

## John 3:2—Nicodemus

The third chapter of John’s Gospel begins with the words, “There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night . . .” (John 3:1–2).

The story then goes on to relate a memorable conversation between Jesus and the teacher of Israel. Jesus speaks of the need to be “born again” (or “born from above”) in order to see the kingdom of God (3:3) and, eventually, the conversation culminates in one of the best-known verses in all of Scripture, John 3:16: “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 makes a return appearance at the end of John’s Gospel, when along with Joseph of Arimathea he prepares Jesus’s body for entombment (John 19:38–42).

But the initial nighttime visit is what would attract the attention of many preachers, authors, and poets: most have taken the reference to “night” as fraught with symbolism, potentially suggestive of ignorance, cowardice, secrecy, desperation, spiritual blindness, or yearning.

An example of the numerous works inspired by this simple image is “The Night” by the Welsh poet Henry Vaughn (1621–95):

Through that pure virgin shrine,

That sacred veil drawn o'er Thy glorious noon,  
That men might look and live, as glowworms shine,  
    And face the moon,  
Wise Nicodemus saw such light  
As made him know his God by night.

Most blest believer he!  
Who in that land of darkness and blind eyes  
Thy long-expected healing wings could see,  
    When Thou didst rise!  
And, what can never more be done,  
Did at midnight speak with the Sun!