



Sermon Preparatory Notes

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GOSPEL COMMENTARY

Before we plunge into the Baptism of Jesus, it's worthwhile to step back and note some of the unique features of Epiphany in Year C of 2013.

First, Epiphany was actually on a Sunday this year. There was no need for liturgical mechanics to acknowledge the event that's the reason for the season. Last week the wise men really did visit Jesus. How might that shape our hearing of the subsequent texts?

Second, while Easter in 2013 is not the earliest it can be, it is certainly more so considering that in 2011 Easter was the second latest date possible. Calculated as the first Sunday following the first full moon that falls on or after the vernal equinox, Easter can occur anytime between March 22-April 25. What might this mean on this Baptism of our Lord Sunday? It means that we have only five Sundays in Epiphany. That's not a lot of time for a church season and it means Lent is upon us, sooner rather than later. This could be the year to make the most of Epiphany and to imagine possible themes that might tie these five texts together.

Third, this year we have readings from three of the four Gospels. Albeit gently, could we celebrate the distinctive epiphanies of Jesus to which each of the four Gospels witness?

What Happened to John?

Since it is Year C, the year of the Gospel of Luke, we hear Luke's version of Jesus' baptism. It is always a helpful exercise to dust off one's Gospel Parallels when it comes to a story that appears in all four Gospels. A comparison of the versions of Jesus' baptism yields several differences in Luke's account. Moreover, the baptism of Jesus in Luke points to a major theme for the Gospel, but also for Epiphany -- what happens when what is revealed is not what people actually want and *even reject*?

Noticeable about Luke's account of Jesus' baptism is that John is nowhere to be found. Reading the verses that the lectionary omits, 3:18-20, is essential because they tell us what happened to John. He's in prison. What might this detail overlooked by the lectionary reveal to us about Jesus' baptism in the Gospel of Luke? First, since John is shut up in prison, he is not present at the baptism of Jesus nor does he baptize Jesus. Well, then. Who does?

Second, the reason John is put in prison foreshadows Jesus' rejection in Nazareth. John has told Herod the truth about his life. Herod doesn't like the truth and gets rid of the evidence. How do we do the

same? Third, while John had a major role in the first chapters of the Gospel, including the story of his mother and father, his birth, his relationship to Jesus, now that Jesus will be baptized, it's just Jesus, and there will be no confusing the two.

John is not the Messiah and the first clue in distinguishing between Jesus and John is oddly baptism. Jesus' baptism will be different and Jesus will baptize differently. We will know they are not the same by how they go about baptizing people. John's baptism is just with water. But Jesus? Well, that's with the Holy Spirit and with fire (think Acts 2).

Of course, this anticipates the scope of Luke's vision reaching back to Adam and then forward, far beyond the confines of Luke 24:53 into the book of Acts. As a result, the Spirit takes center stage here, and reminds us of the unique function of the Spirit in Luke-Acts. Reading the Gospel of Luke through the lens of the Spirit's role generates the following, yet only a sampling, of the Spirit's presence:

Conception (1:35)

Magnificat (1:46-47)

Zechariah (1:67)

Leads Jesus into wilderness (4:1)

Empowers Jesus' ministry (4:14)

Jesus rejoices in the Spirit (10:21)

Conferred through prayer (11:13; compare Mt 7:11)

Jesus commits his spirit to God (23:46)

Luke ends his Gospel with Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit (24:47-49)

Pentecost (Acts 2)

The second person address to Jesus by the voice from heaven is the same as in Mark but in Luke it seems to have a different meaning. Whereas in Mark, such secrecy plays into the general cover-up about Jesus' identity, in Luke, that Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit appear to be the only ones present at the baptism foreshadows a similar moment at the crucifixion, a "last word" found only in Luke (23:46). There is promise in the presence of the Spirit here and at the end of Jesus' life that will be true for all believers.

