

Animals of the Bible (12) The Lamb



Sheep are not the quietest of animals. I recall how, on a camping holiday, next door to a field of ewes and lambs, I was kept awake by the constant bleating through the night, as the sheep called to each other in the darkness. When sheep are handled, however, they fall silent. A sheep being sheared does not bleat. It is the instinctive reaction of a prey animal not to cry out when it feels under threat and thus risk attracting more predators to the attack.

The prophet Isaiah was aware of this when he wrote “He was treated harshly, but endured it humbly; he never said a word. Like a lamb about to be slaughtered, like a sheep about to be sheared, he never said a word.” (Isaiah 53:7, Good News Bible). We are reminded of those words when we read, in St Matthew’s Gospel, of the dignified silence of Jesus at His trial before Pilate, who asked Him, “Don’t you hear all these things they accuse you of?” But Jesus refused to answer a single word, with the result that the Governor was greatly surprised (Matthew 27: 13 & 14).

At the beginning of our Lord’s ministry, when John the Baptist pointed Him out to his disciples, he declared, “There is the Lamb of God!” (John 1: 35). In the Book of Revelation, Jesus appears in the form of a Lamb, bearing the marks of slaughter (Revelation 5: 6 - 14). These passages take us right back to the story of the Exodus, and the blood of the lambs that was smeared around the doors of the Israelites to identify them and protect their sons from the fate that was to strike the firstborn of the Egyptians.

When Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples, recalling the story of Israel’s deliverance from captivity in Egypt, He took wine and declared, “This is my blood, which seals God’s covenant, my blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew

26: 28). As the blood of the lambs spared the Israelites and marked the beginning of their deliverance from the oppression of the Egyptians, so the blood of the Lamb would deliver His people from the oppression of sin and death.

A prayer:

Just as I am, without one plea
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidd'st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! AMEN
(Charlotte Elliott, 1789 – 1871)

- Rev John Barnett

Image: Agnus Dei (Lamb of God), by Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664)