLSB)

This points to the shape of true religion, which is confession, praise, the proclamation of God. When this is known, man is terrified and humbled, and he gives up everything in which he formerly trusted and of which he made his boast. The preaching of grace confounds all self-assurance. (Luther)

TEMPLE FILLED WITH SMOKE – According to the context, in which we are told about the song of praise of the seraphim and its mighty effect, we are to take this smoke as incense, as a symbol of worship. And since shortly before the discussion concerned the revelation of God’s glory on earth, meant by the incense are the prayers of the saints on earth. Cf. Rev 5:8; 8:3,4. Men on earth, who also observe the glory of God, unite their voices with the voices of the angels and together with the holy seraphim give to the three times Holy One praise, glory, and adoration. (Preface & Sanctus) (Stoeckhardt)

The same thing happened when Solomon dedicated the temple. We read in 1 Kings 8:10: “A cloud filled the house of the Lord.” It signifies that God dwells in faith and that He is not served except by faith which confesses and praises God, who is too lofty to be contained by works. So Paul almost always argues against works of the Law and for faith. And this vision is for faith. Words belong to the Antichristians. Even the miracles of Christ were such as were grasped by the senses. Isaiah saw the Lord sitting, yet not except in the vision. Nevertheless, they are called Lord and seraphim, who were seen and yet cannot be seen. Someone voices the slander that the body of Christ is not in the bread because it cannot be seen and that it cannot be anything else except what is seen. Against those people stands this passage, where the prophet saw what cannot be seen. He saw a form, and yet he says he saw the Lord Himself. One thing is shown, another is hidden. He who eats the bread eats also the body of Christ. Christ’s way of speaking, “This is My body,” is of the same kind as the Father’s, “This is My beloved Son.” (Matt. 3:17). Thus in the dove the Holy Spirit was seen. (Luther)

*voice of him.* The seraph. (TLSB)

**6:5** *Woe.* Isaiah’s cry indicates that he is as good as dead. Ex 33:20 declares no one may see God and live. (TLSB)

*I am lost - dawmaw* – To be destroyed or obliterated. Isaiah recognizes the vast gulf between himself and God the Holy One. He is grievously aware of his sinful condition. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

*for I am a man* – There are two reasons for Isaiah’s distress. First, he knew that purity of speech is required for the worship of God, but his lips were impure. Second, Isaiah recognized that he belonged to same people who were corrupt to whom he was to minister. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

Ceremonial impurity. Impure people were barred from the temple (cf Ps 15). (TLSB)

*tamē’*, an adjective meaning “unclean,” that is, ritually and ceremonially impure, defiled. It is the opposite of *qadush* (“holy”) of v 3 and falls into the same semantic field as “sinful.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

A deep sense of unworthiness overcame Isaiah. Who was he that he should see this vision? Even angels had to cover their feet and faces. Isaiah is so far away from the holiness of God that he could make only one conclusion: “I am ruined!” God’s holiness separates Him from sinners. His might power threatens every sinner with eternal separation and punishment. Isaiah stood before God empty-handed. He could offer the one on the throne nothing to bridge the great difference. Isaiah’s best is nothing in the presence of God’s absolute holiness and power. It would have been presumptuous for Isaiah to suggest that he has tried to live as God wanted. The prophet’s works of service, as valuable as they were, made no difference here. He was unclean and lived among sinners. (PBC)

This is the distress and trial of conscience than which no other is more dreadful, namely, to be put on trial concerning the Word and doctrine. The ungodly and fanatics can think of everything except this, where they sin most. Isaiah feels this, and his conscience is tormented in final death, and he says that he is unworthy to teach. He confesses not that he has defiled hands, but defiled lips, that is, an unclean mouth, and he says that the entire nation is thus afflicted. No, this seems to be blasphemy, not only because he says he has seen God but also because he confesses that his teaching is useless and he thinks he must teach otherwise. And certainly reason, even when it teaches the Law and the Prophets in the very best way, is defiled. For the Law, as Paul says in Rom. 4:15; Heb. 7:19, justifies no one but rather makes him guilty. Therefore teaching the Law is not the same as cleansing man, neither hearer nor teacher, since also those who teach the true force of the Law are unclean. For by faith, says Peter (Acts 15:9), the hearts are cleansed, not by works or merits. Therefore saintly Isaiah, too, even to the extent that he taught the Law for the purpose of touching consciences, is defiled and dies as a defiled man. Hence the vision has this purpose, that the righteousness of the people may be condemned and they may aspire to the glory which the prophet saw, that is, move from Law to grace. The prophet is saying: We must become holier so that we may go to the Lord sitting on His lofty throne; we must hear the seraphim and the heavenly fires. You see, he brings charges against himself as well as the people. This has been no small reason for a great disagreement. For such things the saintlets do not want to hear, since they regard their own teaching to be most true and most pure. (Luther)

*eyes have seen the King*. Isaiah was dismayed because anyone who saw God expected to die immediately. (CSB)

Isaiah feared because his eyes had seen the Lord, and he knew that no one can see God and live (Exodus 33:20). But God has chosen to reveal Himself to the prophet. The vision is for the benefit of Isaiah, for the benefit of ministry, and for us. God grants the vision to this sinful man by undeserved love. He will not die, but will live. (PBC)

For that reason, he says, “I am lost.” But it turned out for the salvation of the prophet that he was thus thrust down to hell, so that he might be led away and lead others away from that uncleanness of the Law to the purity of Christ, so that He alone might reign. (Luther)

**6:6** *seraphim flew to me* – Here now a resurrection from the dead takes place. We see that sinners who acknowledge their sins are not abandoned. The prophet cries out that he is lost, that he is oppressed with the consciousness of a defiled mouth, and that he has felt sin and death. And on that account he obtained forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, etc.” says 1 John 1:9; and 1 John 2:1 says: “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father”; so also 1 John 5:18. God hates the sin of hardening and its being defended. Let them be cleansed and let them confess their uncleanness, especially that of the mouth. For where lips and doctrine are unclean, there unclean works follow. Therefore the seraph approaches to set the prophet free from his sin. But he uses means. So, then, two things are set forth to the prophet, namely, Word and sign. The Lord often acts this way. The lips are cleansed by fire. This is the sign. The Word is: “Your guilt be taken away.” Here our sacraments are established. Yet these are disdained and shamefully handled by some who say: Nothing external benefits the soul.<sup>4</sup> But let them criticize as much as they want. What Isaiah experiences here is not a fairy tale, but as there are fearful and serious voices, so there is also absolution, which then is granted through the addition of the sign to the Word. Now, what that sign could do, this our Baptism can also do. (Luther)

*burning coal.* Coals of fire were taken inside the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:12), when sacrifice was made to atone for sin. (CSB)

Fire from the altar of incense. (TLSB)

*tongs - meləqachayim.* This word has the dual ending, indicating something in a pair, or doubled. It is a noun derived from the verb *laqach*, “to take.” Together, we have “double taker things,” an apt description of a pair of tongs. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

Needed to arrange the burning coals. (TLSB)

*altar.* The altar of incense in the Holy Place. The context could imply that Isaiah was a priest serving in the temple. While there was an altar for burning incense in the temple, Isaiah likely saw a vision of heaven. (Cf Ex 25:9, 40; 26:30 for possible references to a tabernacle in heaven; early Jewish and Christian tradition noted these texts.) The angel would get this burning coal from the altar in heaven. This image reinforces the truth that God’s people in the earthly temple were in God’s presence, but God was not confined to a building. Rather, He promised to meet them in the temple. (TLSB)

**6:7** *touched your lips.* When God commissioned Jeremiah, his hand touched the prophet’s mouth (Jer 1:9). (CSB)

Only when God has forgiven Isaiah will he be able and ready to proclaim God’s Holy Word. This holiness is not from Isaiah’s own works but is God’s gracious gift; Holy Communion is also God’s gracious gift. John of Damascus: “Let us apply our eyes and lips and brows and partake of the divine coal. ... Isaiah saw the coal. But coal is not plain wood but wood united with fire; in like manner also the bread of the communion is not plain bread but bread united with divinity” (NPNF 2 9:83). (TLSB)

By cauterizing Isaiah’s lips, God prepared him to be a spokesman of purification to his unclean people. God does the same for Jeremiah (1:9) and Ezekiel (2:8-3:11) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

*sin atoned for* – This action may have reminded Isaiah of the Day of Atonement, when coals of fire from the altar of sacrifice were brought into the Most Holy Place so that the ministering priest would not die but be able to sprinkle the atoning blood (Lev. 16:12-16) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

Parallel concepts emphasizing God's forgiveness. Isaiah did nothing for this forgiveness: the Lamb of God took his guilt and atoned for his sin. Ambrose: "Shall take away, he [the Seraph] says, and shall purge, not I will take away, but that fire from the altar of God, that is, the grace of the Spirit.... Certainly not the wood of the forests, nor the soot and coals.... It was revealed by the mouth of Isaiah that all men should be cleansed by the passion of Christ, Who as a coal according to the flesh burnt up our sins" (*NPNF* 2 10:108). (TLSB)

God Himself reached across the difference between His holiness and Isaiah's sin. He took away the guilt of the prophet in a symbolic action. The coal came from the altar, the place of sacrifice. The message of absolution is clear: "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." Sinners who acknowledge their sins are not abandoned. God made Isaiah a saint, a human holy one, through atonement and forgiveness. We know this to have been accomplished by the suffering and death of Jesus. Isaiah will write eloquently about the work of Jesus later in his prophecy (chapter 53). Here Isaiah was assured that he could stand before God because of the cleansing. His status was changed by God's act, not by any human effort or desire. It was by grace, not works; it is always by grace and not by works. (PBC)

**6:1–7** The Lord appears to Isaiah and calls him as a prophet. In your Baptism and through the Word, the Lord calls you too as His messenger. Relate to others what you have heard and seen about the Lord. Do not let the shame of past sins silence you. The Lord Jesus has made atonement for you in the tabernacle of God's presence on high. • Touch my mouth, O Savior, that I may sing: "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of pow'r and might: Heaven and earth are full of Your glory. Hosanna. Hosanna. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." Amen. (*LSB*, p 161). (TLSB)

#### *Isaiah's Commission from the Lord*

**8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."**

**6:8–10** Isaiah's prophetic commission will have the ironic but justly deserved effect of hardening the callous hearts of rebellious Israel—and so rendering the warnings of judgment sure (see vv. 11–13). See also Jer 1:8, 19; Eze 2:3–4.