We Can't Handle the Truth, or, Anything Else Jesus Says

The verb translated in the NRSV as "filled with expectation" (3:15) will be used again in Luke 7:19-20, where two of John's disciples, sent by John, approach Jesus with this question: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" The differentiation between Jesus and John will need further clarification down the road. Jesus' response to John's disciples is revealing because it is a restatement of his inaugural address in 4:18-19. If what you are waiting for is release for the captives and good news for the poor, then I'm your guy. If not, well, then you will need to wait for another.

The imprisonment of John reminds us of what happens to those who tell the truth, or, to those whose words we don't want to hear. This will certainly be the case for Jesus. Hearing Jesus' first sermon, the hometown folks want to throw him off a cliff. Jesus will be rejected by his friends, his family, his community before he even *does* anything. The same will be true for the women who report about the empty tomb. The women go to the disciples, the ones who *should* believe, who *should* be open to this news, who *should* actually *know* something and they call the women's words an "idle tale."

This is a PG way of translating *leros* which appears only once in Scripture. A better translation is *crap, garbage* -- you get the drift (see Preaching Moment 10 on our website). In other words, John's absence at this moment in Luke's story is a pointed truth-telling of how *we* might respond to Epiphany.

Gospel Commentary 2

On the Baptism of Jesus, a lot of preachers and worship planners encourage congregations to remember their baptisms.¹

Many congregations use actual water as a part of the remembrance, perhaps using a piece of greenery to splash water on the congregation or passing bowls of water among the congregation so people can

put their fingers in it and perhaps apply it to their faces. The gospel readings for today could help frame such a practice.

Luke pictures John the Baptist as an end-time prophet who announced that the apocalypse was about to occur that would end the present evil age and finally and fully bring about the realm of God, a new world in which all things would live forever in love, peace, justice, mutual support, freedom, and dignity. John called people to repent and to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins in order to be part of the coming new world. Repent is to turn away from complicity with the old age and its values and behaviors and to turn towards the coming realm. Baptism gave baptisands a physical assurance that their final destiny was no longer determined by the brokenness of the old age (and its heinous rulers) but would be the realm God. Baptism was an invisible mark initiating those who received it into a community anticipating the realm.

According to Luke 3:15-17, however, John is not the one through whom the apocalyptic transformation will take place. The coming one -- Jesus -- will baptize the community with the Holy Spirit and fire and will carry out the final judgment (separate the wheat and chaff), i.e. the coming one will be the catalyst for the realm and will leave the Holy Spirit to empower the community to continue to witness to the realm after Jesus ascends.

In many congregations, repentance has been reduced to feeling sorry for personal moral transgressions. A preacher might help a congregation reflect on the wider ways in which the community is complicit in old-age practices and values, and hence. As the congregation enters the new year, perhaps they could repent of such connections.

When Jesus came to be baptized, he came to be publicly identified as the pivotal figure in the movement towards the realm. Moreover, his baptism signaled that God was now taking steps through the ministry of Jesus to signal that the turning of the ages expected by John has now begun to take place. As preachers are wont to say, it is both present and future: its signs in the present point to the future consummation at Jesus' return.

Jesus' baptism takes place in community. It is not a private occurrence. This communal dimension reminds listeners that they when they are baptized, they become part of a new social world. My sense is that a good many people today are moving away from the radical individualism of modernity and are longing for community. A preacher could help folk identify the church as such a body.

The voice from heaven (God's voice) identifies Jesus as God's son, in whom God is well pleased. In first century context, these words have less to do with the nature of Jesus and more with his purpose. God's words recall two texts. The Jewish people used Psalm 2 at the coronation of a new monarch. In 2:7, God adopts the monarch as God's son. Thus, God adopts Jesus as divine representative in the final transition from old age to new age.

Isaiah 42:1-4 is the first of Isaiah's servant songs that describe the vocation of Israel as a community to serve God's purpose, which is to bring justice to the nations (gentiles). Justice here refers to qualities of life similar to those of the realm -- communities with covenantal support for all. As the gospel of Luke unfolds, we will learn that Jesus will suffer because other people oppose the realm in the way that Isaiah saw Israel suffer for standing up for God's justice.

