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Holy Trinity-b
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Tremble at God's Holiness

Isaiah 6:1-8

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit sanctifies us is Isaiah 6:

In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne high and exalted. His train filled the temple. Seraphim were standing above him. Each one had six wings. With two they were covering their face. With two they were covering their feet. With two they were flying. They were calling to each other, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory." The sockets of the doorframes shook from the sound of the calling. The house was filled with smoke.

I said, "Woe to me! For I am ruined. I am a man of unclean lips and I am living among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

One of the seraphim flew to me. A glowing coal was in his hand that he had taken with tongs from the altar. He touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips. Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

I said, "Here am I. Send me." (Isaiah 6:1-8)

This is the Word of our Lord.

Dear friends in Christ, fellow saints washed clean in the blood of our risen Savior:

God created Adam and Eve in his image. But they lost it when they sinned. Ever since then humanity has tried to recreate god in our own image. Ancient myths portray the gods as super humans, more powerful than us but like us in many ways. Think of Zeus, Neptune, Athena, Venus, Thor, or Odin. Maybe our modern stories of superheroes have taken the place of those myths. Think of how god is portrayed in movies and on TV. He's a bit stronger, wiser, better, but basically like us. Or think of how people refer to god as "the man upstairs" or "the big guy." They might refer to him as their "buddy" or their "daddy." All that brings him down to our level, recreating him in our image. In fact, back in the 90's Joan Osborne sang, "What if God was one of us? Just a slob like one of us ..."

But that's not the true God. That's not the God of the Bible, our Savior-God. How did he reveal himself to Isaiah? Not like one of us, but totally separated, totally

different. So far beyond us that we can do nothing but tremble at the presence of his holiness. Through the word of God before us today, may the Holy Spirit bring us to stand there with Isaiah and tremble at God's holiness.

How far beyond us he is! To see that, consider how the seraphim behave in his presence. Seraphim are angelic beings. Their name sounds like the Hebrew word for "burning," so pure and holy they are. But even these holy, sinless angels, these spiritual creatures as pure as fire, could not gaze at the Lord in his holiness. So with two of their wings they cover their faces so as not to see. They knew their lowliness compared to the Almighty. In their humility they each cover their feet with two of their wings so as not to be seen. And with two wings they fly, hovering above the throne, ready to serve the King, as they call back and forth to each other: "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3 NIV11). The frames of the doors of this heavenly sanctuary trembled and shook at the sound of their song as smoke filled the air hiding the glorious majesty of the Lord's holiness.

How far beyond the seraphim the Lord Almighty is—as far as the infinite is beyond the finite, as far as the Creator is beyond the creature! As powerful and mighty as the seraphim are, they can not begin to measure up to the One who is omnipotent and almighty, the One who always is and from whom all has come.

Now if he is so far beyond the angelic seraphim, how much farther beyond us he must be! For not only are we separated from him as far as creature from Creator but also that most fatal chasm separates us. For we are sinners and he is the holy One. How unlike him we are!

"Woe to me! ... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5 NIV11), we cry out with Isaiah. What hope is there for us, sinners that we are? How often our words betray the evil that corrupts our hearts! Our lips complain revealing a heart that questions God's goodness. Our lips mutter words of anger or frustration revealing a heart that does not love our neighbor as ourselves. Our lips speak words of greed and envy revealing a heart that covets, discontent with what God has given us. And what of the gossip, lies, foul language, or off-colored jokes that come from our lips? What of the times our lips have failed to speak well of others, failed to call on God in prayer, failed to glorify his name? "Woe to me! I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips."

That is what we are by nature. That's where we have come from. That's what we've inherited from our parents. For we live among a people of unclean lips. That's what our people, our heritage, our nature is. How far removed from God we are! How can we not tremble in terror at his holiness? We tremble in terror calling out with Isaiah, "Woe to me! I am ruined!" For nothing sinful can endure his holiness.

If the vision ended here, we'd have no hope. But all this is introduction. We now come to the main point of the vision. Pay attention to what happens. For now

we see what his glory is that fills the earth. Now we see a totally different outcome for us that God's holiness has accomplished. Now we see a totally different trembling from within us.

Isaiah writes, "Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for'" (Isaiah 6:6, 7 NIV11).

No sinner can survive in the presence of God's holiness. So his holiness planned to take away sin. What love! His holiness planned to atone for sin, to make the payment that purifies us. What grace, totally undeserved by us! Rather than his holiness demanding that we be holy, here we see his holiness freely providing for us, giving us, that holiness he requires. Notice how this is pictured here. One of the seraphim takes a burning coal from the altar. What's burnt on an altar? A sacrifice.

Because we have the New Testament, the picture here is no mystery to us. On the altar of the cross, God offered the one and only Sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world. Yes, God did become one of us. But not a slob like one of us. The eternal, almighty, holy Son of God became flesh and blood, with body and soul just like us, but without sin. Yes, the Father sent his beloved Son. So earnestly, so fervently, did the Father desire to bring you, dear sinner—yes you—into his holiness that he gave up his own dear Son, the One with whom he shared perfect love and unity from all eternity.

And the Son, Jesus Christ, willingly offered himself. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is the Sacrifice that atones for every single sin. He the Ransom that has paid the price for you. His holy blood, shed on the cross, purifies you from all sin. His holy blood cleanses not only your unclean lips; his blood washes your heart clean. He presents you before his Father no longer as the sinner you were born to be but as his bride beautifully dressed with his holiness, his righteous life, without spot or stain.

All this that the Son has done for you, the Holy Spirit has brought to you. Through the water and word of Baptism the Holy Spirit washed you clean and gave you rebirth into God's family as his holy child. Through the Gospel in word and Sacrament the Holy Spirit continues to work in you and strengthens you to live a holy life so that you say no to sin and live for him who died for you. And think of what the Holy Spirit does for you in the Lord's Supper. He touches your lips not with a burning coal but with the body and blood of Christ. "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for" (Isaiah 6:7 NIV11). Is it any wonder that before the Lord's Supper the liturgy leads us to join the seraphim in singing: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts"?

When we consider what the Father, the Son, and the Spirit have all done to bring us, sinners, to stand before his holy throne forgiven and washed clean, how

can we not tremble? We tremble in overwhelming joy. Look at what our God has done for us! Surely he is holy, holy, holy, for he is Father, Son, and Spirit, who has brought us to share in his holiness! This message of forgiveness through the sacrifice of the Son, this is the message that fills the earth with the saving glory of the Lord. With trembling joy we sing with the seraphim, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3 NIV11).

And with trembling joy we say with Isaiah, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8 NIV11). We are here to fill the earth with God’s glory, that saving glory that brings sinners into the presence of his holiness through Jesus Christ. Our once-unclean lips now speak the Good News that purifies. For through your words you can touch the lips of others with the sacrifice of Christ. You can tell them how far beyond us the true God is and how our own sin brings us ruin. Tell them that nothing we do could bring us into his holiness, but he alone planned out how to present us as holy in his sight. Tell them how the Father sent the Son, Jesus Christ, as our holy Substitute. He sacrificed himself to take away the sins of the world. Tell them Jesus has paid the full price to atone for all of their sins. Invite them to come and hear this Good News so that in faith they too tremble at God’s holiness, trembling in joy that the true God has done such great things to bring us into his holiness. Glory be to the name of our Savior-God. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.