**6:8** *I heard a voice* – Now the effect of the vision is shown, which is that the Jews are partly to be received and partly to be hardened. Almost all the prophets were accustomed to contend with these saintlets and wiseacres who always resist the Holy Spirit, blaspheme the Word and grace of God, and boast of their own righteousness, their own works, and their own ideas. And especially when the carnal man begins to learn the things that pertain to faith while his reason has not yet been mortified and has not yet been taught its beliefs, this is a situation to be deplored. The Word of God does not always have humble hearers; on the contrary, the great majority of hearers are proud and presumptuous. (Luther)

No longer the seraphim (v 7), now God Himself speaks. In contrast to the fear that followed the seraphim's voice, here the prophet is encouraged by the Lord's voice. (TLSB)

*whom shall I send* – The Lord wants to send someone to speak for Him. The question here is for the benefit of Isaiah. God wants to send a human to speak for Him. God could have sent the seraphs who sang in the heavenly temple, but He does not choose to do that. Instead, God desires to send a creature limited not only by flesh and blood but also by sin. The man in God's presence here has just confessed his sinfulness, yet God wants to send him. PBC)

That is, many indeed refused the office of teaching, such as Moses and Jeremiah, Jonah and others, especially among the Jews, a most obstinate, blasphemous, and contradicting people, wearying both teacher and teaching with their envy. Here we need courage. Now also our name has a bad reputation; all calamities are traced to us; we are charged with the insurrection that was instigated by others; and whatever explanation we give, whatever we do to ease the situation, there is nobody to hear us. The Lord thinks that hardly anyone is to be found to condemn this nation with its counterfeit righteousness and with teaching that is not sound and does not cleanse hearts, because he would soon have to be killed by that people. Indeed, God Himself will have to employ His glory and majesty and expose His name to blasphemy if He wants us to prevail. So great is the perversity and corruption of nature. But behold, Isaiah was ready. He is very courageous after he has risen from the dead, has been strengthened by the burning coal, and has been made a different man, so that he is ready to hazard his life for God's sake. (Luther)

*for us.* The heavenly King speaks in the divine council. As a true prophet, Isaiah is made privy to that council, as were Micaiah (1Ki 22:19–20) and Jeremiah (23:18, 22). Cf. Ge 1:26; 11:7; Am 3:7. (CSB)

God, who “is one” (Dt 6:4), speaks in the first person plural (cf Gn 1:26; 3:22; 11:7). While “us” might refer to God and the seraphim, it more likely refers to God's triune nature. God is calling Isaiah to represent Him to the people. (TLSB)

*Here am I.* Newly forgiven, the once-fearful Isaiah (v 5) is now bold and eager. (TLSB)

In thankfulness, Isaiah was ready to do whatever God asked for, even though God had not yet declared what exactly Isaiah was to do. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 1)

Isaiah responds without hesitation. The same person who just a moment before was filled with fear and a sense of his own sinful shortcomings now exhibits courage in embracing his call to go for the Holy One of Israel. What caused this transformation? Forgiveness and the realization that God wanted to use him produces Isaiah's reply. Forgiveness has worked a miracle inside the prophet. Courage has replaced fear. Willingness replaced a sense of unworthiness. God has worked this miracle “to will and to act according to His good purpose” (Philippians 2:13). And Isaiah volunteered without knowing anything about his call. He expresses his willingness to go no matter what tasks the Lord has in store for him. (PBC)

## EPISTLE – Acts 2:14a-22-36

**14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.**

**22 “Men of Israel, 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, as you yourselves know — 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24 God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. 25 For David says concerning him, “I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; 26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. 27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. 28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’ 29 “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to**

**this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, 35 until I make your enemies your footstool.”” 36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”**

**2:14 with the Eleven.** The apostles had been baptized with the Holy Spirit and had spoken in other languages to various groups. Now they stood with Peter, who served as their spokesman. (CSB)

*sun tois hendeka*, “with the eleven.” This may imply that it is the apostles (as opposed to the entire 120, 1:15) who alone are consecrated to the public preaching of the Word as their office in the Church. We are told in v 43 of this same chapter that “many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Peter is always named first in lists of the apostles. His work is the focus of chapters 1-12. (TLSB)

*give ear* – Literally “let it be put in your ears.” (Sacra)

*enōtisasthe*, “give ear,” means to give full attention, more than just *akouō*, “listen.” A noteworthy problem in society today is that people do not exercise themselves in careful listening. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

**2:22-32** The setting is Pentecost, the middle of Peter’s sermon. The crowd “came together in bewilderment,” having heard the sound and the preaching in the language of each person (v 6). The crowd is mixed by language and geography, composed of “God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” (v 5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

Since Luke and Acts were conceived as one work and meant to be read sequentially, Luke’s prelude about writing a systematic and ordered account for the purpose of teaching (catechizing) is important (Luke 1:1-4). Luke was not one of the eyewitnesses spoken of in our text (2:32). Yet the Holy Spirit inspired him to research and order the account of the Acts of the Apostles. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

The events of our text occurred 50 days after the resurrection and 10 days after Jesus ascended to be with His Church more than ever. While His visible bodily presence had governed the first 40 days, the Holy Spirit now centers the church’s life on His invisible bodily presence. Jesus is still teaching and feeding His Church. What He began before His ascension (1:1), He now continues through His apostles. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

The text is a continuation of Peter’s sermon from Pentecost morning (Acts 2:1–21), but it stops just short of the burning question of the crowd, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (v 37) and the staggering response of 3,000 Baptisms. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

The Holy Spirit was poured out as tongues of fire on the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, making it possible for them to address the international assembly gathered for the Feast of Pentecost in the native languages of those who heard them, and to announce to them what God had accomplished for them and

for the redemption of Israel. The crowds were amazed to hear the apostles speaking in their own tongues and wondered how this could happen (Acts 2:1–12). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 2)

Speaking in the name of all the apostles, Peter announced that what they were proclaiming was the fulfillment of the prophecy given through Joel (Joel 2:28–32), and that, just as Joel had promised, those who took this proclamation to heart and called on the name of the Lord would be saved (Acts 2:14–21). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 2)

The words of Peter included in vv 22–36 have within them hard words, a strong articulation of Law, spoken clearly and boldly, without fear or hesitation: “This [Jesus] was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (v 23). For those who will receive these words and take them to heart, God offers hope through the proclamation of the Gospel and the Sacraments, as we learn in the verses that immediately follow this text (2:37–39). It is perhaps unfortunate that they are not included in this preaching text, for the convicted sinner must not be left without the invitation to faith and new life, which faith in the Gospel brings. In our preaching we must proclaim that Gospel. However, we are not to attempt to turn the Law itself into Gospel, so as to deprive it of its power, or to preach from the assumption that the Law contains the heart of the Gospel within it. Let the Law retain its right, theological purpose, but do not slight the Gospel. The Law works death; the Gospel alone works saving faith and life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 2)

**2:22** Verses 17–21 prepare for the “miracles, wonders and signs” done by God through Jesus Christ, since these are the last days. The three terms for Jesus’ work do not distinguish the acts of Jesus into specific categories, since they are synonyms (cf. v 19). The signs, for example, are also miracles. The theological import of *sēmeion* is especially significant in John’s gospel (2:11; 4:48; 6:2, 14, 26, 30; 12:37). The evidence of the signs become Peter’s point of entry for the introduction of Jesus into the sermon. The tongues are a continuation of the work God performed during Jesus’ earthly life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

*men of Israel* - Pentecost is a miracle of speaking and hearing. Just a few weeks earlier Peter had cursed and denied Jesus by saying, “I do not know the man.” Now he proclaims the crucified and risen Christ with courage and clarity. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

Theological critics may have trouble with the miracles of Jesus, but Peter had none. The reality of Jesus’ miracles wasn’t the issue, for Peter says, “as you yourselves know.” In fact, the wide knowledge of his life-giving miracles (Jn 11:45–48) was a major factor behind the efforts of religious leaders to crucify him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

Not ethnic or geographical (v. 14) but a strictly religious form of address. (TLSB)

*hear these words* - *akousate* Peter calls on his hearers to “listen carefully,” as you would to evidence in a trial (Barclay Newman, Jr., *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* [London: United Bible Societies, 1971]) and know that Jesus was “approved” (proven, proclaimed) *apodeidegmenon* by God with *dunamesi* “miracles” (such as restoring sight to the blind and raising the dead), *teras* “wonders” (changes in the natural order of the universe, cf. Acts 2:19, “wonders in the heaven above”), and *sēmeiois* “signs” (a special indicator). The three terms are used together in 2 Cor 12:12 to indicate the presence and power of an apostle. Peter sought to remind the crowd how unique Jesus was when he ministered among them. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

*attested..mighty works and wonders and signs.* The mighty works done by Jesus were signs that the Messiah had come. (CSB)

God richly supplied Jesus' credentials in His works. (TLSB)

*apodeideigmenon*, from *apodeiknumi*, to show, to prove by arguments, to demonstrate. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 2)

To demonstrate or exhibit (Strong's). To be approved by a higher power.

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**2:23** *lawless men.* The Gentiles were acting in an evil way. (CSB)

Men without the law (Romans) bloodied their hands, but "you" are the real doers of the deed. The priestly leaders and the excited mob of Good Friday, the men of Israel are indicted for murder in the first degree. Yet, Peter proclaims that it was all according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

*you crucified* – Not every Israelite had rejected or would reject the Messiah, but as a nation the Jews had done so. Yet not of this could have happened if it had not been in accord with "God's set purpose and foreknowledge." The men who crucified Jesus were responsible for what they did. They were not helpless robots. But their actions served God's purpose, which was to offer his Son for the sins of the world. (PBC)

Jesus' crucifixion occurred not only because of the will of sinful people and their corrupt leaders, *anomōn* (lawless, outside the law of Moses) but also because it was part of God's "plan" (*boulēi* and "foreknowledge" *prognōsei* (the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1934] 83). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

*definite plan and foreknowledge* - Paradoxically, God uses man's free work for His purposes. (TLSB)

The "set purpose" (*hōrismenē boulē*) and "foreknowledge" (*prognōsis*) indicate that God doesn't abandon his Messiah, but enacts the design which had been in place from eternity. *Prognōsis* is also used of the election/predestination of Christians in 1 Pet 1:2. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

*lawless men* - Jesus was handed over to the Romans, who were not under the yoke of Moses' Law. (TLSB)

*crucified and killed* - Distinction between mere death and accursed crucifixion. (TLSB)

**2:24** *loosing the pangs of death* - lxx TRANSLATION OF Hebrew is "cord of Sheol" (cf. 2 Sm.22:6), which implies to death an image usually associated with giving birth. Because death's pangs are terminal, not temporary, only God can overcome them. Luther: "(Christ) came back to life, and this became an opportunity for life, which before had been an opportunity for death. In this way death has

become the door to life for us; disgrace has become the elevation to glory; condemnation and hell, the door to salvation. And this happened through Christ, who was sinless, etc.” (AE 19:31). (TLSB)

By means of the resurrection, *anestēsen* (to raise up, come back to life), God reversed the sentence that human judges passed on Jesus and which his executioners carried out (F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970] 70). If God ordained Jesus’ death, he also ordained his rising to new life. *The Pulpit Commentary* (A. C. Hervey, editor, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.] 52) notes that it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Jesus (1) because of the union of his two natures, (2) because the character of God will not allow anyone who trusts in God to ever be forsaken, and (3) because “Scripture cannot be broken.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

*pangs of death* – The word translated “agony” here is literally “birth pains.” Death was “in labor” while Jesus lay in the grave. It could not hold the Lord of life indefinitely and had to give him up. This, of course, is picture language. Death did not give life to Jesus as a mother gives life to her newborn. Rather, God raised him from the dead, and thus death could not hold him. (PBC)