Apocalyptic theologians of antiquity anticipated that God would begin the apocalypse by opening the barrier between heaven and earth and sending angel hosts to destroy and reconstruct. Luke draws on this motif by describing the heavens opening over Jesus. However, the Spirit descends without the angelic hosts. From Luke's point of view, that will occur only when at the second coming.

Of course, according to Jewish tradition, the Holy Spirit has been in the world since creation. The difference for Luke is that the Spirit now adds eschatological manifestation to its repertoire. The Spirit falls on Jesus not because the Spirit was not otherwise present but with apocalyptic intensification. For Luke-Acts, Jesus is the model for the apostles who are the models for the church. The apostles and the church do everything Jesus does because they have the same Spirit.

The reference to the bodily form of the Spirit in the form of a dove puzzles many Christians. Why “in *bodily* form?” Luke uses the literary device of the bodily form to reassure listeners that that the eschatological Spirit had in fact filled Jesus. Bystanders *saw* the Holy Spirit enter Jesus. They could have confidence, then, that Jesus embodied the life of the Spirit by manifesting the qualities of the realm. Indeed, the realm of God takes on bodily form in Jesus and in the life of the church.

A preacher might help a congregation recognize that in the Gospels and Letters, repentance, baptism, and life in the Holy Spirit have little to do with institutional affiliation (e.g. becoming a member of a church). At one level they are saved from being ruled in the present by brokenness, and from ultimate condemnation at the apocalypse. But from a more important level, according to Luke, those who repent, are baptized and realize they are empowered by the Spirit not only to become part of a movement towards the new world but to invite others to join the movement, to work the signs of the realm, and to embody the qualities of the realm in their common life.

As a process theologian, my impression is that increasing numbers of Christians no longer subscribe to a pure apocalyptic worldview. However, those who do not anticipate a singular apocalyptic event often recognize the brokenness of our world, and believe that God is present now and always to lure the world towards values and practices that more fully reflect the characteristics of the realm. In this frame of reference, people still need to repent of complicity with brokenness and to join in community with one another and with God in the movement towards a better world.

ESV GOSPEL COMMENTARY

Luke 3:16 In the two phrases (1) **he who is mightier than I is coming** and (2) **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire**, the Greek word order emphasizes the pronoun “he,” pointing to Jesus (cf. [John 3:30](#)). John the Baptist’s answer indicates that people will know that the Christ has come when he baptizes with the Holy Spirit—which took place at Pentecost in [Acts 2](#). Whether being baptized “with the Holy Spirit and fire” will be positive (involving the coming of the purifying fire of the Spirit at Pentecost; [Acts 1:8](#); [2:3](#)) or negative (involving the divine judgment of fire; [Luke 9:54](#); [12:49](#); [17:29](#)) depends on the response of the individual person. See notes on Matt. 3:11 and Acts 2:3.

Luke 3:17 winnowing fork. A wooden pitchfork used to throw the chaff and grain into the air to separate them. The **wheat** (or grain) would be gathered and the **chaff** burned as fuel in the oven ([Matt. 6:30](#)). **Unquenchable fire** portrays the horrible nature of the final judgment.

Luke 3:18–20 John preaches the **good news** (“gospel”), indicating that he is different from the OT prophets because he is the first preacher of the good news of the kingdom of God (see [16:16](#)).

Luke 3:21 On the location of Jesus’ baptism, see note on Matt. 3:13. **was praying.** See [Introduction: Key Themes](#). **The heavens were opened** to show visible evidence of God’s action.

Luke 3:21–4:15 Jesus’ Baptism, Genealogy, and Temptation. The description of Jesus as God’s Son ([1:31–35](#)) is confirmed: at his baptism by a voice from heaven ([3:22](#)) and his anointing by the Spirit ([3:22](#); [4:1](#), [18](#)); by his genealogy ([3:38](#)); and by Satan’s acknowledgment of him as the Son of God at his temptation ([4:3](#), [9](#)).

Luke 3:21–22 Jesus’ Baptism. Jesus submits to John’s baptism of repentance to identify with Israel’s sin, foreshadowing the judgment he will endure at the cross. (Luke does not explicitly mention John’s role in Jesus’ baptism, though he acknowledges it in [Acts 1:22](#).)

