

SERMON FOR THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY: GEOFF CHADWICK: 16/1/2026
EPIPHANY 2a (OS2): JOHN 1:29-42:
THE LAMB OF GOD.

John 1.29-42

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." ³¹ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.' ³² And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." ³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.' ³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' ³⁹ He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter).

'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (Jn 1: 29, NRSV)

What on earth does this mean?

Scholars have had a field day trying to nut it out. Here are a few possibilities.

The lamb could refer to:

- 1) "The gentile lamb of Jeremiah 11:19 who was led to the slaughter and-did not know it was against him.
- 2) The lamb of the daily temple sacrifice.
- 3) The scapegoat of Leviticus 16 that is banished to the desert carrying the sins of the people. (But unfortunately, it was a goat!)
- 4) The lamb substituted for Isaac at his near sacrifice at the hands of his father Abraham; described in Gen 22.

- 5) The sin offering at the temple (but these were usually bulls and goats).
- 6) The servant of the Lord in Isa 53:7.

Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (Isa 53:7, NRSV)

- 7) The triumphant lamb of the book of Revelation (7:17):

... for the Lamb at the centre 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. (Rev 7:17, NRSV)

- 8) The Passover lamb mentioned in Genesis 11:

They shall take some of the blood [of the lamb] and put it on the doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night... when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.” (Lev 117-13, NRSV)

- 9) And the lamb that is led to the slaughter in Is 53:7.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth: like a lamb to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice, he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? (Is 52:7-8, NRSV)

(See Carson DA, 1991, *The Gospel According to John*, APOLLOS Press/Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, p149)

Now it could be that the phrase:

‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world’ (Jn 1: 29, NRSV)

relates to one or all of these! Perhaps we should choose a favourite!

But let’s remember that John is writing in the AD90’s and has the force of a lot of refined Christian thought behind him. He is writing after the event, and when important ideas about Jesus were maturing.

In a way, John the Baptist’s phrase contains more meaning 60 years after the event than it did from his lips. Perhaps he said more than he knew. Whatever he meant, John the author has picked up later the later developments of Christian thinking.

In AD90, it's also likely that the phrase had become a familiar set of words used by the early converts. I also suggest that the phrase had become a familiar expression in the early church liturgies.

Putting it another way, if a non-believer encountered a Christian and asked:

What do you Christians believe?

The fully rehearsed answer would come:

We believe in Jesus who is the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

Have you ever been asked what you believe as a Christian?

Have you been stuck for words?

Well, here are some words, already formulated by the early church for us to use!

But of course, the answer needs unpacking.

The many meanings of *lamb* may bewilder us, but that's the beauty of the phrase. It is symbolic, not signatory.

Signs have only one meaning (otherwise our road traffic would be absolutely chaotic).

Symbols, on the other hand, have many meanings which point to a mystery greater than themselves. The mystery of: *The lamb of God* is multifaceted.

Passover, Sacrifice, Servant, Seated on the throne and so on, are all aspects of this mystery.

I wonder which meaning is your favourite?

- 1) Do you think of the lamb that took the place of Isaac, at his near sacrifice at the hands of his father?
- 2) Do you think of Jesus as scapegoat, taking our sins into the desert?
- 3) Do you see Jesus as Jeremiah's gentle lamb, where courageous innocence faces absolute injustice?
- 4) Or maybe you're with Jesus of *Revelation* where the triumphant lamb on the throne wipes away our tears?

Maybe you don't have a favourite?

Maybe you like them all!

Maybe it depends on your presence circumstance?

Even so, John the Baptist is pointing us in the right direction. He redirects his own disciples to Jesus. On top of that, John the writer increases the list of titles. If *lamb of God* is not enough, why not include *Rabbi, Teacher, Messiah* and *Anointed*?

These early church titles are also for our use.

When asked

Why do you follow Jesus?

These titles may help us out.

Meanwhile there's a funny little twist at the end of the story.

Simon too, is given a title. *Simon* becomes *Cephas* or *Peter*.

I wonder, if Jesus gave you a nick-name, what would it be?

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.