

General Church Education



FAMILY LESSON: JOHN 3
THE VISIT OF
NICODEMUS

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Family Lesson 33 - B

Visit of Nicodemus
John 3

FAMILY TALK:
A MAN WHO VISITED THE LORD

By the Rev. Donald L. Rose

In the darkness of the night a man of importance, a ruler of the people, came to talk to the Lord.

Why would an important person come in the nighttime? Being important, he might be afraid of what other important people thought, and he might lose his high position. Do you think that while the Lord was in the world there were chief rulers who started to take notice of the things the Lord did and said and who started to believe in Him? Listen to what is said in a later chapter of the Gospel of John:

Among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:43).

Don't you know what it is like to believe something is wrong, but to feel afraid to say anything about it, because of fear of other people calling you names? Yes, there were men of high rank who believed in the Lord, but they were afraid they would lose position if they openly said so.

If someone is shy or afraid at some time in life, is that the end of the story? No. And that is why this story of the man named Nicodemus is useful for us to know. This man comes into the story of the Word just three times. This coming to the Lord at night is the first time, and the other two times it is mentioned that he had first come to the Lord in the nighttime.

At the end of the story, when the Lord was crucified, notice what is said of this man. **“And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh...”** (John 19: 39). Together with Joseph of Arimathea, he put the Lord's body into a sepulchre, not at all afraid of what others would say or think.

The other time he comes into the story is recorded at the end of *John 7*. It is a great story. As you think of it, make sure you notice what a difference was made by the great courage of a man named Nicodemus. More than two years had passed since Nicodemus had come to speak to the Lord in the night. The worst of the leaders by this time were so against the Lord that they sent officers to arrest Him. And the whole council of leaders sat waiting for the officers to bring the Lord under arrest.

But when the officers returned, they did not have the Lord with them. “Why have you not brought Him?” the leaders demanded. The officers gave an answer, and the tone of voice in which it was given must have been very final:

“**Never man ever spoke like this Man**” (*John 7: 46*).

Angry with the officers, they said, “Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?” (Little did they know at that instant that one of the rulers sitting with them *did* believe, but they would know it in just a moment.)

They went on to say that the common people were stupid for believing in the Lord. They said, “But this crowd who does not know the law is accursed.” And it is right at that point that Nicodemus spoke. By mentioning the law, they were giving the impression that the Lord had broken the law. But they themselves had been trying to arrest the Lord without cause. And so we read, “**Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, ‘Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?’**” This made them upset, and they all went home. “**And everyone went to his own house**” (*John 7: 53*).

Isn't it amazing what a simple question can do? Suppose a group of children or young people are making life miserable for some one person they are picking on. Somewhere in their hearts they know it is not fair for a group of people to gang up on one person or tease one person. But no one has the courage to put that into words. If one single person asks, “Is this really fair, all of us picking on this person?” it can change the whole mood. Maybe everyone will lose interest in this unkind enterprise and will return to their own business.

What about in a conversation when a group is talking about someone who is not present? The more they talk, the more uncomplimentary things they bring up about this person. One says, “Oh, he is so dumb.” Another says, “He is such a pain.” And so on. What if one person in that group just said, “Is he really so very hopeless a person that we can all talk as if we were high above him?” That is only a question, but it can have a lot of power. Well, don't forget the example of Nicodemus.

This gives you an idea of the whole story of Nicodemus as we concentrate on chapter 3 of the Gospel of John, that most interesting place in which a man comes to the Lord in the darkness of the night. It is said at the beginning of the Gospel of John: “**In Him was life and the life was the light of man. And the light shines in the darkness...**” (*John 1: 4, 5*). Nicodemus came to the “Light of the World” and talked with Him.

The Lord told him, “You must be born again.” Nicodemus greatly marveled at this saying, but the Lord said, “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be

born again.” “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (*John* 3: 7, 8).