Luke 3:22 the Holy Spirit descended on him. Jesus is anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit for his ministry. This will be an important theme in the following chapters (cf. [4:1](#), [14](#), esp. [vv. 18–19](#)). **like a dove.** This simile does not necessarily mean that the Spirit actually assumed the form of a dove, but it does indicate a bodily form of something like a dove. **voice came from heaven.** God speaks (cf. [Isa. 6:4](#), [8](#)). **You are my beloved Son.** Jesus is not only a man; he is also the uniquely loved Son of the Father (see note on John 1:14). This divine affirmation (cf. [Luke 1:31–35](#); [2:49](#)) will be repeated at the transfiguration ([9:35](#)). **Well pleased** shows that the Father takes delight in all that Jesus is and all that he

has done in his life. It may also indicate that Jesus is the servant of the Lord by alluding to [Isa. 42:1](#), in which case it would be forecasting the death of Jesus for his people.

OT COMMENTARY

God's spirit, God's servant, God's delight.

These concepts are the connective tissue between today's Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 42 and the assigned Gospel lesson from Matthew 3. The passages echo one another.

In Isaiah 42, the divine speaker announces the presence of a servant who is chosen by God and a source of delight for God. God will place God's spirit upon this servant so that the servant is able to bring forth justice to the nations, to be a light, to open blind eyes and bring out prisoners. In Matthew 3, when Jesus is baptized, God's spirit likewise descends upon him and God delights in him. The relationship here is not between God and God's servant, but between God and God's beloved son: "This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (NRSV).

Both of these passages provide an opportunity to talk about the role of these individuals as God's earthly representatives, as God's chosen ones, as workers of justice in the world. What is their mission and role? Why are they divinely chosen? Why do they need the spirit of God? And is this a role for individuals and/or communities?

And how might we, as God's people today, fashion our actions and demeanors into ones fitting for us as servants of God, ones in whom God delights? Are we God's servants, establishing justice on earth as it is in heaven?

How do we take up the mission of the servant and live out our baptismal vows?

To answer some of these questions, let's focus more on this servant figure in Isaiah 42.

The servant of Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55) is spoken of in four different passages -- Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12. Scholars typically extract these four passages from their surrounding literary contexts in order to interpret them with reference to each other; yet, these "servant songs" -- actually the passages are poetic as is the surrounding Isaiah material -- are part of an exilic prophetic announcement about the near future. So, they are best read within the confines of Second Isaiah's overall message as presented in the middle section of the prophetic book of Isaiah.

The kingdom of Judah finds itself in exile with the temple in ruins and kingship at an end. Zion in all its splendor has been diminished, and some of the Judahites are forced exiles in the foreign land of Babylonia. Without a temple and a Davidic leader, the future of the people is greatly in peril. They need assurance, assistance, and a new vision.

Into this difficult political and religious situation, the prophet of Isaiah 42 introduces a servant figure. Interpreters spend much of their energy debating the precise identity of the servant. Is it the prophet himself? Or a ruler whether foreign such as Cyrus or native such as a Davidic kingly figure? The later Christian tradition of course develops the identity of the servant Christologically. The exact historical referent for the servant is perhaps tangential to the passage's principal concerns.

One fundamental and fruitful tension in the biblical text centers on whether the figure represents an individual or a community, the servant as a historical person or all of Israel. Personal or communal. The figure is spoken of in individual terms obviously but this fact does not preclude a collective interpretation. In fact, Isaiah 49:3 explicitly names the servant as Israel: "And [God] said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (NRSV).

Christians have typically seen the servant in individual terms and associated clearly with Jesus -- his life and ministry, but especially his death and resurrection. Jews have understandably gravitated toward the communal interpretation and viewed Israel as called to be a servant to the world, a light to other people.

