

WHO IS THIS MAN?

A Christological Study in Four Parts

Class 3 — Lamb of God

The Sacrifice That Takes Away the Sin of the World

Week Three — January 10, 2027

PRIMARY TEXTS

Old Testament: Genesis 22:1–14; Exodus 12:1–13, 21–28, 46; Leviticus 16:6–22; Isaiah 53:4–12

New Testament: John 1:29–36; 19:14, 31–37; Acts 8:26–35; 1 Corinthians 5:7–8; 1 Peter 1:18–21; Hebrews 9:11–14; 10:1–14; Revelation 5:1–14

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Opening Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world: we give You thanks that the blood of bulls and goats, which could never take away sin, has been fulfilled in Your one sacrifice upon the cross. Open our eyes to see in the ancient rituals the shadow of Your body, and in Your broken body the substance of our salvation. Teach us to bring nothing to this altar but empty hands. Keep us in the confession we sing at every distribution, that You are the Lamb and that the taking away is finished; who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever. Amen.

I. Opening and Framing

The Sentence We Sing Without Hearing It

Most people in this room have sung the Agnus Dei several hundred times. It is the shortest and the oldest of the things we say at the distribution, and it is a direct quotation of one sentence spoken by a man standing in a river. What John the Baptist said when he pointed at Jesus was not a new idea. Every word of it came loaded from the Old Testament: a father on a mountain answering his son's question, a household in Egypt painting a doorframe in the dark, a high priest with his hands on the head of a goat, and a prophet describing someone led away without a word. The Baptist gathered all of it and attached it to a particular man walking toward him on a particular afternoon. This session takes that sentence apart and puts it back together, so that the words we sing at the rail carry the weight they were built to carry.

Discussion Question

What exactly did John the Baptist mean by “the Lamb of God,” and what does it mean that this Lamb walked to the altar on His own feet?

1. Say what you have understood the phrase “Lamb of God” to mean when you have sung or heard it. Does it function for you chiefly as a statement about Jesus' gentleness, about His innocence, or about His death, and what in your background pushed you toward that reading?

The Son of David gave us the King and the Son of Man the scope of His reign. This session supplies the mechanism: how the King actually saves, and why the throne turns out to be an altar.

Key Vocabulary

Seh (שֶׁה): a lamb or kid from the flock. The word Isaac uses when he asks where the lamb is, and the word Isaiah uses of the Servant led to the slaughter.

Pesach (פֶּסַח): “Passover.” The related verb occurs four times in the Old Testament, always with God as its subject, and carries the sense of hovering over a house to defend it.

Kapporet (כַּפֹּרֶת): the lid of the ark where the blood was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement, translated in the Greek Old Testament as hilastērion, the word Paul applies to Christ in Romans 3:25.

'Asham (אָשָׁם): “guilt offering.” The one Levitical sacrifice requiring a ram, with no substitution of species allowed, and the word Isaiah uses for what the Servant makes of His life.

Amnos (ἀμνός): the ordinary Greek word for a sacrificial lamb, used by John the Baptist and by Peter of Christ; Revelation prefers a different word, arnion, for the slain Lamb on the throne.

II. The Original Gift — God Provides the Lamb: Genesis 22:1–14

The first time anyone asks where the lamb is, the answer is that God will see to it Himself.

Read Genesis 22:1–14 aloud.

Genesis 22:7–8 (ESV)

“And Isaac said to his father Abraham, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ He said, ‘Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’ Abraham said, ‘God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.’ So they went both of them together.”

Genesis 22:13–14 (ESV)

“And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, ‘The LORD will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.’”

Key Hebrew Terms:

Yachid (יחיד): “only, unique, beloved.” The Septuagint renders it agapētos, “beloved,” which is the word the Father uses of Jesus at the Baptism and the Transfiguration.

Ra’ah (ראה): “to see,” and in a fuller sense “to see to, to select, to provide.” The verb behind Abraham’s answer in verse 8 and behind the name he gives the place in verse 14.

Seh (שׁה): a lamb or kid from the flock, the word Isaac uses in his question and Abraham uses in his answer.

’Ayil (איל): “ram,” a full-grown male sheep. This, and not a seh, is the animal God actually provides.

The account is the first place in Scripture where a father, a son, a mountain, and a substitute appear together. Isaac carries the wood up the slope, which the early Church noticed immediately. The question he asks on the way is the question this whole session exists to answer, and the answer Abraham gives is larger than Abraham knew.

