

Sermon Notes – January 18, 2026
The Holy Gospel of St. John 1: 29-42
Peace Lutheran Church
” The Lamb of God”

The New Testament gospel of John does not get its own lectionary year. It is used often during Christmas and Easter, and there will be pockets of it during Lent this year and summer next year. But the gospel for today, the second Sunday of Epiphany, is always from the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry in the fourth Gospel. This year, the Baptizer John describes the baptism of Jesus, and in doing so he acclaims Christ as the “Lamb of God” (John 1: 29, 36). While this title may refer to many possible stories (the ram substituted for Isaac at Moriah, the Yom Kippur scapegoat, or the beloved pet in Nathan's parable condemning David), it most likely foreshadows Jesus' identification as the Passover Lamb. This is an important connection for John, explaining his dating of the crucifixion (while the lambs were being sacrificed at the temple) and his emphasis that Jesus' legs were not broken (the Passover lamb needed to be without fault or blemish). It is the blood of Jesus, therefore, that protects us from the curse of death. The Baptizer - like the beloved disciple - and Mary elsewhere in the gospel, stands for the church or the believer-we don't know everything, but we know enough to witness to Jesus. Of course, the classic image is that of the Baptizer portrayed in the Isenheim altarpiece (masterpiece painting on display at the Unterlinden Museum at Colmar, Alsace, France), refusing to be the center of attention but always pointing to the Christ crucified.

This humility of the witness is foreshadowed in the first reading, in which the prophet Isaiah recognizes that he has fallen short of his own witness. God does not condemn the prophet, but in fact radically expands his mission. And the expansion is into a seasonal theme of Epiphany - the proclamation of the Good News beyond the barriers of race, nation, and familiarity, to the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

The second reading begins the season's almost continuous reading from Paul's Corinthian correspondence. In the first verses, Paul is flattering his hearers, perhaps softening them so they will hear the criticism to come. Verse 3, however, is easily missed, yet it is remarkable. Paul slightly alters the normal, formulaic salutation pattern of letters of the time, to fill it with sincere, theological meaning. It is as if we were to reword "Dear Madam or Sir" to make it clear that the one addressed is both beloved by God and bought at an expensive price (using the two actual meanings of the word *dear*). And so, we hear God's absolute endearment of us.