

You must speak these lines from the depth of your own conviction that God is indeed a God of mercy and redemption!

Though shepherds live a hard and rugged life, their lambs and sheep survive only because of their care and even tenderness.

Isaiah = Ī-ZAY-uh

The Lord's proud voice introduces the servant. Speak these lines as a blessing that will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

He won't be like the prophets of old who often made a spectacle of themselves.

His ministry will incarnate gentleness and compassion. "Reed" and "wick" are metaphors for the bruised and faint-hearted among us.

Note the shift to speaking to the servant rather than about him. Imagine speaking these encouraging words to a young person in need of reassurance.

notable person of Israel, such as Jeremiah or another prophet, perhaps Isaiah himself. The servant is fulfilling his mission to restore the covenant with God and return the exiled people to their homeland. His characteristic attitude is humility and kindness; he will be valiant in time of trial and will suffer, and the tools of his craft will be those of peace, not war. He is king, priest, and prophet. As a king, he will redefine the law and establish "justice," which is spelled "salvation," from God. As priest, he will fulfill his mission by being the guarantee of the covenant; as prophet, he will communi-

~~Fear not to cry out
and say to the cities of Judah:
Here is your God!
Here comes with power
the Lord God,
who rules by his strong arm;
here is his reward with him,
his recompense before him.
Like a shepherd he feeds his flock;
in his arms he gathers the lambs,
carrying them in his bosom,
and leading the ewes with care.~~

Or:

READING I Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

Thus says the LORD:

**Here is my servant whom I uphold,
my chosen one with whom I am pleased,
upon whom I have put my spirit;
he shall bring forth justice to the nations,
not crying out, not shouting,
not making his voice heard in the street.
A bruised reed he shall not break,
and a smoldering wick he shall not quench,
until he establishes justice on the earth;
the coastlands will wait for his teaching.**

**I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice,
I have grasped you by the hand; »**

cate God's will and be the "light of the nations." His mission, enlivened by the Spirit, is to free the human being from every evil, even to the innermost part of our humanity. The physically and spiritually blind will recover their sight to resume the right path to true life and dignity; prisoners will regain the freedom of the redeemed and beloved children of God.

READING II

Titus. The first portion of this reading constitutes the heart of the letter to Titus. It may be a confession of faith used in the Baptismal lit-

urgy of the early Church. It contains the main themes of Christian faith and morality—moderation, justice, honesty, piety, hope. The second portion sings of God's saving love through Jesus. Baptism "regenerates and renews" the lives of believers. The term *justified* means "put on the right track," conforming to the divine plan to transform the children into heirs of eternal life and happiness. Our Savior's goodness and his love for all people definitively manifested itself in Jesus, who gave his life for us. That plan of salvation is accomplished through Baptism, by which God regenerates

It is God's grace working through the servant that will cause such transformative effects.

For meditation and context:

**I formed you, and set you
as a covenant of the people,
a light for the nations,
to open the eyes of the blind,
to bring out prisoners from confinement,
and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.**

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 104:1b-2, 3-4, 24-25, 27-28, 29-30 (1)

R. O bless the Lord, my soul.

O LORD, my God, you are great indeed!
You are clothed with majesty and glory,
robed in light as with a cloak.
You have spread out the heavens like
a tent-cloth.

You have constructed your palace upon
the waters.

You make the clouds your chariot;
you travel on the wings of the wind.
You make the winds your messengers,
and flaming fire your ministers.

How manifold are your works, O LORD!
In wisdom you have wrought them all—
the earth is full of your creatures;
the sea also, great and wide,
in which are schools without number
of living things both small and great.

They look to you to give them food in
due time.

When you give it to them, they gather it;
when you open your hand, they are filled
with good things.

If you take away their breath, they perish
and return to the dust.

When you send forth your spirit,
they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth.

Or:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10 (11b)

For meditation and context:

R. The Lord will bless his people with peace.

Give to the LORD, you sons of God,
give to the LORD glory and praise,
give to the LORD the glory due his name;
adore the LORD in holy attire.

The voice of the LORD is over the waters,
the LORD, over vast waters.

The voice of the LORD is mighty;
the voice of the LORD is majestic.

