

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany**  
**Revd Rik Florentinus**  
**Main text: Isaiah 49:1-6**

**Kids talk as introduction to the sermon**

Good morning... I brought a lamp today to remind us of the purpose that God gives to his people - to this church - and to you and me. He says "I give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the world".

(lightning of the candle) Jesus Christ is our light.

All the scriptures talk about how God has chosen us also to be a light to the world - to be a people who by how we live and by what we say, attract people to God.

That we are folks meant to share the good news about Jesus with others That we are to give light like this candle gives light - the light of Christ.

God says that we, as people are like this Candle. Although we are all different and unique God wants us to be like a Lamp.

That we can shine or not shine.

We can tell others about Jesus and his love – or that we cannot.

Kind of like these two lamps - one is shining and one is not.... One is a candle the other an oil lamp, different but both meant to give light.

What does a lamp like this need to shine? Oil! yes! Just as oil must go into the lamp so it can shine, so God's love needs to be in our hearts before we can shine. God gives us the oil of his love. The oil of his word. The bible is God's word and our oil.

(Add Oil To The Lamp)

He wants us to shine but to get us shining one more thing is needed. I have poured oil in it but does it shine already??? NO – it needs a flame. That flame is our faith in him and our obedience to him. When we believe - really believe, then the fuel that he has given us, the oil in our heart - can light up - and draw people to him. (Light second lamp).

So when ever you see a candle or an oil lamp shining in the dark, let it remind you that you may do the same, shining Gods light in the World

*Sermon*

Isaiah 49: 1-7 is also known as "**The Second Servant Song**." There are four servant songs in Isaiah, and of course they are all prophecies, just as all of Isaiah is a prophecy.

As Christians, we understand the "Servant" described by Isaiah in these "Servant Songs" to be Jesus Christ. What's interesting and unique about this Second Servant Song, though, as you may have noticed, is the fact that it's not entirely clear who exactly the servant is.

The song begins **as if the servant himself is speaking**, "The Lord called me before my birth." But then it is reported that God said, "**You are my servant Israel.**" And later on, the name of Jacob is mentioned. The final portions of this song only say "**You.**"

Obviously, with this kind of ambiguity, it drives the biblical scholars about nuts, and everyone has a different opinion about who exactly this servant is.

Some say that in this song, **the servant is Jacob himself**, who of course is named Israel after he wrestles with God.

Others say that **the servant is all of Israel, a sort of collective or communal identification of God's servant.**

There are others who consider the prophets' roles of speaking truth into the present situation, and so they consider **the servant to be one of the Israelite kings around the time Isaiah was prophesying.**

Then there are those who of course identify **the servant as the coming Messiah, Jesus the Christ.**

In this season of Epiphany, these words from Isaiah illumine for us who Jesus is and why God sent him to live the life of a human on earth. But I also believe that by being quite ambiguous here, God, speaking through his prophet Isaiah, is also telling each of us something else about his nature, about Jesus, and about each of us. I think God wants us to understand that while Jesus is the one perfect servant, Jacob is a servant too, and all the people of Israel, from the kings to the lepers, are servants as well. **And all of that can only mean this; we are servants, too.**

I think we find it hard to believe that this passage could be about us, about you and me! but I think that's exactly what God wants us to know.

When God spoke these words through Isaiah, it was a calling to all nations, but also a calling to every individual. God called Christ before he was born and even named him in his mother's womb. **But the Bible tells us that God calls us and claims us before we are born, too.** And certainly, God sent Jesus as a light to the nations and the savior of all the world, even to the ends of the earth.

But what did Jesus tell his followers in the sermon on the mount? **He said, "You are the light of the world."**

My friends, we come this morning once again to one of those Biblical passages that is so easy to "gloss over," and yet which contains such a great challenge for all of us. When we read this "Servant Song," most of us probably think to ourselves, "*Yep! That's Jesus! Savior of the world! Light to the nations! Ain't he grand?!?*"

But God has so much more in mind, because God has called us and claimed us, too. God intends that we, too, will be a light to the nations; reflecting Christ's own light into the world around us. It may seem hard for us to believe, but God wants this for every one of us. We are servants, too!

You know, there is so much darkness in this world, isn't there? At times, we believe that things cannot get any worse for us.

We watch helplessly the terror of the wars in the world.

We cringe when the news reports yet another senseless shooting or bombing.

In the Red-light district where I live in Amsterdam you see the horrors of prostitution, drug abuse and loneliness very clearly every day. But happens not only in this obvious area, its here in Amersfoort too!!!!

We watch the horrors of addiction rip apart families and ruin lives. Or perhaps we have lived through the horrific temptation of addiction ourselves.

