

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 18, 2009**

✠ ✠ ✠

Hymns: 110, 111, 321, 316, 553.

Lessons: Isaiah 63: 7-16, Romans 8: 22-39, Luke 12: 35-40.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 30: 8-18.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Epiphany is a word that means appearance or manifestation or revealing. The Christian festival of Epiphany commemorates the revealing of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, with the wise men from the East the first Gentiles (non-Jews) that came to worship Jesus Christ as Savior. Epiphany is also associated with light. The star that guided the wise men to Jesus was a light that symbolizes the light that Jesus brings into the world. Now that we are well into the New Year and well into the Epiphany season, the season of light, this is a good time to be reminded that

**CHRIST IS THE LIGHT OF SALVATION AND STRENGTH**

- 1. God's people sometimes reject His gracious gifts.**
- 2. Nevertheless God safeguards and preserves His faithful people.**

Isaiah begins this chapter with these words: *"Woe to the obstinate children," declares the LORD, "to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin;"* Isaiah 30:1. Our sermon text makes it clear that the stubborn Israelites had utterly rejected, forsaken, and rebelled against the very God who wanted to defend and protect them. Hear what God says about them: *""These are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the Lord's instruction. They say to the seers, "See no more visions!" and to the prophets, "Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions. Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!""* In this way they displayed the sinful self-reliance that we also display when our sinful nature makes us want to reject the Creator and everything he teaches us. That sinful nature includes self-centered arrogant pride. It's Satan's deceptive effort that tempts us to deny God and despise His divine authority. God said it correctly when he tells us *"the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so"* in Romans 8:7.

We not only reject God and His authority over us, but our sinful nature also makes us want to trust the Creator's creations instead of the Creator himself. Satan tries to lure us into trusting what God provided for us instead of trusting the Provider Himself. That would include such blessings as our intellect, reason, and understanding; our skills, knowledge, and abilities; and the material things that we buy as well as the very money itself with which we buy them.

During Isaiah's lifetime, the people of Jerusalem and Judah had lost sight of God's word in their lives. And not just at the busy, hectic times of year, but all the time. So God sent Isaiah a message for his people, a message that God sends to us as well. We too are a rebellious people. We are often deceitful children of God, unwilling to listen to his instruction. Our sinful flesh doesn't want to see the truths of God's Word. We don't long for the words of the prophets which tell us the things that are right in the eyes of God. Together, with Judah and all Jerusalem, the people of the world – and our sinful flesh – say *"Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions. ... stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!"*

It's a difficult thing to be confronted with our sinfulness by the Holy One of Israel. We are always tempted to join with the world and revel in the filth of sin, using anything as an excuse to get drunk or act on sinful lusts and passions or ignore responsibilities to family and loved ones. But on the other hand, we have the temptation to stay home, and sit secure in spiritual superiority over all the sinful swine out carousing in the world. God has a message for us sinners. ***"Therefore, this is what the Holy One of Israel says: "Because you have rejected this message, relied on oppression and depended on deceit, this sin will become for you like a high wall, cracked and bulging, that collapses suddenly, in an instant. It will break in pieces like pottery, shattered so mercilessly that among its pieces not a fragment will be found for taking coals from a hearth or scooping water out of a cistern.""***

In our sinfulness, we reject the message to fear, love and trust in God so that we lead holy lives. Sin builds and builds. It becomes a high wall, cracked and bulging, threatening to fall down upon us all the time. It will not hold up forever. A life of partying will eventually crash down around you. A life of haughty spiritual superiority will finally come crumbling down as well. Maybe not tomorrow, maybe not even next year, but we sinners will all turn to dust. One day, we will die, and even our bodies will turn to dust. Dust from which nothing can be salvaged. Once the wall of death has come crashing down, there is truly no way to gather up all the pieces and put everything back together again.

But we have another opportunity each time we read or hear the Word of God – the blessed opportunity to revel in God's grace, his undeserved love and mercy. Let's repent of all sins in our own lives individually and collectively by recognizing, grieving, and confessing them; receiving God's forgiveness for them; and striving by the Holy Spirit's power alone to replace them with divinely-directed holy living according to God's Holy Law. Let's do so gratefully, rejoicing that God gives us another opportunity.

