

**COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY, JAN. 16, 2005**  
**(2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time; Isa 49:3, 5-6; Ps 40; 1 Cor 1:1-3; John 1:29-34)**

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In the feast of Jesus' baptism last week, we heard a reading from Isa 42, the first of the "Songs (really poems) of the Suffering Servant." This Sunday we hear from the second such poem. Yahweh's Servant, despite being called Israel at times, actually has a mission to Israel as a whole: to make them return to their Lord. However, a mission just to Israel is considered too small for this Servant. Despite his discouragement in Isa 49:4 (omitted from our reading), the Servant is given an even broader mandate: to bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth, that is, to everyone. His role as "light of the nations" (Gentiles, pagans) is fulfilled by Jesus (see Simeon's words in Luke 2:29-32).

In the famous Fourth Song of the Suffering Servant, Isa 52:13-53:12, read on Good Friday, the Servant is like a lamb led to the slaughter who opens not his mouth; he bears (or takes away, the Hebrew verb means both) the sins of others, Isa 53:11 (cf. Matt 8:17), and gives his life as a sin-offering (a type of sacrifice involving a slaughtered animal, such as a lamb, e.g., in Lev 14:12; see also Rom 8:3). This sacrificial lamb was likened to the Passover lamb, whose blood saved the Israelites in Exod 12:21-28; see 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 5:6. In John's gospel, Jesus is the true Passover lamb who takes away "the sin of the world," as John the Baptist witnessed. Thus, in this gospel, the Last Supper is not a Passover celebration, John 13; rather, Jesus dies at the same time that the Jews are slaughtering their Passover lambs in order to celebrate their Passover that evening; see John 18:28; 19:14, 31.

Ps 40 is used by Hebrews 10:1-10 to argue that the Old Testament foreshadowed a time when animal ritual sacrifice would cease and be replaced by Christ's obedient sacrifice of himself, a perfect sacrifice once for all that need not be repeated.