2. God’s command piles up three descriptions before He names the mountain: your son, your only son, whom you love. The Greek translation renders the middle term with the word for beloved, which is the word the Father speaks over Jesus at the Jordan and on the mountain of transfiguration. What does the escalation of the description accomplish in the command, and what does it mean that the same vocabulary comes back at the beginning and the near-end of Jesus’ ministry?

3. Isaac asks where the lamb is, and Abraham answers that God will provide for Himself the lamb. The immediate fulfillment is the ram caught in the thicket. Christian readers from the earliest centuries have heard a second sense in the sentence: that God would provide Himself as the lamb. How does the difference between God providing a lamb and God providing Himself capture the whole distance from Moriah to Calvary, and how far should a reader press a sentence like this?

4. Isaac asks for a lamb, Abraham promises a lamb, and God supplies a ram. The distinction is not incidental. In the law of Moses the ram is the head of the flock and the required animal for the guilt offering, the one sacrifice for which no substitution of species was permitted, and it is also the animal used to ordain the priests. What does it say about this substitute that God provided the priestly animal rather than the one that was requested?

III. The Blood That Protects — Passover: Exodus 12:1–13, 21–28

A lamb dies, a household is marked, and the God who strikes Egypt stands over the door.

Read Exodus 12:1–13 and 21–28 aloud.

Exodus 12:5–7 (ESV)

“Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it.”

Exodus 12:13 (ESV)

“The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.”

Key Hebrew Terms:

Pesach (פסח): “Passover,” with its verb pasach. The verb occurs only four times in the Hebrew Bible, and Yahweh Himself is the subject of every one of them.

Tamim (טָמִים): “whole, complete, without defect.” The ritual requirement laid on the animal, and the theological requirement laid on the sacrifice.

Dam (דָּם): “blood.” Leviticus 17:11 explains its function: the life of the flesh is in the blood, and God has given it on the altar to make atonement.

Historical Context

The Passover lamb was selected on the tenth of the month and kept in the household four days before it was killed at twilight on the fourteenth, so that the family lived with the animal before it died for them. By the first century the killing had been centralized at the temple, where the lambs were slaughtered in the afternoon in shifts while the Levites sang the Hallel. Josephus reports numbers that suggest tens of thousands of animals in a single afternoon. The blood was dashed against the base of the altar, and the carcass was carried home for the meal, which had to be eaten inside the city walls that night.

The Passover is the founding act of Israel's salvation, and every later deliverance is measured against it. Notice what does the work in the account. The lamb is not a payment offered to persuade God, since God is the one who commanded it. The blood is not a magical substance; it is a sign, and the households that were spared were no more innocent than the households that were not.

5. The verb behind the noun Passover occurs four times in the Old Testament, and in every case God Himself is the subject. Isaiah uses it of the LORD defending Jerusalem like birds hovering over a nest, which suggests that the sense is not so much stepping over a house as standing over it to protect it. If the picture is God hovering above the marked door rather than avoiding it, what changes about how we read the blood on the doorposts?

6. The animal must be without blemish, and the requirement is inspected rather than assumed. Centuries later Pilate says three times that he finds no guilt in Jesus, Herod sends Him back without a charge, and the centurion at the cross declares Him innocent. How do the formal declarations of innocence at the trial function in the Gospel accounts, and why does the sacrifice have to be certified rather than merely willing?

7. God says the blood shall be a sign for you, and then says that when He sees the blood He will pass over. The sign is on the outside of the house, where the family inside cannot see it. What does it mean that the mark is placed where God looks rather than where the household looks, and what does that say about where a Christian's assurance is properly located?

8. The household is commanded to do two things with the lamb: put the blood on the doorframe and eat the flesh that night, roasted, with unleavened bread, dressed for a journey. The blood turns away death and the flesh sustains the body for the road. How does that twofold use of one animal illuminate what is given at the Lord's Supper?

IV. The Prophetic Word — The Day of Atonement and the Suffering Lamb

Israel needed two goats to picture what one man would do, and Isaiah names the offering.

Read Leviticus 16:6–10 and 20–22, and Isaiah 53:4–12 aloud.

Leviticus 16:21–22 (ESV)

“And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.”