God's confessing children just cannot live their lives in sin, whether it's New Year's Eve or any other "special" "just-this-once" day. Instead, we must listen to the message of the LORD and learn from his instruction. God's will is that we gather around the Word of God, and in so doing, hearing God's plan for us for every day of our lives. ***"This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength."*** It's the same message God sends through King David who declares in Psalm 62:1 ***"My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him."***

Rest cannot be found in a party or a bottle. Your salvation will not be present in thoughts of superiority because you do not party. Neither rest nor salvation can be found in a life surrounded by walls of sin and sinful behavior. And so God calls on us to repent; to come to him in quietness and trust and confess our sins. To enter into his presence and lay our sins at the feet of Jesus, the true source of our rest and salvation. As we come before Jesus in quietness and trust, we will find rest and salvation for our bodies and souls. Because in Jesus, and only in Jesus is there forgiveness for our sins. As the angel told Joseph, ***"She [Mary] will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*** Matthew 1:21. Jesus came to save us, His people, from our sins.

Jesus saves us from our rebellion against God. Jesus saves us from our deceitful dealings with other people. Jesus saves us from our sinful losing sight of God when things get hectic in our lives. Jesus gives us rest from the building up walls of sin around us; walls the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh would love to have us build. Jesus saves us from all that. Jesus rescues us from all that sin and brings us close to his side. So close, that St. Paul can say, ***"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** Romans 8:38-39.

When we are held close to Christ, knowing he is our Immanuel, our God who is with us all the time, we cannot live a life of revelry in sin as the godless pagans and the hypocrites among us do. Rather, as God's redeemed people, made holy by the precious blood of our Savior shed on the cross, we live a life of watchfulness, instead. Every day we are watching for the coming of the Lord. We live dressed and ready for service for our Savior, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks we can immediately open the door for him. Because we know it will be good for us when the master comes and finds us ready, even if he does come in the middle of the night, in the second or third watch of the night. We watch and prepare ourselves by heartfelt listening to the words of the seers and the prophets of God. We dare not lose our focus on the Word of God. So we take to heart the message of the Holy One of Israel, even when his words confront us with our sins. By doing so, the Holy Spirit leads us to repentance, and a return to the Lord our God in consecrated quietness and trust.

Even though God's people sometimes reject his gracious gifts, nevertheless God safeguards and preserves his faithful people. In the First Article of the Apostolic Creed, we confess in the words of Martin Luther's explanation that "God also preserves me by defending me against all danger, guarding and protecting me from all evil. All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it." When we forget or ignore that Almighty God is all-powerful, we find it easy to do what King Saul and his soldiers did when confronted by the Philistine warrior, Goliath, and flee in fear. But God promises to protect and preserve us. It's what God said many times in the Scriptures, such as when Moses told the Israelites – and us: ***"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."*** Deuteronomy 31:6. Our Savior himself told us before he left this earth ***"I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."*** Matthew 28:20.

This is what our merciful and gracious God tells us in the Blessed Sacrament of Holy Baptism, in which He claims us as His own, thereby connecting us with His death and resurrection. It's what He restates in Holy Communion, in which He gives us the real body and blood of Jesus in, with, and under the bread and the wine, to assure us of the forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life that He gained for us with His life, suffering, death, and resurrection as he defeated sin, Satan, and death itself. By the Holy Spirit's power we cling to, stand on, and rest securely in those promises. We do so because we know that His compassionate care for us drives Him to keep His promises thereby enabling us to stand firm and not run away from Him in times of fear and fright. It depends not on ourselves, but solely on God's grace. ***"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*** Romans 8:31.

No matter what sin, sorrow, weakness, or failure any of us experienced in our lives, let's securely rest on the fact that neither they nor anything else can separate us from God's love for us that our Lord Jesus Christ displayed. Because of that we can look back on the blessings and disasters, beauty and ugliness, and ease and hardships in our lives, knowing that God's resolve to be with us and keep us as His own does not rest on what we experienced but on His trustworthy word alone. We are ready to face tomorrow in God's grace. Such readiness does not rest on what we can or cannot do but on what God through Jesus Christ has done and daily does for us. In His Holy Word, His Holy Baptism, His Holy Absolution, and His Holy Communion He speaks to us His promise, reassurance, and commitment to remain with us in the future days ahead even as He has done in the past days behind. He does so because Christ is the light of salvation and strength; and even though God's people sometimes reject his gracious gifts, nevertheless God safeguards and preserves his faithful people. So we watch in quietness and trusting strength, confident that through repentance and the refreshing rest of God, we will see our salvation in Jesus Christ. Amen.