

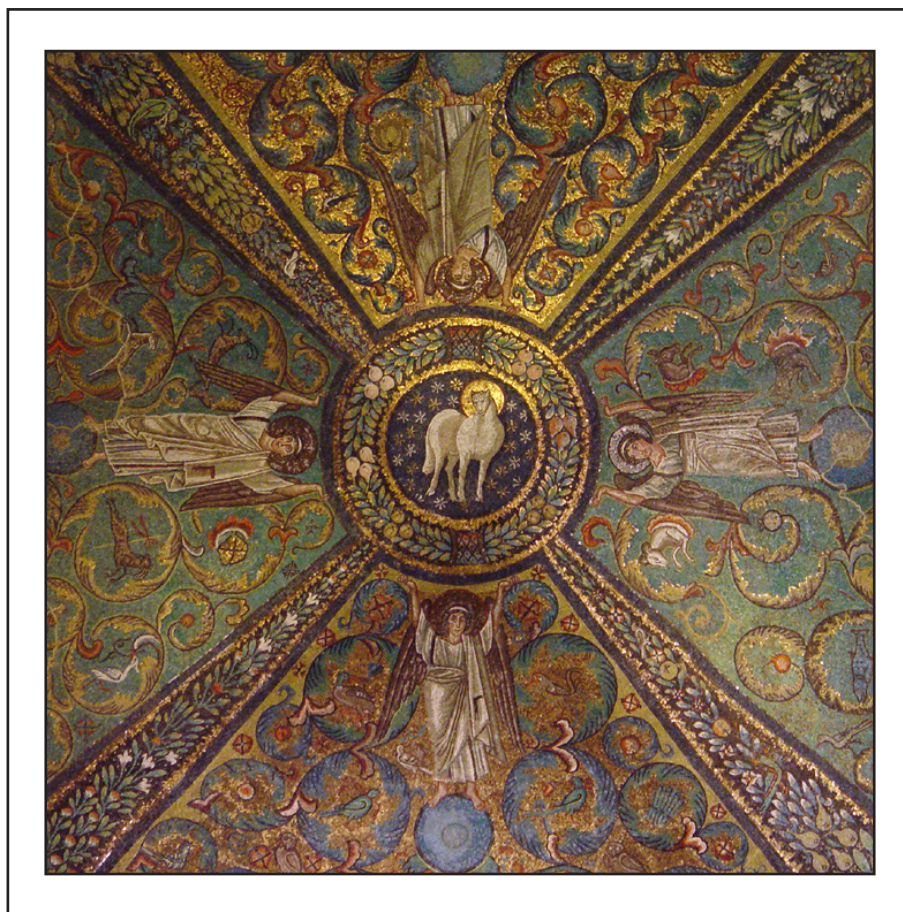
# Living Grace

Cycle A 2nd Sunday  
Ordinary Time

“GETTING TO THE ORIGIN OF THINGS”



*“Does a feather remember it once was...a bird? Does a book remember it once was...a word?” In **Once Upon a Memory**, a little boy is swept away into a world where fantasy and reality come together in surprising and playful ways. The delicate, rhyming verse goes on to explore other objects and their origins. The soft illustrations alternate between images of a curious child and imagined scenes of animals at work and at play, and reiterate the meditative, contemplative feeling throughout the book. “Will you remember you once were...a child?” This closing question invites children to think about what they will remember about their own origins and who they might become.*



### **AGNUS DEI**

*Mosaic by unknown artist ~ 521-547  
Basilica of St. Vitale ~ Ravenna, Italy*

#### **EXPLORING THE ART:**

The Basilica of San Vitale was built in the 6th century, and is one of the most important surviving examples of early Christian Byzantine art and architecture in Europe. The Roman Catholic Church has designated the building a "basilica", the honorary title bestowed on church buildings of exceptional historic and ecclesial importance, and it is one of eight structures in Ravenna that are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The concept of mystical sacrifice occupies a central place in the iconography of the mosaics in the Basilica. Agnus Dei, Latin for Lamb of God, is one of the titles given to Jesus in the New Testament. It refers to Jesus' role as a sacrificial lamb atoning for the sins of man, harkening back to ancient Jewish Temple sacrifices in which a lamb was slain during the Passover, the blood was sprinkled along the door, and the lamb was eaten. The Agnus Dei image above is part of an elaborate ceiling mosaic above the sanctuary. The Lamb is located at the highest point of the arched ceiling, exactly above the altar where the priest raises the host during the consecration of the Eucharist, emphasizing the mystical sacrifice that we consume in Holy Communion.

The Lamb is set against a starry, deep-blue background inside a crown which is carried by four angels dressed in white representing the four corners of the earth. Every surface is covered with a profusion of flowers, stars, birds and animals, including many peacocks. Above the arch, on both sides, two angels hold a disc and beside them a representation of the cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem. They symbolize the human race - Jerusalem representing the Jews, and Bethlehem the Gentiles.

