

# Epiphany 5



## Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you sent your only Son as the Word of life for our eyes to see and our ears to hear. Help us to believe with joy what the Scriptures proclaim, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Isaiah 6:1-8 [9-16]

{1} In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. {2} Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. {3} And one called to [Epiphany 5](#) another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." {4} The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. {5} And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" {6} Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. {7} The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." {8} Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" {9} And he said, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.' {10} Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed." {11} Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; {12} until the LORD sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land. {13} Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

*1. the year that King Uzziah died:* About 740 b.c.e. It is not clear whether Isaiah's vision took place before or after Uzziah's death. According to Isaiah 1:1 the prophet was active during the reigns of Uzziah (783-742 b.c.e.), Jothan (742-735 b.c.e.; he had been co-regent from 750), and Ahaz (735-715 b.c.e.), and Hezekiah (715-687/6 b.c.e.). The Northern Kingdom fell in 722 b.c.e.

*the temple:* "What the prophet sees is the spiritual reality of which the Temple was a symbol, Jehovah's presence as King in the midst of His people." [1]

*I saw the Lord:* In the midst of the smoke and shaking (verses 3-4), Isaiah "sees" Yahweh in a vision filled with Temple imagery.

*2. Seraphs:* The verb *seraf* means burn. In Numbers 21:6 the noun is used of the poisonous serpents sent by Yahweh as punishment for the people's impatience. The same word is used here and in Isaiah 6:2; 14:29; 30:6 for messengers of Yahweh who appear as winged serpents.

*3-4:* The "house" was filled with smoke (Revelation 15:8). The door-pivots shook at the voice of the seraphs who were flying around the "house" with their eyes covered, praising Yahweh. These might easily be the impressions of one who served in the Temple day after day, knowing that he was in the presence of Yahweh, and that all that he did in the earthly Temple was also done in the heavenly throne room of his God.

*Holy, holy, holy:* The "four living creatures" which John saw beside the throne in heaven, each had six wings, were "full of eyes," and sang "Holy, holy, holy...." (Revelation 4:8).

Psalm 99 reflects the ascriptions of holiness to Yahweh in the Temple.

*5. I said, 'Woe is me!...':* The prophet is fearfully conscious of his precarious position in the court of Yahweh: he is a man of unclean lips and he has seen Yahweh. Yahweh told Moses

that no one could see him and live (Exodus 33:20-23), so Isaiah is in danger.

6-8: Isaiah's guilt is dealt with by one of the seraphs, and Isaiah hears Yahweh ask who will be his messenger. Isaiah replies, "Here I am," the response of a retainer ready to serve the master.

9. *Go and say to this people: "Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand"*: It sounds as if the people actually want to hear and understand but that Yahweh's message confounds them. See also the use of the passage in the New Testament (Matthew 13:10-17; Mark 4:1-12; Luke 8:9-10; John 12:40; Acts 28:25-29).

11-12. *"How long, O Lord?"*: Isaiah is to continue to preach until "the Lord sends everyone far away."

13. *The holy seed is its stump*: This is Isaiah's characteristic notion of the remnant from whom the nation will rise again. "...the ruined Israel contains the indestructible germ of the future kingdom of God." [2]

Isaiah's vision and his answer to Yahweh's call for messengers constitutes his call as a prophet. For other visions of Yahweh in his heavenly throne room see 1 Kings 22:19-23, Zechariah 1:7ff; Job 1:6ff.

## Psalm 138

{1} I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; {2} I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything. {3} On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul. {4} All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth. {5} They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD. {6} For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away. {7} Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me. {8} The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

1. *the gods*: The word translated "gods" is the Hebrew *ha'elohim*, a plural noun usually translated in the singular as "God," referring to Yahweh, but sometimes translated as "angels" or "mighty ones." For example, in Psalm 8:5 it is translated "God" by NRSV, and "angels" by the King James version. "...the solution most consonant with the context identifies the gods with the deities of the heathen kings mentioned in v. 4, 'All the kings of the earth.' Before these gods and their worshipers the Israelite king proclaims his faith in Yahweh." [3]

2. *I bow toward your holy temple*: In the dedication prayer for the Temple Solomon prayed, when "a foreigner comes and prays *toward* this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel." The singer may be in a foreign land where (s)he cannot go to the temple, so (s)he bows *toward* the temple.

