

Have you ever watched Wheel of Fortune with Pat Sajak and Vanna White?

It's a TV game show in which contestants guess words and phrases with limited clues.

Random letters are revealed one by one on the puzzle and the first person to guess wins. Sometimes, the audience tries to help.

The Epiphany season in the Christian faith is something like that.

There is a puzzle:

Who is this Messiah? Why is he here?

What does it have to do with us?

The scriptures we hear from week to week  
and read day by day  
reveal him little by little until we see more clearly who he is.

Now, in some ways, we are like those who know the answer and are shouting to the contestants to help them out.

But, perhaps, in other ways, we have some things to learn.

So, let's imagine our own version of a game show.

So, we have two words on the board: One with 5 letters and the other with 6 letters.

As we hear the prophet Isaiah give clues, one person might shout:  
"He is the servant of God to the Israelites."

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Pat, Give me a “J”. OK – there is one J at the beginning of the first word.

And another might cry out:

He is the light to the nations, that God’s salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Give me an “S”, Pat. OK – There are three “Ses”.

Someone cries out: “He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

Another says: Kings will get off their thrones and rulers will prostrate themselves before him.

OK, OK – I’d like to buy a vowel. An “E”, please. There is one “E”.

In case you want to play along, we have two words in the puzzle. The first word has revealed J E S \_ S and the second word has \_ \_ \_ \_ S \_

The audience is restless – somebody calls out: *He lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the mire and clay; he set my feet upon a high cliff and made my footing sure.*

Another calls: He sent missionaries to Greece and Rome and Asia Minor and other Gentile nations.

Some hated him – others loved him.

Ok – Give me a “t” please. One T as the last letter of the second word.

Do you want to solve?

No, I am not quite sure yet.

Someone shouts: John the Baptist saw the Holy Spirit descend on him and called him the Son of God.

Pat, give me an “r” please. One “R” in the middle of the second word.

I'd like to solve: Jesus Christ.  
(give yourselves a hand)

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Yes – Jesus, the Son of God, has come to earth as a human being

- to bring God's saving grace to all people.
- He is God with us,
- he embodies the Spirit of God,
- he has the full authority of God to do the works of God to reconcile humanity.
- He is the Father's Anointed Son, the Christ, our Savior.

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The word “Epiphany” means “Manifestation” or “revealing”.

It has the sense of shedding light on something that had previously not been seen or understood.

When John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and said excitedly to his friends:  
He is the Lamb of God!

It was an epiphany for them.

The sacrifice of a lamb meant atonement for sins. It meant being put right with God.

In ancient tradition, each person would provide the lamb for themselves—

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**but for God to provide the sacrifice**

- as the Lord had done for Abraham and Isaac,
  - and as Moses had done for the Israelites newly-delivered from slavery in Egypt –
- was to redeem sinners for God's own sake.**

Even more, the sacrifice of the unblemished lamb was rooted in the  
Passover

– when the blood of that lamb spared God's people from death and allowed them to escape their captors.

**For Jesus to be this Lamb of God for all people is to shine the divine light of God on him as the Savior of the world.**

His blood shed on the cross is for all people as the atonement, the reconciliation, for all sins.

His blood shed on the cross is God's own sacrifice so that you and I and anyone who trusts in Jesus might have life without fear of damnation.

Now, good people, I can hear you saying to yourself (as I am), that you are not afraid of damnation.

That you (and I) have not done anything so bad.

And, so far as it goes, that is most likely true.

**Except ...**

Except that we were born as offspring of Adam and Eve.

And so we bear the legacy of their sinful rebellion against God.

Sin is in our DNA, and we are powerless to change it.

Theologians call this "original sin".

It is what we confess when we say “We are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves.”

In other words, by our humanity, by the assertion of our own will, we are destined for damnation and can do nothing to prevent it, no matter how “good” we are.

If we rely on our own goodness, then we should be afraid, since to save ourselves, we must be perfect. And I know I am not perfect.

But if someone were to be perfect *for* me,  
if someone were to do what is necessary to overturn my sentence – and yours – of condemnation.

If there were someone I could rely on to bail me out,  
to expunge my record.

If someone were to be the sacrifice for my sins, and yours,  
to shed the blood by which I – and you – are delivered from the death sentence of sin, **then we would be free to live without fear!**

This is the weight of John’s announcement: *Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!*

The “If” is revealed to be actual – the “Someone” is revealed to be Jesus, the Christ, the one anointed by God to be our life and salvation.

As Psalm 27 declares:  
*The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
Whom shall I fear?  
The LORD is the strength of my life;  
Of whom shall I be afraid?*

Of no one – because Jesus has shed his blood on the cross for your sins and mine.

When we grasp that Jesus frees us from the burden of our sin and reconciles us to God, then we respond as John's friends did – we follow him.

We live with Jesus, we grow in our understanding of who he is as the Messiah, the Christ of God;  
we orient our lives around him.  
we learn his teaching,  
we put his teaching into action,

And like John, we point to Jesus and tell our friends: Look, there is the guy who saves my life and yours because he is the Son of God. Come and see. Let me introduce you.

In the Name....