There are wonders of the Lord’s Providence working secretly. There are wonders of regeneration in which secretly the Lord makes a person new and prepares him for heaven. The Lord had many things to tell people at that time, but they could not yet understand — not even a ruler like Nicodemus. “If I have told you earthly things, and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (*John* 3: 12).

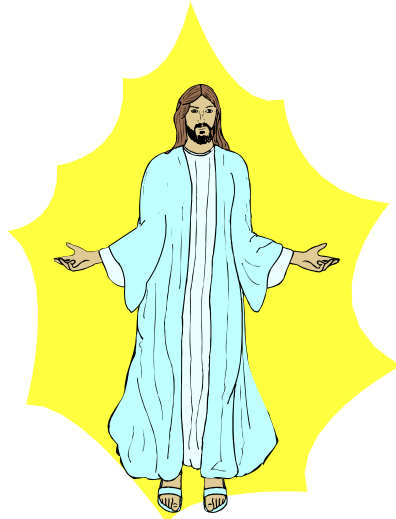
Those “heavenly things” might be called secrets of heaven or “arcana celestia.” We can always learn a little more about them, and we will learn if we come to the Lord out of our darkness, for “he who does the truth, comes to the light” (verse 21).

Visit of Nicodemus

John 3

LEVEL 1 – NICODEMUS COMES TO THE LORD

Nicodemus came to visit the Lord at night. It was dark outside.



Nicodemus was coming to the Lord who is the “light.”

Directions for Project

1) Make the figure of Nicodemus

Color the picture of Nicodemus.

Cut it out.

Fold on the dotted lines so the figure will stand.

2) Make the house

It was at night that Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to visit the Lord. The house is on blue paper to give the feeling of nighttime.

Cut out the window on the house.

Cut the door on three sides as indicated

Fold forward along the dotted line so the door is open.

With the door of the house open, glue the blue house page onto the yellow page so the Lord shows through the door.

3) Displaying the scene

Choose a place to display the scene.

You could use a piece of cardboard as a base. Paint or color it brown or glue dry grass on it.

Fold back on the dotted line at the bottom of the “house” page, so the house will stand up.

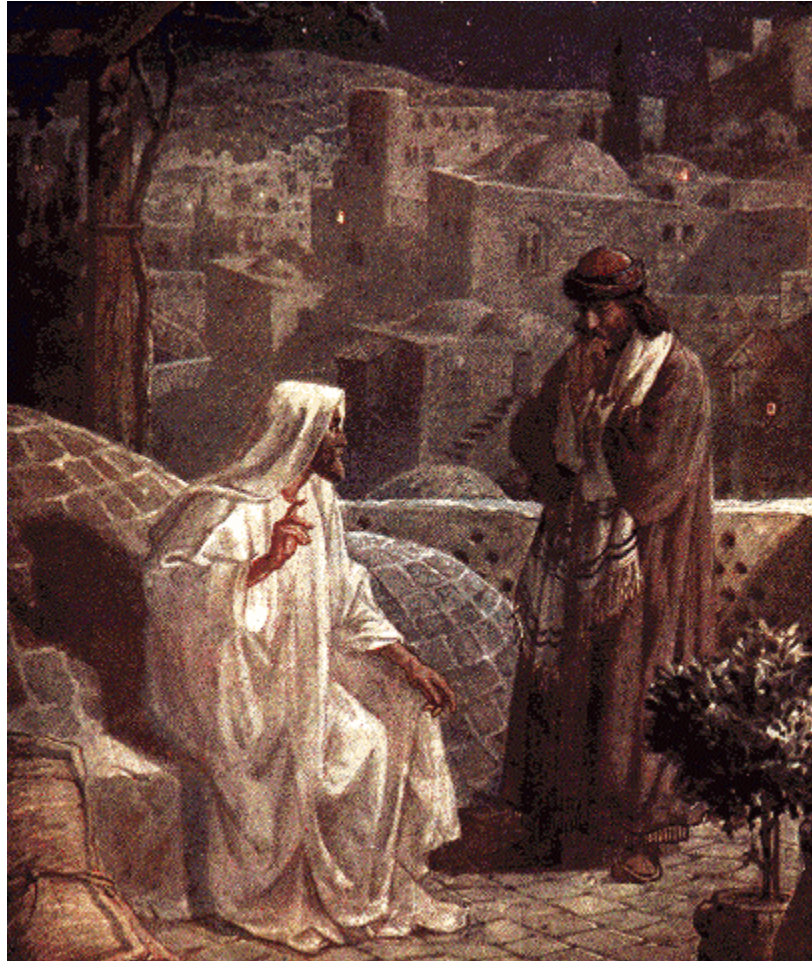
Place the figure of Nicodemus in front of the house so he is talking to the Lord.

