

## John 1:29-42a Epiphany 2A

John 1:29: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." This is the Word of the Lord. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Epiphany. It's from the Greek word that means "to shine upon." In English, "epiphany" can mean "a sudden intuitive perception or insight" about something, the insight brought about by some "simple, homely or commonplace experience." Someone studies a problem for a long time, knowing that they're missing something obvious, and suddenly the light bulb comes on. They've had an epiphany.

Of course, "epiphany" in English can also mean "an appearance or manifestation, usually of a deity." When God makes Himself known so that you can point and say, "There He is," it's a divine epiphany.

We've just begun the season of Epiphany in the Church: it's the season between Christmas and Lent, between hearing of Jesus' birth and impending death. This season is all about Jesus making Himself known, revealing who He is. You can expect to hear readings on Sunday about how Jesus makes Himself known as the Messiah by teaching, by fulfilling prophecy and by performing miracles. You can also expect to hear some texts about how Jesus makes Himself known today. In fact, our text from John 1 is one of these, teaching us much about evangelism.

### The Lamb of God at the Jordan

We're back to the Jordan River and John the Baptist in today's Gospel lesson, just after Jesus' baptism. The people are pestering John the Baptist: they know he's somebody special—in fact, they're wondering if he might be the Messiah. He denies this, of course, so just before our lesson they demand "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" (John 1:22) Listen carefully to John's response: "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." (John 1:26-27)

Say what? He says, "Among you stands One you do not know." When John is preaching to the crowd that day, Jesus is there. The Christ, the Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah is standing among them in the crowd—and they have no idea who He is. He doesn't stand out. He's not wearing a crown or fine robes, nor is He shining with glory. He has no guards or entourage. He's just standing among them, looking just like one of them. This, by the way, is a fulfillment of prophecy: when Isaiah prophesied of Jesus, he said "He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him." (Isaiah 53:2) He looks just like one of them. The crowd knows He's there among them somewhere, but who is He? And how will they find out?

That's where our Gospel lesson begins: "The next day, [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' That's how they know who the Messiah is: John tells them. He speaks the Word of God and says, "There He is! There's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

That's how Jesus is first made known, outed as the Savior. John points to the Man who looks like everybody else around Him. And then John calls Him a lamb. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John's audience may not be convinced—they may be looking for a more impressive-looking savior, and maybe one who's called the lion or the eagle or something more inspiring and fearsome than a "lamb." Maybe that's why John goes on the way he does. He says, "This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because He was before me.' I myself did not know Him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that He might be revealed to Israel."

This is the One, people: even if your eyes say otherwise, go with the Word of God that John speaks. Likewise, John bears witness and recalls Jesus' baptism. He says, "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Him. I myself did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, He on whom you see the spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." Why is this important? Prophecy! Isaiah 40:1 declares, "I have put My Spirit upon Him."

John is saying, "The Scriptures point to Jesus, just as sure as I do, and with far more authority." That's how Jesus is made known, made manifest by John the Baptist at the Jordan. John points to his ordinary-looking cousin and speaks the Word, "That's Him;" or better, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Note that Jesus doesn't add anything to this in our text: He doesn't suddenly glow with glory, turn some stones into bread, make some angels fly in formation or part the Jordan River.

Instead, He lets the Word do the work. From the very first, Jesus demonstrates that first and foremost people will come to know Him because they hear of Him and believe the Word that they hear. Case in point: it's the same thing the next day. "The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as He walked by and said, „Behold, the Lamb of God!“ What's saying that going to accomplish? Faith! Faith comes by hearing. "The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus."

Andrew heard and believed that Jesus was the Savior: He didn't look like a king or a lamb, but Andrew believed the Word. He sought out his brother, Peter—and what did he do? He told him. He said, "We have found the Messiah." Then he brought Peter to Jesus. This is how Jesus makes Himself known—by His Word. He'll do miracles to prove He's the Messiah, but miracles don't give faith. They can wow people, but they don't cause them to believe. The Word does: it gives faith to believe in Jesus—even when He looks least like the Savior and the Son of God. He looks so little like the Messiah in our Gospel lesson that John has to point Him out repeatedly.

He didn't look like the Messiah when He was born, but shepherds heard the Word and went to worship Him. He won't look like the Messiah at all when He's dying, nailed to a cross. But that's where He's most clearly the Lamb of God, doing what lambs do: He's being the Sacrifice, the perfect Sacrifice. He is taking away the sin of the world. II. Behold the Lamb of God: Worship and Evangelism Behold the Lamb of God: Jesus Christ makes Himself and His salvation known by the Word. What's more, He gives forgiveness and faith and salvation in His Word. It's that simple and that miraculous.

God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take up your bed and walk," and the paralytic took up His bed and walked. Jesus makes Himself and His salvation known by the Word. We cannot say this enough when it comes to evangelism—to making Jesus manifest to those around us. Evangelism is, literally, the speaking of the Evangel—the Gospel, because that is how Jesus makes Himself known. When a sermon is preached or the liturgy is sung here, that's evangelism. When you talk with a friend about Jesus over a cup of coffee, that's evangelism.

