

**Year C 2013**  
**The Baptism of the Lord**  
**(Is 42:1-4, 6-7; Ps 29; Acts 10:34-38; Lk 3:15-16, 21-22)**

As we are told in the Gospels, John the Baptist appeared in the desert (or wilderness) preaching a baptism of repentance, and many people came to be baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. The River Jordan had a symbolic significance beyond the fact that its waters were cleansing (they washed away the leprosy of Naaman the Syrian in 1 Kgs 5:10, mentioned in Luke 4:27): the Jordan was the crossing point into the Promised Land, the Land where Israel's God was present. Crossing this river meant "crossing over" into the new covenant with God, the new relationship Jesus came to establish. Crossing over into the Promised Land meant the end of Exile, the end of estrangement from God, the distance between us and the Lord when we are still in our sins, unredeemed, waiting in expectation, as today's Gospel says.

Jesus joined those expectant crowds, hoping for an end to their suffering, to their feeling that God was absent, distant, sleeping and unconcerned. God's Word, as the Fourth Gospel (John) says, became flesh and put his tent among us. Israel's God had walked with his people living in tents (1 Sm 7:6). Now Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, had come down from heaven in answer to the people's prayer in Is 63:19: "Oh, if only you tore open the heavens and came down!" Jesus joins the sinful people not to have his sins washed away, or to repent, but to lead the people into the new and final exodus, out of the exile of sin which began in Eden, was symbolized by the time of slavery in Egypt, and was spoken about by the prophet Isaiah in regards to the Babylonian Exile. This final Exodus is what the conversation was about in Jesus' Transfiguration in Luke 9:31.

But this new Exodus was to be led by the Servant of God, the Suffering Servant. He is introduced to us in the first reading, from Isaiah 42. In this first "song" of the Servant, it is said God is pleased with him and has put his Spirit upon him, just as in Jesus' baptism. In Mark 1:10, it is even said that the heavens were torn, as the curtain would be when Jesus died and gave us new, unprecedented access to God in heaven. This communion with God is described as light, as the end of blindness and imprisonment, as Jesus' ministry is described in Luke 7:21-22. This was also prophesied in the "fifth song" of the Servant, in Is 61:1-2, which Jesus read in Luke 4:17-21 as fulfilled "today."