



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

January 8, 2023

Pastor Randy Ott

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany: The Baptism of Our Lord

First Lesson/Sermon Text: [Isaiah 42:1-7](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 45

Second Lesson: [Acts 10:34-38](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 3:13-17](#)

### Revealed as Light for the Gentiles

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, through our Lord and Savior Jesus: Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

A weird thing happened yesterday. It was something that has never happened before. I started going through all the receipts for taxes already. I've never done that until the month of April, so it really feels weird. I got through it all and got it all organized and all categorized. I'm impressed with myself that I got all that done yesterday. And as I was thinking about taxes, this image popped into my mind and I'm not sure why—Liberty Tax Service. You've seen those around when it gets to be tax season. What do you see out in front of them? Did you ever see that driving around—someone wearing a Statue of Liberty costume pointing at their tax service, trying to get your attention to go get your taxes done there? I don't know why that jumped into my mind. I've never used Liberty Tax Service. I never plan to use Liberty Tax Service, but as I was sitting at the table, all of a sudden I was picturing somebody (I'm thinking making minimum wage) standing out in the cold in a Statue of Liberty suit.

I suppose people do a lot of things like that at times—have people outside spinning those arrows, like you see on commercials, and maybe you have seen them when driving around. They are doing it to draw attention, to point out their business.

I suppose God never really puts on a Statue of Liberty suit but in a very real way, the season of Epiphany is all about God pointing to Jesus as the Promised Messiah. It's His way of saying "Pay attention to Him. Look at Him. This is what I've been talking about all these years." You see it this morning in the Gospel where the dove comes down from heaven. You hear the voice—***"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well***

**pleased.**” “Listen to Him.” God is trying to get everyone’s attention and says “Hey, this is it! Pay attention!”

But He didn’t just start at His Baptism even though that’s when Jesus’ public ministry started. It started long before that. What I read to you from Isaiah is 700 years or so before Jesus was born. In four Servant Songs (this is the first one), God is holding up a sign, an arrow, and He’s pointing ahead to the Messiah that would come and says “This is what He is going to be like. He’s going to be really important for you to pay attention to because here are some of the things that He is going to do.” He lists a few of them that are just amazing in here. **“...he will bring justice to the nations.”** Achieving justice is mentioned in there a couple of times.

Justice in there literally means “a declaration, a judicial declaration.” The reason the Messiah, the Servant who would come into the world, the Anointed One, anointed to be the Messiah, was to bring justice, to declare us not guilty because you and I are guilty. There are no two ways around it. There is nothing in us that isn’t sinful when we are born in this world. Then even after God gives us the gift of faith and connects us to Jesus, we are still incredibly sinful.

I’ve often thought—*I sure hope God doesn’t come back when I’m sitting in a pew,* because I’m terrible when I’m sitting in a pew. My mind wanders, like some of you guys do. We think about different things. Maybe we dose off because we stayed up too late watching a show or something the night before. Who knows what it might be, but this is what we’re like through and through, so we need God to be perfect in our place. That’s what Jesus did.

You saw it at His Baptism. Jesus comes to be baptized by John. John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus was sinless. John even understands that. **“I need to be baptized by you,** not you baptized by me.” But Jesus says “No, this is to fulfill all righteousness.” He is going to come and stand in our place and identify Himself as the One who would fulfill everything there was to fulfill; to be the One who would take away the sins of the world. He is revealed at His Baptism by the voice of the Father. He is revealed by Isaiah by pointing ahead to the Servant who would come. The Servant who would come would not be exactly what many had expected. It would be all about this justice and this peace between us and God. Many had grown into looking for other kinds of messiahs. But God’s plan that He always revealed was that He would be a Messiah that would bring this justice. He would come in a way that was completely unexpected and unlike any other conquering hero, so to speak.

In [Isaiah 41](#), Isaiah is writing ahead to the people who would be carried off into captivity over 100 years later. He is writing to comfort them in the second half of Isaiah. So in [Chapter 41](#) he says that a king would come from the north that would set the people

free and let them go back to the Promised Land. That was Cyrus the Great. He let the people out of Babylonian captivity and they went to go back and rebuild the temple and got everything ready for Jesus to come. But he was a conquering hero.

The Servant, the Messiah, would be different. Did you notice how He was described? **"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."** It speaks not to His coming by brute force—**"He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets."** He is not going to come as a victor saying "Look at me." He is coming out of this deep concern and love for sinners and wants **"...to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon"** of sin. So He is patient, loving and kind, not brash arrogant and conquering as many of the kings of the day were.

