

"Spirit of God... Spirit of Christ... Christ in you" – the Trinity (God in three persons who are one) is not stated directly but is taught by a number of Bible passages like this one.

**12-13 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation – but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.**

"To the flesh...by the Spirit" — the selfish human nature is contrasted with the Spirit-led nature which grows out of the new birth. Paul is referencing what he wrote earlier.

• *For further study, read Romans 8:1-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:16-17.*

**14-15 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought**

**SUMMARY** Paul is writing to born-again Christians who knew the Holy Spirit's empowering. But they too easily fall back on the familiar habits of their old way of life. He reminds them of their new identity as children of God and says – live up to it!

**APPLICATION** The understanding of new life with a new identity is central to growing in Christian maturity. Seeing ourselves as sinners, captive to our selfish and independent desires, will lead us to sin. The good news is, the opposite is equally true.

**QUESTION** *How do Paul's assumptions about the people he is writing to speak to us today?*

**PRAYER** Father, we reflect that Isaiah knew You as Almighty God, Nicodemus met You in Jesus and the Early Church had experience of You through being filled with Your Spirit.

May we be made ever more aware of our relationship with each Person, as we seek, like Isaiah, to be available to You, conscious of our human weakness but rejoicing that we are counted as Your children and empowered to serve.

With humble thanks we praise You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

**about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father."**

"Abba, Father" – Jesus used this form of address, Mark 14:36, which shocked religious Jews with its informality and intimacy.

"Fear...adoption to sonship" – slaves, having no rights, lived in fear of arbitrary punishment. In Greek-Roman practice, adoption conferred the full rights and authority of a son of the family.

**16-17 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.**

"We are heirs" – which transform the way we pray and relate to God as a Father.

*For further study, read John 1:12, Galatians 3:26, Philippians 2:15, 1 John 3:1, 1 John 5:19.*

# The Living Word

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Bible readings for Sunday, May 30, 2021, with explanatory notes

Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary readings for **May 30**

*Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching*

**Trinity Sunday theme: Made spiritually alive in Father, Son and Holy Spirit**

Isaiah 6:1-8 – Isaiah hears God asking, "Who will go for us?"

John 3:1-17 – Even Israel's renowned teacher needs spiritual renewal

Romans 8:9-17 – The life of the Spirit contrasted with the old life

And also read: Psalm 29

## Isaiah 6:1-8 – Isaiah hears God asking, "Who will go for us?"

*Isaiah receives his call from the enthroned Lord in a glimpse of heaven*

**1-2 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were seraphim, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.**

"The year that King Uzziah died" — a time of national disaster in 740 BC when the Assyrians were becoming dominant, and a God-honouring reign of more than 50 years had just ended

"I saw the Lord" – although no one has ever seen God, because God is Spirit, John 1:18, 4:24, at times He clothes Himself with visibility, as here in Isaiah's vision, or Joshua's challenge, Joshua 5:13-15

"Seraphim" – the word suggests that they looked

like flames. "Covered their faces" – even heavenly creatures could not look upon holy God.

**3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory."**

**4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.**

"Holy, holy, holy" — the triple phrase emphasises the Lord's absolute separateness.

**5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."**

"Unclean lips" – the glorious light of heaven makes Isaiah aware of his less-than-holy attitudes.

"The King" – the earthly ruler has died and Isaiah becomes more aware of the Almighty King.

## Psalm 29 – A psalm of David

**1 Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.**

**2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the splendour of His holiness.**

**3 The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters.**

**4 The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic.**

**5 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.**

**6 He makes Lebanon leap like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox.**

**7 The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning.**

**8 The voice of the Lord shakes the desert; the Lord shakes the Desert of Kadesh.**

**9 The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare.**

**And in His temple all cry, "Glory!"**

**10 The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord is enthroned as King for ever.**

**11 The Lord gives strength to His people; the Lord blesses His people with peace.**

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6-7 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

**SUMMARY** Isaiah has a vision of heaven, and the glory of God convicts him of his own unsuitability to speak for God. An angel takes a live coal from the altar, touches his lips and proclaims him free from guilt. He can respond to the question "Who will go for Us", hearing his call from Father, Son and Holy Spirit together.