We might venture the same sort of communal/individual tension within the interpretation of the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3. On one (historical and literary) level, Matthew is clearly presenting a narrative about an individual. Jesus is baptized. He is the Beloved, God's son, the one in whom God is well pleased. On another (theological) level, Christian readers are invited to see themselves in this baptism experience, to see the Christian community as baptized like Jesus into faith, into the beloved community. We are together the daughters and sons of God. God is well pleased with us.

When we hold the tension between communal and individual readings of Isaiah 42 and Matthew 3, our response to these readings become clearer. We have individual models of servanthood as examples. Second Isaiah's servant and Jesus point us toward our important work. They demonstrate that relationship with God is possible. They lay out the types of ministry possible when we are led by God's spirit. But we -- as a community -- also participate in this work of justice together as communities of faith. As churches, not just as individuals, we are God's servants to the world. We participate in God's new thing (Isaiah 42:9), God's new exodus out of exile and brokenness. God's community is God's servant.

OT Commentary 2

This passage in Isaiah shows God speaking into the pain of exile to send a servant who will bring justice, and not to Israel only but to all nations.

Dramatic and powerful! But we've entered in the middle of the story of God's people, so the point will be lost if the preacher doesn't state the obvious. Many -- maybe even most -- folks in the pew do not know the story of Israel, its deliverance, covenant, monarchy, exile, and return. Even if this backstory is obvious to you as preacher, take a moment to sketch the narrative arc so your audience can become part of the story, too.

God delivered his people from bondage in Egypt, made a covenant with them, and brought them through wilderness into the land of Canaan. They became a nation and built a temple for the Lord. For centuries they saw military victories and defeats under kings and generals. They strayed from God's covenant but prophets called them back. Then, in the sixth century BCE, the unthinkable happened.

The Babylonians defeated Israel. They destroyed the temple, plundered Israel's treasure and livelihoods, took them into bondage, and marched them back to the gates of Babylon in chains, prompting "By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion" (Psalm 137:1). The Babylonian victory over Israel was absolute. This was utter, complete devastation of the political, social, economic and religious life God's people had known for centuries.

For Americans who have not experienced combat and defeat on our own soil, it may be difficult to imagine just how devastating it was for God's chosen people to be handed over to enemies, humiliated and destroyed, taken into bondage, all while God did not intervene to stay with His divine hand the terrible defeat.

Preachers must set up this scene, Israel abandoned to its enemies: How could the Mighty Deliverer allow this to happen? Had God abandoned them? Removed from access to the temple and to the land, were they still God's people? Was God still God? In exile they could only conclude that God had withdrawn favor and allowed the Babylonians to punish them for their sins and disobedience.

Into this identity crisis Isaiah speaks a word. The prophet reminds the people who God is and how God works. He draws their attention from this particular, historical moment, to the larger purposes of God. As Isaiah speaks, it's as though we see the camera lens zooming slowly out from a close-up shot to a wide-angle view, a cosmic view. By reminding Israel of who God is, how God works, and what God is

doing by sending a servant, Isaiah expands the frame of reference, re-locating and purposing Israel's particularity within God's cosmic frame.

God is the God not of Israel only or even of Babylon, but the one who "created the heavens . . . and stretched out the earth" (verse 5). This is the God of creation, who made everything that is, and who dwells in this wide, open cosmic space, not contained by the cramped space of exile. This is the God "who gives breath to the people upon [the earth] and spirit to those who walk on it" (verse 5). God's breath animates not only the people of Israel, but every living, breathing creature on the planet. And finally, this is also the God who has reached out to create the particular people called Israel, to call them to righteousness, and to keep them (verse 6). This is the God of the expansive universe *and* the God of these very particular people.

Isaiah proclaims this God acts in particular ways. First, God sends a spirit-filled servant not a conqueror or tyrant -- ("a bruised reed he will not break," verse 3). This agent of God is a liberator who will bring justice, not domination.

Second, God works to bring justice "in the earth," that is, to bring it to all, everywhere. God sends this servant to persevere until justice is done all the way "to the coastlands" (verse 4).

Third, God purposes God's people, to be "a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness" (verses 6-7). God calls them to righteousness not for themselves alone, but for the nations. Isaiah reminds this exiled people that God has not abandoned them but is indeed at work among them, restoring them to be a blessing.