“It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” When Good Friday ended in the bloody death and hurried burial of Jesus of Nazareth, there was no panic and no uncertainty in heaven. There was no question that Jesus would live again, for Jesus is life itself! When Jesus on the cross cried out, “It is finished,” he didn’t mean that the battle and the victory were half-finished. The crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord are really one event. When one is pitted against the other as if one is greater, serious harm is done to the Gospel. When an empty cross is seen as more fully heralding the Gospel than a crucifix, serious harm is done to the Gospel. Already on Good Friday death gave way to life as many came from their tombs (Mt 27:52, 53). The Lord of life tasted death fully for us sinners, including the punishment of the second death, the lake of fire. But make no mistake, “It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” So also it is impossible for death to keep its hold on those clothed (baptized) in Christ (Gal

3:27). See also Rom 6:3–4. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

*krateisthai*, from *krateō*, to become master, to hold fast. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 2)

**2:25-28** Quoting Ps 16:8–11, Peter states that the words cannot refer to David, for his flesh did undergo decay. This psalm rather refers to King Messiah, “great David’s greater Son,” whom David himself prefigured. The flesh of Jesus, wounded for our transgressions, is not dead but rather living and life-giving (Jn 20:27). We cannot see it as did Thomas, and Jesus does not instruct us to touch it with our hand. We can, however, receive it to eat in blest reality. As Jesus promised, “This is my body given for you” (Lk 22:19). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

The teaching of the risen Christ in the first 40 days had opened Peter’s mind to understand the Scriptures (Lk 24:45) and to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name. The Holy Spirit’s inspiration continued Jesus’ instruction that all the Old Testament Scriptures (Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms) testify of him (Lk 24:27, 44). As Peter strung Old Testament texts together like pearls (Joel 2:28–32/Ps 16:8–11/Ps 110:1), he gave radical application to his present day in Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

The lengthy quote from Psalm 16:8-11 is Peter’s *apologia* (“apology,” as in that of the Augsburg Confession) for the concept of the resurrection. Not only is the promise of a resurrection present in the

OT, it is provided by none other than David. The quote is identical with the LXX except for the inversion of *mou kardia* in v 26. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

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David ("I") speaks in two dimensions. First, the king rejoices that God will not allow death to cut of David's or God's covenant people. Second, through David, Christ speaks prophetically of His own soul's deliverance and His body's escape from corruption. (TLSB)

**2:25** *David say concerning him* – Now Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-11 in order to show his hearers that what happened to Jesus was in accord with their own Scriptures. (PBC)

David speaks for Jesus, his descendant. (TLSB)

*I saw the Lord* – Christ has always beheld God, His heavenly Father. (TLSB)

*at my right hand* – Helper from all distress. (TLSB)

**2:27** *not abandon my soul to Hades*. David referred ultimately to the Messiah (v. 31). God would not allow his physical body to decompose. (CSB)

*egkatalipseis*, from *egkatalipō*, to leave helpless, to totally abandon and forsake. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 2)

Though David himself hopes for bodily resurrection, v. 27 is about Christ. (TLSB)

*Holy One see corruption* – Every Jew knew that that "descendant" was the promised Messiah and Peter was inviting them to conclude that the "Holy One" whose body would not see decay was the Messiah. (PBC)

*diaphthoran*, from *diaphthora*, the corruption that ensues when a dead body decays. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 2)

**2:29-32** Peter explains that David was obviously not writing about himself because David died, was buried, and his body remains in his grave "to this day" (Neh 3:16 mentions David's tomb as a matter of public record as well). Instead, David wrote as a prophet about the Messiah God would send who would die but also be resurrected. To underscore his claim, Peter declares of himself and the others who preached by inspiration of the Spirit: "we are all witnesses of the fact" (v 32). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

**2:29** *with confidence* - Regarding "confidently," "in all instances [in Acts] then, *parrēsia* might be rendered 'candor,' . . . the meaning is basically controlled by the situation of confession" (TDNT 5:882). Thus, KJV translates "let me freely speak unto you," and the ASV "I may say unto you freely." The NIV, on the other hand, emphasizes certainty: "I can tell you confidently." "Courage" or "boldness" are the preferred translations in Acts 4:13, where the Jewish authorities are surprised by the *parrēsia* of the

apostles, who were unschooled men. It is also the petition of Peter and John in their prayer within the fellowship (Act 4:29). (See Acts 9:27; 13:46; 14:3; 28:31 for uses of the verb form). “This power of bold and open speech, which is given by God and confirmed by the Lord, is in the situation of confession made possible for the servants of God, the apostles, only by the Spirit” (*TDNT* 5:882). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

*parrēσίας*, from *parrēsia*, to speak frankly, openly, and with confidence. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 2)

*his tomb is with us*. The tomb of David could be seen in Jerusalem. It still contained the remains of David’s body. The words of Ps 16:8–11 did not fully apply to him. (CSB)

David’s tomb, like all tombs except Christ’s encloses a corpse. Only one tomb is remembered with joy because it was empty. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

David, the head of his dynasty, lasted in Judah for 422 years. Ranked with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (TLSB)

**2:30-31** The first component of Peter’s confident telling is David’s death and entombment. Peter uses that fact to speak confidently of the resurrection of Jesus. As certain as the first is, so much more certain is the second, based on the very words of David. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

What a wondrous office the pastor of Jesus Christ possesses today. Even angels longed to look into the sufferings and glories of Christ that pastors are called to proclaim. David and other Old Testament prophets searched intently and with greatest care concerning the time and circumstances of what they predicted (1 Pet 1:10–12). This is the first sermon flowing from the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. Through Peter, the Spirit unveils the Gospel in Psalm 16 and moves Peter to proclaim the fully revealed time and circumstances of the Gospel. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

A theological debate has arisen regarding the hermeneutics of Peter’s use of Psalm 16. Is Peter saying that David’s words apply only to Christ’s resurrection, and not at all to David or other believers? Some interpreters say yes. Others, however, contend that the resurrection promise in the psalm applies first of all to Christ, then secondarily and in a future sense to all who are in Christ, that is, to all believers, including David. In Acts 2 Peter is arguing that the primary (but not exclusive) referent of the psalm must be Christ. In the psalm itself David appears to be rejoicing in God’s promise not to abandon him or any holy or faithful one (*chasid*), and in fact some Hebrew texts (such as the Snaith edition) have in v 10 *chasideyka*, “your holy/faithful ones (plural),” applying the promise to all believers. The preacher can make use of this by stressing that Christ’s resurrection is the promise of our own. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

**2:31** *The Christ* - First use of the term in Acts. (TLSB)

**2:32** *God raised up* – This was the heart of the message which the apostles preached in all the world and which they recorded in the pages of the NT. It is the foundation of our faith. (PBC)

*witness* - The role of the witness is critical as the pericope concludes. Two witnesses are required to establish the facts of the case (Deut 17:6; Mt 18:16; 1 Tim 5:19). This legal principle is addressed by Jesus as he points to his work and the testimony of the Father as his witnesses (in 8:13–18; 15:36–37). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

“We are all witnesses of the fact,” is the acceptance on the part of Peter and the other disciples of the role given to them in the upper room on Easter. “You are witnesses of these things” (Lk 24:48; the “things” are defined in vv 46–57). The term *martus*, “witness,” ties Luke and Acts together. Acts 1:8 puts the thought into the future tense. Throughout Acts appeals are made to the eyewitness role assigned to the disciples. Acts 3:15, 5:32, 10:39 all have variations of the wording. “Telling confidently” on the part of the disciples is done because they have seen the risen Lord with their own eyes. One of the criterion by which Matthias was chosen was his presence with them from Jesus’ Baptism to his Ascension (Acts 1:22). The witnesses are specially fitted for the task “They discharge the task by proclaiming both the facts and their significance as they have grasped this in faith” (TDNT 4:492). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

If the witnesses are restricted to include only the eyewitnesses of the resurrection, then in what sense are believers today able to consider themselves witnesses? To apply passages such as Luke 24:48, Acts 1:8, and 2:32 to all believers as witnesses isn’t appropriate, since the force of the confident telling done in these passages is rooted in the eyewitness nature of their testimony. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

This distinction can be noted in Acts 13:30–31, where Paul preaches in Pisidian Antioch. He refers to those who had seen Jesus alive after the resurrection. “They are now his witnesses to our people.” While here Paul doesn’t include Barnabas and himself among such witnesses, we do find him describing the commission he receives from Ananias in terms of being a witness (Acts 22:15, literally “witness to him,” since *autōi* is dative, not genitive). Strathmann explains: “Paul is not a factual witness in the same sense as the older apostles . . . He is, however, a witness to truth who seeks to propagate the Christian faith by confession. The result is that, when the term *martus* is applied to Paul, the second aspect begins to predominate over the first” (ID) VT 4:494). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 2)

“God has raised this Jesus to life.” Modern theology may question the bodily resurrection of Christ, but not Peter and not the early church. In simple words he states its certainty: “We are all witnesses [eyewitnesses] of the fact.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

**2:33** *right hand of God* – That is, Christ exercises the power of God and enjoys the honor of God. What he had from eternity according to his divine nature he now has and uses according to his human nature as well. He has the authority to send the Spirit whom he promised to send and he sent him. (PBC)

Jesus has equality with God the Father. (TLSB)

If Jesus is not in the tomb, where is he? Peter answers that he has been “exalted.” Lenski points out that the exaltation included both the glorification of Jesus’ body at the time it was resurrected and the ascension of his body into heaven (97). V 33 is an irrefutable reference to the Trinity (Father, Son, Spirit). Peter makes clear that the triune God is working together for the salvation of all. At his Baptism, Jesus received the Spirit in a public inauguration of his ministry and, again, at the right hand of the Father in heaven so that he could impart (“pour out”) the Spirit on those he left behind to continue his ministry (Bruce, 72). Evidence of the Spirit could be easily verified by the things the crowd could “now see and hear” (cf. Acts 2:1–4). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

*has poured out.* See v. 17; Joel 2:28. (CSB)

*execheen* presents a common image related to the Holy Spirit, one that provides an entrance into an understanding of how God works in and through us. In a variety of settings, the Holy Spirit is spoken of in terms of a fluid that can be “poured” out and “fill up” a container, the believer. Acts 2:4 says the disciples were “filled with the Holy Spirit” (emphasis added). Peter quotes a passage from Joel in which God twice promises, “I will *pour out* my Spirit” (Acts 2:17–18, emphasis added). See not only Joel 2:28–29 but also Acts 10:45 and Titus 3:6 for other examples of the Holy Spirit being “poured.” The water image of pouring and filling is also related to Jesus’ promise in Jn 7:38 about “rivers of living water” flowing from the heart of those who believe in him. John explicitly makes the connection between this overflowing water and the Spirit (Jn 7:39). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

Implicit in the imagery of pouring are several important dynamics. We are never the ones who pour; we are the passive vessels who receive the gift. Filling up also implies a purpose or an intended result. In Acts 2, the result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the preaching of the Gospel and about three thousand new baptized believers. Though the text itself does not develop it further, the image of pouring and filling for a purpose can help us proclaim the work of the Trinity to save us and those around us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

