

28th March 2021 10 am Palm Sunday: Christ Our Passover

Service led by Michelle Harris, Talk by Denise Coomber

Interview by Andrew Attwood with Vikki about Listening to God in Lockdown

Readings and Intercessions by Michelle Harris

This transcript is only of the readings and the talk.

1st Reading: Luke 22:7-20

7 Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8 Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.”

9 “Where do you want us to prepare for it?” they asked.

10 He replied, “As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, 11 and say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks: where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ 12 He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there.”

13 They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 15 And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.”

17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

2nd Reading: 1 Corinthians 5:7

7 Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch – as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

Talk

[Michelle:] Denise is going to come and join us now, hopefully. I'm just going to pray for her before she starts. Let's pray.

Father God, would You bless Denise now. Thank You for the preparation that she's done, thank You for the way You've inspired her heart as she's been preparing this talk, but Father, would You speak through her now, would Your Holy Spirit rest on her and work in her, and God, just help her to speak Your words right now. Amen.

[Denise:] Here we go then. What's your fondest memory? And why do you remember it? How are you reminded about it? Is it a smell, a picture, a momento you've kept? Was it an event, and does it remind you of somebody that you love, or loved. Just have a little think about that for a minute.

So throughout Scripture, God's reminded His people how much He loves them. So there's lots of things that we can remember because of what Scripture says, they built memorials out of stone to remind them, they had a tabernacle built, with

the symbolism built into it, of a picture of drawing near to God. He parted the Red Sea for them, He brought down thunder. He had people write songs, prophets acting out events, and there were animals that were sacrificed. And Jesus used parables as well to make truths stick in people's memories, and He used everyday things like sheep, coins, trees, children, nets, fish: things that were around them, to remind people of God's truth. He healed the sick, which would make things stick in people's memories, and He raised the dead. He made memories for people.

And it was no mistake that Jesus went to Jerusalem at Passover. He was going to use all the symbolism of that festival to remind people about His great love, mercy and grace. It was no mistake that He'd set His face like flint and made His way to Jerusalem, even though the last time He was there, they'd tried to stone Him, and the chief priests and Pharisees were plotting to arrest Him. It was no mistake that He was anointed in Bethany: the word Messiah or Christ means 'anointed one', and the smell of the nard which filled the room would have evoked memories; maybe the smell was even on Him when He went to the tomb. And it was no mistake that He had been proclaimed King of Israel as He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, which is what we're commemorating today. It was a day of joy, where Jesus triumphantly rode into the city, and they praised Him for who He is, and the palm leaves would have brought to mind a time when the people of Israel were rescued from their enemies. But despite all the praise and adoration of the crowds, He knew that He had come there to die. The Jewish leaders tried to trip Him up with awkward questions, so that they could arrest Him, and everything He said had a sense of urgency in these next few days, because He knew. So it was no mistake that Jesus was in Jerusalem at Passover. The whole Scripture points towards Jesus and His crucifixion and resurrection, as the turning point of history and all that symbolism in the Old Testament points towards one moment in history.

Now the phrase 'Lamb of God' is used about Jesus 31 times in the New Testament. And we've had read to us 1 Corinthians 5:7, which said that Jesus is our Passover lamb. So how can we show that Jesus Christ in His majesty and glory fulfils this prophetic type of Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world? Well let's look at the time leading up to His death on the Cross for our redemption. So we need to look at the Passover festival. It's a Jewish pilgrimage festival. There were three pilgrimage festivals which meant that people had to go to Jerusalem to celebrate them. So there was this one, Passover, and then Shavuot, which is Pentecost, and Sukkot, which is Tabernacles. So Jerusalem would have been heaving with people when Jesus was there with His disciples, people would have brought everything with them that they needed to celebrate Passover, including lambs, so there would have been a cacophony of noise, and people would have camped out on the hills and it would have been a time of celebration, when they remembered the first Exodus, and we can read about the first Exodus, in Exodus chapter 11: it describes the death of the firstborn of the sons of Egypt. It was the last of the 10 plagues that God visited on the Egyptians, and each plague was symbolic of an Egyptian god, but Yahweh, Jehovah, the Lord was greater than them all. The firstborn son of the Pharaoh, who would have grown up to be considered a god, was killed. But the God of Israel spared those who followed His command. The Angel of Death passed over the houses that had the blood of the lamb daubed on the doorposts, and Pharaoh finally let the Israelites go.

