

Isaiah and Christ: The Prophet meets the Suffering Servant

ReCatechism 8
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Since January, we at Re-Catechism have been on a journey throughout the Old Testament. It's been a walk throughout the pages of the time when the Logos – the Second Person of the Holy Trinity – was not yet manifested in the flesh, even though He existed forever with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Although not manifest in the flesh, God prepared His people to "recognize" Him, as He was prefigured in so many ways and by so many people. Throughout these sessions, we hopefully have a new appreciation of the first verse of the Gospel of St. John, the same verse we will hear for the Gospel reading at the Paschal Divine Liturgy: "**In the beginning** was the Word ... and the Word was God" (Jn. 1:1).

Throughout our time together, we see that the Logos is manifest throughout the times of the Forefathers, the Judges, the Prophets and the Righteous – all before His Incarnation, His Birth in the flesh. God's love never abandoned humanity, even when humanity pushed Him away through their sin and apostasy. The final book of the Old Testament that we examine at Re-Catechism to prepare us for Holy Week and Pascha and see this manifestation of the Lord is that of **the Prophet Isaiah**.

As one sits back to examine *Isaiah*, they cannot help but be captivated by his personality and his love for God. Due to this love, God revealed to him so much about the coming King of Kings, the One who would rid humanity of death and corruption. Although Moses is "the God-seer", Isaiah can't be discounted as having a great picture of Who the Messiah would be – along with the people who would surround Him.

The book of Isaiah is 65 chapters, which is why it's impossible to touch on every chapter and verse. For reasons of brevity (and for you to be able to relate to this presentation through the lens of the Great Feasts), I chose to examine the parts of the book that we would hear in the liturgical life of our Church.

The acrostic is:

Inroducing Isaiah

Supporting Cast: Who does Isaiah prophecy about (other than Christ)

A little Child, God before the ages: About Christ's Incarnation

Illuminating those in darkness: The Life of Christ

A Lamb led to the slaughter: Passion and Resurrection

Holy One of Israel: Conclusion

Introducing Isaiah

One of the most-heard prophets in our liturgical life (especially during Great Vespers services of the Lord, the Theotokos and the Saints) is **Isaiah** (whose name literally means "the Lord is salvation"). He was born in the kingdom of Judah in about 765 BC. At the time of his birth, the Jewish people were divided into two hostile kingdoms: Israel (the capital being Samaria) and Judah (with Jerusalem being its capital).

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Isaiah was of royal lineage. His father, Amos, raised him to be in awe of God and to love the Old Testament Law. Like many figures of the Old Testament, he was married (in his case, to a “pious prophetess” – although we don’t know her name). Together, they had a son, Jashub.

During his ministry to the people, there was an increasing threat of the Assyrians, “the master of the East”. Now, when some people hear this phrase, their minds go immediately to the threat of military strikes. Yet, the danger was actually the distortion of their faith.

The people of Judah were becoming more spiritually corrupted every day due to the influence of foreign cults. This caused the people of God to drift further and further away from His Law. Instead of worshipping God, people would try to ‘solve their problems’ by consulting magic, superstitious practices and necromancy (i.e. magic involving those who ‘communicate with the dead’). In response to these practices, God spoke through Isaiah to His people: “*With their lips they do honour Me, but have removed their heart far from Me.*” (Is. 29:13) Of course, these words also apply to people in today’s world who don’t “walk the talk” when it comes to faith - from those who are “Christian” in name only to those who “act pious” but judge people constantly. This warning is one we should all heed, especially now that Holy Week is coming up.

According to the *OrthodoxWiki* article on the Prophet,

Isaiah left behind him a book of prophecy in which he denounces the Jews for their unfaithfulness to the God of their Fathers. He predicted the captivity of the Jews and their return from captivity during the time of the emperor Cyrus, the destruction and renewal of Jerusalem and of the Temple. Together with this he predicts the historical fate also of the other nations bordering the Jews. But what is most important of all for us, the Prophet Isaiah with particular clarity and detail prophesies about the coming of the Messiah, Christ the Saviour. The prophet names the Messiah as God and Man, teacher of all the nations, founder of the Kingdom of peace and love....

