

Andrew K. Frey

Epiphany 1

Isaiah 49:1-6

Listen to me, you islands;

hear this, you distant nations:

**Before I was born the LORD called me;
from my birth he has made mention of my name.**

**2 He made my mouth like a sharpened sword,
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me into a polished arrow
and concealed me in his quiver.**

**3 He said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."**

**4 But I said, "I have labored to no purpose;
I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing.
Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand,
and my reward is with my God."**

**5 And now the LORD says—
he who formed me in the womb to be his servant
to bring Jacob back to him
and gather Israel to himself,
for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD
and my God has been my strength—**

**6 he says:
"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.**

**I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."**

(NIV 84)

Theme: You are the reward of Christ's work.

1. He was prepared to spread the gospel.
2. He brought you to faith through the gospel

About a month ago we had a baptism during our worship service. God willing, in not too long we will have another. Today we started a Bible Class on Baptism. And today, we celebrate Christ's baptism. Whenever we see someone else getting baptized or whenever we

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celebrate the baptism of our Savior, it is a good time to remember our baptism and what it means.

But there are many times when we fail to think about our baptisms and what they mean to us and our eternal life. It is something we are aware of, but rarely do we treasure it as the means to eternal life as we should.

So today, as we contemplate the baptism of Christ, we consider our baptisms as well. And we see that we are the rewards for Christ's work. He was prepared to spread the gospel and he brings us to faith.

Our text for today was written by the Prophet Isaiah. Isaiah lived about 700 years before Jesus was born. And yet this prophecy is about Jesus. In fact Jesus is speaking here. He is saying that he will be God's servant one day. And God had chose him before the beginning of the world. Before he was ever born, God knew he would be his servant who would do his work. The last couple weeks we talked about the birth of this servant. Yet he hadn't done any work yet—until today.

For today, the first week after Epiphany, we celebrate the baptism of Jesus. And Jesus' baptism is the beginning of his ministry. At this time he was around 30 years old. 30 years after he was born in Bethlehem the one whose birth the shepherds, angels, and wise men celebrated is finally going to get to work. He is finally going to do what God chose him to do and prepared him to do—spread the gospel.

It all started with Jesus getting baptized by John the Baptist. At his baptism, we clearly see the Trinity. We see God the son—Jesus, standing in the Jordan River. God, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, landing on Jesus' head. And we hear God, the Father's voice from heaven. This is one of the only times in the New Testament, the God spoke from heaven. **You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.** The Father spoke from heaven, because this was such an important occasion. He wanted everyone to take note. Jesus was beginning his work. His work as our substitute and as the servant of God.

But why did Jesus have to be baptized in the first place? Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins, to bring us to faith, and give us a new life. Jesus wasn't a sinner and he was going to go to heaven no matter

what. So what was he baptized for? Since Jesus' baptism marks the beginning of his ministry, it is also the time when he officially took on his role as our substitute. So in a way, Jesus needed to be baptized—since he is our substitute and we need to be baptized.

We need to be baptized because we are nothing horrible miserable, sinners by nature. From the time we were conceived we were God's enemies. We couldn't do anything but sin again him. And we were on our way to hell. But through the waters of baptism our sins have been forgiven. We were brought to faith in Jesus as our one and only Savior. And we were given the ability to live a new life. Before our baptisms, we could do nothing but sin, but now we don't have to sin. We can choose not to—we can now obey God's will. We can live a new, holy life.

But there are many times that we fail to live a new life in view of our baptisms. Instead, at times we go back to the sinful ways of our unbelieving hearts. We fail to follow God's Word and honor him as our Savior. At times, we may also fail to recall what our baptisms mean to us. "My parents had me baptized because it is the right thing to do—or it is what was expected of them, everyone was doing it." "It is something that happened to us a long time ago and doesn't matter much any more," we may think. Or, "It means I'm a Christian, but it's not that big of a deal, I would have become a believer some other way—or it's not necessary for eternal life."

But it is necessary for us. That is why Jesus was baptized as he began his work as our substitute. Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy in our first lesson for today. For it is a prophecy that Jesus would be prepared to be God's servant. There, Jesus says, **He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.** Jesus' mouth is like a sharp sword. It is a finely tuned weapon—a weapon used to bring us to faith. The writer to the Hebrews uses similar language to talk about the word of God. **The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.** Not only is Jesus' Word like a sharp sword, but it is also like a polished arrow. It is precise weapon. Its polished—made exactly how

God wants it to be. And this arrow is in God's quiver, ready to go. Jesus was waiting for the right time to begin his ministry. Jesus was polished, he was sharpened. He was equipped to spread God's word. And he was kept until just the right time. He was used in just the right way at the right time to accomplish God's task. And today, Jesus began to fulfill that prophecy.

