



In the Fourth Gospel (John), Jesus encounters individuals who represent a specific type of person. Nicodemus is a Jewish scholar who is literally and metaphorically in the dark about Jesus. He is an honest individual, one with well-formed beliefs, whose attitude to Jesus is positive, but limited by his own understanding of God.

He is impressed by the signs that Jesus has worked, but these do not, and cannot, bring him to a true appreciation of who Jesus really is. He seems to want to fit Jesus into his present system of belief, but Jesus challenges him to expand his vision beyond a narrowly Jewish way of thinking to one which is universal.

Jesus appeals to their common Jewish heritage by invoking the memory of Moses fashioning the bronze serpent and curing the Israelites who had been bitten by snakes as punishment for their complaining during the Exodus journey through the wilderness. By a play on the verb "to lift up", he presents his own being exalted on the cross as a similar healing for all those who will look at him and believe. Jesus speaks of this concern of God as being due to God's love for the world, that is, for all human beings. It is on the response which the person makes to the revealing of God's self in Jesus that judgement depends: it is not an act of God, but the result of the decision which each person makes for themselves which determines whether a person is condemned or not. Judgement is in the here and now, based on whether we accept or reject Jesus and his message. ■

LEARN

In the Gospel according to John, the crucifixion is "the exaltation" ("lifting up") of Jesus as king and priest.

Light and darkness/night are symbols of belief and unbelief in the Fourth Gospel.

Judgement in John is the decision the person makes to accept or reject Jesus and his message: it is something which the individual does, not an external, divine action.

SAY

The Son of Man must be lifted up... so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

(John 3:14-15)

REFLECT

Nicodemus is an interesting character. We first encounter him as a furtive figure, coming to Jesus under the cover of darkness: later he speaks up against the religious authorities' attempt to convict Jesus without giving him the benefit of due legal process; finally, he emerges as a courageous person, risking his reputation, and perhaps more, to bury the body of the crucified Jesus. We can see in him an example of developing faith and commitment.

It is in this dialogue between Jesus and the Jewish scholar that we find perhaps the most concise summary of the Christian faith. Sometimes, we can see displayed at sporting events posters proclaiming "John 3:16": this is the four-line verse which says: "God loved the world so much/ that he gave his only Son,/ so that whoever believes in him may not be lost/ but may have eternal life." Some people have said that if we were to lose the whole of the Christian scriptures except for this one verse, then we would still have the essence of the Gospel.

Nicodemus sincerely believed in the teachings he had received: Jesus did not tell him that he was wrong, but encouraged him to think more deeply about how God viewed the world, not just Nicodemus' part of it. Perhaps we might put ourselves in Nicodemus' shoes and broaden our understanding of Jesus and his message as well. ■

DO

Memorise the text of John 3:16, given in the "Reflect" section.

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her.
Be joyful, all who were in mourning;
exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast.

COLLECT

O God, who through your Word
reconcile the human race to yourself in a
wonderful way,
grant, we pray,
that with prompt devotion and eager faith
the Christian people may hasten
toward the solemn celebrations to come.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

A reading from the second book of
Chronicles.

All the heads of the priesthood, and the
people too, added infidelity to infidelity,
copying all the shameful practices of
the nations and defiling the Temple that
the Lord had consecrated for himself in
Jerusalem. The Lord, the God of their
ancestors, tirelessly sent them messenger
after messenger, since he wished to spare his
people and his house. But they ridiculed the
messengers of God, they despised his words,
they laughed at his prophets, until at last the
wrath of the Lord rose so high against his
people that there was no further remedy.

Their enemies burned down the Temple
of God, demolished the walls of Jerusalem,
set fire to all its palaces, and destroyed
everything of value in it. The survivors were
deported by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon;
they were to serve him and his sons until
the kingdom of Persia came to power. This is
how the word of the Lord was fulfilled that he
spoke through Jeremiah, "Until this land has
enjoyed its sabbath rest, until seventy years
have gone by, it will keep sabbath throughout
the days of its desolation."

And in the first year of Cyrus king of
Persia, to fulfil the word of the Lord that
was spoken through Jeremiah, the Lord
roused the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia to
issue a proclamation and to have it publicly
displayed throughout his kingdom: "Thus
speaks Cyrus king of Persia, 'The Lord,
the God of heaven, has given me all the
kingdoms of the earth; he has ordered me to
build him a Temple in Jerusalem, in Judah.
Whoever there is among you of all his
people, may his God be with him! Let him go
up.'"

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 136

Response:

**O let my tongue
cleave to my mouth
if I remember you not!**

1. By the rivers of Babylon
there we sat and wept,
remembering Zion:
on the poplars that grew there
we hung up our harps. (R.)
2. For it was there that they asked us,
our captors, for songs,
our oppressors, for joy.

"Sing to us," they said,
"one of Zion's songs." (R.)

3. O how could we sing
the song of the Lord
on alien soil?
If I forget you, Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither! (R.)
4. O let my tongue
cleave to my mouth
if I remember you not,
if I prize not Jerusalem
above all my joys! (R.)

SECOND READING Ephesians 2:4-10

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the
Ephesians.

God loved us with so much love that he was
generous with his mercy: when we were
dead through our sins, he brought us to life
with Christ – it is through grace that you have
been saved – and raised us up with him and
gave us a place with him in heaven, in Christ
Jesus.

This was to show for all ages to come,
through his goodness towards us in Christ
Jesus, how infinitely rich he is in grace.
Because it is by grace that you have been
saved, through faith; not by anything of your
own, but by a gift from God; not by anything
that you have done, so that nobody can claim
the credit. We are God's work of art, created
in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from
the beginning he had meant us to live it.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Glory and praise to you, O Christ!
**God loved the world so much that he gave
his only Son;**
everyone who believes in him has eternal life.
Glory and praise to you, O Christ!

GOSPEL

John 3:14-21

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
John.

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

"The Son of Man must be lifted up
as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,
so that everyone who believes may have
eternal life in him.
Yes, God loved the world so much
that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may
not be lost
but may have eternal life.
For God sent his Son into the world
not to condemn the world,
but so that through him the world might be
saved.
No one who believes in him will be
condemned;
but whoever refuses to believe is
condemned already,
because he has refused to believe
in the name of God's only Son.
On these grounds is sentence pronounced:
that though the light has come into the
world
men have shown they prefer
darkness to the light
because their deeds were evil.
And indeed, everybody who does wrong
hates the light and avoids it,
for fear his actions should be exposed;

but the man who lives by the truth
comes out into the light,
so that it may be plainly seen that what he
does is done in God."

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
(all bow during the next two lines)
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the
Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living
and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

We place before you with joy these offerings,
which bring eternal remedy, O Lord,
praying that we may both faithfully revere
them
and present them to you, as is fitting,
for the salvation of all the world.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Jerusalem is built as a city bonded as one
together.
It is there that the tribes go up, the tribes of
the Lord,
to praise the name of the Lord.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

O God, who enlighten everyone who comes
into this world,
illuminate our hearts, we pray,
with the splendour of your grace,
that we may always ponder
what is worthy and pleasing to your majesty
and love you in all sincerity.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