Project Here

Visit of Nicodemus

John 3

LEVEL 2 – NICODEMUS VISITS THE LORD AT NIGHT



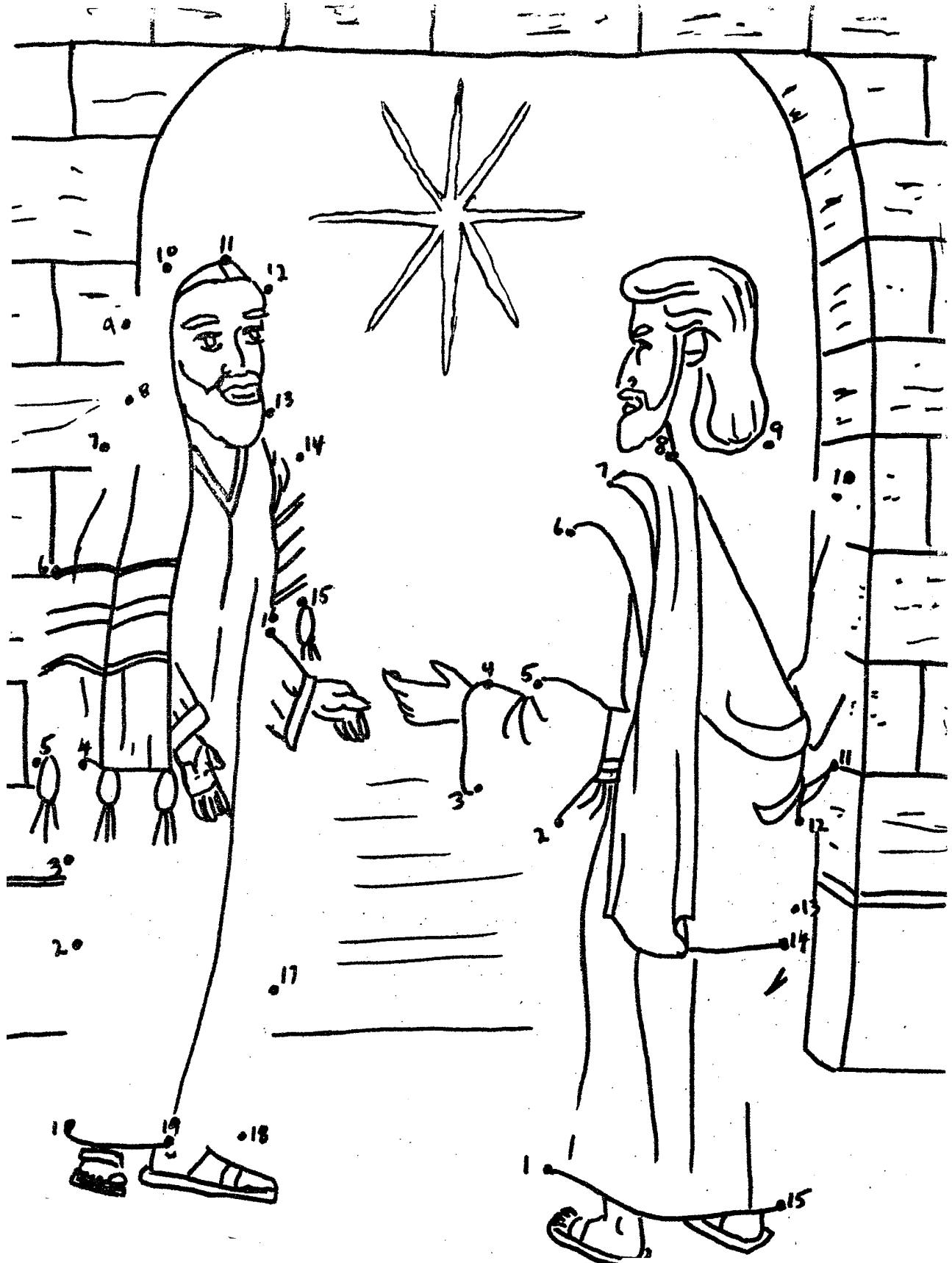
Directions:

Look at the picture on the next page.

It shows Nicodemus coming to visit the Lord.

Join the numbered dots in order.

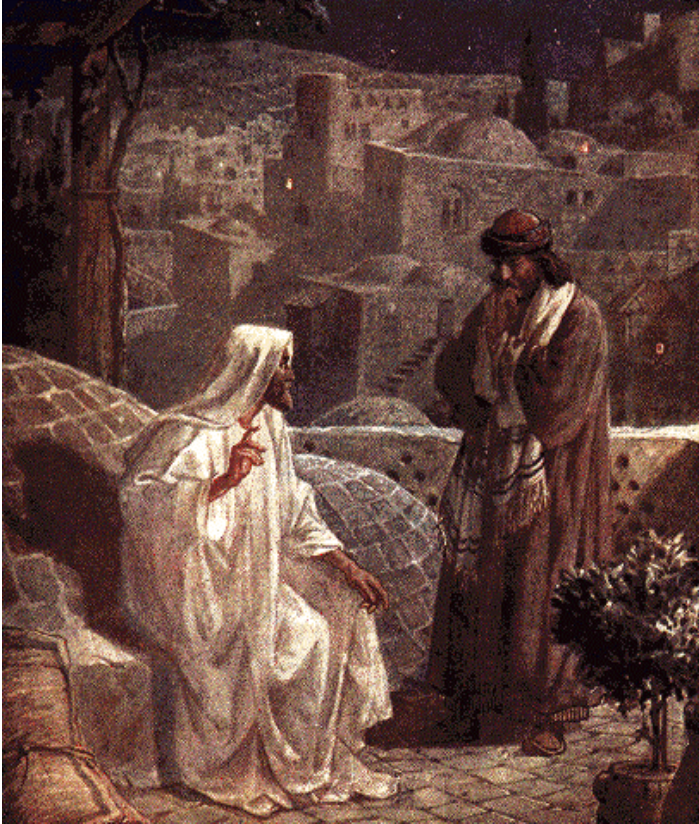
Then color the picture.



Visit of Nicodemus

John 3

LEVEL 3 – THE VISIT OF NICODEMUS



Our lesson today tells the story of the first visit of Nicodemus to the Lord.

Do you remember how many times Nicodemus came to see the Lord after this first visit? _____.

This first time Nicodemus came at a certain time of day. It was _____.

(Check your answer in John 3: 2.)

Can you imagine why he would come then? Remember that he was a powerful ruler of the Jews. He didn't want people to see that a powerful man like himself needed to go to Jesus to have his questions answered.

Do you ever feel like Nicodemus—embarrassed if your friends would see you being a religious person? Sometimes people nowadays like to make fun of religion or even of morality, calling others “prissy” or “goody-good” if they try to do what is right.

Why would people say this? It might be that they want to do wrong things, and don't like good, or it might just be that like Nicodemus they are afraid to let anyone see that they need to learn from the Lord.

Jesus answered Nicodemus' questions about heaven, and then He taught him to have courage in looking for the truth. Read again *John 3: 19-21*:

Light and Truth

“...the light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

Here Jesus talks about “truth” and “light” as almost the same thing. Who do you think He meant when He said, “The light is come into the world?” _____?

