

Born of water in John 3:5 - is Jesus referring to water baptism?

Jesus in John 3:5 tells a respected Jewish leader Nicodemus that unless one is born of water and the Spirit one cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Most think that as water baptism features in the gospels and was meant to give a fresh spiritual start with God water means baptism. There is a problem with the word Spirit too. Does it refer to the Holy Spirit as in third person of the Trinity or does it refer to God as a whole who Jesus calls a Spirit elsewhere? Or does it mean wind?

As water and wind are symbols of God's spirit it allows us to affirm that the text is not thinking of water at all. But suppose it is.

Born of water is what concerns us here.

All the interpretations are,

1 it means water baptism.

This one needs amending.

The different scenarios for baptism are not subcategories. They are categories.

So we will change this as follows.

We are starting again.

We could be talking about the racist Jewish practice of the time where non-Jews were symbolically washed of their sins and sinful culture. Jesus expected Nicodemus to know what he meant so it is clearly Jewish baptism if it means baptism at all

1 Jewish baptism of people who can make a choice by immersion in water only.

2 Jewish baptism of people who can make a choice by being washed but in any form.

3 Jewish baptism of those who can choose and babies or others who cannot and need another to choose for them.

4 A new form of baptism of people who can make a choice by immersion in water only.

5 A new form of baptism of people who can make a choice by being washed but in any form.

6 A new form of baptism of those who can choose and babies or others who cannot and need another to choose for them.

(This is merely reflecting that baptism has different meanings and the meanings matter. For John the Baptist baptism was a repentance symbol but Christians say their baptism is a sacrament. It fixes the soul.0

7 The water is the Holy Spirit for the Old Testament speaks of pure water washing away sin and does not mean real literal water. This view could well be correct as Jesus again expected Jesus to know what it meant from the Old Testament.

8 The water is the water of the amniotic fluid in the womb at birth. Nicodemus took Jesus to mean this for he started talking about if a man can get back into the womb again. Jesus is thought to correct him though. This alleged correction is not clear. Jesus telling Nicodemus he should know this stuff may imply only that he should have thought it out for himself not that he was wrong to link it to birth of the flesh.

Many say Jesus is speaking of people needing the spirit who are already born. "Be born of water". The Churches that believe in infant baptism hold the command is given to parents to baptize their children as well.

But John's gospel treats time as irrelevant in spiritual terms where Jesus says he was the I AM and living in Abraham's time. So that is doubtful.

Some say Jesus was not talking about two births but one so its not birth into this world and another one. Water and spirit then in this view are the same one.

The grammar is supposed to mean both of and from so being born of water and the spirit is strictly born both of water and the spirit and from water and the spirit.

The word “of” in our translations (ex) can mean both “of” and from. But it is absurd to say that the water can cause God to live in us. Water is not magic.

I would ignore the point that amniotic fluid is strictly speaking not water but the woman’s body fluids. And later on in pregnancy it is made mostly of the baby’s urine. Culture has always said that it was water. We cannot assume the gospel wants us to be pedantic.

The Old Testament texts about pure water washing sinners are thought to be in Jesus’ mind too and this seems to rule out urine and amniotic fluids. But Jesus may have been influenced by these texts yes but he surely knew that pure water in the physical sense does not exist.

I deny that Jesus saying you must be born physically or of the flesh and then of the Spirit would be a silly truism, unless you are born at all you will not be here to be saved. But it could be poetic and a device for showing that you need the Spirit as much as you need to exist in this world or there is no salvation. It is not redundant for Jesus to tell people who are born they need to be born to be saved and then by the Spirit.

So why didn’t he say you need to be born and then born of the Spirit?

The answer is that you are created at birth and need this creation completed by having the Holy Spirit in your heart. So there is no need for the then.

Objection: If you compare John 3:5 – “Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!” and 1 Corinthians 12:13 – “For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body” it clearly means water baptism. But the latter is referring to the Holy Spirit as what you are cleansed in. No mention of water.

So there is no problem with Jesus meaning the water of the womb. Anything else is going too far. The important thing is that the womb is mentioned and water baptism is not. Jesus did not even use Jewish baptism traditions of the time as a clarification. Why? Because he was not thinking of it.

The Church Fathers said some interesting things.

Saint Ambrose of Milan explained how baptism is metaphorically an attempt to kill the sinful person and rebirth them as one who is in line with God! This shows how some parents have no moral integrity with their own babies. Violence is intended period.

“Although we are baptized with water and the Spirit, the latter is much superior to the former, and is not therefore to be separated from the Father and the Son. There are, however, many who, because we are baptized with water and the Spirit, think that there is no difference in the offices of water and the Spirit, and therefore think that they do not differ in nature. Nor do they observe that we are buried in the element of water that we may rise again renewed by the Spirit. For in the water is the representation of death, in the Spirit is the pledge of life, that the body of sin may die through the water, which encloses the body as it were in a kind of tomb, that we, by the power of the Spirit, may be renewed from the death of sin, being born again in God” (The Holy Spirit 1:6).

He showed how a lot of baptisms cannot work. This is an issue today where clearly many Christians including prelates do not believe Jesus’ blood takes away sin.

“You have read, therefore, that the three witnesses in baptism are one: water, blood, and the Spirit (1 John 5:8): And if you withdraw any one of these, the sacrament of baptism is not valid. For what is the water without the cross of Christ? A common element with no sacramental effect. Nor on the other hand is there any mystery of regeneration without water, for ‘unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God’” (The Mysteries 4:20).

St Augustine of Hippo penned the following.

“It is this one Spirit who makes it possible for an infant to be regenerated . . . when that infant is brought to baptism; and it is through this one Spirit that the infant so presented is reborn. For it is not written, ‘Unless a man be born again by the will of his parents’ or ‘by the faith of those presenting him or ministering to him,’ but, ‘Unless a man be born again of water and

the Holy Spirit.' The water, therefore, manifesting exteriorly the sacrament of grace, and the Spirit effecting interiorly the benefit of grace, both regenerate in one Christ that man who was generated in Adam" (Letters 98:2).

So its not about the parents. Today parents a lot of the time only baptize their baby for the sake of the party and the photographs.

We conclude that the Christian doctrine that baptism saves is based on untruths. The Christian tradition is not reliable.