# Living Grace

READ-ALoud STORY



## **ABIDE IN ME**

*Vicki Shuck, Esperanza Arts*

*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

*By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.*

*~ John 7:7-9*

Read-aloud video link:

**ONCE UPON A MEMORY**

Written by Nina Laden & Illustrated by Renata Liwska

# Sunday Gospel

JOHN 1:29-34

John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said,  
"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

He is the one of whom I said,

**'A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me  
because he existed before me.'**

I did not know him,

but the reason why I came baptizing with water  
was that he might be made known to Israel."

John testified further, saying,

"I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven  
and remain upon him.

I did not know him,

but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me,

'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain,  
he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'

Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God."

# Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

## JOHN REMEMBERS HIS ROLE AND JESUS' ORIGIN, CAN WE REMEMBER OURS, TOO?

Cycle A is the first year of the 3 year cycle of the Lectionary, and we begin with a quick trip to John's Gospel. John, who was at the foot of the cross with Jesus, offers an "eyewitness" validation of the story of John the Baptist and Jesus's baptism. This Gospel, is similar to our children's story, as it examines a present reality with the inquisitive mind. How did all of this come to be? Who is aware of Jesus' origin and purpose? What does the community understand about Jesus and his beginnings? What do they understand about his identity and mission? We are led back to the origin to find out - just as we go back to the seed to discover the type of a plant, its fruit, and its purpose.

In this Gospel, the apostle John, begins with examining the fruit, "the lamb of God". This would immediately grab the crowd's attention. Symbols have the power to communicate novels of words with one concept, metaphor, or picture. That is what is happening here. It would be as if the Pope standing in an all-Catholic crowd held up a symbol and exclaimed, "the bread of life"! To us Catholics, the Eucharist is the primary symbol that we build our life and theology on. To the Jewish people "a sacrificial lamb" would hold the same power and significance. The crowd's attention would be grabbed. We remember from past weeks that John the Baptist's mission was to be the herald. A herald's job in the first century was to go into town and announce to everyone that a very important person and event is coming their way. "Look over here!! Don't miss this!!" Thus, John the Baptist very effectively had everyone's hearts ready and minds inquiring, "Wow, what next?".

In our children's story, *Once Upon a Memory*, we look at feathers, books, chairs, cakes, grandmothers, and dads with the question, "Do you remember what you once were?" This is what John the Baptist does for the people of Jesus's day. He begins at the end, where Jesus ends up as the sacrificial lamb of God, and then takes them backward to explore and question, the origin of it all - where did this sacrificial lamb come from?

John gives witness that this man came before him. He is leading us to look backward to the question of the origin, "Sent from where and who?" We arrive at God the Creator who is the source of the personal and collective memory in the origin of all things. And from that very same creator, the origin of all things is where Jesus, "the lamb of God" comes from. John the Evangelist begins, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) The Church in it's wisdom begins Cycle A by taking us back to the beginning of the origins of all things!

# Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

**YOUR STORY:** Do you know the story of when you were born? Do you know any stories from when you were a younger child? How important is it that we know where we come from? How can that make a difference in the way we live our lives?

**THE CHILDREN'S STORY:** What is the main question in our story? Which one is your favorite? How does this question help us to think about our own stories?

**THE GOSPEL STORY:** How much do you think Jesus remembered about who he was and where he came from? How do you think that he knew for sure? What was the role in signs and symbols in helping people to know who Jesus was? What do you think his cousin, John the Baptist, understood? How much did both John and Jesus need to rely on faith on a day to day basis in fulfilling God's mission? How do you think it made a difference for Jesus? Would he have had the courage if he knew how his life would end as the sacrificial lamb? If he is the Lamb of God, what is that saying to Jesus and to the people?

How does Jesus choose to live with this knowledge of who he is, where he came from, and the foreshadowing of his sacrificial death? What can we learn about our own identities, missions, and living a life for others, by the way Jesus choose to live his life and mission?

# Biblical Background

JOHN 1:29-34

**GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING:** The Jordan River runs from north to south with its source being in the Golan Heights in Caesarea Philippi. It runs into the Sea of Galilee and then continues south towards Jericho emptying into the Dead Sea. John baptized in the region of Jericho in the Jordan River. Jericho is in the desert lands; thus the topography is dry. It is a seven-mile-wide valley dissected by the Jordan River to this day. The area is flat so crowds could have gathered easily with a vast viewing area of the river.

**TERMS: Baptizing with water** John baptized in water, leaping off the Jewish understanding of “mikvah” the ritual bath that Jewish people would take before offering sacrifice at the temple. Baptism was understood because it sprung from this cultural and spiritual foundation.