The holy Prophet Isaiah had also a gift of wonderworking. And so, when during the time of a siege of Jerusalem by enemies the besieged had become exhausted with thirst, he by his prayer drew out from beneath Mount Sion a spring of water, which was called Siloam, i.e. "sent from God." It was to this spring afterwards that the Savior sent the man blind from birth to wash, and He restored his sight. By the prayer of the Prophet Isaiah, the Lord prolonged the life of Hezekiah for 15 years. (www.orthodoxwiki.org/Isaiah)

As he proclaimed the Good News of the coming of the Messiah with such accuracy, he is known by some as “the fifth evangelist”. He prophesied for about 60 years, during the reigns of Kings Joatham, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Manessah. It is during this last king's reign that Isaiah died a martyr’s death. By order of Manessah, Isaiah was sawn through a wood-saw.

Isaiah gave up his life for God, whom he loved with all his being. He was initially buried close to the Pool of Siloam (the same spring mentioned above and one that we hear about in the New Testament). During Byzantine times, Emperor Theodosius the

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Younger moved his relics to Constantinople (to the Church of St. Lawrence in Vlachernae). Today, some of his relics are preserved at Chiliandari Monastery in Mount Athos.

He is referred to in every Matins, as "Ode 5" of the *Canon* is dedicated to him. To find out about the events which occurred during his life, one needs to consult the 4th Book of Kings and 2nd Chronicles. His liturgical feastday is on May 9th.

Of course, Isaiah was "God's mouthpiece" - as all prophets are. He served God and thus helped show the people of God who was to come - especially the Messiah, the Virgin Mother and the Voice in the wilderness. So before the Messiah, let's talk about the...

Supporting Cast: Who does Isaiah prophecy about (other than Christ)

For the Church, he is commemorated every Tuesday and many times throughout the year. Christ said of him that "among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than" him. As "the greatest of the prophets", **St. John the Baptist and Forerunner** is the person who pointed to Christ and said, "behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." Although alive seven centuries before him, Isaiah details his life in the 40th chapter of his book (verses 1-5):

"Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" says your God. "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins." The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

If the contemporaries of Jesus' time couldn't pick up the reference to Isaiah's prophecy, St. John the Baptist made sure to remind them. We hear him answer the Jewish authorities in the Gospel of John that he is, indeed, this "voice of one crying in the wilderness." As Isaiah was "God's mouthpiece", so too John acted as the Forerunner: he made very sure to say he wasn't the Messiah. Yet, John's contemporaries who were part of the "religious elite" did not accept him as the Forerunner of the Messiah. He was merely a "person in the desert". Their pride blinded their eyes to the Truth. This is why we all need to *listen to the Scriptures* and not make our own exegesis and interpretations.

Now, although it is a short prophecy of Isaiah referring to the Forerunner and Baptist, it should have been a clue as to who he was in the plan of salvation. Then again, the Scribes and Pharisees (along with the "regular folk" during the time of Christ) didn't pick up on the references to a greater figure in the Church: **the Theotokos**.

If we are ready to find Christ our King in the pages of *Isaiah*, it's only natural that we should expect to find our Lady, the Ever-Virgin Mary. We hear of the extraordinary birth of her Son with Isaiah's words, "Before she travails in labor to give birth, before

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the pain of birth pangs comes on, she escapes it and bears a male” (66:7). Church fathers, like St. John of Damascus, remind us that “He who was of the Father, yet without mother, was born of a woman without a father’s cooperation...For, as pleasure did not precede it, pain did not follow it”. In the Church’s rich liturgical tradition, we find the various hymns about the Virgin Mary (or “Theotokia”) in Vespers speaking of this miracle and the Theotokos’ place in the Plan of Salvation. For example, several Vespereal Hymns speak of the Theotokos and this miracle detailed in Isaiah:

“Who will not call you blessed, All-holy Virgin? Who will not hymn your child-birth without labour? For the only-begotten Son, who shone from the Father beyond time, came forth from you, pure Maiden, ineffably incarnate.” (Plagal 2nd Tone)

“You were known as a Mother beyond nature, O Mother of God; you remained a Virgin beyond reason and understanding; no tongue can expound the marvel of your child-bearing; for while your conceiving, Pure One, was wondrous, the manner of your bearing child cannot be comprehended, for wherever God wills the order of nature is overthrown.” (Grave Tone)

On a personal note, this is why I don't like seeing in the various "Jesus movies" the Panagia having birth pains. If I could say anything to them, I'd say, "guys, stop with the elaborate scenes of how Panagia 'couldn't wait to make it to the stable'... she didn't have them - the Bible says so! So, please stop feeding the public false information." But again, I digress.

