

## **HEAVEN MEETS EARTH IN DIVINE WORSHIP**

Hear again the Word of God for the Feast of the Holy Trinity:

*And one continued to call to one and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, YHWH Sabaoth; all the earth (is) full of His glory."<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

In this order of service, each time it is used to receive God's gracious gifts, we declare anew events recorded about 758 B.C. drawn from Isaiah's waking vision. This Lord's Service, immediately after the Lord Jesus descends to us in the means He chose – Word, bread and wine – we chant the truths of Isaiah's oracle. In the canticle, "Isaiah, Mighty Seer in Days of Old," we sing with the heavenly hosts an everlasting threefold Holy. With them we offer the sacrifice of praise to the living God given by the heavenly ones who continually burn with holy fire. They are the Seraphim who attend the Lord of Hosts in unending heavenly worship.

How privileged are you, are we, to be free to join our voices to the enduring antiphonal (back and forth) worship chant of the ages, sung in so many languages! In addition, as we sing of Isaiah's vision, we echo the confession of the Church of the past five centuries, for this hymn was composed by none other than Dr. Martin Luther. With words translated from his paraphrase of Isaiah's glorious seeing, we sing to one another, along with the ones burning in the holy fire of God's glory, the Word of the Lord. We remind its hearers, each and every one of us, that, in God's purely proclaimed Word and His rightly administered Sacraments, heaven meets earth in Divine Worship.

The Word of God in the Lord's service to us reminds us that God comes to meet us with His Holiness that removes our guilt and sin. We do not reach up to bring Him to earth; He reaches down to lift us up on in Him. In His proclaimed Word, in His Visible Word, He touches all of you. You who receive Him through those means in the Faith are given His good and gracious gifts – forgiveness of sins and strengthening to life everlasting. Those whom He touches who have rejected the Faith, though they attempt to

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<sup>1</sup> *Isaiah 6:3.*

receive for themselves treasures they think they have earned, receive just condemnation. That being declared, let us return to contemplating right worship, as God shows, through today's Word, just what that means.

Praise begins in the heavenly realms by the host surrounding the Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity. Humans are freed to behold that worship through the revelation of God, specifically in His written Word. Having viewed the heavenly worship, believing humans confess their sinfulness in the presence of the Holy One. The Holy One hears human confession of sins and sends His messengers with cleansing gifts from the Altar of His sacrifice. Human guilt is taken away and sin is forgiven. Yes, dear ones in Christ, this is it: Worship in heaven is brought to earth; worshippers are moved by Divine Worship to confess their sins; God's messengers give them His gifts and they are declared holy. Now, we dive into today's Trinitarian text from Isaiah, as it begins:

*In (the) year King Uzziah died, then I saw the Adonai sitting upon (a) throne high and exalted, and His train was filling the Temple.<sup>2</sup>*

That year, the way we mark the calendars now, was one in which Israel had been at one of its heights of peace and prosperity. It was, though not known to its rulers or people then, only to survive as a nation for about 36 more years. Due to the unrepentant sinfulness of Israel's kings, priests, and people, the nation was soon to fall. That which was once part of the kingdom united by David and ruled by Solomon was even headed into oblivion.

At the same time, the year of Isaiah's vision was the same year that one of the founders of Rome was born. From the passing of Israel to the ascending of Rome, we may learn something. That is that the glory of the Old Covenant was fading and that which was needed for the glory of His New Covenant to be revealed was just beginning.

In that year, Isaiah was given a waking vision, an oracle, of Divine Worship. He describes the One sitting exalted on the heavenly throne as Adonai, Lord or Master.

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 6:1.

Isaiah tells of the robes, the train of the garments, filling the spacious hall, the heavenly Temple. Other than the fact that the Master of Creation was seated, the prophet records no other details about him. In fact, the prophet recalls more details about that which was surrounding the enthroned Lord than about the Lord Himself.

So that we are clear about Who the prophet witnessed wrapped in robes of light and clouds of smoke, we turn to Scripture. There we hear that Jesus declared that it was Himself Whom the prophet saw. Jesus' witness has been handed down to us by the Apostle/Evangelist John (12:41). So, the ancient prophet of Israel, that pure preacher of God's Word, saw Christ enthroned about seven and a half centuries before His incarnation.

If Jesus' Word is not enough witness, we have that of Stephen, as he was being stoned to death (Acts 7:55), and that of a much older John writing from exile (Revelation 5:7). In the Acts account, the living and ascended Christ is seen by the man who was condemned to death for declaring that the Church killed the Author of Life, Jesus Whom God raised from the dead. In the Revelation, the risen Christ Jesus is revealed to be the Lamb Who was slain but lives eternally, as he receives the scroll of God's final judgments upon the earth and unrepentant sinners. All of that puts Father and Son together in the heavenly throne room of the heavenly temple. That you believe that is the work of the Holy Spirit. How privileged are you to chant and sing of such great realities on the Feast Days of our Lord and King's Church! Up for air and back into the text as Isaiah describes more of that which he beholds of eternal heavenly worship:

*Seraphim were standing from above Him: six wings, six wings for each one, with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.<sup>3</sup>*

Those burning creatures are in positions of service to the enthroned One. Their position is not of those lifted over Him, but of those who are ready to attend to His slightest command. They are called Seraphim. That is plural, and means, "burning ones."

