

People who have adopted a child know that there is a whole process that you have to go through to adopt a child. You have to do interviews and fill out mountains of paperwork. Sometimes you even need to travel to a foreign country. The whole thing is a labor of love. Today we are going to see the labor of love that the Triune God performed in order to make us his children. We will see that 1. The Father gave his Son, 2. The Son was lifted up on the Cross, and 3. The Holy Spirit gave us a new birth. The Triune God did all of that in order to make us his children.

First, the Father gave his Son. Our Gospel today comes from John chapter 3. John chapter 3 is one of the most wonderful chapters in the whole Bible. A man named Nicodemus comes to Jesus. He comes at night. Some have suggested that he comes at night because he is afraid to be seen with Jesus.¹ He’s a Pharisee and the Pharisees for the most part were opposed to Jesus. So perhaps he came at night because he was afraid to be seen associating with Jesus. But Nicodemus’ conversation with Jesus must have had a profound effect on Nicodemus, because you see we meet Nicodemus a few other times in the Gospel of John. Once in chapter 7 Nicodemus sticks up for Jesus when the Pharisees are criticizing him. And towards the end of the book when Jesus dies, Nicodemus is one of the ones who buries Jesus. So if here in chapter 3 Nicodemus is afraid to be associated with Jesus, by the end he openly associates himself with Jesus by helping to bury Jesus. This conversation with Jesus must have had quite a profound effect on Nicodemus. And this third chapter of John has had a profound effect on many people since, especially verse 16: **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16)**. God’s love for the world is amazing. It’s amazing in at least two ways. First, God’s love for the world is amazing because the world is in rebellion against God. It started way back with Adam and Eve when they disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. God gave Adam and Eve the whole Garden of Eden. He said just don’t eat from this one tree. But they disobeyed God and rebelled against him. And we can all think of times when our own sinful nature has shown its rebellion against God. But yet God loved the world. Sometimes I see all of the godless things that go on in this world, but I have to remind myself, God loves the world. He doesn’t love the sin. Please don’t hear me wrong. But he loves every single person in this world. God loves this world of sinners. That’s amazing.

The second thing that makes God’s love for the world amazing is what he was willing to give to save the world. **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16)**. God the Father paid a great price to make us his children. The price he paid was his one and only Son. The Father loves the Son. Do you remember when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River? Do you remember what God the Father said from heaven? He said, “This is my Son whom I love.” The Father loves the Son. And the Father gave his beloved Son so that we could live. What an amazing gift the Father gave us! What a high price the Father paid so that we could be his children. The Father performed an amazing labor of love in order to make us his children: he gave his one and only Son. The Son also did something amazing in order to make us his children: he was lifted up on the cross.

Jesus says, **“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him” (John 3:14)**. Jesus was talking with Nicodemus. Nicodemus knew the Bible very well.² He was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council. Jesus even calls him a teacher of Israel. So he would have known the Bible very well. So Jesus brings up a story from the Bible that Nicodemus would have known very well and shows him how that story pointed forward to Jesus. One time the Israelites were wandering in the desert and the LORD had been providing them with manna every morning but they got tired of it and they complained, **“There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest**

¹ I owe this insight to D. A. Carson.

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this miserable food!” (Numbers 21:5) As a judgment the LORD sent venomous snakes among them. Many Israelites died from the snake bites and many more were sick. But God loved his people and so he said to Moses, **“Make a bronze snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live” (Numbers 21:8).** Do you see how that pointed forward to Jesus? Just like the snake was lifted up on the pole, Jesus was lifted up on the cross. And just like the Israelites looked at the snake on the pole and believed God’s promise and lived, when we look to Jesus on the cross and believe in him, we have eternal life. Jesus said, **“The Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him” (John 3:14-15).**

So far we’ve seen that the Father performed a labor of love in order to make us his children. He gave his one and only Son to be our Savior. We’ve seen that the Son also performed a labor of love in order to make us his children. He was lifted up on the cross to pay for our sins. It’s Trinity Sunday. We’ve talked about the Father and the Son. We have one person of the Trinity left to talk about: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also performed a labor of love to make us his children. The Holy Spirit gave us a new birth.

Jesus says to Nicodemus, **“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again” (John 3:3).** People need to be born again because parents pass down their sinful natures to their children. Jesus says, **“Flesh gives birth to flesh” (John 3:6).** Children often have some of the same characteristics as their parents. People often say about babies that they have their parents’ eyes or their ears or nose. We pass a lot of good things down to our children but one bad thing that we pass down to our children is our sinful natures. I have two children of my own. And I can see their sinfulness when they disobey. And I sometimes think, “I’m sorry. You got that from me.” I passed my sinful nature down to my children. And we got it from our parents. It’s been that way ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin and passed it down to their children. Our parents passed down their sinful natures to us and so we need to be born again. And the Holy Spirit works a new birth in us through baptism. Jesus says, **“Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5).** “Water” refers to baptism. And Jesus says “water and the Spirit” because the Holy Spirit is at work in baptism to give us a second birth.³

A few weeks ago I asked my parents for my baptism certificate. I have my baptism certificate displayed on my desk. I keep that certificate on my desk as a reminder to me, that I was born the first time on July 9th 1986. I was born the second time two days later on July 11th, 1986. When I was born the first time my parents gave me physical life. When I was born the second time the Holy Spirit gave me spiritual life. There in your baptism, you were born of water and the Spirit and the Holy Spirit gave you spiritual life, a new birth. There in your baptism God gave you a new birth (John 3:5-6; Titus 3:5) and washed all your sins away (Acts 22:16) and connected you to Jesus (Romans 6:3-4) and called you his own dear child (Galatians 3:26-27).

So we see that the triune God performed a labor of love to make us his children. The Father gave his one and only Son to die so that we can have eternal life. The Son was lifted up on the cross to forgive us our sins. And the Holy Spirit gave us new birth in our baptism. The triune God worked together to bring about our adoption into his family and now the Triune God calls us his children. Amen.

³ For further reading on baptism, see A. Andrew Das, *Baptized into God’s Family: The Doctrine of Infant Baptism for Today*, Second Edition (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2008).