

## Baptism Of The Lord (January 12th, 2020)

### Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7

*This was probably written near the end of the Babylonian exile. There are four sections in the book of Isaiah that are called the “suffering servant songs.” They depict in deeply touching poetry, a chosen servant who must suffer much because of fidelity to God. This reading is taken from the first of those songs. Isaiah describes the election, anointing and mission of the servant, as well as the way the servant will go about accomplishing the objectives set out by God.<sup>1</sup>*

**Thus says the Lord:** God is speaking in his heavenly courtroom. All the nations, which the preceding chapter had summoned to trial, as well as Cyrus, their conqueror, must look to this servant for God’s judgment of salvation.<sup>4</sup>

**1Here is my servant.** Authors and preachers from the first days of the Christian era have seen in Jesus the perfect image of the suffering servant. Indeed, Jesus himself quotes from the songs of Isaiah and sees himself as their fulfillment.<sup>1</sup> Although written over five hundred years before Christ was born, these prophecies are fulfilled so clearly in Jesus that Isaiah has been called the Fifth Gospel.<sup>2</sup>

**whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased,** When Jesus is baptized and thus publicly given his messianic role, the heavenly Father pronounced these same words over his Son.(Mt. 3:17) Similar words are used again at the Transfiguration as Jesus’ messianic glory shines brilliantly before the eyes of the apostles.(Luke 9:35)

**upon whom I have put my spirit;** This refers to God exerting power rather than to the third person of the Trinity. That revelation must wait until the New Testament.<sup>4</sup>

**he shall bring forth justice** To “bring forth justice” is a phrase that means that he is commissioned to carry out the divine will.

**to the nations,** This servant’s role is not limited to Israel but would become universal.<sup>3</sup>

**2not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard in the street.** The servant will work patiently and quietly to effect an interior reform on earth. He will not threaten nor condemn nor will he be a military leader.<sup>4</sup>

**3A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench,** The purpose of these images is to express the Lord’s compassion on those who are hurting and in need.<sup>13</sup> It can be viewed as a reference to the mercy of Christ.<sup>16</sup>

**4until he establishes justice** The justice of the Lord will see to it that those who are beaten down will be restored and refreshed.<sup>13</sup> **on the earth; the coastlands** These are the pagan lands of the west.<sup>16</sup> **will wait for his teaching.** This servant is being described as different from other leaders, not relying on military might nor upon treaties with other nations. He will not be a victorious warrior nor king, nor like other prophets shouting out their warnings. What the servant is will speak much louder than his words.<sup>3</sup>

6I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice, Here God is calling his servant (Jesus) to conform to His plan of salvation.<sup>5</sup> I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, This phrase evokes the image of the creation of the first man, for the verb in each instance tells of a potter carefully modeling clay.<sup>5</sup> and set you as a covenant of the people, This time the covenant is made not only with Israel, but through Israel with all nations.<sup>4</sup>

a light for the nations,

7to open the eyes of the blind, True light comes through teaching and moral reform. Without it, all men are blind.<sup>4</sup> to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness. What is stressed here is not so much physical freedom and miraculous vision as spiritual renewal.<sup>4</sup>

### Acts 10:34-38

*“What God has purified you are not to call unclean” was the message that Peter heard from a heavenly voice at just the time that messengers arrived from the Roman centurion named Cornelius who had been directed by a heavenly messenger to seek Peter out and to receive his Gospel.<sup>2</sup> This was a crucial moment for the early church. The vision of Cornelius, followed by Peter’s vision of God telling him all foods were purified, led to the acceptance of the Gentiles as members of the church.<sup>14</sup> Upon visiting the household of Cornelius and seeing their faith, Peter preached to them, beginning with the baptism of John and ending with the commission of Jesus to preach the Good News. Today’s scripture is taken from this sermon.*

34Peter proceeded to speak to those gathered in the house of Cornelius, This was Peter’s first address to non-Jews. As in all Christian preaching to Gentiles, proofs from Scripture take a secondary place.<sup>7</sup> saying: “In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. According to the Catechism, “In every nation anyone who fears (God) and does what is right is acceptable to God.”<sup>6</sup> (CCC 761) God shows no favoritism to one nation over another in the New Covenant, but all stand as equal candidates for divine blessing and sonship.<sup>8</sup>

35Rather, in every nation whoever fears This means to be in reverence and awe of the Lord.<sup>3</sup> him and acts uprightly This refers to one who practices righteousness and approaches God with a sincere heart, which Peter seems to imply could be done even if one were not a Jew.<sup>5</sup> is acceptable to him. It is hard to imagine how drastic a reversal of thought this must have been for Peter. As he says during his dream, it was “unthinkable” even to eat “unclean” foods; to consider the Gentiles as equal in God’s eyes to the Jews was even more unthinkable.<sup>14</sup>

36You know the word that he sent to the Israelites as he proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, Notice the use of “Christ” as Jesus’ second name. “Christ” means “the anointed one.”<sup>15</sup> who is Lord of all, This means both Jews and Gentiles.