**APPLICATION** None of us will be like Isaiah, but we are all called to serve God in spiritual gifts by going, working and speaking for Him.

**QUESTION** What remedy do we have when we become aware of our unholiness?

### John 3:1-17 – Even Israel's renowned teacher needs spiritual renewal

*Through Nicodemus, Jesus gives us the most important statement of the gospel*

1-2 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs You are doing if God were not with Him."

"He came... at night" — a cautious private visit after dark (John hints at his spiritual darkness) showed Nicodemus' genuine desire to discover who Jesus was.

3 Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

"No one can see" — we enter the world by physical birth, and enter into spiritual awareness through spiritual birth. This was a challenge to Nicodemus who believed he qualified for the kingdom of God through being a correctly-religious Jew.

4 "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

5-6 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

"Live coal... from the altar" — taken from the place of sacrifice, symbolic of the final, perfect atoning sacrifice later to be provided by God in Jesus.

8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

"Born of water and the Spirit" — water cleanses from impurity, the Spirit transforms hearts. This cannot refer to Christian baptism — Nicodemus would not have understood that — but must refer to what he knew well, the Scriptures. Water in the OT is often symbolic of renewal and cleansing, Ezekiel 36:25-27.

"The Spirit gives birth to Spirit" — the presence of God's Spirit which is born in the human spirit of someone who believes.

7-8 You should not be surprised at My saying, "You must be born again." The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

"You" — not just Nicodemus, everyone.

• **For further study:** How the Bible uses "born again", "born of God" and becoming a "child of God" to talk about the same thing in John 1:12-13, Titus 3:5, 1 Peter 1:3 and 23, 1 Jn. 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1 and 4 and 18.

"The wind blows" — 'wind' or 'spirit', which with 'breath' and 'breathe' are all the same word group in Hebrew. Jesus is reminding Nicodemus of the 'life into dry bones' prophecy of Ezekiel 37:1-14 and saying that He is its reality.

9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

"Nicodemus asked" — it was shocking for him, a renowned Scripture teacher, to be told he could not enter the kingdom of God on his merit as a Jew and his good works.

10-11 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, We speak of what We know, and We testify to what We have seen, but still you people do not accept Our testimony.

"We speak of what We know" — Jesus, one of the Trinitarian godhead, gives Nicodemus an ironic answer, saying "We know... We testify" as if to say "We are God and we really do know..."

12 "I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven — the Son of Man.

14-15 "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."

**SUMMARY** An esteemed Jewish religious teacher makes a cautious, night-time visit to meet Jesus who is not a formally trained rabbi and has the calloused hands of a carpenter/builder. He asks a question — essentially "Who are you really, and how is it that these signs and wonders accompany You?" Jesus tells him that this is the kingdom of God, apparent to those who enter it by a spiritual awakening or birth from above. His reply is the most direct and profound explanation of how we are transformed by receiving the Good News.

**APPLICATION** The key is the change of heart that believes and fully trusts who Jesus is, and what He has done, so that we, deserving of condemnation, can walk free in new and eternal life. The absolute requirement for every person to be born again spiritually is often contested — but only by those who have not yet come into that experience.

**QUESTION** What is your story of coming to know Jesus personally?

### Romans 8:9-17 – The life of the Spirit contrasted with the old life

*With the Holy Spirit active in us, we should choose to follow His leading*

9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

"Have the Spirit of Christ... belong to Christ" — to be dedicated as an infant, brought up by Christian values, or attending church, does not make one a Christian, any more than frequenting the gym for coffee makes one a gymnast. To "belong" to Christ

"Lifted up" — it would be some years before the connection with crucifixion would be apparent to Nicodemus. The bronze "snake in the wilderness", Numbers 21:4-9, was raised up as a symbol of judgment, and a means of deliverance. Jesus on the Cross is a picture both of judgment for our sin, and the means of deliverance from it; God grants spiritual, eternal life through Jesus who, unlike the effigy, has life in Himself, John 1:4, 5:26.

16-17 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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.

"To condemn... to save" — the holiness and righteousness of Jesus shows up the selfishness and independence of the world, not to further condemn, but to provide another way: believe, and live. Faith is not about doing, but believing.

is a decision only we can take, to believe and invite the Spirit of God to live in us and renew us.

10-11 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who lives in you.