

Swedenborgian Sunday School Notes for the Revised Common Lectionary

John 1:29–42 • Lambs and Doves

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John 1:29–42

The Lamb of God

Isaiah 49:1–7

The servant of the Lord

Overview

Although John’s gospel does not mention Jesus’ baptism, our reading describes the events that surround it. Today, as we look again at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, we will focus on the images of the lamb and the dove. These images teach that we need to purify both our hearts and our minds to be spiritually reborn. Being clean in heart and mind means being innocent both in our feelings and in our thoughts.

Key Points

- Innocence comes from the Lord because the Lord is innocence itself.
- Innocence means following the Lord and not wanting to harm anyone.
- We are baptized with spiritual life when we cultivate innocence both in our minds and in our hearts.

Example for Teaching Children

Do any of you play sports or watch sports on TV? *(pause)* What is the name your team? Or what are your favorite pro teams? *(pause)* Have you ever heard of a team called the Lambs? *(pause)* How about the Doves? *(pause)* Why do you think people don’t use these names for their teams? *(pause)* People want their teams to sound *strong* and *fast*, not gentle and innocent like lambs and doves. Lambs and doves seem weak—and we do not like to feel weak! *[Thanks to the Rev. Ken Turley for this idea. –LSW]*

But in our Bible reading today, Jesus is called “the Lamb of God,” and God’s spirit comes down to him in the form of a dove. Do you think Jesus was a weak person? *(pause)* Jesus was willing to stand up to the most powerful people of his time, fearlessly speaking for the truth. So calling him a “lamb” and a “dove” does not mean he is weak. Do you have any idea what it does mean? *(pause)*

Our church’s teachings tell us that lambs and doves both mean innocence—lambs especially innocence in our *hearts*, and doves especially innocence in our *minds*. What does it mean for people to be innocent? *(pause)* When people are in court, being innocent means they didn’t do anything wrong. So it means not wanting to hurt anyone else.

There is another meaning of innocence: loving the Lord and wanting to follow his teachings. Sheep do not have to be herded like cows because they will simply follow wherever their shepherd leads. We are like lambs in a good way when are willing in our hearts to follow wherever the Lord leads us.

Doves can fly in the air, where they have a good view of everything below. So doves are like good and innocent thoughts in our minds, showing us the way to be kind to others.

The Bible teaches us that to be good and kind people, we need to work on becoming innocent both in our hearts and in our minds. In other words, we need to work on not *wanting* to hurt anyone and not *thinking* about ways to hurt anyone. And especially, we need to be willing to listen to what the Lord teaches us and follow it every day.

Basic Correspondences

John the Baptist = God’s Word leading us
lamb = innocence in our heart
dove = innocence in our mind

Thoughts from Swedenborg

All the ideas in the minds of angels and spirits are turned into various depictions outside of the angel or spirit. When they become things in the vegetable kingdom, they turn into trees and shrubs of various kinds. When they become things in the animal kingdom, they turn into lambs, sheep, goats, cows, horses, mules, and other similar animals. And when they become flying creatures, they turn into doves, pigeons, and various kinds of beautiful birds.

Apocalypse Explained #513a.2

The Lord is the innocence itself that exists in his kingdom, since he is the source of all innocence. This is why the Lord is called “the Lamb” in John 1:29, 36, and in many places in the Book of Revelation.

It is well-known that in the highest meaning, the Passover lamb is the Lord. The Passover symbolized the Lord’s glorification—that is, his putting divinity into his humanity. In a symbolic sense, the Passover means our spiritual rebirth. So the Passover lamb symbolizes the core feature of spiritual rebirth, which is innocence. We can be reborn only through kindness that has innocence within it.

Arcana Coelestia #3994.6