

6 April 2022
Lent 5 Midweek

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Our Ordinary Lenten Exodus: the Agnus Dei”
Text: Exodus 12:1-13, 21-27; John 1:29-36

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

In saving His people from the clutches of Egypt and the bondage of their slavery in that country, God broke the will of the Egyptians with ten plagues. For the first nine, the people of Israel watched in wonder as God showed His power over nature and especially over all the gods of Egypt. One by one He humbled them. One by one He showed that He was the one and only true God. He wanted His people freed, and freed they would be.

But for this last and greatest plague upon Egypt, Israel would not just sit back and watch in wonder - they would be a part of it. They were active participants. They would put their faith into action.

For this night of the last and greatest plague would be a night of death. And not a little. All the first born sons in all the land of Egypt - the first born sons of man and beast, of high and low - would die this night. It was not an arbitrary decision by God to do so. He had told Moses, and Moses had told Pharaoh, that what Pharaoh did to His son, to Israel and all his family, holding him in bondage and robbing him of life, God would do to Pharaoh's firstborn son (Exodus 4:22-23) if he did not let them go. Pharaoh had nine chances to avoid that fate, but would not. Now God would turn the tables.

But there was a way of rescue from this sure and certain death: **blood**. The blood of the passover lamb. The blood of the lamb that would cause death to pass over that house. So at twilight that night, that night of death, lambs gave their lives as substitutes for all the first born sons of Israel. And the lambs that had been slaughtered, whose blood on the lintels and doorposts of their homes saved them from this plague, were then eaten. Food for the journey they were about to undertake. They weren't to be wasteful. If a household was too small to eat a lamb on its own, then they would join with others. And they would get ready. They would be ready. Through the blood of the lamb shed for them, and the body of the lamb consumed by them, they would be saved and free. That very night.

Of course, as we have been considering all this Lenten season, that exodus and those passover lambs - as great as it was - would be surpassed by a greater exodus, from a greater slavery, to a greater freedom. And tonight, we could add, *by a greater Lamb*.

So when it came time to rescue *the world*, save *the world* from the clutches of satan and

our bondage to sin, death, and the devil, the Father of the household of all men chose the Lamb that would be our substitute; chose the Lamb whose blood would protect us and set us free; chose the Lamb who would be our food. The Father sent the Spirit to descend, land, and remain on Him. That's the one. The Father's Lamb. To save all the world from death. John saw it and so proclaimed: ***Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!***

This John is often called the Baptist, John the Baptist, because that's what he did. But to confess Jesus as the Lamb of God is really what he was sent for. To point us to Jesus, to put our faith in Him. That He is the Lamb whose blood would protect us, whose body would feed us, and who would be our substitute. The Lamb. Of God.

No other lamb would do. In Egypt, there were many lambs sacrificed that night, but there is only one who could save not just all in a country, but all *in the world*. In Egypt, there was one lamb per household, or one for a few put together. But what lamb could there be for the household of all men, all women, all people, and not just at that moment in time, but for all time? What lamb could there be to protect us from not just physical death, but spiritual, eternal death? What lamb could feed the world? Only one, of course. A Lamb who is much more than a lamb, but God Himself. God's firstborn Son. God's only-begotten Son. God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God.

John saw the Spirit descend that day upon Jesus and remain on Him. That's the Lamb God the Father, the Father of all creation, chose for us. He chose Him from before the foundation of the world, but pointed Him out to John that day. ***Behold, the Lamb of God!*** The Lamb who would shed His blood for us, mark us with that blood in Holy Baptism, and feed us with His body in Holy Communion. This Lamb deliver us from sin, death, and the devil.

John was the first to proclaim that, but not the last. The Church has been proclaiming it ever since: *O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world*. It is the *Agnus Dei*. The fifth ordinary, the fifth part of the liturgy that is ordinarily in every service. We proclaim that when it is time to eat, time for the Church to eat, time for our family of faith here to eat, because that's what you did with the lamb. After it shed its blood for you, it gave its body to you as food. For the exodus. And for our exodus from sin, death, and hell, the Lamb of God is our meal for the journey - for the journey through this life to the life of the world to come. It is the food of forgiveness, and of freedom from the fear of death.

And it is in our liturgy not only for us to know and confess, but to pass on to our children, and their children. The liturgy is good at that. It is steadfast and reliable. It states what is so. It teaches us and focuses us.

So God told Moses and the people of Israel to do this each year, this liturgy of the

Passover, on that same night each year. To remember and to teach the generations to come, *but also to participate*. To become - even generations later - part of the people God brought out of Egypt. So God instructed Moses, *when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'* And when our children ask us, *what do these words mean? Why do we sing them here?* We tell them: *This is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover - His Passover Lamb, who was struck down for us that we might live. By His Blood we are saved and by His Body we are fed. Behold, the Lamb of God!* And this no mere remembrance of something that happened long, long ago, but something that we now join in, become participants in. We join in Jesus' exodus.

And His exodus is a greater exodus, from a greater slavery, to a greater freedom, by a greater Lamb. And so not just once a year do we remember, celebrate, and receive, as Old Testament Israel, but now, Jesus said, *as often as you do this*. Often! There is no minimum, no maximum, no precise date. As often as you do this, as often as you need this, it is here for you. The Lamb of God is here for you. His forgiveness and life are here for you. Take eat, take drink. *Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away your sin!*

And taking away your sin is what it's all about. What the Scriptures are all about, what the liturgy is all about, what Lent is all about, what Jesus is all about. *For where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation* (Small Catechism). Where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also the exodus from death to life. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), but those wages have been paid. In blood. The blood of the Lamb. Our Passover Lamb. The *Agnus Dei*.

O Christ, Thou Agnus Dei, that takest away the sin of the world, grant us Thy peace. Thy peace, in our troubled world, in our troubled lives, in our troubled times, in every trouble and time of need. Grant us Thy peace, that our souls rest in You.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.