

## What Shall We Call Him?

**A Sermon by Pastor John W. Bengston  
Augustana Lutheran Church  
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What titles – words or phrases – do we use to identify Jesus? For example, we use the titles Christ and Savior to speak of Jesus. How many others can you think of? I went through just some passages of the Bible and came up with the following:

Light  
Light of the World  
Way  
Truth  
Life  
Good Shepherd  
Prince of Peace  
Emmanuel  
Bread of Life  
Water of Life  
Resurrection  
True Vine  
King  
Son of David

On December 23, we looked at the hymn, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” to read the several titles used in that hymn to point to Jesus. We then can add to our list:

Wisdom  
Lord of Might  
Branch of Jesse  
Key of David  
Dayspring

In today’s Gospel reading, four titles are used to identify Jesus:

Lamb of God (twice)  
Son of God  
Rabbi  
Messiah

It is said that in any language, the more words used to speak of an object, person, or action, the more important that object, person, or action is to the people who speak that language. I seem to remember hearing a speaker once say that the Eskimos have about fifty words for whale blubber. I don’t know if you were counting, but I named 25 titles

used to speak of Jesus, and I am sure I missed some, too. He must be very important. Obviously, he is! He is all important!

John the Baptizer used “Lamb of God” in the Gospel reading of this morning two times, and we use that phrase every time we celebrate Holy Communion. As we begin the distribution of the elements of Holy Communion, we sing the statement from John 1:29. It’s on page 13 in the bulletin this morning.

Where did John the Baptizer get that language? It seems to come from the very first sacrifice the Israelites were to make. Before the visitation of the 10<sup>th</sup> plague on the Egyptians when Israel was held in slavery there under the Pharaoh, God instructed the people of Israel to select a lamb, one per household, a male one year old without blemish, and sacrifice that animal, taking some its blood and putting it on the doorpost of their houses and on their lintels. Then they were to roast the lamb and eat it. You can read about the Passover beginning in Exodus 12.

The result was that the angel of death passed over the houses of the Israelites and Pharaoh finally let the Israelite slaves go free. The sacrificial lamb effected the deliverance of the Chosen People from slavery to the Egyptians. They were freed.

Now the Lamb of God, Jesus, offers himself on the cross that we might be delivered from slavery to sin. We are freed to live for him and do his will on earth as it is in heaven. He is our Passover Lamb, or as Paul writes, Paschal Lamb, in 1 Corinthians, using the Greek of “Passover.” Paschal Lamb is one more title to add to our list. That makes 26.

So Lamb of God comes from the Passover experience of ancient Israel, which John the Baptizer used to announce Jesus’ public ministry, and gave us a statement that we incorporate into our worship today. This Lamb of God forgives and frees us from slavery to sin so that we can be followers and disciples today.

Jesus is God’s Word incarnate, and he is the Light for our lives.

In the dialogue contained in today’s Gospel, verses 38 and 39, we heard:

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for? They said to him, “Rabbi – there’s another title to add to our list and that makes 27 – (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.”

Following Jesus involves all that we are and have, but in this text two specific functions are named: come (or in other words, follow) and see.

Discipleship is a journey, and the one who leads us is the Master – the 28<sup>th</sup> title to include on our list. This journey is an adventure, because we only know the final destination, not the route we’ll be taking. Did you know that your journey of discipleship would take you to this place on January 20, 2008? Neither did I, but here we are worshipping together, led

by the Master to be fed in the faith by his Word, this meal, and our fellowship. And where has your journey of discipleship taken you prior to this day? I don't mean that question only geographically. I more importantly, I mean it as a follower of the Lamb. When I entered seminary in Illinois in 1960, I had no idea that my first Call would be as a Mission Developer in Aurora, Colorado, four years later.

Some have been led to foreign lands, and some to familiar locations. When Jesus says, "Come, follow me," we give up our lives to his will, and he does take us on an adventure, whether it be near or far.

About twenty years ago, when I was pastor of Christ the Savior Lutheran Church in Aurora, a fine young couple, Terry and Michele Finseth, spoke to me, and long ago I received their permission to share their story. They were owners of two auto parts stores, parents of two elementary aged children, and very comfortable in life. Terry and Michele were very involved in the congregation. We talked together, and in the conversation they said, "We have all this, and we do not feel this is what life is about." The upshot of their faith journey was that they sold their stores, their house, gave away most of their possessions, and went to Americus, Georgia, headquarters of Habitat for Humanity, and were trained to become full time volunteers in Habitat's International effort. Their initial assignment was to the Solomon Islands, and their first task was to build the home they would live in. What a contrast to the way they lived in Aurora! What a journey. Their journey has since taken them to Fiji, and then under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church USA to Sudan, Italy, and now Jerusalem. Some adventure of faith!

Tomorrow we celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. This minister of the Gospel of Christ Jesus understood his journey quite differently. He perceived his Call to declare God's Word of justice and hope to this nation in a powerful and loving way. When he earned his doctoral degree in theology in Boston, I imagine he had no idea that the journey of faith ahead of him would require being jailed, stabbed, and eventually assassinated.

Most of us as disciples have a much quieter faith journey, but nevertheless a journey of trust, obedience, and witness. Some live in the same place all their lives as disciples of the Lord – consistently, lovingly, and faithfully.

What's your journey been like following "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"? How has Jesus led you?

The other word Jesus spoke in verse 39 is "see." "See" relates to using the eyes of faith, not just the powers of observation. We live in a world that often teaches us to accept, "I see, therefore I believe." Now, in some ways, that is quite necessary. "I see the sign says, 'Stop' and I believe it would be best if and all drivers I did so." Or "I see mold on those leftovers, and I believe it would be best not to eat them." Our powers of observation are very helpful.

But so is the seeing that comes from faith. It's not all, "I see, therefore I believe." It is also true that, "I believe, therefore I see." Some dimensions and experiences of life are not available to us except through the eyes of faith. When we live in a relationship of trust in Jesus, our Redeemer and Friend – there are two more titles to add to our list which are numbers 29 and 30 – we place our confidence in him who is the Way. Because he helps me walk by faith, not by sight, I see God's hand at work through Augustana, MetroCaring, the ELCA World Hunger Appeal, personal kindnesses, and governmental actions that affirm and address the lives of hungry, sick, unemployed, and disabled people. Seeing with faith is to discern the power of the Lord God at work through individuals, structures, and systems.

Jesus invited not just two disciples to "Come and see." The living Lord – there's another title that did not get on our list, so that's 31 – invites us all to "Come and see." Be a disciple and perceive through the eyes of faith the One who is the Lamb of God. Come and see. The Light of Life is with us and among us. Amen.