

In 1991, a story surfaced from Operation Desert Storm (**picture**) about a soldier who got a “Dear John” letter (**picture**). While other soldiers around him were receiving love letters from girls back home, this poor guy gets a letter from his girl that says they’re through. Worse, she’s getting married to someone back home! To add insult to injury, she wrote, “Will you please return my favorite photograph of myself? I need it for my engagement picture in the newspaper.” The poor schmuck is devastated. His girl is marrying someone else and now she wants her picture back. It was too much.

When a buddy found out what had happened, a plan was hatched. From every corner of the camp, soldiers handed over extra photos of their girlfriends. There were hundreds of photos. The jilted soldier put all the photos in a shoe box and mailed it home with a note. “Please find your picture,” he wrote, “but please return the rest. For the life of me, I can’t remember exactly which one you were!!”

With a bit of a different picture, a different perspective, life was different for both the soldier...and one surprised girlfriend! Our perspective of Christmas is on the other side of the world, too. For many, Christmas is gifts, trees, Santa, lots of eating and partying. Even in church, very little of the ancient, Middle Eastern backdrop of that first Christmas surfaces. That first Christmas was about an animal – a lamb – **Mary’s Little Lamb**.

When Jesus was born, lambs were a central part of the religious life of Israel. If you were Jewish, no one needed to explain the significance of something so commonplace. For centuries, lambs were sacrificed for the sins of the nation. While lambs aren’t specifically mentioned in the Christmas story, they’re implied by the shepherds’ presence and the fact that Jesus was born in a stable. There may have been many flocks around Bethlehem.

Today is our last message in our series, *An Old Testament Christmas*. We’re going to focus on Jesus as the Lamb. Scripture says that Jesus Christ is the lamb slain before the foundation of the world. The Lamb is cradled in the womb of the Old Testament, whose types and symbols, promises and prophecies are pregnant with Jesus.

Today instead of just camping out on one passage, we want to do a Scriptural survey to show that **Mary’s Little Lamb** was the promised Lamb of God, sent to save people from their sins. If you’re taking notes...

1.The lamb on the mountain. If you have your Bibles, you might want to turn to Genesis 22. God calls Abraham who receives the promise that he will become a great nation. His descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and as many as the grains of sand on the seashore. God eventually provides Abraham and Sarah with a son, Isaac, when Abraham was 100 years old!

Genesis 22 begins with God’s instructions for Abraham to take Isaac, his son, the son of promise, to the mountain of Moriah. In verse 2, God tells him to “*sacrifice [Isaac] there as a burnt offering...*” Early the next morning, Abraham set off to the mountain with his son. The journey took three days. I can’t imagine what must have been going through his mind during this trip!

Verse 6 tells us that Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son, Isaac. In verse 7, Isaac asks his Dad a haunting question, “*The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?*” I love how Abraham answers his son in verse 8: “*God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.*”

Abraham builds the altar, arranges the wood and ties his only son to the altar. As he reached out his hand to slay his cherished child, the angel of the Lord speaks in verse 12: “*Do not lay a hand on the boy...do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from Me your son, your only son.*” Abraham then looks up and sees a ram caught in the thicket. He substituted the ram for his son and sacrificed the ram. From then on, Abraham calls the place, “*Jehovah-jireh,*” which means, “*The Lord will provide.*” Let’s look at some truths from this passage:

Mount Moriah is where the Temple was eventually built. Scholars tell us it was in close proximity to where Jesus was crucified as God’s final sacrifice.

God “Himself” provided the lamb. The word *Himself* is significant. God *Himself* sent His lamb, Jesus, to die for the sins of the world. The sacrifice came from Him. It was no accident that a ram was in the thicket. God provided the sacrifice. Just as Abraham offered his only son, so God Himself provided the sacrifice of His one and only Son on our behalf.

The ram was a substitute offering. Jesus died as our substitute, when He paid the price for our sins. The ram points to the “*Lamb of God.*” Verse 8 shows Abraham’s faith that God would provide a “*lamb.*” It was a ram, a male. Abraham’s statement was prophetic, looking toward a day when the Lamb of God would be sacrificed on the altar of Calvary. The ram served as a substitute, but only the sinless Lamb of God can effectively wipe out our sins once for all. So, as we continue to sail through Scripture, I want to frame our study by asking and answering Isaac’s question, “**Where is the lamb?**”

2. The lamb in the Passover. Let's fast forward to the nation of Israel as they prepare to leave the slavery of Egypt. We want to focus on Exodus 12.