These are just two examples of the Church rightly preaching the Truth of the Bible. Other denominations – both Christian and non-Christian – would have people believe that the Virgin Mary is a “random figure” that was not preached about before the time of Christ. Her role in the plan of salvation, however, is one that very important. This importance can be seen clearer and more pronounced, however, when we discuss the next prophecy: the Incarnation of the Logos.

A little Child, God before the ages: About Christ’s Incarnation

Christmas is such an important feastday in the Church. Without Christmas, we have no Pascha. Christ was manifest in the flesh as a human being, not as a “ghost” or other things early Christian heretics asserted. We see His presence in Isaiah 7:14-16, as we hear of His conception and birth in the flesh:

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel. Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.”

The Virgin conceiving and bearing a Son we see in the person of the Theotokos, as mentioned above. The prophecy mentioned above is mentioned in the Doxastikon (one of the last hymns) of Matins two Sundays before Christmas.

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Indeed, the name “Emmanuel” is mentioned many times as we approach Christmas to remind us of this very prophecy. “Emmanuel”, of course, means “God with us”. The name was God’s way of revealing so plainly and simply the miracle of the Incarnation to His people. The name itself pointed to the fact the Messiah would not merely be a good moral teacher or prophet – He would be **quite literally ‘God with us’**.

Various Church fathers have dealt with this part of Scripture. Here are just two fathers' comments about the Virgin birth:

"... He says, 'the Lord will give, not to you [singular], but to you [plural] a sign. To you - who are these, then? The members of the house of David. For it is there that the sign has germinated. What then is the sign? [The Virgin Birth].... If she were not a virgin, it would not have been a sign. For the sign has to depart from the common order, to go outside the confines of the normal course of nature, to be unusual and unexpected to such a degree that anyone who sees it or hears it, recognizes its [extraordinary] character.... The Prophet has said not, 'behold a virgin' but 'Behold the Virgin', employing the word 'behold' with the dignity that befits the Prophet." (St. John Chrysostom)

Now... The reason that St. John Chrysostom gave that explanation of the “sign”, is the fact that the Hebrew version we have today (the Masoretic text) does not say “Behold the Virgin” but “Behold the young lady”. The text which says “behold the Virgin” is the Greek translation, the Septuagint. Some people use the Hebrew text to discard the fact that it was a Virgin who gave birth and they claim it was simple a “young lady”. To which Chrysostom explains: if it was just a young lady it would not have been a miracle (a sign) that Isaiah is talking about.

From Eusebius of Caesaria (another early Ecclesiastical author), we hear that:

"... if our Saviour and Lord took the name 'Jesus' but not 'Emmanuel' when He was born from the virgin according to the prophecy, how would He have proved the saying true if it had said that '*they will call* His name Immanuel'? Therefore, this is not how it is written; for not all men were going to call Him by this designation. The prophetic word offers accurately, '*You shall call.*' For you, O house of David, for whose sake this is foretold, received a token of salvation at the time... 'Call Him Immanuel' and ascribe to Him the responsibility for your freedom from your enemies, to Him (that is) who will at some time be born from a virgin but who is already God and is 'with us'...." (Eusebius of Caesaria)

Also, Chrysostom explains the fact that Christ was named Jesus as it was foretold by the angel Gabriel, and not “Emmanuel” as it was prophesized by Isaiah, because Isaiah said, “*they shall call Him Emmanuel*” – i.e. the people shall call Him Emmanuel, because every time they watch Jesus performing a miracle they felt that God (Emmanuel) was among them.

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The Creed speaks to the miracle of the Incarnation, something people must believe in order to be called true Orthodox Christians: “Light from Light, True God of True God, begotten, not made, of one essence with the Father... Who for us and for our salvation came down from Heaven and was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and was made man.” Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Logos, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Yet, He is also fully man, which is why He was born of the Virgin - Perfect God and Perfect Man.

The people of his time were blessed to have Isaiah speaking these words, because only in this way could they be prepared for such a drastic reality. Who could imagine of a virgin giving birth? Could they be ready to accept this Messiah? The people of Christ’s time should have studied the Scriptures a bit more closely...but I digress.

