

**Worship Material**  
**Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2023**  
**A step into the unknown**  
**Materials from Roots Bible Study**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Great God of the known and the unknown,  
we are aware of your presence with us;  
so familiar but calling us ever deeper into you.  
We don't always feel ready  
to step out of our comfort zone.  
Prepare us now as we gather here,  
to be up for every new challenge,  
whatever it involves,  
however unsettling it may at first seem.  
We open ourselves to find our confidence in you.  
**Amen.**

**Read. John 3.1-7**

**Bible notes**

Many believed in Jesus 'because they saw the signs that he was doing'. But he 'would not entrust himself to them', 'because he knew what was in everyone' (2.23-25). Jesus requires more than a superficial response to 'these signs that you do', and with Nicodemus' recognition that they reveal 'the presence of God' there begins a conversation suggesting that Jesus dares to entrust himself to this 'leader of the Jews'. This trust is respected since Nicodemus will have the courage to speak up for Jesus to other leaders, appealing to the law for a fair hearing (7.50-51). And he will bring costly myrrh and aloes for Jesus' burial (19.39-42). But we are not told whether the man who first came 'by night' ever openly acknowledged that 'the law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth through Jesus Christ' (1.17). Jesus acknowledges Nicodemus' high regard for Moses, the greatest ruler of his people, who descended from Mount Sinai shining with divine glory (Exodus 34.29-35). The importance of right rule is reflected here in the references to the kingdom of God, which Jesus explains is 'from above', 'of the Spirit', 'heavenly', 'eternal', and indeed 'not from this world' (18.36). And Jesus shows his respect for Moses (how put a bronze serpent on a pole so that whoever looked at it would live; Numbers 21.9) to help Nicodemus understand that Jesus' being lifted up on the cross will bring eternal life to all who believe. Nicodemus is slow to grasp these deep distinctions between what is eternal and what perishes, and the ambiguity of language has him confusing what is 'from above' with what is merely 'again'. But he is poised to step into the unknown, leaving us with his open question, 'How can these things be?'

## Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

What does Jesus mean, to be 'born again'? The Greek word used for 'again' can also be (and is) translated as 'from above'. This isn't a second birth that just repeats our human birth. This is rebirth in the Spirit, the process of becoming a child of God. We can see it as a journey, rather than a one-off event - a spiritual rather than physical journey into a new life. This new life that comes from above is one given by God - a new life that starts with an experience of rebirth and leads eventually to eternal life. How do we respond to the challenge Jesus posed to Nicodemus? Are we ready to journey with the Spirit, wherever it blows us?

## A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

We thank you, Lord Jesus,  
for the faithfulness of the disciples - so ready to help,  
even though they didn't understand what was going on.  
We thank you for the joy we can have,  
the hope in the unknown,  
high expectations of your power in our lives,  
courage to follow your Spirit in all we do.  
We thank you for the unexpected experiences,  
for the unexpected people we will meet, walking your way. Go with us, Lord.  
**Amen**

## A prayer to conclude

Let us go out with courage.  
Let us go out with love.  
Let us travel the world together,  
held safe by our Lord above.  
**Amen.**