Faith Ev. Lutheran Church **Harrison, Michigan**
St. John Ev. Lutheran Church **Clare, Michigan**

The First Sunday after Epiphany **January 8, 2017**

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, you gave your one and only Son to be the light of the world. Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and believed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased. Alleluia! (Mark 1:11)

Sermon Text: Isaiah 42:1-7

Isaiah 42:1-7

1 "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.
2 He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
3 A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
4 he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.
In his law the islands will put their hope."
5 This is what God the LORD says—
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:
6 "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,
7 to open eyes that are blind,
to free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

What did you get Friday? Presents? Candy? Money? You do know what Friday was, right? Epiphany! The Gentile's Christmas! A time to celebrate the birth of Jesus!

Didn't celebrate? Christmas tree already at the curb? Decorations stored away in the basement? January 6th comes and goes without much fanfare. No Epiphany sales. No Epiphany school breaks. No Epiphany cookies. But still a reason to celebrate.

"Epiphany" means to "reveal." On January 6th you rejoice that God "revealed" Jesus to more than just those who lived in Judah; Jesus is revealed to people around the entire world. After all, remember who shows up on the first Christmas? You see Mary and Joseph and a group of shepherds. Maybe a dozen people there? (For comparison's sake, how many knew about the birth of your first child?) The newspaper did not slap a picture of Mary and Joseph with their newborn on the front page. Mary did not post her news on Facebook. Joseph did

not call his parents and announce that they were now grandparents. Very few knew that God's thousands-of-years-old promise had just happened. So, God chooses to reveal Jesus.

Little by little news about the arrival of Jesus spreads. Magi from the east follow a star marking the place where Jesus lives. They offer gifts of gold, incense, and frankincense— not to a baby, but to a King (Matthew 2:1-12). Old man Simeon rejoices that he can die in peace because Jesus comes for him! (Luke 2:29-32). An old woman named Anna declares: "Jesus will free people from hell!" (Luke 2:37-38).

Apart from those few Bible snippets, you don't really know much more about Jesus. In fact, for the first 30 years of Jesus' life all you know is: (1) Jesus is born, (2) he lives in Nazareth, (3) his father is a carpenter, and (4) he goes to the temple with his parents. Thirty years of life is shrouded in mystery.

So, today, thirty years into Jesus' life, God reveals more about Jesus' mission. That's important— because the torture, terrorism, and tragedy in our world can cover up the joy Jesus still brings us. **Behold the Servant!** *who brings justice to the nations, who illuminates freedom.*

Imagine yourself standing next to God at your dining room table. He has laid out a row of rare coins across the tabletop. He points at one of the five remaining 1913 Liberty Head nickels. His finger taps the 1933 Gold Double Eagle (which is valued at $7.5 million). Next to it is not the common 1943 steel penny, but rather a 1943 penny made with precious war-time copper. Then God points at one special coin that stands out from all the others. *"Look! Pay attention! Comprehend what's so great about this coin!"*

In our reading God draws your attention to someone very special, someone greater than the world has ever met. He taps his finger on Jesus, stressing: **"Here is my Servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight."** You see that, right? Out of all the prophets who ever proclaimed, out of all the kings who ever ruled, out of all the priests who ever preached, Jesus stands out from them all! At his baptism, God the Father upholds Jesus— he endorses him: *This is my Son!* (Matthew 3:17). God the Holy Spirit marks Jesus as chosen as he descends on him in the form of a dove (3:16). Jesus comes for a specific purpose— and it's more than healing diseases or filling you with earthly blessings. He comes to **bring justice to the nations.**

Maybe you're sitting here, thinking, "Yeah, I already know that." Of course, you are not living in 700 B.C., piecing together prophecies so that you don't walk past Jesus on the way to work. You live thousands of years after Christmas. There is no mystery here; you have no doubt that Jesus is God-approved and comes for you! You know he dies for your sins. You know on Easter he says, "Your debt of sin is forgiven!" You know he lives in heaven and rules all things. You know you are going to heaven. So, Isaiah's words can sound like something you have heard umpteen million times before!

The nation of Judah thought the same thing. God uses Isaiah to speak to them. He cries: **"Behold my Servant!"** The people already knew who God was. Walk down the street and (boom!); there stands God's temple. That towering image declared God's presence among them. Priests walk down main street in garments designed by God—

reminding that you cannot go to God on your own. Animals "moo" and "grunt" and "bah" as they wait to be sacrificed. They died because the wages of your sin deserve death. Those animal shrieks would finally end when Jesus arrived. Judah already heard about God's intention to send a Savior— and they still worshipped idols.

Yes, little blocks of wood and stone statues and metal sculptures. They did not know when it would rain next, so they asked a clay figurine to send rain on their fields. They bowed down to a wooden pole, hoping it would compel this goddess to make their herd multiply. They asked a stone statue to protect their nation from enemies. God puts his finger on this Servant— this Jesus— only to watch people pay no attention to what special gift God is sending. Instead, people searched for guidance in life in other places.