**2:34-35** David reverses conventional speech by addressing one of his descendants as his superior. Christ, David’s son, is David’s Lord. (TLSB)

Peter again quotes David, Ps 110:1, to show that the words of exaltation were written about Jesus, not David. Jesus used the words of Psalm 110 to identify himself and his mission and ministry (Mk 12:35–37; Mt 22:41–45; Lk 20:41–44). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

**2:34** *David did not ascend* – Nowhere in the tradition is David believed to have ascended to God’s presence. Therefore, the text must apply to his messianic successor, who has ascended to the right hand of God. (Sacra)

*The Lord said to my Lord.* The Lord (God) said to my Lord (the Son of David, the Messiah). According to Peter, David addressed his descendant with uncommon respect because he, through the inspiration of the Spirit, recognized how great and divine he would be (Mt 22:41–45). Not only was he to be resurrected (vv. 31–32) but he was to be exalted to God’s right hand (vv. 33–35). And his presence there was now being demonstrated by the sending of the Holy Spirit (v. 33; Jn 16:7). (CSB)

**2:36** *all the house of Israel* - Devout Israelites gathered for Israel’s third great feast (Pentecost) commemorating the completion of the grain harvest (Lev. 23:15-21). They were fully taught (catechized) from Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms. What they hadn’t believed is the identity of the Christ whom they were expecting. The Spirit’s Christ-centered emphasis is clear in Peter’s preaching. “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 2)

*know for certain* - *asphalōs*, from *asphalēs*, safely, assuredly; here “inescapably.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 2)

*made* - Appointed to office. Through the resurrection, God clearly reveals Jesus’ status as Son, Lord, and Messiah. (TLSB)

*you crucified* - Though only some people were directly responsible for Jesus’ trial and murder. His death was required to remove the guilt of all people’ sin. (TLSB)

*Lord and Christ* - The Church has always confessed that Jesus is God. (TLSB)

Bruce (73) says of this summary verse: "The gospel message has been proclaimed: the witness of the apostles and the testimony of prophecy have combined to give assurance of the truth of the proclamation. The attested facts point to one conclusion: 'Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.'" (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 2)

*kai kurion . . . kai Christon*, "both Lord and Christ." Jesus' death not only makes him Savior, but also exalts him to the highest place and gives him authority over all as Lord. There is power in the blood of Jesus. Having his blood on you—being literally, metaphorically, and theologically implicated in his death—is the only way to life and salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

### GOSPEL – John 3:1-17

**Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "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." 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 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. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The 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." 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.**

**3:1-21** John 3:1-21 comprises the well-known conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. It has rightly been said that John 3:1-21 contains the whole of Christ's teaching. If we had nothing except these twenty one verses, we would know the way of salvation. Ylvisaker divides these verses thus: In verses 1-10 we have a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus. Verses 11-21, beginning with "verily, verily" (the second in this Gospel, the first at 1:51), we have a discourse by Jesus: (Buls)

1. Verses 11-13, Who Jesus is;
2. Verses 14-17, What He has come to accomplish;
3. Verses 18-21, What the result of His coming will be to men.

Note that the Nestle/Aland Greek text begins verse 14 as a subparagraph. They do this because there are those who consider verses 14-21 an exposition by the Evangelist John, not the words of Jesus spoken to Nicodemus. We do not agree with this idea. With Ylvisaker, Stoeckhardt, Kretzmann, Hendriksen and Lenski we maintain that Jesus spoke the words, recorded in verses 14-21, to Nicodemus. (Buls)

Nicodemus is again mentioned at John 7:50-52 and 19:39-42. His bold actions on both occasions are a reflection of John 3:21, an argument in favor of considering verses 14-21 as the words of Jesus to Nicodemus on this occasion. Did Nicodemus become a child of God on this occasion? (Buls)

Fahling says: Nicodemus came seeking and left believing. (Buls)

Stoeckhardt: As one born again, as a believing disciple of Jesus, Nicodemus leaves. Where we find him again in the Gospel accounts, he appears as a disciple of the Lord. (Buls)

Lenski: What did Nicodemus say or think? John is not making this a story about this man but a report of the testimony of Jesus to himself. . . We may well say, however, that Jesus' words must have made an indelible impression upon the old Pharisee and must have shaken him profoundly. In due time he came to faith. (Buls)

Bengel: Even Nicodemus subsequently acted more openly. (Buls)

Evidently he is referring to John 7:50-52 and 19:39-42, and is implying that Nicodemus became a child of God. (Buls)

**3:1-17** Read carefully John 1–2, giving special attention to 1:9–14, which describes the new birth of faith in Christ that makes us children of God. John 4 offers a specific example of the Good News coming to an individual in the non-Israelite world. The Samaritan woman, in turn, told the Good News, and many others believed (Jn 4:39). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

John's chronology isn't linear, making it difficult to determine when this meeting took place. A fair bit of evidence must have accumulated, since Nicodemus spoke glowingly of Jesus doing "these signs," while evidently he'd discussed the events with others, since he told the Lord, "We know that you are a teacher come from God" (v 2). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

**3:1** *a man of the Pharisees*. Although both the Pharisees and "the Jews" are frequent antagonists and often targets of Jesus' barbs, here we meet one of the rulers—a member of the Sanhedrin—whom John presents in a more favorable light. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

"Now" has been explained in two ways: (Buls)

1. Nicodemus is an example of the people mentioned in 2:23-25, people with a weak, milk-faith;
2. Nicodemus is different from those people.

If the former is correct "now" means "now" in the narrative sense. If the latter is correct, it means "but." Both explanations have been suggested by eminent exegetes. We shall not try to solve this, nor need we. But it is very clear that Nicodemus is not yet a Christian. (Buls)

"Of" occurs approximately 160 times in John's Gospel and has a variety of meanings. Here it tells us that he was a member of the Pharisaic party. (Buls)

"Nicodemus" is a Greek name. During the Hellenistic period many Jews were given Greek names. (Buls)

The Jewish ruling council is also called the Sanhedrin. (Buls)

Nicodemus is mentioned only here and again in John 7:50 and John 19:39. The last reference clearly indicates that he became a Christian. (Buls)

Verses 1-10 constitute a dialog. Verses 11-21 constitute a monolog. John gives us eleven conversations of Jesus in full detail. (Buls)

Their general view was that prophets were rare or had vanished. (TLSB)

For more on Nicodemus see Jn 7:50–52; 19:39–41. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

John's use of "Jews" is not racial but theological. It refers to those who are opposed to Jesus' Gospel. Nicodemus is an exception. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

As a Pharisee and ruler, he undoubtedly knew the OT well. (PBC)

*Nicodemus, a ruler.* Member of the Council who later spoke on Jesus' behalf and participated in providing Jesus an honorable burial. (TLSB)

Nicodemus was a good Pharisee and that he in common with all Pharisees relied upon himself. He practiced righteousness outwardly and believed that his own achievements were in themselves a sufficiency. (Yilvisaker)

Luke 18:18-30, <sup>18</sup> "A certain ruler asked him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" <sup>19</sup> "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. <sup>20</sup> You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" <sup>21</sup> "All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said. <sup>22</sup> When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." <sup>23</sup> When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. <sup>24</sup> Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." <sup>26</sup> Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" <sup>27</sup> Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." <sup>28</sup> Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!" <sup>29</sup> "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God <sup>30</sup> will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

**3:2 by night.** Perhaps Nicodemus was afraid to come by day. Or he may have wanted a long talk, which would have been difficult in the daytime with the crowds around Jesus. (CSB)

So that his colleagues would not know. John's presentation of this encounter may symbolize those in the world who come out of evil darkness to Jesus, the light of the world (cf.3:19-21). (TLSB)

We do not know precisely at what time this happened. Why did he come at night? His secret visit was probably because he feared he would be exposed to the ridicule and hatred of his fellows, or because he thought himself too eminent a person to compromise his dignity by making this visit in public. (Buls)

Stoeckhardt: He was ashamed of this visit to Jesus before his colleagues. (Buls)

Hendriksen: We just do not know. (Buls)

Opinions vary as to why Nicodemus comes "by night." Is it the only time both are free? Is it fear of the council? Could John be drawing attention back to the previous light and dark comparisons (1:1–18)? The simplest explanation is probably best, but perhaps John also points out the darkness to note subtly that

while Nicodemus believes in much that Jesus is doing, he isn't a believer in Jesus as Messiah. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Therefore, we have no idea of the sincerity of Nicodemus's greeting or whom he considers like-minded in this assessment of Jesus. In most other instances in the Gospels, when Jewish leaders said, "We know," it preceded a challenge to his authority or teaching, sometimes done with flattery, sometimes antagonism. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Others came to Jesus with similar words in apparent attempts to flatter him into letting down his guard (Lk 20:19). In contrast, Nicodemus seems sincere. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

*Rabbi* – This was an official title of honor and a Jewish term for teacher. At this point Nicodemus may have been like many people today who recognize Jesus as someone really great but miss the point that He is the Son of God and the only Savior from sin.

Hendriksen: We just do not know. (Buls)

Nicodemus does not see Jesus as Savior, but merely as teacher. He bases this belief on the signs. For "these signs" see 2:23. There are many unrecorded signs in John's Gospel. Nicodemus implies that God not only accompanied the signs, but was the source of help and power. Nicodemus is not confessing Jesus' divinity in this verse. He thinks of Him as a prophet. Similar to Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament who performed miracles also, but only with the help of God. (Buls)

"Rabbi" was the Jewish term for "teacher" (1:38). "We know": he speaks for himself and his associates. Read Ezra 7:1–10 for an example of one among many who fit the description of "a teacher who has come from God." "Miraculous signs," *sēmeia*: see 2:11, 23; 4:48; 6:2; etc. Martin Franzmann (*Concordia Bible with Notes: New Testament* [St. Louis: Concordia, 1971] 171) comments, "Believing is more than seeing signs and being somehow drawn to him who performs them. . . . the stance of the sympathetic spectator is not the stance of faith (2:23–25). Believing is more than a good man's sincere religious interest in Jesus . . . Jesus' brusque disregard of Nicodemus' compliment makes that plain." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

*teacher* – didaskalos – A master teacher like one possessing a doctor degree.