Exodus 12 describes how Passover was to be celebrated: each household was to take a year-old male lamb into their house on the 10th day of Nisan, which is in the Jewish calendar. And I don't know if you've ever seen a year-old lamb, more of a ram (and they don't have that name for nothing!) The animal would have made a significant difference to each house, so if every house has got a ram living in it, you can imagine, we have a dog living in ours and he makes quite a difference. Well, as Jesus came to Jerusalem, He is greeted as Son of David, and He comes in the name of the Lord, and He was going to make a huge difference to

everybody's lives. So they were to daub the blood of the lamb on the doorposts so that the Angel of Death would pass over their houses. And we remember in Holy Week how the blood of Jesus also ran down as He died in our place, and how He, like the Passover lamb, was born to die.

They took the wealth of Egypt with them, but they didn't have time for the dough to rise. So they just took it with them, but they were free.

God instructed the Israelites to remember the night of the Passover every year, and they were to eat roasted lamb, together with Matzah and bitter herbs, as they did when they left Egypt. And when we celebrate Easter, we will be reminded how Jesus has set us free from sin and death. The Jews would know the Passover story inside and out, they'd be very aware of what each symbol would mean. But Jesus was going to revolutionise the way they thought, as He celebrated Passover with His disciples.

What we're going to do is weave in and out of a Passover meal, perhaps a Passover meal, **that** Passover meal, or perhaps the Last Supper or perhaps what it looks like today, so history just goes out the window here, so I'll be flipping backwards and forwards between various different times.

I think the first thing we need to do is understand Sabbaths. Sabbaths are holy days in the Jewish calendar, you're not allowed to do any work on them at all. The Passover meal takes place on the 14th of Nisan in the Jewish calendar every year, which is a high Sabbath or a special Sabbath day, which is commemorating the day the Israelites left Egypt, and coincidentally Passover falls on the 28th of March this year which is today. It's part of a festival of unleavened bread, which is a seven- or eight-day festival, depending on whether you're orthodox or not, and it reminds the Israelites how they didn't have time for the bread to rise, and most importantly, the Passover. So, the 14th of Nisan was the Passover Sabbath, the 15th of Nisan was the Sabbath of unleavened bread: two Sabbath days in a row. Now either of these may or may not have fallen on the weekly Sabbath. So we don't know, perhaps there were three Sabbath days in a row. Why am I telling you this? Because in Matthew 12:40 It says, "Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth," and Friday to Sunday isn't three days and three nights, but also like the Passover lamb, Jesus came into their midst for three days before He was killed. So Jesus celebrates His Last Supper with the disciples before Passover.

It may have been because He was in an Essene guest-house and the Essenes didn't follow the Greek calendar, but we don't have time to go into all that stuff now, so please look it up later, or ask me and I will explain it to you later. So Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and is killed on the 14th of Nisan, just like Passover lambs, if there were any Passover lambs killed that year, remember the Temple curtain was split in two, so it might not have been possible.

And before Passover happens, the Preparation happens, which means removing yeast from the house. We heard a bit about that in the reading as well. And it's to remind them that they had to leave Egypt before allowing the bread to rise. Yeast is a symbol of sin, so the Preparation Day was also a time of reflection and repentance. Now I'm sure all you sourdough makers out there know that there's yeast in our atmosphere all around us, some of it lands on flour and water mixture and it makes dough rise, so no amount of cleaning and dusting will get rid of all the yeast. And I think that's the point: we can't rid ourselves of sin, we are fallen humans and sin will always be there. So 1 Corinthians 5:7 says, "Remove the old yeast of sin so that you may be a new batch of dough." But that's only part of the verse, the answer to the problem of sin comes later. We can't remove our sins and become holy in God's sight. We can't earn our way into God's presence, no matter how good we think we are. But Jesus did that for us.