Isaiah continues with more prophetic teachings about the Incarnate Christ:

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. His name will be called the Angel of Great Counsel, for I shall bring peace upon the rulers, peace and health by Him.” (9:5-6)

This is actually a hymn we hear during Great Compline, verses that are chanted to remind us that, “**God is with us, know this you nations and be submissive, for God is with us**”. Obedience to God is something we tend to forget, but is so central in our worship of Him. How can we worship God truly if we do not remember we are His children – but also faithful servants to the King of Kings?

Later on, we hear of the “Root of Jesse”. The prophecy reads as follows:

“There shall come forth a rod from the root of Jesse, and a flower shall grow out of his root. The Spirit of God shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and godliness.... It shall come to pass in that day that there shall be a Root of Jesse who shall arise to rule nations. The Gentiles shall hope in Him, and His resting place shall be honourable.” (11:1-2, 10)

Orthodox Christians hear of this prophecy during Matins preceding and during the Feast of Christmas (specifically, the *katavasiae*): “Rod out of Jesse’s root, and flower that blossomed from his stem, O Christ, you have sprung from the Virgin... you have taken flesh from her who knew not wedlock.... Glory to your power, O Lord!”

The coming of the Messiah would not merely be for the “people of God” in the Old Testament, however. Isaiah prepares his people to realize that the Messiah – indeed, salvation – is not a cultural phenomenon. Salvation is for all of humanity who was born. The human race is to find reconciliation with the Creator, not those who are of a certain bloodline. He says in the 9th chapter: “O country of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea and rest dwelling along the seacoast and parts of Judea and the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, a people who walk in darkness behold a great light; and you who dwell in the country of the shadow of death, upon you a light will shine!” (9:1)

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Of course, Isaiah does not merely stop here with his prophecies about the Messiah. He continues by...

Illuminating those in darkness: The Life of Christ

Early in the book of Isaiah, we hear of him seeing a vision in the year that King Uzziah died. The king was a great sinner – so much so that the gift of prophecy had ceased for a time because of it. That shows that if we move away from God, He will not “chase after us and make us believe.” Rather, He will be waiting for us when we decide to turn back and repent.

After the king’s death, Isaiah “saw the Lord on a throne, high and lifted up. The house was full of His glory.” (6:1) This entire scene is filled with liturgical symbolism. It says Seraphim (one of the orders of Angels) cried out, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (6:3) As mentioned before, it is a direct reference to the “Victory Hymn” of the Divine Liturgy we celebrate every Sunday and feast – specifically, before the Priest says, “Take, eat, this is My Body....” For those wondering, the word *Sabbaoth* literally means, “army” or “host”. Therefore, “Lord Sabbaoth” means that God is the Lord and Commander of the Heavenly Host of Angels.

Yet, this revelation of God’s glory is also depicted in another *katavasia* of the Feast of the Meeting of our Lord (when Jesus was presented in the Temple as a 40-day infant):

“Isaiah once symbolically saw God seated on an elevated throne, with a host of glorious Angels standing with Him. He cried out, “Woe is me, I am lost! With my eyes I have foreseen incarnate God and He is the Master of never-setting light and peace.” (Ode 5)

As Isaiah said this, he witnessed a foretaste of Holy Communion: “one of the Seraphim had a live coal in his hands... which he took with tongs from the Altar. He touched my mouth and said, ‘Behold, this has touched your lips. Your lawlessness is taken away and your sin is cleansed.’” Even though Isaiah had “unclean lips” (that is, he was a sinner), he still was blessed by God to witness His glory. The same words of the Seraphim are repeated by the Priest every time he receives Holy Communion. Maybe it would be a good idea for us to say the same thing and recount how Isaiah prepared his people for a more intimate and real communion with God – not merely one of prayer from afar. This was also revealed in the New Testament when Simeon the Righteous held Christ in his arms on the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord. He experienced what Isaiah did during this vision: communion with God that was unheard of.

As well, we hear of the Lord’s baptism prefigured in his book with the allusions to water and “becoming clean”. Prophecies associated with the Feast of Theophany say:

- “Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean. Put away evil from your souls before my eyes.” (1:16)
- This prophecy is also mentioned when we bless the waters at every baptism and on Holy Theophany, reminding us that the purpose of Holy Water is to become holy – and it’s not a ‘get out of jail free’ card, and that simply drinking it is enough to make us holy.