For 400 years the Jews lived in terrible conditions until God raised up a leader named Moses. He goes before Pharaoh with a message from God: *"Let my people go!"* Pharaoh blows him off, so Moses comes back several times with the same refrain: *"Let my people go!"* But Pharaoh has no intention of letting the Jews go free. So God devises a plan that will cause Pharaoh to beg the Jews to leave his land and sends a series of terrible judgments/plagues on Egypt. Though the first nine inflicted severe suffering on the people, Pharaoh hardened his heart against God. The 10th one would get his attention. At midnight on a certain night, the Lord would go through the land of Egypt and every firstborn son would die immediately.

But God would spare the Israelites, if they followed His instructions. When the blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the doorpost of each Jewish home, God would see the blood and would literally *"pass over"* that house. But if God didn't see the blood, He'd take the life of the firstborn in judgment.

It was the blood of the lamb that saved the people of God that night. Every year since then, for 3500 years, the Jews have observed a Passover celebration as a solemn reminder of God's amazing deliverance in Egypt. Let me share *ten* of the most notable similarities between the events of the first Passover and the sacrifice of Jesus as our Passover Lamb.

It must be a lamb. Exodus 12:3 says each man was to *"take a lamb"* for his household. It couldn't be a bull or a dove, which were sometimes used in Old Testament sacrifices. God was specific. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he cried out, *"Look! the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29). Paul says *"Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed for us."* Revelation refers to Christ as the Lamb in 30 separate instances.

It must be a male. Exodus 12:5 specifies, *"the animals you choose must be year-old males."* Jesus fulfilled this as He was the Son born of a virgin.

It must be a year-old lamb. The lamb must be in its prime, not too young or old. Even so, *"Christ offered up Himself in the midst of His days, not in infancy with the babes in Bethlehem."*

It must be without blemish. The Hebrew text uses a phrase that means *"without defect."* Jews carefully inspected their lambs to make sure there were no open sores, patches of bare skin, infections, blemishes or sickness of any kind. This kept them from offering an inferior creature while keeping the best for themselves. 1 Peter 1:19 picks up on this when it speaks of Jesus as being *"a lamb without blemish or defect."* When Pilate examined Jesus, he declared, *"I find no fault in Him"* (John 19:6). Even the hostile high priests could find no just cause to put Jesus to death so they trumped up false charges against Him.

It must be slain and roasted. Exodus 12 is clear on this. All the lambs were to be slain at the same time and the blood drained. The carcasses were to be roasted and eaten whole. They weren't to be boiled or eaten raw (both pagan customs). Anything left over was to be burned. Thus, the lamb was to be completely consumed. Both the slaying and roasting picture the sufferings of Christ on the cross. Not only did He die, His death was a complete sacrifice.

It must have no broken bones. Exodus 12:46 specifies that when animals were chosen for the Passover sacrifice, none of the bones were to be broken. It was the custom of the Romans to break the legs of those being crucified to hasten their death. John 19 tells us that the soldiers didn't break Jesus' legs because He was already dead. Verse 36 points out this happened to fulfill the scripture that says, *"Not one of His bones will be broken."*

It must be offered "between the evenings." This unusual phrase is a literal translation of the Hebrew phrase found in Exodus 12:6. Although the ESV says that the offerings were to be made at twilight, the words literally mean *"between the evenings,"* which in Jewish thought meant between 3-5 P.M. The New Testament tells us that Jesus was crucified at the *"third hour,"* meaning 9:00 A.M., since the Jews reckoned time in 24-hour periods beginning at 6:00 A.M. Matthew 26:45 tells us that there was darkness from the sixth hour until the ninth hour, or from 12 noon to 3:00 P.M. Shortly after that Jesus uttered His final words and died. His body was taken down from the cross before sundown. Jesus died *"between the evenings"* (3-5 P.M.) at the exact hour Passover lambs were being sacrificed.

It must be sacrificed by all the people. Exodus 12 stresses that the lambs were to be offered by every man for every family. All the lambs must be slaughtered at precisely the same time. They represented the total participation of the nation in the blood sacrifice. By the same token, Christ was crucified by the Romans on behalf of the Jews. Everyone participated in His death. His death was a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. What many lambs did for many, Jesus the Lamb of God did for all.