That’s right, He was talking about Himself. How is He like light? Well, what does light do? It makes things clear. That’s just what the Lord’s truth does for us. Light makes things clear to our eyes. Truth makes things clear to our minds.

Truth is heavenly light, and it is so much brighter than our light in this world that our day seems like night in comparison to heavenly day. Read what it says in the book *Heaven and Hell*:

“...the light in the heavens exceeds by many degrees the noonday light of the world...The brightness and splendor of the light of heaven are such as cannot be described.”

We are also told that the angels see the light as “flaming” like the sun, or “white” like the moon, depending on how they love the Lord.

We hope that you will come to “love the light” and turn away from the darkness, so that the Lord will be your sun and moon.

Project



On the next page is a picture of a sunburst representing the sun of heaven.

Draw or paint a picture of the Lord as you imagine Him in the middle of the sunburst. If you want, you can show the Lord as an abstract figure of light, without definite features.

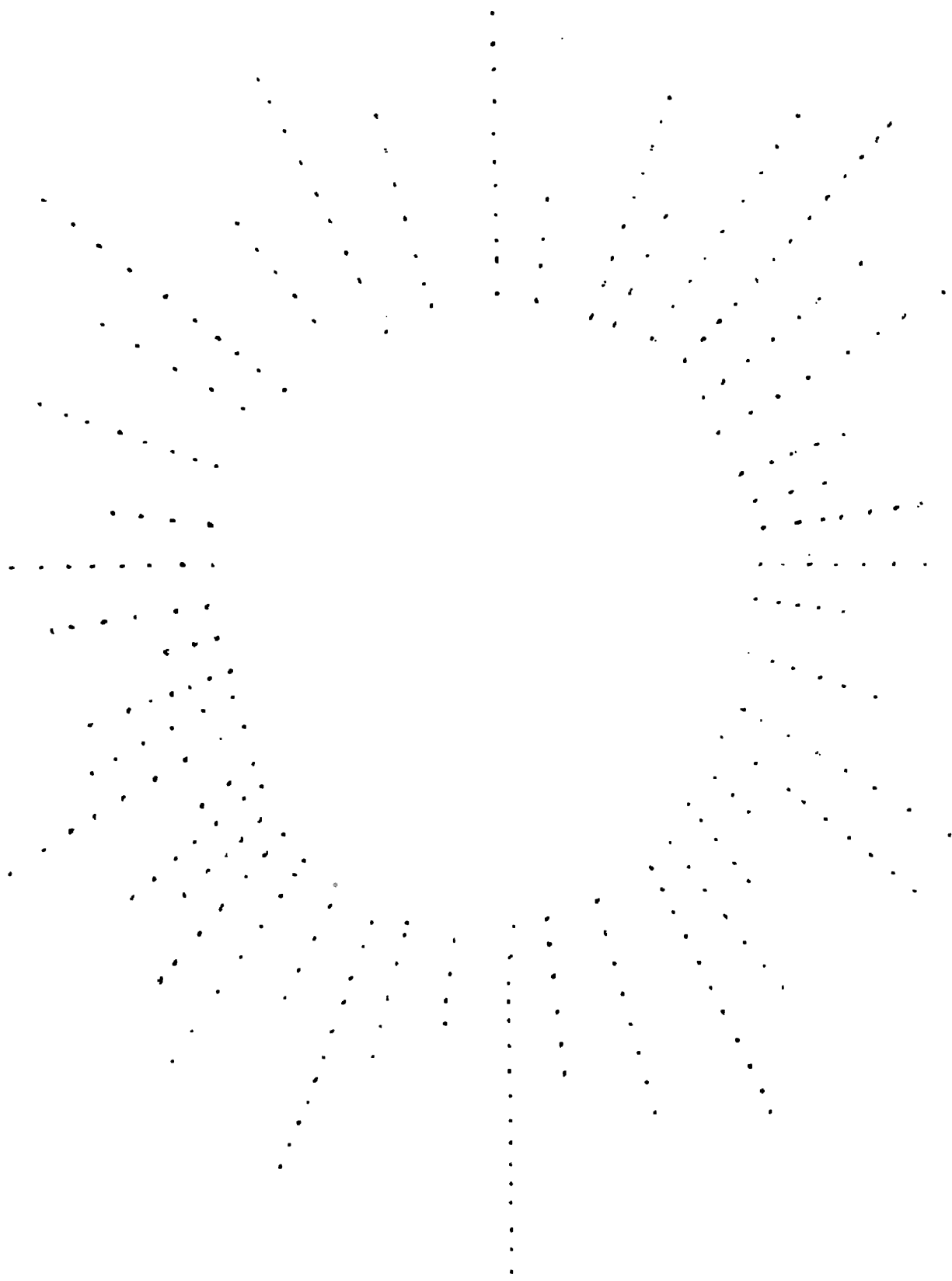
Color the rays of the sun with bright sun colors.