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- “You will draw water with gladness from the wells of salvation.” (12:3)
- “Be glad, you thirst desert, and rejoice exceedingly and let the desert blossom as a lily. The desert places of the Jordan shall blossom abundantly and rejoice exceedingly.... [Behold our God] will come and save us. Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will hear. Then the lame will leap like a deer and the tongue of stammerers will speak clearly, because water has broken out in the desert and a channel in a thirsty land. And the waterless land will become pools and there will be a spring of water for the thirsty land. There will be joy of birds there, folds for flocks and reed beds and pools. And there will be a pure way there, and it will be called a holy way, and no one unclean may pass along it. There will be no unclean way there. But the scattered will walk upon it and not go astray.” (35:1-2, 4b-8)
- “All who are thirsty, go to the water....For as rain comes down, or snow from heaven, and does not return until it saturates the earth, and it brings forth and produces and gives seed to the sower and bread for food, so shall My word be, whatever proceeds from My mouth” (55:1, 10-11)

These prophecies not only speak of Holy Theophany – where God revealed Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – but also to the miracles that would follow the event at the Jordan. People would be cured of illnesses, both physical and spiritual. God was indeed with His people – but *joyful sorrow* would soon creep into the words of Isaiah.

A Lamb led to the slaughter: Passion and Resurrection

While many people would suspect a Person who would bring back the feeling of “the land of milk and honey” to Israel would be exalted, things were not so simple. Indeed, Christ brings with Him peace, forgiveness and love – but not everyone accepts the Gift of Grace. The sense of *χαρμολύπη* (joyful sorrow) is felt throughout the book. This is why Isaiah is so often quoted throughout Great Lent and Holy Week. He prepared the people of God for something so great, everyone would be blind to see it coming: the death of the Messiah promised by God.

The hymns of Holy Week are too many to begin to assign them to Isaiah’s prophecies. From the verses of the “Alleluia” (26:9-15) to the hymn “Christ is risen”, Isaiah paints a remarkable picture of Jesus in the Old Testament. Let’s begin with the Passion of our Lord.

According to Philip Kariatlis, Associate Lecturer at St. Andrew’s Greek Orthodox Theological College in Australia,

“Is 50:4-9 makes explicit the role of the Suffering Servant of God as the one who would lead the people of Israel out of exile and back to the Father's home. He could do this because the 'Lord God' had given him "the tongue of a teacher" (Is 50:4), and therefore could claim to be a genuine spokesperson of God, whose words could sustain the weary ones. That he was the faithful servant of God is further outlined in the next verse where Isaiah reveals that the Suffering Servant of God would both listen and obey the Lord God even in the face of scourging and mocking:

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The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting (Is 50:5-6).

The extent of the servant's attentiveness to the will of God necessarily means affliction, hostile opposition from the world, and ultimately death to which the Suffering Servant remains uncompromisingly committed and steadfast. Yet the Suffering Servant's willingness to suffer abuse is equalled with God's steadfast action to help and ultimately vindicate him. Again this passage was interpreted by the early Christian Church as a prophecy fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

... [Later on in] Isaiah, (Is 52:13-53:12) [he] affirms that in suffering, would the servant of God be glorified, exalted and lifted up. The image of the honoured servant is made even more powerful by the extensive description of suffering and humiliation presented in these verses which signify that the glory of God's servant is to be situated in his suffering. It is precisely for this reason that, during His Passion, Christ is depicted as a bridegroom by the Eastern Orthodox Church. Whereas the image of a bridegroom is naturally identified with the glorious crowning of a man's life, in the case of Christ it is associated with his suffering to show precisely that it is through suffering that Jesus Christ is glorified.

(http://www.greekorthodox.org.au/general/resources/publications/article/details.php?page=187&article_id=30)

If one takes chapter 53 of Isaiah and reads it, they could easily mistake it for a gospel passage on Holy Thursday night. I don't believe any commentary is necessary to describe his words, so here they are – unedited:

Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

² *For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.*

³ *He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.*

⁴ *Surely He has borne our grief and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.*

⁵ *But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.*

⁶ *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

⁷ *He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.*

⁸ *He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.*

⁹ *And they made His grave with the wicked— But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.*

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¹⁰ *Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.*

¹¹ *He shall see the labor of His soul and be satisfied.*

By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.