As an interested and conscientious teacher, Nicodemus wanted the latest and best information available about God. Jesus appeared to be the one who had it. (PBC)

*no one can do these signs*. Cf 2:23. For Nicodemus, these signs were legitimate indications of God's presence. (TLSB)

**3:3-6** Nicodemus probably was in agreement with the Jews who saw themselves as children of Abraham and therefore part of God's kingdom simply because they were biologically descended from Abraham. To the contrary, Jesus says, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

**3:3-4** Note just how incongruent Jesus' reply is compared to v 2. The Lord appears to have heard something completely different from what Nicodemus said. Nicodemus praises him as teacher and doer of

signs; Jesus replies by speaking of being born into the kingdom of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Nicodemus, a son of Abraham, born and circumcised into God's covenant people, must assume that his place in the kingdom is secure. Now this charismatic rabbi is telling him that he must be "born again." Or is Jesus intentionally talking past Nicodemus by using *anōthen*, which can mean either "again" or "from above"? Nicodemus obviously hangs on the former interpretation, and we can practically hear the incredulity—if not outright sarcasm—in his response. Note, too, how "a man" is the principal actor in Nicodemus's idea of new birth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

**3:3** *truly, truly I say to you* – Literally, "truly, truly" or "amen, amen." (PBC)

Jesus is neither flattered nor does He "talk down" to Nicodemus. Three times Jesus says "I tell you the truth." (3,5,11) Two times Nicodemus says "how." (4,9) And Jesus adds another "how" in 12. Nicodemus' questions clearly show his utter lack of faith. Jesus' answers clearly show the utter necessity and truth of conversion, a work of God in man. (Buls)

"Again" has caused much discussion. It is found in John 3:3; John 3:31; John 19:11 and John 19:23. In the last three instances it must mean "from above." But does it mean that here? Eminent exegetes translate "from above." But the word as it is used in verse 4, clearly shows that the meaning is "again." Thus in most of our translations. (Buls)

*see the kingdom of God* – Like most Jews of his time, Nicodemus thought of the kingdom of God in political terms. He expected that one day God would send a revolutionary leader, who would inspire the Jews to throw out the Roman army of occupation. (LL)

"Can see" means "to experience." (Buls)

"The Kingdom of God" here means the invisible church. The *Una Sancta*. Repentance is required for entrance into this kingdom (though the Gospel of John does not use this word). Lenski has a beautiful discussion at this point.

Note that we have negatives in both protasis and apodosis. If both be dropped it means: "If ever anyone is born again he is able to see the Kingdom of God. We make this observation to bring out the point that "anyone" is universal, not restrictive, "anyone, no matter who." (Buls)

In John, this expression is used only here and in v. 5. Refers to the reign of God that came in the person of Jesus, on whom John focuses throughout. (TLSB)

"The kingdom of God" is used in John only in this text and 18:36; it deserves special attention. See also Rev 11:15;12:10. Events in the kingdom of God proceed, not by human will or decision, but by God's will, in his way. The Gospel, received by faith, gives assurance that his will is gracious. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

*born again.*† The Greek also may mean "born from above" (see NIV text note). Both meanings are consistent with Jesus' redeeming work, and no doubt both meanings are implied here and at v. 7. (CSB)

*Born.* Metaphor of salvation, favored by John. (TLSB)

*again.* Gk *anōthen*, “from above.” Nicodemus either misunderstood Jesus’ words, assuming human birth and effort, or began to play a word game by taking Jesus as literally as possible. But Jesus meant a spiritual rebirth that only God can effect from above. (TLSB)

Jesus use of grammar indicates there are no exceptions to what He is saying. (Buls)

Depending on the context, *anōthen* can signify “from above” (James 1:17), “from the beginning” (Lk 1:3), “for a long time” (Acts 26:5), or “again” (Gal4:9). Translators differ. Vulgate: *denuo*; Luther: *von neuem*; KJV, TEV, NIV, GWN: “again.” NEB: “over again.” Beck (1976), JB, NRSV: “from above.” Note that “again” here does not denote mere repetition, as Nicodemus mistakenly understood (v5). The new birth is another kind of event, different from natural and sin-corrupted generation (v 6). It can only be “from God,” by his grace alone (1:13; 6:44; 12:12–32; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

**3:4** *a second time into his mother’s womb* – To Nicodemus, Jesus was talking in riddles. He could hardly mean that a person must undergo a second physical birth. Nicodemus seemed to have senses a deeper meaning, but what was it? (PBC)

Though Nicodemus is not yet a Christian he is not ashamed to ask questions. "Man" means "human being." Nicodemus uses the Greek word for physical rebirth, showing that is what he is thinking Jesus means. Jesus responds, in verse 5, with the same word. But Nicodemus uses "to be born" sequentially in verse 4, whereas Jesus inverts the order of the verbs but does not make them sequential. Both of Nicodemus' questions in verse 4 are preposterous. These questions show us how ridiculous conversion appears to human reason, left to its own resources. (Buls)

**3:5-6** Jesus moves Nicodemus to see beyond earthly birth—even rebirth. He parallels v 3, substituting “born of water and the Spirit” for “born again/from above.” He wants Nicodemus to start seeing God as the author of salvation and starts developing his theme in what we might term “Third Article language.” Rebirth is birth from above; birth from above involves water and the Word. Flesh (*sarx*) generates fleshly things; the Spirit generates spiritual things. Therefore, no man can regenerate himself and become right before God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

**3:5** *kingdom of God.* To be born of God, from on high, is to be born of the Holy Spirit through God’s means: “by water and the Spirit.” Luther writes, “Here Christ also speaks of the Holy Spirit and teaches us to regard Baptism as a spiritual, yes, a Spirit-filled water, in which the Holy Spirit is present and active; in fact, the entire Holy Trinity is there. And thus the person who has been baptized is said to be born anew” (Luther’s Works 22:283–86). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

*born of water and the Spirit.* † A phrase understood in various ways: 1. It means much the same as “born of the Spirit” (v. 8; cf. Tit 3:5). 2. Water refers to baptism—that of Jesus and his disciples (v. 22; 4:1–2). (CSB)

Again Jesus speaks of a universal truth, no exceptions. When He says "I tell you the truth" it denotes Jesus' divine authority, attributed to His human nature. (Buls)

"Born of water and the Spirit." We note first of all: the preposition is not repeated after "and." Therefore "water and Spirit" are one indivisible unit. The water in baptism is not a mere symbol. Secondly, the only baptism known at this point in Jesus' earthly life was that of the Baptist. The Holy Spirit was bestowed in John's baptism. There is only one baptism, Titus 3:5. Thirdly, the effects of John's baptism and the baptism after Pentecost were the same. (Buls)

What were the differences? First, John's baptism was for Israel only, see John 1:31. Secondly, John's baptism was given at the end of the Old Covenant. The apostolic baptism (Matthew 28:19) was given at the beginning of the New Covenant and is for all nations. Thirdly, there are those who say that the words "of water" are not important because Jesus does not use them at the end of verse 8. Dropping the words "water and" in verse 5 is supported by no Greek Manuscript evidence. (Buls)

The commentaries will demonstrate the opposing views of the Reformed and Lutheran on the efficacy of water-baptism. (Buls)

Who can understand conversion? That's what Jesus will say in verse 8. (Buls)

This is an elaboration on v. 3. The preposition "of" (Greek ek) governs both nouns. "Water" and "Spirit" therefore belong together and point to Christian baptism. Augustine: "We are born spiritually then, and in spirit we are born by the word and sacrament" (NPNF1 7:82). "IN the first place, we take up Baptism, by which we are first received into the Christian Church" (LC IV 2). "Reason and free will are able to live an outwardly decent life to a certain extent. But only the Holy Spirit causes a person to be born anew (John 3:5) and to have inwardly another heart, mind, and natural desire" (FC SD II 26). (TLSB)

**3:6 flesh** – On *sarx* in John see 1:13,14; 6:63; 8:15. Luther: "With reference to this, Christ says that the physical birth remains physical and produces physical life and nothing more, and that in and of himself man is nothing but flesh" (Luther's Works 22:268). cf. Mt 3:9. Keep in mind, though, that physical birth, too, is from God (Ps 139:13; Luther's explanation of the First Article in the Small Catechism). But sin and death, piggy-backing on natural generation as the deadly AIDS virus does on healthy cells, "spread to all men" (Rom 5:12; Ps 51:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

Human nature as it derives from natural, physical birth (cf 1:13). (TLSB)

Notice the beautiful symmetry in this compound sentence. "Gives birth to" is common to both parts. In Greek the perfect participles are used as nouns and denote existing state. (Buls)

The first sentence denotes physical birth, "of the flesh." The word "flesh" denotes fallen human nature, totally devoid of goodness or righteousness. The two occurrences of "flesh" are identical in meaning. (Buls)

"But" or "and likewise." (Buls)

*Spirit is spirit.* Spiritual life comes only by the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

The two occurrences of "spirit" are not identical in meaning. The first means "Holy Spirit" but the second means simply "spirit." (Buls)

Baptism, a means of grace, causes a person to be spiritual, forgiven, reconciled to God, a member of the *Una Sancta* through Jesus Christ. (Buls)

All of us alike come into this world outside of God's kingdom. Contrary to what some teach, infants begin their lives under sin's condemnation. As Job once said of our physical birth, "Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one!" (14:4). And Paul's years later said, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature [flesh]" (Romans 7:18). We can only conclude with David, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). (PBC)

**3:7-8** Jesus comes back to that sticking point of *anōthen*, pointing out that the work of the Holy Spirit in creating saving faith happens where God pleases, without the invitation or consent of man. These verses, together with vv 11–12, tie nicely with Article V of the Augsburg Confession, wherein we confess that “through the Word and Sacraments, . . . the Holy Ghost is given [John 20:22]. He works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in those who hear the good news” (AC V 2). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

**3:7-8** A birth never happens apart from other people. In physical birth there is always at least a mother giving birth and a child being born. Usually there is also a father or family, a community of people in town, at work, at church. There is also a nation of which the child is a citizen. The newborn belongs to the family, the community, and the nation into which he is born. In spiritual birth there is a congregation, the whole Body of Christ, and the triune God. The newly baptized belongs in that congregation, belongs to the Body of Christ, belongs to God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

**3:7** *You*. This assertion applies to everyone, not just Nicodemus. (CSB)

*must*. There are no exceptions. (CSB)

The participle beginning this verse in Greek introduces a prohibition. Again, Jesus is saying something that pertains at all times to all human beings. Note that Jesus speaks forthrightly but lovingly without the niceties of such words as "please." (Buls)

"You must" here and in verse 14, does not denote compulsion, but necessity in the sense that God wills conversion and also that man is totally unable to help himself. The "born" is passive in verse 6. But physical birth and conversion are passive experiences. "You" is plural, it refers not only to the Jews but also to all people. Here "again" means "again." (Buls)

This *dei* is not the “must” of moralistic, didactic admonition, but the Gospel-motivated “it is necessary” of Jn 9:4. There is no other way into the kingdom. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

*born again* – Jesus made one imperceptible change in His words here. When He said, “You must be born again,” He use the Greek plural “you.” Clearly He was not speaking only about Nicodemus. “You” in the plural fits all people. (PBC) (CSB)

**3:8** *wind*. No human being can understand, govern, or control the wind’s movement. Jesus urged Nicodemus to discard his narrowly naturalistic view of human beings, as well as any presumption that they produce new birth. The new birth is an act of God (cf 1:13). (TLSB)

† The work of the Holy Spirit is beyond human comprehension (v. 9). He works as he pleases in the rebirth of believers. (CSB)

The first part of this verse is an axiom. All people understand it. We can observe the fact that there is wind, that it blows and that it makes a sound. This is inherent knowledge. (Buls)

Jesus is pointedly telling Nicodemus: "You're an educated man but cannot explain this physical phenomenon." Of course, it's true of all men, even the most educated meteorologist. They observe the movements of clouds and winds but what Jesus says here is still true and will be so until the end of time. (Buls)

