

2nd Sunday after Epiphany
January 18, 2026
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
The Lamb of God

John 1:29-41 (EHV)

The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.’ ³¹I myself did not know who he was, but I came baptizing with water so that he would be revealed to Israel.”

³²John also testified, “I saw the Spirit descend like a dove from heaven and remain on him. ³³I myself did not recognize him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴I saw this myself and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

³⁵The next day, John was standing there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶When John saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look! The Lamb of God!” ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

³⁸When Jesus turned around and saw them following him, he asked, “What are you looking for?”

They said to him, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

³⁹He told them, “Come, and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying. They stayed with him that day. It was about the tenth hour.

⁴⁰Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. ⁴¹The first thing Andrew did was to find his own brother Simon and say to him, “We have found the Messiah!” (which is translated “the Christ”).

Dear Friends in Christ,

What many of us think of today when we think about a lamb is very different from what an Old Testament Israelite would think of when thinking about a lamb. We might think of a cute, fuzzy baby sheep. Not long ago in our country, some may have thought of a lamb as a baby animal that would grow into a sheep. And that sheep would provide wool to keep my family warm and meat to keep my family fed. I'm sure the Hebrews of the Old Testament would sometimes view lambs as cute baby animals. Certainly, they viewed lambs as an eventual source of wool and food. But the lamb was also very important to their religious life.

From a very young age, Jewish boys and girls would learn the importance of lambs in their religious life. Every year, in the spring, you ate a special meal. Roast lamb, bitter herbs and unleavened bread. Your parents would tell you the true stories of the past. They would tell you about the first Passover. They would tell you about how your ancestors ate roast lamb the night before they were set free. They would tell you about how your ancestors trusted the Lord and put the blood of that lamb around the doorframe of their home. They would tell you about how the Lord passed over every home that had the blood of the lamb. Every spring you would hear this same story as you ate roast lamb with your family for the festival of Passover. Lambs were not just cute baby animals to you.

And when you were older you may have gone to Jerusalem, to the temple courts. Every morning in the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem a lamb was offered as a whole burnt offering. Every evening another lamb was offered as a burnt offering, demonstrating the people's trust and dedication to the Lord in all things. A lamb was not just a source of clothing and food for you.

And at times your family would take a lamb to the temple for a sin offering or guilt offering. Your family sought the forgiveness of sins from the Lord God in the way God told them. The blood of a lamb must be spilled to forgive your sins. Growing up with the worship practices God prescribed in the Old Testament would make you think of lambs in a very different way than we do today. So, what are the people at the Jordan River thinking when John the Baptizer declares, *“Look! The Lamb of God?”*

They don’t think that Jesus is a cute, baby animal. They don’t even think that Jesus is the one to give them clothing and food, although as the Son of God, he could do this. Instead, God has trained his people to think of a lamb as a sacrifice to take away sins. This Jesus is going to be a sacrifice. This Jesus is going to die. I don’t know if John’s disciples immediately made the connection between Jesus being like a sacrificial lamb and actually dying, but we know that is the connection.

Nevertheless, two of John’s disciples begin to follow Jesus:

³⁵The next day, John was standing there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶When John saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look! The Lamb of God!” ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When Jesus turned around and saw them following him, he asked, “What are you looking for?”

That is a good question for all of us. “What are you looking for from Jesus?” Some look for Jesus to make their earthly life better. When things are going wrong, when they are in physical need, they go to Jesus. If I just follow Jesus and do what he says, he’ll provide what I need in life. And then when life is going pretty okay, I don’t need to follow Jesus so closely. On the other hand, some may follow Jesus closely when things are going well. But they drift away when problems arise because they are going to handle the problems on their own.

Some may follow Jesus because it is good for the kids to learn to learn the moral teachings of Jesus so that the kids can be good people in this world. And when the kids grow up, they don’t see as much need for Jesus, the good moral teacher. Some may follow Jesus because that is what their parents and older family members expect them to do. But when you are out on your own you don’t see much need for Jesus. You’ve got life figured out and are doing well without the strictness of the Bible. What are we looking for from Jesus?

John’s title for Jesus tells us what we really need from Jesus. “Lamb of God” tells us that we need a sacrifice to die for us. We need the forgiveness of sins. Whether life is going well or not, we need the Lamb of God to forgive us. Whether we have life figured out or are a complete mess, we need the Lamb of God to sacrifice himself for us. Whether we are young or old, we need the Lamb of God because we all should be looking for the forgiveness of sins.

John has great news for all who look to Jesus as the Lamb of God. *“Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* The Lamb of God fulfills what was promised through the sacrifices of all the lambs at Passover and all the lambs for sin offerings and all the lambs for guilt offerings. The Lamb of God forgives sin. Jesus does not only forgive certain sins or the sins of a specific group of people. The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world!

Are you looking for certainty that your sins are forgiven? The Lamb of God guarantees forgiveness of all sins. For you are in the world. You are a part of the many sinners of this world. That means that the Lamb of God paid for your sins by his sacrificial death. Don’t even try to convince yourself that something you’ve done is not forgiven. Jesus takes away the sin of the world. You can’t get around it. Your sin is forgiven!

John even tells us how this is possible with a sentence that might best be described as a riddle: *This is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.’* Remember that Elizabeth gave birth to John about three months before Mary gave birth to

Jesus. John and Jesus were related, likely cousins of some kind. But John came into this world first and Jesus was after him. But this is only part of the story. For Jesus outranks John in every way even though he was born three months later. I'm sure you can think of a younger sibling or relative that surpassed you in some way. They likely had an advantage of being born after you. Not so with Jesus. His advantage is that he existed before John even though he was born after John.

The Lamb of God is the eternal Son of God who was born in time to the virgin Mary. That is the answer to John's riddle. That is the answer to how Jesus can take away the sin of the world. The lambs used for sacrifice at the temple were to be without blemish or defect. Jesus, as true God is without blemish or defect. He is the perfect Lamb of God, holy and without sin. As true man, the Lamb of God is able to offer himself as the sacrifice upon the cross. His true, human blood is able to be shed so that our God passes over our sins. As true God, Jesus' blood is more precious than gold or silver. His holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death have redeemed the whole world from sin.

Believers in Christ, we need to hear this message often for we too often take our eyes off Jesus as we look for something else in life. We need to have someone be like John and say to us, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." The tradition of the Christian church is to sing this message to each other before Holy Communion. When we sing the "Lamb of God" the "Agnus Dei" in Latin, we are proclaiming the good news of the forgiveness of sins to each other before we receive that same forgiveness through Christ's body and blood. We do this for each other privately as well. Be a John the Baptist for anyone struggling with sin and life and point them to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Be like Andrew and find someone who needs to hear about the Christ who is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

When Old Testament believers thought of lambs, they would think of sacrifice. Truly Jesus is the Lamb of God who sacrificed himself to forgive the sins of the world. In addition to this image of Jesus, the apostle John gives us another image of the Lamb of God in the book of Revelation. There, Jesus is the victorious Lamb of God. He was slain, but he lives forever and ever. One day, we will join the heavenly choirs with all the saints and angels. John describes the scene in this way:

And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels who were around the throne and around the living creatures and the elders. Their number was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands upon thousands. ¹²With a loud voice they were saying: Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing. ¹³I also heard every creature that is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever. (Revelation 5:11-13).

Amen.