

**Isaiah 42:1-9 (The Baptism of Our Lord—Series A)**

**“The Servant of Yahweh”**

**Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT**

**January 8, 2023**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text is the Old Testament Lesson from Isaiah 42:

<sup>1</sup>Behold, my Servant, whom I uphold, my Chosen One in whom I delight. I am placing my Spirit upon Him. He will bring forth the verdict for the nations. <sup>2</sup>He will not cry out and He will not raise His voice, and He will not make His voice heard in the street. <sup>3</sup>A bruised reed He will not break; a dim wick He will not snuff out. He will faithfully bring forth the verdict. <sup>4</sup>He will not grow dim and He will not be crushed until He establishes the verdict on the earth, and the coastlands will wait for His instruction. <sup>5</sup>Thus says the God, Yahweh, the Creator of the heavens and the One stretching them out, the One hammering out the earth and what comes forth from it, the One giving breath to the people upon it, and spirit to the ones walking on it: <sup>6</sup>“I am Yahweh, I am calling you in righteousness, and I will seize your hand and I will guard you, and I will appoint you to be a covenant for the people, to be a light for the nations. <sup>7</sup>By opening the eyes of the blind, by bringing out the prisoner from the dungeon, from the house of confinement the ones who are living in darkness. <sup>8</sup>I am Yahweh; that is my name, and I will not give my glory to another nor my praise to idols. <sup>9</sup>The former things—behold—have happened, and new things I am declaring. Before they spring forth, I am making them known to you.”

If you were here for Christmas Eve, you heard about the song of the angels, “Glory to God in the highest.” But before we dug into that text together, I highlighted other songs in the Bible: the songs in the first two chapters of Luke, the Book of Psalms, and the four Servant Songs in the Book of Isaiah. This morning’s Old Testament text is the First Servant Song. In these songs, Isaiah envisioned one Servant in particular who would set people free and bring about salvation for the world. This Servant would not just redeem Israel but would also bring Yahweh’s salvation to the ends of the earth, setting us all free from sin, death, and Satan. He would lead a new exodus into the new creation, the home of His people forever.

God had chosen Israel as His servant to share His Word and salvation with the nations. Israel was to announce the Lord’s verdict against idolatry and deliver His Word—His *torah*,

His instruction—among the nations. Yahweh chose Israel with the intention that the covenant people would be in mission to the world as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). At Mt. Sinai, the nation of Israel was commissioned to be the Lord’s “go between,” mediating between God and the nations. Israel was to be a model of what the Lord desires for all people. Israel was chosen to be God’s light to world, not because its people were more important or upright than the rest of the nations. They were not chosen because they were more numerous, mighty, or powerful. Israel was chosen to be the Lord’s servant because of His gracious love. Deuteronomy 7:7-8: “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deut. 7:7–8 ESV).

Now we are set up for Isaiah’s message. At the end of chapter 41, just before the First Servant Song, the Lord holds council in heaven. He puts the nations and their false gods, idols, on trial and finds them wanting: “Behold, you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing; an abomination is he who chooses you. . . . Behold, they are all a delusion; their works are nothing; their metal images are empty wind” (Is. 41:24, 29 ESV). Now it was God’s servant Israel who was to announce this verdict against idolatry and share the Lord’s teaching among the nations. Since false gods do not save, the servant Israel was to bring truth and light to the nations in the Word of the only true God who alone saves. But the nation of Israel was defeated, weary, rebellious, and idolatrous themselves! The people are described as blind prisoners groping about in a dark dungeon. They are self-imprisoned in

bondage to other gods and have turned away from faith and trust in the only true God, Yahweh Himself.

The Lord's servant Israel had failed in their God-given mission. A new Servant was needed, One who can take the first servant's place and accomplish what he couldn't. Israel was not capable of fulfilling its role. But God would remain faithful to His promises, both to Israel and to the world. And so God the Father says, "Behold, my Servant, whom I uphold, my Chosen One in whom I delight. I am placing my Spirit upon Him. He will bring forth the verdict for the nations."