When a six-year-old tells me that Jesus died for me, that's evangelism. It all goes back to His Word. Since the devil hates the Word of God—and Christ and evangelism, he will do anything he can to thwart the speaking of God's Word. He therefore tempts us to make evangelism complicated, and to doubt that the Word does the work of making Jesus known.

A big trend today in evangelism and missions is a sad one: it's the idea that you are not to speak the Gospel, but you are to be the Gospel. On its face, this is absurd: you cannot be the Gospel because you cannot live a sinless life and then die for the sins of all the world. You cannot be the Gospel unless you are talking about a different gospel. Sadly, that's what happens here: "being the Gospel" is all about loving other people. It's about acts of kindness and caring. It's about living a Christian lifestyle. It's the latest version of "They'll know we are Christians by our love"—not by our teaching.

It's not much about repentance and forgiveness of sins, which fades into the background. Many regard talk about sin and the cross to be too offensive—obstacles to evangelism. Within those who teach this, some have even said that the idea of Jesus' death on the cross is "cosmic child abuse," not the Sacrifice for your sin.

Ergo, don't speak that Gospel, but be a gospel instead. Should you and I be loving, kind and caring? Of course. But all of our love, kindness and caring are filthy rags that save no one. Christ is the One who saves, and He makes Himself known in His Word. The reason this trend continues in Christianity is because it's what's taught in some of the huge churches in America and elsewhere, and what's made them big. Lots of people, lots of programs, lots of income.

It's here that the devil tempts us to covet glory and believe that bigger must be more pleasing to God. There is a huge church in Texas that meets in an old sports arena and has thousands attending each week—and an even larger tv audience. Many people say you should be "more like them." In that specific case, the truth is this: the pastor of that congregation denies sin and the need for forgiveness, preaching only on the goodness of God and positive thinking.

The truth is also this: one of our Sunday school teachers here with a class of three does more evangelism on a Sunday morning than that pastor will accomplish in a lifetime—why? Because evangelism is speaking the Gospel. That means you are well-equipped for evangelism. You have what it takes because you have the Word. Look out, then: if the devil can't change the Gospel, he likes silence. He wants you to think that you're simply not the one to speak the Gospel to others—especially to the others whom you know outside of church, who would never step foot in here without an invitation. If you buy into this, repent.

You've heard the Word, so you know what to say. If you don't, then that's an opportunity for more repentance— and some study.

Look at our Gospel lesson—look how Andrew and Peter become believers! An abrasive guy who eats locusts and wears unfashionable clothing says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." It looks and sounds absurdly ineffective by human standards, but the message is the Word of God. Andrew hears and believes. He tells Peter, and Peter believes. It's all about the Word, not the speaker. It's the Word, not you. So if you say that you are not one who can share God's Word with others when the opportunity arises, you must examine yourself with this question:

Do you doubt the power of God's Word so much that you believe your speaking would keep it from doing what God sends it to do? Do you really think your awkwardness is that much more powerful than God's Word? Oh, rejoice: God puts His Word into your ears to give you faith. It moves from there to your tongue so that you can say it to others. Christ makes Himself manifest to them when you speak His Word. If you want a big dose of evangelism, look at our worship service this morning in light of the truth that Jesus makes Himself manifest in His Word. We're told by the world that our liturgy isn't particularly user- or visitor-friendly, unlike other forms of service. But do you know what visitors often say when I talk to them?

They're impressed by how our service stays focused on the Word of God. You hear it. You pray it. You speak and sing it into each others' ears. It is by that Word that Jesus makes Himself known. It's by that Word that He comes with forgiveness, faith and salvation. Our service is at least as user-friendly as a locust-eating John the Baptist pointing out Jesus. In fact, we use the same words, don't we? Early on in the service, we sing "O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, that takest away the sin of the world." Then we hear the lessons and the sermon, where Jesus makes Himself known in the Word. Later we sing, "O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us."

There's a lot of Gospel in those words: when John spoke them Andrew, believed in Jesus. We sing them for the Gospel, and also for another reason: Jesus is present here in His Word and Supper. The Lamb of God, who sacrificed Himself on the cross for the sin of the world, is present in His means of grace to give that forgiveness to you.

He is just as present here as He was by the Jordan. John pointed to Him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God!" By your singing, you point to the Word and the Supper and say, "Look! The Lamb of God!" And why is He here? To take away your sins. Jesus makes Himself manifest by means of His Word. He always has, always will. Evangelism then begins here, as we speak and sing His Word to make Him known to each other—to strengthen one another in faith. Then it goes from here—not with bells and whistles and glamour and fancy-canned programs, but with you, the people of God, speaking His Word to others as the opportunity arises.

It's the message, not the messenger, that saves: for that Word reveals the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And if He has taken away your sin, then you are forgiven for all of your sins. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen

