

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Septuagesima Sunday, January 27, 2013

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 165, 147, 142:1-3, 358, 23:1-2.
Lessons: Exodus 12:1-14, 1 Peter 1:18-25, Mark 1:1-11.
Sermon Text: John 1:29-34.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Look! Behold! Open your eyes and see! This word is used in the New Testament to show the excitement, the enthusiasm, the joy of something very special that has been seen or revealed.

And what is that? It is something very special, something that the Jews had been waiting for since the time of Abraham. It is something that mankind had been waiting for since Eve and Adam first sinned in the garden of Eden

As soon as he saw Jesus on this day, John the Baptist said for everyone within hearing: ***“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*** That single sentence has established a standard for all Christian preaching since then. The faithful preacher will continually point to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

John the Baptist uses the picture of a lamb that is about to be sacrificed, and practically shouts

“LOOK, THE LAMB OF GOD, WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD!”

- 1. John is pointing to Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Lamb of God.**
- 2. John witnesses and testifies about this Jesus, teaching that**
- 3. Jesus came to take away all the sins of the world.**

When our text says ***“the next day”***, it refers to the day after some priests and Levites and Pharisees had demanded of John ‘who are you?’ It is as if they were accusing John: Who are YOU? Whom do you claim to be? What authority do you have to proclaim such a message? The implication was that John might be claiming to be the promised Messiah. In his answers, John makes it clear that he was not the one he talked about. He is simply the voice announcing the coming of the Lord. He deemphasized his own role. He is just the forerunner, the advance man, the one who prepares the path for Jesus. And, as you will hear, on this day, too, John makes it clear again that he is not the Messiah but simply an unworthy human who points to the very fulfillment of the Old Testament Passover Lamb.

Make no mistake. The Son of God, Jesus, is the one God sent to take away all the sins of the whole world. This Lamb of God is God made human. He is ***“The Word [who] became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”***

And now the written Word of God uses the picture of a lamb, drawing upon the Jews’ history of working with lambs, especially the lamb which was sacrificed at Passover. When this gospel was written, lambs, sheep, and shepherding were very much a part of most people’s lives in Judah, Israel, Palestine, and that entire part of the world.

For Jews especially, lambs were an essential part of their worship and obedience to God’s ceremonial laws. You know that lambs were to be slaughtered as part of the Passover festival.

Jesus is that Lamb of God who came to give himself as a sacrifice to win forgiveness for a sinful world. He is the Passover Lamb whose blood saves us from death. You heard in our Old Testament lesson about the

institution of the Passover. Every Jew learned about the first Passover, the time when the angel of the Lord saved their people from death in Egypt because they had the blood of an unblemished lamb painted on the doorposts and lintels of their houses. Every Jew celebrated the Passover each year, remembering that it was with the blood of a perfect, flawless lamb that God had saved them.

The Jews who heard John say this would recognize that he was talking about the Passover lamb, and hear that in Jesus is found the ultimate Passover lamb. His sufferings, blood, and death would redeem not only Israel, but all mankind. Every annual sacrifice did not in itself take their sins away, but pointed to the Savior, the Redeemer whom God would send to redeem them from all their sins and from the devil and from eternal death.

Jews who heard or read this gospel should recognize the picture, even if they would not accept Jesus as the Savior.

Many Old Testament sacrifices which God commanded pointed to a lamb. The Jews killed lambs for many of their worship services. John is pointing to Jesus and telling all who will hear and listen that they now can see the real sacrificial lamb.

Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Passovers. Jesus is the Lamb that the daily offerings of the Jews pointed to. We read in Exodus 29:38-41 ***“This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day: two lambs a year old. Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight. With the first lamb offer a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil from pressed olives, and a quarter of a hin of wine as a drink offering. Sacrifice the other lamb at twilight with the same grain offering and its drink offering as in the morning--a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire.”***

Jesus is the ultimate, final burnt offering without defect that Leviticus 1:10 pointed to. ***“If the offering is a burnt offering from the flock, from either the sheep or the goats, he is to offer a male without defect.”***

Jesus is the ultimate fellowship offering that we read about in Leviticus 3:6-8 ***“If he offers an animal from the flock as a fellowship offering to the LORD, he is to offer a male or female without defect. If he offers a lamb, he is to present it before the LORD. He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it in front of the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron's sons shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides.”***

Jesus is the sin offering through which we receive forgiveness, as we read in Leviticus 4:32-34 ***“If he brings a lamb as his sin offering, he is to bring a female without defect. He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it for a sin offering at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered. Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.”***

Could John also have been thinking about the words of Isaiah 53:7? Jesus was led like a lamb to be slaughtered: ***“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”***

We also read elsewhere in the New Testament that Jesus lived in the flesh on earth, while he lived among man, without sin, a lamb without blemish or defect. Peter writes in his first letter, as you heard in our epistle lesson, ***“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”*** (1 Peter 1:18-19) In this way Jesus fulfilled God's law in our stead, in our place and then with his bloody sacrifice on the cross, the Lamb of God who came from God and who was God, satisfied God's just anger against the sin of all the world.

He lifted the sin onto his own shoulders and carried it away in death. He still takes our sin away and always will by the merits of his holy sacrifice. We read about that lamb, Jesus Christ, repeatedly in the book of Revelation. In Revelation, the pictures are most often pictures of victory, victory over Satan, over death, over sin. For example, we read in Revelation 5:12 ***“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”***

Our sermon text goes on: ***“Then John gave this testimony: ‘I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with***

water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.'"

Once again John fulfilled his calling as a voice for the Christ and testified about Jesus.

John is referring to the day Jesus came to be baptized in the Jordan River and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove. John makes it very clear that God, ***"the one who sent me to baptize with water told"*** who the Son of God is. John was told to watch for the Holy Spirit. When he saw the Holy Spirit appear in the form of a dove and rest on Jesus, he knew for a certainty that was what God had meant. At Jesus' baptism by John, we read in Luke 3:22 ***"and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'"***

That was the sign promised by God. John recognized the Christ, the Lamb of God, and then used his knowledge to help others see and believe. ***"I have seen"*** he emphatically declared ***"and I testify that this is the son of God."*** John wanted everyone to know why Jesus surpassed him and why Jesus could take away the sins of the world. Jesus was the Son of God. The apostle John also wanted his readers – us – to see this truth and believe and live eternally. Near the end of this gospel we read ***"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*** (John 20:30-31)

The testimony by John the Baptist in our sermon text also explains why he said earlier that he ***"would not have known"*** Jesus without the sign from heaven. John certainly knew Jesus as his relative, but the sure sign that Jesus was the Christ – the Messiah, the anointed one – the very son of God, was the manifestation of God's Spirit at the time of Jesus' baptism. Peter also testified about all this at the home of Cornelius, as we read in Acts 10:37-38: ***"You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him."***

So John could say Jesus came after him, yet Jesus surpassed him. Jesus was born later than John, he began his ministry after him, yet Jesus was more important. Jesus was and is and forever shall be God, the Son of God, the Word of God from the beginning and he was also the Lamb of God. God revealed Christ to John so John could preach repentance and baptism and in that way guide people to Jesus; first the people of Israel, and secondly all people to Jesus.

You can be assured that this Savior is your Savior, made yours by the work of the Holy Spirit when he worked faith in you. As you cling to the Word of God, hear, and read it, you can rejoice with the hymn writer:

***"In every time of need,
Before the judgment-throne,
Thy works, O Lamb of God, I'll plead,
Thy merits, not mine own."*** (The Lutheran Hymnal 170:6)

May you share John's excitement as you, too, ***"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."*** Amen.