

ISAIAH 42:1 A Proud Parent

Those of us who have had children, or perhaps nieces & nephews – think back to some of their ‘firsts’, and how they made us feel. For instance, there was that first smile; the first slurps of mushy baby food; the first word – often da da da – which we *knew* meant that our little one was definitely a genius; then there were those first steps, the first day at school, the driving licence, the first job, producing the first grandchild – and so it goes! How did these things make us feel? Inordinately proud, of course!

But were (or are) our children perfect? Of course not! Did they ever do the wrong thing? Did they ever disappoint us? Of course they did.

Did we disown them when they were difficult? No, we didn’t – though I’m talking about the average family here, of course. I recognise some families do it very tough indeed, and perhaps they have more difficult memories. But for children brought up in a loving home – Mum and Dad can say three things without reserve; they can say:

You are mine; I love you and I’m proud of you.

Today, our lectionary readings focus on the Baptism of Jesus, where God says the very same things of his Son. But let’s begin with the Isaiah reading, which puts the baptism of Jesus into context. As we look into his Word, I hope we will gain fresh insight into how God relates to us as his children.

Isaiah 42:1 says: **Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.**

Isaiah chapter 42 is the first of four (or some say 5) servant songs that are pivotal in the Book of Isaiah. They introduce the Messiah and give us a picture of this special, suffering servant whom God is to send. Back in Isaiah chapter 11, God spoke about the coming of a servant who was to have a special role in the history of Israel: You’ll probably be familiar with the text. It says:

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

God called many servants through Israel's journey – Abraham, Moses, David, a string of inadequate kings, and even Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus who were God's instruments in the judgement of Israel. Then there was the nation of Israel herself, whose people were covenanted to serve and obey their God. All these servants ultimately failed in their commission. They fell frequently, at times being faithless, rebellious, disloyal, and disobedient – you name it. Israel and her leaders found it impossible to stay on track.

Did God wash his hands of them? No. Did he abandon them? No. He certainly got ticked off with them, but he didn't give up on them. Instead, in his great love and mercy, he did a 'new' thing.

In Isaiah 42, v9, God specifically announces a new plan. He says, **“See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.”**

What was new was that God was going to send the perfect servant, who would be Israel's deliverer - the Messiah, his Son. This servant would bring salvation not only to the wayward Jews, but to the world. God would include the Gentiles as well as the Jews among his chosen people. Unlike other servants, this servant would get it right – he would be faithful and obedient to death.

Let's take a closer look at 'The Servant' from verse 1.

Before telling us what His Servant is like or what He will do, God affirms His own commitment to the one He has called.

First of all he affirms His *relationship* to His Servant. He says, **“Here is my servant, whom I uphold.”** In these words, God reveals an intimate and loving relationship. He is *“my”* servant. There is belonging. It's like a good relationship between a parent and a child. It's a bit like introducing a son or daughter that we're proud of to others. We say *“This is my son”*, or *“this is my daughter.”* It speaks of a relationship of love and security, support and protection.

Secondly, God affirms His choice of the new Servant declaring that this person is his **“chosen one in whom he delights.”** The Servant is personally chosen by God for the calling or task ahead. More than that, God delights in his choice.

Have you ever *delighted* in someone? Perhaps seeing someone you love do something which makes you proud; perhaps as an employer, seeing a trainee grasp something complicated he or she has been beavering away at; perhaps simply enjoying being in the presence of someone special, whom you love and admire. It's a feeling which is a mixture of warmth, love and pride in a person. (You know I *delight* in you lot, don't you?)

So, God not only *chooses* his servant, but *delights* in him! He's absolutely thrilled to bits with him.

Thirdly, God affirms His *investment* in His new Servant. He says, "I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations." God imbues his chosen servant with His very own Spirit and as a result, his servant will be God's incarnation on earth. He will ultimately put to rights everything that has gone wrong in the world. He will indeed bring justice to the nations.

In our Gospel reading this morning, at Jesus' baptism we hear echoes of the same words God spoke through Isaiah regarding his Servant. As Jesus came up out of the water, a voice from heaven came, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Mat 3:17)

These words carry the same claims of belonging, love, and pride. In other words, God is saying of Jesus, "You belong to Me, I love You, and I am proud of You."

Now, while these words are deeply significant for the ministry of Jesus, they have great meaning for us as well. That's because we too are God's chosen servants.

God said of Jesus as he came up out of the water, "This is my beloved Son" – in other words, "You belong to me"

Jesus is the Son of God – we would expect the Father to declare this. I wonder though, if we have ever thought of ourselves in the same light?

Let me highlight a few Scriptures:

There's John 1:12 &13, which says: To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

If we have received Jesus – in other words surrendered our life to him, believing he is the Son of God, then God has accepted us as his son or daughter. We have been born of God! God is our Father, just as he is Jesus' Father.

God says to us, as he says to Jesus: "You belong to me!" It doesn't matter how inadequate we might feel. It doesn't matter how much we think we have made a mess of things. It doesn't matter how old, or how young we are, or how gifted or not gifted we are – God says, "You belong to me."

God said of Jesus, **"This is my beloved Son"** In other words, **"I love you!"** And God says to us, "I love you!"

I wonder if we sometimes doubt that. When life serves us things that drag us down, or bring us sorrow or pain, or simply exhaust us – we can easily be tempted to think God is looking the other way. Even worse, we can be tempted to think he doesn't care about us anymore.

Listen to these words from Jeremiah 29:11 **'For I know the plans I have for you', says the Lord. 'Plans to prosper you, not to harm you; plans to give you hope and a future.'** It will be all right!

In Psalm 34:15,18 we read, **The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; The LORD is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.**

God does not always shield us from unpleasantness or suffering – those things come from living in a fallen world – but God *does* promise he's right in there with us, and he promises us that it will be all right. (Rom 8:28) He loves us so much, he gave his life for us – we know that, don't we?

So believe it! God says, "I love you!" If you ever begin to feel alone or abandoned by God, hold on to that truth.

Then, of Jesus, God said, **"with him I am well pleased."** God was *proud* of his son. And you know something? God is proud of us! The wonderful thing is, that God's pride in us, his delight in us, has *nothing* to do with our performance. It has *everything* to do with our being his child.

Does anyone have a drawing or painting on their fridge – perhaps done by a small child or grandchild? If I asked you how it compared with the Mona Lisa, what would you say?

You'd say, "Don't be ridiculous. It's not on my fridge because it's a work of art. It's on my fridge because my child – or grandchild- painted it and gave it to me!" You're proud of their humble effort, because you *love* them!

God is incredibly proud of us, even when our efforts are faulting and imperfect, because he *loves* us! When we turned away from our sin, and gave our lives to him – whether that was an understanding we grew into, or whether it was a decision we made at a point in time, we became his child. We're told that that the angels in heaven rejoiced! And God continues to rejoice over us.

Zephaniah 3:17 says this: **The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."**

Today, as we've reflected on the new servant promised in Isaiah, fulfilled in Jesus, I hope that we've been reminded of God's love for *us*.

What God said to Jesus, he also says to us: "You belong to me; I love you; I'm proud of you!"

Let's pray.