So we've prepared our houses, we've prepared our hearts. Let's see what symbolism there is in the actual Passover meal. First of all, how did Jesus and His disciples celebrate the Last Supper? I'm sure you've seen some wonderful paintings by Leonardo da Vinci of the Lord's Supper, they're all sitting on one side of the table and staring out looking at us with their blond hair and blue eyes, but that's not probably how it happened. And we've read in Luke 22, that there was a man with a pitcher, carrying a water jar, which would have been an unusual sight, so he was probably an Essene monk because women carried water, so that would have been an unusual thing. It seemed that Jesus had prepared the whole thing, and He was telling the disciples to go and find what He'd already prepared.

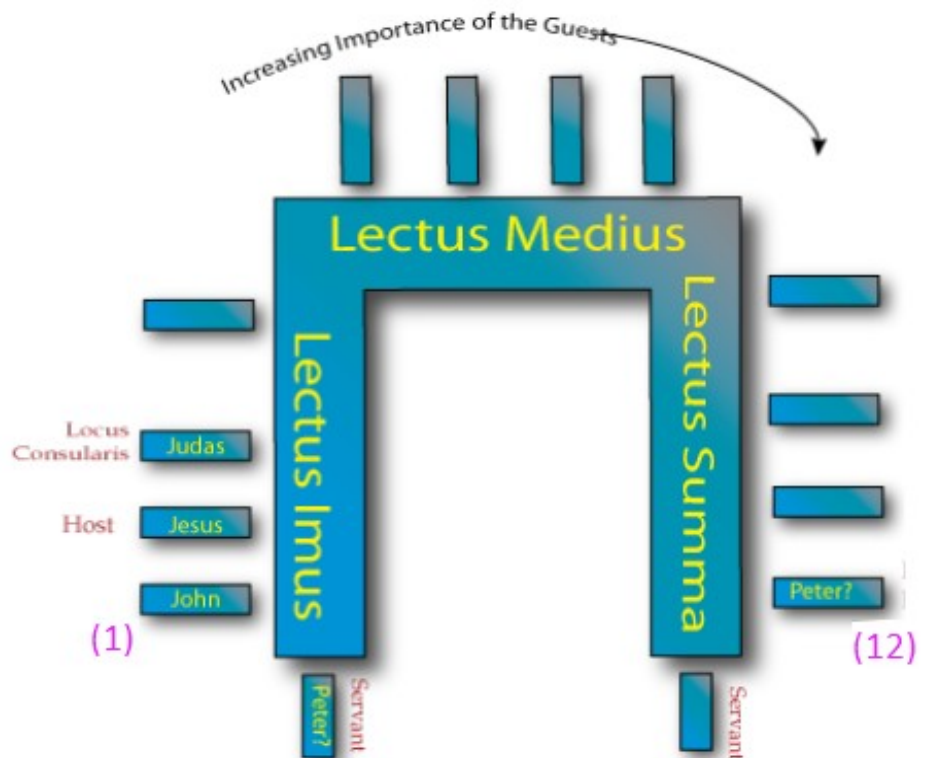
So, in Luke, 22:12-14, it says,

12 He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there.'

13 They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table.

Now Luke's going to show you a slide now, which shows a triclinium. Let's look at the picture of the triclinium. If you imagine, these are numbered places from 1 to 12 so the bottom left hand corner is place one, the host always sat here. So Jesus would have been sitting here (2), and we can work out from what it says in Scripture where other people were sitting, so we can work out that John was in position 1, and the place of honour at the table was the position behind Jesus. So they were lying down, reclining at the table: this is a Roman triclinium, so their feet would have been sticking out behind them, they'd have been leaning on their left elbow, and eating with their right hands. So, the place of honour where Judas was sitting, was behind Jesus, he was keeping His back. The place in front of Him was His right-hand man, which is John, and we can work out, because Peter speaks to John halfway through the meal, that he was probably sitting over there or he might have been sitting, he might have been sitting in position 12 on the other side of the table, which is the position of the servant, or he might have been sitting in one of the other servant positions. You can imagine him finding out that Judas has got the place of honour, harrumphing himself round to the other side of the table. So, the verses of scripture that tell us all this, so Matthew 26:7, which is when Jesus was anointed with oil,



