

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Third Sunday in Advent, December 13, 2020**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 59, 66:1, 68, 64, 70.

Lessons: Isaiah 43: 1-13, Revelation 15: 2-4, Matthew 20:17-19.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 49:1-9a.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Did you notice to whom God is talking here? He includes you. Now you may not be a physical descendant of Abraham. But God commands: ***“Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations.”*** This message, like all of Scripture, is for you: You are a resident of the ***“distant nations”*** Isaiah spoke of.

This is a command for ***“the islands”*** and the ***“distant nations”*** to listen. God commands all humanity to listen. He tells us all we need to know in the words he caused to be written. God’s prophet Isaiah wrote down the words God gave him by inspiration. Like the other words of Scripture, they are not words taught by human wisdom but words taught by the Holy Spirit. We, too, are commanded to listen. The words are God’s, and they reveal the great truths of his love for all the world. Listen, because what you hear means the difference between life and death, between redemption and final, eternal judgment. We are to listen to God the Son, the person of the Messiah. Jesus Christ says to you today ***“Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name. He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. He said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.’”***

So it becomes obvious that these are words spoken by

**THE SERVANT OF THE LORD**

- 1. Listen to the servant of the Lord!**
- 2. He received no honor from men, but his was a bloody service.**
- 3. He was sent to God’s chosen people – the descendants of Abraham, who rejected him,**
- 4. And finally, He was sent for you.**

Who is this chosen servant of the Lord in whom God will display his splendor? Who else but the Messiah fits the description here? God chose him before birth. From the beginning God’s plan for the deliverance of the world involved the coming of one person. As God told Adam and Eve, this person would be the seed, or offspring, of a woman. Throughout the long history of the Old Testament, God promised the coming of such a deliverer. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all anticipated the coming of that one deliverer. God promised David that such a deliverer would come from his family and that this one great descendant would rule forever on David’s throne.

Consider the description of the Messiah here. God set him apart long before his birth. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was born of a woman at the time determined by God. The Almighty God in his grace made the mouth of the Messiah like a sharpened sword. Remember the words of Jesus. They were often like a sharp sword cutting away pretense and unbelief, exposing sin, and then applying the healing balm of God’s grace for sinners. In addition, Isaiah wrote that the Messiah was hidden: ***“in the shadow of his hand he hid me.”*** The God of grace did not reveal the Messiah until it was time for him to do his work on earth. Then the heavens themselves – as shown in the great star leading Gentiles to the town of his birth – joined the angels in announcing his arrival. The Messiah is the Servant in whom the Lord would display his splendor. That is, the

Messiah would come to accomplish the most glorious and wonderful blessings that God planned for all humanity. He would redeem the world from sin, death, and hell. The Christmas history which even our children learn shows us the glory of God's grace, and it points to the Great Servant – the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Yet we might wonder how the Messiah could be identified in verse 3 as ***“Israel.”*** This Servant becomes the reason God had chosen his people as descendants of Jacob, also called Israel. The Messiah would come from the descendants of Abraham. God continued to identify the origins of this Messiah through the prophecies of the Old Testament. When God calls the servant Israel, he brings all those prophecies to mind. Israel, God's chosen people of the Old Testament, existed for only one reason – to be the nation from which the Messiah for all humanity would come.

The Messiah, this Servant of the Lord, would fulfill the mission God intended through Israel. He is the focal point of all Israel's history. And so the Great Servant receives the name Israel as a title implying all that God promised to bring to pass through this nation. He is the true Israel, who would bring lasting glory to God. And through faith in him, all who believe are true “children of Israel”.

The servant goes on and tells us ***“But I said, ‘I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God.’”***

The grand promises God made for the salvation of mankind did not come about with a spectacular and triumphant military campaign. Instead, it was a sad, lowly, bloody one. The Messiah set aside his glorious power and majesty in order to be a servant. That great only-begotten Son of God became nothing and humbled himself and became obedient to death. In the Garden of Gethsemane, all appeared lost. Eleven men who followed him surrounded Jesus. The twelfth led a band of soldiers to arrest him. After three years of ministry, after all the sermons and all the miracles, it seemed that only death awaited him. From all human perspectives, the Messiah's mission had failed. From the cross he exclaimed, ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** (Mark 15:34). Yet, a few hours later, he would commit himself to the hands of the Lord: ***“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”*** (Luke 23:46). This verse in Isaiah prophesies these events. It reminds us of the human nature of the Servant of the Lord and anticipates the Savior's words in Gethsemane.