Isaiah 53:6–7 (ESV)

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”

Isaiah 53:10–11 (ESV, abridged)

“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days... by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.”

Key Hebrew Terms:

Kapporet (כַּפֶּרֶת): the lid of the ark between the cherubim, where the blood was sprinkled. The Septuagint renders it hilastērion, which is the word Paul applies to Christ in Romans 3:25.

Kipper (כִּפֶּה): “to atone.” The verb occurs sixteen times in Leviticus 16 alone, and its root sense is debated between covering, wiping clean, and paying a ransom.

‘Aza’zel (עֲזַזְאֵל): the term attached to the second goat. It has been read as a place, as a description meaning the goat that departs, and as the name of a demon of the wilderness.

‘Asham (אָשָׁם): “guilt offering, reparation offering.” The Levitical sacrifice that required a ram, and the word Isaiah uses for what the Servant makes of His own life.

Nasa’ (נָשָׂא): “to lift, bear, carry away.” Used of the goat bearing the iniquities into the wilderness and of the Servant bearing the sin of many.

Two rituals stand behind the Baptist’s sentence, and both are needed. The Day of Atonement deals with sin comprehensively: blood taken into the presence of God, and guilt carried out of the camp. Isaiah then takes the vocabulary of the sacrificial system and applies it to a person who goes willingly and does not speak.

9. A. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT. The blood was sprinkled on the lid of the ark, the one place in Israel where God had promised to meet His people, and directly above the tablets of the law they had broken. The Greek Old Testament calls that lid the hilastērion, and Paul uses the same word of Christ, whom God put forward publicly. What is being claimed by naming a person as the place of atonement, and why does it matter that the blood went onto the covering over the broken commandments?

10. A. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT. The verb for atonement is used sixteen times in this one chapter, and its root sense is disputed: to cover, to wipe clean, or to pay a ransom. Each carries a different picture of what happens to sin. Which of the three does the ritual of the two goats actually enact, and does the ambiguity of the word protect us from oversimplifying what the cross accomplished?

11. A. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT. One goat is killed and its blood carried inside the veil; the other is kept alive, has the sins of the nation confessed over its head, and is driven into the wilderness. Two animals are required to picture one work. What does each goat accomplish that the other cannot, and where in the Passion do you see each of the two functions?

12. A. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT. The second goat is sent away to a place from which it will not return, into a land cut off. Whatever the disputed term behind it means, the ritual is a picture of removal rather than of concealment. John the Baptist says the Lamb takes away the sin of the world, and the verb he uses can mean both to bear a burden and to carry it off. Why is a sin that is covered still a problem, and what does removal add?

13. A. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT. The high priest entered the Most Holy Place once a year, and never without blood, and then came out and did it again the next year. The Letter to the Hebrews reads the repetition as evidence: a sacrifice that has to be repeated has not finished anything. What does the annual return of the Day of Atonement confess about itself, and what does a single entry, made once, claim?

14. B. THE SUFFERING LAMB. Isaiah says the Servant was oppressed and afflicted and did not open His mouth, and then twice compares Him to an animal: a lamb led to slaughter and a ewe silent before her shearers. Before Pilate and before Herod, Jesus gives no answer, and the governor marvels. What is the difference between a silence that is defeat and a silence that is consent, and how do we know which one this is?

15. B. THE SUFFERING LAMB. Isaiah calls the Servant's life an 'asham, a guilt offering, which is the one Levitical sacrifice that required a ram and permitted no substitute animal. The ram is the animal God supplied on Moriah. What does Isaiah accomplish by naming the sacrifice this precisely, and how does the vocabulary tie the Servant back to the mountain where Abraham lifted the knife?

16. B. THE SUFFERING LAMB. Five statements of substitution stand in three verses: He has borne our griefs, carried our sorrows, was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. The pronouns move back and forth between our and Him. Is the cross an example of sacrificial love that we are meant to imitate, or an actual transfer of guilt from the guilty to the innocent, and what hangs on the answer?

17. B. THE SUFFERING LAMB. Isaiah says the righteous one will make many to be accounted righteous, and the verb is causative: He does something to them rather than merely showing them something. A moral example inspires people to become righteous; this makes them righteous. What is the difference, and which one of the two can help a person who has already failed?

18. B. THE SUFFERING LAMB. An Ethiopian official reading this chapter in a chariot asks Philip the only question that matters: about whom does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else? Philip begins with that Scripture and tells him the good news about Jesus, and the man asks to be baptized before the conversation is over. Why does this particular passage lead so directly to a font?

