

## The Testimony of John

John 1:29-42

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany, January 15, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

There are two possible lambs of God to which John the Baptist may be referring when he calls Jesus the Lamb of God.

The first one is the lamb that God commanded Israel to slaughter at the Passover. Passover was a celebration that God commanded Israel to observe once a year to commemorate the fact that He had freed them from slavery in Egypt. For four hundred years prior to the first Passover, Egypt had held Israel captive as slaves in Egypt. Israel served the Egyptians under cruel conditions. God decided to liberate Israel from slavery to Egypt. He did this to fulfill the promises that He made to Israel's ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In order to do this God sent Moses into Egypt to deliver His messages to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Moses delivered a series of messages that basically said this to Pharaoh, "Let the people of Israel go free or I will do something bad to your country." Whenever Pharaoh refused to let the Israelite slaves go free God would do something bad to Pharaoh and his country. God sent various kinds of disasters to Egypt which we today call plagues. The disasters included such things as the Nile River upon which Egypt depended for water turning into blood, huge numbers of flies or locusts or frogs. The plagues included a freak hailstorm and boils among both people and cattle. Once God even put Egypt into darkness for three days time. The worst plague with which God threatened Pharaoh was the death of the firstborn of Egypt. God told Pharaoh that if Pharaoh did not let Israel go free, God would strike down the firstborn of Egypt. That means that if Pharaoh refused to let Israel go free God would in some supernatural way put to death every firstborn in every family of Egypt.

This was to be the plague that would force Pharaoh's hand. Once Pharaoh beheld his own dead firstborn son who would have been heir to his throne, he let Israel go. God acts as if He knows that Pharaoh will let Israel go when He puts to death the firstborn of Egypt. Therefore in addition to telling Moses to warn Pharaoh about this final plague also tells Moses to command Israel to observe a ceremony. The ceremony was simple. Israel was to keep a lamb in their homes for four days prior to the night in which the plague on the firstborn of Egypt would occur. On the night when the plague was predicted to occur God commanded Israel to slaughter their lambs and roast them over the fire. Every Israelite household was to take some of the lamb's blood prior to its roasting and put the blood on the doorframes of their homes. This blood would serve as a sign to God that that home was not have anyone put to death as a result of His supernatural activity. This is why the ceremony is called the Passover. The lamb's blood on the door of the home was the sign to God to spare that home from death.

When John the Baptist calls Jesus the Lamb of God, this is one of the lambs about which he is referring. That means that Jesus will be slaughtered in some fashion. When Jesus dies He will shed blood in some fashion. That blood will then be applied to people in some fashion. When the blood is applied to people it will serve as the sign to God that He should spare that person from death.

The other lamb of God about which John the Baptist could be speaking when He calls Jesus the Lamb of God is the lamb that God commanded Israel to sacrifice in order to atone for their sins. Once Pharaoh had let Israel go free, God through Moses led the people out of Egypt to the land He had promised to give to them. On the way God gave Israel instructions through Moses regarding the kind of sacrifices that He wanted. God wanted about five different kinds of sacrifice and one of those sacrifices involved lambs. If an individual Israelite had sinned and had done so penitently without intentionally trying to disobey God, then God commanded a ceremony to be done in order to atone for that Israelite's

sins. The ceremony was that the Israelite should bring a lamb without blemish or defect to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The Tent of Meeting was the place where God lived with Israel while they were in the wilderness after God had freed them from slavery in Egypt. Once the Israelite who had sinned brought the lamb to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting he was supposed to slaughter the lamb. The priest would take the blood and put it on the altar and then the priest would burn the fat of the lamb on the altar, but keep some of the meat for himself. Once this ceremony was completed the person who made the offering would have their sins forgiven before God. This was the sin offering.

When John the Baptist calls Jesus, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," John is saying that Jesus will make a sacrifice in which Jesus Himself will die. When Jesus makes this sacrifice the penitent sins of the ones who worship Jesus will be forgiven. Since John the Baptist says that Jesus takes away the sin of the world this means that the sacrifice of Jesus will count for the whole world. When Jesus sheds His blood anyone in the world who is penitent will have their sins forgiven. Furthermore John the Baptist is also saying that anyone who is a priest of Jesus will eat of His flesh and when that happens the flesh of Jesus will make the person who eats it holy.

Since John the Baptist calls Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and later John the Baptist simply calls Jesus, "The Lamb of God," John the Baptist is referring to both lambs. Jesus is both the Passover lamb and the lamb that takes away sin. Jesus will offer the sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world and the sacrifice that liberates His disciples from their slavery. And the only slavery that Jesus will talk about is slavery to sin. Therefore just as God liberated His people Israel from slavery to Egypt and rescued them from death with the sacrifice of a lamb in the Old Testament so also the testimony of John the Baptist is that God will liberate His people from all over the world from their slavery to sin with the sacrifice of Jesus. Such sacrifice will forgive them of their sins and when they eat of the flesh of the sacrifice of Jesus, they as priests of God will be holy.

Such is the testimony of John the Baptist.

Furthermore it is the testimony of John the Baptist that in spite of the fact that Jesus comes after John, Jesus was in fact prior to John.

