

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

***"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*** (John 1:29)

John the Baptist had gained quite a number of disciples. But John knew that such discipleship would not be permanent. He knew he was only the forerunner to the promised Messiah. And John did not resent or resist that prospect. In fact, John rejoiced over it. He gladly said: ***"He – Jesus – must increase, but I must decrease"*** (John 3:30). So, John would gladly recede into the background as Jesus came to the foreground.

So, seeing Jesus coming toward him, John called out to his disciples, ***"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"***

By saying "behold," John is saying to his disciples: "Look! Turn your eyes over there! Don't miss this! That Man is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

But how did John know? Well, he tells us what he witnessed at Christ's baptism! ***"I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him"*** (John 1:32). You see, it wasn't from his own reason that He knew Jesus to be the Christ. Instead, it was revealed to him. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that ***"He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit"*** (John 1:33).

Like St. Peter, who would later say to Jesus: ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"*** (Matthew 16:16), this was revealed to Peter not by reason, but by ***"My Father who is in heaven,"*** Jesus says (Matthew 16:17).

We are in the season of Epiphany. Throughout this season, Jesus is revealed to be the Messiah, the Son of God, in various ways. Today, we hear how Jesus was revealed as the Son of God through the proclamation of the Word. Through the proclamation and power of the spoken word, Jesus wins His first disciples.

***“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*** Following the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by John, John came to realize what had just happened. He baptized the very Son of God. Yes, he attempted to decline Jesus, because Jesus knew no sin. But today, we hear the rest of the story. All of what happened that day in the Jordan River was revealed to him before Jesus broke the tension with John when He spoke, ***“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness”*** (Matthew 3:15).

Suddenly, John realized. He remembered. He had an epiphany. He baptized the sinless One, so that Jesus would be the sin-bearer.

So, again as Jesus came walking toward John, John speaks to get the attention of his disciples, ***“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”***

Then, the next day, John speaks again as Jesus walks by: ***“Behold, the Lamb of God!”***

Now, upon hearing these words, every devout Jew knew that these words could only refer to the promised Messiah. For one thing, every sacrifice of a lamb, especially that of the Passover lamb, was a type, a direction sign, which pointed forward to the coming Redeemer.

“Look! Jesus is the Lamb of God! ***There*** is the Man ***you*** need to follow! There is the long-awaited Savior! Why are you standing here with me? Go to Him!”

Jesus is the Lamb of God who came to give Himself as the sacrifice to win forgiveness for a sinful world. **He** is the Passover Lamb whose blood saves us from death (Exodus 12:1-13). **He** is the burnt offering ***“without defect”*** (Leviticus 1:10). **He** is the sin offering through which we receive forgiveness. **He** is to be the lamb ***“led to the slaughter”*** for our sins (Isaiah 53:7).

Here, John the Baptist is proclaiming Jesus’ mission. Jesus is ***“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*** John is pointing forward to Christ’s atoning work upon the cross. Jesus didn’t come just to forgive the sins of certain people. He came for the entire sin of the entire world. He came to take away all the sins of every sinner, from Adam down to the last transgressor born before the Last Day.

All this sin, Jesus as the Lamb of God takes away with His one tremendous sacrifice as the spotless Lamb who would carry out God's grand design: to cancel the sins of all mankind. This is known as universal justification. But don't be confused. This has nothing to do with universalism where all are saved no matter what they believe.

Instead, universal justification means that Jesus came to save everyone who believes and trusts in Him. For everyone who trusts in Him, they are freed from the power of sin. This is what Jesus proclaims: ***“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but who ever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God”*** (John 3:17-18).

***“Behold, the Lamb of God!”*** After two of John's disciples heard this proclaimed, they followed Jesus. Jesus then turned and saw them following Him and said to them: ***“What are you seeking?”*** (John 1:38) That is a most-important question. Here we have two faithful Jews who have long been seeking the Messiah. What were they seeking?

Could they be seeking a Messiah who would bring freedom from the Romans? Could it be a Messiah who would restore Jerusalem and Jewish power? Could it be a Messiah who would be a miracle worker?

How might we respond? Are you seeking help coping with daily burdens? Seeking a life made easy? What are we seeking from Jesus?

All of humanity is seeking something. Sometimes, we just don't know what. Since most people do not know what they are really seeking, they continue to seek. Some seek **power**, for with power, they can do whatever they want. Some seek **wealth**. Like power, you can do a lot with wealth. You can buy whatever you want. Some seek **knowledge**. But sometimes it isn't about knowledge, instead knowledge may be used to impress others, or even to control others, or to attempt to solve the world's problems all on their own. Others, seek **popularity**. Who doesn't desire to be liked? This is the whole point behind social media. But what do power, wealth, knowledge and popularity all have in common? They are fleeting. Each of these things lead to the same result: death.

Without knowing it, what most people are really seeking is a Savior from sin and its effects. We are seeking a sense of identity. We are seeking a sense of security. We are seeking meaning and purpose.

What we are really seeking, God provides. ***“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”***

In fact, this is what John’s two disciples were seeking. They said to Jesus, ***“Rabbi, where are you staying?”*** You see, they wanted to stay with Jesus, learn from Him, and get from Him what He had to offer them – the forgiveness of sins. Jesus replies, ***“Come and you will see.”***

In Christ, our identity is restored as a redeemed child of God. The sin that alienated us from God and others is forgiven. In Christ, our security is restored. We are reconciled to God since our sin is removed, so that while we live or when we die, we are certain that we are protected by God. In Christ, our meaning and purpose is restored. We are children of God with a vocation: to love God and serve my neighbor.

Immediately, as the two disciples are told ***“Come and you will see”*** by Jesus, one of them, Andrew, tells his brother Simon Peter, ***“We have found the Messiah!”*** He brought him to Jesus.

This is the Church’s mission. Word and Sacraments are God’s means for transmitting salvation, but we are the human agents who bring those means to bear on people. Through Andrew, we see the early church’s involvement in Jesus’ mission on a one-on-one basis. John the Baptist tells two of his disciples about Jesus. Then one of them, Andrew, tells his brother about Jesus. And so it goes on through human history, and so the church grows one by one.

Through the spoken word, we hear and follow Jesus. The Apostle Paul proclaims, ***“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ”*** (Romans 10:17).

So, like John the Baptist and Andrew, through the working of the Holy Spirit in us, we testify of Jesus in who He is – ***“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”*** He is what the world is seeking. We invite our friends and neighbors saying, ***“Come and see!”*** We invite, so that others can hear and see Jesus in this place. Here in the Divine Service, we come to see, learn, believe, and follow Jesus as He comes to us through His Word and Sacraments! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**