This is good news! God is still God. God's people are still God's people in their particularity, yet with a purpose that extends beyond themselves to all the earth. Notice that the reassurance Isaiah offers is not triumphalistic. There is no talk of revenge, of turning the tables on the Babylonians, no "let's kick butt and take names."

Rather Isaiah shifts Israel's gaze here from themselves back to the wide casting of God's promise and plan. The horizon of possibility is no longer the hand in front of my face but the very edge of the earth's curvature. A roomy expanse for God to "declare new things" that "spring forth" (verse 9). This is a vision that is full of future.

We celebrate Jesus' baptism this first Sunday of Epiphany. Jesus has come into the world as a light that "darkness cannot overcome" (John 1:5), "a light to the nations" (Isaiah 42:6). Matthew 3:13-17 marks the baptism of Jesus with an echo of Isaiah 42:1, "the Spirit of God descended upon him," and "a voice from heaven" announces, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

The pattern of servanthood continues from Isaiah to Matthew. In Jesus, God again sends a servant who will bring justice, who God "anoints to bring good news to the poor . . . proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and declare the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). During Epiphany we recognize and receive Jesus, the servant of God for the whole world.

ESV Old TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

Isa. 42:1–9 This is the first of four Servant Songs, fulfilled in Jesus Christ (cf. [49:1–13](#); [50:4–9](#); [52:13–53:12](#)). Isaiah sprinkles references to "the servant of the Lord" throughout [chs. 40–55](#). Often it is a title for the people as a whole ([41:8–9](#); [42:19](#); [43:10](#); [44:1–2](#), [21](#), [26](#); [45:4](#); [48:20](#)), but at times the servant is

a specific person within Israel who is distinct from the whole, with a calling to serve Israel and beyond ([49:5–6](#); [50:10](#); see notes on 52:13; 53:11). The second Servant Song ([49:1–13](#)), which clarifies that the servant is distinct from Israel, also *calls* him Israel ([49:3](#)); this is best explained as identifying the servant as the representative and embodiment of the whole people. This last point shows why the traditional Christian reading, that the servant is a messianic figure, accurately captures Isaiah’s intent. First, in the Davidic covenant, David’s heirs represent and embody the people as a whole: Israel is God’s “son” ([Ex. 4:22–23](#)), and the king becomes God’s “son” on his coronation ([2 Sam. 7:14](#); cf. [Ps. 89:26–27](#)). Therefore the servant follows the pattern of David’s heirs. Second, the servant achieves the expansion of his rule throughout the Gentile world ([Isa. 42:1–4](#); [52:13–15](#)), which is the work of the Davidic Messiah in [chs. 7–12](#). Third, later prophets describe an heir of David, and especially the Messiah, as the servant ([Ezek. 34:23–24](#); [37:25](#); [Hag. 2:23](#); [Zech. 3:8](#); cf. [Jer. 33:21–22](#), [26](#)), which supports reading the servant in Isaiah as a messianic figure. In addition to his royal function, the servant also has a prophetic role ([Isa. 49:1](#); [50:4](#), [10](#)) and a priestly one ([53:11](#); cf. [Ps. 110:4](#), which folds a priestly role into Messiah’s royal office). Isaiah’s audience must know that God will restore the exiles and then fulfill the mission of Israel by means of the servant whom he will raise up at some unspecified time after the return from exile: this is where their story is headed.