"In the same way." In what same way? Grammar requires that we say that Jesus is not speaking on the Holy Spirit himself, but the *person* who is born of the Spirit. Regeneration yields observable evidence. It shows in the life of the converted person. But regeneration itself is a deep mystery. It is God's work in its entirety, including faith. (Buls)

Here the Reformed exegetes make a point that "water" is omitted here in some manuscripts. But there is more manuscript evidence for including "water" than for eliminating it. They say it is only the Spirit that is important. In this way the Reformed attempt to deny that baptism is a true means of grace. Compare what Luther says in the Small Catechism. (Buls)

Like *anōthen* (v 3) and many other words in John, *pneuma* is capable of different meanings in different contexts. Here it refers first to "wind," then to "the Spirit." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

We can understand the working of God's Spirit as little as we can predict the wind blowing on us. We know when it blows, and it affects us. But we can't see it. We can't be certain when or from what angle it will come. (PBC)

**3:9-13** Jesus makes the point that one cannot teach what one does not know. Jesus knows because of what he has seen. His worldview is not confined to an earthly point of view. His worldview is from the heavenly point of view, which sees the kingdom of God for what it is and knows how we can enter it. His word is to be trusted. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

**3:9** *how can these things be* – The reason that natural man cannot comprehend this is answered in 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

Nicodemus' question truly reveals his spiritual ignorance, but let us not be fast to condemn him. Must we not admit that we often ask the same and similar questions? Nicodemus was a Pharisee, but a friendly and honest one. But friendliness and honesty cannot convert anyone. (Buls)

The old expression "You can teach them but you can't learn them" comes to mind here. Stanza 2 of the hymn "These Things Did Thomas Count as Real" (LSB 472) parallels the situation the Lord faces with Nicodemus, whose own skepticism blinds him to the truth of Jesus' words. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

This new query reveals not only that Nicodemus has as yet experienced no effect of the Spirit in his own heart, but likewise that he has no understanding concerning the many passages in Scripture which deal with this matter. The deplorable fault in Nicodemus was that he must satisfy his reason in all things and he desires an answer to every "why." (Yilvisaker)

**3:10** Nicodemus professed to know—surprisingly—what he did not grasp. (TLSB)

*teacher* – Same word used for teacher in verse 2. – Jesus was increasingly emphatic as He responded to Nicodemus' bewilderment and skepticism. In effect, Jesus said, "Nicodemus, you ought to be able to grasp this. A lot of what you have learned in Scripture points to this. I am telling it to you straight. I am not making this up. I bring it to you from heaven, from God Himself. Believe Me, this is the way it really is!" (LL)

The words imply that Nicodemus was a well known teacher. These words are not to be taken as a reproach, or as irony, but rather as an expression of sincere sadness over this sorrowful state of ignorance. (Buls)

Kretzmann: The subject of regeneration is treated so often in the Psalms and in the visions of the prophets that a teacher of the people should have been thoroughly familiar with its full import. See Psalm 51:12; Ezekiel 11:19. (Buls)

Here the dialog ends. Verses 11-21 are discourse, a monolog spoken by Jesus. (Buls)

Jesus takes Nicodemus to task for presuming to teach Israel without rightly knowing Israel's God. While not the focal point of this particular outline, pastors and teachers in Christ's Church do well to remember that our preaching and teaching begin and end in the Word of God, especially in the Gospel of his Son. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Definite article "the" suggests that Nicodemus was a recognized teacher among his contemporaries. (TLSB)

Hebrews 5:12, "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!"

**3:11-12** Jesus then returns to the heart of his message. Evidently Nicodemus has heard the testimony and holds it intellectually while denying it spiritually. Perhaps he is like many today who treat Jesus as a great moral teacher but cannot release themselves from attempts to merit favor and earn righteousness through works. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

This is also a good time to connect the verbal Gospel with the Sacraments. Christ takes "earthly things"—water, bread, wine, and flesh and blood people—and makes them instruments and means of his grace. He blesses his Church with the "heavenly things" through the voice of Holy Absolution, the water of Holy Baptism, and the bread and wine of Holy Communion. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

**3:11** *we*. The plural associates others, perhaps the disciples, with Jesus. The words are true of Christians as well as of Christ. (CSB)

Again a divine asseveration as in verses 3 and 5. Nicodemus began by saying "we know." Now Jesus begins His monolog with "we know." Who are "we?" Jesus and John the Baptist? Jesus and the Holy Spirit? "We" might be a literary plural, which means Jesus is speaking only of Himself. It might be Jesus and the Father. (Buls)

In any case, they know and have seen. And so they speak and give testimony. (Buls)

"You people" is the Covenant people of God. (Buls)

Here we have an excellent example of personal evangelism. Jesus is courteous but does not soften the stark reality of Nicodemus' ignorance. (Buls)

In the pronoun "we" Jesus very likely includes the circle of his disciples (down to the present), whom he has drawn to himself and who affirm his testimony. It could also refer to the Trinity, since the Father (Jn

8:18) and the Spirit (Jn 16:5–16) also testify to Christ. “You” (plural in Greek) includes all who, having heard Christ’s words, stand outside the circle of faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

Christ speaks for the OT prophets (He is “the Prophet”; cf.4:19; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17) and the new Christian community, the Church. Nicodemus and the entire community he represented were blind to this testimony. (TLSB)

**3:12** *I told you of earthly things* – Jesus taught Nicodemus and his peers through illustrations, parables, and signs of God’s “earthly things,” e.g. water, wind, natural birth. Yet even though they were “teachers of Israel,” they did not believe. Would they then believe if He told them heavenly truth in heaven’s own language. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

Nicodemus struggled to understand the need for spiritual birth on earth. How then would he ever understand the heavenly nature and powers behind such a spiritual birth produced by the Holy Spirit? Jesus’ sayings were often enigmatic to His hearers. (TLSB)

This verse is a compound-complex sentence made up of two conditional sentences, the first a fact condition and the second, in the form of the question, future more vivid. The whole verse is really a lesser to greater argument. In the first conditional sentence the protasis is a past tense and the apodosis present tense. In the second conditional sentence both verbs are future. (Buls)

What is meant by "earthly" and "heavenly" things? (Buls)

Ylvisaker: Regeneration takes place on this earth in the hearts of men, even though it is a creative act of God. With the heavenly things He alludes to the atonement, the act resolved upon in the bosom of the heavenly and eternal Love, and executed on the earth, not IN us, but FOR us who are of the earth, by the humiliated and exalted Son of Man, who is in heaven. (Buls)

Fahling: The spiritual regeneration, while a wonderful work of God, yet is an earthly things in this respect, that it takes place on earth, in the hearts of men . . . What if Christ will touch upon things wholly in the unseen? . . . He speaks of the mysteries concerning His own person and of the gracious counsel and purposes of God. (Buls)

Kretzmann: What would be the result if Christ should begin to teach of matters not open to human observation and experience, things wholly in the unseen, the essence and purposes of God? (Buls)

**3:13-15** The Son of Man, the royal king who receives heaven’s glory from the Ancient of Days in Dan 7:13–14, is to be “exalted and lifted up” (Is 52:13–53:12), but on a cross! This event was typified by Moses’ bronze serpent and its healing effects (Num 21:4–9). “Must,” as in v 7, states that this is God’s Gospel way of salvation, and there is no other. Note the frequency (and importance) of the verb “believe” in the text: 3:12,15,16,18. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

**3:13** *the Son of Man*. Jesus’ favorite self-designation. (CSB)

Luther: “[Jesus] calls Himself the Son of Man who has His existence both on earth and in heaven [simultaneously]” (AE 22:321). (TLSB)

In the next two verses, Jesus emphasizes a vertical understanding of *anōthen* in two different contexts. He first professes that he is “from above,” since he “descended from heaven.” Yet in the divine economy of the Trinity, the Son is in constant ascension to his Father while, as the Word made flesh, his prayers

continually ascend on high. This verse may then remind the Gospel's reader of Jesus' earlier words to Nathanael, "You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (1:51). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Since Nicodemus has already praised Jesus for the God-given signs he does (v 2), the Lord appears to be urging him to "connect the dots" and realize that as these signs have their source from above, so also the birth of which he speaks comes from above. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Jesus had the knowledge and authority to tell Nicodemus of heavenly things because He alone came from heaven. He was the Word, who was with God when the plan of salvation was determined. And He had become a perfect human being, the Son of Man, to execute the plan. (PBC)

The first example of heavenly things is found in verse 13. The second example begins in verse 14. Among human beings there is only one human who is heavenly and that is Jesus. (Buls)

"The One who is in heaven" is a variant reading, not found in all the manuscripts. Lutheran exegetes are unanimous in including the words. Lutherans say: "The amazing thing is that the incarnate Christ is in heaven also according to His human nature." The Reformed say: "His divine nature is in heaven, but only His human nature can be on earth in the state of humiliation." Lutherans insist that in the state of exaltation Jesus' human nature is everywhere. The Reformed deny this. We are dealing with a fundamental difference in theology here. Of our translations, only KJV and NKJV include these words. (Buls)

For two reasons we must include these words: (Buls)

1. A difficult reading would hardly have been added;
2. The diversity of variant readings shows an attempt to clarify these fathomless words.

While Jesus was on earth He could say: "I came from heaven and am in heaven." (Buls)

**3:14-21** Jesus is sharing these words with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council. Nicodemus approaches Jesus at night, most likely for fear of being seen talking with the one he calls "Rabbi." He recognizes that Jesus is the one who has come from God because of the miraculous signs he is doing. Jesus shares with Nicodemus that he must be born again through water and the Spirit. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

It is often observed that John's description of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus is a kind of theology in a circle—a coming down, followed by an upward return to the Father. Raymond Brown makes the fascinating observation that there are three statements concerning the lifting up of the Son of Man in John's Gospel and that these correspond to the three Passion predictions in the Synoptics. Further, says Brown, "'being lifted up' refers to one continuous action of ascent" that embraces the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension (*The Gospel According to John* [Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1966], 146). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

The text (especially v 16) is so well-known that we tend to forget the immediate context. Jesus is in dialogue with a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a well-intentioned but theologically inadequate seeker for whom the love of God must have been an astonishing surprise. Max Lucado (*He Still Moves Stones*

[Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993], 126–32) does a masterful job capturing the impact the Gospel of God’s love must have made on this legalist. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

**3:14-15** Refers to the Old Testament Reading from Num 21:4–9. Throughout the Gospels, “lifted up” is used as a metaphor for crucifixion. It does not mean “lifted up in praise,” as is often thought in our day. Our praise is not what draws persons to Christ. It is his perfect sacrifice for our sins. Our response is then praise. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

While most translations begin a new sentence, the *kai* at the beginning certainly allows us to treat vv 13–15 as one complete thought: the Son of Man came down from heaven in order to be lifted up above the heads of sinful men and thereby to bring salvation to mankind. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Again, human effort is completely discounted. The bronze serpent sat in Israel’s encampment for all to see. No one cured himself of his snakebite; God effected the cure. So also, when we look upon the One who was pierced (cf. Jn 19:37), who has now ascended into heaven, we are healed of sin-sickness and eternal death. By “looking to Jesus” (Heb 12:2), we are blessed with eternal life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

