

JESUS: THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

Jesus: The Gift of God's Love

Twelve Daily Studies for Christmas

John 3:1–17; 7:45–52; 19:38–40; Romans 5:8

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



So far in our Christmas studies, we've unwrapped God's gifts of grace and truth in the person of Jesus. Now, for the next three days, we'll consider a third gift God gave us through the birth of Jesus. On that momentous night, Mary lovingly swaddled her newborn and laid heaven's greatest treasure in a manger built to hold animal feed. When Mary gazed into her infant's eyes, she peered into the most profound wonder of the universe: God's gift of love to a love-starved world.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

What must've gone through Mary's mind as she held newborn Jesus? According to Luke, after the shepherds came to worship the baby and told Mary and Joseph about the angels who appeared to them, "Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her *heart*" (Luke 2:19 NASB, emphasis added). As you prepare to open the Word, ask the Lord to give you Mary's pondering heart. Bible study is for the heart, not just the mind. So in a moment of silence, invite the Lord to touch your heart with the love of Jesus. You may wish to write your thoughts in a prayer.

Quotable

*Every Christmas,
God announces
to every one of us,
the three words
that are most
important to hear.
He says to us,
"I love you."*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Now read the opening verses of John 3, which describe the encounter of a hungry soul seeking out Jesus in the still of the night.

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.” Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.” (John 3:1–3)



Observation: Seeking Light in the Darkness

In the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, observation is the first step toward unlocking the meaning of a text and applying its principles. Look closely at the passage and answer the following questions.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, perhaps to catch Jesus in a private moment without interrupting crowds. What piqued Nicodemus' curiosity about Jesus? (Compare John 3:2 with 2:23).

A member of the elite Sanhedrin and a “respected Jewish teacher” (3:10), Nicodemus knew the Bible better than most. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus painstakingly observed every detail of the Old Testament law along with the countless regulations of the rabbinic law. But Jesus, who “knew what was in each person’s heart” (2:25), perceived a gaping hole beneath Nicodemus’ perfect facade.

If this Sanhedrin official had come to size up Jesus, he quickly realized that he was the one being sized up and found lacking in the most basic truth of the spiritual life. Neither Bible knowledge nor religious duty nor even a direct line to Abraham merits entrance into the kingdom of God. Jesus said that Nicodemus must be “born again” (3:3). Let’s look at what Jesus meant.



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Interpretation and Correlation: What It Means to Be “Born Again”

The word translated “again” in Greek is *anōthen*, which, according to commentator William Barclay, has three possible meanings:

- (1) It can mean *from the beginning, completely radically*. (2) It can mean *again*, in the sense of *for the second time*. (3) It can mean *from above*, and, therefore, *from God*.¹

Because no English word can communicate all the nuances, most versions of the Bible translate the phrase “born again” and note a secondary translation, “born from above.” Barclay helps us put the pieces together with this insightful interpretation:

To be born anew is to undergo such a radical change that it is like a new birth; it is to have something happen to the soul which can only be described as being born all over again; and the whole process is not a human achievement, because it comes from the grace and power of God.²

With this meaning in mind, read John 3:4–8.

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?” Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.”

Supposing that only people with Abrahamic DNA qualified for God’s kingdom, Nicodemus was fixated on physical birth and completely missed Jesus’ point. What did Jesus say to shift Nicodemus’ perspective from physical to spiritual?



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What light did Titus shed on Jesus' meaning? Highlight the theme of water connected to the Spirit in these verses:

When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life. (Titus 3:4–7)

Theologically speaking, the term *regeneration* best captures Jesus and the apostles' teaching on new birth. At Christmas, we celebrate not only the birth of Jesus but also God's plan to give new birth and new life through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit—all motivated by God's heart of love to save us!



Application: Trusting in Jesus

In his message, Chuck Swindoll gave thanks for God's amazing love that is the foundation of our new birth:

Thank You, Father, for sending Jesus and for what prompted You to do so—Your great love for us. We give You thanks for loving us, who are in many ways so unlovely, and yet You find in us a reason to give Your Son. Thank You for Jesus who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Close this study on new birth in Christ with your own prayer of thanksgiving for the radical change the Holy Spirit performed in you when He gave eternal life to your soul through spiritual rebirth. Recall the moment you trusted Christ as your Savior, and give thanks to the baby in the manger who made it possible for you to be born again. And if you've never put your faith in Christ, trust Him now as your source of new life.

In the next study, we'll examine Jesus' illustration of faith drawn from a powerful story of salvation from the Old Testament.



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I acknowledge that I have no life in myself apart from the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, who draws me out of the darkness of sin into the light of new birth. Thank You for washing me clean in the waters of Your mercy and generously pouring out the Spirit through Jesus my Savior. It's because of grace I am made right in Your sight. I pray to You with confidence in my eternal inheritance and in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. William Barclay, "The Man Who Came by Night," in *The Gospel of John*, rev. and updated ed., vol. 1, *The New Daily Study Bible* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001), John 3:1–6 (contd), Logos.
2. Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, John 3:1–6, Logos.



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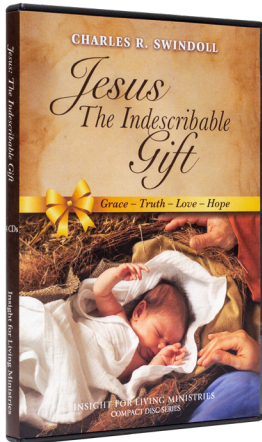
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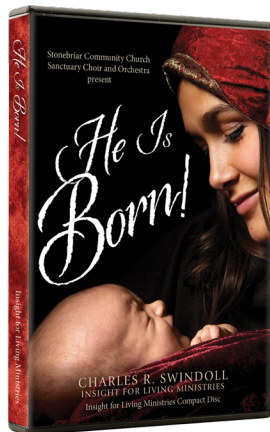
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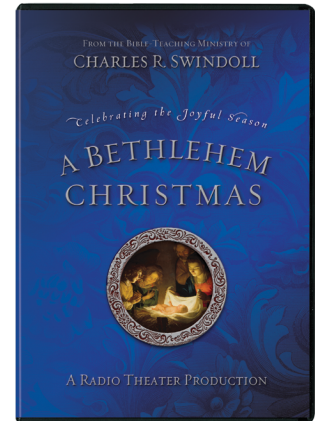
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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