



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

January 8, 2012

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Sermon Text: [Isaiah 49:1-6](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Isaiah 49:1-6](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 2](#)

Second Lesson: [Acts 16:25-34](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Mark 1:4-11](#)

### You Live in the Year of the Lord's Favor

The early Christians didn't mark the birth of Jesus. They didn't stop to celebrate it in the way that we do. For them, the first festival they celebrated was Easter, and the second one was Epiphany, where they focused on how Jesus was to be the Savior not only of the Jews but of the whole world, which is what Isaiah speaks to us about today. They celebrated it by focusing on how the Magi came to see Jesus, the first non-Jews that we know of that came and acknowledged Jesus as their Savior.

During the season of Epiphany we focus on how Jesus is revealed. That's what the word "epiphany" means, how he is revealed by his powerful teaching and by his powerful works, his miracles. This morning we see that power in action as we consider these words from Isaiah that were spoken some 700 years before the Messiah was born. He talks about his birth in the past tense. He talks about his work in the past tense. He talks about the difficulty of his work. He talks about the struggle as he carried out his work, in the past tense. It's kind of insightful I think for us who at times try to put an imposition on one another that God never has. We try to put the imposition on one another that if you are a Christian, you will never feel down or you will never struggle or you will never be worried. Our God tells us where to turn when we struggle and when we are worried. And that's exactly what we see the Messiah himself talking to us about this morning. We see the Messiah revealing himself to the prophet Isaiah in his words. And he also reveals what his work will be.

In Isaiah 49, this is one of the servant messages that are in the second part of the Book of Isaiah. The servant is doing the speaking through Isaiah. He tells some people to sit up and pay attention that might not have thought that this servant was going to be for them, that this anointed one of God would be for them. The anointed one, who we saw in Psalm 2 many would take their attacks against, says "I've come for you also. Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations." He's telling them to sit up and pay attention because he has something important to tell them. He says "This has been God's plan all along. Before I was born the Lord called me. From my birth he's made mention of my name." The person who is doing the talking, even though he says "He said to me 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor,'" it's not the country Israel. It's the Messiah standing for everything that Israel should have been but was not. The Messiah being faithful to God, not straying from God. The Messiah devoted to God, because the people, the children of Israel, had strayed. They fell in love with Baal and Ashtoreth and other things. They fell in love with the things of this world and drifted away from God, so God had to send a Savior for them. In fact, later in

the text he says that it's not enough just to bring back the lost sheep of Israel and Jacob. So when he says, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor," he's not talking about the country. He's talking about a person that is going to bring Israel back.

How he is going to do it he says is in a way that is going to be different. He says "He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow" (a well-used arrow, used often) "and he concealed me in his quiver." The Messiah, his mouth would be a sharpened sword. That's a picture of how he would teach with authority, not just repeating what others have said, not just reading out of a teacher's guide, not just saying "This is the right answer. Repeat after me, this is the right answer," but teaching and showing what the kingdom of God would be like, in powerful ways, through powerful parables, through touching people and reaching their heart, by drawing someone in who was there to get some water and then telling them about the Living Water and then telling them that he was the Messiah, by telling someone about the nature of sin and that the only way that sin is taken away is through him, by talking to people about sin and grace with a parable about someone who thought they had done everything, someone who the people would look up to like a pharisee and showing the true nature of grace in the person that they would least expect it to be found, in a tax collector. Jesus did this over and over. People often said they marveled at his teaching because he taught as one who had authority. He wasn't just a parrot like the teachers of the Law often were who just repeated what a different rabbi said. He handled the Word of God with incredible power and applied it to day-to-day life in powerful ways, because it was his Word, and he is true God and he is the Savior.

Even though he was wielding the sharpened sword, it appears his arms got a little tired of swinging it from time to time, doesn't it? Here's our Savior talking 700 years before he was born; can you hear the pain and the anguish in his voice when he said, "God said to him, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.'" But here is his response to God. "I have labored to no purpose. I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing." It kind of sounds like Jesus on the way to cross, right? "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have longed to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." Can't you kind of hear that in those words? He reached out to those who were his own, but his own would not receive him, as Scripture says. It says his own mother and brothers thought he was crazy and went to take possession of him because they didn't know what in the world he was talking about.

Seven hundred years before he was born, he says "I've labored to no purpose. I've spent my strength in vain and for nothing." It's an indictment on how hard he worked to save and how people work to avoid being saved.