The blood must be sprinkled. Once the lamb was slaughtered and blood drained, the father took a bunch of hyssop (a leafy bush), dipped it in the blood, and put blood on the top and sides of the doorframe. The blood was a sign that the family had sacrificed a lamb as God commanded. *"The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you"* (Exodus 12:13). It pictures the application of Christ's death to our own hearts by faith. That's why 1 Peter 1:2 speaks of the sprinkling of the blood of Christ. The lamb alone could never save a Jew.

Not even the blood in the basin could save. Only the blood sprinkled on the doorpost could spare the people from the terrible judgment of God.

Jesus Christ is our only hope of salvation. He's God's Lamb offered for the sin of the world. But Jesus' blood only saves when taken by faith. For those who reject the blood, even the Lamb of God can't save them.

The meat must be fully consumed. Not only was the blood shed and meat roasted, but the family was to eat the meat together with bitter herbs and unleavened bread (a reminder of their days in Egypt). They weren't allowed to keep the meat for later use. Any part not eaten was burned. This signified their complete participation in the death of the lamb. His life was taken, his blood shed, the blood applied, meat roasted and meat consumed. Through these measures the Jews were reminded that their redemption came through the death of a substitute. The lamb died in their place. By eating its meat, they signified their complete identification with the lamb who died for them.

Afterward, they were safe and free! The death angel stopped at every home in Egypt, but every home in Goshen (where the Israelites lived) was spared. From Pharaoh's palace to the lowest household came loud wailing. Families screamed as they discovered dead children in the middle of the night but not in Goshen. Soon after that Pharaoh sent word that the Israelites were free to leave. In fact, he begged them to leave before anyone else died!

It's why God told the Jews to eat the Passover in haste. He knew they'd be moving soon. Through the blood of Christ, the great Lamb of God, we're safe from God's wrath and set free from the penalty of sin. In Him, through Him and by Him, God has delivered His people once and for all.

3. The lamb in prophecy. Isaac's question was, "*Where is the Lamb?*" The answer was given in stages, as God's redemptive history unfolded through the pages of Scripture. Fast-forward to the prophet Isaiah for a more detailed description of the Lamb and a more complete answer to Isaac's question.

Isaiah 53 is an incredible prophecy. There's no way to read it and fail to see that God's Lamb is the great divine Substitute for the evil of the human heart. Verses 4-5: "*Surely he took our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*" What a beautiful picture of His work on the Cross. Verse 7: "*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is silent, so he did not open His mouth.*"

Scripture preserves carefully the sinlessness of Jesus. He's without sin, but carried the sins of others. That's why He did it in silence. He had no interest in defending Himself, so never spoke up. He's led to death as a Passover lamb. When cows are about to be slaughtered, they become very nervous and begin bellowing. Sheep though are silent. Writing 500 years before Christ, Isaiah answers Isaac's question of *Where's the Lamb?* by answering that the Lamb will be pierced for our transgressions and be our sin-bearer.

4. The lamb in the manger. Luke 2 sheds further light on Isaac's question of where the Lamb is. An angel gave the first announcement of the Lamb's birth to shepherds. No one paid attention to guys who smelled like sheep. They were working stiffs with a part in the world's greatest drama in history.

Warren Wiersbe (**picture**) points out that it's quite possible that that these shepherds were caring for flocks that provided sacrifices for the Temple services. Here were men caring for lambs being prepared to die in the Temple. Then, the angel comes and tells them the good news about the baby, God's lamb who will take away the sins of the world. The shepherds had spent their lives caring for lambs. Now they have the privilege of meeting the Lamb who will die in their place and care for them for eternity.

When they heard the news, they "*hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.*" They didn't waste any time. It's a good application for us. Let's learn from them and run to the lamb nestled in the straw. Let's be in a hurry to worship the Christ of Christmas.

Once they saw the Lamb of God, verse 17 says that "*they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.*" They didn't keep the news to themselves. They told everyone they met about the baby in the barn, lying in a feeding trough. We don't know if they recognized the newborn boy as the ultimate Passover Lamb. We do know that they went to check it out. The word *found* means "*found after a search.*" They didn't sit back and wonder. They took action.