7 a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

so there's another example of reclining, and then Luke 7:36-38 probably makes more sense of that.

36 When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. **37** A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume.

38 As she stood behind him

(which is where His feet are, remember)

at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears.

So, that shows us that they're reclining at the table. That's all I wanted to say there, so it makes a little bit more sense of everything, so as Jesus is going around, washing His disciples' feet, He walks around the edge of the table.

So I've just explained where everybody was, so John 13:23 says

23 One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him.

so that's where we get the verse about John, and then the place of the most honoured guest, which is probably where Judas was sitting, because it says in Mark 14:20, "The one that was going to betray Him was 'the one who dips bread into the same bowl with Me'." So that could only have been John or Judas, the ones either side of Him. And Jesus said in John 13:26, the betrayer is the one whom He will give the piece of bread when He's dipped it, and you always passed it round to the left. So that's where they were at the table. I don't know if that's of vital importance, but I think it's important that we understand a little bit more about how things are happening. And then Peter in position 12, that's John 13:24, when he talks to John.

So, but anyway, Jesus, even though He knew what Judas was going to do, He gave him the place of honour, and He may even have washed his feet, depending on when in the meal the feet were washed, Judas might have already gone by then. But even though He knows what we're like, we can be seated with Jesus in heavenly realms because of what He's done for us. And it tells us that in Ephesians 2:6. So that's another memory He's making there for the disciples: this person that's going out to betray Him is the one that has the highest honour. So let's just whizz through the Passover meal, because we've probably used up quite a bit of time already, so the meal starts with a blessing,

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who gives us the fruit of the vine, who has kept us alive and permitted us to reach this season.

And then Jesus, or whoever's leading, would have washed His hands as a symbol of washing away impurity. Candles would be lit. Israel was meant to be a light to the world, an example to the nations around them, but Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." in John 8. He's the one that brings light and illumination to our lives.

Now just as we have an order of service for things, the Passover has a Seder, which means 'order', a set way of doing things, and one of the ways that they remember this is, they have a plate with little indentations on it all the way round with all the things that they have the symbols in their Passover meal, so Luke is going to show you an example of that plate now. So there's a plate there, and you have all these things on this plate so you've got



greens, an egg, horseradish, shank bone, Charoset, which is a sort of Waldorf salad with apples and nuts and things in it, and bitter herbs. And then in the middle there's a picture of some unleavened bread.

So, first of all, they have four cups of wine, I've got a cup of wine here. So four cups of wine that they're going to eat throughout the meal.

- The first one's the cup of sanctification. And it's reminded them how they were a nation set apart for God; but after the Resurrection we are described as set apart for God, we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, 1 Peter 2:9.
- The second one's the cup of the plague, which reminds them about the plagues.
- The third is the cup of redemption, which reminded them that they were bought with a price, the lamb that was killed in the place of the firstborn, and we'll come back to that later.
- And then the last one is the cup of Hallel, that's where we get our word 'Hallelujah', which means 'Praise', praise God.

So they drink the first cup. And then they work their way around the Seder plate, and each thing means something.

- So, the greens, which are usually parsley, is a symbol of life, and it's dipped in the...
- salt water, which represents the tears of the people.
- And then there are three Matzot¹ or unleavened bread, I've got some here (the corner's broken off), and they're wrapped in a linen cloth, the middle one is taken and broken in half. This bit is shared around: it's the bread of affliction. And then the other bit is hidden somewhere in the room. In modern times, children have to go and find it later and then bring it back to the host, but if you look at the Matzah, I don't know if you can see that, it's all covered in holes and there are stripes all over it, so it reminded me of Isaiah 53², which says, "He was pierced for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, and with His stripes we are healed."



