

## ***Behold the Lamb of God***

Christmas Meditation

December 25, 2016

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning.<sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.<sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.<sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

*<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God whose name was John.<sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe.<sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.*

*<sup>9</sup> The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.<sup>11</sup> He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.<sup>12</sup> Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—<sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

*<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

*<sup>15</sup> (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'")<sup>16</sup> Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.<sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.*

*<sup>19</sup> Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was.<sup>20</sup> He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."*

*<sup>21</sup> They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No."<sup>22</sup> Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"*

*<sup>23</sup> John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"<sup>24</sup> Now the Pharisees who had been sent<sup>25</sup> questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"<sup>26</sup> "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know.<sup>27</sup> He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."<sup>28</sup> This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

*<sup>29</sup> The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"<sup>30</sup> This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'<sup>31</sup> I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."*

*<sup>32</sup> Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.<sup>33</sup> And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'<sup>34</sup> I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One.*

John 1:1-34 (NIV)

During our Advent series, “The Call of Christmas,” this year we looked at several of the people who answered that first “Call of Christmas” – Zechariah and by extension his wife, Elizabeth; Mary and Joseph; and then last week we looked at the shepherds. One person who was instrumental to the first “Call of Christmas” that we didn’t look at was John the Baptist, the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

How special was John the Baptist? Well, when Jesus was an adult he would tell us that John the Baptist was the greatest ever to be born of a human man and woman. That’s pretty special. He was better than all the prophets of the Old Testament. Why is that? Because he was more than a prophet. John the Baptist was the one whom God called to prepare the way for the coming Messiah. John the Baptist was called by God to fulfill God’s purpose for his life even before he was born. The angel Gabriel says to Zechariah in the temple this about his long awaited son, “And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:14-16). As Christians we are called to “be filled with the Holy Spirit.” It is an ongoing experience during our life here on earth. We humans never get fully filled with the Holy Spirit during our time here on earth. John the Baptist was filled with it even before his birth because God had a special plan for him.

John the Baptist, the greatest born of a human mother and human father was called by God to prepare and point the way to the one who is better – the only one who can save us from our human predicament. Zechariah’s song after John was born:

*You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

Luke 1:76-79

What John the Baptist stood for, his message, was just as important as who he was. John the Baptist stood for repentance. The word repentance means to turn. Repentance is the turning from ourselves for salvation and turning to the only one who can truly save us. John the Baptist’s “Call of Christmas” was to prepare the way and to point to the only one who could do that. In God appearing as the baby in the manger, on that first Christmas morning some 2,000 years ago, the dawn from on high had broken upon us. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” The adult John the Baptist points out the adult Jesus in our passage this morning, “look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

John the disciple and gospel writer, not to be confused with John the Baptist, writes in his first letter, “you know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5). The reason why the Son of God appeared – the reason that the Word of God became flesh – was to take away sin! That is the central reason of the incarnation – God among us, to take away our sins!

Why did he have to have no sin? Because the lambs that were offered in sacrifice to take away sins in the Old Testament had to be spotless, without blemish. Yes, God is a merciful God, but he is also a holy God. In extending his mercy to all creation God will not sacrifice His holiness.

All serious believers knew that the blood of animals could not really take away sin, at least in any permanent way. The whole system was pointing forward to something better, pointing to someday a final sacrifice for sin. And it began with the baby born in the manger. Actually all this was alluded to, prophesied, way back in the Old Testament, in Genesis 22:8, when Abraham was called to sacrifice his own son Isaac. Abraham's words to Isaac as they're going to the place to offer the sacrifice, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." Little did Abraham know that it would come thousands of years later.

So what did John mean when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world?" Actually that statement was pretty shocking for the Jewish people in a couple of ways. One, it meant that the Messiah, the God-man who came to earth would have to die. And not just die, but die like a lamb does – be slaughtered. That was not the Messiah the Jewish people were expecting.

And the second way is even more shocking. His death would take away the sin of the entire world. It would be for everyone which created two other big problems for the Jewish people. One, they did not feel that they needed to be saved from their sins, and two, they thought that the Messiah was going to be for them, not for everyone.

He was called the "Lamb of God" because he would die. That is why God sent him! That is why he came! And, he was God's lamb for the world, not just a Jewish lamb for Israel.

He will die for Jews, but not just for Jews. He will die for people scattered all over the world. He will die for anyone who repents – who acknowledges his or her own sinfulness and agrees to turn away from any other way of salvation – and believes in Jesus, the Messiah, born as the baby in the manger. But not just the baby in the manger.

Also, the one who lived a perfect, sinless life here on earth, was crucified, slaughtered, died and was buried, and rose again to offer salvation to all who repent and believe.

You see, while we often do it, we cannot separate the Christmas story from the Easter story. It's all one big story which God set into motion before he even created the world. The baby born in the manger, the Christ child, means nothing without the lamb's death on the cross and Jesus' death on the cross means nothing without it being God himself in the form of man, the Son of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

So today, we celebrate Christmas, the birth of God, the Word of God coming to dwell among us, knowing that God's ultimate plan of salvation has come upon us. We know that he has brought it to completion. "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And not only does he take away the sin of the world, he takes away your sin and my sin. God gave it all for us with the hope that we will give it all to Him in return.

**Response Song** – "Christmas Offering"

### **Communion Meditation**

This morning we celebrate communion, which is the ultimate sign of what God has done for us in the Gift of Christmas, the Lamb of God who takes away our sins.

That same baby who was born in the manger in the little town of Bethlehem, would go on to live a perfect, sinless life, and some thirty years later, on the evening that God was going to bring His plan of redemption to completion, Jesus stood before his closest disciples, the ones who represent the ones he came to save, he took bread and he broke it, and said this is my body, my body which will be broken, but not just broken, but slain, slaughtered. Afterwards he took the cup and said that what is in this cup represents my blood, my blood which will be poured out for the sin of the entire world – for all who repent and believe.

And the truly amazing thing is that he did this willingly and voluntarily for you and for me and for everyone else. “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”