

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

January 15, 2022 – EPIPHANY 2 / YR. A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: “*Come Unto Jesus—The Lamb of God*”*

Isaiah 49:1-7	(The Lord’s Servant will bring light and salvation)
Psalms 40:1-12	(Happy are they who trust in the Lord and long to do His will)
1 Corinthians 1:1-9	(Christ gives us spiritual gifts, and sustains us until He returns)
St. John 1:29-42	(Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world)

This morning’s Scripture lessons have in common the theme of being called by God. First, the prophet Isaiah declares how the Promised One was called from His mother’s womb to be the Messiah that will bring salvation to the people of Israel—and even more—who will be a Light (giving guidance and direction) to the Gentiles.

Next, St. Paul tells the believers in Corinth that thanks to the spiritual gifts which God has poured out on them through the Holy Spirit, they will be kept strong and blameless in their calling as Christ’s followers, until the time of that Promised One’s return.

And in today’s Gospel lesson, we hear John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus, and how, following His baptism, Our Lord called Andrew and his brother Simon to follow Him in ministry. It is this Gospel for this Second Sunday after the Epiphany, on which we will focus our attention. Particularly, I’d like us to look at John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus on two separate days.

“Look,” John says on the first day, pointing to Jesus as He draws near to John and his disciples. “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” On the second day John again says to his disciples as Jesus approaches. “Look, it’s the Lamb of God!” So what does John mean when he calls Jesus “the Lamb of God?”

Is he referring to the several lambs that were sacrificed daily at the Temple in Jerusalem? Every morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed for the sins of the people (see Exodus 29:38-42)¹, certainly pointing toward the mission and identity of Jesus. Yet, other lambs were also offered in thanksgiving to God for the abundance of the harvest, for an increase in the people’s herds and flocks, or for the birth of a child. Sacrificing these lambs was intended as an act of rededication to the Lord, and provided a way to draw closer to God. The meat from the lambs was then consumed by the worshippers and by the priests who offered the sacrifice of thanksgiving on their behalf.²

Prayers were said, psalms were sung, Scripture was read, and the people affirmed by their presence and by their offerings that they were God’s children, as well as brothers and sisters of one another. As you can see, worship in ancient Israel was surprisingly similar to our Eucharistic liturgy, when we gather to commune with God and one another, and to thank the Lord, offering Him our gifts of bread and wine, along with ourselves as living sacrifices.

Is it the lamb sacrificed for sin, or the lamb of thanksgiving and communion, that John is referring to, when he calls Jesus “the Lamb of God”? Or is John referring to the *Passover Lamb*?

That was the lamb which every household in Israel slaughtered once a year, whose blood was then painted on the doorposts of their homes as a way to remember the first Passover, when the angel of the Lord passed over the Israelites’ and struck down the firstborn of their Egyptian taskmasters. The flesh of that Passover Lamb had to be consumed entirely on the night of the Passover. As such, it commemorated the provision God gave His people to strengthen them in their escape from bondage in Egypt, to the promised land where God would give to them an abundance of every good thing.

So, which type of lamb is Jesus, as “the Lamb of God”? There is every indication that John meant all three kinds of lambs, but in particular, Jesus as the Passover Lamb, the Lamb whose blood, when covering the faithful, would spare them from death, and grant them a new life in a new place. However, when John points to Jesus and says “Behold, the lamb of God,” he is indicating even more than the images of the lambs sacrificed for sin, or for thanksgiving, or the Passover Lamb might suggest. John is proclaiming that Jesus is a Lamb provided by God’s own hand—much like the lamb that was miraculously provided in the story of Abraham and his son Isaac.

And because Jesus has come from God, this Lamb does more than simply spare the lives of His chosen people and bring them to the promised land. This particular Lamb, this unique third person of the Divine Trinity, who is Jesus, has been given God’s own power and authority to take away the sins of the whole world—Jews and Gentiles alike—unlike the Temple lambs sacrificed for only the sins of the Jewish people.

As every Israelite knew, God’s Word says that sin leads to death. Permanent Death. The final death of body, soul, and spirit. THE END. No second chance. That was the point of the story of Adam and Eve, who came under a sentence of death after disobeying God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That’s also the message of the story of Noah and the flood, and of every prophet sent by God to the people of Israel. Sin leads to death. Not just for God’s chosen people, but for all humankind. As the Apostle Paul puts it so directly in Romans 3:23: “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”

John is proclaiming that Jesus, by offering His own Body and Blood, frees all people from the death sentence we deserve, if we believe in Him. This Lamb of God is the slain Passover lamb whose shed blood caused death to pass over the children of Israel, and whose flesh sustained the people escaping from slavery.