The God of glory thunders,
and in his temple all say, "Glory!"
The LORD is enthroned above the flood;
the LORD is enthroned as king forever.

us and makes us daughters and sons through the Spirit. Jesus' baptism is the sign and the first step of Christian Baptism.

Acts. In his speech to Cornelius, Peter clarifies that Jesus went about doing good and healing those oppressed by the devil, because God was with him. Through him God has proclaimed peace, the *šalôm* (total well-being) that guarantees that every person will receive what is needed to live a full life. We who share Baptism into Christ's death, the immersion into the floodwaters of death, are commissioned to complement

Christ's service of bringing justice and peace to the earth.

GOSPEL

The baptism of Jesus puts the finishing touch on the Christmas mystery and reminds us of our own Baptism. Just before creation, the Spirit of God hovered over the waters of chaos. After the creation of man and woman, the sacred author tells about the abundance of water: "In Eden was born a river that watered the garden and then divided into four arms" (Genesis 2:10). God, full of goodness, beauty, power, and

knowledge, lavished his goodness on earth and fertilized it with water. We might listen for God's voice in this creation scene in paradise, addressed to the "image and likeness": "You are my son, you, my daughter, my favorites; in you I am pleased." In Genesis the brand new human being is presented in the midst of the waters of paradise.

When the feet of Jesus of Nazareth touched the waters of the Jordan River so the Son of God might receive the baptism of conversion, those waters did not stop, as they did when Israel, freed from slavery,

Titus = TĪ-tuhs

Beloved = bee-LUHV-uhd

Let the first word set your tone.

The "grace of God" appeared in Christ Jesus.

blessed = BLES-uhd

Be sure to distinguish the sinful ways and the virtues enumerated here. Each is distinct.

Our "blessed hope" is the "appearance" of Christ at his second coming.

Jesus' willing sacrifice is remembered here.

Renew your energy for this section that glows with gratitude.

This point requires extra emphasis: we were saved because of God's "mercy," not because we merited it.

These final lines encapsulate an entire theology of salvation. Through Baptism we received the Spirit and received justification and the promise of eternal life! Slowly progress from one concept to the next.

Remember that Peter is in the home of a Gentile where he has experienced a powerful and unexpected manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

crossed the Jordan, the boundary to the Promised Land (Joshua 3:16). At his birth in the flesh, Jesus of Nazareth had crossed another boundary, that which separates the divine from the human, heaven from earth. At the Jordan thirty years later, the Son of God stood in line with sinners, awaiting the ritual that signified a change of life. He who came to take away the sin of the world knew why he was standing in that line; his plan was not to redeem humankind from a distance, but rather to mingle, to be identified with sinners, "becoming like men, becoming obedient

READING II Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–7

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to Titus

Beloved:

The grace of God has appeared, saving all
and training us to reject godless ways
and worldly desires
and to live temperately, justly and devoutly in this age,
as we await the blessed hope,
the appearance of the glory of our great God
and savior Jesus Christ,
who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness
and to cleanse for himself a people as his own,
eager to do what is good.

When the kindness and generous love
of God our savior appeared,
not because of any righteous deeds we had done
but because of his mercy,
he saved us through the bath of rebirth
and renewal by the Holy Spirit,
whom he richly poured out on us
through Jesus Christ our savior,
so that we might be justified by his grace
and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Or:

READING II Acts 10:34–38

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Peter proceeded to speak to those gathered
in the house of Cornelius, saying:
"In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. >>

unto death" (Philippians 2:7–8). That is why the waters of the Jordan continued their course and carried with them the mystery of what had just happened: the baptism of God's Son, which for the moment went unrecognized by his brothers and sisters. At that time, nobody on the bank of the Jordan who accompanied Jesus was aware of anything unusual, until the radiant light of the Passover—the outcome of this first baptism—revealed the meaning of what had happened at the moment of his baptism. Jesus' baptism was a Trinitarian epiphany in which the Son of God was pre-

sent to the world by the Father and the Holy Spirit with the words "You are my Son, my beloved, I delight in you," accompanied by the Spirit's hovering like a dove over the place where the Son was baptized.

We hear in the Gospel: "It happened that among the people who were being baptized, Jesus was also baptized." The presence of the people was not fortuitous; it places his baptism in the context of the Incarnation. Jesus, before taking this plunge in the River Jordan, entered the life of the common people. The Son of God, before being baptized, was incarnate like