

Second Sunday of Epiphany, January 20, 2008, Year A

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector

Scripture: John 1: 29-41

"Come and See"

Today's Gospel lesson brings us to an area near Jericho, right by the River Jordan – the day after Jesus was baptized. If you remember from last week's Gospel – during His baptism, Jesus arose from the water and the sky above Him was opened – and there, for the first time we are presented with the incredible presence of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Father spoke and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove, above the Son, – the Holy Trinity affirming the divinity of Jesus – in the same water that parted so that the Ark of the Covenant could cross on "dry land" the very first time; the same water from which Elijah's chariot of fire ascended into heaven; which Elisha parted with Elijah's mantle. *"And when he also had struck the waters, they were divided here and there; and Elisha crossed over."* (2 Kings 2:14) And now, John the Baptist gives further proclamation of Jesus' identity for all to hear – at the spot in the Jordan. This time the waters weren't parted –but instead the heavens were – as the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus -- and God the Father spoke. This was no ordinary place – and this as we know, is no ordinary man! This was the One who would be sacrificed – once – for the sins of all.

Here in John's Gospel– John the Baptist proclaims Jesus to be the "Lamb of God." Many of us have heard and are familiar with the term "Lamb of God" – but how many of us are sure of its significance? John the Baptist may be famous for many things, but I believe his most important task was to point away from himself and point towards Jesus – specifically **as God's Lamb**. Right here – he tells us not only who Jesus is – but he tells us why Jesus must die such a sacrificial death on the cross – for the sins of the whole world.

To more fully understand the magnitude of this declaration by John the Baptist, we need to go all the way back to the Book of Genesis to start gathering evidence.

- Remember the story from Genesis 22 where Abraham leads his only son – Isaac, up Mount Moriah – to the place where he was to sacrifice him? Isaac keenly identifies that they have the wood, which he is carrying on his own back, and they have the fire for the burnt offering – but he asks his father – *"where is the lamb?"* Lambs, spotless without blemish – as close to meek perfection, were used as a sacrifice to Almighty God. Abraham, trusting in the fact that God somehow would allow his son to survive, answers Isaac's question: *"God himself will provide the lamb."*
- Years later, as the descendants of Abraham's grandson, Jacob who was also known as Israel, are suffering as slaves in Egypt, with Moses pleading with Pharaoh to let them go – God once again uses a sacrifice – without blemish – an innocent lamb, for the purpose of saving His people. He instructs Moses *"Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning. For the LORD will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down."* (Exodus 12:21-23) Right here we are introduced to the thought of God's people – people who believe and trust in Almighty God, to be saved by the "blood of the lamb." Let's take this one step further – Israel's firstborn children were saved by the blood at the first Passover – and so too are we, the children of Abraham – born or adopted – through the blood of an innocent Lamb. When that blood was applied to the door posts – **Jesus Christ is revealed to us**. You see Jesus

Second Sunday of Epiphany, January 20, 2008, Year A

is **not A DOOR** – or one of many doors to heaven – but **He is “THE DOOR.”** Why else would Jesus say these words from John 10:9 *“I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”* We are all more than familiar with John 14:6. It is perfectly clear to me that Jesus wasn’t dropping clues when He said *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.”* No, He was stating the absolute truth, plain and simple. Sadly, there are many who are still not ready to hear this, or to believe this – and worse yet – there are some who outwardly reject this – in the name of inclusivity and political correctness. May God have mercy on them!

Just as we saw during the last two sermons by our rector, Father Ward, regarding the Star of Bethlehem; God has a plan, since the very beginning, regarding His Messiah, His Lamb – who would be sacrificed for the sins of the world. As God used the heavens to guide the Magi – we are given God’s Word as our guide – and it is all there – for us to see – and not for us to pass over. (Sorry – I had to!)

Holy Scripture tells us that after Isaac, after Moses and the Exodus from bondage in Egypt, the Prophet Isaiah foretold of God’s sacrificial lamb and how He would stand before men, be judged – and then be killed. *“Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.”* (Isaiah 53:7)

The Apostle Peter reveals that Jesus, the Lamb of God, the One whom he identified as *“the Messiah, the Son of the Living God”* (Matthew 16:16) at Caesarea Philippi, ransomed us – thereby freeing us from the grips of sin and death – and in doing so – He paid the ultimate price; *“with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”* (1 Peter 1:19) Only God could pay this perfect price – so that He could provide perfect justice – and free us from our sins – the ultimate atonement.