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 6:2.

The root of their name is the same as that of the fiery serpents we heard about a few weeks ago whose image was lifted up in bronze and placed upon a pole – that all who were bitten might look at it and be healed. It also appears to be the root of the word used to describe a group of devout Israelite laymen that existed from the end of the Old Covenant era and into the beginning of the New Covenant era, the Pharisees.

Even so, the similarity seems to end with the meaning contained in the word, “burning.” While the serpents of Moses’ time had burning bites, and the Pharisees of the intertestamental time were burning with zeal for the Law of God, the Seraphim continually burn with the light of God’s pure and cleansing fire. They, in the ranks of the Sabaoth – the heavenly hosts – are shown closest to the enthroned Lord of heaven and earth. John, almost nine centuries later declares them to be full of eyes, bearing likeness to earthly creatures.

These fiery winged creatures each have six wings. You know that, because you sing it so often, particularly in the Festival half of the Church year (at a minimum during the Five Great High Feasts and the Feast of the Holy Trinity). Six is the number of the days of creation. It is the number of man. Therefore, it is the number that is closest to God, Who created man in His own image. It is the number taken on Himself by God as He became one with man. As fully human, a true sixth-day being, God in our flesh died in our sins. God did this to restore to man the image the first man lost when he cast it away in Paradise in the desire to equal to the Three in One and One in Three.

There is so much more that could be said about the six in the number of each Seraphim’s wings. Even so, we will hold to the revelation of Isaiah’s vision. There we hear, sing and chant that each fiery messenger attendant of the reigning Master of Creation covered his face with two, his feet with two, and with two he flew. The covering of the face indicates humility even in these perfect, holy, sinless beings closest to the throne of the slain but now living God. The covering of the feet may represent hiding that which may touch a fallen, sin-filled earth. Or, in the explanation that the text best supports, the Seraphim’s wings over the feet display that those heavenly messengers will

not go anywhere on their own. They await the Lord's bidding. That is proclaimed later in our text, after the prophet confesses the reality of his position before the Almighty Lord of Hosts. Now our text continues with the revelation of that which the humble, pure, bound to the will of God, burning ones continually declare:

*And one continued to call to one and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, YHWH Sabaoth; all the earth (is) full of His glory."<sup>4</sup>*

A little later today, you will chant, "Holy is God, the Lord of Sabaoth," three times. Once will be for the Father, once for the Son, and once for the Holy Spirit. Think about what your chant is echoing.

The German forefathers of the LCMS sang, *Heilig ist Gott, der Herre Sabaoth!*" as a hymn paraphrase of the words they knew to be, *Helig, heilig, heilig ist der Herr Zebaoth*. When Latin was the language of the Church the people chanted, *Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus Dominus, Deus omnipotens*. When Greek was the language of God's people united by Him in Word and Sacrament, they declared, *αγιος, αγιος, αγιος Κυριος σαβαωθ* [Heideos, heideos, heideos, Kyrios Sabaeoth]. As Isaiah beheld, recorded, and disseminated his revelation to the church, they read, קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה יְהוָה יְהוָה קְדוֹשׁ h קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ. [Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh, Yahweh Sabaeoth]<sup>5</sup>

"Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Heavenly hosts," the eternal chant of the Lord's fiery messengers, has been the Church on earth's chant for almost 2,800 years! It is your chant today that is given to remind you of the heavenly worship that even now resounds, from the pure spacious hall from which our enthroned Lord rules, throughout the creation. From there His glory, the manifestation of Who He is, fills all the earth. That is to say, Divine Worship moves faithful sinners to confess their sinfulness and is the means God uses to grant them Holy Absolution.

The Church Militant's song, when first given to the Old Covenant Church by God through Isaiah, was given with images that were reflected in the Temple in

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<sup>4</sup> *Isaiah* 6:3.

<sup>5</sup> [Biblia Hebraica Westmonasteriensis with Westminster Hebrew Morphology 4.18](#). (2013). (Is 6:3). J. Alan Groves Center for Advanced Biblical Research.

