

MAUNDY THURSDAY  
Exodus 12:1-14; Mark 14:12-26  
*The Paschal Feast*

God's family, marked by circumcision with God's promise, huddled together, ragged, tired, and uncertain what the future held. Moses had been interceding for them, on God's behalf, with the Pharaoh, who held them in slavery. Negotiations had not gone well. Pharaoh was resolute, and each plague sent to break him only seemed to lead him to dig his heels in more. Things were really reaching a head now. God said the final plague was coming—the worst plague of all: the death of the firstborn. The angel of death was going to fly over Egypt and slay every firstborn son. If Pharaoh didn't value life, perhaps he'd at least fear death.

God's family, marked by circumcision with God's promise, huddled together, ragged, tired, and uncertain what the future held. They'd been given directions to mark their doorposts with the blood of the lamb for death to pass them over. The search for the lamb was not easy. It had to be perfect, without blemish or defect. Israelite flocks weren't exactly overflowing with such animals. Their livestock resembled them, weary and malnourished. This was a costly sacrifice, requiring the cream of their crop: a healthy, perfect, innocent lamb. But since when has the remedy for death ever been cheap?

Being a good steward of His creation, God was careful to make sure that none of the lamb would go to waste. He gave directions concerning what to do with the lamb after it had been slaughtered. They were to roast it and eat it as part of an elaborate family meal. Not only that, but this meal was to be repeated each year as a memorial of this sacrifice and God's deliverance worked through it. They ate the means of their salvation, and then they ate it again and again and again to remember what God had done on that marvelous day.

God's family, sealed by Baptism with God's promise, huddles together, ragged, tired, and uncertain what the future holds, heavy laden with sin and its consequences, subject to the cruel tyranny of death, in desperate need of salvation and deliverance, but unable to attain it ourselves. We come to gather as the family of God to be marked with the blood of the Lamb, the innocent, precious, perfect sacrificial Victim, who by His death makes death pass us over.

It was no coincidence that Christ, our innocent Lamb, was slaughtered to save us from death during the Passover. The Passover was THE feast of the Israelite Church Year. Jerusalem during the Passover was like Saginaw would be if it hosted the Super Bowl, World Series, Final Four, Stanley Cup, and NBA Championship all at the same time. God offered His Lamb for all to see, as pilgrims, priests, and merchants flocked into town to celebrate the Passover feast or at least make a buck off it, so that all might see His promise kept.

It is also no coincidence that Christ instituted the new and better paschal, which means "Passover," feast, during the Passover meal. As they ate an innocent lamb in remembrance of the one-time sacrifice of an innocent lamb for their salvation, Christ graciously gave His Church, the new and better Israel, a new and better family meal, wherein we now also eat an innocent Lamb in remembrance of the one-time and once-for-all sacrifice for our salvation, not from Egyptian tyranny, but from sin, death, and hell. Even more, we do not eat another lamb in remembrance of the first lamb, but we partake of the very Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world by His precious blood, poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. There was no way the apostles could miss the connection. The early church celebrated the connection,

often calling the Lord's Supper a participation in the paschal mystery of our Lord. For us, far removed from the Old Testament celebration of the Passover and the Jewish roots of the Christian Church, it is important for us to be reminded.

St. John the Baptist had this in mind when He called out, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" The church fathers had it in mind when they sang "O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world" before the Lord's Supper. The Reformers had it in mind when they would hold up the chalice and host before the Sacrament was distributed and say, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" The New Testament had always lain hidden in the Old Testament and now, even today, the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New, every time we celebrate our Savior's paschal meal. As Baptism replaced and surpassed circumcision as the sign of God's adoption, as Good Friday replaced and surpassed the Exodus as the defining moment in the history of His people, so also the Lord's Supper replaces and surpasses the Passover Meal as God's family's meal, for we have a new and better Lamb. While Israel ate lamb and unleavened bread at their Passover feast, we now feast upon unleavened bread which is the very Body of our Lord in our paschal feast.

Christ is our Passover Lamb, and that is why on Easter we light our paschal candle, or Passover candle, to celebrate the fact that, unlike that first lamb sacrificed in Egypt, our Lamb of God took His life back up again after saving us by His death. It is no coincidence that St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 5(:7-9): "*Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.*"

Consider the love of our God. He did not want Israel simply to be delivered or to remember its deliverance, but to taste it and see it in the Passover feast. So also, God has loved us so much that He wants us to taste, to touch, to eat and drink His love. He has sacrificed His Son once and for all yet He didn't want to stop there. No, He wants to give us His Son, once slain but now delivered from death, as the seal of our own salvation and deliverance from death, as the pledge of His love, as an intimate means of commemorating the ultimate expression of His grace and power to save. He gives us the Bread of Life to comfort us when death looms.

And so as God's family, sealed by Baptism with God's promise, we once again huddle together, ragged, tired, and uncertain what the future holds. We gather as the family of God and celebrate the family meal, feasting on salvation, tasting the goodness of the Lord, sustained by hope. Our Lamb has been slain. Death has passed over. As Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea to the Promised Land, so now also we pass through Baptism to life eternal. As God provided manna for the journey as Israel wandered in the wilderness, so also He has provided His Church with heavenly manna, the Body and Blood of the Bread of Life, to sustain us in faith and conviction on our journey through this often inhospitable and hostile world. "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,*" but don't just behold Him. Take and eat, take and drink, for everything is ready. The Lamb is slain. The Blood is shed. The Supper is ready. Amen.