He is also the Lamb sacrificed in the Temple for sin, and the Lamb offered with thanksgiving and rededication to God, so that God might hear the people’s prayers as they rejoiced and ate together. Because He is all this, Jesus alone is the One whom angels and saints worship in heaven, crying out: “*Worthy is the Lamb ... who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!*” (Revelation 5:12).

A story is told about a tourist who was visiting a church in Germany. He was surprised to see a carved figure of a lamb near the top of the church tower. When he asked why it was there, he was told that at the time the church was being built, a workman fell from a high scaffold. His coworkers rushed down, expecting to find him dead. But to their surprise and joy, the man was alive and only slightly injured. He had survived because a flock of sheep was passing beneath the tower at the time, and he had landed on top of a lamb. As the lamb broke his fall, it was crushed to death. But the man was saved. To commemorate that miraculous escape, a stonemason carved a lamb into the tower at the exact height from which the workman fell.³ It is a reminder to us, that Jesus, the Lamb of God, was crushed that we might survive our fall—not from a church tower, but from Original Sin.

We also read in today’s Gospel that because John the Baptist called attention to Jesus as the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, two of John’s disciples—whose names are not given—turned and followed Jesus. Also, because of John’s declaration, Andrew tells his brother Simon, “We have found the Messiah!” And he brings Simon to the One who will change him into Peter, the Rock on which Christ would build His eternal Church. As these men show us, who would not want to come unto the One that is able to free us from sin, death, and hell, and can transform us into new men and women?

In the Cathedral in Copenhagen, Denmark, there is a magnificent statue of Christ by the noted sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen. When Thorvaldsen first completed the clay model for the sculpture, he gazed upon it with great satisfaction. It was a statue of a majestic, conquering Christ, with His face looking up and arms stretched outward. But later that night, after the sculptor had left his fine new work in clay to dry and harden—before sculpting it in marble—something unexpected occurred. Mist from the sea got into the studio and the clay failed to harden as quickly as anticipated. Instead, the upraised arms and head began to droop.

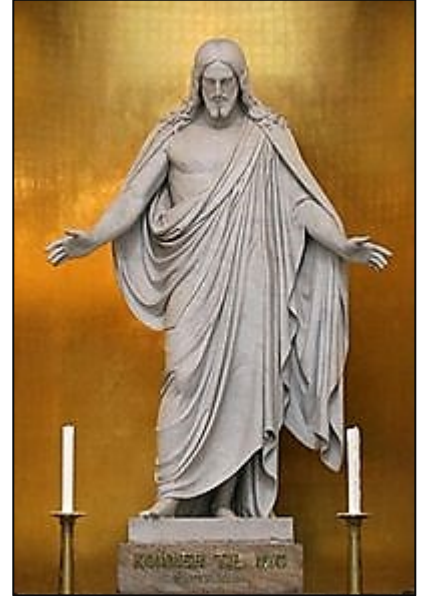
And as they did, the imposing Christ with arms uplifted and head erect was transformed into a Christ with head bent forward and arms extended downward, as if in a pose of gentle invitation.

At first, Thorvaldsen was bitterly disappointed. Then, as he studied the transformed sculpture, he came to see a dimension of Christ that had never before become real to him: It was gentle Jesus, the merciful Savior.

So Thorvaldsen left the sculpture that way, and inscribed on its base, “Come Unto Me.” Ever since then, that image of the Lamb of God in His mercy has inspired millions.⁴ There is even a copy of the statue in the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City.

May this same merciful Lamb of God inspire us to greater devotion and sacrifice as we journey through Epiphany and this new year as the congregation of St. John’s, Compass. Blessed be His name, now and forever!

Let us pray: “Lamb of God, You share the pain, and bear the shame, of the whole world, and You bring salvation, healing, and hope to all who follow You. Continue to have mercy on us all, and grant us Your peace. This we ask for Your love’s sake. Amen.”⁵



* Adapt. N. George-Hacker, 19 January 2014, St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church, Cobleskill. Used with permission.

¹ Adapt. “How was the extremely large number of animal sacrifices in the Old Testament possible?” © 2022-2023 [GotQuestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org) < <https://www.gotquestions.org/animal-sacrifices-in-the-Old-Testament.html> > 9 January 2023.

² Adapt. Richard J. Fairchild, “Look, the Lamb of God,” [Spirit Networks](http://www.spirit-net.ca/sermons/a-or02su.php), 2005 < <http://www.spirit-net.ca/sermons/a-or02su.php> > 9 January 2023.

³ Adapt. Fairchild, *op. cit.*

⁴ Adapt., King Duncan, “A Change in Posture,” [ChristianGlobe Illustrations, Christian Globe Networks, Inc.](http://www.sermons.com) <<http://www.sermons.com>> 14 January 2014.

⁵ Adapt. Fairchild, *op. cit.*