¹² *Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.*

Earlier in the book, in chapter 50, we heard about the Lord offering Himself as a sacrifice for the salvation of others: “I gave My back to those who struck *Me*, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.” (v. 6)

Both passages detail for us the people’s unbelief, the Lord’s torture and wounds for our sins, His silence before His accusers, His death, His entombment... and His complete innocence (even though He suffered as a criminal). This passage from Isaiah shows that, although Christ carried His cross to Golgotha (for a time, with the help of Simon of Cyrene, yes), the greater Cross Christ carried on that day was the Extreme Humility. Jesus Christ is the God-Man, showed so eloquently by Isaiah; yet, He humbled Himself and took human flesh, suffered as we did and then was crucified by us! He carried with Him all of our sins – the sins of every human being from Adam and Eve until the end of the age at the Second Coming. This is the greatest of burdens – yet, it was nothing for the God-Man Christ. In the end, the blood of the Messiah was spilled so that we could have eternal life and great mercy.

Isaiah, though, does not stop here with His detailing the God-Man. No! There is Life after death! There is Resurrection! Isaiah speaks of the Descent into Hades in chapter 45, where He says, “My Anointed...will go before you and level mountains; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and shatter the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness and I shall open unseen secret things to you, so you may know I, the Lord God, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel.” (v.1-3)

Isaiah becomes joyful as he foresees the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We sing the hymn, “O shine, do shine, O New Jerusalem! For your light is come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. Behold, darkness and gloom shall cover the earth upon the nations but the Lord will shine on you; and His glory shall be seen upon you. Kings shall come to your light and the Gentiles to your brightness.” (60:1-3) Even from the Cross on Golgotha, we can see that the world was suffering – but the Lord was victorious over death. After His descent to Hades, He crushed the bars of the eternal prison that held fast those imprisoned (as we hear in a *katavasia* of Pascha). The glory of the Resurrected Saviour is an important message taken from *Isaiah*, since in the Resurrection do we find hope and consolation. Only by seeing the Risen Lord – and that the Church is the “New Jerusalem” Isaiah speaks of – do we fully understand the pages of this important book.

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Holy One of Israel: Conclusion

We see the Prophet Isaiah so clearly throughout the life of Christ. The promise that he gives of humanity “turning their swords into plows and their spears into pruning hooks, [with] nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore,” can only be fulfilled when the Holy One of Israel, Jesus Christ, comes again “to judge the living and the dead, and His Kingdom will have no end”. Until then, Isaiah sees wars and cosmic disturbances disrupting this heavenly peace that is wanted by so many people.

Yet, even surpassing this great promise of eternal peace is the promise of Eternal Life and the Final Day – η έσχατη ημέρα. In eternal life, everything will take new shape, everything will have a new meaning. “For behold, the Lord shall come like a fire, and His chariots like a sudden blast of wind...” (66:15) The Lord says that, “All flesh will worship Me in Jerusalem.” (66:22-23), meaning both Jews and Gentiles will come together to glorify Him.

As all of us walk towards the end of Great Lent, enter Holy Week and await the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can learn much from the example of Isaiah and his writings. His writings are read for a reason during Lent: he truly brings to life the sentiments of χαρμολύπη – joyful sorrow – for his readers. In the spirit of this χαρμολύπη, I would like to close with some advice he gives all of us as Pascha comes closer (specifically, selections from chapter 58):

“Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins. ² For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God... ³ ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ ⁴ ‘Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. ⁴ Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. ⁵ Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? ⁶ ‘Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? ⁸ Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. ‘If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, ¹⁰ and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. ¹¹ The LORD will guide you always... You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

Isaiah and Christ: The Prophet meets the Suffering Servant

The Holy One of Israel is Jesus Christ. His presence is undeniable in the Old Testament. His incarnation, life death and resurrection are true, historical facts found in the New Testament. His might and presence in the Church continue to this day – and will continue unto the ages of ages. The question for all of us is *do we want His presence to guide our lives?* This is the decision all of us must make – as Orthodox, as Christians, as human beings.

As for Me,” says the LORD, “this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants,” says the LORD, “from this time and forevermore.”
(Isaiah 59:21)

Καλή Ανάσταση!