



THE NEW SHOFAR

The Shepherd and the Lamb are one

In the Lamb of God we are made one with the Shepherd

Good Shepherd

The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world

Whenever I think of sheep in theological terms it is difficult to move beyond the writings of St John. One of his more powerful images is found in the Book of Revelation. Whilst the images John uses there seem to impenetrable, their value for our spiritual lives comes from our need to ponder prayerfully the things being revealed to us in the image. Working on them is a bit like peeling an onion. There is layer upon layer of meaning and the more we “peel”, the more God reveals Himself to us.

The Lamb and God reigning



The great image of the Lamb sitting upon the throne with God is one such image. The beauty of what John is revealing to us is spelled out in the Gospel when Jesus proclaims...*the Father and I are one*. How important this message was to the church of the time! They were struggling to live the Gospel in a hostile world, and it would have been so much easier for them to wonder about their survival, let alone their call to evangelism. Having the Lamb on the throne is the proclamation of a **reigning** Lamb. The Shepherd of Israel continuing the work of *leading*, *feeding*, *finding* water, *protecting* and *shepherding* the reconstituted Israel through His Son the *Lamb*. The **ing** endings are reminders that when we speak of the works of God, we are using action words, verbs – in this case participles giving the sense of an ongoing activity in the world. God and the Lamb are always *God-in-action*. There is no other kind of God revealed to us.

All of this can be found in contemplating the icon. Note the way the kings of the earth, the wise, the powerful and the elders all bow down before the Lamb and God. They are joined by the angels, heavenly beings of every kind in acknowledging the *reigning God*. God and the Lamb rule over the whole of the cosmos and all that is happening. Therein lies the hope of today’s feast: God and the Lamb are even now “shepherding” us.

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The Lamb is also our Shepherd

That same Lamb is also celebrated as **the Good Shepherd**, the One who will lead His disciples as lovingly as the Father shepherded Israel from slavery in Egypt to a new life in Canaan. These are not different kinds of sheep. It is the One Sheep.

And Revelation unveils even more! *The lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd* is the cry of the angel. We are so used to the image of Jesus as the Lamb of God and the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd that we might not immediately consider the excitement found in joining the two images together: The **Lamb** is our **Shepherd!**

The imagery of Jesus as Lamb has profound theological implications. It speaks to us of the sacrificial lamb of the Passover. That same lamb was also a regular part of the offerings in the Temple, a lamb sacrificed to God for the forgiveness of sin. John presents Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the Lamb of sacrifice who Shepherds the people for whom He has given His life. The Lamb of sacrifice is also meant to be one of us! Pope Francis captures this well when in a sermon he asked that priests *be shepherds with the smell of sheep*. This is exactly what Jesus had done in the Incarnation. The Lamb, the Good Shepherd, the Lamb of Sacrifice was the shepherd who becomes one with the flock and makes His home among us. As one of us.

The Incarnation means we too are one with the Shepherd-Lamb

This helps us understand why the Good Shepherd is able to say, *I know my own and my own know me*. He became one of us and therefore knows intimately who we are; our strengths and weakness, every aspect of our lives. Jesus goes on to proclaim how *My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me*.

Therein lies the sting. In order to be shepherded by the Good Shepherd, we need to have such a deep level of intimacy with Him, that we are able to hear Him speaking to us in the totality of our lives. Not just in worship. Not just in the Bible. But in all things. This is a massive ask and is only possible through our closeness with Him, a closeness manifested in us following in His way.

Knowing how we belong to the Good Shepherd and share life with the Lamb is the source of all of our value. We are incredibly precious in the eyes of the God who loves us enough to become one of us. To know God is to know ourselves and our worth; to love God is to love ourselves for who we are: sheep who know the Shepherd, who hear His call and who respond to the voice of God by walking in the footsteps of the Lamb.

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