

**The First Sunday After the Epiphany**  
**Baptism of Jesus**  
**Cycle A RCL**

**Isaiah 42:1–9**

The Servant Songs (Isaiah 42:1–4, 49:1–6, 50:4–9, and 52:13–53:12) have presented a puzzle to readers over the centuries. In Isaiah 49:3 the Servant of Yahweh is clearly Israel, but in other contexts the Servant most likely represents a particular individual. In Isaiah 53:3–6, the Servant suffers for the redemption of the whole nation. Some believe that the Servant Songs represent a separate written source used by the Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40–55). Whether Israel as a whole, a faithful remnant of Israel, or a designated individual, however, the Servant is going to bring Israel salvation from exile in Babylon.

**Psalm 29**

We call this *hymn* an “enthronement psalm,” that celebrates God’s kingly rule over heaven and earth. The physical power of a thunderstorm is the psalm’s figure for the power of God. The hymn calls upon all the gods (Hebrew *bene ‘elim* “sons of the gods,” 29:1. *BCP*: “you gods.”) to acknowledge God’s cosmic power along with the human worshipers in the temple (29:9-11). As such, the psalm becomes an interchange in which both human beings and the very creation itself delights in God’s kingship. The similarities of certain sequences in the psalm have suggested to some interpreters a dependence upon Canaanite poetry, a dependence that might argue for an early date for the poem's composition.

**Acts 10:34–38**

This passage begins Peter’s speech in the house of the centurion Cornelius in Caesarea Maritima. Caesarea was a city built by Herod the Great around 10 BCE and dedicated to his patron Augustus Caesar. Jewish tradition associates the city with pagans and paganism so that the Talmud does not even consider it part of the Land of Israel. Its prominent features included a giant underwater breakwater to create a safe harbor for coastal ships, a great amphitheater for games, and a massive double temple to the goddess Roma and the divine Augustus. All of these structures have been recovered in recent excavations. In Acts Peter, not Paul, is the first apostle to the Gentiles.

**Matthew 3:13–17**

Matthew’s Gospel borrowed the account of the Baptism of Jesus from Mark 1:4–11 but dealt with the thorny problem Mark ignored as to why Jesus would come to John for Baptism since John was proclaiming a Baptism for the remission of sins. Did Jesus regard himself as a sinner? Matthew removed Mark’s comment about the remission of sins (Mark 1:4), and has Jesus command John to baptize him “to fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus’ baptism fulfills the prophecies of scripture in obedience to God’s will.

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