Here John delves into a mystery. When he says that Jesus comes after him he means that he began his ministry before Jesus began His. In other words John the Baptist began baptizing people and preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins before Jesus began preaching repentance. Jesus does not begin to preach repentance and the Kingdom of God until after John has begun to preach and baptize.

Yet in spite of the fact that John begins his ministry prior to Jesus, John's testimony is that Jesus is prior to John. And how is Jesus prior to John in spite of the fact that Jesus begins His ministry after John? Jesus is prior to John because Jesus is the Son of God. It is the testimony of John the Baptist that Jesus is the Son of God.

How does John know that Jesus is the Son of God because God told John who to look for.

Twice John says that He did not know Jesus. These words need to be taken carefully because last Sunday when Jesus shows up in Matthew's Gospel to be baptized, John says that I need to be baptized by you so he must have known something was up when Jesus arrives. John's point here in John's Gospel however is not to give his own testimony as to who Jesus is, but rather to give the testimony of the One who sent John to baptize. The One who sent John to baptize was God.

God sent John to baptize with water. God sent all of the prophets to Israel to preach to Israel. Since John is the last of the prophets of the Old Testament, God also sent John to do what John was doing. That was all the authority that John needed to do what he was doing. John did not have to be Elijah to do what he was doing, even though he was the Elijah who was to come according to Matthew, Mark, and

Luke. John did not need to be the special prophet that God predicted would be coming. John did not have to be the Christ, Israel's expected Messiah, in order to do what he was doing. It was sufficient that God had sent John to baptize people with a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. If God sends you to do something what more authority do you need? And so John came baptizing. God sent John to baptize.

God had instructed John when God sent John to baptize. God did not willy nilly send John to do whatever John wanted to do. John had to do what God told him to do. If John did not do what God told him to do then John would not be a prophet of God. When God instructed John on what to do, God told John to watch for a man upon whom the Holy Spirit would come. Whoever John saw the Holy Spirit come down and remain on would be the One who would baptize others with the Holy Spirit. Furthermore the man upon whom the Holy Spirit would descend and remain would be God's Son.

You might say it this way, until John saw the Holy Spirit descend in the form of a dove and remain on Jesus, John did not officially know that Jesus was the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and that Jesus was the Son of God. Once John saw the dove descend from heaven and remain on Jesus he then knew and is able to testify to us that Jesus is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and Jesus is the Son of God.

When Jesus baptizes people with the Holy Spirit He brings them to a true faith in God. Such people who are baptized by Jesus with the Holy Spirit don't simply believe that God exists. That's easy. Even the demons do that. No the people that Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit have a true faith in Jesus that is to say a faith in God that relies entirely on God for its salvation.

Furthermore when Jesus baptizes someone with the Holy Spirit that person receives the Spirit of prophecy. They are able to predict the future and know what God's future plans are. They know what God will do between now and the end of the age.

When the Spirit descends on Jesus and thereby designates that Jesus is the Son of God, God is indicating that Jesus is the proper king of Israel. God had promised all of the kings of Israel who descended from David that they were His sons. He regarded them as sons and disciplined them as sons. He made them promises as His sons. He promised them that if they kept His rules and statutes without failing any one of them that He would establish their throne forever. At the time when Jesus arrived the throne of Israel still was not established forever. By designating Jesus as His Son, God is giving Israel one last chance to produce an heir of David who will actually keep God's laws and statutes in their entirety. When Jesus keeps God's will in its entirety God then established the kingdom of Israel forever. Israel has been an everlasting kingdom ever since God made it everlasting when Jesus kept all of the will of God. Jesus is the king of this kingdom and because the kingdom is everlasting the throne of Jesus is also everlasting.

This is the testimony of John.

No wonder the disciples of John wanted to follow Jesus! Who wouldn't want to follow Jesus! Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Here is the Son of God who will make Israel an everlasting Kingdom.

And when Jesus finds the disciples of John the Baptist following Him He asks them what they want and all they want is to see where Jesus is staying.

I have often been disappointed that John's Gospel does not tell us where Jesus was staying. You would think that it was important enough to tell us that John's disciples wanted to know where Jesus was staying that he would take the trouble to tell us where Jesus was staying! But he doesn't. And that means that it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter where Jesus is staying. All that matters is that Jesus is staying

there. The disciples of John want to stay where Jesus is staying and wherever it is that He is staying that is where they want to be.

And so all Jesus says is, "Come and see." He invited them to stay with Him.

No wonder these new disciples of Jesus went and told their relatives about Jesus. And no wonder Andrew told Simon, "We have found the Messiah!"

Of course Jesus is the Messiah. If He is the Lamb of God who saves from sin and rescues from slavery and establishes the everlasting Kingdom of Israel, of course He is the Messiah! He is the Christ. Of course the disciples of Jesus bring other people to Jesus! Why wouldn't they?

They have the testimony of John the Baptist.

And this is why John the Baptist came baptizing with water. He came baptizing with water that we would know who Jesus is. John the Baptist came baptizing with water so that Jesus would be revealed to Israel.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.