

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

SERPENT

EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY'S THEME

Introducing the Gospel

Prediction of the passion to Nicodemus (John 3: 1-17)

As is usual in John's Gospel a number of major themes are compressed into this encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus. The theme of significance for the second Sunday of Lent concerns the covert prediction of Jesus' death on the cross. This prediction draws on the story in Numbers 21: 4-9. When Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness those who looked at it were preserved in life. In a similar way Jesus will be lifted up on the cross and thereby bring life to those who believe in him.

The image to stimulate reflection on John's teaching about Jesus being lifted up on the cross is *serpent*.

Core extract from the Gospel (John 3: 14-16; for reflection throughout the week)

And 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.

Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)

Lord Jesus Christ,
you reign from the cross in glory.
Draw us to yourself,
that we may share your risen life,
and proclaim your saving grace
to those around us;
now and for ever.
Amen.

READING NEXT SUNDAY'S GOSPEL

John 3: 1-17

Nicodemus Visits Jesus

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? 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. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ‘Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And 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.

ENGAGING WITH THE THEME

Dwelling with the text (John 3: 1-17)

Begin to explore John's account of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus by employing the SIFT approach of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking. You may find that one of these approaches comes easier to you than the others. But it is worth trying all four.

- What details in the passage catch your attention (Sensing)?
- What big ideas in the passage spark in your mind (Intuition)?
- What most touches your heart in the passage (Feeling)?
- What most stretches your mind and makes you think in the passage (Thinking)?

Thinking and talking

Identify topics within the passage that can get you thinking and talking. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- What do you make of Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night?
- What do you understand by being born of the Spirit?
- How do you read the reference to Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness?
- Why did God send his only Son into the world?
- What does this narrative say for us today?

Using your Bible

Explore the narrative of Moses lifting up the serpent.

- Numbers 21: 4-9

Explore the image of Jesus being lifted up in John's Gospel.

- John 8: 28-29
- John 12: 32-36
- John 19: 16-19

Explore other references to Nicodemus in John's Gospel.

- John 7: 49-52
- John 19: 38-40

Explore the promise of eternal life in John's Gospel.

- John 3: 35-36

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT (YEAR A) Sunday 1 March 2026

Exploring online

Widen your exploration of John's teaching about Jesus being lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

- Nicodemus in John's Gospel
- The serpent in the wilderness
- The snake as the symbol of medicine

Drawing on experience

The image to stimulate reflection on John's teaching about Jesus being lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness is *serpent*. Draw on your experience of serpents. For example:

- When have you encountered snakes in real life?
- When have you seen snakes in zoos or on film?
- When have you seen the snake as a symbol of medicine?

What have you learned about serpents?

Creating and making

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by John's teaching about Jesus being lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness or by the image of the serpent.

- Make a mural about Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus.
- Make snakes as the symbol of medicine.
- Create a collage of pictures of Jesus lifted up on the cross.
- Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of the serpent lifted up in the wilderness or on the image of the serpent.



EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

Each week we are inviting people in their homes to look forward to those Sunday services that follow the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel readings. We employ the SIFT approach (Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking) to encourage reflection on the Sunday Gospel. We are suggesting a variety of ways in which people of all ages, and households working together, may engage with the Gospel reading and celebrate that engagement with shared activities.

These materials have been developed by the Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral working in collaboration with the staff team here at the Cathedral, and with sponsorship and support from the St Mary's Centre in Wales.



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