

16 January 2011  
Epiphany 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Unwrapping Jesus as the Lamb of God”  
Text: John 1:29-42a (1 Corinthians 1:1-9)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last week we heard that after John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, the heavens opened, the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven said, *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”* (Matt 3:17).

This week, we hear what John did and proclaimed after that. When he now sees Jesus, he points to Him and proclaims: ***“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”***

This is, perhaps, not what we would expect. For it would, perhaps, make more sense if, after the voice from heaven identified Jesus as God’s beloved Son, John would go around proclaiming: “Behold the *Son* of God!” But he doesn’t. It’s ***Lamb of God*** for John. *That’s* how he *unwraps* Jesus for us. And today I want you to consider why that is.

But I’ll not leave you in suspense. I’ll tell you straight out, now, why this is: *because just knowing that God, who is almighty, is here, is not necessarily good news.* Because why has He come? Is this Son of God here to redeem or to revenge? Is He here to comfort or to condemn? Power and might can work both ways, you know. And so John pointing to Jesus and proclaiming: “Behold the *Son* of God” tells us *who* Jesus is, but nothing more.

For the fact is, if you just know God as *almighty*, you don’t really know God and you will be filled with questions. Like, if you are almighty, then why the shootings in Arizona, God? Why the floods in Australia and Brazil, God? Why the troubles in *my* life, God? If you are almighty, why don’t you stop these things? Or maybe you’re not really almighty at all? Or if you are, then maybe you don’t really love us, or love me, or care for me, or want to help me. Maybe we can’t really count on you.

For who, then, is God, really? An unknown and unknowable God is a frightening God. Is He the God of sunny days or of hurricanes? Is He the God of spring flowers or earthquakes? Is He the God of love or of war? Which Son of God is here?

Or think of it like walking down a dark alley, and you know someone is there with you - you can hear the heavy footsteps, it's someone big. But who is it? You cannot see them or know their intentions. It's frightening. . . . But if they come into the light to be with you as a friend, a helper, a protector, *that* is good news. That is what you need. And then there is peace.

Well that is, John wants you to know, the God you have. Jesus is God the Son, yes; but even more. He is ***the Lamb of God***, the friend of sinners, companion of the downcast, lifter of the low. He has come to be your Saviour. It's ***Lamb of God*** for John, *that you might know who Jesus really is* - that the Son is the Lamb and the Lamb is the Son, and that in Him we see how God *does* love you, care for you, and help you. That He has come to lay down His life for you, and give you peace. He has come to **BE** your peace, **by taking away the sin of the world**. By taking away **your** sin.

Now that sounds very "formula" and not really practical. Yeah, sin and forgiveness - but people want more than that. That's why some churches don't talk about sin anymore, preferring instead to talk about how to improve your life. *But don't be fooled!* Sin *really is* the problem. The regrets you have, the skeletons in your closets, the habits you can't break. The sin that breaks families and friendships and churches, and causes you to do and be what you don't want to do or be. The sin that is imposed on you by the sinful acts of others, or the sin that has subjected and effected creation.

We've been trying to take all this away ourselves - sin and the effects of sin - with our own efforts for a very long time, for thousands of years. Through laws, through psychology, through counseling or motivational speaking, even in the name of God. But we can't do it. Sin, and the pain and hurt it causes, is still here. It is too embedded in our human nature. And if you think you get a handle on it, it mutates, changes, evolves, taking many shapes and sizes, and hiding and appearing in many different forms. And so there are *still* crazed gunmen, floods and earthquakes, and troubles in our lives.

But in Jesus we have one who is like us, but not like us; who is true man, but also true God; who has come to be and do what we cannot be and do; who has come as ***the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world***. Not by destroying us and the world to purge us of our sin, but by taking our sin upon Himself and then being destroyed in our place. And so as we heard last week, beginning at the Jordan and ending on the cross, that's what Jesus does - He takes away the sin of the world by putting it on Himself; that it be on Him and not on us; that we be forgiven and set free.

And this is what Jesus is still doing now through His Word and Sacraments - applying the forgiveness won for us in His life and death, that we may live in peace and freedom and not in bondage to our sins. That is what is happening with every baptism, every absolution, and every communion: you are beholding **the Lamb of God** forgiving sin, giving life, and promising salvation. Still taking the sin and death that is ours, and giving the forgiveness and life that is His.

*And that changes everything.* For it means that should you get gunned down by a crazed man's bullet, or should you get swept away in a flood, or should you get crushed under the burdens and diseases of this world and life, or should sin come upon you in any of a million other ways - you have hope. No, even more, you have *confidence!* Confidence not in an almighty God, who may or may not act for you, but in **the Lamb of God**, your friend and Saviour, who came and took away your sin, who made you a child of God in Him, and who promised you the gift of everlasting life. A gift He really and truly can give, for He Himself rose from death to life, to take you through death to life with Himself. He's the only one who ever did, and so He's the only one who really can.

And now with that confidence, you can live a new life. A life set free from fear by faith; faith in the God that you know, and that you know loves you. For He showed you this love - in the manger, at the Jordan, on the cross. If He didn't love you, He wouldn't be there.

And if He didn't love you, He wouldn't be here for you today. It is no accident that in our communion liturgy, we sing the words of John the Baptist: "*O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, who takest away the sin of the world.*" The Jesus who stepped into the Jordan that day is the same Jesus who comes to us here, "stepping into," if you will, the bread and wine on the altar, that we eat and drink not mere bread and wine, but the body and blood of our Passover Lamb. The Lamb who gives His life that we may live. The Lamb who gave His life *for* you on the cross. The Lamb who now gives His life *to* you in His Supper. The Lamb who lived and died for you, that you might die and live with Him.

So He is not "the Lamb of God who came to show you your potential," or "how to improve your life," but **the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.** To make you and all creation new. That newness will happen, finally and fully, when Jesus comes again and all old things pass away. *That is what we are waiting for*, as St. Paul told the Corinthian Christians. But already that new is breaking into the world now, and making a difference now. Breaking in with Jesus' work for you here, with His gifts; but also breaking into the world as *you* go into the world and live the new life you have been given. Like John broke into people's lives; like Andrew broke into his brother Simon Peter's life; and as you break into people's lives . . . with forgiveness for their sins, with help in their time of need, with love

when they are cast down or cast out, with a word of hope when all seems hopeless, and in so many other ways. The Lamb of God breaking into *their* lives through *you*.

That is the gift of God unwrapped for you today by John and this Word of God, this gift of Jesus, that you may rejoice in Him - what He has done *for* you, what He is now giving *to* you, and what He is working *through* you. For this child born for us, this Son given to us (Isaiah 9:6), is ***the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world***. And truly, there is no greater gift than that.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.