



THE NEW SHOFAR

Draw all people into God's being - Father, Son and Spirit

Isaiah 6:1-4 - Matthew 28:16-20

TRINITY

Our God reigns!

Our reading from Isaiah is dated around 734^{B.C.}, the time of the Syro-Ephraimite wars. It serves as a reassurance to the people of Israel: no matter what comes their way as a consequence of their sins, *Yahweh of Hosts(All-powerful) dwells on Mount Sinai*. In the setting of the ministry of Isaiah the prophet, it reveals the way he was taken up into the heavenly council. There, in the presence of Almighty God, the future was revealed to him. He knows the divine agenda, a plan that will unfold despite the political machinations of the nations (and those of Israel!).

Importantly, the failure of the people to hear the Word of God uttered by the prophet was also written into the divine plan. Even in the midst of rejection the Reign of God continues. Having been called and commissioned by God, the mission will succeed. To the world and to those who struggle to believe, it may appear as though evil is in control, that godless men and women are winning. Isaiah knows differently. He has seen the throne of God. It was no empty throne. God was sitting on the throne – ruling. Even though the best of men and women are *people of unclean lips*, unworthy of the call given to them – God reigns. Those who live under God enjoy the graces of God.

The Old Greek version of this text offers an interpretation of what Isaiah is saying...*for the heart of this people has exalted itself, they have listened with heavy ears and have shut their eyes*. This is the reason for them not being unable to listen, unable to hear God speaking to them through the chaos and darkness of the times. Our Hebrew text struggles with the idea of God hardening the hearts of the Jewish people, impairing their vision and interfering with their hearing. This meant they could not hear and so be lost in darkness. Is this really what God wants?

Holy, Holy, Holy is God, the Lord of Hosts

Isaiah affirms the holiness of God. It is one of the uniting themes of the whole of his prophesy and it is on this divine holiness Israel can go forward in hope and with confidence. *Holiness* here means *otherness*, something *removed from the profane*. While it can be experienced, it cannot be understood fully by human minds. The ways of God are not the ways of this earth. However, as Isaiah recounts, the *holiness* of God permeates the whole of creation. God is “other” but at the same time *one-with-us* (hence the name Immanu-el). In faith, what we experience in human history is the *glory* of God, the overflowing of God’s sovereign rule. The presence of a *Reigning* God.

The word for this divine glory is *kabod* and it has the rich sense of the effulgence of God – the bright shining, radiant, brilliance of God flowing out from the magnificent and mysterious throne of the all-powerful Yahweh. For the prophet, this is the only way God can be God.

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And his train filled the Temple

This is the key point for the prophet. While affirming the mighty, the mysterious and the overwhelming power of God, he also notes the way the power of the throne of God flows down to earth...his train fills the Temple. The image offers to Israel under threat a reminder of a reality beyond that which is immediate and pressing – the invaders. God is an “out-flowing” God, reaching from heaven into earth.

In the name of God – Father, Son and Spirit

God revealed the divine name to Moses at the burning bush. He said **I AM WHO I AM**. A little weird in English but in Hebrew it reveals the nature of the divine Being. We usually write it as “Yahweh” (please, never Jehovah! – that is a poor translation from the Latin) but the name means – *I am who I am now, as I have always been in the past and will be forever into the future*. That is quite a name but in revealing it, what God is saying is how there is never a moment when God is absent. The darkness pushed back at creation will never cover the earth. It may be deep, impenetrable at times and have the power to snuff out life. But, even in the midst of that darkness, the light of God shines and the search for this sure light in darkness represents our journey as disciples. We yearn for God and God responds to that yearning, even pursuing us long before we know who it is for whom we are searching.

In knowing God as Father, we know Jesus as the anointed Son

When Jesus is revealed to us as *the Son of God* we are told something significant. “Son” points to an intimacy of relationship, to love, care, nurture, kindness and compassion. We know Jesus as the Son and the Spirit is called the *Spirit of Jesus Christ*. This Spirit came down upon Jesus and anointed him at his baptism. At that moment the mystery of God as Father, Son and Spirit was revealed.

This is where the New Testament picks up the image from Isaiah. We now see how it is that the train of the heavenly robes *fill the temple*. It was difficult for the people of Israel to find God as wars, famine, droughts, invasions and incessant political uprisings rocked their nation. The milk and honey of the land of Canaan had long turned sour and bitter to the taste. Now, in this Jesus anointed by the Spirit, we have the divine soaked in human reality. He lives with the anguish, pain, hunger and sense of helplessness that plagues all of us. Ours is the “temple” now filled with the heavenly Reign of God. In this Spirit-anointed Jesus it is as if we are there around the very throne of God, alongside the Seraphim singing the praise of God.

Paul in his letter to the Galatians writes...*God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts*. That is what is meant by the outflowing God of the Hebrew Bible. This Spirit is God breathing, God loving, God living, God shining into our lives, all of which we experience in Jesus the Christ.

In Christ, the Word in flesh, the love of God enters into creation – *his throne fills the temple*. God becomes a part of the very fabric of human life in all its limits, fragility, tragedy, joy and pain. To understand the meaning of life, our life’s direction and the reason we are on this earth in the first place, we need to understand this revealed truth.

We are never far from the cross of Christ

It is at the crucifixion of the Son of God that we see this promise being acted out in its fullness. The Son spills the very last of his blood for the sake of all men and women. He is the clearest manifestation of this *outpouring-God* and the Father vindicates his sacrifice in raising him on the third day. It is the Spirit who *pours out* this same divine life, love and power into all believers. We are transformed into living conduits for this divine love to flow into every human situation, every man woman and child without exception. In us the Trinitarian mystery is continuously unfolding.

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