

# 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 "mikbah" 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.

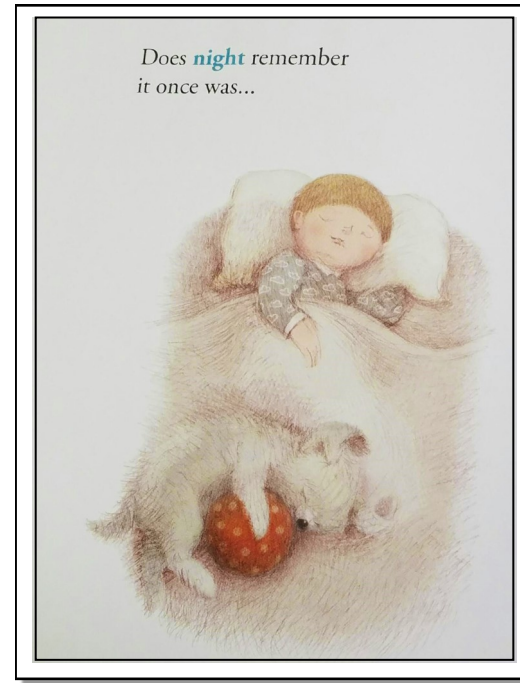
*Baptizing with Spirit* Jesus was the first to be baptized in the Holy Spirit at his baptism, "the Holy Spirit came down from heaven and descended upon him like a dove". This only happened to Jesus. It is through Jesus, and his death and resurrection, that this immersion in the Holy Spirit became accessible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

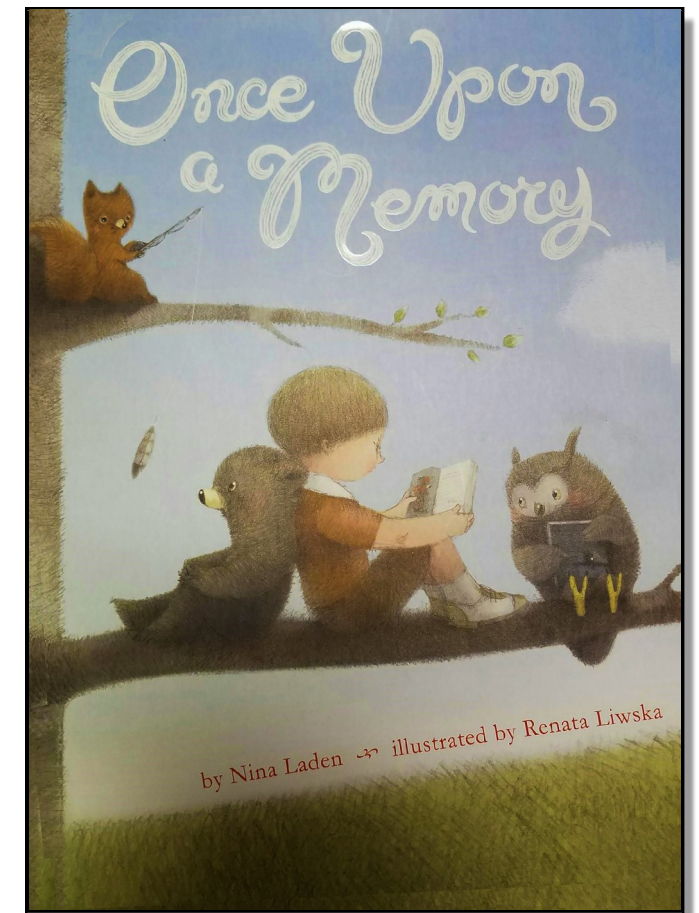
**CHARACTER QUALITIES:** KNOWING YOUR ROOTS  
GROWING YOUR MISSION

**ADDITIONAL FAMILY ACTIVITIES:** Bring out baby pictures of each family member. Talk about each persons' birth. Try to trace back to grandparents and great grandparents, sharing pictures and stories of where they were born, etc... 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.

