

Jesus, the Light to the Gentiles

Isaiah 49:1-13, Epiphany Sunday

January 6, 2008

Beloved of the Lord...As a rule, children do not naturally listen to nor heed the voice of their parents. Parents know well that when their child is busy with this or that, it is nigh unto impossible to get their attention. When we ourselves were children, it was no different. How many times did our parents call for us, and we didn't listen or hear? In like manner, the first word of our text today is LISTEN! Almighty God is here saying LISTEN! PAY ATTENTION! Stop what you're doing and hear my voice! *Listen, O isles, unto Me; and hearken, ye people from far.* In these words the voice of God thunders across the land and beyond to the thousands of islands in the sea. These islands represent the Gentile people, the Gentile nations whom God is calling to faith by the Gospel. They are to listen to God's Word, for if they listen they will hear the voice of their Savior saying, "The Lord that called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name." "His name shall be called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

It is Christ, the Son of God, whom God called forth from the womb, anointing Him Savior of the world. And though Christ was born as a Jew, He came as a Light to Jew and Gentile alike. The Father says to the Son, "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles." The coming of the Wise Men to Jesus, their worship and adoration of Him, symbolize and represent the joyful receiving of the Gospel by all Gentile nations. The Bible says, "Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faith, and the Holy One of Israel." The Wise Men may have been kings, or may have not. But to this day there are kings and servants who believe in Him.

What is really striking about Isaiah's words today is that they are a conversation between the Son of God, and the Father. The Son first speaks of being formed in the womb of Mary, His mother, and then the Son tells how the Father, "hath made my mouth like a sharp sword." Christ is like a sword in that His Word cuts and lays open the sins of all men. While men often hide their sins from others by crafty lies and deceit, the Word of God, His Ten Commandments exposes and lays bare man's nakedness, man's sin. And so even if a man is a master at hiding his sins from others, man's sins are an open book before God, every page, every sin numbered. And God does punish sin. God says, "I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the

iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me." Sadly, many refuse God's admonition. Like children many are too preoccupied to stop and consider the evil they have done in life. And so the Bible says, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This is because all men by nature are under the power of darkness, the power of the devil. We are not born into this world with any goodness. It should be obvious to all that we are born totally corrupt, totally evil. "We were by nature children of wrath even as others." We are not born as sons of God into the world, but sons of the devil, servants of Satan, servants of sin. "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning." Satan then is the puppet-master of all men, until the Light of the Gospel, the Light of Christ converts the soul.

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." The Bible teaches that Jesus was the polished arrow, the chosen weapon from God the Father, that would destroy the works of the devil. And so in our text, the Son of God says that the Father "in the shadow of His hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me." The Son was like a hidden arrow in the quiver of His Father, a miraculous weapon which surprised and defeated Satan. For when Jesus hung and suffered on the cross, Satan thought his victory was complete. Yet it was at that moment the Father's arrow had been set loose. The arrow struck the heart of the enemy, when Christ, by taking the world's sins upon His own shoulder's, redeemed us from Satan's power! Christ then is the arrow which pierced the heart of the Evil One. If only we believe in Him, the devil has no claim upon us! And as Luther said of the devil, "one little word can fell him!" The name which saves is JESUS.

How lamentable it then is that when the Son hung and suffered upon the cross, in the blindness of sin, most did not see the Son to be their Savior. When Jesus was lifted up between heaven and earth, the Jews reviled Him saying, "He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him." When Jesus saw this, as a True Man, He was discouraged by their words. It seems the very thoughts and prayers of Christ on the cross are recorded for us here in Isaiah. For the Son of God says, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain." Though discouraged, He puts and places all faith in His Father above. For then Christ says, "yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." In the midst of unimaginable suffering,

He trusted in the love of His Father. Jesus says, "My God shall be my strength."

Too often in life we are very unlike Jesus. When troubles befall us, or when we get discouraged, instead of trusting in our heavenly Father as Jesus did, we wallow in self-pity. Like children we cry and complain about our lot in life, instead of placing our confidence in the Lord's mercy. While there is no sin in being discouraged from time to time, it is always a sin not to place faith in our heavenly Father who has promised to keep and preserve us. Psalm 73 says, "My flesh and my heart faileth: *but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*"

In like manner, as He suffered, Jesus trusted in His heavenly Father, and the Father then spoke words of comfort to the Son saying, "It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth." Now truly, these are beautiful words. For the Father is saying to the Son, "Because you are my servant, you will be happy to accomplish this task for me. For in this way you will not only save the Jews, but all the Gentiles as well! By way of the cross, you will be my salvation to the end of the earth, for all people!" And truly these words lifted up the soul of Jesus! For in the midst of His grief on the cross, there was happiness in the knowledge that by His blood, by His merit, He would save the entire world, all sinners from sin! The Father placed that joy before Him, the joy of our salvation! "Jesus drew comfort from the assurance that He was hanging there by those nails to bring eternal life also to millions of Gentiles." (K. Miller) Notice also that the Father here says that Jesus is MY SALVATION, "unto the end of the earth." It pleased the Father just as much as the Son, to give and provide salvation to all men. The Holy Ghost also sincerely desires your salvation, for it is He who by the Gospel Word calls and invite you to faith. "Fear not, only believe." Hence the Father and the Spirit desire your salvation just as much as the Son. They were there with Christ also, as He suffered on the cross. They all worked for the same goal, they all had the same purpose, your salvation.

And so the Father who is with Christ at the cross, says to His Son, "I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people..... That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves." Christ really is our covenant of grace. He is like a living contract, a living hope, a living testament, that all our sin and guilt have been removed. Now only God's love and mercy are upon

us. "I know my thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil." If we doubt, if we waver, it doesn't change nor diminish God's love one iota. For His love toward us is confirmed, it has been proven already by Jesus Christ. And no one, no devil, can undo, what Christ has done for you.

And so Christ then is much like the warden to a prison. He, as the Light, comes to our dark and lonely prison cell, unlocks the door and says, "Dear friend, I have set you free. Go in peace, heaven awaits." These very words create the faith to believe. When we see that Christ did not come to condemn, but to save, the darkness of our sin disappears. Christ is our Light! "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." In the Gospel God offers to us free salvation on a silver platter. Faith realizes, faith understands and says, "This gift belongs to me. It has been given to me from the hand of God Himself! And God will not take this gift away. Jesus is my covenant" proof of God's grace.

"They shall not hunger nor thirst; He that hath mercy on them shall lead them." Here again is Christ our Good Shepherd. When we hunger, He feeds us. When we thirst, He gives us drink. When we commune today, He will assure our hearts that He with His body and blood gives us true and real forgiveness of sins, and where there is forgiveness there is life everlasting. "I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted." This means even the mountains or trials of faith become beneficial in our life. Whatever trial, hardship, or cross we must bear, it becomes bearable when we remember God only seeks to strengthen our faith by it. These mountains have a purpose. They teach us to lift up our eyes to heaven, to pray, to become little children. We walk by faith, not by sight. Our highway becomes high and straight, exalted up to the heavens. By faith we say, "This is God's will for me, my path is now clear. His grace is leading me to heaven."

And so dear children of God, let us rejoice, for we are the Gentiles Christ died for. He was raised again because of our justification. To this day His Gospel Word goes out to the four corners of the world, even to Sinim, which is China. "Sing O heavens; and be joyful O earth; and break forth into singing!" Christ is the Light of the Gentiles! Christ is our Light! May His grace be sufficient for you. Amen.