Then poke the holes with a compass point, or a fat needle.

(It is easiest to do this if you put the paper on a rug, NOT on the table!)

When you hold your finished picture up to the light or a window, you can imagine what it is like to see the Lord as your sun.

Tape the picture to a window where the sun shines through.



Visit of Nicodemus
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LEVEL 4 – BORN AGAIN

The place in the Word that mentions being BORN AGAIN is in the conversation of the Lord and the man named Nicodemus.

“Born again” — what does it mean?

Nicodemus could only think of being born all over again like a baby.

But when the Lord talked about being “born again” he was talking about a person changing themselves into a new person—the kind of person that cooperates with what the Lord says is true and good. We are being “born again” when we behave according to the Lord’s truth because we love it and want to do it. We are learning to really care about other people.

The Word gives vivid “pictures”

The Word gives us pictures of what a person is like when they are learning to follow the Lord’s ways. Such a person is like



...a tree, which first grows out of the ground from a seed,

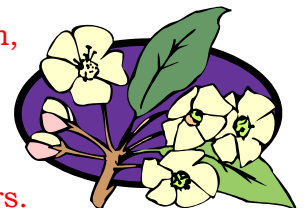


then it becomes a stem from which branches go out, and these are adorned with leaves; at length it blossoms, and from the inmost of the blossoms the fruit begins to form...

True Christian Religion 571

Here is another picture of a person who is changing from a selfish person to one who loves and cares for others:

The first state...may also be compared to the state of a silk-worm, when it draws out and evolves from itself filaments of silk, and after finishing its industrious labor, flies forth into the air, nourishing itself, not by leaves as before, but by the juices of flowers.



If you have a copy of *True Christian Religion* (TCR), you can look at the number 687. It has several “pictures” of what such a person is like. Here is a list of them:

1. The silkworm is mentioned again, and its transformation into a butterfly.
2. A blossoming plant or tree
3. The ripening of fruit
4. Evening or morning showers of rain
5. Flowers that open in the morning and close at night
6. The fragrance of gardens and fields
7. The rainbow in the cloud
8. Birds who love to wash themselves

The Lord gave us these “pictures” to show what it means to be born again. This is what He was talking to Nicodemus about.

Application

- 1) Choose some of these comparisons and draw pictures to illustrate them.

OR

- 2) Write a story about a person who changes from being selfish, or even evil, to being good.
 - ◆ Your character can be imaginary
 - ◆ Your story could be like a fairy tale
 - ◆ What happens to your character to change him or her?

The Visit of Nicodemus
John 3
LEVEL 5 – YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

What did the Lord mean when He said,
“You must be born again?”



Nicodemus questioned incredulously if a man could actually go back into his mother’s womb. Of course this is impossible. It is a spiritual birth that the Lord meant—the rebirth not of your body but of your mind. This is called regeneration.

