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Holy Faith, Santa Fe
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Epiphany 2 – Year A
Isaiah 49.1-7
Psalm 40.1-12
1 Corinthians 1.1-9
John 1.29-41

In the name of the one, true, and living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Do you ever get the feeling that you just can't get rid of John the Baptist? We heard from John the Baptist back in Advent, when he was telling us to repent and prepare the way of the Lord. There he was in his camel hair, eating locusts and wild honey – not a very pleasant dinner guest, and a hard message to listen to, let alone act on! But we can't dismiss John the Baptist that easily. He was back last week, by the banks of the Jordan River calling people to repentance, and all of Jerusalem was going out to him to be baptized with water to wash their sins away. He even baptized Jesus there in the Jordan River, he who knew no sin. Now he's back this week in John's Gospel, with a message that is perhaps easier for us to hear and easier for us to take to heart. John is testifying to us about who Jesus is and what that means for our lives. No wonder why it seems like we just can't get rid of John the Baptist!

What is this testimony of John the Baptist? Remember that just before the story we heard in this morning's Gospel lesson, priests from Jerusalem had gone all the way to where John was baptizing in the wilderness and asked him, "Who are you?" He denied he was the Messiah. He denied he was Elijah, who was expected to come back and anoint the Messiah. He denied he was the prophet, who was expected to foretell the coming of the Messiah. Instead, when John saw Jesus approaching, John turned

the attention away from himself and toward Jesus by testifying, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

This title, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” may suggest the bulls, goats, and sheep that were offered as sacrifices for sin under the Jewish purity laws. This title could suggest the goat on whose head Moses’ brother Aaron the priest would lay his hands and confess all the sins of the people of Israel, and then release the goat into the wilderness, from whence we get our term “scapegoat.” This title could suggest the Passover lamb that is offered in remembrance of the night when God delivered God’s chosen people from the bondage of slavery. This title could suggest the suffering servant, whose song comes after the servant’s song we heard this morning from Isaiah, who was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent.

Regardless of the allusion, John’s testimony about Jesus as the Lamb of God points to Jesus being sacrificed to take away the sin of the world. Notice that John’s testimony speaks in the singular “sin,” not “sins,” indicating an entire condition as well as an individual act or acts. Jesus as the Lamb of God will, according to John, change the situation in which the whole world finds itself, as well as we who are individual sinners. With this understanding, John’s earlier call to repentance may be easier to hear, but perhaps no easier for us to act on.

John the Baptist also refers to Jesus as the one of whom John said, “After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.” This reference comes straight out of the Prologue to the Gospel of John that we hear each Christmas. Remember these words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,

and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'" This Word, or Logos in Greek, is understood to be the Word of God, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, through whom God speaks and all is created and made new. John's testimony is that Jesus is the Word of God made flesh who is greater than John (and you and me) because the Word has existed with God and as God from before time. It is through Jesus as the Word of God that everything – you and I and all creation – will be made new.

John the Baptist also identifies Jesus as the Son of God. The Word of God, the Logos, came down from heaven and became flesh in the person of Jesus as God's Son to offer salvation to the world. John twice says he did not know Jesus. Well, of course, John did know Jesus because their mothers were related. What John means is that John did not know Jesus to be the Son of God until Jesus' baptism. Notice that John's Gospel doesn't provide a description of Jesus' baptism itself, but John the Baptist gives his testimony of what happened as if it were – well, last week. "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on [Jesus]. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" It is through baptism with the Holy Spirit that Jesus, the Son of God, offers salvation to the whole world.

John the Baptist testified that he came baptizing with water that Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Word of God, the Son of God, might be revealed to Israel. In this season of Epiphany when we celebrate Jesus being revealed to the whole world, John the Baptist

is testifying to us about who Jesus is. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is the Word of God who makes all creation new. Jesus is the Son of God who offers salvation to the world. We are the recipients of John's testimony about the revelation of Jesus, but we are called to make that revelation our own.

You know, tomorrow we observe the Feast of the Confession of St. Peter, when Jesus asked his disciples who the crowds were saying he was. And they answered him, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Then Jesus asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "You are the Messiah [the Christ], the son of the living God." We are called to say who Jesus is – be it the Lamb of God, the Word of God, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ, or some other title for Jesus. Jesus is all these things and more. Much of what we see in Jesus depends on our answer to Jesus' question, when he first utters a word in John's Gospel to John the Baptist's disciples who see Jesus: "What are you looking for?"

More importantly, not only are we called to own this revelation of Jesus in our own lives, we are called to share that revelation of Jesus with the rest of the world. Just as John the Baptist deflected the priests' question, "Who are you," and instead pointed to Jesus and told them who Jesus is, we are called to divert attention away from ourselves and shine the light on the true Light of the world, so that, in the words of today's collect, we "may shine with the radiance of [Jesus'] glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the end of the earth."

That's the reason we don't want to get rid of John the Baptist. That's the reason it's worth our listening to John the Baptist to remind us that Jesus is the Lamb of God

who takes away the sin of the world, the Word of God who makes all things new, and the Son of God who offers salvation to all. Amen.