Friend, if you've never come face to face with the one who sacrificed His life for you, would you run to the manger right now? We know that things must have clicked for the shepherds when they got there. Verse 20 says that they returned "*glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*"

Conclusion: Let's pull this all together with some lessons for us.

Jesus Christ is God's lamb. He fulfills every detail of the Old Testament picture. No other person in the Bible meets the requirements. Later, after Jesus was born, Simeon took Him in his arms and blessed Him, saying that Jesus would cause the rise and fall of many in Israel, indicating that while some would follow him, others would bitterly oppose Him. Then, he added a special word for Mary, "*a sword will pierce your own soul too.*" It was an early reference to the type of death Jesus would die. From the very beginning He was marked out as God's sacrificial lamb. Though Mary didn't know all the details, she knew suffering was His destiny. It's why many great artists, when painting Mary and the Christ child, portray her with a sense of heaviness on her face, as if she can see the form of a cross on the horizon.

There is no salvation without sacrifice. Hebrews 9:22 reminds us that "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*" A living lamb may be cute, but saves no one. In God's economy only shed blood can forgive sin. As God's Lamb, Jesus had to die on the Cross to save the world.

But even Jesus cannot save you without faith. Abraham had faith that God would supply a substitute. In the Passover we learn that it's blood that saves, when it's applied. Isaiah predicts how the Messiah would suffer and die in our place. The shepherds responded and told others about the One who can take away sins forever.

Friend, attending Grace Church won't save you. When God looks down from heaven, the only thing that matters is that He sees the blood of the Lamb applied to the doorposts of your heart.

When you know the Lamb, you'll follow Him. When Jesus was just about to begin His public ministry, John the Baptist calls out to Him with yet another part of the answer to Isaac's question in John 1:29: "*Look the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" John the Baptist was so convinced that Jesus was God's Lamb that he said it again the next day when he saw Jesus: "*Look, the lamb of God!*" (John 1:36). Verse 37 says that when two men heard this proclamation, they decided to follow Jesus. That's because when you believe the truth about the Lamb, you will follow Him!

If you refuse God's lamb, there is no other plan of salvation. Consider two men in Egypt on the afternoon before that fateful night. One is a good, moral Egyptian, the other an immoral, dishonest Jew. Somehow the two men have become friends, despite their cultural differences. As they chatted, the Israelite described in some detail his plans to kill a lamb and put the blood on the doorpost. Only he sees no purpose in this strange thing. Why should he waste a perfectly good lamb on such a useless endeavor? Later that afternoon the Israelite keeps putting off killing his best lamb. His wife pleads, "Sweetheart, it's time. Don't wait too long." When the appointed hour comes, he kills the lamb but not with any enthusiasm. He doesn't take the blood and put it on the doorpost. 10:30 comes and goes, then 11:00 and his wife is fearful her husband will put it off too long. Their four children, including the firstborn son who looks so much like his father, gather round the table. 11:30 and still the man delays. 11:45 and still the man has not done it. His wife weeps before him. "How can you risk the life of your oldest son like this?" Grudgingly, the man takes hyssop and applies the blood to the doorpost. His wife smiles because her family is safe. Midnight comes and goes and nothing happens. Not a sound is heard. Not even a dog barks.

But in Egypt there's great wailing, women crying, and fathers screaming. Death! Everywhere, death! Firstborn sons dying in their sleep. Firstborn cattle dead in their stalls. Not a family is left untouched by the death angel. In the home of the good and moral Egyptian man, sudden terror and then wailing. Their 15-year-old son, their hope for the future suddenly stopped breathing. Why? Because there was no blood on the door!

But what if the Egyptian had put blood on his door and the Israelite hadn't? Then, the roles would be reversed. It's the blood of the Lamb that makes the difference. For those who reject the blood, God has no other plan of salvation. Acts 4:12, "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*" Isaac asks, "*Where's the Lamb?*" He's the substitute sacrifice. He's the Passover Lamb. He's the prophesied redeemer. He's **Mary's Little Lamb**. He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world by dying on the cross.

Has He taken away your sins? Have you trusted Him, have you asked Him to? You must apply His blood to the doorposts of your heart. You must trust in His blood for the forgiveness of your sins. Where will you find such a lamb? Look to the Cross! Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! Jesus is the Lamb you need. He is God's Lamb for your sin. **Mary's Little Lamb** is our Savior! Is He your Savior?