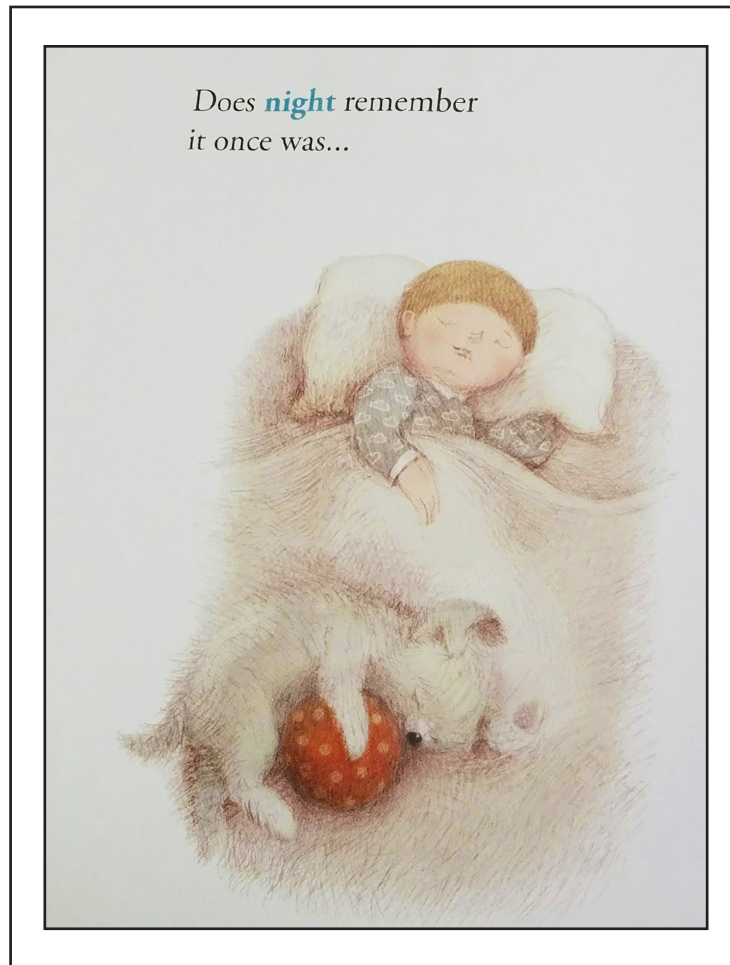
**Baptizing with the Holy Spirit** Jesus was the first to be baptized in the Holy Spirit at his baptism, “the Holy Spirit came down from heaven and descended upon him like a dove”. This only happened to Jesus. It is through Jesus, and his death and resurrection, that this immersion in the Holy Spirit became accessible to all.

**CULTURAL INSIGHT:** In this reading John speaks of John the Baptist as a “witness” to Jesus. In the Mediterranean world, a witness played a much different role than in our Western culture. In the western world, a witness is called upon to give the facts with no interpretation. Judges and lawyers are then called upon to interpret the facts and then give “witness”. In the Mediterranean world, the witness is also the interpreter of the events. When John the Baptist is spoken of to give witness, it is understood that it is his job to be the interpreter of the events. In this gospel he assumes this role when he begins his interpretation with proclaiming Jesus as “the Lamb of God”. He could not have given Jesus a more potent title to the Jewish listener. The sacrificial lamb is the primary symbol of the sacrifice in the temple. The Jewish temple was built on the rock, believed to have been the altar, upon which Abraham brought Isaac for sacrifice.

**INSIGHT INTO MEANING:** In this gospel from the book of John a big leap is made. Instead of “a voice from heaven” proclaiming that Jesus is none other than the “Son of God”, in this account, John the Baptist boldly proclaims this Good News. John directs the crowd to look to what came before him, to the origins as to what holds the greatest honor, and to what is true. We can learn a lot from this in our American forward-looking, futuristic society. To look backward - to know from whom and from where we can come - brings wisdom and understanding. In the case of Jesus, to look back is to see God in his origin. This authenticates his baptism in the Holy Spirit, as well as to be the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit, thus making “all things new”!

# Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME  
AND IN THE WORLD



**QUESTION OF THE WEEK:** Explore these big thoughts: At what point does the day turn into night? At what point did you your parents become adults? What place did Jesus' baptism play in his mission? What place does our baptism play in our lives?

**GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES:**    **KNOWING YOUR ROOTS**  
  **GROWING YOUR MISSION**

**FAMILY ACTIVITIES:** Share baby pictures of each member of your family. Talk about each persons' birth. Try to trace back to grandparents and great grandparents, sharing pictures and stories of where they were born. Grow in your understanding of the origins of your own family. Talk about how having a greater awareness of your own family's origins helps you have a greater appreciation of how your family is a part of God's family - the Body of Christ.