

Isaiah 42:1-7

January 9, 2005 – THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

Hope in the Epiphany of Christ

☆ **Gentiles need His light.** (vv.5-7)

☆ **The LORD delights in Him.** (vv.1-4)

In the name of Jesus, God's shining Epiphany Light, dear Gentile believers:

One of my most frightening experiences as a boy was when our anchor stuck near the mouth of the Charleston harbor on the southern Oregon coast. The fog was too thick, so we dropped anchor near a buoy marking the channel. At first the water was calm. But after an hour of fishing, the tide reversed and began rushing out to sea. We could hear the breakers on the bar as the water churned past our buoy and collided with the ocean waves. It didn't help that a boy my age from our congregation had recently drowned, and my dad had to identify his body. No one can swim against a rip tide. Yet we had **Hope**.

This past week after nearly seven days at sea a man was rescued from the branches of a floating tree. Caught in the Christmas Sunday tsunami, they found him 100 miles off the Indian coast. What else could keep him alive so long if he did not have **Hope** of someone finding him? But did he have **Hope** for life even after death? I don't know. But **Hope** is sadly lacking from newscasts about this terrible disaster. God wants us to **Hope in the Epiphany of Christ**. When people ask you, tell them first that ...

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"This is what God the LORD says..." which right away makes this different from the evening news. Reporters are asking every conceivable religion, "Did God cause this disaster?" Muslim leaders only recognize their god Allah; they have no use for the **LORD**, Jehovah, who reveals His thoughts in the Bible. Buddhists don't recognize Allah or the LORD because Buddhists do not believe in a personal God or a Creator. Neither Buddhism or Islam will tolerate each other, and even less Biblical Christianity. But strangely, our American media feels duty bound to find some Episcopalian bishop who recognizes all religions as equal even though none of the others recognize his. Such politically correct "tolerance" is what the God of the Bible is rejecting through Isaiah the prophet in the verse right after our text: **"I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols."** (Isaiah 42:8 NIV)

And who is **the LORD**? From Genesis to Revelation and all 64 books in between, the one true God reveals Himself as **"he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it."** Finally, who are you going to believe – scientists who admit they were not there in the beginning? Or the LORD God proves He was with details no one could make up? The Episcopal bishop may want us to believe the earthquake and tsunami were not caused by God, but God says He rules over the wind and wave. He can create and destroy at will. We would all be in the dark about this except that the LORD tells us: **"The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars....The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the Lord shakes the desert....The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"** (Psalm 29:3-9 NIV) God tells us that He cursed His own creation because Adam rebelled and brought death and destruction into God's perfect world by his sin. We reap what we sow.

So why don't we give God the glory due His Name? Why do we let hours and days go by without thinking about our Creator? Why do we question His will for our lives? Why do we prefer a warm, sunny beach to the Sunday warmth of worshiping God in His holiness? If we really worship the LORD as our Creator, why is it so hard for Him to get through so that we finally feel broken and sorry for our sins?

Fact is, we're all by nature trapped in the chains of sin and shackled to the prison walls of our own stubborn unbelief and disobedience to God's commands. He commands all good in one word: "**Love.**" But we do not love Him as we ought even though "**in him we live and move and have our being.**" (Acts 17:28) And we fail to love our neighbor whom God created as the perfect receptacle of kindness starting right in our own home. We may enjoy priceless blessings in a Christian congregation and even send the Pastor a card once a year. But we rarely say a word of encouragement for the officers and elders who serve us day by day. How true what Jesus said about what we deserve from similar disasters: "**I tell you...unless you repent, you too will all perish.**" (Luke 13:5 NIV) All this, we sinners are too **blind** to see!

That's why it is so astounding that the LORD God of the Bible had this to say to Jesus the Messiah 700 years before He was born of the virgin Mary: "**I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.**" **Captives**, we could not get out. Drop the chains, but we were still imprisoned by our blindness. Open our eyes, but still we sat in the deepest **darkness** of our gloomy **dungeon**. We **Gentiles need** this more than anything else: the **Epiphany light of Christ** because...

✧ **The LORD delights in Him.** (vv.1-4)

If your doorbell rang and in your driveway was a car that said, "Publishers Clearinghouse Sweepstakes," and the party at your door shouted, "You won the million dollar jackpot!" would you: a) ignore them; b) find someone else to talk to on the street; c) go back to your game of Scrabble; or d) none of the above? Why do we foolish sinners keep looking for help from the government, relief agencies, our own education or talents or investments – when God has shined the spotlight on His only begotten Son. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan by John with the Holy Spirit dove descending and the voice of the Father proudly proclaiming: "**This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.**" (Matthew 3:17 NIV)

700 years earlier through His prophet Isaiah the LORD said the same thing with more details about the coming Messiah: "**Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.**" It's understandable that the Muslims don't want the tsunami to be about sin. Muslim areas were hardest hit in mostly Buddhist Sri Lanka and India, as well as Indonesia which is 90% Muslim. Yet if my home and family were destroyed in one of these areas, I would have to admit I still deserve far worse because of my sins. We all do. God says, "**The wages of sin is death.**" (Romans 6:23) That's eternal **death** in hell which all of us have earned from the holy God because of our sinful thoughts, words and deeds against God and in neglect of our neighbor.

But while God says, "**The wages of sin is death,**" He also says, "**but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" (Romans 6:23) God's greatest gift was to satisfy His own **justice** by accepting Jesus as the Volunteer to suffer the **wages of [our] sin [by His innocent] death** on the cross. God proclaimed His **justice** satisfied by raising Jesus from the dead. In such a Savior, we have **Hope**.

What Isaiah said came true in Jesus: "**He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.**" That's **law** in the broad sense of all God's Word including the comfort and encouragement of the Gospel. Those **islands** were far to the west of the Mediterranean in what is America today. Not 100 miles off the coast of India floating in some tree branches, but 1000's of miles distant from God and drowning in our sins – way out there God sought and found us by the skillful searching of the Savior in whom **the LORD delights**. Maybe you're just waking up, thirsty deep in your soul, starving from hunger and sick with dysentery. Open your eyes and see His **light** piercing sin's night. In the warm glow of such kindness what else can we do but **Hope in the Epiphany of Christ?** And everyone else you see floating out there, can you keep yourself from telling them? **Hope in the Epiphany of Christ.** In Christ Jesus it's always a great day to be alive! Amen.

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