V. History Vindicates the Type — The Hour and the Unbroken Bones

The lambs were dying in the temple while He was dying outside the wall, and a Roman detail enforced a Passover regulation without knowing it.

Read John 19:14, 19:31–37, and Exodus 12:46 aloud.

John 19:32–36 (ESV, abridged)

“So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water... For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: ‘Not one of his bones will be broken.’”

John dates the crucifixion with unusual care. He notes that it was the day of Preparation of the Passover and about the sixth hour when Pilate delivered Him up, and that the Jewish leaders would not enter the praetorium so that they might remain able to eat the Passover. He then reports the one detail that a Roman execution squad had no reason to observe and every reason to ignore.

19. Crucifixion was ordinarily ended by breaking the legs, which brought suffocation on quickly, and the soldiers do exactly that to the two men on either side. They come to the middle cross, find Him dead already, and skip the procedure. John says this happened so that the Scripture

might be fulfilled: not one of His bones will be broken, which is the regulation governing the Passover lamb. What does it mean that the rule was kept by men who had never read it?

20. John places the crucifixion on the day of Preparation and notes the hour, so that Jesus is dying while the Passover lambs are being killed. The chronology has been debated for centuries against the accounts of the Last Supper as a Passover meal, and the proposed solutions are several. Setting the debate aside, what is John telling his reader by insisting on the timing, and how does an evangelist preach a doctrine by reporting a clock?

VI. The Fulfillment — Behold, the Lamb of God

The Baptist points at a man walking toward him and gathers every thread of the Old Testament into one sentence.

Read John 1:29–36; 1 Corinthians 5:7–8; 1 Peter 1:18–21; and Revelation 5:1–14 aloud.

John 1:29 (ESV)

“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’”

1 Peter 1:18–19 (ESV)

“...knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”

Revelation 5:5–6 (ESV, abridged)

“And one of the elders said to me, ‘Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.’ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain.”

Key Greek Terms:

Ho amnos tou theou (ὁ ἄμνος τοῦ θεοῦ): “the Lamb of God.” The genitive says both that God supplies the lamb and that the lamb belongs to God.

Ho airōn (ὁ αἰρῶν): “the one who takes away,” a present participle. The verb means both to lift a burden and to carry it off, and John’s sentence uses both senses at once.

Tēn hamartian tou kosmou (τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου): “the sin of the world,” singular. Not a list of offenses but the whole condition of a fallen race.

Arnion (ἀρνίον): the word for lamb used twenty-eight times in Revelation and almost nowhere else in the New Testament, describing the slain Lamb who is worshiped on the throne.

John the Baptist did not invent a new category. He pointed at a man and applied to Him a word already carrying the ram of Moriah, the lamb of the Passover, the goats of the Day of Atonement, the daily offering of the temple, and the silent lamb of Isaiah 53. The apostles then use the same word to explain the Supper, the ransom, and the throne room of heaven.

21. The Baptist says sin rather than sins, in the singular, and he says the world rather than Israel. The verb he uses can mean either to shoulder a burden or to remove it, and John never disambiguates. What is claimed by the singular noun, and what is lost if the sentence is heard as a promise to forgive a list of individual offenses?

22. Commentators divide over which lamb the Baptist meant: the Passover lamb, the daily offering of the temple, the ram of Moriah, the lamb of Isaiah 53, or a conquering lamb from apocalyptic expectation. Given everything the class has studied this hour, is the question of which one a problem to be solved, and what is gained by hearing all of them at once?

23. Paul writes that Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed, and tells the Corinthians to keep the festival. Peter writes that we were ransomed not with silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. Both apostles assume that the Old Testament ritual explains the death of Jesus rather than the other way around. What does it cost a congregation that skips the Old Testament to arrive at Good Friday?

24. John weeps because no one is worthy to open the scroll, and an elder tells him to stop weeping, since the Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered. John turns to look at the Lion and sees a Lamb standing as though slain. He hears one thing and sees another, and both are true. How does the substitution of images redefine what conquest means, and why does the Lamb still bear the marks of slaughter in heaven?