***“And now the LORD says – he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength – he says: ‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.’”***

As useless and unsuccessful as the work of the Servant of the Lord appeared to be, he had entrusted his entire mission into the hands of the Lord God, his Father. Isaiah has recorded a prophetic dialogue between the Servant of the Lord and the Lord himself. The Servant said, ***“I have labored to no purpose.”*** And so it seemed. But the goal and the mission and the purpose of the Lord in sending this Servant would not fail.

The Lord responded to his Servant by repeating the reasons for sending him. We see two reasons listed here. First, the servant came to restore the tribes of Jacob. His work would focus on the people God had chosen. Jesus was born in Bethlehem to ***“save his people from their sins,”*** as the angel proclaimed to Joseph (Matthew 1:21). But we also see God's second reason for sending the Servant. God implied the reason in the first verse when he commanded the distant nations to listen. The Servant was also to be ***“a light for the Gentiles that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”*** God had bigger plans for displaying his splendor than merely restoring the believing Jews from captivity under a foreign nation. The work of this Servant of the Lord would be for all people all over the world. At his birth the angels announced this wonderful news: ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”*** (Luke 2:14 KJV) Through this Servant, God provided deliverance for all humanity. In the Word of God, in the scripture lessons we hear throughout the church year, we hear just how he did that and what it means.

***“This is what the LORD says-- the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel-- to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: ‘Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.’ This is what the LORD says: ‘In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep***

*you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, to say to the captives, “Come out,” and to those in darkness, “Be free!””*

The Lord continues speaking to his Servant. These words come from the LORD, Jehovah, ***“the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel”*** – two favorite names of God in the last 27 chapters of Isaiah. The name Redeemer recalls the laws of redemption in Leviticus.

If a man was forced to sell himself as a servant or sell his property to another, he could later buy back whatever had been sold. If he could not, a relative – a kinsman-redeemer – then could buy back whatever had been sold. The Lord is the Redeemer. His people had sold themselves into the slavery of sin and could not escape. Because they had nothing to offer as adequate payment for any of their sins, they could not redeem themselves. The Lord would offer the payment; the Servant of the Lord would suffer and die to buy back those held captive by sin and death. In the first fulfillment of this prophecy, the Lord would redeem his people from the captivity of Babylon. Cyrus would release them from that bondage, but it would only be a preliminary event to a much greater deliverance through the Servant of the Lord.

The name ‘Holy One of Israel’ appears repeatedly in the Old Testament. God is indeed holy. He is separate and different from all humanity and from his people. He is without imperfection, without sin and is greater than all that is on earth. But he is a God who is not content to remain in a separate and perfect existence outside the world of human activity and history. He is the Holy One of Israel. The perfect God of the universe has reached out and blessed human history by pledging himself to Israel. He chose to create the ancient nation of Israel, to preserve it throughout the centuries, and to guide its course to serve his own purposes. His purpose clearly centers on the arrival of this Servant of the Lord who will be born from the nation of Israel. The Servant would carry out the plan of God in redeeming the world. In the Servant, God broke into the course of human events to rescue humanity. Through the Servant, God declared all the world holy and righteous and removed all that separates sinners from his holiness and therefore from his presence. Because of the Servant and only because of the Servant humanity can anticipate perfect deliverance and joy in the presence of this Holy One.

But the Servant here is described as ***“despised and abhorred by the nation.”*** We see the Servant rejected by his own nation, again as an apparent failure. Such a description recalls the events of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. His own countrymen screamed, ***“Crucify him.”*** When Pilate asked what he should do with their king, the crowd answered, ***“We have no king but Caesar”*** (John 19:15).

The Servant is anything but an outwardly impressive figure. But the Lord asks us to look beyond appearances. As we listen, the Lord encourages his “despised and abhorred” Servant. Things are not what they seem to be. The Lord tells his Servant that kings and princes will bow down to him. Why should powerful heads of state bow down to this lowly, unimpressive servant? They will bow down because of the redemption he will bring to the world. The kings of the earth bow because of the unsurpassed blessing of the redemption God has provided for their people and for all the people of the earth. Ultimately that will happen on judgment day, when all, believer and unbeliever must bow before Jesus. Believers will bow in joy. Unbelievers will bow in terror to God’s terrible judgment on them because of their rejection of Jesus Christ. Remember that kings and princes outside the people of Israel – Gentiles – give honor to this Servant. Redemption is for all humanity.

In this Advent season, at Christmas, and every day, listen to the Servant of the Lord! His bloody service was for you because he loved you. He was sent to God’s chosen people – the descendants of Abraham, who rejected him. But never forget that he was sent for you. He has redeemed you and set you free from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil! With Simeon who will hold the baby Jesus in his arms, we rejoice, too, ***“saying: ‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.’”*** (Luke 2:28-32 NIV) Lord, may we look to Jesus for salvation every day! Amen.