

## Holy, Holy, Holy Is the Lord Almighty

### Isaiah 6:1-8

<sup>1</sup> In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings. With two they covered their faces. With two they covered their feet. With two they flew. <sup>3</sup> One called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Armies! The whole earth is full of his glory! <sup>4</sup> The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of the one who called, and the temple was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> Then I said, "I am doomed! I am ruined, because I am a man with unclean lips, and I dwell among a people with unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies!" <sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me, carrying a glowing coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. <sup>7</sup> He touched my mouth with the coal and said, "Look, this has touched your lips, so your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven." <sup>8</sup> Then I heard the Lord's voice, saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am. Send me!"

On this Trinity Sunday, we confess our faith in our God as he has revealed himself in his Word. Our God is triune. He is three separate persons in one God. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one* (Deuteronomy 6:4). He is not many gods. He is one God. But our God is also three persons. When our Lord commanded baptism, he told us to apply water to an individual *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 28:19). How God can be three separate persons and yet only one God is a tremendous mystery. We can't fully understand it. But it's important that we believe it and confess it. In today's creed we confessed: *Whoever wishes to be saved must have this conviction of the Trinity*. So our belief in the triune God is an article of faith. It's something we believe in, but we can't fully understand it. But that's okay. We have no trouble worshiping a God who is way beyond our understanding. And we can be thankful that he does reveal himself to us just like he did for the Prophet Isaiah. In a vision that Isaiah witnessed when he was called for ministry, God reveals himself in majesty as the most holy of all. We join angelic praises in confessing: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty. Like the prophet we tremble before him because of our sin. Like the prophet, he takes our sins away. And with his prophet he sends us to share his forgiveness.

We are told that the prophet saw this vision in the year that Uzziah, King of Judah, died. The death of Uzziah marked the beginning of the end for Judah. Failing to learn from the northern tribes' unfaithfulness when they were destroyed by Assyria, Judah would soon follow suit with spiritual decline that would result in them being taken captive by the next world power of Babylon. God still sent prophets to warn his people and lead them to repentance. That's what God had planned for his prophet Isaiah. Isaiah would bring God's message of judgment. But he'd also share God's message of grace with several prophecies about the coming Savior.

When God calls his prophet into service, he appears in an awesome and terrifying sight. God appears in majesty seated on a throne in his temple with the train of his robe filling the temple. He appears with a number of angels called seraphs. Each seraph had six wings. And what's interesting is what they do with their wings. With two wings they are flying, which sounds normal. But the other four wings they use to cover their faces and feet. Why do they do this? They are in the presence of our triune God. His holiness is so great, it forces these supernatural creatures to demonstrate great reverence and humility to be in his presence.

Being in the presence of the Most Holy they are moved to offer him praises: *Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Armies! The whole earth is full of his glory!* The One seated on the throne is set apart. He is infinitely separate and above all creation. He is absolutely perfect in every respect and exalted above all things. Everything depends on him for their existence. He possesses perfect independence. In him are perfect power, perfect goodness, and perfect love. In his holiness he hates sin with all the power of his infinite being. He must and will punish all sin. There's no getting around that. He would cease to be holy if he did not oppose sin and all its consequences. The seraph's praises ring so loud the whole place trembles. And smoke filled the temple. What an awesome sight!

The doorposts weren't the only things trembling. The prophet himself stood in the presence of the Almighty. A deep sense of unworthiness overcame Isaiah. He confessed, *"I am doomed! I am ruined, because I am a man with unclean lips, and I dwell among a people with unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of Armies!"* Isaiah was terrified because his eyes had seen the Lord and he knew no one can see God and live. Isaiah stood before God empty-handed. He had nothing to offer God. He was unclean and lived among a people that were unclean.

Who of us would dare to stand before the Almighty? This prophet would later write: *"All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags"* (Isaiah 64:6). If holy angels must hide themselves in the presence of our holy God, how can any of us stand before him with the filth that has crossed our lips and the sin that has polluted our lives. "Woe is me! I am ruined too!" We must join the prophet in trembling because of our sin.

