

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Epiphany 2A
January 15, 2023
John 1:29-42a

The Lamb of God

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

The Epiphany season has two main themes that are closely related. First of all, the word "Epiphany" means "manifestation," "appearing," "revealing," or a "shining forth." The emphasis is on Jesus being revealed as divine. This happens when the Wise Men are guided by a star to seek and find Jesus. It happens at Jesus' Baptism. It happens when Jesus casts out demons, heals many and various diseases and afflictions, and performs other miracles. The season ends with His transfiguration when His divinity really does shine forth. The second theme of the season is evangelism, that is, telling the good news about Jesus. When that happens, God fulfills through His Church what He spoke of Christ: "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (Is. 49:6).

Now when we think of evangelism, we often have in mind techniques and programs to increase church attendance or membership. That's the goal. We think if we just do the right things, or enough of them, the numbers will go up. It's all very pragmatic. And there is no end to the number of programs available. But they don't work. Try as we might, the numbers don't grow. But, true evangelism is really quite simple and natural. If we believe in Jesus and follow Him, we will naturally tell others of Him and invite them to join us. And any results are up to the Holy Spirit.

That's what we see in today's Gospel. John, who had been chosen and sent by God to prepare the way for Christ by preaching repentance and baptizing, now proclaims the Messiah who had come. He had seen what happened when Jesus was baptized – the heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove, and the Father spoke words of His approval of Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17). He saw the signs which he had been promised by God. Jesus was manifested as the very Son of God Who would save the world from sin. So John proclaims, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Yes, Jesus is the Lamb of God. He comes from God and is in fact God as John later declares. God Himself had come to take on your flesh and your sin in order to save you. And that's what the Lamb of God does. Absolutely no one and no sin is excluded from Christ's work. From the first human being to the last, from the sin of Adam and Eve to the last sin to ever be committed, Jesus takes **all** the sin away. But, notice it's sin, not sins. Jesus came to save the

world from the sinful condition of the entire human race in its state of rebellion, separation from God, and spiritual death. And all this shows in all that we do contrary to God's Word and will. And this is important because if Jesus doesn't take away the sin of the world, how could you ever be sure He took away **your** sin or mine and rescue you from your sinful condition? Yet, because He did and does take away the sin of the world, you can be sure that He took away your sin, and all of it at that. He didn't leave some of it for you to handle or to work out. He took it **all** away. It's now His.

And how did this come about? Isaiah tells us, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:6-7).

Indeed, this is how it went for Jesus. After He was arrested, He didn't try to defend Himself. Rather, we're told, Pilate was surprised that Jesus would not answer him and defend Himself. Then, when Jesus was nailed to the cross on Calvary, He effected our salvation. And, lest we ever forget what Jesus had to endure to earn our forgiveness and salvation, we hear what St. Peter writes, "knowing that you were ransomed . . . not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." (1 Peter 1:18-19). Yes, the perfect and spotless Lamb of God was sacrificed for the sin of the world on the altar of the cross. The blood shed by that Lamb assures us that God passes over us and gives us life, even as the blood on the doorposts of the Israelites in Egypt assured them of life.

So [later] when you sing, "O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, who takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us," you can be sure that He **does** have mercy upon you. When you look upon the very Body and Blood of the Lamb of God, there is no chance at all that any of your sin is left behind when Jesus took it on Himself and carried it up Calvary. There is no possibility at all that even one of your sins was not placed on the head of the Lamb of God. For when the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world, He most certainly takes away all **your** sin. For when Jesus died for the sin of the world, He died for **your** sins, every last one of them.

And when the Lamb of God takes away your sins, they are taken away. For your sins are not too many or too large for Jesus' sacrifice. He has taken away all your sins, even those you don't know about or remember, even those you try to hide and keep secret. He has not left them for you to deal with or to work on. He hasn't taken away the sin of the world, only to leave yours lying around for you to handle. Rather, when Jesus takes away your sins, He removes them "as far as the east is from the west." Why would you ever want to keep them for yourself and live in them and die in them?

So, what does this have to do with evangelism? John directed two of his disciples to Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God!" The disciples heard this and followed Jesus. And when He

asked them, "What are you seeking?", they asked where He was staying. And Jesus answered, "Come and see." They did. Then, one of those, Andrew, told his brother, Simon, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus." That's it. That's evangelism. He told him about Jesus and brought him to Jesus.

You see, evangelism starts here where Jesus is, in the flesh, with His Word and Spirit, in the water, in the bread and wine, bestowing His death and resurrection on sinners, reconciling them to the Father. The preacher points you to Jesus, and you are evangelized ... you are "Gospeled" by preaching and Sacrament. Then you go out to your home and to your community, to your vocations, your various stations in life, and you tell those in your life about Jesus, as Andrew told Peter. You bring them to the place Jesus is staying, as Andrew did with Peter. You bring them to Church. So they can hear for themselves and be evangelized, i.e., "Gospeled," by the Lord in His preaching and Sacrament.

You need more examples? Parents bring their children to Holy Baptism and the Divine Service. They make sure the kids are in Sunday School and Catechism class. Spouses encourage one another and hold each other accountable to regularly attend Bible study and The Divine Service. You have a friend or coworker going through a difficult time; you know they need Jesus. You send them a Gospel centered note of encouragement and invite them to come to Church with you. You visit a loved one who is sick and pray with them for the Lord's mercy. You rejoice with a friend on his birthday, giving all praise to Christ. You mourn with a wife who has lost her husband, and you console her with Christ's resurrection victory over death.

There's more. Don't forget what St. Paul tells us about our attendance at the Eucharist: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). Your presence at this altar, receiving the gifts of Jesus, is a witness proclaiming Christ crucified. It is an encouragement to your pastor and your brothers and sisters in Christ. It is a witness to the world of the Gospel truth. The very most important evangelism you can do is be here where Jesus is, forgiving your sins and giving you eternal life. The very most important evangelism you can do is go to Church!

That's what it means to follow Jesus, to be His disciple. Be here, where He is — hearing Him. This is what it means to be a royal priest of God. Point others to Jesus and tell them He is the sacrifice for their forgiveness and life. "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" God grant that we follow Him always. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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