

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church

Shobonier, Illinois

Epiphany 5C

February 9, 2025

Isaiah 6:1-13

In the Presence of the King

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. (Isaiah 6:1 NKJV)

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

The Epiphany season has two main themes. The first is the revelation of Christ as the Son of God and the Messiah promised in ancient prophecy. The second theme, related to the first, is how God continues to reveal Himself and expand His church through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. In olden days, God revealed Himself directly to the prophets and gave them the message they were to proclaim. In the later days, God has spoken to us through His Son, the Lord Jesus (Heb. 1:1-2). Today's text tells us what once happened to one of those prophets of old. And as we hear God's Word, preserved for us in Isaiah's book, we will see the themes of Epiphany come shining through.

Isaiah begins by setting this event within an historical context, "In the year that King Uzziah died." King Uzziah had ruled over Judah for 52 years. You can read about him in 2 Chronicles 26. Within a year of Uzziah's death, Isaiah was given a vision of the heavenly throne room. How this all took place we're not told. What we are told is this:

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy,

holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" 4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

What an awesome scene! Isaiah is brought into the presence of the Lord, the creator of heaven and earth. He sees the glory of God and hears the seraphim proclaim His holiness. He beholds Yahweh Sabaoth, the Lord God Almighty, the Lord of Hosts. In this glorious vision, Isaiah sees Jesus Himself, the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8; see also John 12:41). By the grace and power of God, Isaiah saw the Savior, promised of old, who died on Calvary's cross to atone for your sins, and for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). The glory was so great, even the seraphim covered themselves with their wings. The doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. Yes, indeed, Isaiah beheld the very glory of God, the glory of Jesus.

And yet, as great as this glory was, it was veiled because no man shall see God's face, and live (Ex. 33:20). Isaiah knew this. Still, this was more than he could bear as he declares, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts." In the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords, Isaiah knew his utter sinfulness. In the presence of the Holy, Holy, Holy, he knew he deserved nothing but death and destruction. He knew he had no business standing in the very presence of God. Indeed, terror is the only reaction for the sinner who comes face to face with the King, Yahweh Sabaoth. For this is the Judge of all who knows your heart and can read your inner thoughts.

This is why the Apostle John, when he saw the One in the midst of the lampstands, "fell at His feet as dead." (Revelation 1:17). This is why Peter, after the miraculous catch of fish, fell at Jesus' knees and cried, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8). And this is why the publican would not dare to lift up his eyes toward heaven as he begged, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). Each had come to know full well his utter sinfulness and unworthiness to stand before God. Indeed, this is our lot as well, though we tend to be more arrogant and tend to think we somehow deserve to come before God on the basis of our own merits or worthiness. Yet, the truth is, we too would and must cry, "Woe is me!" For this is the reality of our condition. We in no way can stand in the presence of a holy God on our own.

Yet, God does not leave Isaiah in his fear and trembling, and He does not leave us in ours. Rather He comes with forgiveness. Whether He sends his seraph to touch Isaiah's lips with a hot coal from the altar, or He sends His servant to absolve you in the stead of Christ and touch your lips with the Body and Blood of the Lamb of God, the result is the same. Your lips are cleansed and your sins are forgiven. Your sins are removed and forgotten by God. For His justice has been satisfied by the final, perfect sacrifice for sins, which is the Lord Jesus. Indeed, the cross is the altar upon which the Lamb of God has been slain and sacrificed for the sin of the world.

So Isaiah had gone from fear to forgiveness. Yet, there was more. And as we see this something more, we must understand that it flows out from what precedes it. For the forgiveness of sins, that is, the saving Gospel of Christ, is what creates and sustains saving faith. It's the Gospel which enables, empowers, and motivates true Christian living, the fruit of faith. Now when Isaiah answered God's call, "Here I am, send me," he did not know what God wanted him to do. And after hearing what God did want him to do, he didn't shrink from his task. For Isaiah had been chosen to deliver God's word to Israel and Judah. And this was often a word of scathing law, though throughout his life he also proclaimed abundant Gospel. For Isaiah had been chosen and sent to call Israel to repentance and announce that Israel would fall. As such, his preaching would often be unwelcome, and the people ignored it or dismissed it.

Yet, God declares, "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Is. 55:11). And so it shall. Whether the Law or the Gospel, God's Word will do what it will. The Law will bring people to repentance or harden them in their sin. The Gospel will bring peace and comfort to penitent sinners.

Thus, you have been brought here, into God's House, into the presence of the King, the Lord Almighty. For this is a place consecrated by and to the Lord. But you are no less a sinner than Peter, and no less unclean than Isaiah. You too dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips. So as we enter the presence of the King, we do well to listen to the Word of God recorded by King Solomon, "Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil." (Eccl. 5:1).

So, what really happens here each week? What do we do in the presence of the King? Though you have become a child of God in your Baptism, though you have received Christ's name as one of God's chosen ones, you are still a sinner. So, immediately after invoking God's Name, we too confess our sin, our unworthiness to come into His presence. We confess that we have nothing to offer God to stay the arm of judgment and wrath - no good work, no sacrifice, nothing. That we stand in His presence at all is only due to His grace and mercy in Christ Jesus. Then, God's sent messenger touches your ears with the absolution, the forgiveness of sins, and later he touches your lips with Christ's Body and Blood. You hear God's Word read and proclaimed. You hear Him pronounce His blessing upon you. Having had your sins taken away, you go to serve when and where and how the Lord wills, for He has given you work to do (Eph. 2:10). God expects you, who, on account of the sin-atoning death of His Son, have been absolved of every sin, to be involved in accomplishing His will in your life. These good works are not the basis of your salvation in any way. Rather, they are the fruit of faith that naturally follows the forgiveness and faith which the Lord gives in abundance.

Like Isaiah, we have come into the presence of the King; we too have been brought from fear to forgiveness to faith. And flowing from that faith, we bear fruit. God grant you such faith and fruit that Christ may be revealed to others through you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.