In his vision God allows his prophet with unclean lips to stand. Immediate help comes from the altar of God's grace. God orders a seraph to take a live coal from the burning altar. The altar is burning up a sacrifice that was made for sin. The seraph touches the prophet's mouth with the coal and announces: *"Look, this has touched your lips, so your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven."* Of course, every sacrifice that was made on God's altar pointed to just one sacrifice. That one sacrifice was made by God's Messiah for a world of sin. He'd make that one sacrifice that covered all sin on a cursed cross. So with one sacrifice God has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (Hebrews 10:14).

God must reach across the difference between his holiness and mankind's sin. Forgiveness and atonement are God's work. Before his prophet could do anything, God by his grace forgave him. Nothing has changed. We too are forgiven by an act of God's love. *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). God gives us sinners just the cleansing we need. The Lord purged the entire world of sin through the suffering and death of Jesus. The holiness of God has done away with sinfulness and uncleanness. God now declares the whole world is holy and righteous because of Christ Jesus. Those who believe this declaration are called saints. They are separated from the world of sin and death. They are set aside for Holy God and they receive all his blessings. God has provided the only answer to sin and rebellion that has plagued humanity. All sin is purged in Jesus. God included every human being when he declared the world holy because of Christ. All are invited to believe it and receive it resulting in a peace with God that surpasses all understanding.

What brings joy to angels in heaven is privileged by every minister of the gospel. He stands before God's people. They have just confessed their sins that came from unclean lips, minds, and lives. They do this in a public worship setting or in private. In the place of our Savior, we

get to announce: Your guilt is removed. Your sin is covered. Look to Christ's cross. There he said, "It is finished!" Look to his tomb. It's empty. He rose from the dead. God no longer holds your sin against you. Repentance makes angels rejoice. Forgiveness brings us joy. May we treasure the time God gives us to confess our sins. And may God's absolution, spoken by your pastor, a fellow sinner, fill you with joy.

In the final verse of this vision we see evidence of our Triune God. The Lord asks, "*Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?*" This question takes us back to creation when God was planning to make mankind in a special way. Genesis 1 records: "*Let us make man in our image.*" The plural shows up because God is three persons. The three persons of the Godhead were planning to make people in his own holy image. Now the Triune God is looking to send someone to minister to his people.

One must ask, why not send angels? God has used angels on occasion to be his messengers. When the virgin Mary needed to learn about her unexpected pregnancy, God sent an angel. When Mary's fiancé needed reason not to divorce pregnant Mary, God sent an angel. When Joseph needed to be warned about the dangerous King Herod's threat to the Christ child, God sent an angel. Holy angels always do God's bidding. And they're very good at it. Angels were there to restore strength to our Savior at his temptation in the desert and during stressful prayer time in the garden. So God needed to get a message out to his people. Why not send an angel?

God could have sent seraphs that sang God's praises till the doorposts shook. But God chose not to do that. Instead, God chose to send a creature that was limited by flesh and blood. They were also limited by sin. This man in God's presence had just confessed his sinfulness. Yet God still wanted to send him. It's pure grace that God chooses to send us sinners to speak for him. And we see Isaiah's willingness to speak for God. This was the same person who just moments before was filled with fear and a sense of his own sinful shortcomings. He now embraces the call to go for the Holy One of Israel. God's forgiveness and the realization that God wanted to use him produced Isaiah's willingness to serve. Forgiveness worked this desire to serve in the prophet. Courage replaced fear. Willingness replaced unworthiness.

The words of Isaiah, "Here am I. Send me," are etched in stained glass artwork that is found in our seminary's auditorium. Very recently seminarians and their families saw those words when they gathered this week for assignments into the public ministry. Those seminarians that we send out have unclean lips and can only tremble at the thought of serving God. But they also know they have been washed clean in baptism and with blood that Christ shed for them with the one sacrifice he made for all sin. With courage and willingness they go to serve God's people the good news of sins forgiveness and the sure hope of eternal life. Just 26 men in this year's graduating class are answering God's call. That's just filling 15% of the 175 pastoral vacancies across our synod today. What makes those 26 sinners special. They've been trained. So we need to train more and more forgiven sinners to consider offering themselves for God's service. But God's call to serve is not just for young men with college and seminary training. God calls each of us to speak for him. Each of us knows people that need to hear their sins are forgiven. They need to know that Jesus gave his life for them. They need to know that his resurrection from death assures them of God's forgiveness. God has accepted Christ's payment for their sin. So when our synod leaders come the third Saturday in September to discuss personal evangelism with us, I pray all of you will be there with willing hearts saying: Here am I. Send me.