

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**First Sunday After Epiphany, January 7, 2024**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 165, 147, 142:1-3, 358, 644.

Lessons: Exodus 12:1-14, 1 Peter 1:18-25, John 1:19-28

Sermon Text: John 1:29-34

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

You know who Jesus is. You have probably heard this since you were very young.

But not everyone has been so fortunate, so blessed to know about Jesus.

John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus. This meant preaching the Word of God as it had not often been heard. It meant preaching the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of God's Word.

Included in John's preaching was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and symbols, types, pictures of Jesus. Here we see John plainly pointing out another role of Jesus, based on a picture very familiar to people in his day. John tells us

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

- 1. This Lamb was to be sacrificed,**
- 2. Not only for Jews but for the whole world.**
- 3. Jesus takes away the sin – all the sin – of all mankind.**

John the Baptist is the only one in Scripture who seems to use these exact words to identify Jesus, *“Lamb of God”*. But the picture of the savior as a lamb is found repeatedly in Scripture.

The Jews knew about a Passover lamb, that was sacrificed so that God would save them in Egypt. At that time God commanded each family to slaughter a lamb and spread its blood on the sides and tops of the doorframes of their houses. When the angel of the Lord came to Egypt that very night to kill the firstborn of all in Egypt, the angel ‘passed over’ the houses marked with the blood and people there were saved. They repeated the Passover meal each year to remind them of that deliverance for them, the descendants of Abraham.

But perhaps they didn't recognize that this was a picture of a much greater deliverance – the deliverance from sin. Sin is a fatal disease. Sin is a leprosy. Sin is a fatal cancer. Sin is missing the mark, iniquity, and transgression. By nature everyone is a slave to sin, eternal death, and the power of Satan. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, delivered mankind from that slavery, a much more terrible, eternal slavery than the Jews endured in Egypt.

In our Gospel lesson you heard the verses just before our sermon text, when John the Baptist was preaching.

He did not claim to be something or someone he was not. He even downplayed his role in God's plan of salvation. Who he was, his person, was not important. His message was the important thing.

So it is today. The person, the personality of the one bringing the message of God is not important, although it is easy to let the person, the personality of the one delivering and speaking the Word of God get in the way of hearing what God has to say to us in his Word. Because of our sinful nature, it is easy for the hearer to want to ignore or reject the message of the messenger of God because of his person, his personality. And because of everyone's sinful nature, it is easy for the messenger to become puffed up and think more highly of himself than he ought and try to make himself more important than the message.

But the important thing is the Word of God, and we are commanded not to add to the Word of God, not to subtract from the Word of God and not to twist or change it in any way.

So the person telling you “this is what God says” is not the important thing. The man standing in this pulpit is not the important thing, The important thing is the message.

John’s message made it clear that he was not the Christ, the appointed Messiah, the Savior.

When religious authorities of the Jews demanded to know who he was, Scripture tells us **“John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, ‘I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’” Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” “I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”**” (John 1:23–27, NIV84)

And it was the very next day when **“John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”**”

We just talked about the Passover Lamb. But the lamb in general was also a very common animal to be sacrificed by the Jews. A lamb was sacrificed, killed, as a gift to God. A lamb was an offering to illustrate that Jesus, the lamb of God, would be sacrificed, killed, and his blood would wash the sins of people away.

And just as the blood of the Passover lamb saved the Israelites in Egypt, so it is the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, that saves mankind from eternal destruction in hell.

For Jews especially, lambs were an essential part of their worship and obedience to God’s ceremonial laws.

The Jews who heard John say this should 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 animal 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: **“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.”** v. 38-41

Jesus is the ultimate, final burnt offering without defect that Leviticus 1 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.”** v. 10

Jesus is the ultimate fellowship offering that we read about in Leviticus 3: **“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.”** v. 6-8

John was sent specifically first to the Jews. But we must remember that Jesus was sent to redeem the whole world, as Scripture plainly emphasizes that **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:16, NIV84)

Jesus is the sin offering through which we receive forgiveness, as we read in Leviticus 4: **“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.”** v. 32-34

We also read elsewhere in the New Testament that Jesus lived as a human on earth, and he lived among men, 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 of all mankind 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: ***“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”*** v. 5

At Jesus’ baptism by John, we read in Luke 3: ***“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.’”*** v. 22

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. 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: ***“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.”*** v. 37-38

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.