25. The song sung to the Lamb ascribes to Him power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing, which in the Old Testament belongs to God alone, and the ground given is that He was slain and by His blood ransomed people for God. Worship is being given to a killed animal, and the whole company of heaven joins the song. What has the death accomplished that makes this worship right rather than blasphemous?

26. Every sacrifice in this session was chosen, inspected, and killed by somebody else. The ram was caught in a thicket, the Passover lamb was selected by the household, and the goats were assigned by lot. The Lamb of God walked toward the Jordan on His own feet and afterward said that no one takes His life from Him but He lays it down of His own accord. If the sacrifice for

your sin was not extracted from Him but offered, does this study end with a debt still owed, or with a gift already given? Explain the difference.

Synthesis and Closing

Text	Contribution to Session Theme	Key Term
Genesis 22:1–14	God provides the sacrifice rather than receiving one, and the animal He supplies is the priestly ram of the guilt offering.	Ra’ah
Exodus 12:1–13	The blood marks a household for protection, and the flesh feeds it for the journey; God Himself stands over the marked door.	Pesach
Leviticus 16	Sin is both covered by blood carried into God’s presence and carried away out of the camp; two goats are required to picture one work.	Kipper
Isaiah 53:4–12	The lamb is a person who goes willingly, is silent, and makes His life a guilt offering that accounts many righteous.	’Asham
John 19:31–37	The Passover regulation is enforced by a Roman detail that had never read it: not one of His bones is broken.	Tamim
John 1:29	The Baptist gathers every thread into one sentence and applies it to a man walking toward him.	Ho airōn
Revelation 5:1–14	The Lion turns out to be a slain Lamb, and the worship due to God alone is given to Him because He was slain.	Arnion

27. The congregation sings the Agnus Dei at the distribution, which places John 1:29 on our lips at the moment we receive the body and blood. Now that you have traced where the words come from, what will you be saying at the rail this week that you were not saying before?

28. Every thread in this session ends with someone else supplying what was required. Where in your life are you still trying to bring the lamb yourself, and what would it take to come to the altar with empty hands?

Closing Prayer

O Lamb of God, who was slain before the foundation of the world: we praise You that in Your blood we have redemption, in Your wounds we have healing, and in Your death we have life. You were the ram in the thicket, the lamb of the Passover, and the offering carried out of the camp; and You went to it on Your own feet. As You stood in heaven bearing the marks of slaughter, so stand among us now in Your holy Supper, that we who receive Your body and blood may be preserved in the true faith to life everlasting. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Appendix: Liturgical, Lectionary, and Hymnic Connections

Liturgical Connections

The Agnus Dei has been sung during the distribution in the Western church since at least the seventh century, when Pope Sergius I directed that it be sung by clergy and people at the fraction. It is the congregation's direct quotation of John 1:29, placed at the moment of communion so that the body and blood being received are identified with the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Its threefold form mirrors the threefold Kyrie and the threefold Sanctus, and its third petition changes the request from mercy to peace, which is the Passover gift: the destroyer does not enter this house. The German form, "O Christ, Thou Lamb of God," preserves the same text in Luther's Deutsche Messe and is sung in many congregations at the same point.

Lectionary Connections

Genesis 22:1–18 is the traditional Old Testament reading for the First Sunday in Lent in the one-year lectionary and appears in the Easter Vigil in both series, where the account of the substitute on Moriah is read in the darkness before the resurrection is announced. Exodus 12:1–14 is the Old Testament reading for Maundy Thursday. Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is the appointed Old Testament reading for Good Friday. John 1:29–42 is read on the Second Sunday after the Epiphany in Series A, so that the Baptist's sentence opens the season in which the Church watches the ministry begin, and Revelation 5 is read on the Third Sunday of Easter in Series C.

Hymnic Connections

LSB 434: "Lamb of God, Pure and Holy" — Nicolaus Decius, 1522, a German versification of the Agnus Dei and among the earliest hymns of the Reformation.

LSB 438: “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth” — Paul Gerhardt’s meditation on Isaiah 53 and John 1:29 together; stanza five marks the door with the blood of Exodus 12.

LSB 550: “Lamb of God” — a modern hymn built on the Baptist’s sentence, suitable for closing this session.

LSB 547: “The Lamb” — Gerald Coleman’s hymn on the willing Lamb, whose refrain answers the last question of this study.

LSB 198: “O Christ, Thou Lamb of God” — the German Agnus Dei in the liturgy itself, sung at the distribution.