By turning to idols for guidance, Judah was really missing out on the forgiveness Jesus brings. If they could not see only Jesus, they would turn to their idols hoping to make guilt go away or find control in a chaotic world or find peace in frightening society. They would only see Jesus as another person with happy words, but nothing more.

Look at the Jordan River; see the God-approved Jesus standing there. Keep that sight in your mind as you read through Isaiah's description. [**The Servant Jesus] will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.** Jesus does not come to give you new rules. He does not come with whip in hand, snapping out how you need to be a better person. He does not hold the Ten Commandments over your head, barking: "Why did you hate?!" "Why don't you listen to your authorities?!" "Why aren't you a better parent?!" "Why can't you trust me?!"

We know Jesus is born to save us. Yet, we can still feel slavishly driven by his commands—as though obedience to his Commandments are the ticket to heaven. To feel that our efforts appease God—as Judah felt their efforts appeased their idols—you will fear that God only helps you when you behave well. The moment challenges press into you, you will fear that God can't do enough. If you fear God is not for you, then you'll look elsewhere for guidance. That, my friends, will leave you under the hammer of God's justice.

Behold the Servant! God sends you. Look! Pay attention! Comprehend what makes him better than any other leader or any other advice. **Behold the Servant!** *who brings justice to the nations.*

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. When you wonder what is going on in your world— why people can so heartlessly torture an innocent youth or what compels a man to drive a semi-truck through a crowd, when you feel bruised and beaten up by the fact your world is not perfect, Jesus comes to remind you: "Sin exists in your world." Because sin exists, life is not perfect— and it never will be. Yet, Jesus does not snuff out your hope.

He [does] not falter; he [is not] discouraged. Yes, Jesus is tempted by the devil to think God will does not care about him (Matthew 4:1-10). He does not cry out against God because people are sick; he cures them. He is not discouraged when it seems his prayers are never answered. Instead, he makes it his mission to **establish justice on earth.** That "justice" is to give sin what it deserves: death. How fair he would be to crush us, to snuff us out for eternity! Yet, in love, Jesus is crushed. His life is snuffed out. He *brings justice to you.*

In case this sounds too good to be true, pay attention to **what God the LORD says… "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand.** The "you" is

Jesus. The "righteousness" is God's desire to make what is wrong in the world right. What is wrong in this world is sin. So, he uses Jesus **to be a covenant for the people.** A covenant is a contract between God and people. Jesus is the contract God extends to you. The only way you have peace with God is through Jesus. At your baptism God scribbles your name into the contract. At his table he looks at his contract again: *Jesus' body given for you; Jesus' blood shed for you.* That means: You are forgiven. That means: God is your Father who cares for you. That means: You are God's child— someone he cares for.

Yes, this might sound like something you have heard before. Yet, take in Isaiah's images and pair them to what you experience in life right now. **[I will make you] 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.** Imagine groping in pitch black, so-thick-you-can-feel-it darkness. Where do you find guidance? How do you prevent personal injury? How do you know you are heading in the right direction? You need something to chase away darkness. You need something to remove uncertainty. You need a light.

Behold the Servant who **opens eyes that are blind.** Not only does Jesus cure the blind (and proves his divinity), but he continues giving you guidance and direction. If you ever wonder what waits on the other side of the grave, Jesus reveals the Father. If you fear your behavior is too bad for God to forgive, Jesus lights up his work on the cross. If you feel unsure that you will go to heaven, see Jesus rise again for the simple reason that he made peace between you and God. He opens your eyes to see this.

Jesus clearly reveals the freedom you have from prison. God's Ten Commandments no longer hang over your head as a list of your shortcomings and doom. You now embrace them with a desire to serve your God with an undivided heart. You forgive others because you are moved by the fact God forgave you. You love your spouse—holding no lustful thoughts—because Jesus married himself to you by faith. You are the faithful student and worker; you don't steal by being lazy. Why? Because shame on you if you do? No! Because Jesus freed you from hell. He guarantees heaven; he blesses you with things you need. Now, you get to use your hands and mind and abilities to be a productive worker and use your efforts to praise a God who saved you! **Behold the Servant** *who illuminates freedom.*

Yes, for us who live far removed from the first Christmas, we may think we have seen everything there is to know about Jesus— who he is, what he did for us, and why we can go to heaven.

Yet, remember that your God expands the work of Jesus for you. In this world you will have troubles. Those troubles may press you to look into many different places for guidance and security. So, God reveals the many things Jesus does for you. He establishes justice between you and God. Even though we still sin— and struggle with habits— he does not crush you or snuff out your life. He leads you to the healing waters of his forgiveness.

You see this great work. A God who is united to you— not against you. May you walk by the brightness of his light with a life that reflects genuine thankfulness for all that he has done for you. **Behold the Servant!** *who brings justice to the nations, who illuminates freedom.*