4-5. *All the kings of the earth*: The whole world in the persona of the kings of the earth sing the praises of Yahweh. See also Psalm 68:32; 98:3.

7. *Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me*: The trouble is not specific, but Yahweh's action on behalf of the psalmist is clear: "You stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me."

## 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

{1} Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, {2} through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you--unless you have come to believe in vain. {3} For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, {4} and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, {5} and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. {6} Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. {7} Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. {8} Last of all, as to one untimely born, he

appeared also to me. {9} For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. {10} But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them--though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. {11} Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

*3-9. I handed on to you...what I in turn had received:* What follows (verses 3-5) is a formula which Paul has taken up from the early traditions of the church. A new grammatical structure begins in verse 6, "Then..." and is continued in verse 7, "Then..." and concluded in verse 8, "Last of all...". "The first appearance to Cephas...is not recorded in the Gospels and only alluded to in one passage, Lk 24:34. Historically speaking, it was the reason for the status of Peter in the primitive church and probably for the founding of the circle of the Twelve." [4]

*Cephas:* Paul only refers to Peter in 1 Corinthians and Galatians and almost always uses Peter's Hebrew name. In Galatians 2:7, 8 he uses the Greek name Peter.

*the twelve:* This is the only time that Paul uses this term to refer to the central group of disciples/apostles who had witnessed the resurrection. "In the Gospels all apostles are [*mathetai, disciples*], yet not all [*mathetai*] are apostles, but only those expressly appointed by Jesus." [5] Matthias was appointed to replace Judas (Acts 1:21-26), but when James was killed by Herod (Acts 12:2) no replacement is mentioned. Paul was an apostle (not in the Gospels), but not a disciple.

*6. more than 500...at one time, most...are still alive, though some have died:* "the accent apparently lies not on the fact that the majority are still alive, but on the fact that some have already died.... And by pointing out that even witnesses of the resurrection have died, Paul provides in advance an argument for his thesis that believers who die during this period attain to life." [6]

*Then he appeared to James:* James is the brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19), who had not believed in him during Jesus' lifetime. This appearance is "not preserved elsewhere in the canonical Scriptures, but it is found in *Ev. Hebr. fr. 7.*" [7] "His status in the church was also grounded by 'his' appearance." [8]

*all the apostles:* A different group from the Twelve in verse 5. "The important thing is that *all* apostles have seen the risen Christ. This is accordingly definitive for the concept of an apostle." [9]

*8. one untimely born:* The Greek word, *ektroma*, means a premature birth, a miscarriage, a still-born, a monstrosity, "unfit to be called an apostle," because he persecuted the church. Paul does not view this as just an unfortunate mistake on his part, the result of excessive zeal, but a fatal blasphemy from which he was only rescued by the grace of God.

*he appeared also to me:* See 1 Corinthians 9:1. Paul's right to be called an apostle is determined by the fact that Jesus appeared to him, last of all, in a vision on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:6). The two issues of this passage, the resurrection and Paul's apostleship, are linked in this phrase. Paul mentions other times when he "saw" the Lord in Acts 18:9 and 22:8.

*9-10. I am the least of the apostles.... But by the grace of God I am what I am:* Based on human considerations Paul was last and least. But by God's grace he is nevertheless a hard-working apostle. God's grace was not "in vain."

*11. Whether then it was I or they:* "In his own characteristic mode of expression Paul relativizes the *human* differences in favor of the essential thing, proclamation and faith. With this, he has returned to vv 1-3a." [10]

## **Luke 5:1-11**

{1} Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, {2} he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. {3} He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to

Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. {4} When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." {5} Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." {6} When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. {7} So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. {8} But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" {9} For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; {10} and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." {11} When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

This is Luke's version of the call of Peter, James and John. Though it differs substantially from the story in Mark 1:16-20 and Matthew 4:18-22, the conclusion is the similar in all three. Simon (Peter), James and John (Andrew is not mentioned in Luke, but notice "they" in verses 6 and 7) all leave their boats and follow Jesus.

*1. the lake of Gennesaret:* Luke 4:44 has Jesus "proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea," but this passage is a sequel to 4:40-41. the lake is the Sea of Galilee.

