

Lent Vespers 1
28 February 2010
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

“Christ Can Bear our Sins to Save us Because He is the Almighty God in the Flesh.”

“For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire him..”

Isaiah 53:2

Introduction

How can the prophet Isaiah describe the Almighty God in this way? The prophet Isaiah can and does describe the Almighty God in this lowly way because God has commanded him to do so, for all Scripture is given by inspiration of God.¹

And God here describes Christ according to His humiliation. Christ’s humiliation refers to Christ’s deliberately not using at all times the Divine Majesty and Glory that He possessed because He is the Son of God and suffers to take on the form of a servant in order to save all men from their sins.²

¹“All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” **II Timothy 3:16.**

²“**133. Wherein did Christ’s State of Humiliation consist?** Christ’s State of Humiliation consisted in this, that according to His *human* nature, Christ did *not always* and *not fully use* the divine attributes *communicated* to His human nature. ... Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being *in the form of God*, thought it not robbery to be *equal with God*; but made Himself of *no reputation* and took upon Him the *form of a servant* and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in *fashion as a man*, He *humbled Himself* and became *obedient unto death*, even the death of the cross. *Phil. 2:5-8.*” *The Small Catechism*, p. 109.

At the same time, however, Christ remains the Almighty God, even at the zenith of His humiliation, His death, in order to effect the salvation of men.³ For only the Almighty God can deliver men from their sins and save.⁴

Christ, then, can bear our sins to save us because He is the Almighty God in the flesh who suffers to take on the form of a servant in order to deliver us from our sins and give life eternal.

I. Christ's Office as Savior Regulated the Use of His Divine Majesty and Glory.

A. Isaiah 53 is about the Person and Work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

During this season of Lent we will meditate on Chapter 53 of the Book of Isaiah. Chapter 53 of Isaiah is about the Person and Work of Christ to save us from our sins and give life eternal. It is a vivid description of Christ's Passion in order to effect our salvation. Luther writes:

Here we begin chapter 53. Until now you have heard Christ's kingdom depicted in the cross and that it is carried forward by faith and the Word alone. Yet that leading of faith, the Word, and the cross is not without deliverance and protection. In this chapter the prophet speaks primarily of the Head of the Kingdom as he treats of the person of the King and the manner of His deliverance. This is the foremost passage on the suffering and resurrection of Christ, and there is hardly another like it. Therefore we must memorize this passage This King will be glorious, but after His death. This indicates that this King is different from an ordinary one, since He will begin His reign after death.⁵

³“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” **Acts 2:38.**

⁴“Christ could not dispense with His deity in the state of exinanition. He had to attach the full weight of His deity to His obedience, suffering, and death, as Scripture tells us Gal. 4:4-5 and Rom. 5:10. Facing death, He had to be the mighty God that He might be able by His death to overcome death, to raise up again the temple of His body (John 2:19, 21), to take up His life again (John 10:18). Jesus Christ ‘died not simply as any other man, but in and with His death conquered sin, death, hell and eternal damnation’ (*Trigl.* 1023, F.C., Sol. Decl. VIII, 25).” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 289.

⁵*Luther's Works*, Vol. 17, p. 215.

B. Christ humbled Himself unto the death of the Cross in order to save men from their sins.

We see this extraordinary King's approach to ruling His people in today's verse from Isaiah 53. The prophet Isaiah writes:

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire him.⁶

This appearance seems hardly consistent with a king. Kings are resplendent with royal regalia, evincing regal power. But Christ is not. Why? Christ does not manifest His glory for the sake of our salvation. *Were Christ to enter our world in the glory that is naturally His because He is the Son of God, He would defeat His purpose: our salvation.* If Christ were to appear in His own glory, He would not save us but rather would annihilate us. We get a glimpse of this effect in Christ's Transfiguration. St. Mark the Evangelist writes:

And after six days Jesus taketh *with him* Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. ... and Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid.⁷

We again see Christ revealing a little bit of His glory and dispersing the crowds in the Temple and leveling the cohort in the Garden of Gethsemane. St. John the Apostle writes:

And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the chargers' money, and overthrew the tables.⁸

How could one man clear the Temple? Christ cleared the Temple by allowing some of His Divine Majesty shine through. The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes:

⁶**Isaiah 53:2.**

⁷**St. Mark 9:2-3, 5-6.**

⁸**St. John 2:13-15**

WHY DID THE SELLERS YIELD TO THE CLEANSING BY CHRIST?