From the heavenly point of view, the deliverance from snakes in the wilderness (Num 21:4–9) was not merely for the benefit of the people at that time. As wonderful as the miracle was for the individual people who recovered from snakebites, it was also a miracle that kept the people of Israel alive. Since that was the nation from which Jesus would be born, the salvation of the world depended on Israel staying alive. In addition, it has become a lasting picture of God’s deliverance for all people from *the* serpent. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

**3:14** *just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert* – Jesus draws a comparison between the lifted up bronze serpent and the lifted up Son of Man. This comparison is developed throughout the pericope. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

In Num 21:4–9, the Israelites complained about their redemption from Egypt and the “miserable food” God supplied them from heaven. (Similarly, in Jn 6:25–71 many complained when the redeeming Christ said he would feed them with the real food of his body and blood, given for the life of the world.) God sent deadly serpents which bit the children of Israel, and many died (cf. 1 Cor 11:30). This was a physical manifestation of the old spiritual plague brought by Satan, “that ancient serpent” (Rev 20:2). The serpents brought death by biting their victims and injecting poison. Even so, the serpentine devil brought death to Adam and Eve, and the entire human race, by deceiving them and injecting the poison of original sin (Genesis 3). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

According to God’s command and promise, however, Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. Note the play on the similar Hebrew words *nechash-nachushet* “snake of bronze” in Num 21: 9, leading to its name *nachushtan* “Nehushtan” in 2 Kings 18:4 (which says the serpent was preserved and revered as a “holy relic” until godly King Hezekiah ended the idolatry about 800 years later). All those who were bitten and looked up at it lived. The serpent is a type of the Son of Man; Christ is similar, but greater, in the following ways: (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The lifted-up serpent looked like a deadly serpent, but was without poison. The lifted-up Son of Man looked like a sinner, but was only in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom 8:3); he was crucified as a criminal, but was without sin (Is 53:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The bronze serpent was lifted up to make sport of the deadly serpents, as if it were a slain trophy. The Son was lifted up to make a public spectacle of the enemy, as if the defeated devil were on the cross (Col 2:15 NIV, KJV; cf. RSV footnote). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

God made the elevated bronze serpent the source of life (Num 21:8). The elevated Son of Man is God's source of eternal life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Whoever looked up to the bronze snake was healed. They did not need to do any good works first, only behold the "savior" God provided, and God fulfilled his objective promise. Likewise, "everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life" (Jn 6:40). No good works are necessary first (Epistle Lesson). God fulfills his objective promise in Christ without any merit on our part. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

All who looked to the serpent were healed. God's promise was for the entire people. Similarly, but in a greater way, God's salvation in Christ is for the entire world, Jew and Gentile alike. Note the emphatic "all" in Num 21:8 (NIV: "anyone"), and pas, "all," in Jn 3:15, 16. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

The lifting up of the Son refers not only to his crucifixion, but also to his resurrection and exaltation to glory in heaven. The verb *hupsoō*, "lift up," is also in the "exalted" of Phil 2:9. Jesus speaks of the hour of his crucifixion as the hour of his glorification in John 17. cf. *anabebēken*, "gone up," in Jn 3:13, which suggests that the lifting up of Christ on the cross is also his exaltation back to heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

To help Nicodemus link Christ with the Scripture he already knew. It also points to the fact that there is only one way to be saved. The serpent is a type of the Son of Man; Christ is similar, but greater, in the following ways: (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Some versions begin a new section at this point, others that a new section begins at verse 16. In either case they attribute these words (from here to verse 21) to the Evangelist John. But we note that Jesus is still speaking in verses 16 and 17. (Buls)

Jesus is explaining. Verse 12 denotes what is observable: the results of regeneration. Verse 13 denotes what is not observable: the eternal counsel of God for man and the marvel of the person of the incarnate Christ. Verse 14 introduces the second unobservable truth: The salvation of mankind. Verses 15 to 21 are like the opening of the flower with beautiful petals. Jesus moves from the unobservable to the observable in verse 21, the good works of a Christian. In other words, Jesus is the speaker to the end of verse 21. (Buls)

Back to verse 14. (Buls)

Kretzmann: There are three points of similarity between type and antitype in this story. The brazen serpent of Moses had the form and appearance of the poisonous reptile after which it was modeled, just as Jesus was revealed in the form of our sinful flesh, had the needs and ways of an ordinary human being, was finally punished as a criminal. Just as the brazen serpent, however, had no poison, was altogether harmless, so Jesus, though in appearance like unto sinful men, was without sin, holy, harmless, undefiled. A strange curse was resting upon Him, He hung upon the cross. And finally, just as he that looked at the brazen serpent in faith remained alive, so also every sinner that has been poisoned by sin in its various

forms, but now looks up to Jesus the Savior, in simple, trusting faith, shall not perish, but have eternal life. (Buls)

"Must be" is impersonal and does not denote compulsion or fate. The necessity is caused by the will of God and the dire and awful condition of mankind. (Buls)

"Lifted up" are correlative adverbs of manner, indicating a precise comparison. What they have in common is the verb "lift." The Old Testament account is found at Numbers 21:8ff. This verse reminds us immediately of John 12:32-34 where the same verb is found. (Buls)

Bengel: Where there was no other remedy. (Buls)

True. What he is implying is that there is no remedy except in the uplifted Son of man. The impersonal verb does not denote compulsion or fate but the necessary willing obedience of the Son of man. For it was for this purpose that He became incarnate. Lenski insists that the point of comparison should not be pressed beyond the idea of "being lifted up." After due consideration we prefer the interpretation of Kretzmann: (Buls)

The act of Moses in the wilderness, in erecting the brazen serpent before the eyes of the stricken people, was typical, symbolical, Numbers 21: 1-9. . . Jesus is the antitype of the brazen serpent. . . There are three points of similarity between type and antitype in this story. 1) The brazen serpent of Moses had the form and appearance of the poisonous reptiles after which it was modeled, just as Jesus was revealed in the form of our sinful flesh, had the needs and ways of an ordinary human being, was finally punished as a criminal; 2) Just as the brazen serpent, however, had no poison, was altogether harmless, so Jesus, though in appearance like unto sinful men, was without sin, holy, harmless, undefiled. A strange curse was resting upon Him, He hung upon the cross; 3) And finally, just as he that looked at the brazen serpent in faith remained alive, so also every sinner that has been poisoned by sin in its various forms, but now looks up to Jesus the Savior, in simple, trusting faith, shall not perish, shall not be punished with everlasting destruction, but have eternal life. (Buls)

Hendriksen has a good exposition of type and anti type at this point, but ruins it completely when he adds:

Though Christ is lifted up in the sight of all, he does not save all. (Buls)

He believes in a limited atonement and his interpretations are very often synergistic. More on this later. (Buls)

Lenski: The Book of Wisdom 16:6 calls this serpent the symbol of salvation, and in church decorations it is constantly used to picture Jesus. (Buls)

*so must the Son of Man must be lifted up* – "Lifted up" (*hupsōsen*) is an obvious reference to the story of the bronze serpent in Numbers 21. It may also suggest the glorification of the Suffering Servant in Is 52:13: "He shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted." Later in John's Gospel (12:32-33), Jesus uses this word to signal the kind of death he was to die. And the same word is used again in Acts 2:33 and 5:31 as a reference to the ascension of our Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

**3:15-16** Jesus makes clear that salvation is a gift, for the Son of God is himself a gift that God gave. No restrictions are placed upon the recipients, for "whoever believes" lives. The Son of God come down at Christmas finally fulfilled his mission on Good Friday. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

Luther here emphasizes the personal union in Christ. He notes that while earlier Jesus spoke of the Son of Man, he now shows that “God’s Son and Mary’s Son is only one Person. He appropriates both natures for the work of salvation and redemption from eternal death” (LW 22:351). It is not a mere man who saves us, nor is it God exercising his unbridled power. Instead, the God-man Jesus Christ conquers through surrender and saves his people from sin, death, and devil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

**3:15** *whoever* – All the “that” clauses in this section (15,16,17,20,21) denote purpose. In this instance the word “that” hangs on “eternal life.” By the way, the passive infinitive denotes what was done to Jesus, what He suffered on the cross. There is no such thing as faith in Christ unless it be in the crucified Christ. Compare Galatians 2:20. The Son of God loved me by giving Himself in my stead. That is the only way in which the love of God is revealed to us. (Buls)

That word “everyone” does not denote limitation but open invitation. Just as the serpent was lifted up for all on the occasion, so Jesus was lifted up for all. Furthermore, “who believes” does not mean that man must do something first to make the atonement an actuality but rather that God Himself causes the hearers to believe in what has already been done for all. (Buls)

*believes*. That is the whole point of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in verses 1-10. Faith in Christ is always the God-given *modus* of salvation, not the man-generated *causa* of salvation. (Buls)

Note that both participle and verb, are in the present tense. Being in possession of life eternal is a present reality for the believer. For him there is no such thing as judgment. (Buls)

The promise belongs to everyone who believes. It is universal. No one who believes is excluded. At the same time the promise belongs to each one who believes. It is personal. God knows our names, and each of us has eternal life. (PBC)

*eternal life*. An infinitely high quality of life in living fellowship with God—both now and forever. (CSB)

Bengel: The cross is the ladder to heaven. Eternal death, because of the poison of sin. Eternal life, by regeneration and faith. This mention of eternal life is made at the earliest opportunity in each instance in the discourses of the Savior, and occurs in this passage first (in the Gospel of John). (Buls)

Note that Bengel considered the words “should not perish” textual. They are found in the Koine text and therefore in KJV and NKJV. This difference should not be passed over lightly. By the way, the term “everlasting life” occurs seventeen times in the Gospel of John and six times in 1 John. (Buls)

The dying Israelites who looked at the bronze serpent lived. Now everyone who looks in faith at the Son of Man will live forever. The typology and the textual variants support taking the words “in him” with “believes,” not “have,” though both make sense. Echēi, “have,” is present subjunctive, indicating that the believer has eternal life both now, in the midst of deadly snakes, and forever in heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

“so that” (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this “lifting up” of the Son of Man is that every believer may not “perish” (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have “life eternal.” In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later

summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins “believing” with “life.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

**3:1–15** Nicodemus, though “the teacher of Israel,” shows that he cannot comprehend the Spirit’s miraculous work of new birth through Baptism. Human reason, darkened by sin, cannot accept that God can grant spiritual rebirth through ordinary water used with His Word. But such a great promise has come from none other than the Son of Man, lifted up on the cross for our salvation! • O Holy Spirit, I praise You that You have given me new birth to a living hope through Christ’s resurrection. Amen. (TLSB)

*For God So Loved the World*

**16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**

**3:16-17** V 16 is referred to by many Christians as the Gospel in a nutshell. Since Baptism is a Means of Grace that conveys the gifts of the Gospel, and since the water of Baptism is sometimes administered by way of a scallop shell, Baptism might be referred to as the Gospel in a scallop shell. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 2)

