

12 July 2017
Commemoration of Isaiah

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Greenspring Village, Springfield, VA

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“The Fifth Evangelist”

Text: Isaiah 6:1-8; Hebrews 11:32-12:2; Luke 4:16-22a

Isaiah is often times called “the fifth Evangelist” because he wrote so much of Christ. It is Isaiah who wrote of the virgin birth. It is Isaiah who wrote that *the people walking in darkness have seen a great light*. It is Isaiah who wrote of Jesus as the branch that would grow from the stump of Jesse. It is Isaiah who writes that on the mountain of the Lord death would be swallowed up, a great feast prepared, and that God would wipe away tears from all faces. It is Isaiah who wrote, “*Comfort, comfort my people,*” who wrote of all the miracles Jesus would do, and that the Spirit would be put upon Him. It is Isaiah through whom God said, “*Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.*” It is Isaiah who wrote of Jesus’ crucifixion, saying that Jesus would be *stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted*; that Jesus was pierced for our transgressions, was silent like a sheep before its shearers, and that He bore our iniquities. It is Isaiah who wrote of the visit of the Magi, and it is Isaiah who talks about the new heavens and the new earth. Isaiah knew his Saviour.

So it really is no surprise that the first sermon Jesus preached - after He was baptized and after His 40 days in the wilderness being tempted by satan - when He goes home and goes to church, the first sermon He preaches is from a reading from the prophet Isaiah. And He says this: “***Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.***” Or in other words: that guy Isaiah wrote about? It’s Me. ***The year of the Lord’s favor*** is here. The wait is over.

Isaiah could write so eloquently of that not just because he was a prophet and the Holy Spirit spoke these words through him, but because he experienced the Lord’s favor himself. It *literally* touched him. For when he has been given a glimpse of heaven, and he saw the Lord sitting on His throne and the angels surrounding Him and singing, he cried out in dismay: “***Woe is me! For I am lost; for 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!***” Or in other words, I’m a dead man. A sinner cannot come into the presence of God and live.

But live he did. Not because of his own merit, but because the Lord took away his sin. A burning coal from the altar, the altar of sacrifice, a holy thing, touched his lips and cleansed him. His ***guilt was taken away*** and his ***sin atoned for*** by this sacrifice. He was forgiven. And suddenly, Isaiah not only lived, but became a new man. And his lips, once unclean, would now prophesy - like no other - of the Lord. From dead sinner to fifth

Evangelist.

That is a picture of what happens to us as well. For we are unclean. We are dead in our trespasses and sins. We have no right to come into the presence of God. And yet here we are. Because the Lord has taken away *our* guilt and atoned for *our* sin. You are forgiven. The sacrifice from the altar of the cross has touched you and made you new. The blood from that sacrifice poured over you in Holy Baptism. The flesh and blood of the sacrifice touching your lips as you eat and drink the Holy Supper. And like Isaiah, with these you need not fear anymore. For the Lord has done for you what He promised. What He promised Adam and Eve, promised down through the ages, spoke through the prophet Isaiah, and has now fulfilled and given to you. From dead sinner to child of God.

For his efforts, Isaiah was rewarded - tradition says - by being *sawn in two*, as we heard that some were in the reading from Hebrews. But once you have gone from death to life, as Isaiah did, then death has no power over you. And the people that wield death have no power over you. For you've been given a life greater than death; a life that overcomes death. In this world, because of sin, death overcomes life. But in Jesus, life overcomes death. And not lions, fire, sword, flogging, stones, chains, or saws can take that away. How excited Isaiah must have been to proclaim such a Saviour. To proclaim the Saviour who had done that for him.

And so now Isaiah is one of *the great cloud of witnesses who surround us, whose lives of faith encourage and astound us* (LSB #667 v.1). And they teach us. They teach us that when sin rears its ugly head, when the wild beasts tear at our flesh, when the fires of persecution burn hot, when words are hurled at us like swords and stones, when all the powers of hell try to silence our mouths and kill our faith - look to Jesus. Look to the one Isaiah wrote about. ***The founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and - what happened to Him? - is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.***

Which is where you too will be. In Jesus. Baptized into Him, absolved by Him, and fed with Him. For on the Last Day, when Jesus comes again, He will again speak words of fulfillment. But this time, the scroll that He will unroll on that day will not be the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, but the Book of Life. And we will see the Lord and we will not be afraid. Because the Lord we will see is the Lord we know, the Lord we hear, the Lord we eat and drink. The Lord who conquered death and gives us life. The Son of Mary, our brother in the flesh. And He will not ask ***Whom shall I send?*** but will say to you, *come and rest*. Come to the feast promised to you. Come for all is now ready. And we will come in joy.

Until that day, and knowing that great and glorious day is coming, ***let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*** For at the finish line is Jesus, the one of Isaiah's pen, the conquerer

of sin and death and hell, already victorious, with His victory for you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.