The Word of the Lord from 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

I. The Lamb of God at the Jordan

Epiphany is the season that’s all about how Jesus is made known, and this is how it happens in the Gospel of John: “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 the crowds there know who the Messiah is: John tells them. He has to tell them, because Jesus doesn't stand out. He's been standing in the crowd for at least a day, and nobody's noticed Him. So John points Him out: “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 as the Savior. And the Lamb. 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 Bear” or “the Seahawk” or something more inspiring and fearsome than the "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. 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. We read: “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. So the text continues, “The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.” Andrew hears and believes that Jesus is the Savior: He doesn’t look like a king or a lamb, but Andrew believes the Word. He seeks out his brother, Peter—and what does he do? He tells him. He says, “We have found the Messiah.” Then he brings 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 doesn’t look like the Messiah when He is born and laid in a manger. He doesn’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. Not programs or high-tech stage shows or sensible advice or poignant emotion, but the Word.

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 the Holy Spirit? 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. It may puzzle people at first, but 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—body, blood and all—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, well 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