

The Lamb of God: for the NT Jews & for Us Today

The Christmas season is over.
No more stories about babies.
No more songs about childish **innocence**.
Gone are the stable, the manger and the stars.
Last week's Baptism of three small babies is in our past.

What effect did the season have on you or me?
Certainly, there was the joy of the season.
Lots of celebrating – with food, parties, family.

Sure there is **always** the impact of a baby.
Baby Jesus -- a human baby ... or even a new puppy ... or a baby kitten.

Probably it's because we cherish new, fresh life.
It brings forth hope for the future.
It brings forth smiles of joy.
There's an **innocence** and that **innocence** brings out our protective instincts.

We continue that sense of **innocence** in today's Gospel.
We have those special words from John the Baptist: "Behold the **Lamb of God**."

A lamb.

A baby sheep.

An **innocent** creature.

"The **Lamb of God**."

We repeat these words of John the Baptist at each liturgy.

In the Gloria we sing:

"Lord God, **Lamb of God**, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us."

After the Lord's Prayer and the exchange of a sign of peace we pray three times:

"**Lamb of God**, you take away the sins of the world.

Have mercy on us; grant us peace"

Then, immediately before Communion the priest, holding up the host, reminds us once again:

“This is the ***Lamb of God*** who takes away the sin of the world.
Happy are those who are called to his supper.”

“The *Lamb of God*” – those words are so familiar to us.

But, what impact did they have on the Jewish people who heard John the Baptist?

What came to their minds when they heard “*Lamb of God*”? – what visions – what meaning?

The Scriptures of the Jewish people made many references to lambs.

Generally the writings told of sacrifices offered to the Lord.

When the people heard John the Baptist maybe they were reminded of the story in Genesis where young Isaac asks his dad, Abraham: “Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the holocaust.” (Gen. 22:7-8)

Or, perhaps, they recalled the Law of Moses in the Book of Leviticus where they were instructed how to offer an **innocent** lamb for their sins. (Lv 4:32-35)

On hearing John the Baptist they also may have been reminded of what the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah had said: “... like a trusting lamb led to the slaughter...”?

(Is 53:7 and Je 11:19)

Or maybe they recalled the Passover lamb from the Book of Exodus? (Ex 12:1-14)

Looking at the whole line from today’s Gospel helps us a bit:

“Behold, the *Lamb of God*, who takes away the sin of the world.”

Ah ... a lamb that saves us by taking away our sins.

The lamb slain – the blood on the doorposts – the Jewish people saved from Egyptians.

Ah ... the lambs offered each day in the Temple for the sins of the people.

Yes, I think people understood John the Baptist’s words.

It had an impact on them.

As the Gospel tells us, they started to follow Jesus as they had followed the Baptist.

For the next three years Jesus prayed, taught, worked miracles and finally

died for the people. Jesus **lived and died** as their “*Lamb of God.*”

How about today?

Our culture says: “free the **innocent** – punish the guilty.”

Jesus would be counter cultural – he is **innocent** but lived and died for others.

Where would we find current examples of the *Lamb of God* in today’s society?

Who are the people willing to give it all for others?

Perhaps we may think of Rev. Martin Luther King who preached a counter-cultural message of non-violence and was assassinated for his work.

Perhaps it is a Mother Theresa who gave her long life for others by caring for the people dying on the streets of Calcutta – treating them as precious human beings – a counter-cultural message.

Perhaps it is a younger woman like Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, working for the common good of the people in Arizona, only to be shot by some deranged young man.

Perhaps it is a military service man killed by a road-side bomb in Afghanistan.

Perhaps it is a southern Wayne County policeman killed while trying to break up a domestic squabble.

Perhaps it is a parent, a grandparent, a sister or a brother, or a friend who is giving give up their time for others.

Today we hear the Baptist’s words anew.

Today we are reminded how critical those words are to our faith life – how we repeat them over and over at each Mass.

So, I ask:

For whom would we die?

For whom would we give up our life?

For what cause would we give every ounce of our energy?

For what cause would we die?

To help our soul-searching we can go to today's Psalm for guidance.
The Psalmist prays to the Lord saying:

*“Sacrifice or offering you wished not,
But ears open to obedience you gave me.
Here I am Lord;
I come to do your will.”*

PAGE * MERGEFORMAT 3

PAGE * MERGEFORMAT 3