

## Sermon Draft

**Text: Isaiah 6:1–8 (9–13)**

**Sermon: “Holy, Holy, Holy”**

As the Epiphany season continues, God reveals himself as a loving God who freely forgives miserable sinners. Having been forgiven, Christians readily proclaim the wonders and love of our merciful and gracious God. Isaiah in our Old Testament Reading and Peter in our Gospel find themselves confronted by their sinfulness in the presence of an almighty God.

Despairing, they are given peace and absolution by a loving God, who desires not the death of a sinner, but to give him mercy. Having received God’s forgiveness, they leave everything behind and follow him. Our Psalm speaks of singing of the ways of the Lord in thankful proclamation of his great glory and gracious deliverance from our enemies and earthly troubles.

Isaiah received his commission ***“in the year that King Uzziah died”*** (v 1). Uzziah, also known as Azariah, reigned as a “good” king of Judah for fifty-two years, ***“and he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD”*** (2 Kings 15:3). But Uzziah became proud and entered the temple to burn incense before the holy God.

Even as the priests tried to restrain Uzziah from this unconsecrated worship, the Lord struck him with leprosy to the day of his death. Thus, though Uzziah was classified as a “good” king, his guilt before the holy God received God’s wrath. During the reigns of Uzziah and his son Jotham, who also **“did what was right in the eyes of the LORD”** (2 Kings 15:34), the people did not do right. **“The people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places”** (2 Kings 15:4, 35).

Therefore, in today’s text, Isaiah, though he is classified as a “good” prophet, rightly confesses that he is **“a man of unclean lips”** dwelling among **“a people of unclean lips”** (Isaiah 6:5).

When God opens heaven, the vision is always the same, for heaven is filled with the glory of the Lord. The worship of the angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven is eternal. Thus, Ezekiel, John, and Isaiah describe similar visions of the throne room of God. Each, in his own way, describes the glory of the Lord, and each reacts with fear and trembling, for one does not see the face of the Lord God and live (Exodus 33:20).

In a similar way, we like Isaiah, tremble in the presence of the Holy God, but God cleanses us with Christ's body and blood.

When Isaiah saw God in all his splendor, majesty, and glory, he was not giddy. He didn't experience an emotional high due to his personal encounter with the almighty God. His reaction wasn't even one of joy, but of fear, humility, and reverence: fear, because he knew that he was a sinner in the presence of the most holy God, for nothing unholy can abide his presence; humble reverence, because he was in the presence of his Lord and Creator. He saw God in all his awe-inspiring, overwhelming heavenly glory.

Isaiah found himself in the presence of the great "I AM," Creator of all that is seen and unseen, and he saw quite clearly what he had not seen before:

***"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (v 5).***

Isaiah saw what cannot be seen by unbelievers because it remains concealed from their eyes. He saw what he truly was, a miserable sinner. He recognized that he was a sinner among sinful men. He deserved destruction at the hands of God, who sat enthroned before him.

Isaiah's conscience convicted him of his sin. The vision of God and the seraphim who attend him caused Isaiah to mourn for Israel and fear for his life. He realized that he and all his people were by nature dead in sin and that in them was by nature no righteous thing. Isaiah had nothing to merit the favor of God. He had nothing to appease his wrath and earn his forgiveness. He stood before his God in naked shame.

Isaiah was undone. He was utterly lost and felt his uncleanness with particular clarity. Isaiah was literally brought to silence as though dead. In our Gospel, Peter experienced the same thing when he found himself in the presence of God in the person of Jesus Christ. After the first miraculous catch of fish, Peter fell down before Jesus and begged, "***Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord***" (Luke 5:8).

Such is the reaction of those who get even a small glimpse of the divine nature of God. They are crushed by the reality of their sin. The facade of their imagined self-righteousness falls away. The light of God's glory reveals the darkness of their souls, all pride is removed, and they despair.

If ever man's sinfulness stands out, it is when he is in the presence of holiness. It is a fearful thing to be delivered into the hands of the almighty God.

But what of us? We have come to this holy place. We stand on holy ground. We are in the house of the Lord, in his temple. We have come to this place consecrated to the Lord God to be in his divine presence. We call upon the Lord, invoking his holy name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, trusting him to keep his promise to be in the midst of his people wherever they are gathered (Matthew 18:20). We are in the presence of the same God with whom Isaiah could not abide. Isaiah was not worthy to sing the song of the angels or even to see the vision before him. He had no wings with which to hide himself and cover his shame.

So, too, we are men and women of unclean lips, living in the midst of a people with unclean lips. we are not worthy to be here in the presence of God. How dare we sing the song of the angels or approach God's heavenly throne? We have no wings with which to hide our shame. We stand before God naked in our sin, without even a single fig leaf with which to hide.

But for Isaiah an angel came forth, a seraph from the army of God, an angel who is in the temple day and night singing to the glory of the Lord. He flew to the altar and took from it a burning coal, a remnant of the burnt offering, and placed it, burning, on Isaiah's lips, and Isaiah's sin was forgiven. He was made holy like the angel, for he partook of that which was sacrificed in his place. It was put on his mouth, and it made him clean.

Like Isaiah, we have had our guilt taken away. We, too, have been made clean. We have no fig leaf. We need no animal skins, for we are clothed in the robes of Christ's righteousness. He who did not covet the glories of heaven came down from heaven for the salvation of his people (Philippians 2:5–8).

And saving his people, he takes of what is his and makes it ours. He has removed our filthy garments and clothed us with pure vestments (Zechariah 3:3–4). At the same time, he sends forth his Holy Spirit, who breathes into us the power to believe and gives voice to our confession that Jesus is ***“the Christ, the Son of the living God”*** (Matthew 16:16).

This Jesus, who is God in the flesh, is not yet revealed to us in heaven, but in the humiliation of the crucified Christ. The cross is the only door to heaven, and Christ is the only image of God. This Christ is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, and the cross is his throne and the glory of his Church. Through the cross, Jesus fills the earth with his glory. Through the cross, Jesus opens the door of heaven to us, and we pass under the bloodstained lintel and doorposts. He who sees Jesus on the cross sees the almighty God and his gracious and loving mercy.

Therefore, we no longer need to mourn our sins, for just as Isaiah was made pure by the burning coal, in the Holy Eucharist the flesh that suffered the holy fire of God's wrath for us is placed on our lips and tongue, and we are purged of our sin, made holy and righteous in God's sight. All the glory that was and is God is fed to us in this most holy meal. Therefore, we are made holy like the angel host. Condemned no more, we stand with the angels and archangels and all the saints of heaven and sing with them the threefold hymn of praise, "**Holy, holy, holy**" (v 3).

So it is that our tongues are loosed to sing God's praise and tell of his glory. We no longer have to fear, for we have received his blessed Absolution. How do we know? Because we have already, this very day, heard Jesus say, "***I forgive you all your sins.***"

***Amen***