

“He Has Taken Away the Sin of the World”

John 1:29-42

As we do each year during the season of Epiphany, we spend these weeks witnessing Jesus of Nazareth being revealed as the Christ. That is what an epiphany is – that which was once hidden is revealed. Last week we witnessed Jesus’ Baptism, and, oh how Jesus was revealed as the Son of God.

He comes up out of the water and God the Father’s voice thunders down from heaven, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.” And the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all present and active at Jesus’ Baptism, just like they were all present and active at your Baptism. No voice thundered down; no dove descended upon you; but do not think that their presence is any less diminished. God chose to reveal Himself you to in the Word joined with water. Like I said last week, that may not be the way you want Him to come to you, but that is the way in which He has chosen.

And now, in our reading today, Jesus is further revealed as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. This is not immediately after His Baptism. It is not even “the next day” as you might think by reading the text. “The next day” is not the next day after Jesus’ baptism, but is the

next day after John was asked, “Are you the Christ?” Immediately after Jesus’ baptism, Jesus had gone out into the wilderness for 40 days being tempted by the devil. As the letter to the Hebrews says, we have a high priest (Christ) who can empathize with our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way we are, yet was without sin.

And now, He has returned and is going to begin His public ministry. John sees Jesus coming toward him and he says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Look carefully at those words. He does not say, He has come to take away the “sins” of the world. He has come to take away the “sin” of the world. Literally, the sin (singular) of the cosmos – all that is seen and unseen.

You are not a sinner because of the “sins” you commit. You are a sinner because of “sin.” You are born in sin. Even more, you are conceived in sin. The “sins” you commit, your evil thoughts, words, and deeds are only the fruit of your “sin”, your nature inherited from Adam. That is the real problem. Anyone who would say, “I am not poor (in spirit), I am not miserable, I am not a sinner” would essentially be saying, “I do not need the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” If you are not a poor, miserable sinner, then you have no need for Jesus to have died on the cross.

For the sake of the poor, miserable sinners, John the Baptist reveals who Jesus is. Jesus comes as the Lamb of God who takes away the “sin” of the world. He is the final offering on the altar of the

cross so that the One who was without sin (Jesus) could become sin for us, as St. Paul says. This One sinless Man becomes the personification of sin. He becomes the fullness of sin, so that God the Father can pour out the fullness of His wrath upon that sin.

No sin is left unpaid for. That is the great exchange we saw last week in Jesus' baptism. The burden of all the guilt for all the sin of the world He took upon Himself. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the "sin" of the world. We hear John the Baptist reveal this truth. If the "sin" of the world, inherited from Adam, is taken away, then the guilt of your "sins" is taken away also.

Our human nature always wants to look at things backwards. When you look back at your life and feel shame for your sin, do you think about the sin of Adam? or do the pangs of guilt come from the "sins", the unfortunate ways in which you treated your neighbor? or the guilty pleasures that you allowed yourself to participate in?

The pangs of guilt I have felt in my soul have never come from pondering the depth of my depravity as a child of Adam. My prayer of thanks to God is always, "Thank you Lord for rescuing me from myself." As I said a couple weeks ago, "When I listen to my heart, I end up sinning, because that is what my heart tells me to do."

I am a poor, miserable sinner by nature – and so are you. We needed the Lamb of God to come and take away the sin of the world. We needed the Son of God to shed His blood on the altar of the cross.

We needed the righteous wrath of God to be directed at Jesus and not at us.

During this Epiphany season, we ponder Jesus of Nazareth being revealed as the Christ, the Messiah, the One promised to Adam who would crush the head of Satan. John the Baptist revealed Him to all those who would listen to his words, just like those same words have revealed Him to you this day. As I said last week, “God presents Himself the way God wants to present Himself. And God permits Himself to be found when and where He permits Himself to be found.”

Through the words of John the Baptist, He has chosen to reveal to you the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The amazing thing about the presence of God in the church today, versus the presence of God in the days of old – in Bible times, is that you are just as forgiven as the believers who walked and talked with Jesus and John the Baptist.

The blessing of being a Christian today is that we have 2000 years of testimony of faithful witnesses as to how Jesus of Nazareth has redeemed not just the hearts of all humans, but the cosmos and everything in it. He has taken away the sin of the world. Amen.