But why a Lamb? The people of Israel were familiar with lambs as prescribed by God for the sacrifices and it was an important part of their culture; and who they were. At Passover, each family had to have a lamb; and during the year, two lambs a day were sacrificed at the temple altar, plus all the other lambs brought for personal sacrifices. Those lambs were brought by men to men, but here is God’s Lamb, given by God to mankind! Those lambs could not take away sin, but the Lamb of God can and does take away sin. Those lambs were for Israel alone, but this Lamb would shed His blood for the whole world! The Father made it clear to John just who Jesus is by sending the Holy Spirit like a dove to light on Him. What a beautiful picture of the Holy Trinity! How awesomely ironic – that at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion – at the very hour that He was nailed to the cross – the Passover lambs were being slaughtered and prepared for the Seder. Just like the stars in the sky at His conception, birth crucifixion - and the eclipse that took place – this was God’s plan for mankind and for His Lamb. This is far more than symbolism – this is God fulfilling His promise and His plan of Salvation for the world from the beginning of time. The hope and freedom that God provided through the first Passover was fulfilled by the Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrifice – giving us the hope and freedom that comes with His gift of eternal life.

It is certainly no mere coincidence that God speaks plainly to us about His Lamb. To get a much clearer picture of God’s plan for creation and the role of His Lamb – we need to continue in His Word and go to **the end of the story** – to the Book of Revelation. The Apostle John witnessed

Second Sunday of Epiphany, January 20, 2008, Year A

a sea of people who were robed in white and he asked one of the elders present who these people were. The elder answered:

- *“These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”* (Revelation 7:14-17)
- The Lamb of God – Jesus of Nazareth, is, was, and shall be the Redeemer of mankind. But you have got to know that there’s more: John writes *“And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.”* (Revelation 22:1-5) That is the promise that comes to those that seek, know and love Jesus Christ as Lord – *“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.”* The evidence is clear – and it is right before each one of us. The sinful world needs a savior – and God in His mercy and love has provided one – and His name is Jesus – the Lamb of God. Tragically – many cannot see it and just as many refuse to.

There are those who are more likely to consider Jesus in their life if they hear about Jesus from someone they already know and trust. Personally, it means that the people you have the best chance of introducing Jesus to - are those who know you and trust you, whether family member, friend, or neighbor. **Uh oh, here it comes - the E word!** Evangelism is best when it happens through relationships that are already there – that already exist. It is through friendships and close relationships that people can truly evidence and experience the love of Christ. The two men – John the Baptist’s disciples - who were present that day at the Jordan – went and told two of their family members. Andrew told his brother Peter – and John (the author of this Gospel) told his brother James. Relationships formed through relationships.

Jesus asks these disciples, *“What are you looking for?”* Well, today Jesus asks each one of us this very same question. Whether we realize it or not, each of us is looking for something. Every person on the planet is created by God to need Him, to be in relationship with Him, to be fulfilled by Him. **Whether we realize it or not:**

- each of us is looking for someone - a specific someone;
- and that someone is Almighty God.
- Jesus is the one who can show us who God is, because “God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart . . . has made Him known.”

This is what the Gospel of John is about: **making God known through Jesus Christ the Son of God.** If you already know Jesus as the Son of God, you are still invited to follow Him, to follow Him down deeper paths of discipleship, obedience, and faith. **We can always learn more!** There is not one of us here today that can claim to know Jesus completely. We will never know Jesus completely – until that day when we stand before Him – face to face. Our relationship with Him never reaches a point of perfection when we can say, “Well, that’s about

Second Sunday of Epiphany, January 20, 2008, Year A

as far as I can go!" **My brothers and sisters - if you know Jesus - but want to know Him more, this invitation is still for you!**

But if you're sitting here today and **wondering who Jesus is**, or **maybe you are unsure**, **and you've never made the decision to follow Him**, I hope and pray that you will **consider making that decision today**. Jesus invites you to follow Him. He invites you to get to know Him. Please open your pew Bibles to **Revelation 3:20 – page 1119**. These are words that speak to each one of us: Jesus says "*Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.*" Jesus, THE DOOR, makes His invitation – and all we have to do is accept – opening our hearts to Him. Eventually Jesus wants you to confess Him as Lord of your life and the Son of God. But it all starts with an initial response to what He says to those first two disciples: "***Come and see.***"