We struggle in the darkness of mental illness, depression, or anxiety.

We worry and wonder and stress nearly every single day as we think, “there must be a better way.”

Indeed, there is a better way. **That’s why Jesus came; so that we could know there is a better way.**

Jesus came so that he could shine light in the darkness of our lives as he shows us the path to the infinitely loving Father. That’s why Jesus is the greatest servant of all.

But one of the many wonderful truths of the Bible is the fact that God calls each of us to follow in Christ’s footsteps.

**God calls our names even when we are in our mother’s wombs. God considers each of us to be a sign of his glory!** Isn’t that an amazing thing?

We ...messed up, broken, struggling, stressed-out people are a sign of God’s glory! God wants us to be a light shining in the darkness of this world, even as Christ has been a light shining in the darkness of our lives.

If you don’t believe me, listen to this. In this very same passage from Isaiah, the servant doubts his abilities to fulfill God’s calling and claim on his life.

He says, “I have wearied myself in vain. I have used up my strength for nothing.” Yet still this servant, full of doubt, is to be a light to all nations. Listen again to God’s response to these excuses. Isaiah reports: “Now the Lord has decided—the one who formed me from the womb as his servant—to restore Jacob to God so that Israel might return to him.

Moreover, I’m honored in the Lord’s eyes; my God has become my strength.”

Have you ever had that feeling of complete failure? You’re absolutely convinced that you can do nothing right, and you doubt if anyone will ever find any worth in your at all?

Well, this is what you need to hear this morning; these words from God, shared with us by the prophet Isaiah. God has a plan for us;

God wants even more from us than we can imagine. God wants us to be a light to ALL nations because we are honored in God’s sight.

You know, whether we say it out loud or not, we are all more than aware of that simple truth in life that you typically don’t ask something of someone unless you know they are capable of doing it.

In other words, you don’t ask a lawyer to perform your upcoming brain surgery.

You don’t seek out a car salesman when you need a birthday cake. As a parent you wouldn’t ask your child to do something if you didn’t think he or she could do it. right?

You will not overask him or her, and you are there looking over the shoulder to help when it is needed.

It seems hard for us to imagine that we might be called by God to be a light to all nations. “Surely not,” we think, “that’s why Jesus came.” Well, my friends, that’s true.

That is why Jesus came, to be a light shining in the darkness. But what Isaiah teaches us this morning is that in God’s kingdom, there is more than one servant.

Jesus was just the first among many. And no not just also your minister or leadership team, there’s also a Bram, and a Susan, and Jeff, and Sharon, and Joe, and Cheryl, and Thomas, and Julia. Every single person sitting in this church, and many millions more in this world have been called by God by name to share his light in this world.

And God never would ask this of us if he did not KNOW that we can follow through.

God never would have claimed us if we did not bring him honor.  
God never would have called us if he did not know that we could bring him glory;  
beautiful, bright, radiant glory.

The Lord called you before your birth. He claimed you while you grew in your mother's womb. He saw in you glory and honor. And God has sent you to be a light to the nations. Yeah, he's talking to you!

You know in Amsterdam there are many street artists. On a day a circus owner was walking at the Dam square and saw a crowd of people around a table watching a show. On the table was a pot turned upside down and a duck tap dancing on it. The circus owner was so impressed that he offered to buy the duck from its owner. After some haggling the owner agreed to sell the duck and the pot for 5,000 euro. A couple of days later the circus owner returns to the owner. "Your duck is a rip-off!" He says angrily. "I put him on the pot in front of a big audience and he didn't dance a single step!"

"Well," asked the duck's former owner, "did you remember to light the candle under the pot?"

While someone might use a candle that way, that's not what candles are for. Light is meant to be seen. To shine. To shine brightly. To shine constantly, To shine usefully. That is the kind of light we are to be. A light that does not shine is of no value. Hide it under a bushel? NO! let it shine!

How? By living differently than the world. By serving others. By talking, and acting in a way that glorifies God and points the way to Jesus.

A light also guides. I like to carry a flash light when I travel. When I'm staying somewhere unfamiliar, it is very helpful to guide me down a dark hallway. A Christian light serves as a guide in a world that is groping in darkness. We can guide people to see God. Learn about Him. And obey His gospel.

A light can also warn. It may say "danger ahead." "Caution." "Stop." Our light also can serve as a warning to the world that something is wrong. It can shine in our social circle. At work. In our neighborhood. In the dorm at college.

Wherever we are, our Christian light can be seen. Shining bright. Guiding. Directing. Even warning. We can let our light shine with the knowledge that it is the Almighty God who has called you to be a light in the world.

Amen