37what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, John’s baptism of Jesus is taken as the starting point of Jesus’ ministry.<sup>9</sup> One of

the requirements of the person chosen to replace Judas, was that he had to have been in the company from the time of the Baptism of Jesus.(Acts 1:22)

**38**how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. This anointing at his Baptism designated him as the Messiah.<sup>8</sup> The Jews used the word “messiah” to describe the future anointed king who would restore the Davidic kingdom.<sup>10</sup> **He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil,** That Peter attributes such oppression to the devil strengthens the image of the kingdom of God as a rule that must do battle with a counter-kingdom run by Satan and his demonic minions.<sup>5</sup> **for God was with him.”** Jesus’ works testify that he fits Isaiah’s portrait of the suffering servant.

### **Matthew 3:13-17**

**13**Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan Great things happened at the Jordan for it was there that Elisha cured Naaman, servant of the King of Syria, and Elijah was taken up into heaven in a fiery chariot. It was the place where Elijah transferred his ministry to his successor, Elisha and where the new Elijah — John the Baptist — passed the baton to Jesus. Here too, the Jews ended their wandering in the desert when Joshua led them through the Jordan river and into the land that God had promised to them.<sup>10</sup> **to be baptized by him.**

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

**15**Jesus said to him in reply, These are the first words of Jesus in this gospel. He asks John to baptize him because it is in accord with God’s will and must be done in order to fulfill the divine plan. John’s baptism of Jesus was an embarrassment to the early church and this is how Matthew explains how the sinless one could have received a baptism of repentance.<sup>12</sup> **“Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”** Jesus is sinless and has no need for John’s baptism. He nevertheless submits to the rite to identify with sinners and align himself with God’s plan. Jesus performs Old Covenant regulations to fulfill and perfect them in the New. St Thomas Aquinas points out that Jesus’ baptism prefigures the Christian sacrament. The water, Spirit and divine voice signify the effects of baptism whereby the soul is cleansed, the grace of the Holy Spirit is imparted and the recipient is adopted as a beloved child of God.<sup>11</sup> **Then he allowed him.**

**16**After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened for him, The opening of the heavens signifies the new possibility of communication between God and humankind.<sup>16</sup> **and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon him.** This calls to mind how the Spirit fell upon the Jewish kings of the Old Testament when they were anointed. For example, Samuel told Saul that one of the signs that he was truly anointed king was that “the spirit of the Lord will come mightily upon you.” Similarly when Samuel anointed David as king, “the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.” The Spirit’s coming upon Jesus at this time could be seen as a royal event recalling the anointing of Israel’s great kings.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>17</sup>And a voice came from the heavens, The episode reveals the Blessed Trinity: the Father speaks, the Son is baptized, and the Holy Spirit descends as a dove.<sup>11</sup> saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” When Jesus comes out of the Jordan, he comes out as Israel’s royal Messiah-King anointed by the Holy Spirit. Now as the truly “Anointed One,” Jesus is ready to begin his messianic mission of building the kingdom. Once again the Jordan River is a place of new beginnings.<sup>10</sup>

*Some of the material for this commentary was taken from (1) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 2004” by Aelred R. Rosser, (2) The Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Gray, (3) “The Bread Of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (4) “The Book Of Isaiah Chapters 40-66” by Carroll StublmueLLer, C.P., (5) The Jerome Biblical Commentary, (6) “The Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (7) “The Navarre Bible: Acts of the Apostles,” (8) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles,” (9) “The Acts of the Apostles” by Luke Timothy Johnson, (10) “Mystery Of The Kingdom” by Edward P. Sri, (11) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: Matthew,” (12) “The Gospel of Matthew” by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., (13) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 2005” by Martin Connell, (14) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:1999” by Lawrence E. Mick, (15) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., and (16) “Saint Joseph Edition The New American Bible.”*

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*