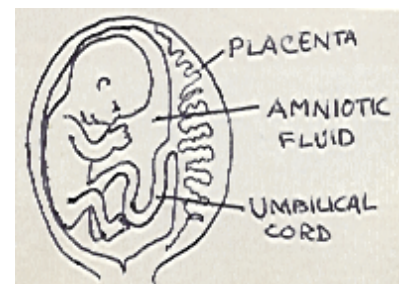
There is a correspondence between physical birth and spiritual rebirth, or regeneration. A baby’s growth and development in the womb is an image of the growth of a person’s new spirit when he is regenerated. So the process of conception, gestation and birth can teach us about regeneration.

The womb of the spiritually reborn man is his rational faculty, or understanding, which receives wisdom from the Lord. The understanding can receive truth from the Lord so that people can look at how they think and act and turn back to the Lord if they choose. In this way a new will can be born.

Every human being must have a body. A soul without a body is not enough. So in the womb the soul forms the body. The embryo in the womb does not yet have its own will and understanding, but it does have a spiritual vessel receiving the Lord’s love which will become the will, and a vessel receiving His wisdom which will become the understanding at birth.

The heart of every person corresponds to his will and the lungs to his understanding. The heart and lungs must both be active and working together for a person to function as a human being. If you hold your breath long enough, you will lose consciousness, and you can’t think or will when you are unconscious. If your heart stops beating you will be in even worse shape.

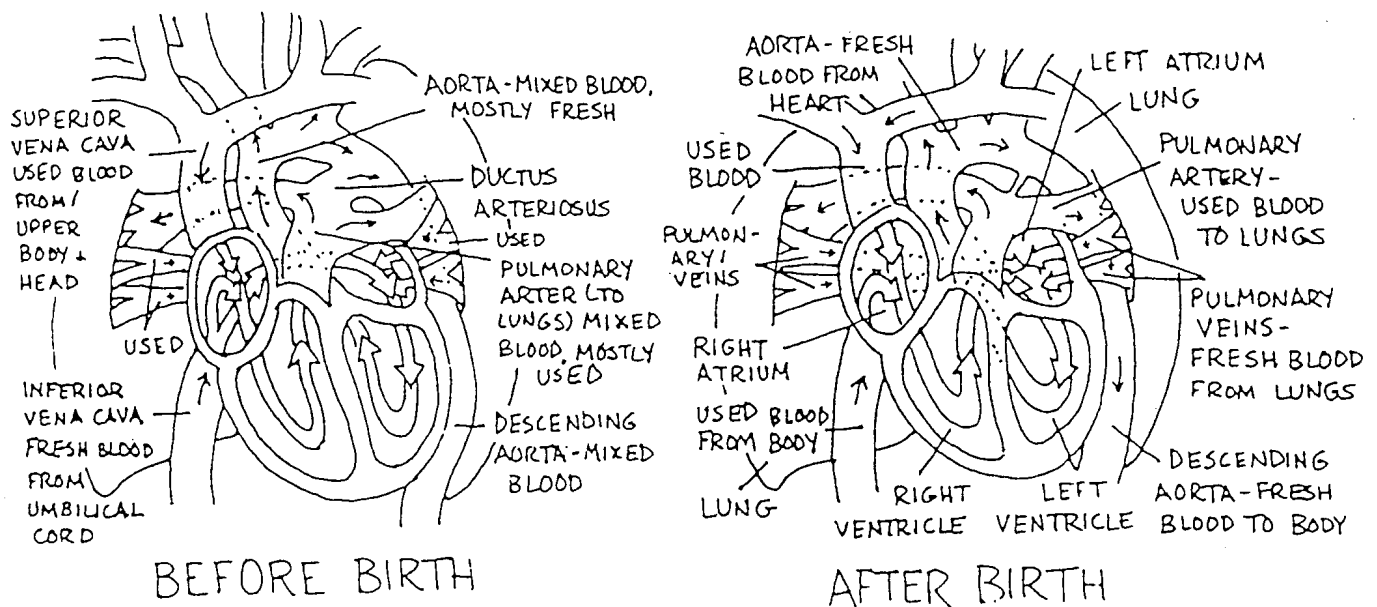
In the womb, the heart of the fetus beats, but its lungs do not breathe. It doesn’t need to breathe, because it gets oxygen from its mother’s blood, through the placenta and umbilical cord. The first breath is an important milestone, because it is the first time the lungs function. When the baby is born and breathes, those vessels which receive the Lord’s love and wisdom become the will and understanding of a new individual.



