

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sunday after Epiphany, January 13, 2008

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Hymns: 134 (252) 132, 128, 53:1-3

Lessons: Exodus 16:11-18; Romans 14:13-23; Luke 12:51-59

Text: Isaiah 42:1-8

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ our shining Light,

Last Sunday we learned that Epiphany is sometimes called the Christmas of the Gentiles because the first appearance of the Savior to the Gentile nations was when the Wise Men from the east came to worship him.

Our text, taken from the prophecies of Isaiah, foretells that the coming Messiah of the Jews would also be the Savior of the Gentiles, the heathen nations outside of the Jewish nation. The fact that God caused such a prophecy to be made and the fact that it was fulfilled should be of particular interest to us who are descended from Gentiles.

For our comfort and enlightenment let us learn about

JESUS, JEHOVAH'S BELOVED SERVANT, THE LIGHT OF THE GENTILES

- 1. He is God's chosen Servant who came in all meekness and humility to save the heathen;**
- 2. He was sent by the almighty Creator, the God of the Covenant, who alone is to be worshiped;**
- 3. He was sent to bring spiritual light to all that sit in the darkness of sin.**

Isaiah the prophet tells us what God says about Jesus, "*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.*" Jesus is called God's Servant. From eternity already God made a plan of salvation for sinners. Jesus was the one who was to carry out this plan. In that sense Jesus is God's Servant. He is also called God's "*chosen one*", the one God chose to come to this earth in the likeness of sinful man to redeem all sinners.

God the Father not only chose his Son for this work, but he also upholds him in doing this work, equipping him and supporting him for this work. This means that God the Father supported him with his divine power. He gave the Holy Spirit to be in and with Jesus according to his human nature. As a man, then, Jesus did his work of redemption with the full power of the Holy Spirit resting on him. Jesus did not have only some of the Spirit's gifts, for Jesus himself said, "*the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit,*" John 3:34. The Holy Spirit was given to Jesus at his conception and so he was anointed with the Spirit to do his work. In his first sermon at Nazareth, Jesus said, "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,*" Luke 4:18-19.

God the Father says of Jesus, he is "*my chosen one in whom I delight.*" Jesus is the holy Son of God, a true man also, but with all the attributes of God given also to his human nature. So it could not be otherwise than that God would express his delight in his Son. At Jesus' baptism the Father said, "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased,*" Matthew 3:17.

Our text foretells the work of God's chosen one in whom he delighted: ***"he will bring justice to the nations."*** Again the Father says, ***"In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope."*** Jesus was prophesied first as the Messiah of the Jewish people. When Jesus was born, Simeon referred to him as having come ***"for glory to your people Israel,"*** Luke 2:32. But here in our text Jesus is foretold as the one who would ***"bring justice to the nations."*** That means that through Jesus the Gentiles also would receive the rights and privileges of the new covenant of God's mercy in Christ. This is what Jesus also preached in his first sermon at Nazareth (Luke 4). Through Jesus Christ the Gentiles would also hear of and receive justice. Even the remotest islands would await the deliverance from sin as they longed for salvation. This longing for salvation could only be satisfied by Christ's work of redemption.

The way in which Christ would do his work of redemption is also foretold in our text. ***"He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."*** These words describe the meekness and humility of Jehovah's chosen Servant. Jesus did not come to this earth in a blaze of glory with much publicity and public acclaim. He did not hire a public relations director to make himself known! Jesus did not use force to get people to accept him as their Savior. Jesus' entire ministry is characterized by gentleness and patience. When the Pharisees and other leaders of the Jews rejected Jesus in unbelief, Jesus did not challenge them to a fight or try to force their allegiance to him. Rather, Jesus withdrew from them. When large multitudes of people followed him after he healed many, Jesus told them not to make him known to others.

Jesus' spirit was different from many church leaders today who want their names to be made known in every conceivable way. Jesus' spirit was far different from those today who want to force their "Social Gospel" on others whether they are willing to accept it or not. Force may be used and is used by worldly kingdoms, but Jesus said, ***"My kingdom is not of this world,"*** John 18:36.