**3:16** *God so loved the world.* The great truth that motivated God’s plan of salvation (cf. 1Jn 4:9–10). (CSB)

Very likely the best known verse in the Bible. Verses 16-18 explain verses 14-15.(Buls)

"World" is the Greek word "kosmos." It must denote all human beings. Not just people who have been chosen, or "elected" to believe. (Buls)

"So that" denotes actual result. (Buls)

"One and only" is translated in KJV, NASB, AAT and NKJV as "only-begotten." Others translate it "only" in the sense of unique. The Nicene Creed and our Lutheran fathers understood this word in the sense of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. (Buls)

The verse clearly shows that Jesus is God's gift to all human beings of all time. (Buls)

The love referred to is the aorist of agape; the “one and only” notes a uniqueness, only one of its kind. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

Greek agapao, used repeatedly in John; God’s sacrificial and faithful love for the entire world alienated from God, that is, all humankind. (TLSB)

God values, cherishes, and esteems mankind on the basis of God’s own being; from eternity he is love (1 In 4:8). He loved the whole world, all people (vv 17–18 preclude a limited love or atonement). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Perhaps the best-known verse in the Bible. In verse 14 "so" meant "thus" in the sense of "in the same way." But here in verse 16 it means "to such an extent." "For" is an explanatory particle, used here to elucidate verses 14-15 further. This example is the clearest in the New Testament as to what God's love

means. It does not say that God "liked" the world. He did not. But He loved the whole world in all its misery and sin, loved it to redeem it. (Buls)

"The world" must mean the entire world of people. The Reformed limit it to the elect from every nation. Compare Lenski and Hendriksen on this point. Parallel passages here are John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Romans 5:12-21. More could be mentioned but these are sufficient. (Buls)

Again and again the Scriptures stress the fact that IN CHRIST, in His suffering, death and resurrection, the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, redemption, justification, eternal salvation FOR ALL MEN is an accomplished fact. Because of their twin false teaching of a limited atonement and synergism, the Reformed (and those like them) teach that forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, justification are merely potential, merely making it possible for all to be saved. Read Article IV of the *Apology* and Article II of the *Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration)* where again and again reconciliation, justification, forgiveness, redemption are used synonymously and interchangeably as accomplished facts for all men, posited in the means of grace for all. (Buls)

Even some Lutherans claim that although John 3:16 is universal, 2 Corinthians 5:19 and Romans 4:25 are merely potential. That won't do. To deny the universality of the justification of all men, in Christ, at Romans 4:25 or the universality of reconciliation of all men, in Christ, at 2 Corinthians 5:19, means to deny the universal atonement *per se*. (Buls)

Back to verse 16: "so that" with the indicative, to denote actual result, is found only here and at Galatians 2:13. (It can be used with the infinitive to denote actual result). Note that "so much-so that" are correlative. The first "His" is relational denoting the divinity of Jesus. "One and only" makes that even clearer. KJV, NKJV, NASB, and AAT (2nd ed.) translate "only-begotten" denoting the eternal generation of the Son from the Father. All other translations have "only" which is surely wrong. (Buls)

By the way, some commentators feel that verses 14-21 are the words of the Evangelist not those of Jesus, for only in this passage Jesus calls Himself by this term. But if Jesus gave the word John at 1:18, why couldn't He use it of Himself? It is powerful in the mouth of Jesus. He knew that He proceeded from all eternity from the Father and yet He was willing to become man to die for us. (Buls)

*world*. All people on earth—or perhaps all creation. (CSB)

kosmos – This refers to everything in the world but in this case especially that portion of the population that is hostile to the God. This word is used 75 times in John.

*that he gave*. God gives, gives, gives. That's the story of the Gospel. "That" introduces another purpose clause, repeating and amplifying the one in verse 15. There it was stressed from the point of view of the Father sending and giving His eternal Son. "Whoever believes," not restrictive but invitational, for all. "Not perish," death and destruction, for the believer, are gone, abolished. For him death is not dying but the beginning of eternal life. "But" following a negative is very strong: "quite to the contrary." We know nothing quite so antithetical as eternal death and eternal life. (Buls)

God not only sent His Son, but also offered Him to the world. He became our atoning sacrifice. (TLSB)

This verse brings together several of John's most important and frequent theological words: *theos*, "God," *huios*, "Son," *monogenēs*, "only-begotten," *agapaō*, "love" (about 40 occurrences, including the noun *agapē*), *kosmos*, "world" (75), *pisteuō*, "believe" (90), and *zōē* "life" (35, of which 17 are with *aiōnios*, "eternal"). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 3)

The conjunction *hōste* (NIV: “that”) followed by the indicative emphasizes that the result actually happened (M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, pp. 121–22, para. 350). The Father actually gave up his Son to death, only to receive him back in glory, fulfilling the typology of Abraham, a human father who also did not spare his only son and received him back alive (Gen 22:16; cf. Rom 8:32). The adjective *monogenēs* may mean “one and only, unique,” or “only-begotten” (see Holy Bible: New Testament—New Evangelical Translation, 2d ed. [Cleveland, NET Publishing, 1992] appendix 2. c. 6., pp. 542–44). The *hina* clause indicates purpose: God sacrificed his Son in order to save. This reasserts the bronze serpent typology of vv 14–15. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

“so that” (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this “lifting up” of the Son of Man is that every believer may not “perish” (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have “life eternal.” In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins “believing” with “life.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

God’s love brought results. He offered the ultimate sacrifice for the world He loved. (PBC)

*his only Son*. See 1:14, 18; cf. Ge 22:2, 16; Ro 8:32. Although believers are also called “sons of God” (2Co 6:18; Rev 21:7), Jesus is uniquely God’s Son. (CSB)

*monogene* - Sole or only born. – *aiios* A child or son. In this case the son was not adopted like we are.

*Believes* – *pisteuo* - To have faith in God. Found 90 times in John.

“Whoever believes in (the Son of God, be it with a strong or with a weak faith,) may have eternal life (John 3:15) Worthiness does not depend on the greatness or smallness, the weakness or strength of faith. Instead, it depends on Christ’s merit” (FC SD VII 70-71). Luther: “Look at the words, I beseech you, to determine how and of whom He is speaking... No one is here excluded. God’s Son was given for all. All should believe, and all who do believe should not perish, etc. Take hold of your own nose, I beseech you, to determine whether you are not a human being (that is, part of the world) and like any other man, (you) belong to the number of those comprised in the word “all” (WLS 1859). (TLSB)

*not perish* – *apollumi* To be destroyed, in this case eternally. To die.

Eternal separation from God. Cf. Is. 66:24; Mk. 9:48. “Out of His immense goodness and mercy, God provides for the public preaching of His divine eternal Law and His wonderful plan for our redemption, that of the holy, only saving Gospel of His eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

*eternal* – Adjectives like perpetual, for ever, everlasting are used to describe eternal.

*Life* – Life like a lifetime.

**3:17-18** Jesus was sent to earth as an authoritative representative of the Father. A contrast should be noted between the judging/condemning and the saving act of his mission of salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

**3:17** *did not send* - “so that” (purpose clause with *hina*). The purpose of this “lifting up” of the Son of Man is that every believer may not “perish” (this word is used at least ten times in the Gospel!) but have “life eternal.” In 10:28, we read about the same dramatic contrast between perishing and having life. John later summarizes the whole purpose of his Gospel thus in 20:31, again with a *hina* purpose clause that joins “believing” with “life.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

As noted above, verses 14-17 tell us what Christ accomplished for us. This verse is the last in this section. "For" is explanatory, emphatically elucidating verse 16. It tells us why God DID NOT and why He DID send His Son. Mankind has a bad conscience because of sinfulness and sin. According to his flesh he is always listening to Satan who pictures God as enemy, not as friend. Even Christians, insofar as they still have a flesh, all too often think of God as enemy and judge rather than as Savior and Friend in Christ. (Buls)

Jesus says: "God did NOT send His Son into the world in order to judge (condemn) the world, but, quite to the contrary, in order through Him (Christ) the world be saved." Compare John 12:47 and then His words to His enemies at 5:34. (Buls)

SEND SON – apostello The one who was set apart and sent specifically for this cause.

JUDGE – krino Someone who makes a decision and judges right from wrong. The trial in our case left to defend ourselves would result in being condemned, punished and sentenced to eternal damnation.

The Church of Rome, because of its works righteousness, was constantly presenting God as Judge. Over and over Luther said that the Gospel presents God as Savior, not as Judge. Compare Galatians 4:4.5 and Galatians 3:13.14. The "so that" clauses in Galatians 4:5 and 3:14 (two sets of them) respectively denote what we call objective and subjective justification. In Christ, the blessing of Abraham (justification) became effective for all nations. Christ redeemed all the condemned, all human beings. And in Galatians 4:5 we are told that Christ came to redeem the condemned, all human beings. The Gospel portrays Christ as Savior, not as Judge. (Buls)

We know that Christ will return in judgment, but at this time, Jesus doesn't mention God's alien work of condemning and crushing through the Law. Instead, he focuses completely on the unmerited favor God shows the world. While not explicit in this verse, *anōthen* remains implicit, for God sent Jesus from above into his creation, “in order that the world might be saved through him.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

save – The following adjectives say it well: Deliver, protect, heal, preserve or make whole.

"Sent with a commission." Note that "all people -- the world" is used thrice in this verse: to denote Christ's incarnation, becoming a man, for all; again, for all people; and again, all people. Christ came to condemn no one, not even Judas. That should never be forgotten. Mix no Law into the Gospel. (Buls)

The two *hina* clauses show purpose from two different perspectives. In the first, the active voice asserts that God's purpose was not to condemn. In the second, John goes against the natural flow of language and switches to the passive *sōthēi*, “be saved,” to emphasize the Son as the agent who does not carry out his saving work independently of the Father, but humbly serves the Father's purpose. The NIV obliterates the difference between the two *hina* clauses; the KJV, NKJV, RSV and NET have it right. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 4, Part 2)

Another explanation. The obvious reason for which this verse is added is that people (even Christians) think of God merely as a judge. This verse has two more purpose clauses. The first tells us why God did NOT send His Son, and the second tells us why He DID send Him. Christians need to listen to this verse. Christians, too, often slip into the false idea that Jesus is merely a Judge. (Buls)

Note that "world" occurs three times in this verse. The first instance, in a prepositional phrase, denotes the incarnation. The second and third instances denote all mankind. (Buls)

By the way, if "kosmos" (according to the Reformed theology) in verse 16 means only the elect, the conclusion of verse 17 is difficult to understand. "Kosmos" simply must mean "all people." (Buls)

Note: Pentecost I is the same day as Trinity Sunday. John 3:1-17 clearly speaks of the Trinity. The Triune God is the saving God. One cannot be saved without faith in the Trinity. It is suggested that on this day the Athanasian Creed be used rather than the Apostles' or Nicene Creed because the Athanasian Creed is so very clear on the doctrine of the Trinity. Many sects deny the Trinity. They are not Christian. Therefore, we must stress the Trinity in our teaching and preaching. (Buls)