

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

As the angelic hand stayed the dagger poised to slay the only son, the Divine Promise in which both father and son trusted was “God will provide for Himself the lamb.” Isaac lived because of the Lamb. Abraham and Isaac lived by faith in the Lamb. But their faith was not in a reluctant ram whose horns were entangled in a thicket. They trusted in the Lamb who would be sacrificed to take away their sins. They believed God, and it was credited to them as righteousness.

God did provide the Lamb, just as He had promised. Two millennia later, a faithful son of Abraham stood on the Jordan’s stony banks and proclaimed “Behold, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world!” And now He who came after John but was before him is publicly revealed as that Lamb, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world.

John knew Him. John knew him like Joseph and Mary and the Shepherds and the Magi knew Him. But the Mystery had not yet been revealed. So John testified “I did not know Him...” But there was a promised sign, a concrete external symbol by which John would truly know Him. The God who called and sent John gave him the sign: “Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” So John continued in his spirit-less baptisms, washing with water, daily trusting that God would provide the Lamb.

And then that ancient sign was fulfilled. The Babe of Bethlehem now Man of Nazareth was marked by the sign. As the Prophet Samuel poured oil over the head of the shepherd king of Israel, and the spirit of the Lord came upon him, so now a new and better Samuel stands witness to a better Anointing – the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus and remaining. He is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One promised of Old, Savior of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the true Shepherd King of Israel, anointed with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Living God.

That He be revealed, John came baptizing with water. But now John must decrease, and Christ increase. And for you, dear Christian, that is Good News. That is the Promise fulfilled for you. For John’s testimony “I did not know Him...” was your testimony. Knowledge is not faith. To know the account of Jesus’ life and death and resurrection is not salvific. The devil knows that, his dark angels do as well. The demons knew who He was. Believing in Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny is of no help to you. Without faith, you cannot truly know Him, the Lamb of God.

The problem, of course, is your defilement. It is inherited, it comes to you with your flesh. But no washing, not even John’s washing, can cleanse you of it. Mere water isn’t enough. It is an internal defilement, defilement of heart and soul. And although it is a pervasive internal defilement, it has been manifest externally in your words and deeds.

But take heart, fallen man, for God’s Promise is for you. God has provided the Lamb. He stood there, in the Jordan, and was washed with an unnecessary washing by a sinful cousin. But then the ancient sign was completed, the sign for which John waited. And as the Holy Spirit descended visibly and remained on Him, He was installed into His Office. He is the Christ of God, the Anointed.

His Holy, sinless Body touched those Jordan waters. It was not He who was cleansed, rather in His Baptism all water on earth was set apart for holy use. And as that water is applied to you, water comprehended with the Word of God, the fulfilment of God's Promise, you are washed clean.

It is not simply a removal of filth from the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the fulfilment, the antitype, of the Flood, in which eight souls were saved through water. It is the fulfilment, the antitype, of the salvation of Israel in the parting of the Red Sea, who passed through those waters alive.

It is the fulfilment, the antitype, of Israel's passage through the same Jordan River into the Promised Land. For passing through that water, baptized into Christ, all your sins are removed. They are washed from you, and flow backwards through time and are deposited upon the Lord in the Jordan. So John could proclaim Him the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, for there He, being sinless and holy, took upon Himself all sin of all time. He took upon Himself your sin.

So baptized into Christ, your sins are removed. And since John's baptism with mere water gave way to Baptism with the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that descended and remained upon Christ fills you in your Baptism. You are not swept clean, put in order and left empty. You are filled by the Spirit of God, your body His temple.

And by that Spirit, the Spirit that proceeds from the Father and the Son, you know Him. You know Him as Abraham knew Him, for Abraham saw His Day and was glad. You know Him as your Savior, your Christ, your Redeemer, your God, the Lamb who takes away your sin. And you join John in his faithful confession "I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." The Lord has arisen over you, and His glory is upon you. Your Light has come.

And of Him you are in Christ Jesus, Who became for us Wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. God has provided the Lamb. And just as the faithful ate the lamb in captivity, just as their lintels and doorposts were marked with the blood of the lamb, just as death passed them over, so to you, O True Israel, you who are the Bride of Christ, His Holy Church.

And as God gave John a sign by which to know the Christ, so too has He given you the signs of Bread and Wine, that you eat the Lamb. Your soul is marked with the Blood of the Lamb, the Blood of the risen and ascended Christ. So death passes you over.

God has provided the Lamb. Behold, the Lord, the Ruler has come, and the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory are in His Hand. And so are you, dear Christian, in His hand. And as He has promised, no one can snatch you out of His hand. And you shall never perish, and He gives you eternal life.

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