

**Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 428, 05-30-2021 †† Trinity**

*“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,”* Mark 9:24.  
*“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,”* John 12:21.

**ISAIAH 6**

*<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!”*



Nearly 25 centuries ago, the pagan tyrant of ancient Syracuse, King Hiero, asked the wise, world-renowned poet Simonides to tell him about God. “Give me a day to consider, and I will tell you.” The next day, the king asked again, and Simonides said, “Give me two days, and I will tell you.” Two days later, the king asked about God again, and Simonides replied, “Give me four days, and I will tell you.” So on and so forth he continued and always asked for double the time than was previously asked. The king finally became impatient and asked Simonides why he kept putting him off, the wise man said, “The more I think about it, the less I know about it.”

My friends, you have more of an answer than the poor godless kings and poets had, even if they thought about it for 100 years. The simple sentence, “God is spirit,” “God is love,” and “God is all-wise” each are more than Simonides had.

Today we say also that God is three. Today is what the church calls “Trinity Sunday”; the day we give special consideration to the doctrine of the triune character and work of the Godhead. Today we hear overtones of Christmas, when we join in the song of the angels. Today’s song is the *Trisagion*, “*Holy! Holy! Holy is the Lord of hosts!*” Today we are reduced to praising and hallowing the God that we do not comprehend.

God is one and yet three—one in essence and three in persons. This is the faith of the orthodox Christian church of every land and denomination. Along with the ancient church, the whole church today confesses faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

This teaching is a mystery. We cannot comprehend it. It is entirely above our human reason. That is readily admitted by all who hold to it and believe it. So Christians do not presume to understand the Trinity. We simply believe it. We accept it by faith because God in His Word declares it. And God does not ask us to understand it. He declares it as fact and calls on us, not to sit in judgment over it, but to believe it. We are even invited to join in concert to it, to ...

## **Sing Along To The Unfathomable Triune God**

The whole outcome of the first five chapters of Isaiah is that, through sin, God’s people are not what they ought to have been (ch. 1), nor what they were meant to be (ch. 2-4), nor what they might have been (ch. 5). They call evil good and good evil (5:20). They are wise in their own eyes (5:21). They are heroes in drinking wine and strong beverages (5:22). They violated God’s law and the grave opens its mouth wide (5:14). God’s anger is not turned away, they ignore the work of His hands (5:12), the enemy armies are ready to multiply dead bodies, and any light is darkened by clouds (5:30). Mercy is exhausted and nothing but judgment lies ahead.

Now in chapter 6 we are taken up with Isaiah into God’s heavenly courts. Isaiah didn’t describe the manner of his seeing. Vision? Dream? Out-of-body experience? We can’t tell. There is also no description of the Lord, unlike other OT testimonies, just that He is “*on a throne, high and exalted.*” Maybe sinful man didn’t want to see it, or maybe Isaiah just couldn’t comprehend what he was seeing.

What did Isaiah describe? The Lord high on a throne, with the train of His robe covering the whole floor. Above Him hovered angels—special angels called seraphs, who wait on Him and attend Him. They were not just winged creatures, but each seraph has six wings. Wings covered their eyes, for they must not pry into the divine, but not their ears, for their role is to wait for the Word of the Lord and obey it. Wings covered their feet, the part of the body that may have contact with the dust of the earth. One commentator I read wondered if they cover their feet to disavow choosing their own path. They are perfect creatures without sin, holy relative to us, but before the Lord they covered themselves anyway. They sang out, “Holy! Holy! Holy!” Three holies. Apparently it’s a matter of deep joy, intense devotion, on the part of the seraphs to chant the Lord’s praises. Holy is to be separated or set apart, pure, sacred, not common or vulgar. God is absolutely sanctified in every way. Everything shook. Earthquakes everywhere.

To see this as a *proof passage* of the Holy Trinity is to go too far. Sometimes the Bible simply repeats itself for emphasis. Hebrew did not use exclamation points. However, knowing what we do, in light of the New Testament we can certainly witness to the Trinity. Angels of high rank have insight into the Lord that we do not. He is God and not man. He is not only one, but three, yet also one. The more we try to penetrate the meaning of that, the more dizzying it becomes.

In what must have been beautiful but deafeningly fearful, Isaiah realized himself. His mood is quite different than Christmas. His reaction to the vision was humbled, devastated, crushed. He was uncomfortable. He was exhausted. “I am ruined! I am dissolved! I am silenced!” The cause? “I am a man of unclean lips? Why was Isaiah so bothered about lips? Maybe the song, which would involve the lips, was just so majestic. Sins of speech may remind Isaiah of his uncleanness. The God that Isaiah did not understand—could not understand—reduced the prophet to nothing. Sin is the issue. It always has been when the Lord calls His servants. Moses took off his shoes and covered his face. Daniel saw God and couldn’t eat for three days. Peter told Jesus to go away from him, for he is sinful man.

The same goes for us, too. The God we do not understand reduces us to nothing. We approach His altar, shrouded in majesty and mystery, to praise and hallow Him, except for one thing—we know what else has passed through our lips. These are the lips of an unclean people of sin. We speak the same confession as Isaiah. When out of our sinful hearts, we’ve misused God’s name, when we’ve called God to damn all sorts of things, when we’ve sworn on God’s

name when we shouldn't have, when we lied through our teeth. Friends, like Isaiah, we are a people of unclean lips, and the wages of our sin is death. Not one of us has any right to be in this position and live, let alone sing and hallow the Lord of hosts. We are reduced to nothing.

Isaiah first could not do as the angels did. But then something happened that meant Isaiah could not do otherwise than the angels. The altar is a place where holiness is accepted. From it a seraph-angel used tongs to remove a live coal. It literally touched Isaiah's lips to "cover over" His sin and guilt. This "cover over" word means "atone," "remove guilt," leaving no room for doubt. God could have just announced forgiveness, but the angel took this visible sign to him. Nor did he leave Isaiah trying to read God's lips; the seraph told him what he was doing. Burning, cauterizing, signifies purifying. In the live coal is atonement, propitiation, satisfaction, forgiveness, cleansing, and reconciliation.

Now Isaiah could not help but sing praises and hallow God. Christians have been singing this prior to communion since the second century A.D. The pastor will take not a live coal, but the very body and blood of Christ, to touch your lips and absolve us. It may be "styrofoam bread" and cheap grape wine, yet the Lord comes to us and touches us of unclean lips and atones for our sin. Notice that there is no man-made compensation or sacrifice involved, simply God-for-us.

Friends, our God hasn't necessarily called us into such a position as the prophet Isaiah, but he has still called us into different vocations in life: parents, children, students, teachers, employers, employees, neighbors, citizens, etc. And we get to do so, not as a people of unclean lips, but rather as a people whose lips have been touched with the fire of the Gospel, whose lips and hearts have been cleaned from sin. And it's with these new refreshed, clean, holy hearts that God has given to us, that words spill from our hearts out of our lips to give this holy Lord the honor that he rightly deserves; just as the angels who sing his praises in heaven. We get to bring that cleansing fire of the Gospel to hearts that are covered in the stickiness of their sin. What motivates us to do it? Forgiveness. It is the forgiveness that forgave us. To be joined to God means to join a missionary society. If my sins can be forgiven, so can theirs. Oh, that lips would announce the Trinity's holiness and forgiveness! Sing "holy, holy, holy," but join also the song of forgiveness. Forgive the best, forgive the worst. Forgive your boss at work the work jerk. Forgive your mother and your father, your sister and your brother. Forgive your friends, forgive your enemies, for is each "holy" the angels rejoicing when one sinner repents? In the name of Jesus, Amen.