

Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD Almighty

Holy is a word that's used a lot, but most of the time it's used rather flippantly. Excited people will exclaim "Holy Moly!" - although I can't seem to find anyone who knows what a moly is. If someone hits their thumb with a hammer, they say, "Holy Mackerel That Hurts!" And you don't have to be much of a baseball fan to recognize the distinctive voice of Harry Caray saying "Holy Cow!" when something exciting happened during a Cubs game.

Of course, nobody who says these things really thinks that whatever moly is, mackerels, or cows are holy. There's only one that's truly holy - the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In our text for this Trinity Sunday, we get a glimpse of the holiness of all three persons as the LORD calls one of his greatest prophets into service – the same calling he's given to each of us to serve him all our lives. Holiness is perfection. Holiness is glory. Holiness is something we can't really describe, other than to say, along with the angels who appeared to Isaiah, ***"Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD Almighty!"***

1. His holiness shows we're lowly.

Our text takes place during the reign of King Uzziah in the land of Judah. Uzziah was faithful to the LORD, and was rewarded with a peaceful and prosperous reign. The borders of Judah extended to their farthest lengths and Uzziah was famous throughout the Ancient Near East. But his people – God's people, weren't faithful. Satan had his evil claws dug into the hearts of many of the people who bowed to Baal and other false gods.

Because of this disobedience, the prosperity under Uzziah wouldn't last. Babylon was already poised to move in and carry God's people off into captivity. The LORD called Isaiah to warn the people of impending judgment if they didn't repent and return to the LORD.

The LORD came to Isaiah with a vision of his holiness. ***"I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple."*** God, our Heavenly Father is King over the entire world he created. In Genesis it tells us, ***"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."*** To our Heavenly Father, very good means perfect and holy, without sin.

Mankind was also created to be holy. We were meant to live forever – never to have sickness, pain, or death. Man was in complete harmony with God with the same holy will and desires. The sin of Adam and Eve changed all of that. They fell into Satan's trap and took mankind with them. We now have a sinful nature, but our Lord still demands perfection from us. Our Father in heaven didn't change, mankind did, and that IS NOT acceptable to him.

There's more to this holy vision. ***"Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying."*** Imagine that! Angels! The soldiers of God's heavenly army! Spiritual creatures, confirmed in their holiness, unable to sin – and yet even they covered their faces and feet because they're unworthy to see or stand in the presence of the LORD.

"And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple

was filled with smoke.” Even the holy angels can only find one word to describe the LORD – HOLY! Holy Father! Holy Son! Holy Spirit! Our God is 3 times holy! The whole earth is full of his glory. There’s nothing he can’t see. There’s nothing he doesn’t know. His almighty power shook the Temple to its very foundation.

Who can blame Isaiah for his despair over his sad condition? **“Woe to me! I cried. I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”** Our Creator demands perfection, and nobody can meet this demand. All people are born in sin. I know when I stack up my life against God’s Law, I cry with Isaiah, “Woe to me!” “I am ruined!”

There’s no hope for any of us on our own. We sin constantly! Has your mind wandered during worship this morning? Has anything taken your attention - even for a second from your LORD? How long has it been since you’ve had a thought, much less a word or action that was less than perfectly loving? On your drive to church this morning, did you drive one MPH over the speed limit? Cut a yellow light a little too close as you went flying through the intersection, rolled through a stop sign?

ANY one of these sins – and they are sins – make us deserve eternity in hell, and these are the ones we consider “little.” Think of all the “big” sins – the deepest, darkest, hateful, lustful, terrible things we think about every day! Woe to me! Woe to you! We’re ruined for eternity on our own. His holiness shows we’re lowly.

“Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD Almighty!” This song of the angels points out our sins. It shows us that our Heavenly Father is absolutely perfect and demands this perfection from us. If this was all that Isaiah saw, this song of the angels would be a hopeless dirge. It would make us mourn our hopeless and helpless state. But that’s not all. The LORD loves all people, and shows that love to Isaiah and to all of us.

2. His holiness makes us holy.

“Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.” In Old Testament temple worship, the altar of the LORD was where sacrifices were made for sin. These sacrifices were pictures of what sin looks like to the LORD. They were bloody, burnt, dead animals. Imagine the smell! That’s what sin is to our holy God – detestable.

These sacrifices were burnt to pay for sin. They were a picture of the Savior to come, the one promised way back in the Garden of Eden, the promise renewed again and again in the centuries since; the promise rejected again and again by God’s chosen people. In spite of this rejection, the LORD kept his promise.

