



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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

January 19, 2014  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany  
Sermon Text: [Isaiah 49:1-7](#)  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Isaiah 49:1-7](#)  
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 89](#)  
Second Lesson: [Acts 13:38-49](#)  
Gospel Lesson: [John 1:29-41](#)

### **Paranormal Activity: Jesus is Revealed as the Lamb of God**

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

It's in the announcement sheet last week and this week. We talked about it last week. During Epiphany, the first three weeks and the last week of Epiphany, the sermons are focusing on paranormal activity. We are not focusing on doors opening and closing and people getting pulled by invisible wires across rooms like you see in the movies. We are focusing on what the meaning of the word paranormal is. As we said last week, it literally means not able to be proved by science or scientific experiments. It's something you can't explain. It's paranormal. Beyond the norm.

It really fits the season of Epiphany. During Epiphany, Jesus is revealed as the promised Messiah because he makes the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk. He raises the dead. He does things that science can't explain. But in what I read to you in any of the readings today you don't really see any of that, do you? There are no miracles that take place that reveal Jesus. So where is the paranormal activity in what I just read to you a little while ago from Isaiah 49?

I suppose one of the things you could say is beyond the norm is that 700 years before he is born, the Son of God, the promised Servant, the Suffering Servant who came to be the Messiah is having a conversation with the Father, and the prophet Isaiah records it for us. I think that's a little beyond the norm, isn't it? The things he talks about I think are fascinating. He talks about how the promised Messiah would come from Israel and even in these readings is called Israel, yet he's not only for Israel. When he starts addressing us he says, "Listen to me, you islands; you distant nations." This is something that involves you. This is something that shows you how the God who has created the world is concerned about much more than just the children of Israel, the Northern Tribe of Israel and the Southern Tribe of Judah. The Messiah is going to come for all people. He is the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. That's revealed in our reading. It says "It's too small a thing for you just to bring them back, just the children of Israel. I'm going to send you to bring back all people of the world."

You and I know that. You and I rejoice in that, because if it was only just for the children of Israel, I don't think there are all that many of Jewish blood that are gathered here this morning. So this is important for us. But I think one of the things that you might have missed that I think is fascinating to look at is what you find in Verse 4.

The Messiah is talking about this being for the nations. He is talking about this being too small a thing. Now he is going to do something greater and grander than many had imagined. But look at what he says in Verse 4. *"I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all. Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God."*

Does that surprise you? He carried out the Lord's work and he redeemed all people of all time. He paid for all people's sins of all time and yet he still can say "I have labored for nothing"? "I've spent my strength for thing at all. I've labored in vain"? Can you hear the pain in his voice 700 years before he is born knowing that he is going to come and leave the glory of heaven and become one of us and live as a human even though he is the one who said "let there be light" and there was? He comes and lives as one of us and people are incredibly indifferent to him at best often, and at worst incredibly hostile. When they see the miracles he performs when he says, "Lazarus, I say to you, come out," and he comes out of that tomb, how did the leaders of the Jews react? Do you remember? "We have to kill him! We have to kill him now! If he keeps raising the dead, everyone is going to follow him!"

*"I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing."* It kind of sounds like what he was saying when he was walking to the cross, doesn't it? He sees the women crying and says, "Don't weep for me. Weep for yourselves Jerusalem. I've longed to gather you like a hen gathers her chicks, and you wanted none of it." His heart went out because he had done all these things. He had revealed himself as the fulfillment of all this prophecy and the people didn't want anything to do with him. *"I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing."* Those are words that really indict the people, don't they?

Yet they are also words that indict us, aren't they? Since Jesus has ascended back into heaven and you have become a believer in him, how many days could he look down at you and say, "Look at what they are doing. Look at how they love themselves more than they love me. Look at how they've made their children the Baal of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the god that they worship more than they love me. I've spent my strength for nothing and I've labored in vain! Look at how they're chasing after the things they want and ignoring what I have told them to do and what I have said would be a blessing to them!" Day after day God looks down from heaven and that's what he sees when he looks at you and he looks at me.