ANSWER: That the merchants in the temple, without any resistance, yielded to the command of Jesus, was not because they wanted to avoid the scourge. The majesty of the person of Christ, His holy earnestness, which shone from His face, moved them, and drove them out.⁹

In the Garden of Gethsemane, the cohort come to arrest Jesus collapsed and fell to the ground at merely His word. St. John the Apostle writes:

Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am *he*. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am *he*, they went backward, and fell to the ground.¹⁰

The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes of this moment:

WHY DID HIS BITTER ENEMIES FALL TO THE GROUND?

ANSWER: He asked the officers, “Whom do you seek?? They answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” When Jesus declared, I am He,” frightened they went backward, and fell to the ground. The tone of His voice and His whole appearance revealed some of His divine majesty which was hidden in Him. It would have been easy for Him with one word of His omnipotence to smash and annihilate the armed band. He wanted to show His enemies real clearly how impossible it was for them to take Him prisoner, if He Himself had not consented.¹¹

Plainly, had Christ manifested the Divine Majesty and Glory He possessed because He is the Son of God, He would have annihilated everyone. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

Had Christ, however, appeared in this form, which would have been His normal form, He could not have been made under the Law and suffered and died. His parents and relatives, the Jews, the high priests and their servants, Pilate and his mercenaries, would have fled in consternation before Him. In the interest of His office He, therefore, limited the use of His divine majesty. He did not appear as

⁹*Wisdom for Today, Volumes II & III, p. 35.*

¹⁰**St. John 18:4-6.**

¹¹*Wisdom for Today, Volumes II & III, p. 272.*

Lord, but as servant, not as the God-Man, but as a man like unto other men, submitting even to the death on the Cross.¹²

Christ, then, regulated His use or non-use of His Divine Majesty according to the needs of His Office of Redeemer of men from their sins.¹³ This fact becomes vividly manifest at the zenith of His humiliation, His suffering and death on the Cross for the sins of the world. St. Paul the Apostle writes:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.¹⁴

The prophet Isaiah writes:

He shall see the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their inequities.¹⁵

Jesus says:

Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.¹⁶

¹²*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 286.

¹³“Phi. 2:6ff cannot possibly mean anything else than that Christ, in humbling Himself according to His human nature, refrained from the full use of His imparted divine majesty, so far as His office as the Servant of God and man demanded this.” *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 289.

¹⁴**Philippians 2:5-8.**

¹⁵**Isaiah 53:10.**

¹⁶**St. John 10:17-18.**

Christ, then, refrained from the use of His Divine Majesty and Power so that He suffered and died a truly human death, the separation of body and soul¹⁷. St. John the Apostle writes:

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.¹⁸

And yet, in the midst of death, Christ remained the Almighty God in order to deliver us from our sins. To be sure, God cannot in and of Himself die, but when God becomes man, then God can die because He is now man.¹⁹ St. Paul states that it is God who died for our sins and the sins of all men when he says that God purchased the Church with His own blood:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.²⁰

St. Peter says they killed the Prince of Life, i.e. they killed God²¹:

¹⁷“**DEATH. a. Temporal, bodily death: separation of soul from body at the end of life.**” *The Small Catechism*, p. 215.

