

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

John 1:29-42

Year A - Epiphany 2, Text: John 1:29-42a
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Verses 1:29–30, The Lamb of God: The evangelist has called Jesus the Word, the Light, and the Son. John the Baptist now calls Him “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Here, we think of the Passover lambs that died to save Israel in Egypt (Exodus 12). In John’s Gospel, Jesus dies at the time when the Temple priests are ankle deep in the blood of thousands of Passover lambs. It is made quite clear that He dies as the perfect Passover Lamb.

The description of Jesus as God’s Lamb also reminds us of the prophecy of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:7,12. He would be like a lamb led to the slaughter and would carry the sin of many (“many” in Hebrew can also mean “all”). Although Jesus dies as the humble Lamb and Suffering Servant, He is still greater than John (the truth of v.1:15 is repeated).

Verses 1:31–34, God’s Clear Sign: Jesus is greater than the Baptizer, since He is the eternal Son of God, God’s final Word to humanity, the Savior from sin. All of this is already clear. The Baptist now adds another reason: Jesus has the Spirit in a unique sense.

John appeared at the Jordan River to allow God to reveal the identity of His Son. The story of the actual baptism of Jesus is not told. Was it left out deliberately to avoid the false impression that John, after all, was greater than Jesus, since he baptized Him?

The actual baptism is not important here. John confesses that he was still in the dark as to the identity of the Messiah until God gave a clear sign from heaven: the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. Many prophets and men of God had been gifted with the Spirit in the past. Jesus has no mere gift. He Himself has and embodies the Spirit without measure, as 3:34–35 states. He is God’s true and only Son because the Spirit remains with Him (note v. 32-33).

In what follows, Jesus calls His first disciples. As important as they are, they never occupy center stage, either in this act of the drama or in any scene in the Gospel. Every story, even every verse, is told to glo-

rify Jesus as the Lamb of God (v. 35), the Messiah (v. 41), and the Son of God (v. 49).

Verses 1:35–39, Come and See: John again points to Jesus as the Lamb of God (v. 29), this time for the special benefit of His disciples. One of the two is identified as Andrew (v. 40); the other is unnamed, but is probably John. This little story underlines the truth that Jesus is greater than the Baptizer.

John’s disciples leave him (with John’s own encouragement) to follow the Greater One! At first, they see Jesus only as a Rabbi, a teacher. They follow Him home, but stay the night since it has become late; the tenth hour is 4 pm, since the Jewish day began at 6 am. What begins as a short stay becomes a permanent relationship, remaining or abiding in the Lord (see 13:4–10).

Verses 1:40–42, Sharing the Good News: Andrew becomes the first personal evangelist. He finds his brother Simon and makes the great announcement, “We have found the Messiah.” (Note: There is a modern-day evangelism program called “Operation Andrew” that focuses on one-to-one relationships).

Only in this Gospel is Peter called Cephas, an Aramaic term meaning “rock.” And only in John’s Gospel is Jesus called (in the Greek text) “the Messiah”; see also 4:25, and note the NRSV version of Matthew 1:1 which translates the Greek word *Christos* as Messiah. For his Greek-speaking readers, the evangelist explains these names. Peter is the Greek word for rock. *Messiah* (meaning Anointed) is *Christos* in Greek.

In Hebrew and Jewish thinking, a name was more than a “tag” by which a person was identified. It was a description of a person’s character, or his role and function in life, in God’s plan. Jesus, God’s Anointed, looks at Simon, and sees what God has in store for him. By giving him a new name, He hints at the truth that Peter is the rock on which Jesus will build His church (see Matthew 16:18).

