



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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January 12, 2014

Epiphany 1 - The Baptism of Our Lord

Sermon Text: [Isaiah 42:1-7](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Isaiah 42:1-7](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 45](#)

Second Lesson: [Acts: 10:34-38](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 3:13-17](#)

Paranormal Activity: Jesus Appears as the Christ

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

I don't know if you read the weekly announcements from last week, but if you did, you noticed that one of the themes of the sermons over the season of Epiphany is "Paranormal Activity." If you read that, you might have thought to yourself that's kind of goofy. Paranormal activity? What does that have to do with Epiphany? Paranormal Activity... that's a series of movies, isn't it? It looks like it's shot with nanny cams stuck up in the corner of a bedroom or a kitchen and there are doors opening and closing and night light vision, and stuff like that? What does that have to do with Jesus revealing himself as the Son of God?

Well, if you look up with the word "paranormal," literally it means "beyond the norm." If you look in a dictionary, it will say "unable to be explained by science." That's why they have this whole series of movies, *Paranormal Activity*, about demons (that's really what it comes down to) doing all these things. They have a new one out now I think, isn't there? *The Marked Ones* or something like that is the latest one that's out there. I wouldn't go watch any of those. My kids like them. I say I wouldn't go watch those with your eyes. I just don't care for that kind of stuff. I have no need to say here kitty, kitty to Satan. God said to flee the devil. He's a roaring lion.

But I do think the word "paranormal" helps us understand the purpose of Epiphany fairly well. Something that can't be explained by science. If Jesus during Epiphany is revealing himself to be the Anointed One, the promised Messiah, the Christ (Messiah and Christ both mean Anointed One), it can't be something that is proved by science. He did it by healing people. How did he heal the people? Could you prove by science how he healed people? No. When he went to some guy who was laying on a mat and said, "I say to you, get up and walk," and he got up and walked, can you scientifically recreate that experiment and do it yourself? No. His powerful actions showed him to be the Son of God.

Also during Epiphany this year we'll look at his powerful words, the Sermon on the Mount, for a few weeks in the middle of it. But today I want you to think about this paranormal activity. What goes beyond the norm when Jesus is demonstrated to be the promised Anointed One. He is anointed as the Christ. He shows himself to be the Christ.

It happened at the Jordan where he was baptized by John, right? It's beyond the norm to have heavens open and a dove come down and descend on someone, right? It's beyond the norm to have a voice from heaven say, "This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased." Anybody hear that while getting ready for church today? Did that happen to you? It's not the norm. But it's important that he was anointed.

Notice in our Second Lesson that's what Peter pointed to in Acts 10 when he was talking about these things. He said how God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit at his baptism and how he went around doing good and healing people, doing things beyond the norm. That shows us that he is the one that God had promised.

Now the words we are looking at today from Isaiah are one of the promises. That one would come who would be anointed by the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah 41, at the end of the chapter, God really says the same thing that he says at the start of 42 where he says here, or behold, or look at this. At the end of 41 he had said here, or behold, or look at this, and he had the people look at all the false gods that are around in the world. "All these gods that all these different people around you worship," he was saying "they are all nothing. Take a look at them. They amount to nothing." But he says, "Now, as opposed to all those gods that are nothing, here is my Servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight." Seven hundred years before he was born, God speaks through Isaiah and says, "This is who I want you to focus on. The one who I will put my Spirit on and he will bring justice to the nations." Seven hundred years before he anointed him, he says, "Take a look at this one. The one I anoint with the Spirit. That's the one I've been talking about since I said I would put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers." So it's important that we see that Jesus is the Anointed One.

But that phrase that followed it in what I just read to you from Isaiah... "he will bring justice to the nations." That one could be a little scary, couldn't it? When you were a kid and mom said, "I just made these cookies for something special. Don't eat any of them." And mom rounds the corner and you have your hand on the cookies. They are in your mouth and the crumbs are falling onto your shirt, do you really want justice from mom right then and there? Of course not! You know you're in trouble. If the coming Messiah was going to come and bring a justice that is what we deserve, we've all had our hand in the cookie jar with God, right? God said, "Don't do this," and we've done it. God said, "Do this," and we've failed to do it. So that could be scary until you see what he says a little bit later in here.

Verse 5 and following... the Father talks directly to the Servant, to the Anointed One. He says, "I will make you a covenant." The covenant that he is going to be is a very special covenant that's going to bring justice to the nations and in his teaching, the islands will put their hope. So this justice he is bringing is something that's positive, not something that makes us afraid. This justice that he is bringing is to do for us what God demands of us.