Isa. 42:1 Behold my servant. In contrast to the idols (“Behold, you,” [41:24](#)) and the idol-worshipping nations (“Behold, they,” [41:29](#)), God presents his servant as the only hope of the nations (cited in [Matt. 12:18–21](#)), **whom I uphold**. The servant’s success is of God, **in whom my soul delights**. The servant is God’s delight, in contrast with the “abomination” of [Isa. 41:24](#) (cf. [Matt. 3:17](#); [Luke 9:35](#)). **my Spirit**. The servant’s power, in contrast with the “empty wind” of [Isa. 41:29](#) (cf. [11:2](#); [61:1](#)). The human race, by implication, is impressed with the wrong strategies, remedies, and powers. **justice**. The key word in [42:1–4](#). In the Bible, justice means fulfilling mutual obligations in a manner consistent with God’s moral law. Biblical justice creates the perfect human society (cf. [Deut. 10:18](#); [Isa. 1:17](#); [16:5](#); [32:1–2](#); [61:8](#); [Zech. 7:9](#)). The messianic servant is the only hope for a truly just world. This Messiah will bring not only individual spiritual forgiveness and health (cf. [Isa. 1:18](#)) but also the establishment of perfect justice throughout all earthly governments.

Isa. 42:1 The servant, the Messianic king ([9:6–7](#)), rules with justice and mercy ([Matt. 12:17–21](#); see [Matt. 3:17](#)).

Isa. 42:2–3 In contrast with ruthless human conquerors, like Cyrus ([41:2](#), [25](#)), the Lord’s quiet servant will not crush but will defend the weak (cf. [11:4](#); [40:11](#)).

Isa. 42:4 The servant is unweakened by the demands of his mission. **the coastlands**. Using the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea as the image, this designates the remotest peoples of the earth.

Isa. 42:5 The Creator and Sustainer God is well able to keep the promises of [vv. 1–4](#).

Isa. 42:6–7 The servant is **a covenant for the people** (cf. [49:8](#)), i.e., he represents the people in God’s covenant. He will become **a light for the nations** (cf. [49:6](#)), bringing the knowledge of God to them; this probably lies behind Jesus’ saying in [John 8:12](#). **to open the eyes ... to bring out**. This is the purpose of God’s grace for his people, using liberation from Babylonian exile as an image for spiritual liberation.

Isa. 42:6 Christ the light of the world ([John 8:12](#); [9:5](#)) brings light to the nations ([John 12:32](#); [Acts 26:18](#), [23](#)), fulfilling the promise to Abraham of blessing to the nations (see note on Gen. 12:3).

Isa. 42:8–9 Both the triumph of Cyrus ([41:2–4](#), [25–29](#)) and the greater triumph of the servant glorify the true Lord of history and discredit idolatrous claims of human mastery. The God who has promised the world-transforming display of his glory ([40:5](#)) directs all events as he pleases to that final end. **my glory I give to no other**. God must discredit all idols to receive his proper honor. He is not one of many; he is not superior among inferior gods; he is not even the best of all; he is the *only* God, and he will have his people know and rejoice in this truth. **new things I now declare**. God deliberately draws attention to the seemingly impossible predictions he is making, citing his previous prophecies as evidence of his credibility (cf. [41:22](#)).

ESV EPISTLE COMMENTARY

Acts 10:34–43 This message to the Gentiles is unique among the sermons of Acts in providing a summary of Jesus' ministry. It contains no scriptural proofs and was cut short before Peter could give an invitation to trust in Christ. It is quite likely, of course, that the speech was an extended one, of which Luke gives an abbreviated account.

Acts 10:35 in every nation. Not just among Jews. **acceptable to him.** The word used here (Gk. *dektos*, "acceptable, welcome") does not refer to legal justification before God (for which the NT uses Gk. *dikaioō* and related terms), nor is Peter talking about the basis for justification. Rather, the question here is whether God's favor is made available to Jews only ("partiality," [v. 34](#)) or is now available to Gentiles also (those "in every nation"). **fears him and does what is right.** This expression summarizes the behavior of someone whose life is pleasing to God. Although Peter does not explicitly mention saving faith (as he will in [v. 43](#)), it would likely be included or implied in the meaning of these two terms in this context (see note on v. 2). After all, faith is trusting God and responding to him.

Acts 10:36 The references to the **good news of peace** and to Christ being **Lord of all** echo [Isa. 52:7 and 57:19](#): the gospel is for all people, including Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles.

Acts 10:38 The simple statement **he went about doing good and healing** is a profound summary of Jesus' life, and an ideal to which all Christians would do well to aspire.