So, the bread reminds us of the bread of life. And then the Hagaddah happens, which is a reciting of how the first Passover happened, and they have a book sometimes, and the eldest child asks questions so that the story can be told again: "So why is this night different from every other night?" And then the cup of plague is drunk, more washing of hands, and then the meal itself begins. So they say,

Blessed are You, Lord God, King of the Universe, who brings forth food from the earth.

Now at this point, the bitter herbs would have been eaten: it's usually horseradish or onion mixed together, which represent the bitterness of slavery, and then the Charoset, which is just a paste which represents the mortar from the bricks, when they were building things, so they'd have wrapped it up in a bit of unleavened bread and then scooped it into a bowl and then passed it on to the next person.

And then the lamb would have been served. This is the high point of the meal, the main course. And obviously the lamb would have reminded the people that God saved them. The Angel of Death passed over them. The lamb died so that they didn't have to. And God saved them. The lambs were sacrificed in the Temple as burnt offerings as well, to remind people that there must be a consequence of

¹ The plural of Matzah is Matzot (although there are other variants)

² Extracts from Isaiah 53:5, NIV (first phrase) & KJV (& NKJV) (2nd and last phrase)

sin, but this lamb wasn't a burnt offering lamb. We're not sure if there was any lamb at the Last Supper, but the Lamb of God was certainly there with them, and He's the one that was going to die in their place. He's the one that took the punishment for all sin for all time. He's the one who was pierced for our transgressions, and crushed for all the wrong things we'd ever done or will ever do. Nowadays they don't have a lamb, they just have a shank bone to remind them about the lamb. They can't sacrifice anything at the moment because there's no Temple, and they don't need to, because Jesus paid the penalty, once for all, it says in Hebrews 10³,

Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

So I don't know how they come into God's presence without being forgiven. It seems a little incomplete. But nowadays, we just have faith in the complete work of Jesus when He died in our place, it's by faith we're saved, it's all through God's grace, love and mercy. We can have life if we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. And the verses about the lamb in the New Testament include Revelation 5:6,

I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne.

And Revelation 22:1-3, Jesus is enthroned as a glorified lamb, so the symbolism is so obvious. He is the sacrifice that takes our place, that pays the penalty for our sin, so that we can be free, so that we can live again. We can have an amazing life with God Himself as our Father. So Paul described Christ as our Passover lamb.

I missed a bit out:

- the Maror and the Chazeret, the dipped things, Jesus would have passed that on to Judas, and Judas would have gone out into the night before they started taking the whole meal together.
- There's also on the plate an egg, which does represent all the animals killed in sacrifice: it represents life, and there were all sorts of sacrifices the Jews had to do before they could come into God's presence. Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. His was the sacrifice that paid the ultimate price. And it says in Hebrews 10:10, the blood of bulls and goats are never enough⁴. But we've been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all⁵.

So Jesus has made this memory in their heads, He's associated it with something that they already know, but they've been sitting there thinking, "Well, this isn't what we usually do! What a way to remember God's love, that the Passover lamb is like Jesus, who is going to die in our place." So as they share the food, maybe that's what they were talking about, that it's a bit strange, but reflecting on God loving them.

Most Jewish families don't eat Passover lamb, they have Gefilter Fish or beef. It's a poor substitute – Jesus is the real thing – they can't sacrifice, but we know that Jesus is the sacrifice, who loved us and gave Himself for us.

So then there'd be more washing of hands. And this may be the time when Jesus washed the disciples' feet, another one of those memories that He was making: the King of all the Earth becoming the servant of all, as an example for us.

