

It's that time of year again. Men and some women are disappearing into the woods real early in the morning or in the late afternoon hours, spending hours standing or sitting in a tree stand, keeping their eyes peeled for the elusive buck. I am not a hunter, but in talking to some veteran Michigan hunters, I am told that the real hunters are out in October and early November. When I inquired what was meant by that, I was told that real hunting involves a bow and an arrow. Anyone they tell me can hit a buck with a gun. But it takes real skill to hit a buck with an arrow. Usually an arrow shot properly spells the end of a buck. You follow a blood trail after the shot, and usually your prize awaits you. But today, I would like to take you out of the woods, and away from deer hunting. However, I do want you to study some of the equipment. Particularly an arrow that needs to be in everyone's quiver. This arrow spells life, happiness, and joy to all who carry it. Let's pull back the string of God's Word today, and listen to "An Arrow shot heard round the World!"

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to eavesdrop in on a conversation where God the Father is speaking to God the Son? Wouldn't it be interesting sometime to be a fly on the wall when members of the Holy Trinity sat down and discussed things together? Well, Isaiah had that opportunity. And in our text for this morning, the prophet writing by inspiration records a conversation between God the Father and God the Son.

Did you notice whom this reading is addressed to? Whom is this Servant talking to? He's talking to you, and he's talking to me. He says, "Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations." Isaiah wrote to the Israelites, but here, his audience is much greater. It includes people who live far away from Israel, and it includes people who are separated from biblical times by thousands of years. Jesus is saying here, This message is for you islands, you people in the United States in the year 2011. This message is for you distant nations, you people in China and southeast Asia.

The servant Jesus then reminds us that he was God's choice to save the world even before he was born. Remember when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary? When people these days have babies, they spend literally hours and days trying to come up with the perfect name for their new child. Well, Mary didn't have to worry about that. Gabriel told Mary what God was going to name her baby even before he was born. The child's name would be Jesus – Why? Because the name Jesus means Savior, and that was God's way of letting the world know that this child was his choice to save the world from sin.

Jesus tells us that his mouth would be like a sharpened sword. "He made my mouth like sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me." The words of Jesus cut deeply into the hearts of people. He exposed their problem of sin and warned of the judgment to come. He pleaded with people to come to him and put their trust in him for salvation instead of themselves. We never grow tired of hearing and reading the words of Jesus because they change our lives. "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." When we get weary and worn from all the problems of this life then Jesus' words lift us up as he tells us in John 14, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going to prepare a place for you...I will come back and take you to be with me..." The words of Jesus cut into our hearts and lead us to confess our sin before him. We hear John the Baptist telling us this morning, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Think of all the times the words of Jesus have been used in your life to change you and bring you close to him.

Now let's spend some time thinking about this name for Jesus, this name given here, this name about a polished arrow in the hand of our heavenly Father. "He made me a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver." A "*polished arrow*" is the silver bullet for make-believe enemies like werewolves and vampires in *Twilight*, or real enemies like sin, death and hell. Jesus came into the world to take out the prey of sin, death and hell. Further, Jesus was "*concealed*" like an arrow in God's "*quiver*." God protected His **Messiah** from cruel King Herod killing all the baby boys in Bethlehem. God warned the Magi in a dream to go back home another way. Another angel told Joseph to flee with the Child and His mother to Egypt, and then to return again. God protected His Son for the sake of our salvation. God had a plan.

Think again of how much work ancient people put into making arrows that were straight, attaching feathers, and attaching pieces of sharp flint as points on the arrow. The English were successful with their long bows because they had access to a good source of arrows that flew straight and true.

Every person born into this world believes with all their heart they can make their own arrows to take aim at their problem of sin and make it go away. Remember the man who came to Jesus at night. His name was Nicodemus. He believed in his heart of hearts that he could make the right arrows to take aim at his problem of sin and make it go away. He wanted to save himself by meticulously following Old Testament laws and extra laws set down by the rabbis. Jesus then told him he needed to be born again to be saved. At first Nicodemus laughed at this do. But then he heard Jesus say so simply and so clearly, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." Then Jesus went on to say, "God so loved the world..." Instead of making our own arrows that never hit the mark, Jesus is telling us this morning, he is the polished arrow that can hit the mark perfectly and save us completely.