Have you ever thought about how often that is so important for you? **"...a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."** **"A bruised reed he will not break..."** You and I are quite often in our lives, even after we have come to faith in Jesus, smoldering wicks and bruised reeds. There might be days when we have a burning love for our Savior but there are other days when the devil is leading us to question everything about our God. "Why would He let this happen?" "Why does that happen?" "That's not fair to me." "God, where are you? How could you let that happen to me?" Our faith begins to weaken and smolder. And our God, in love and patience, reaches out to us. He reaches out to us with His Gospel. He reaches out to us through our fellow Christians who point us back to these objective truths of our God, that He has come and the Servant has provided justice for the nations.

To drive home this point of what He would do, He uses two other illustrations at the end of [Isaiah 42:1-7](#).

(1) He will be a covenant for His people. His people would be the children of Israel. They would understand the covenant aspect of things. Covenants were things they were used to. There had been two-sided covenants. **"Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession."** [\(Exodus 19:5\)](#) They didn't obey Him. They didn't keep their side of the covenant. He would be a covenant for them in a whole new sense where it would be a completely one-sided covenant. He would be our righteousness. He would be our forgiveness.

(2) But then He uses another image that would make sense to the other people He is trying to address already here, 700 years before Jesus came. The Messiah, the Servant who is coming, the Anointed One, the Christ, the Messiah will be a Light for the Gentiles. He is revealed here as a Light for the Gentiles. The Gentiles wouldn't have had the covenant idea with God's people like they would have understood it, but light? That's pretty easy to understand. If you're living in

darkness, light is a good thing. If you get up in the middle of the night in an unfamiliar place, a light is a wonderful thing as you're trying to get to the bathroom. That's wonderful. Jesus would be the Light that would show people their own sins and their need for a Savior. He would be that Savior. It wouldn't be just for the Jews. It would be for all people of all time.

He is revealed through Isaiah. He is revealed through Peter's preaching. He is revealed at His Baptism. The question then has to come, how is He revealed today? Does He still desire to be revealed today? Does He still need to be revealed today? If you're going to say "no" to me, I'm going to tell you that your nuts. It's just so obvious to me that He needs to be revealed today.

When I start working with people on different things, let's say I'm working with couples and one of them isn't our member. I'll ask them if they're a Christian. If they said "yes" I used to think that was enough. Now I say "Can I explain with you what I think it means to be a Christian?" I walk them through God's Great Exchange—stick figures, math equations—to show what God demands, what God expects, what God sees, man-made remedies and God's remedy. What I have found maybe the last five times I've done this, three of the five people looked at me in amazement at it and they said "This first part, what God demands and what God sees, that I understand. Man-made remedies I understand. But that's all I've ever known of Christianity." This God's Great Exchange part, that Jesus was perfect in our place and that He died as the punishment for our sins, three of the five people said to me, "I didn't know that. I've never heard that." These are your neighbors. These are the people you spend time with during the summer and the winter. And they don't know the way to heaven. We seem to assume that everyone knows the way to heaven because we do. So don't tell me that people out there know about Jesus. They have a caricature of Jesus from culture or from movies or from the media that Jesus is there telling us we have to do good things and be good. That's what those three people were telling me. This idea that Jesus won't break a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick, they have no clue about that!

So does God need to be revealed today—yes! Most definitely Jesus needs to be revealed as the answer to sin. So what is God's plan for doing it today? It's pretty obvious. It's us. It's those who know Jesus. He has said "You will be my witnesses." ([Acts 1:8](#)) He desires to be revealed as a Light for the Gentiles yet today and His goal is that it is done through us, His people.

Often, when I've said that, people will say "Yeah, pastor, but I don't know what to say." Do you know why you're going to heaven? Tell people why you're going to heaven. But if you're really worried that you don't know what to say, next Saturday at 9a.m., and the following Monday at 6:30p.m., I have God's Great Exchange workshops. I'll teach you how to use stick figures and math equations to share Jesus. If you say "I don't know what to do," I'll equip you with the what. God will put the opportunities in front of you

to share Jesus, to reveal Jesus. But if that's the reason that is holding you back, we'll start equipping you so you can do it.

After we know the answer, Jesus is the Light that doesn't snuff out smoldering wicks, once we understand His love and His desire to have more people be connected to Him and once we are equipped with tools to do it, the question then has to become this: Do I want people in heaven with me, or do I not care if they go to hell?

God cared enough to send Jesus. God cared enough to point a whole bunch of arrows at Him so that you would know who He is. Now He wants to share some of those arrows through you. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.