

Reflection: Jesus is the Lamb of God. John 1: 29 – 34 Linda E Hunter

What's in a name?

In the Bible and other texts, Jesus is known by a variety of names and titles, from the Light of the World, to Saviour, King or Kings and many more., I am sure you can recall some yourself. Some titles, such as the Saviour, express Christ's role within the theological framework of Christianity, while others are primarily metaphorical.

Here in our reading this morning John the Baptist gives Jesus a new title that does not appear elsewhere in the Gospels – he alludes to Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God, the one who will be slain 'and points him out to his own followers, saying '*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*'.

Centuries earlier, Isaiah vividly described how Jesus would be "*like a lamb that is led to slaughter*". When Isaiah likened him to a lamb being led to slaughter, he painted a picture that was all too familiar to his audience. Throughout scripture, despite being portrayed as innocent, vulnerable creatures, lambs had been routinely offered up to God as a sacrifice. Just as Jesus would be when he was crucified, for the forgiveness of our sins.

In Exodus, God tells Moses to instruct each home of the Israelites to "take a lamb for each family, so, following instructions, they select an unblemished lamb, slaughter it at twilight, then sprinkle it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses, so that those houses, would be passed over when the judgement of the Lord passed through Egypt. They did as they were told and, when, the angel of death crept through the streets of the city, the cries of their Egyptian neighbours mourning the loss of their first-born children was heard throughout the land. Then the Israelites roasted the lamb's flesh, eating it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. After being freed from Egypt, the Israelites continued to commemorate the feast of the Passover each year, to be reminded of their liberation. This is what became known as the Passover lamb, the "paschal lamb," the lamb of sacrifice.

The book of Leviticus contains additional instructions about how the regular sacrificing of an unblemished lamb to atone for sin was a part of Israel's worship. Lambs were also used daily for burnt offerings. Burnt offerings were the most common offering practiced within the Mosaic Law. They acted as a means of atonement, constantly reminding the people of their need for God's mercy and his willingness to give it to them.

So, knowing this prophecy the Jews would have been familiar with the terminology when John the Baptist's referred to Jesus as the "Lamb of God," it would not have been a surprise to them.

After his death and resurrection, Jesus is worshipped as the Lamb who was slain. Throughout the book of Revelation, he is consistently referred to as the Lamb, in chapter 5 we recall the words, *'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!...To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!'*

For us as Christians, we make the connection between Jesus and the Paschal Lamb: his blood was shed as an atonement for sin –we have the assurance of eternal life through faith in him.

Just before we receive communion we say together the words of the Agnus Dei

O' Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world have mercy upon us,
O' Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world have mercy upon us,
O' Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world grant us peace.

We say these words to remind us that Jesus is indeed the bread of life and the cup of salvation, that as we eat and drink in remembrance of him we will indeed receive forgiveness. For each of us, as we see God's presence in our daily lives, whatever we are doing, whoever we are with and wherever we are, we are assured that through our faith in him, salvation is ours.

When I was thinking about what to write I was reminded about that great hymn Lord enthroned in heavenly splendour and in particular the verse which goes like this:

Paschal Lamb, thine offering, finished
once for all when Tthou wast slain,
in its fullness undiminished
shall for evermore remain,
Alleluia, alleluia!
cleansing souls from every stain.

John the Baptist proclaimed to his disciples, "Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" the Paschal Lamb, the sacrificial Lamb. Every time we gather to receive Holy Communion, the sacrament of God's forgiveness, we are reminded that *'Jesus is the Lamb of God.'*