By Adam's disobedience, all people were made sinners. The fruit of this original sin are the evil deeds that are forbidden in the Ten Commandments. These include unbelief, false faith, idolatry, and being without the fear of God. Israel's malady is also ours. It is the sin-problem that we have all inherited as human beings. It is no wonder, then, that the First Commandment is "You shall have no other gods." In the *Large Catechism* we learn that to have a God means trusting and believing Him with all our heart. "Confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust is right, then your god is also true. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you do not have the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. Now, I say that whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 359.

Since Israel put its trust in idols and false gods, the nation was no longer able to bring God's instruction of Law and Promises to the fallen peoples of the world. God appointed His One-of-a-Kind Son to be the Servant who would fulfill what Israel was unable to do. This Servant would bring Yahweh's verdict against false worship and idolatry. He would bring it forth in truth and establish it upon the earth. The Lord's Servant would be a light for Israel to bring them back to Yahweh. He would also be a light for the nations. He would be the Lord's agent to bring all peoples out of their self-imposed incarceration in bondage to other gods. He would set them free from the prison house of sin and death.

"Behold, my Servant, whom I uphold, my Chosen One in whom I delight. I am placing my Spirit upon Him. He will bring forth the verdict for the nations." At Jesus' baptism, we see the fulfillment of God's promise to place the Spirit upon His Servant. From today's Gospel reading, "And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'" (Matt. 3:16–17 ESV).

God the Father delights in His Son, who took to Himself a true human body and soul, so that He might serve Israel and all humanity. Matthew tells us in chapter 12 of His Gospel that the incarnate Son of God is indeed the fulfillment of the Lord's promise in this First Servant Song, "And many followed [Jesus], and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles' (Matt. 12:15–18 ESV). Again, at

Jesus' transfiguration, God the Father identifies His Son, His Servant, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (Matt. 17:5 ESV).

We are to listen to the Lord's Servant, Jesus Christ, who took up His ministry of tenderness and love. As one commentator said it, "God's answer to the oppressors of the world is not more oppression, nor is his answer to arrogance more arrogance; rather, in quietness, humility, and simplicity, he will take all of the evil into himself and return only grace. That is power."<sup>2</sup> Our Lord had compassion for "bruised reeds" and "dim wicks." He talked publicly with immoral women, socialized with sinners and tax collectors. He healed the lame, touched unclean lepers making them clean, and gave sight to the blind. He brought in the in-breaking of the reign and rule of God crashing into the world of idolatry and sin, to people in need of the freedom and the forgiveness that grants new, eternal life. "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28 ESV).

That is why the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 42 is also the Suffering Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53. To free all people from Satan's bondage, from sin, death, and hell, Jesus, the Servant is abused, killed, and discarded, yet also raised from the dead. Through His sacrificial guilt offering, He gives the verdict of "not guilty" to sinners because He has suffered, died, and is risen again granting perfect forgiveness and rescue from death and the devil. From the Fourth Servant Song we hear these familiar Gospel words about our Servant-

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<sup>2</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 2, 211. Quoted in R. Reed Lessing, *Concordia Commentary: Isaiah 40-55*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 258.

Savior, Jesus: "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. 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. . . . By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities" (Is. 53:5–11 ESV).

By grace through faith in Jesus, you have been declared right with God. He has made you righteous through the waters of Holy Baptism, cleansing you with His blood, gifting you with His own righteousness so that you are saved from sin and death forevermore.

Through His Word and Sacraments today, Jesus serves you in love and mercy so that you hear His Law and receive His Gospel that enables you to turn from your idolatry and sin, and by His grace, embrace through faith the salvation of the one, true God in the forgiveness of sins. Through your baptismal incorporation into Christ and the hearing of the Lord's Word, as the Holy Spirit sustains faith in Christ by the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, the stranglehold of idolatry is broken. Your eyes have been opened to see Christ, the light of world. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "At one time you were darkness, but now you are light

in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8 ESV). He has raised you up out of the prison house of sin and death. He has redeemed you from the house of bondage. The Lord's Servant—Jesus the Savior—has brought forth the Father's verdict to you: "Go in peace. You are free." Amen.