

Lord God, heavenly Father, You manifested Yourself, with the Holy Spirit, in the fullness of grace at the baptism of Your dear Son, and with Your voice directed us to Him who has borne our sins, that we might receive grace and the remission of sins: Keep us, we beseech You, in the true faith; and inasmuch as we have been baptized in accordance with Your command, and the example of Your dear Son, we pray You to strengthen our faith by Your Holy Spirit, and lead us to everlasting life and salvation; through Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, by Veit Dietrich, p. 152)

The LORD said to Moses, "Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will drive you away completely.... Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall keep this service. And 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 the people bowed their heads and worshiped. Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead.

In Christ Jesus, the Father's Beloved Son, your Substitute, in whom He is well pleased, dear fellow redeemed:

After John had baptized our Lord, Jesus came out to him again and John pointed to Him and said: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 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." ... "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.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

It would appear from this, that although John knew Jesus as his cousin, who was sent by God and did not deserve to baptize Him, it was not until the baptism that he definitely concluded Jesus was the Messiah. The Spirit came down in the form of a dove and by this prophesied action of God, Jesus was anointed as the long awaited Christ. *"Behold – look"* said John, *"this is the One promised of old who came to take away the sins of the whole world of sinners."* This looking is in our text in the account of the Passover Lamb and its blood: **Behold, God's Beloved Son, the Lamb of God, Delivers His People.**

I

The Christian Church since ancient times has been singing *"The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world"* after the bread and wine are consecrated and before the communicants receive them along with Jesus' true body and blood in holy Communion. We New Testament believers are connected with the Old Testament believers by this sign of the Lamb sent by God for our deliverance. The heavenly Father acknowledged this sign of His love for us in Christ, at His baptism when He said: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It was the sign John recognized and pointed out to his followers. It is the sign present for you and me in our baptisms in the name of this beloved Son, our holy Substitute.

Did the Lord in our text need the blood of the Lamb on the doorframes so that He would know the differences between the homes of the Israelites and the Egyptians, so that He might strike dead the firstborn of the household? - not at all! It was an act of faith and worship on the part of the Israelites. They responded this way after being told what to do: "...the people bowed their heads and worshiped. Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did."

As they left Egypt with bellies full of the Lamb whose blood delivered them, they recognized this was the work of God for them. Soon they would need to be reminded that the Lord was for them not against them. When they saw and heard Pharaoh's chariots chasing after them on one side and the Red Sea on the other blocking their escape, what they beheld challenged their faith.

Many times throughout that exodus, journey in the wilderness for 40 years, and entrance into the promise-land, many of them would doubt the signs given them by God that He loved them and

would always rescue them from the hands of their enemies. Frankly, so we also are filled with fears doubting God's perpetual love and care for us. But He remains faithful and even forgives our many thoughts, words and actions of unfaithfulness.

II

It became a sign of God's mercy and grace for them and recalled every year thereafter as they celebrated the Passover. "You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall keep this service. And 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.'"

How is it that Israel will observe this rite forever? Well, already noted, the Christian Church continued to observe it in its rite of Holy Communion where the body and blood of Lamb of God is distributed among us His people for their deliverance from sin, death and hell. Then consider how heaven is described for us in Revelation: "... between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though It had been slain ... And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation and You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God.'"

From Jesus' anointing as the Christ through the present Church's observance of the holy Lamb of God on into eternity this Lamb is beheld. This Lamb of God was seen with real physical eyes on the banks of the Jordan and on the cross on Calvary and is seen in the courts of heaven now and forever. But now in this life, the Lamb is seen in the signs of water, bread and wine. Now it is similar to the signs of the blood on the doorframes in Egypt and the roasted lamb at every Passover meal up until the night on which our Lord was betrayed – hidden under signs. But these signs are accompanied with the promise of forgiveness and life to sustain us in our journey to the ultimate and eternal promised land.

You may have your baptismal certificate framed and hung on a wall at home. And/or you may cross yourself regularly with the words from your rite baptism: *"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."* By these outward signs drawing you back to the sign given you through those gracious waters, you behold the

Lamb of God who delivered you. Christ Jesus your Savior is the Lamb provided by your heavenly Father. The Father beheld Him in the waters of the Jordan, so did John and all gathered there at His baptism. They heard the Father declare Jesus, the Christ, as your holy Substitute, the holy Lamb who would be slain for all your sins.

God knows that we, His beloved creatures are most tangible by nature, so He has instituted these tangible means and signs to bring to you His Lamb and all His blessings to you. Through water, bread, wine and the voice reverberating in your ears, the Lamb delivers you from all your enemies here and now. While the children of Israel had a powerful display of signs with the Passover Lamb, they have nothing over you. The same Deliverer is active in your life, my fellow redeemed, as the One who was also active for them delivering them from the hands of their enemies and delivering them to the safe promised land. As you go forward in life, look not at the many signs the devil, the world and your own sinful flesh vividly put before you to frighten you. Look to the signs from your gracious Lord, who loves you in that holy unspotted Lamb now and forever. Amen.