Jesus was especially concerned about the lowly of this world, the people to whom the world pays little attention, people who are despised, people who are broken-hearted because of their sins. When our text speaks of a ***"smoldering wick"*** or the ***"bruised reed"***, it is speaking of such people who knew their guilt and felt ashamed, and longed for the Savior's love. The prophecy in our text foretells that Jesus will show them his kindness and gentleness because he wanted them not to be lost but saved. So Jesus invites all such sinners, ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest,"*** Matthew 11:28. That is the rest poor sinners receive through the means of grace, the Gospel in word and sacrament.

This gracious, loving, gentle Savior, we learn from our text, was **sent by the Almighty Creator, the God of the Covenant, who alone is to be worshiped.**

2.

He is described in our text as ***"he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it."*** With these words God introduces that part of our text which speaks of the Lord as the God who made a covenant. God had made a covenant first with Abraham that there would be a coming Messiah who would deliver the people from their sins. God kept that covenant when he sent forth Jesus as the Savior of mankind. He who is the almighty Creator of this universe and everything in it gave this great and comforting covenant. In our day many people reject the creation of the universe. They put their trust in words that speak of evolution, something that is supposedly based on scientific fact. The fact is that it takes as much or more faith to accept the theories of evolution as it does to accept God's Word. Other people today speak about some Great Designer ("Intelligent Design") instead of the Creator. Our text as well as many other Bible passages supports the teaching of Creation. (See Psalm 104 as an example.) God called everything into being by his almighty Word. He who

was able to call all things into being, give them life, and preserve them, could he not also keep the covenant he made to send the Messiah? Surely there can be no doubt that he would do so.

Furthermore, God says in our text, ***“I am the LORD, that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols!”*** This is said to give further assurance that the God of the Covenant would not go back on his promise to send the Messiah. If God would not keep his solemn pledge made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the Jews, then he would lose the right to be called the ***“LORD”***. Then he could no longer claim to be the only God who is to be worshiped and adored. Then he would be just like the idols of the heathen, or like Allah of the Moslems. This was the assurance for the people of old. It is also an assurance to us now that Jesus is our Savior, the one and only Mediator between God and sinners. Our God alone is to be worshiped and glorified, for he is the only true God.

Finally, our text teaches that Jesus **was sent to bring spiritual light to all that sit in the darkness of sin.**

3.

The heavenly Father said to his Son Jesus, ***“I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”*** In these words God assures his Son that he would send him as the Mediator between God and sinners in fulfillment of his covenant promise.

Two groups of people are recipients of this promise. First, the Israelites, the Jewish people, for the covenant was first made with them, and the Messiah was first sent to them. But Jesus would also be a Light to the Gentiles. Why this is so important is indicated by the various expressions describing the spiritual condition of the people. They were ***“blind”***; they were ***“captives”***, and ***“those who sit in darkness.”*** All people are by nature spiritually blind because of sin. They do not know the true God. They cannot understand spiritual truths. They are enemies of God, ruled over by Satan. As such they are sitting in ***“the dungeon”***. They do what Satan wants them to do in disobedience to God’s Law. They are in spiritual darkness. The Bible also describes them as ***“God’s enemies”***, ***“ungodly”***, ***“controlled by the sinful nature,”*** (See Romans chapters 5 through 8.) If such a condition were to continue, we would be eternally lost in hell. There would be absolutely no hope of salvation, or going to heaven.

So it would be were it not for Jesus, who shed his blood for us, suffered and died and rose again, and this way there was ***“peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.”*** (Hymn 94). Thanks to the Lord, the Savior was sent, also for us poor sinners, and he is the Savior of all people in the world. We are no longer God’s enemies. We no longer sit in the darkness of sin. We are spiritually enlightened by the Holy Spirit. We know the truth and believe it.

So we thank the Lord in this Epiphany Season and say with the poet,

***“All glory, Jesus, be to thee
For this Thy glad epiphany;
Whom with the Father we adore
And Holy Ghost forevermore”***

Amen.

(Hymn 131:5)