¹⁸**St. John 19:30.**

¹⁹The Lutheran Church confesses: “*We Christians must know that if God is not also in the balance, and gives the weight, we sink to the bottom with our scale. by this I mean: If it were not to be said [if these things were not true], God has died for us, but only a man, we would be lost. But if ‘God’s death’ and ‘God died’ lie in the scale of the balance, then He sinks down, and we rise up as a light, empty scale. but indeed He can also rise again or leap out of the scale; yet He could not sit in the scale unless He became a man like us, so that it could be said: ‘God died,’ ‘God’s passion,’ ‘God’s blood,’ ‘God’s death.’ For in His nature God cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is correctly called God’s death, when the man dies who is one thing or one person with God.*” *The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ.*⁴⁴, underscore added.

²⁰**Acts 20:28.**

²¹“The blood and death of Jesus is actually the ransom for the sins of the whole world. For since He is the Prince, the Source, the Author of life, it is *God’s* martyrdom, *God’s* blood, *God’s* death which is placed in the balance. And God the Father has accepted the sacrifice, He is reconciled to sinners. This fact he has unmistakably confirmed by raising Jesus from the dead and by glorifying and exalting Him to the right hand of His majesty. All this is heavenly comfort for poor sinners.” The Rev. Dr. P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible, New Testament, Vol. I*, p. 547.

But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.²²

Luther writes:

St. Paul speaks of it this way in Philippians 2:6, 7: Jesus Christ, “though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant.” He says that Christ emptied Himself of the divine form; that is, He did not use His divine might nor let His almighty power be seen, but withdrew it when He suffered. In this emptying and humiliation the devil tried all his hellish might. The Man and Son of Man stands there and bears the sins of the world (John 1:29), and because He does not give the appearance of having divine consolation and power, the devil set his teeth over the innocent Lamb and wanted to devour It. Thus the righteous and innocent Man must shiver and shake like a poor, condemned sinner and feel God’s wrath and judgment against sin in His tender, innocent heart, taste eternal death and damnation for us – in short, He must suffer everything that a condemned sinner has deserved and must suffer eternally.

This is what David talks about here [Psalm 8:5], as though he wanted to say: “Sin and death are conquered, the enemy destroyed, the kingdom of heaven is won. It happened in this way, that the Lord, our Ruler, true Man and Son of Man, travailed with body and soul in His tender humanity. He underwent such need and anguish that He sweat blood and felt nothing so much as that He was forsaken of God. In His soul He had to quench and extinguish the temptation of being forsaken by God, the devil’s flaming darts (Eph. 6:16), hellish fire, anguish and everything that we had deserved by our sins.” By this the kingdom of heaven, eternal life, and salvation were secured for us, as Isaiah also says (53:11): “He shall see the fruit of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.” His body and soul, he says, travail in deep and difficult suffering. But He does this for our great benefit and for His own great joy. For He conquers His enemies and triumphs, and by His knowledge He makes many righteous.

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

Christ could not dispense with His deity in the state of exinanition²³. He had to attach the full weight of His deity to His obedience, suffering, and death, as

²²**Acts 3:15.**

²³Exinanition is another expression for Christ’s humiliation: “**Kenosis**. A Greek term signifying the act of emptying or of exinanition, employed in the history of Christology to

Scripture tells us Gal. 4:4-5 and Rom. 5:10. Facing death, He had to be the mighty God that He might be able by His death to overcome death, to raise up again the temple of His body (John 2:19, 21), to take up His life again (John 10:18). Jesus Christ “died not simply as any other man, but in and with His death conquered sin, death, hell and eternal damnation” (*Trigl.* 1023, F.C., Sol. Decl. VIII, 25).²⁴

Because of Christ’s deliberately refraining from the use of His Divine Majesty and Power because He is the Son of God in order to save us from our sins, Isaiah can and must write of Christ’s exceedingly humble appearance:

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, *there is no beauty that we should desire him.*²⁵

