

The Church of the Transfiguration
The Second Sunday After the Epiphany
John 1:29-42

The Victory of the Lamb

The Rev. Dr. Patrick S. Cheng
January 18, 2026

Good morning! Today we celebrate the Second Sunday After the Epiphany. As some of you may know, Epiphany comes from the Greek word *epiphaneia*, which means “appearance” or “manifestation.”

It’s fitting that, during this season of Epiphany, we are called to reflect upon how Jesus Christ appears – or is revealed – in the world.

For example, on the Feast of Epiphany itself (January 6th), we heard how Jesus was revealed through the Star of Bethlehem that led the three wise men to the manger.

Last week, during the First Sunday After the Epiphany, we heard how Jesus was revealed through the dove-like Spirit that descended upon him during his baptism by John the Baptist.

This week, Jesus is revealed – not through a star or a dove – but through the image of the lamb. In today’s gospel reading, John the Baptist sees Jesus and says “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” This in turn leads to the calling of Jesus’ first disciples.

* * *

What does it mean to describe Jesus as the “Lamb of God”?

Each Sunday, you hear the following words, right before you come up for Holy Communion: “Behold, the Lamb of God; behold him that taketh away the sin of the world.”

What comes to mind when you hear those words? Do you think of a cute and fluffy lamb like the ones on the cover of today’s bulletin? Do you think of a rack of lamb that one might eat during Easter supper? Or do you think of something else?

Well, the people in Jesus’ time who heard the words “Lamb of God” would have thought of three things.

First, they would have thought about the forgiveness of sins. Every day, a lamb was sacrificed in the Temple. The purpose of this daily sacrifice was to ask for God to forgive the sins of the broader community.

Second, they would have thought of freedom. Once a year, each Israelite household would eat a lamb for the Passover meal. The meal would commemorate the lamb’s blood that was smeared on the entrance to each home during the first Passover, which ultimately allowed them to escape Egypt and go to the Promised Land.

Third, they would have thought of victory. There was a strand of apocalyptic thinking that viewed the lamb as a symbol of victory. But it was an unlikely symbol of victory. The victory of the

lamb did not come through military conquest, but rather through a sacrificial death that revealed the cruelty of human sin. But that death also revealed how sin and death would ultimately be overcome through the loving faithfulness of God.

By the way, there's a stained-glass window right behind me with an image of the victorious lamb from the Book of Revelation. I invite you to look at it – it's on the left side – when you walk through the chancel for communion.

* * *

This morning I would like to talk about the third of these images of the Lamb of God. That is, I would like to focus on the Lamb of God as an unlikely symbol of victory.

During the Second Temple period – the time when Jesus walked the earth – Judea was a land under siege. It was occupied by both the Roman Empire as well as King Herod the Great. This dual occupation was sustained by ruthless military forces that crushed any dissent through terror and violence.

So how did the Lamb of God serve as an unlikely symbol of victory in that particular context?

Well, victory did not mean fighting violence with violence. Rather, victory meant the power of a sacrificial death to reveal the cruelty and depth of human sin. Furthermore, victory meant a refusal to believe that sin and death would be the last word. Instead, sin and death would ultimately be overcome through the promise of God's loving faithfulness.

Take, for example, the Crucifixion. In the Roman Empire, crucifixion was a horrific punishment designed to stamp out rebellion through fear. But ultimately the crucifixion of Jesus Christ resulted in God's victory over sin. How? Well, the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross revealed the sinful cruelty of the Roman government. But, more than that, God refused to let sin have the last word. Through the Resurrection, God overcame death, and love had the last word.

* * *

This weekend, we celebrate the life of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Like Jesus, Dr. King lived a life of nonviolence for the sake of others. He fought the evils of white supremacy and segregation, and he paid the ultimate price for doing so.

As with Jesus, Dr. King's untimely death revealed the depth and cruelty of human sin. But Dr. King's death was not the last word with respect to his vision for America. His dream that "one day little Black boys and Black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers" has become a reality in many places during the last half-century.

Speaking of the depth and cruelty of human sin, I don't know about you, but I've had a really hard time processing the occupation of Minnesota during the past few weeks. I've heard that, right now, there are twice as many federal agents in the Minneapolis / St. Paul area as there are local police officers. And the news reports of the violence that is occurring there, including the death of Renee Nicole Good, have been terrifying.

What gives me hope, however, is the Lamb of God. The Lamb of God promises us that no innocent death is ultimately meaningless. Instead, such a death overcomes the sin of the world by revealing the depth of human cruelty and depravity. But more importantly, such a death reminds us that,

through God's loving faithfulness and the Resurrection, sin and death will never have the last word. Love will conquer all.

* * *

A well-known saying by my TV hero Fred Rogers (also known as "Mister Rogers") was that, when scary things are happening, "Look for the helpers." Look for the helpers. In other words, we will always be comforted by finding the "people who are helping" others.

There are plenty of opportunities in the coming week if you want to look for the helpers – or if you want to be a helper yourself.

Tomorrow morning, there will be a diocesan celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day at the Church of the Holy Nativity in the Bronx at 10:00 am. Bishop Heyd will be celebrating, and Cathedral Dean Winnie Varghese will be preaching.

Tomorrow afternoon, there will be a "Vigil for Courage and Conscience" at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine at 4:00 pm with The Rev. Dr. Canon Kelly Brown Douglas preaching. The vigil will be an opportunity to rest in prayer and to be strengthened for the work of love and justice.

On Friday, January 23rd, the Diocese will be joining a rally and march in solidarity with Minneapolis-St. Paul at the north end of Union Square at 4:00 pm.

Finally, if you don't feel like going anywhere, the Diocese has established an Immigration Legal Support Fund to which you can donate online. This fund provides emergency legal assistance to immigrant families through local nonprofit legal providers. You can find more information about this fund on the diocesan website: www.diocesen.org.

I leave you with the words of Bishop Craig Loya, the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota. Bishop Loya says:

"The forces of evil always want us to meet fear with fear. The forces of evil in the world are always fed by mimetic anger and hatred. . . . Beloved, we're not going to do that. We, as followers of Jesus, are going to [be] like our ancient ancestors and turn the world upside down by mobilizing for love. We are going to disrupt with Jesus' hope. We are going to agitate with Jesus' love."

Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him that taketh away the sin of the world. And may the loving faithfulness of the Lamb of God sustain us today; in the days, weeks, and months ahead; and always.