We might sit here today and shake our heads at those people that didn't pay attention to Jesus. Do you ever wonder, does he look down at us and look over at the Father and say, "I've labored to no purpose. I've spent my strength in vain and for nothing."

Think about it for a moment. Did you give any gifts this holiday season? Did you put your heart and soul into that special gift for that special person? You gave that to them and you are sitting there and you can't wait to watch them open it up. You're just watching. You can't wait to see their reaction. You don't want to miss it. They open it up. They tear the wrapping off, and they look at it and say "Gee thanks. That's nice. Where's my next gift." How would you feel? Would you want to use the scissors that cut the wrapping paper for a different purpose right about then?

Now think for a minute about our God. He sees all these faces gathered to sing his praises. He looks down from heaven and he sees our faces singing (in a monotone voice with no joy) "How glorious is your name in all the earth. You are the king of glory. You bought me with your own blood. How glorious is your name in all the earth". Didn't we just do that a little bit ago? Didn't we sing those incredible words? "How glorious is your name in all the earth. You bought me with your own blood!" When he looked at you, do you think he thought your body language reflected the glory of what you were saying?

"Oh, but this is church. We can't get excited. I mean, it's not as important as a Packer touchdown Pastor. You have to understand that." Do you think God ever looks at us and says, "I've labored to no purpose. I've spent my strength in vain and for nothing." He brings before us the opportunities to reflect his light and to share the fact that he is the Messiah that came, not just for the Jews, but for the whole world with people. He brings those people into our lives. He leads a conversation so that we can share our faith without it being forced, without it being contrived, without us tackling someone and saying "Are you saved?" He brings these opportunities to us and sometimes we don't even see them. Do you think he says, "I have labored to no purpose. I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing."

One of the reasons our Savior teaches with such power is so that it changes us, not just so that it forgives us. That forgiveness is what he does. But then it changes us so that we live for him and not for ourselves, so that we don't view worshiping him as a chore that we do and now God should just shut up and leave us alone the rest of the week because we gave him that time, so he should be okay with that. He wants us to view our worship of God as everything we do at all times and in all ways. That's what his Word does for us. That's what his Sacraments do for us. You and I fail him. There's no denying it. You and I fail him.

Yet look at what he says next. He says, "Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God." He says "I'm going to keep serving these people that reject me. I'm going to keep living perfectly in their place. I'm going to carry all of their sins to the cross. I'm going to take away all their sins even though many of them will never believe in me. I'm going to do what the Lord has sent me to do. What is due me is in the Lord's hand. I'm going to do it because this is that task that from before eternity, we as the Triune God had set our hearts upon. And my reward is with my God. I'm going to do what he has called me to do."

The outcome of that for you and me is that all of our sins and all of our failures have been taken away. All of the times that led our Savior to sigh as he looked at us have been forgiven. Now he forgives us and empowers us so that we can be the mirrors that reflect his light and his love to a world that is going to hell. This is what our Savior reveals as his work. He has come not just for the lost sheep of Israel, which many in Israel thought. He says, "That's too small a thing. I will make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." And God's plan for bringing his salvation to the ends of the earth he laid out. It's pretty easy to understand. As we talked about in our Bible study this morning in the commons...you will be my witnesses. That's God's plan. "I've equipped you to know how you are saved. You're my witness. Go reflect that light." We say "No Lord. We can't do that. I can't do that. We can't talk about you. That's why we hire other people. We have a hired Bible slinger like a Clint Eastwood gunslinger from an Old West Western. We will tell him to talk to them. We'll tell him to go to the school and the church. I can't talk about Christ."

God's called you to do it. It's his command. It's what he told you. How he brings his salvation to the ends of the earth is through you. That's his plan.

If you say "I don't know how to do it," that's why we have all these Bible classes, so you can be equipped to do it. That's why we started a 10-week Bible class on *Be My Witnesses*. That's why on Tuesdays we are looking at another class that talks about forging our church into a caring community so we are equipped to share the Gospel with one another and with outsiders.

God shines his light into our heart through the Word so that we can reflect that light as we go and tell. That's his plan. That's his command. For all the times you and I fail to do it, yes, he forgives us. But that forgiveness empowers us and moves us to want to do what he has told us to do because his command will be a blessing for us and for others.