We don't have lamb, though, at most of our meals. So Jesus is going to use two of the things that were at the meal that we probably still have in some way, in most of our meals at home around our tables today. How can we remember what He's done for us? So remember the Afikomen⁶ that has been hidden. Well, the children

3 Hebrews 10:1

4 Hebrews 10:4

5 Hebrews 10:10

6 The middle Matzah

would now bring it back, somebody might have brought it back round, I don't even know if they had it, but when it's found they take it to the head of the house who redeemed it from them, buys it back, so if it's the father, he'll probably give his children some sweets to buy it back. And that's an amazing picture how Jesus bought us back from the kingdom of darkness.

19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'⁷

He was taking the elements they knew from the Passover and making it real to them in a new way. They probably didn't have a clue what He was talking about, but we know, we recognise this very easily because it's part of our Communion Service. So this memory reaches down to us through the centuries, as we take bread, and remember what Jesus did for us, how He left the glory of heaven, and humbled Himself even to death on a Cross, so that we can be free, so that we can have life.

So, you remember I told you there were three Matzot put into a cloth and hidden, I don't know why there were three, but it's supposed to represent unity so maybe it's Father, Son, Holy Spirit, but they didn't understand that at the time either, so I don't know. I do think it's quite significant, though, that they're wrapped in linen and set aside for later, just like Jesus was wrapped in linen.

So the supper is now over. And now we come to the bit described as. "After supper," you remember we read in Luke 22, "In the same way, after supper He took the cup, and He said,..." This is the third cup. This is the cup of redemption. "'This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you.'" So the bread and the wine would have been taken together, and that's what we remember now, at our Communion Service, we remember His body broken for us, and His blood, shed for us. The new covenant, what is that? It's in Jeremiah 31:34, "I will forgive your wickedness, and remember your sins no more," and in Ezekiel 36,



26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

So we don't need to sacrifice, because Jesus is the sacrifice. We remember that Jesus became nothing for us. He gave up His life so that we can be free.

Have you, by faith, applied the blood of the lamb to the doorposts of your heart? Can Passover, redemption and freedom be part of your story? Maybe we should stop now and pray a prayer to the Lord to ask Him to become our Passover lamb.

Father God, thank You that You sent Jesus. Jesus, thank You that You were willing to come and be our Passover lamb, You were willing to come and die in our place, so that we can be forgiven.

Lord, I open my life to You now, and I ask You to come in to take control, and to be my Saviour and my Lord. Take away my sin, buy me back from the kingdom of darkness, which You've done by dying on the Cross for me, and help me to live life in all its fullness with You, my Saviour and my Lord.

And now that we are children of God, we'll be able to join Him with a final cup of praise, praise cup, the cup of Hallel, and sing with the people that were

⁷ Luke 22:19

singing then,

Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples.
For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.
Praise the Lord.

There is a fifth cup of wine, the cup of Elijah, which is left untouched. Sometimes there's a whole place-setting is set up for Elijah, who will one day arrive to herald in the Messiah. In Malachi 4 it says,

5 'See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. 6 He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.'

But we know of another Elijah, the voice of one who was calling in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord!" Jesus said of him,

27 'This is the one about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.”

That's Luke 7, and the messenger is the one who said⁸,

“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

The Jews say, "Next year in Jerusalem," because they want to go back there. They want to wait for their Messiah to come. They want their Passover to happen again. And then they'll be able to say⁹,

“Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’”

Matthew 26 tells us that when they'd sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives, and it was dark. And so Jesus makes His way to Gethsemane, where He prays, "Not My will but Yours be done."

And the Passover lamb dies in our place, so that we can be free, and we can have life in all its fullness. The Cross becomes the greatest symbol, the greatest Memory Maker of all. And on it Jesus Christ, our Passover lamb, is being sacrificed.

So let's just think about the symbol that He used for the Passover supper. "This is My body broken for you. This is My blood shed for you. Do this in remembrance of Me."

Amen. Let's just take a little bit of time in quiet before we listen to another song, just thinking about what Jesus has done for us. Thank you Jesus.

8 John 1:29 [NKJV]

9 John 12:13 [NKJV] (NIV has the same words with different punctuation)

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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