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

Phil. 2:6-8 thus describes the personal armor of Christ, our Champion. Luther aptly calls the exinanition the official garb of Christ It is certainly a remarkable armor and garb. The earthly warrior, out for victory, girds his sword to his side and displays his great might. Christ’s equipment for the victory to be gained is of quite another sort. Christ ... emptied Himself, became lowly, altogether lowly, indeed nothing. But this strange equipment accords with the nature of the work He had to do. It was not to conquer fortified cities. It was not, by a divine word of power, to hurl Satan into hell It was a case, in executing

express the manner of Christ's voluntary humiliation. It is borrowed from. Phil. 2, 7: ‘But made Himself of no reputation,’ literally, ‘emptied Himself.’ This is explained in the same passage by saying that Christ, being endowed with divine glory, did not look upon this majesty communicated to His human nature in a spirit of selfishness, He did not count it as a prize to be on an equality with God, but looked upon it to our gain. He assumed the form of a servant and became obedient unto death. The great outstanding feature of the humiliation, or kenosis, was the voluntary exchange of the ‘form of God’ for the ‘form of the servant.’ *Concordia Cyclopedia*, p. 384, s.v. “**Kenosis**”.

“**ex-in-a-ni’tion**, *n.* an emptying or evacuation; hence, privation; loss; destitution.” *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, p. 642, s.v. “**exinanition**”.

²⁴*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 289.

²⁵**Isaiah 53:2.**

the divine counsel of redemption, of vicariously paying the debt of mankind by being obedient, suffering, and dying.²⁶

II. The Knowledge of Christ's Passion is the Saving Knowledge of God that Gives Life Eternal.

A. The Knowledge of the Passion of Christ saves.

How can God withdraw His Majesty and die and yet remain in death the Almighty God able to vanquish death? This fact is a great mystery of the faith²⁷. But we needn't comprehend it, for who can comprehend the infinite power and ways of the Almighty God? But we can certainly see the heart of God and His disposition toward fallen, sinful men. And that's what we need to know for our salvation. The prophet Isaiah writes:

He shall see the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.²⁸

There it is: **Knowledge**. And knowledge comes by what? Preaching the Gospel, the Word, which Word creates faith²⁹. And we are justified by faith. St. Paul writes:

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.³⁰

And where we have justification by faith, there we have salvation. Again, St. Paul writes:

²⁶*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 289.

²⁷Great is the mystery of our faith; God come in the flesh. "A Great and Mighty Wonder." The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes: "To be able to render such perfect obedience in the stead of men, to suffer and die for them, He had to renounce not seemingly, but actually the full use of the form of God. Our reason cannot perceive how this is possible, but we believe it on the basis of Scripture. Luther expresses it in the familiar lines: 'No garb of pomp or power He wore, A servant's form, like mine, He bore, To lead the devil captive'" *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 289.

²⁸**Isaiah 53:11**

²⁹"So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." **Romans 10:17.**

³⁰**Romans 3:28.**

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God....³¹

B. Life eternal comes through the saving knowledge of God.

And where we have the saving knowledge of God and His Passion, there we have life eternal. Jesus says:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.³²

Luther writes:

Concerning this knowledge and its power the prophets have spoken gloriously and clearly prophesied, as in Isaiah 53[:11]: “By knowledge of Him shall He (My Servant, the Righteous One) make many just or righteous.” This means: “He will redeem them from sins and snatch them from the devil’s jaws solely through this: that they know Him and who He is.” Likewise, Jeremiah 9[:23-24] says: “Let no one boast of his wisdom nor of his might nor of his riches” – in short, let no one boast at all – “but if anyone wants to boast in this, that he knows Me and knows who I am: the Lord, who does good and establishes righteousness and justice on earth.”³³

Conclusion

Christ, then, is a remarkable King who vanquishes His enemies by humbling Himself and submitting to the death of the Cross.

But in so doing, Christ burst the bands that bound His subjects by paying for our sin. And where our sin is atoned for, there Christ has liberated us from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

This truly is liberation and deliverance and this by the mighty armor of Christ’s humiliation. Through this liberation, our sins are forgiven, the world, the flesh, and the devil vanquished, God is reconciled, and we gain the life everlasting.

Amen.

³¹**Ephesians 2:8.**

³²**St. John 17:3.**

³³*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 69, pp. 35, 36.