

## Order of Worship for March 1, 2026

### Prelude

P: The Lord be with you,

**C: and also with you.**

**Opening Hymn: “Jesus Lead Thou On” - Hymn #718**

**Confession and Forgiveness p. 151**

### Service of the Word

#### Entrance Psalm:

P: He remembers His covenant forever,

**C: the word that He commanded, for a thousand generations.**

P: Seek the LORD and His strength;

**C: seek His presence continually!**

P: Remember the wondrous works that He has done,

**C: His miracles, and the judgments He uttered,**

P: O offspring of Abraham, His servant,

**C: children of Jacob, His chosen ones!**

P: He is the LORD our God;

**C: His judgments are in all the earth.**

**ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

P: He remembers His covenant forever,

**C: the word that He commanded, for a thousand generations**

**Kyrie (Lord, Have Mercy) p. 152-3**

**Salutation p. 156**

#### Prayer of the Day

P: O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen**

**Hymn of Praise: “Praise to the Lord” - Hymn #790**

#### Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 12:1-9

R: The LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you,

and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

R: This is the Word of the Lord

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**Epistle Lesson: Romans 4:1–8, 13–17**

R: What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,  
and whose sins are covered;  
blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.” . . .

For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom Abraham believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

**Holy Gospel: John 3:1-17**

P: The Holy Gospel According to St. John the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter

**C: Glory to You, O Lord (sung)**

P: Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, 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 the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, We speak of what We know, and bear witness to what We have seen, but you do not receive Our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And 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, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**C: Praise to You, O Christ. (Sung)**

**Sermon Hymn:** “*Jesus, Refuge of the Weary*” - **Hymn #423**

**Sermon:** “*Teaching the Teacher*” – **John 3:1-17**

Over 15 years ago, Pastor David Platt published a book called *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*. In it, he talks about how American Christians have manipulated the gospel to fit our cultural preferences. He shows what Jesus actually said about being his disciple—then invites you to believe and obey what you have heard”. In fact, he put it this way: “A relationship with Jesus requires absolute, undivided, exclusive affection.” That’s quite the statement, and a standard few, if any, can live up to.

Of course, it wasn’t just him. Others have thought that. Christian denominations that claim a more visible role for the Holy Spirit, where people can speak in tongues and do miraculous healings, teach that if you haven’t had those gifts manifest, you don’t have enough faith. Groups that teach that you have to decide to follow Jesus often expect some sort of great conversion experience before your baptism as an adult. Martin Luther joined the monastery because he wanted to be more than just an ordinary believer, devoting his whole life to God.

Yet we see through the Bible that following Jesus wasn’t just one way. Yes, when Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John, they left their nets and boats and families to follow him.

Matthew left his tax booth when Jesus called him. Jesus told the rich young man to sell all he had and give to the poor to become a disciple. Yet he also told others to not leave where they were, but to instead stay. Paul didn't call everyone to join him on his missionary journeys, but instead told people to bloom where they were planted. Being a disciple didn't look the same for everyone.

That's why it's always interesting to look at the man featured in today's lesson, Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and Pharisees kept the Law. Pharisees followed the Ten Commandments. Pharisees paid tithes, guarded the Sabbath, and strictly kept Old Testament regulations and requirements. And they wore long robes.

Nicodemus was also a member of the Jewish ruling council—the Sanhedrin—the seventy-member Jewish Senate. The Sanhedrin judged people according to a book called the Mishnah. The Mishnah contains 613 commandments. There is no room for error in the Mishnah. Once you're out, you stay out. Once you're down, you stay down. You can never bounce back.

As a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus believed that there are no second chances. There is no grace. There is no forgiveness. None. Zero. Zilch. Nada. Never! So, you'd better be careful. And look over your shoulder. And second-guess yourself. You'd better watch what you wear, how you act, the length of your prayers, and the amount of money you give. Because there's no bouncing back.

Nicodemus first came to Jesus at night (John 3:2). More, however, is going on than just the time of day. Darkness describes people who rebel against Jesus. “The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness” (John 3:19). Remember Judas? He betrayed Jesus. When? “It was night” (John 13:30). Coming to Jesus at night describes Nicodemus. He's in the dark, just like Judas. Nicodemus is lost in the spiritual darkness of legalism.

The same darkness engulfs us when we don't believe in second chances, when we won't forgive, when we refuse to embrace grace, when we won't turn the other cheek or walk the extra mile. It gets dark—very, very dark.

That's why Jesus says to Nicodemus, “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). There is no chitchat here. No idle talk. Jesus goes straight to the point. Jesus says our best won't do, our works won't work. We must be born again. In John 3:1–8, Jesus uses the term “born” eight times—eight times in eight verses! Do you think Jesus is trying to make a point?

How active were you when you were born? Were you talking on a cellphone with your mother, telling her when to push? Did the doctor ask you to measure the contractions and report from inside the womb? Did you place your hands against the top of the womb and push yourself out? Postpartum celebrations applaud the work of the mother, not the child. Mom gets a medal. The child gets a pacifier and a blanket!

Here's the point. We were all passive when we were born. We didn't do a thing. We weren't

born because of what we did. Our mother did all the work. The same is true for our spiritual birth. God does all the work.

