Preschool–Grade 6

Jesus and Nicodemus

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: A respected teacher came to Jesus by night, and Jesus told him plainly, "Ye must be born again," born of water and of the Spirit. God's love for the world is the reason: He gave Jesus so that whosoever believes in Him will not perish.
Bible passage: John 3:1–21. Students read it out loud themselves.
Memory verse: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." *John 3:16 (KJV)* and "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." *John 3:5 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
Before class: read John 3:1–21, Numbers 21:4–9, John 7:45–52, John 19:38–40 and Acts 2:1–41. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses.

1. Opening game: One Question (5–10 minutes)

Ask: *If you could sit down with Jesus for one hour and ask Him one question, what would you ask?* Each student writes a question on a slip of paper. Read a few out loud (no names) and write them on the board. Then ask: *Is it all right to have questions about God?* Say: "Today we will meet a teacher of God's people who came to Jesus at night with questions. Jesus gave him answers he never expected."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Read out loud: John 3:1–8. Students take turns, a few verses each. Old words in this passage:

- **Pharisees** (3:1): a group of Jewish men who worked hard to keep God's law; **ruler of the Jews**: a leader of his people
- **Rabbi** (3:2): teacher, or Master (John 1:38); **miracles**: wonderful works only God can do
- **verily, verily** (3:3): truly, truly; **the kingdom of God**: where God rules as King
- **womb** (3:4): the place a baby grows inside its mother; **flesh** (3:6): our human body
- **marvel not** (3:7): don't be surprised; **bloweth where it listeth** (3:8): blows where it wants; **whence**: from where; **whither**: to where

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Read out loud: John 3:9–21. Old words in this passage:

- **master of Israel** (3:10): a teacher of God's people; **testify** (3:11): tell what you know is true; **witness**: what someone tells as true
- **ascended** (3:13): went up; **the Son of man**: a name Jesus used for Himself
- **lifted up the serpent** (3:14): Numbers 21:8–9, the serpent of brass on a pole; **eternal life** (3:15): life with God forever
- **only begotten** (3:16): the only one born that way; **whosoever**: anyone at all; **perish**: be lost forever; **everlasting**: forever
- **condemn** (3:17): judge guilty and punish; **condemnation** (3:19): the judgment
- **reproved** (3:20): shown to be wrong; **made manifest** (3:21): shown clearly; **wrought in God**: done in God

Then read **Numbers 21:8–9** and **John 12:32–33** together. Jesus being "lifted up" pointed to the cross.

Teacher note on "Son": the Bible calls Jesus the Son of God because He was born of Mary by the Holy Ghost (Luke 1:35). He is the one God manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16): "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a ruler (John 3:1), and "a master of Israel" (John 3:10). Why might it have been hard for someone like him to come to Jesus with questions?
2. Nicodemus said, "we know that thou art a teacher come from God" (3:2). Jesus answered by talking about being born again (3:3). Why do you think Jesus went straight to that?
3. Jesus said, "Ye must be born again" (3:7), not "you should." What does the word "must" tell us?
4. Read John 3:8 and Acts 2:2–4. What do the wind and the new birth have in common?
5. Moses' serpent of brass helped only the people who looked at it (Numbers 21:9). How is that like John 3:14–15?
6. Read John 7:50–51 and John 19:39. What do these verses show about Nicodemus after John 3?

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4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Explain the words: in John 3:16, **so loved** means loved so very much, **begotten** means born, **whosoever** means anyone, **believeth** means believes, **perish** means be lost forever, and **everlasting** means forever. In John 3:5, **verily** means truly, and **except** means unless. Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say John 3:16 this week; learn John 3:5 next.

5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "God so loved the world that He gave Jesus. And 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). Jesus told Nicodemus, 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God' (John 3:5). On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached how to obey it: 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are **born of water** when we are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). We are **born of the Spirit** when God fills us with the Holy Ghost, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). That day the Holy Ghost came with 'a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind' (Acts 2:2), and about three thousand people who gladly received the word were baptized (Acts 2:41). That is the new birth Jesus told Nicodemus about."
Pray with the students, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

Teacher note: if students ask how the first church obeyed John 3:5, read Acts 2:38–41 and Acts 10:44–48 together: at Cornelius' house they heard them "speak with tongues, and magnify God" (10:46), and Peter "commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (10:48). Say what the Bible says, warmly, and never put down anyone's family or church.

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6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. Nicodemus came to Jesus with what he didn't understand (John 3:4, 3:9). What is one question about God I want to bring to Him, or to my pastor?
2. John 3:16 says "whosoever." Write the verse with your own name in place of "the world" and "whosoever."
3. Jesus said, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). Write a short prayer about where you are on that, and what your next step is.
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: ask your parents or pastor one question about being born again. Then tell one person John 3:16.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You for loving the world so much that You came to us in Jesus, and that whosoever believes in Him will not perish. Thank You that we can bring You our questions. Help us obey Your Word and be born of water and of the Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a student asks why Nicodemus came by night: the Bible doesn't say, so don't guess (John 3:2). John reminds us of it later, "he that came to Jesus by night" (John 7:50; 19:39), and both times Nicodemus is standing up for Jesus or caring for His body.
If a student asks, "What happened to Nicodemus?": he told the other Pharisees their law must hear a man before judging him (John 7:50–51). After the cross, he came with Joseph of Arimathaea and brought "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight" for Jesus' burial (John 19:38–39).

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