Jerusalem of that age. The people who heard Isaiah's words need not simply imagine the heavenly worship. They could travel to Jerusalem and behold its earthly enactment! Why, even in these words they could behold heavenly reality in the earthly Temple services with their own eyes:

*And shook the foundations the thresholds from the call of the calling one, and the house was filled with smoke.*<sup>6</sup>

The faithful in ancient Israel could behold the smoke of the fires of the altar of incense – representing the prayers of the people – daily ascend into the heavens. They could witness the ascending smoke of the altar of sacrifice. There slain animals were burned to foreshadow the sacrifice of the final, perfect, sinless Lamb. They could hear Isaiah's oracle, witness the earthly images of heavenly realities – and ignore it as show, or empty ritual, or chancel prancing by prettily garbed priests – or behold it for that which it was, a foretaste of salvation things to come. The prophet Isaiah certainly understood it the latter way, when, upon beholding the heavenly worship of angelic praise he declared:

*And I said, "Woe to me! I am lost! For (a) man of unclean lips am I, and in midst of (a) people of unclean lips I dwell. For the King, YHWH Sabaoth my eyes have seen."*<sup>7</sup>

You, today, are beholding and participating in Divine Worship, earthly enactments of heavenly realities. Do you view this as show? Do you believe that your work before God is to move Him to give you gifts? If so, this text is calling you to repent, to hear and own Isaiah's reaction to Divine Worship as your own.

The prophet, transported waking to behold heavenly wonders with earthly realities, grasps his position in worship. He confesses himself to be a sinner who lives among God's elect, who are all sinners. Though Isaiah nowhere describes the Face of the Lord, he still confesses the reality that he, as a child of Adam, has no place, in himself, in that eternal hall of praise. As a called servant of the Lord, one given to preach the Word of God to people whose ears were often stopped and hearts hardened, he also confesses

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<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 6:4.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 6:5.

their sinfulness. He acknowledges he has nothing to bring, to offer, to sacrifice, to God in order to change his impure state before the Holy One. With that confession, one of the winged messengers of God's purifying fire moves, as the vision continues to report:

*Then flew one to me from the Seraphim, and in his hand (was a) burning coal in tongs, which he had taken from upon the Altar.<sup>8</sup>*

That humble glowing servant whose feet were covered, moved only at the Master's unspoken, yet revealed will. That is, God wills to forgive sinners who are moved to repentance. The Seraph goes forth from attending the throne. He who is holy lifts from the Altar of Sacrifice that which is pure. He who is fiery does not even dare to touch holy fire with his burning hands. He takes a temple utensil to bear it. And then,

*He touched upon my face, and caused to say, "Behold, this one has touched upon your lips, and is taken away your guilt and your sin (is) atoned for."<sup>9</sup>*

That servant, reflecting in his revealed nature the glory of God, touches the lips of repentant Isaiah with that which was taken from the Lord's Altar. His next words declare the forgiveness of God. That which was used for the sacrifice was taken, touched the sinner, and he was propitiated before God. Not only did God, through the messenger, declare Isaiah's guilt gone, but that his sin was completely atoned for – there was no fiery wrath to come upon Isaiah for being in the Presence of the Lord of Hosts.

The Church does note that Isaiah does not complain that he had no need to hear God's absolution from a messenger. He does not confess that it is enough to declare his sin and simply believe he is forgiven. Rather, the prophet hears and receives God's forgiveness, through God's chosen creature that day.

Can you grasp why a pastor, when he hears your sins in a private setting, such as in a hospital room, nursing home, or at the death bed of a sinner/saint asks, "Do you believe that my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?" If it was good enough for Isaiah to receive holy absolution through a messenger, it is good enough for you.

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<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 6:6.

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 6:7

That also is simply another earthly reflection of heavenly realities. After all, we have heard today that the Church's worship is to mirror that which occurs eternally in the heavenly Temple.

Now that you have heard again of that which God wills to do for you, can you behold yourself free to tell others of Isaiah's vision and where they may behold for themselves the glory of God and the forgiveness of sins?

Yes, it is this easy to explain with today's text: Worship in heaven is brought to earth; worshippers are moved by Divine Worship to confess their sins; God's messengers give them His gifts and they are declared holy. Heaven meets earth in Divine Worship.

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Feast of the Holy Trinity (*LSB* One-year series)

Psalm 29: Isaiah 6:1-7; Romans 11:33-36; John 3:1-17

June 11, 2017

*Pastor Michael A. Merhouse*

***Soli Deo Gloria***

*In (the) year King Uzziah died, then I saw the Adonai sitting upon (a) throne high and exalted, and His train was filling the Temple.<sup>10</sup>*

*Seraphim were standing from above Him: six wings, six wings for each one, with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.<sup>11</sup>*

*And one continued to call to one and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, YHWH Sabaoth; all the earth (is) full of His glory."<sup>12</sup>*

*And shook the foundations the thresholds from the call of the calling one, and the house was filled with smoke.<sup>13</sup>*

*And I said, "Woe to me! I am lost! For (a) man of unclean lips am I, and in midst of (a) people of unclean lips I dwell. For the King, YHWH Sabaoth my eyes have seen."<sup>14</sup>*

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*And he touched upon my face, and caused to say, "Behold, this one has touched upon your lips, and is taken away your guilt and your sin (is) atoned for."<sup>16</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 6:1.

<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 6:2.

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 6:3.

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 6:4.

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 6:5.

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 6:6.

<sup>16</sup> Isaiah 6:7.