

# St Oswald's Church, Sunderland

Pontus Bramberg

2nd Sunday of Epiphany, AD 2023

May I speak in the name of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

'Here is the Lamb of God', John the Baptist says regarding the Lord. Christ is indeed the Lamb of God, but what does this mean? The Lamb is found in many places in the Old Testament, most notably the Paschal lamb. The Paschal lamb was sacrificed by the Israelites to mark their doorposts when all the firstborn of Egypt were struck down, except the Israelites whose doorposts were marked with the blood of the Paschal lamb. In a similar way, we as Christians are marked with the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, so that we will not be condemned with the world. While this is the primary image of the Lamb in the Old Testament, there are other instances where the Lamb is present, for example the ram provided by God to Abraham as a sacrifice instead of Isaac (this itself is an interesting story with important parallels to Our Lord: notably Isaac was not a little boy as one might imagine but a grown man, traditionally aged 33 as Our Lord at His crucifixion, easily capable of overpowering his elderly father and thus necessarily being bound to sacrifice with his own consent). The prophet Isaiah, foretelling Christ's sacrifice, writes about the suffering servant 'He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth' [Isaiah 53:7]. In a similar way, Jeremiah writes about the 'gentle lamb led to the slaughter' [Jeremiah 11:19]. There are also the daily sacrifices of sheep in the temple, with which John the Baptist, whose father was a priest, would have been extremely familiar. Even in the New Testament Book of Revelation, we read, in the fifth chapter, about a Lamb which John (not the Baptist) saw in his revelation:

'He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. They sing a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth."' [Revelation 5:7-10]

This is especially interesting considering that the one who is worthy to open the seals has been identified earlier in the chapter as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, who 'has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals' [Revelation 5:5]. Christ is thus both the Lamb of God who is sacrificed and the conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah. He takes away the sins of the world and righteously rules the world.

All of the mentioned Lambs perfectly refer to Christ, the one true Lamb of God, but why is this an important title of the Lord? The lamb indicates purity and innocence, which of course the Son of God perfectly embodies. The only perfectly innocent man was sacrificed for all of our sins, so that we might not be condemned. In the Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist, this sacrifice, while not in any way repeated, is made present for us under the elements of bread and wine: Our Lord really becomes present in a literal sense, which is why we must always approach the communion rail with the utmost reverence and fear of God.

Amen.