

# THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

## LECTIONARY #21

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;  
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**.

Isaiah = I-ZAY-UH

A reading in which the Lord identifies his servant, characterizing his virtues in terms of his humility and preparedness, followed by a passage in which the Lord shifts from talking about his chosen servant in the third person ("he") to the second person ("you"), which allows you to direct your proclamation to the gathered assembly. Take advantage of this shift in pronouns.

Even stresses on the words in this line, which present a compelling image. A bruised reed is easy to break; why isn't the chosen servant breaking the reed?

Emphasize "grasped you" and "formed you."

The passage ends with images of dire things the Lord will use "you" to correct.

**READING I** The Book of Isaiah contains four poems that introduce the theme of God sending a "suffering servant," who will sacrifice his dignity and his entire self for the people's redemption. Chapter 42 begins the first of these poems. It opens by employing the Lord's voice to reveal this servant to Israel. The Lord deems this one as "chosen" because he has already pleased the Lord by all he has done. Empowered by God's spirit, the emissary has the task of bringing justice to the world. The Lord suggests that his servant's arrival will be highly anticipated, as even

the far away regions of the earth await his teaching.

From a Christian perspective, we know that the teaching that Jesus brought to the earth was not what his own people wanted to hear. They were hoping for a political figure who would rid Judea of foreign control and would finally establish Israel's reign as supreme on earth. Instead, God has quite a different mission for his chosen servant. Verses 6 and 7 of chapter 42 describe the Lord providing instructions for the one he has chosen to establish God's justice. God calls his anointed one

"a covenant of the people" and "a light for the nations." The law of the covenant that the faithful servant of God reveals to the people is one focused on mercy and compassion, as he will give sight to the blind, release to prisoners, and light to those trapped in darkness. The Suffering Servant will prove to be victorious not by his political might but by his loving justice.

**READING II** Chapter 10 of Acts witnesses Peter entering the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and there experiencing a great change of heart.

For meditation and context:

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

**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.

READING II Acts of the Apostles 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.**

Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts **uprightly**  
is **acceptable** to him.

You know the **word** that he sent to the **Israelites**  
as he proclaimed **peace** through Jesus **Christ,**

who is **Lord** of all,  
what has happened all over **Judea,**  
**beginning** in Galilee after the **baptism**  
that John preached,  
how God **anointed** Jesus of Nazareth  
with the **Holy Spirit** and **power.**

He went about doing **good**  
and healing all those oppressed by the devil,  
for **God** was **with** him."

This reading expresses ancient convictions  
of the earliest members of the faith.

"Peace," "Christ," and "Lord" express  
a unified vision of things.

Even emphasis on the words of this line.

Even emphasis here as well, characterizing  
Jesus' powers.

As a faithful Jew, entering the house of a  
Gentile would have caused Peter to stand  
apart from the Law. However, he listens to  
an angel in a vision and comes to have a new  
relationship with this foreign household.

Today's reading begins after Peter  
discerns the meaning of his vision. He dis-  
covers that "God shows no partiality" in  
bestowing his message of salvation upon  
all people. Instead of choosing people  
according to a particular nation, God finds  
acceptable the one who "fears him and  
acts uprightly." Furthermore, Peter deems  
those in Cornelius' household as "accept-

able" to God precisely because they have  
heard the word intended for the Israelites  
but which is now extended to them. Thus,  
Peter names Jesus "Lord of all."

Our portion of Peter's discourse con-  
cludes with a summary statement of all  
that Jesus had accomplished in the land of  
Judea. We are right to suggest that Peter  
sees no partiality in the ministry of Jesus as  
his good deeds went out to all who were in  
need. In a similar way, Peter has come to  
know that those who have heard the word  
must also act with impartiality. Herein lies a  
primary gift of baptism; baptism in the Lord

provides a unity that no human bias can  
divide.

**GOSPEL**

The entire liturgical season  
of Christmas might be  
thought of as a manifestation of divine  
theophany. A theophany occurs when  
God is made manifest to humankind. The  
manger scene, the celebration of Mary as  
the ark of God's coming into the world, the  
journey of the wise men to Bethlehem, and  
today, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan  
are all grand theophanies which reveal the  
depth of God's love breaking into the world.

Galilee = GAL-ih-lee

A reading that emphasizes the simple power of baptism.

Note the shift in the pronouns here, from "I" to "you," then from "you" to "me."

Slight pause between "God" and "descending."

## GOSPEL Matthew 3:13–17

### A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

**Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.**

**John tried to prevent him, saying,**  
**"I need to be baptized by you,**  
**and yet you are coming to me?"**

**Jesus said to him in reply,**  
**"Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us**  
**to fulfill all righteousness."**

**Then he allowed him.**

**After Jesus was baptized,**  
**he came up from the water and behold,**  
**the heavens were opened for him,**  
**and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove**  
**and coming upon him.**

**And a voice came from the heavens, saying,**  
**"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."**

Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism begins with John trying prevent Jesus from being baptized. Obviously, John does not believe that Jesus needs to undergo baptism as a means of repentance and conversion. Instead, he presents himself to Jesus as the one who needs to be baptized. Matthew's resolution to this dilemma is to put this event into the framework of "fulfillment," which he frequently employs throughout the Gospel as a whole. In this case, Jesus announces to John that he wishes to be baptized "to fulfill all righteousness,"

demonstrating total obedience to the will of God.

The theophany which seals the Lord's baptism is symbolized by the descent of a dove upon the head of Jesus. The Spirit provides a visible sign that accompanies the Father's voice in announcing the presence of his Son. Similar to the story of Noah sending the dove forth from the ark to testify to the dried earth (Genesis 8:6–12), so too is a dove associated with the regeneration of creation inaugurated at the Lord's Baptism. God chose Israel as his beloved

possession, and now God's relationship with Jesus reveals him as the New Covenant; in Jesus God's promise is fulfilled, and the world begins anew. From the manger to the Jordan, God's in-breaking into the world manifests a new creation. S.W.