

Jesus has come for everyone – and for everything living

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Epiphany + 2 – Isa 49 1-7, Ps 40 6-13, 1 Cor 1 1-9, Jn 1 29-42

The Season of Epiphany is about Jesus being revealed to the world. So our readings prioritise mission and witness; like God's words of inspiration to Isaiah today: *I'll give you as a light to the nations so my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.* Those words remind me that Jesus commanded us to be like Isaiah when he said: *Go and make disciples of all nations.* ^{Mt 28.19} The mission is ours now. And the light we Christians are called to spread is the Good News of Jesus; the Gospel.

In last week's Gospel, we heard Matthew's account of the Baptism of Jesus. Today it may feel like we're hearing the same story again; this time, from John's Gospel. There are shared elements in Matthew's and John's accounts. There's the Baptist's insistence on Jesus being more important than him. And there's the Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove. But beyond that, our patron saint, John the Evangelist presents us with some enigmatic details that weren't there in Matthew's account – and they don't appear anywhere else in the Gospels either.

They start when Jesus comes down to the Jordan River where John is baptising, and the Baptist tells the gathered people, *Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.* I imagine the Baptist saying these words might pass almost unnoticed for us, and many other Christians. We come from a tradition where we sing or say those words every time we gather for Holy Communion – *Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.* But I think we're meant to sit up and take

notice, because *Lamb of God* is there twice in today Gospel. It appears nowhere else in the Bible. It's a witness to the world about who Jesus is: it's an Epiphany.

So our two Johns – John the Baptist and John the Evangelist – what *do* they mean to say to the world when they name Jesus *the Lamb of God*? What would all those people down at the river with the Baptist have thought he meant when he said it?

They'd have had the Hebrew Scriptures to guide them. Lambs that you read about in the Hebrew Scriptures are mostly sacrificed as sin offerings; sort of fines people paid for failing to live as faithful people of God.

But there are a few mentions of lambs in the Hebrew Scriptures that spring to mind for me particularly. One is the lamb that should've been offered when Abraham and Isaac went out on the journey that almost saw Abraham offer his only son Isaac as a sacrifice. ^{Gen 22} For Christians reading that, the idea of the sacrifice of an only son has a strong associations with the crucifixion of Jesus.

We read about another lamb in Isaiah's last *servant song*; the lamb that was to be sacrificed because *the Lord laid on him the guilt of us all*. ^{Isa 53.6-7} Again, for Christians, that has very strong associations with the crucifixion of Jesus. *Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*. The Baptist may well be foretelling that Jesus will be our crucified Saviour.

But the lamb in the Hebrew Scriptures that strikes me as being most immediately evoked by the Baptist's words is the Passover lamb of Exodus 12. When God's people were about to be freed from slavery in Egypt, they had to paint their doorposts and lintels with the blood of a sacrificed lamb. That lamb's blood was a sign on their houses that would protect them when the Lord struck the land of Egypt. The Lord would ravage the land of Egypt that night, but seeing the lamb's blood on their

doorway, pass over their house leaving them unscathed.

When we sing the Lamb of God just before we take communion, it's a reminder that the blood of Jesus – the Lamb of God – shelters us from the consequences of our alienation from God. Because of the blood of Christ, we are spared the spiritual consequences of actions and failures we've remembered and confessed at the beginning of our gatherings.

But it's not just a private matter – a comfortable arrangement between a select few people and God. The Baptist opens our eyes to a whole new level when he says Jesus is the Lamb of God *who takes away the sin of the world*. Jesus hasn't just come to shed his blood for God's historical chosen people, or faithful church-goers. He's come for everyone – and indeed for everything living. I guess that's why this reading is set for us in this season of Epiphany. It must be an Epiphany for us too

Thus enlightened, what are we meant to do about it? ... It's all there in today's Gospel. The Baptist points to Jesus and says who he really is. Andrew and his brother respond; they follow Jesus. He turns and asks them: *What are you looking for?* They ask him: *Where are you stopping?* And he says simply: *Come; you'll see.*

Such a simple invitation. We practised doing it two weeks ago at the feast of the Epiphany when we chalked our doors. That's why the first Passover story is my pick of the lamb references. The Hebrews daubed their doorways with blood. We marked our doors with chalk to say: *What are you looking for? ... Come; you'll see.*

Today, Jesus showed us how to do it. Ask people; *What are you looking for?* If it seems like what they're looking for is to belong to Jesus here, or anywhere else you may be stopping, just invite them: *Come and see.* It's that simple. Amen