

THE LIGHT HAS COME INTO THE WORLD

the Egyptians held them as gods, even Jannes and Jambres: and whereas the signs which they did were not of God, they perished and those also that believed on them. And now let this man go, for he is not worthy of death. 2 The Jews say unto Nicodemus: Thou didst become his disciple and thou speakest on his behalf. Nicodemus saith unto them: Is the governor also become his disciple, that he speaketh on his behalf? did not Caesar appoint him unto this dignity? And the Jews were raging and gnashing their teeth against Nicodemus. Pilate saith unto them: Wherefore gnash ye your teeth against him, wherens ye have heard the truth? The Jews say unto Nicodemus: Mayest thou receive his truth and his portion. Nicodemus saith: Amen, Amen: may I receive it as ye have said.

The Apocryphal New Testament, M.R. James-Translation and Notes, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924

There is no clear source of information about Nicodemus outside the Gospel of John. There's a theory that he is identical to Nicodemus ben Gurion, mentioned in the Talmud as a wealthy and popular holy man reputed to have had miraculous powers. Christian tradition asserts that Nicodemus was martyred sometime in the first century. He is venerated as a Saint by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches.

Lenten Solemn Prayer *over the people*



Deacon or Celebrant. Bow down before the Lord.

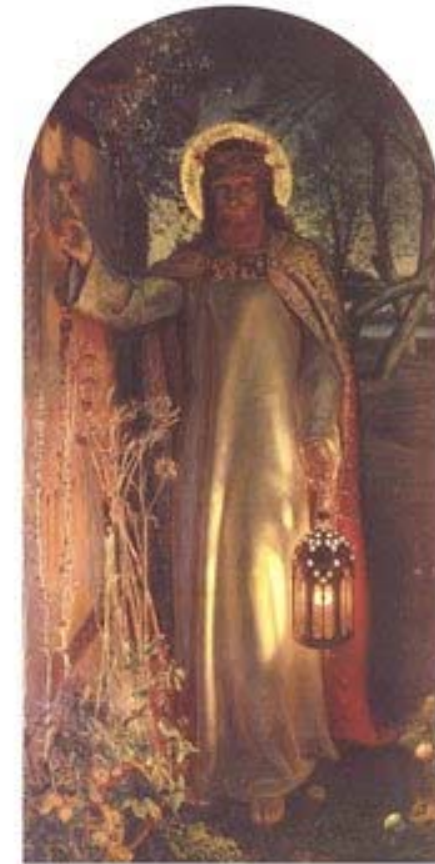
All kneel

Celebrant

Look down in mercy, Lord, on your people who kneel before you; and grant that those whom you have nourished by your Word and Sacraments may bring forth fruit worthy of repentance; through Christ our Lord. **AMEN**

Nicodemus and Jesus,
c.1450 Anonymous,
British Library, London

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT



The Light of the World

*"I am come a light into the world,
that whosoever believeth in me should not abide in darkness."*
John 1:9

The Light of the World

William Holman Hunt Begun in 1851.

Now in the chapel at Keble College, Oxford, with a later copy in St. Paul's Cathedral. Hunt, a Victorian Pre-Raphaelite artist used the title for his picture of the risen Christ standing knocking at the heart's door of every man.

We all have to make the choice to open the door. Look closely at the painting. You'll notice the handle is on the inside. Someone once said,

THE LIGHT HAS COME INTO THE WORLD

Jesus Christ never forced his way into anyone's life; he is the perfect gentleman, he waits to be invited. If you open the door to invite Christ into your life, he will enter.

Today's Gospel Saint John 3:14-21 [Year B, Lent 4]

✠ JESUS SAID, "JUST AS MOSES LIFTED UP THE SERPENT IN THE wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.' [© NRSV]

Commentary on Today's Gospel: Nicodemus

It is regrettable that today's Gospel passage is taken out of its context. Last year we read the beginning verses of Chapter 3 on the Second Sunday of Lent. The chapter begins with the nocturnal visit of the Pharisee jurist, Nicodemus, who was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish equivalent of the Supreme Court. He had a question to ask the Lord. He began with pleasantries but was flummoxed when Jesus looked into his soul and answered his real question before it was asked:

Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above ¹.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old?

¹ It is unfortunate that the mistranslation, *You must be born again*, has colored the spirituality of so many Christians who have been deluded that Jesus spoke about emotional conversions. It is plain that he spoke of Baptism. Notice the **boldfaced** sentence.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.

The words we hear today were directed to the celebrated visitor. Jesus alludes to the Cross:... *the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.* Further, it is to Nicodemus that he says the (arguably), most quoted passage from the New Testament.

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. '

Nicodemus appears just three times in John's Gospel. First, here in John 3:1-21; next when the jurist states the law concerning the possible arrest of Jesus during the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:45-51). His third and last appearance is after the Crucifixion when he assists Joseph of Arimathea in preparing the corpse of Jesus for burial (John 19:39-42).

Nicodemus also appears in Chapter V of a forged Medieval work, *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, itself contained within a heavily reworked writing known as the Acts of Pilate. *Pilate* purports to be a report to Emperor Claudius written by Pilate, his onetime procurator. Here are some paragraphs from the Nicodemus part of the text:

1 But a certain man, Nicodemus, a Jew, came and stood before the governor and said: I beseech thee, good (pious) lord, bid me speak a few words. Pilate saith: Say on. Nicodemus saith: I said unto the elders and the priests and Levites and unto all the multitude of the Jews in the synagogue: Wherefore contend ye with this man? This man doeth many and wonderful signs, which no man hath done, neither will do: let him alone and contrive not any evil against him: if the signs which he doeth are of God, they will stand, but if they be of men, they will come to nought. For verily Moses, when he was sent of God into Egypt did many signs, which God commanded him to do before Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and there were there certain men servants of Pharaoh, Jannes and Jambres, and they also did signs not a few, of them which Moses did, and