How good was Jesus at taking aim and destroying your problem of sin? Isaiah 53:6 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." The prophet Isaiah says "the punishment that brought us peace was upon him." His payment for our sin was perfect. When he cried from the cross, "It is finished" he was announcing to the whole world that he was the polished arrow in the hands of the Father. He hit the mark perfectly.

Years ago, I remember seeing my first Robin Hood movie. Maybe, you remember that scene where there is an archery contest. It appears Robin Hood is about to lose the match when one of the sheriff's top archers lands the arrow in the middle of the target. Then Robin Hood shot an arrow that also went into the center of the target and split the other arrow. I was thinking to myself at the time that no one could ever do that. It was impossible. But you know what. A perfect and holy God expects every human being to hit the mark perfectly, to split that arrow every time in order to be saved. In Romans 3 the Lord defines sin as falling short of the mark, God's mark of perfection. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." But then Jesus hit the mark perfectly. His payment for sin was perfect. He lived a perfect life that is now credited to your account. The Father raised Jesus from the dead to prove to you the polished arrow in his hand did the job perfectly for you.

How will people respond to this amazing good news that Jesus has done it all to rescue us? Listen to what the Messiah tells us, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet, what is due me is in the Lord's hand and my reward is with my God."

Jesus suffered when people turned up their noses at what he had to offer them. They did not want to give up their hope of shooting their crooked arrows to make themselves acceptable to God. They did not want Jesus to do the job for them. The great gospel chapter of Isaiah 53 begins with these words “Who believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed.” Jesus often spent nights in prayer to his dear heavenly Father, because he was exhausted from all the people who rejected him. You get a sense of how low Jesus felt on Maunday Thursday. After 3 years of preaching and doing dazzling miracles, his last 11 followers had abandoned him. A 12th had betrayed him. And this was after Jesus pleaded with his Father, “If it’s possible, please take this cup from me. But, Heavenly Father, if this is what you need me to do, then I will do it.” And how much of a failure did Jesus look like the next morning, when he was crucified in public? It did look like Jesus had spent his strength in vain and for nothing. But Jesus, trustingly put his life and his difficult days into the hands of the heavenly Father, trusting that there would be some rewards from his labor for us.

And sometimes that’s how we are going to feel also. We feel like failures when we struggle against a sin and think we have it beaten, only to find ourselves slipping right back into it a little while later. Maybe you feel like a failure when you are thinking back to a chance that you had to open up your mouth and make a difference in someone’s spiritual life, but you failed...the words you could have said came to your mind long after the conversation was over. But you know what? You have a Savior who can identify with you. Jesus went through the same temptations that plague you, except Jesus was without sin. And Jesus told us that it was going to be this way. He said, “if they persecuted me, you better believe that they are going to persecute you.” Which wouldn’t be very comforting except that Jesus also said, “but take heart, I have overcome the world.” You see, the Servant would appear to be a failure, but he wasn’t. And sometimes our efforts are going to seem to fail. But you can’t be a failure if you are in Christ. Because Jesus’ work was really magnificent and impressive. When you are with Jesus, he forgives your failures and he promises to bless your efforts to struggle against sin, your efforts to live a Christian life, and your efforts to be a Christian light.

What happens when some people reject Jesus as the only polished arrow who came save them? The Lord takes this message to other people so they have an opportunity to listen and believe. The Lord says, “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” Isaiah is rightly called the Fifth Gospel, because it not only speaks clearly of Jesus the one to save us, it also lets us know that God in his mercy will reach people in all the world with this message of how Jesus has rescued us. Even as I speak, there are people who are laying down their crooked arrows and crooked ideas about saving themselves by their false religions. They are coming to Jesus from distant lands. I recently heard how people in China with ample access to smart phones are able to download the Bible read in their own language. Our own Wisconsin Synod continues to supply Bible correspondence courses in Pakistan. Since 2006, more than 25,000 people have been enrolled in Bible correspondence courses in Pakistan. This in a country that is 97% Muslim. In India Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries serves 8000 souls in a country where only 2.6% are Christians. Yes, there are people in these distant lands that are giving up their crooked and twisted ideas of saving themselves. They are seeing Jesus as this perfect Savior, this polished arrow in the hand of our heavenly Father. May this polished arrow strike more hearts and lives. May the Lord use us as bows in order to shoot this arrow to the islands and distant lands of our world. Amen.