Do you know the most quoted Bible verse in America? “God helps those who help themselves.” But there’s a problem with that. It’s not in the Bible! God doesn’t help those who help themselves, because God knows we cannot help ourselves. God knows that He has to do 100 percent of the work! That’s why Jesus uses “born” eight times in eight verses!

“Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God’” (John 3:5). We are born again of water and the Spirit! And what’s that called? Holy Baptism! The Holy Spirit is really present—in, with, and under the water—creating new life!

Martin Luther writes in his Small Catechism that Baptism “works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare” (SC, Baptism, Second Part). The reformer writes in his Large Catechism, “There is no work done here by us, but a treasure, which God gives us and faith grasps” (LC IV 37). Also from his Large Catechism: “Here in Baptism there is freely brought to everyone’s door such a treasure and medicine that it utterly destroys death and preserves all people alive” (LC IV 43).

If you’ve been baptized, you have new eyes to see God’s beauty, a new mind to understand God’s Word, a new voice to sing God’s praises, new hands for service, and new feet to run the race of faith.

Nicodemus asked, “How can these things be?” (John 3:9). Start all over? Bounce back because you’re baptized? Nonsense! Nicodemus is still living in the darkness of rules and regulations. And don’t forget his long robes! Jesus answered, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” (John 3:10). As Israel’s teacher, Nicodemus should have understood that the Old Testament is all about bouncing back.

Abraham grew up in a house full of idols, tried to pass off his wife as his sister twice, and had a child with his wife’s servant instead of waiting and trusting in God’s timing. God called him to bless the world. Moses killed a man and doubted his abilities. God called him to lead His people out of Egypt. Aaron built a golden calf. God called him to be Israel’s first high priest. Jeremiah 31:31 promises a new covenant. Ezekiel 36:26 promises a new heart. And Lamentations 3:22–23 says that God’s mercies are new every morning.

God is the Giver. Grace is His idea. Forgiveness comes from Him. Can God really be that generous? that loving? that giving? Yes. Yes. And yes! In John 3:16, Jesus doesn’t say, “whoever achieves” or “whoever succeeds.” Jesus says, “whoever believes.”

One of the most genre of reality TV shows is that of home renovations. Chip and Joanna Gaines turned their Fixer Upper show into all kinds of spin off businesses. This Old House just celebrated its 47<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Property Brothers, Flip or Flop, and other shows create tension

as houses get renovated. There is always more to do than first expected, there is always some sort of cost overrun and time crunch, yet the final product always looks wonderful because of the work of the contractors.

Buying a fixer-upper gives us a picture of what God did for each of us when we were baptized. We were dead, disobedient, depraved, and doomed. But when we were born again through water and the Spirit, we were delivered! God could have said, "I'll make all new things. The old won't do." But instead, God said, "I'll make all things new, even and especially you!"

Did Nicodemus believe? Did Nicodemus leave the darkness of legalism? Did Nicodemus embrace grace? John 3 wasn't the end of the story. We read later in John's gospel these words: "Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight" (John 19:39). When the other disciples, the ones who gave up everything to follow Jesus, had denied and fled, who was there to help prepare Jesus for burial? Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, two secret disciples, were the ones who got Jesus' body from the cross to the tomb.

Imagine that! Nicodemus, the one who came in the dark, now lives in the light. The one who crept through the shadows now comes to the cross. And the one who was caught in the clutches of legalism is now living in the splendor of God's grace. Nicodemus! He bounced back. And so shall we! Every single time! Amen.

**Creed:** Holy Baptism Parts 3 and 4, pg. 325

**Prayer of the Church:**

P: Lord in Your mercy . . .

**C: hear our prayer.**

**Sharing Our Ministry:**

**Offering/Voluntary:** (Brass 11:00) - "*Jesus, Lead Thou On*" - Paul Manz

**Offertory:** "*What Shall I Render to the Lord?*" p. 159

### **Service of the Sacrament**

**Preface** p. 160

P: It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, Everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who left behind everything to follow the way to the cross, so He could lead us to the Promised Land of life with You. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and singing. . .

**Sanctus** (*Holy, Holy Holy*) p. 161

**Prayer of Thanksgiving:**

P: We give thanks to You, almighty God King of the Universe for You have sent Your only begotten Son into the world that whoever believes in Him has eternal life. Jesus was lifted up on the cross to take away our sins and so that we can see Your love to us and be drawn to faith. Grant us that forgiveness and faith as we come to the meal of Jesus' true body and blood given for us. Hear us as we pray the prayer He taught us . . .

**Lord's Prayer and The Words of Our Lord** p. 162

**Pax Domini** (*Peace of the Lord*) and **Agnus Dei** (*Lamb of God*) p. 163

**Distribution of Holy Communion:**

**Communion Hymns:**

(Choir 8:30) – “*God So Love the World So That He Gave*” arr. Benjamin M. Culli

“*Jesus, Priceless Treasure*” - **Hymn #743**

“*God Loved the World So That He Gave*” - **Hymn #571 vs 1-5**

**Song After Communion:** “*Lord, Bid Your Servant Go in Peace*” – **Hymn #937**

**Prayer After Communion:**

P: Almighty God, You sent Your only Son as the Word of life for our eyes to see and our ears to hear. Help us to believe with joy what the Scriptures proclaim, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**C: Amen.**

**Blessing:** p. 166

**Closing Hymn:** “*Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer*” - **Hymn #918**

**Postlude:** (Brass 11:00) - “*God of Grace*” - Paul Manz