

**COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY,
JANUARY 11, 2004 (FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD)
Isa 42:1-4, 6-7; Ps 29:1-2, 3-4, 9-10; Acts 10:34-38; Luke 3:15-16, 21-22**

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The above readings fit together nicely, beginning with the first of the four poems of the “Suffering Servant” of Isaiah, with whom the Lord is well-pleased. Humbly but firmly, this Servant will make Yahweh’s ways (“Torah and justice”) known to the nations (*goyim*, Gentiles, pagans), for he has Yahweh’s Spirit. He will be given as a “covenant to the people, light to the nations,” enabling the blind to see, and freeing captives who dwell in darkness. According to the Gospel, Jesus’ mission began with his baptism by John (though in Luke John has already left the stage!), at a time of great expectation in Israel, who was waiting for God’s final (“eschatological”), messianic visitation. Jesus is the expected one, the one who has God’s Spirit, and this is confirmed by the Father’s voice from heaven declaring Jesus to be his beloved Son, with whom he is well-pleased (using the above Servant-language; the expression “beloved son” also recalls Isaac in Gen 22:2, 12, 16).

Ps 29 is one of the most ancient texts in the Bible, and expresses Yahweh’s majesty and eternal kingship in terms of his mastery over the stormy, chaotic waters (cf. Gen 1:2), giving his people strength and *shalom* (“peace”). The Tradition has seen Jesus’ baptism as a sanctification of water, and his mastery over chaos and evil was exemplified by his calming of the storm and walking on the sea. Finally, the reading from Acts depicts the very beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy about the pagans coming to know the ways of the true God: Cornelius’ reception of the Spirit proved that eschatological, messianic salvation was not limited to Jews, but included Gentiles as well; through Jesus, everyone can be at peace with God (see Acts 15:7-11).