Now if you want to get back to paranormal, if you want to get back to scientific explanations, this time of the year, at the start of January you see all kinds of ads for all kinds of diets. There are all kinds of people with before and after pictures on all those commercials. They'll say to look because the scientific study has shown that this is effective if you do this, this and this, and all that kind of stuff. If you look at the ministry of Jesus Christ and you scientifically say that he was a success, could you do it? Could you point to the crowds and crowds of people that were there? He started his ministry with no one following him. He got popular for awhile, but then when he said "I am the bread that has come down from heaven. Whoever eats me will have eternal life," the

people went, “what are you talking about? Did you eat some funny mushrooms, Jesus? I don’t want to listen to you anymore. You’re nuts!” And the crowds disappeared. And the last year was the year of opposition so that when he finally was put on trial, there was no one to defend him. The followers stood off in the distance. They locked themselves in a room. Where is the scientific proof that this works? This ministry of Jesus Christ is paranormal. There is no scientific proof that you can point to.

*“I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing.”* A lot of people could look at it outwardly and agree with Jesus. But look at the last verse the Father spoke to his Son 700 years before he was born to strengthen him and encourage him to carry out the task he had given him. The Father says, *“This is what the LORD says—the Redeemed and Holy One of Israel—to him who was despised and abhorred...”*

*“I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing.”* He was despised and abhorred by the nations. “To my suffering servant, here is what I have to tell you... *Kings will see you and stand up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.*” He speaks these words of promise to encourage the suffering servant, the one who was putting himself on the line. And at times, as he looked around with his eyes, it looked as if it was for nothing. But he says, “I’ll sustain you, and I’ll keep you strong until you accomplish the purpose for which you were sent.”

You and I know that Jesus did it. You and I know that he appeared to every eye as though nothing he did was successful. Satan even had to think, when Jesus died on the cross, that he had won. But then Jesus rose. That assures us he paid for the sins of the world. He accomplished what the Father had sent him to do. That means for you and for me that all those times when Jesus has looked at us and said, *“I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing,”* he’s forgiven us for all those times. He’s taken away the guilt of the sin of all the times we have failed him. When you and I focus on that glorious truth, that he has opened heaven to us and taken away our guilt and he promises to be with us and sustain us until that day, until he calls us to our heavenly home, it fills us with joy. It’s not a joy that can be scientifically proven or displayed, but it’s a joy in which we live even in the midst of sorrow. There’s no mistake that it makes absolutely no scientific sense... joy in the midst of sorrow. But as a Christian, that’s what we have.

When we lose a loved one and we know they believed in Jesus, we know they are with the Lord. We are filled with sorrow, yet we have joy to know they are with the Lord. As we go through heartache and hardship, as we face difficulty day after day after day, we have sorrow. There’s no denying it. But we have joy because God’s promises sustain us. Not only was the suffering servant his chosen one, you and I who are baptized into Christ are his chosen ones. Before the creation of the world, he knew that we would be his own because of his love and his faithfulness, not because of anything in us.

When you and I know and rejoice in this truth, we understand a greater truth. You and I are involved in the paranormal. You and I are to be active in paranormal activity every

day of our lives. Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with ourselves and with one another. Admonishing those who are caught in sin and pointing them to Jesus and saying repent and find forgiveness. We are called to teach and admonish one another. We are called to be encouragers. We are called by God to do all these things. As we do them, paranormal activity is taking place.

There's no way you and I should be believers in Jesus, but we are. It's his gift. There's no way that he should be able to work through people like us who make so many excuses, who say things are important but then say you should go and hurry up and do it. God has said we are the ones who are to do the work that we have said is important to do. As we do it, we carry out his task and proclaim his Gospel and that Gospel accomplishes things that we cannot understand but things that we rejoice in.

This is the task the Lord has given you. It is not a question of, will you be his witness? If you are a Christian, the question is, will you be a faithful witness or an unfaithful witness? The name Christian leaves you no option. You are involved in paranormal activity. Amen.