

Can you finish each verse of this nursery rhyme?

Ready?

Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb.

Mary had a little lamb its fleece was white as

_____.

Everywhere that Mary went, Mary went, Mary went.

Everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to _____.

Well done! Almost everyone knows those verses.

What you might not know is the story behind the nursery rhyme.

Some say it was written in 1830 by Sarah Hale. Sarah had a classmate who brought a lamb to their school in Sterling, Massachusetts one day. Her classmate’s name was Mary Sawyer.

Others say this rhyme was developed in England as a way to teach children about Jesus, the Virgin Mary’s, little lamb.

That’s actually a pretty good way to think of Jesus, as long as we remember that he’s **“More Than Mary’s Little Lamb.”** He’s also God’s Lamb, whose sacrifice erased every sin of every sinner.

It was John the Baptist in our lesson who first called Jesus **“the Lamb of God.”** Although, Isaiah did prophesy 700 years earlier that the coming Savior would be led to the slaughter like a lamb.

We like to hear those words of John. But, what we really love is singing them in our Communion song, ***O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world.*** When John first spoke those words, do you wonder how John’s disciples reacted? Was it: *“Huh? Who are you talking about? That guy over there? He’s going to take away the sins of the entire world?”*

What was it like for John? His mom, Elizabeth, and Jesus’ mom, Mary, were cousins. That means John and Jesus were related. Add to it all the excitement that Elizabeth’s son was the one who’d

prepare the people for the Savior’s coming. Did he wonder if his relative, Jesus of Nazareth, was really the Savior they’d been waiting for for centuries?

Now, most people wouldn’t consider it a compliment to be called a lamb. Lambs are weak and helpless. They aren’t very smart. But clearly, John wasn’t insulting Jesus. He continues: **This is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.’**

Although John was older than Jesus by 6 months, he claims Jesus existed before him. That’s only possible if Jesus was More Than Mary’s Little Lamb. Jesus could only have existed before John if he was either an angel, or God!

Thankfully, John didn’t have to guess about Jesus’ identity. It was revealed to him at Jesus’ baptism, where he testifies: **“I saw the Spirit descend like a dove from heaven and remain on him. I myself did not recognize him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I saw this myself and have testified that this is the Son of God.”**

Jesus isn’t only the son of Mary; he is also the Son of God! So why wouldn’t John have simply said: **“Look, the Son of God?”** Why call him the Lamb of God? He was describing the purpose of the Son of God, what he came to do for you and me.

During OT times God had commanded his people to sacrifice lambs for their sins. This was to teach them that sin is serious business, deadly serious. The punishment for sin is death. The lambs offered for the sins of the people were butchered and then burned.

Jesus, the Lamb of God, had to give up his life because those millions and millions of lambs sacrificed in OT times couldn’t cover a single sin. Those lambs were an I.O.U., delaying the payment

of sins real debt. Human sin can only be paid for with human blood and a human sacrifice.

So, either we're going to die eternally in hell, or we're going to need a substitute to pay the eternal price! That's why God's Son became Mary's son with human flesh and blood.

The OT lambs offered to God could have no physical defects. God would only accept a perfect sacrifice for sin. Jesus' fleece was "*white as snow.*" His life didn't have even a single smudge of sin.

No wonder John was excited to see him and shouted, "**Look!**" . He was like a person seeing mountains or an ocean for the first time in their life. Do we get excited about Jesus and shout, "**Look!**" so that others notice him, too? Or, have we become so used to him that we've gotten bored with him, like the person who gets that mountain or ocean view every day.

We won't take Jesus for granted if we keep reminding ourselves what it is he did for us.

Each time we complain about the way our neighbor shovels or doesn't shovel their sidewalk, or we make fun of our classmates, or roll our eyes when our parents ask us to do something, or grumble about our leaders ... we have fallen short of God's perfect standards. While each failure should kill us, it doesn't because the Lamb of God was crushed, crucified and killed instead of us.

How can we be so confident that Mary's little lamb can and did forgive us? Because he's More Than Mary's Little Lamb, he's God's Lamb too.

Look again! He isn't just the Lamb sent from God, he's the Lamb who **IS** God! That's what makes his walk perfect and his perfect walk in our footsteps is credited to us. Through faith, God views your life the way he views Christ's life ... you're perfect!

As John the Baptist was pointing over to Jesus as the Lamb of God, he was also pointing back to a sacrifice so special in the OT, that it could only be done once a year.

The Day of Atonement was the only day each year when the high priest could enter into the Holy of Holies of the Temple. The Holy of Holies was the place the Ark of the Covenant rested. That's the place God called his home with his people.

If he tried stepping into God's presence any other day he would die. That's why God carefully laid out specific instructions for their own safety. Part 1: The high priest would offer a sacrifice for his own sins, then he would offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people. He would take the blood of that second sacrifice with him behind the curtain and sprinkle it on the Ark of the Covenant.

Part 2: Next, he would take two male goats. One would be killed and one would live. The one which remained alive was called the scapegoat. You've heard of a scapegoat, haven't you? It's the person who didn't do anything wrong, but everybody points to and says: "*It's all his fault.*" That's exactly what God did for his OT believers with the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement.

Part 3: The High Priest would again go back behind the curtain and sprinkle more blood, the goat's blood on the Ark of the Covenant. Once he came back out to the people, he would place his blood-soaked hands in the head of the live goat, the scapegoat.

What happened to that scapegoat? It was led into the desert, far away from the camp and the people never to be heard from or seen again. That's the picture God wanted his people to see of what happened to their sins.

What a remarkable picture of Jesus. Jesus is so much More Than Mary's little Lamb! He's the Lamb upon whom the Lord laid our sins. He's the Lamb who took our sins to the cross and left them there – never to be heard from or seen again.

Jesus is More Than Mary's Little Lamb. He's your Lamb too!