God demands of us that we never have our hand (so to speak) in the cookie jar. That we never sin. That we at all times and in all ways have all of our thoughts, all of our words, and all of our actions perfectly in line with God's will. You and I can't do it. Because we are born in sin, we don't want to do it. But God did it for us. The Messiah came and he brought justice to the nations. This declaration that we are not guilty because he lived perfectly in our place and he gives that perfection to us. For many of us, he gave it to us when we were baptized into him, when he brought us to faith. We are then clothed in Christ's righteousness. That justice that he brings is this declaration that through his life and through his death, taking the punishment of all sin of all time on himself, the world is declared not guilty. And that comes to us personally and we get the benefit of it through faith. That's the justice he brings.

That justice he brings in a love that is just amazing and I think it's beyond the norm. The love the Messiah has is paranormal. Look at how it's described in Verses 3 and 4... "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth." His love kept him going toward the cross of Calvary. His love kept him from becoming discouraged. Even as he was walking to the cross he said, "I've always longed to gather you like a hen gathers her chicks, but you don't want to." I think a lot of us would have said, "Okay, that's enough. I'm done with you. You can all just go to hell." But he didn't falter or become discouraged until he provided salvation for everyone.

Now he continues to extend that salvation in a way that is beyond the norm when it comes to the love he has for us. It says, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." It's a beautiful poetic picture of God's love for you. "A bruised reed he will not break."

As we live in this world, think of how often you and I are just bruised reeds. We are beaten down. We are just beaten down by the things we have to deal with in this life. Whether it's sickness. Whether it's relationship challenges. Financial challenges. Whether it's the loss of loved ones. We get beaten down fairly often. We get weary. We get weights on our shoulders so that we are stooped over as we are shuffling our feet to get through the day. This is how we are. And he says, "A bruised reed I won't break."

When you're troubled, at times even by your own sins, and you're bruised by your sins that you can hide from everyone else but you know that you know them and God knows them, he says, "I'm not going to break you. I'm going to keep coming to you with my love, with my Gospel of forgiveness, because I want you to be close to me."

"A smoldering wick he will not snuff out." A smoldering wick... it says in other places in Scripture "don't put out the Spirit's fire" as a picture of faith. So a smoldering wick would be someone whose faith is nothing more than just a glowing ember. He will not snuff it out. He won't say, "I've had enough of you" and just snuff you out. He always reaches out in love to us. We might harden our hearts, but he does not stop loving.

I think that's beyond the norm. I think the norm for you and for me at times is that we don't do this. Our God gives us opportunities to encourage with the Gospel of Jesus Christ the bruised reeds that are all around us, and we don't do it. We don't want to get involved. We are afraid we might say something wrong. We have more excuses than Moses when God said go to Egypt.

"A smoldering wick I won't snuff out." In the Priority in Ministry listening meetings that we held, this is what our congregation said is an important part of our ministry and one of the most important things we need to improve upon and quickly, is reaching out to smoldering wicks, our inactive members.

"A smoldering wick I will not snuff out." Picture it this way... you have a candle that is just that glowing ember. If you don't act to fan it back into flame, you are snuffing it out, aren't you? When we don't reach out in love to those who seem to be drifting from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are snuffing them out. The only thing that feeds faith and strengthens faith and keeps us in the faith is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If we aren't using that to fan that wick into flame, we are snuffing them out.

The congregation said, "we don't want to do that. We want to be active in reaching the inactive." So the Elders came up with a new ministry that we are starting and we have a meeting tomorrow night. If you want to see if you want to be involved in it, you can come and listen and see. It's a ministry to take CDs to the inactive to say, "Here is the Word of God. You haven't been connected to it. Here is a way to connect it to you." Is it worth your time? If it isn't worth your time, tell us how we can make it better so it is worth your time. But we are trying to do something to imitate Christ and not snuff out smoldering wicks.

If we look at ourselves honestly, I think you would have to see that the norm for us is to not want to do these kind of things. Not to want to get involved with one another and encourage bruised reeds among us. Not to want to fan into flames smoldering wicks. But our God went beyond the norm for us. His love for us is paranormal. It forgives us for each of the times we have failed him in the past, that we have sinned against him by not doing these things. His love continues to say "You are forgiven. Here is my body. Here is my blood. You are clothed in my righteousness at your baptism. You are mine. I love you beyond the norm." Now he wants us to reveal him to others just as he was revealed to us.

So the next time you see one of those commercials where the door is shut, or they all open at once and everyone jumps, remind yourself that paranormal is not just something negative. It's not just something demonic. Paranormal is God's love for you in Christ. It's beyond the norm. God wants you to be paranormal in your love for others and be his voice and his eyes and be the extension of his peace. That's the privilege God gives you when he calls you to be paranormal as well. Amen.