The coal from the altar is a picture of Jesus. **With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’”** When a metal worker wants to purify a metal, what does he do? He puts it in a fire. Fire takes the impure and makes it pure. This is the picture here. Isaiah’s unclean lips are made clean by a fiery coal from the altar of the LORD. His sin is atoned for.

Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise. His sacrifice doesn’t stink to high heaven like a burnt dead animal. His sacrifice is a pleasing aroma because it pays for all sins. He’s holy because he’s true God. He was under the Law because he became a man. He shed his blood on the ultimate altar of the

LORD – the cross. He suffered hell for us, defeated sin, death, and the devil and declared his victory with his empty tomb. He paid for your sins and mine, Isaiah's and everyone's. His holiness makes us holy.

“Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD Almighty!” Because of Jesus, this song of the angels is a song of praise to our merciful and gracious Lord and Savior. Jesus unlocked heaven. We no longer fear judgment for our sins. So, if heaven is open to all people, and the LORD wants all people to be saved, how come people still go to hell? What about me? How do I know that I'm not one of them? How do I know that Jesus' forgiveness is for me? Why didn't Jesus just take all of us to heaven? The LORD answers all these questions for us. We see it in his little conversation with Isaiah at the end of our text.

3. His holiness makes us serve him only.

Jesus paid for all sins, but only those with faith in Jesus benefit from this forgiveness. This faith is a gracious gift from our LORD to sinners who are dead and blind enemies of God by nature. We can't choose Jesus on our own, but he chose us.

“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit – True God – gives us faith in Jesus, but he doesn't work in a vacuum. He works through means to bring us his grace. The word and the sacraments are his tools to bring us to Jesus and to heaven through Jesus. At your baptism he set up shop in your heart and made you a Christian. He's working right now as you hear the good news of Jesus. He's made you a new creature, one that wants to serve the LORD.

Isaiah received his calling with the LORD's own voice. **“Then I heard the voice of the LORD saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”** The Holy Spirit called Isaiah, and made him understand exactly what he was to do. He was enlightened, given the gifts that he needed to carry out the LORD's work. Isaiah didn't have an easy road ahead. He was to call a fallen nation to repentance before they face judgment – not a popular message. But the Holy Spirit strengthened him, kept him close to his LORD and Savior through his life and used him to bring many to Jesus through his preaching and prophecies of the Savior. Isaiah, a dead, blind, enemy of God by nature was made into a faithful servant who is now in glory for eternity. Miracle after miracle! Thank you, Holy Spirit!

The Holy Spirit has done these miracles in you and me too! He's doing them right now! We were called at our baptism, and that calling is renewed as we stay close to our Savior Jesus. We receive understanding of what Jesus has done for us and what we are to do out of thanks and praise to him. We're not only willing and able, but our new nature, our Christian nature delights in serving our LORD.

With Isaiah, we say, **“Here am I. Send me!”** Our duties may be different, but our work is the same. Moms, dads, you've been sent to bring your kids to Jesus. You've brought them to be baptized, now keep them close to Jesus. This doesn't stop when you leave church but is your calling for your daily life. Read your bibles, study as a family. This is why you're here – why the LORD gave you those children.

Kids, you've been sent to grow up with Jesus. Obey your parents and teachers. They're stand-ins for Jesus. Faithfully study your Bible stories. Learn your memory verses. These are tools for your life with your Savior to bring you to heaven.

In your workplace, your circle of friends, your extended family, you've been sent to be a light in a dark and sinful world. Stand up for the perfection the LORD demands. Point out sin as sin, without compromise. Live a life of Christian love and obedience to your LORD. Never pass up an opportunity to tell why you live the way you live, why you love the way you love – because Jesus loved you first. Tell those who are broken by their sins that Jesus paid for them and heaven is open to them - for free. Stay with Jesus and bring others to Jesus. This is why you're here!

Staying with Jesus isn't easy because we're still sinners, but don't worry. The Holy Spirit is working in us. He's working for us. He's working with us to take us to heaven. Like any worker, he needs his tools – the word, the sacraments. DO NOT take away his tools. They're our lifeline to Jesus for eternal joy in heaven. His holiness makes us serve him only.

What a wonderful LORD God we have! What a miracle that each of us, lowly sinners can be made holy! What a wonderful gift to serve him only! What a privilege to spend our lives of labor to our LORD, longing for the day when he takes us to heaven forever! All of this is ours because our perfect LORD shares his glory with us. Only one word really describes it – holy – times three! ***“Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD Almighty!”*** Amen.