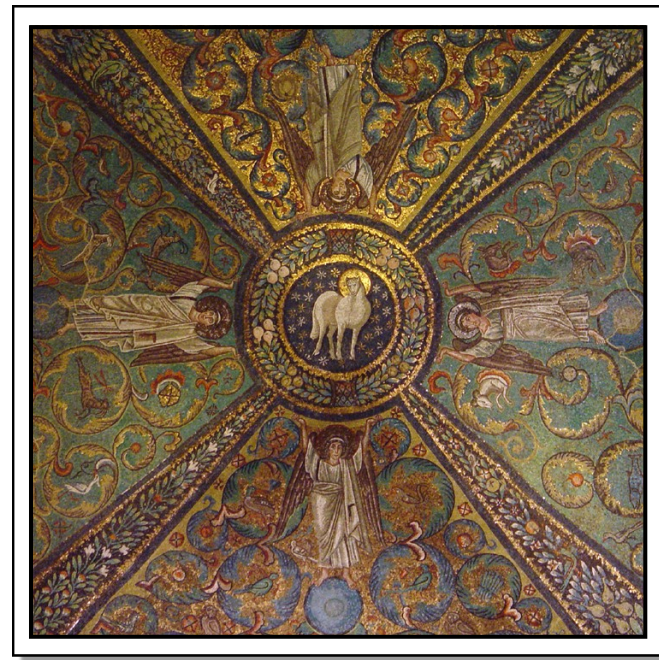
# Living Grace

Cycle A 2nd Sunday  
Ordinary Time

"GETTING TO THE ORIGIN OF THINGS"



*Once Upon a Memory* asks, "Does a feather remember it once was... a bird? Does a book remember it once was... a word?" A boy is swept away to 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. "Does a chair remember it once was... a tree? Does a garden remember it once was... a pea?" The soft illustrations alternate between images of an 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.



*ST. VITALE - AGNUS DEI*  
Mosaic by unknown artist ~ 521-547  
Basilica di S. Vita ~ Ravenna, Italy

## EXPLORING THE ART:

## CHRISTIAN ART & SYMBOLISM

The Basilica of San Vitale 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 honorific title bestowed on church buildings of exceptional historic and ecclesial importance. It is one of eight Ravenna structures inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The above mosaic depicting the Lamb of God is set against a starry, deep-blue background inside a wreath which is supported by four angels each standing on a blue sphere. 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 in Christian theology, 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.

"Agnus Dei" is Latin for "Lamb of God" and is an image of a lamb with a halo and a banner and cross used as a symbol of Christ (as on the tabernacle in our Church). It is also a liturgical prayer that we say at every Mass "Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world..." addressed to Christ as Savior.

As we learned in our last lesson, mosaic is a technique where an image is made from the assembling of small pieces of colored glass, stone, or other materials. It is often used in decorative art or as interior decoration. Mosaics have a long history, starting in the 3rd millennium BC all the way into modern times, used frequently in religious art throughout all of the ages.

You are invited to see and touch the mosaic tiles used for prayer and reflection along a self-guided tour of the Prayer Garden in our very own St. Bridget Spirituality Center across the Plaza from the church.

# 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 PARENTS

### DOES THE SON REMEMBER HE ONCE WAS GOD?

Cycle A is the first year of the Lectionary Gospels, 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. It is helpful to note that this gospel, like our story, approaches a present reality with the inquisitive and exploring mind as to where did this come from. And continuing on, as to 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 our primary symbol that we build our life and theology. To the Jewish people "a sacrificial lamb" would hold the same power and significance. The crowd's attention would be grabbed. We have to remember from later weeks that John the Baptist's mission is 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. Don't miss this!! Thus, John the Baptist very effectively has everyone's hearts ready and minds inquiring, "Wow, what next?"

In our 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?" That is what John the Baptist is doing for the people of Jesus's day. He holds up for them where Jesus ends up, as the sacrificial lamb of God. He then leads them backward to explore and question, the origin - 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.

## 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 CHILDRENS' 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 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?