And as a result of Christ's work, God will be glorified. We see God's glory in the work of his son. For God, in his grace sent his son into this earth. And he forgave all our sins. Through Christ, we see just how great God is. We see that he is merciful and compassionate. We see that he is all powerful and eternal. We see his glory not just because he can perform miracles, or that a dove rested on him. But because he forgives us through his son.

God chose Jesus and prepared him to spread the gospel. The Words of Jesus are a precisely made weapon, used to bring sinners to faith and give glory to God. But is that what happens?

At times it seemed as if Christ was doing his work in vain. At first Jesus had many followers, and enjoyed some prosperity. But as it turns out, they just wanted to see miracles. Or perhaps they wanted Jesus to be an earthly king who would lead them out of the oppression of the Romans. They didn't really want the Messiah to be their spiritual Savior. And so when the going got tough, they fled. Jesus was betrayed by one of his own disciples. Another one denied that he even knew him. And others fled the scene when he was arrested. On Palm Sunday, many welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem. But less than a week later, most of them had rejected Jesus. The people stirred up trouble and demanded that he be crucified. Jesus spent countless hours preaching the gospel and informing the Jewish people and their leaders about God and his will. But it seemed as if no one really cared about his work and that it was all in vain. Jesus said so in verse 4, **But I said, I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity.**

And at times it still seems as if his work was all in vain. The gospel is spread. People hear his word all the time. And yet, less and less people are coming to his house to worship him. People are too busy for him. They were baptized and brought up in the Church, but other things come up. Real life gets in the way, and people just don't have

enough time to foolish things. Despite all the time and effort put into sharing the gospel, it seems as if all the work is in vain. Jesus' Word may not be that great of a weapon after all.

It may have seemed as if his work would be all in vain, but Jesus knew it wouldn't be. He went on to say, **surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God.** Jesus knew that even though his work seemed in vain, he would have a reward. What Jesus had coming to him for his work was with God, and would be given to him soon. And what is Christ's reward? You. All believers are Christ's reward. The reward that Jesus receives for spreading the gospel is those who believe the gospel.

When Jesus brings us to faith, he gives us to the Father. And we become his own dear children. We are no longer his enemies. But we are such a great gift, that God doesn't keep us as his own. He gives us back to Christ. So the reward that Christ's gets for spreading the gospel are those who he brought to faith for the Father. Those who follow him and believe in him as the only way to eternal life.

So Christ's work wasn't in vain after all. Through his preaching he had led many people to faith. But his Word is not the only way we are brought to faith. Many of us were brought to faith through the waters of baptism. At our baptisms we were welcomed into God's family. Christ forgave the sins of his enemy. He gave us a new life and assures us of eternal life with him forever. What takes place, then, at our baptisms is that reciprocal giving within the Trinity. Christ wins us for the Father. And the Father gives us back to the son as a reward for winning us. You are so highly treasured that you are shared. God values your eternal life so much, that you are his reward.

Our baptisms connect us to Christ. They connect us to Christ and his baptism. Christ became our substitute. Everything he did, now stands for us. Everything that The Father said of him, he says of us. So when the Father said that he was well pleased with Christ, that means he is well pleased with us. Because our baptism connects us to Christ and his baptism, before God it is as if we have kept all of his law. Through Christ we have fulfilled his requirements.

This is the message of the gospel. And this message is for all people. First its for the Jews. As Jesus says in verse 5, **the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back**

to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him. Jesus was first sent to spread the gospel to his own people. So that they may be brought back to the one true faith.

But that wasn't enough for this sharp sword and polished arrow. His message of salvation is for all people. He says in verse 6, he says: **It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.** Jesus was also sent to the Gentiles. At his baptism Jesus began his ministry of bringing both Jews and Gentiles to the one true faith. This is why we want to spread the gospel. This is why we tell everyone God's word. That is why we baptize all people. It coincides with Jesus command to baptize **all nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**

So think back about your baptism—whether you can remember it or not. What does it mean to you? I can't tell you what it means to you, But I can tell you what it means to God. It means that you are connected to his Son. Through his work as our substitute, God is pleased with you. Through your baptism and Christ's you will live with him in heaven forever. Your life means so much to God that you are his reward. Amen.