The opening of the lungs at birth causes great changes in the heart and the path of the blood's circulation through it, because the baby gets oxygen through its lungs instead of the umbilical cord. In the fetus there is much mixing of fresh and used blood; after birth there is no such mixing.

To see the difference more clearly, color the diagrams below:

- ♦ color the vessels carrying fresh blood red
- ♦ color the vessels carrying used blood blue
- ♦ color the vessels with mixed blood various shades of purple.

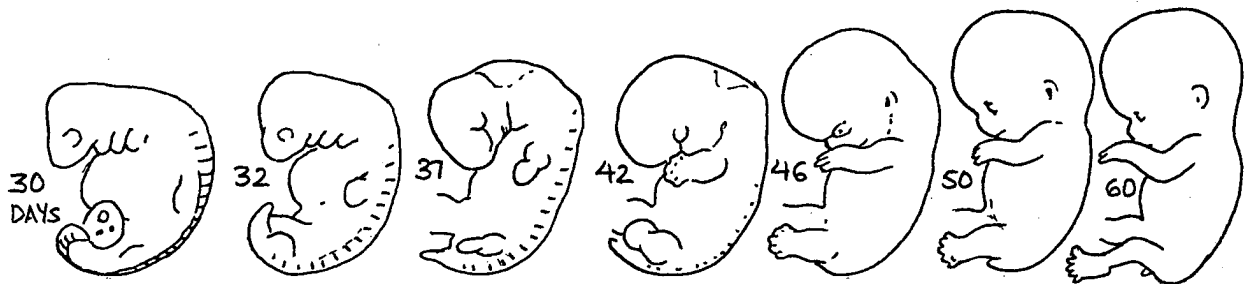


At birth, the first working together of the heart and the lungs makes it possible for the baby to live on its own. And it is a picture of the beginnings of spiritual life in each of us—when we begin, on our own, to want to do what is good, and to see the truth that will make it possible for us to do what is good. Before this time, we may know what is true *from other people*, but this is like the fetus receiving oxygen through the umbilical cord, not through its own lungs.

Just as the soul needs a body to function in this world, the new soul being formed by the Lord in the regenerating person needs a body so it can function. The “body” of this new soul is the person’s thoughts, intentions and actions. These must be put in order for the new will and understanding to grow. If we want to be made new—regenerated—we must become aware of what is selfish and disorderly in ourselves, be sorry for the wrong things we have done (repent), pray to the Lord to help us change, and make ourselves keep His Commandments. Then, and only then, can the Lord purify our thoughts and loves.

The Lord can't regenerate us if we don't cooperate. All our lives the Lord gives us interior good feelings that remain with us (that is why they are called "remains"). These good feelings do not become a part of us, really belong to us, until we choose to express them in an orderly life. Then our good actions are like a "body" in which these good affections can function.

The process whereby the Lord changes us can be illustrated by the development of the embryo.



In the first two months of prenatal life, the embryo's external appearance gradually becomes more and more human. We have to make our life look more and more "human" by ordering our thoughts and actions. We do this by learning from the Word what is true and good, and making ourselves act in accordance with the Lord's teachings.

The baby is not nearly ready to be born. If it were born at two months it would die immediately. It must spend the next seven months growing and strengthening. It learns to suck and swallow, to grasp and kick, and to expand its lungs in preparation for breathing. Only then is it ready to be born and live as a person. In the same way, for a new will to be born in us, we must form a functioning body for it—a body of true thought and good actions.



For our infant spiritual "body" to grow, we must nourish it with spiritual food. The teachings of the Lord's Word will nurture and sustain us through all the states of our life in this world, and through all the eternity of heavenly life.