*the word of God:* Luke uses the phrase four times in the Gospel and fourteen times in Acts. Elsewhere in the New Testament it is used three more times. "...in Acts the phrase denotes the Christian message as proclaimed by the apostles; here Luke uses it of Jesus' own preaching.... as the phrase suggests, the ultimate root of this preaching/teaching is God himself, for the phrase means... 'the word coming from God....' [11]

*2. two boats:* Both boats are needed later in the story at verse 7.

4-5: Jesus request that they go out into the lake and let down the fishing nets, together with Peter's reluctant acquiescence sets the stage for the miracle.

6-7: The quantity of fish that were caught provides evidence of Jesus' power and ground for the promise made to Peter in verse 10, "you will be catching people."

*II. they:* Peter, and the sons of Zebedee, James and John are certainly intended. Possibly also Andrew, for he is mentioned together with them in Luke 6:14 in the list of Jesus' disciples. Remember, in John, it is Andrew who brought Peter to Jesus (John 1:40 f.).

## Reflection

Isaiah said, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" The psalmist "walks in the midst of trouble." Paul is "unfit to be called an apostle." And Peter begs Jesus "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." For each the confession of unworthiness is met by grace.

Isaiah's sin is blotted out and he is the one whom Yahweh sends with a message for others who are unworthy. The psalmist is preserved from the wrath of his enemies and delivered by the Lord. By the grace of God Paul claims the designation of "apostle" and proclaims the Gospel. And Peter is told that he will be catching people.

It is not who or what we are in ourselves that is important. It is what God has determined us to be. His purposes are more important than ours, and his grace overcomes our unworthiness. Our response to God's grace is to be like that of Paul who worked hard so that the grace of God was not in vain.

## Hymns [12]

*With One Voice* (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

403 --D--Lord, Speak to  
242 --I--Let the Whole  
--I--752v, 631v, 773v/812s  
318 --P--The Lord Will

434 --G--The Son of  
784v --G--You Have Come  
Down  
719s, 519, 535, 547

### Prayers of the People [13]

P or A: Christ calls us to leave behind lives to sin to become fishers of people. Trusting in God's faithfulness, we pray "Lord, in your mercy" and respond, "Hear our prayer."

A: That we would be ready to leave behind all that we know, as we--like the prophet Isaiah, the disciples of Jesus, and Christians throughout history—dedicate our lives to your service.

**Lord, in your mercy.** Hear...

A: That missionaries in places torn and weakened by hunger, poverty or political corruption, may find inspiration in the light of your Word, even in the midst of darkness. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

A: That we may be humble in our service, and continually reminded that the work we do is not for our glory, but for yours alone. **Lord, in your mercy.** Hear...

A: That those who mourn the loss of friends and family may be comforted and strengthened to face a new day. **Lord, in your mercy.** Hear...

A: That the sick and the dying may be healed. We pray especially for \_\_\_\_\_, and those whom we name in our hearts... **Lord, in your mercy.** Hear...

P: Give us willing hearts so that we might receive with gladness your call to service. We pray in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

### Or [14]

*Presider or deacon*

Holding firmly to the good news of salvation, let us pray for all those in desperate need.

*Deacon or other leader*

For the holy catholic church throughout the world. For *N* our bishop, for presbyters, deacons, and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For this holy gathering and for all who enter with faith, reverence, and fear of God.

For this country, for all nations and their leaders, and for our community.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, prisoners, captives, and their families, the hungry, homeless, and oppressed. For the dying and the dead, and for those who care for them.

For ourselves, our families, friends, and companions on the way, and all those we love. Remembering the blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

**To you, O Lord.**

*Presider*

God of infinite glory, who cleanses our lips with the word of your Son, hear the prayers we offer this day and sustain us with your Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Notes

[1] J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah: Chapters I-XXXIX*. Cambridge: The University Press, 1954, p. 45.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

[3] Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms III 101-150: Introduction, Translation, and Notes with an appendix, The Grammar of the Psalter*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1970, p. 276.

- [4] Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975, p. 256.
- [5] Karl Heinrich Rengsdorf, “[*mathetai, disciples*],” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (ed. by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren). Vol. I. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964, p. 325.
- [6] Conzelmann, *Ibid.*, p. 258.
- [7] *Ibid.*, p. 258, note 91.
- [8] *Ibid.*, p. 258.
- [9] *Loc. cit.*
- [10] *Ibid.*, 260.
- [11] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1981, p. 565.
- [12] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rc1c0001.txt>
- [13] [http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter\\_c.txt](http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt)
- [14] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>