

**Worship Material**  
**Hope refreshed,**  
**Material from Roots Bible Study**  
**Sunday 11th January**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

God of hope,  
open our eyes, our ears and our hearts  
to become more aware of the hope that you offer:  
a hope that is refreshing;  
a hope that has no limits;  
a hope that is for all people.

**Amen.**

**Read Isaiah 42:1-9**

**Bible notes**

Classically, scholars have dubbed this the first of four songs commonly known as 'servant songs'. But as Hugh Williamson has pointed out, the four 'songs' in Isaiah 40–55 continue a theme first introduced and spelled out in the early chapters of the text (notably chapter 9). The poet/prophet of the exile picks up the theme of good governance – the absence of which was a reason for the exile – and paints a picture of God's servant that many Christians see perfectly fulfilled in Jesus – hence this text being used on the day we mark our Lord's baptism.

Structurally, these verses are no more a 'song' than the surrounding context. Indeed, Isaiah 40–55 is one long poem/song focused on the situation of the Judeans in exile. The original audience here was a defeated and disillusioned group of exiles far from home and lacking hope. Verse 27 suggests that they assumed that even God had given up on them. However, there is good news for them in this passage of hope, comfort and good governance.

Many characters are identified as 'servant' in Isaiah – Eliakim in 22:20, David in 37:3 and, most importantly, Jacob–Israel in 41:8-9. The call outlined in Isaiah 42:1-9 is for all the exiles to fulfil. But in Christian theology, this is also seen as a portrait of Jesus, the archetypal servant of God and the one who we are called to imitate in our lives.

Notice that this is a pastoral, prophetic and political calling, in that it is offering comfort to people, giving them a word of hope from God and pointing to good governance of their society; there is no separation between these three in the mind of God. While much of Isaiah 42 describes the ministry of Jesus, it also encapsulates the type of world God wants to see his people involved in creating, a vision that reaches its apex in Isaiah 65:17ff. Here God reminds his people that they are not abandoned in exile, that he has plans for their restoration and for them to play a key role in the delivering of his plans – outlined in brief here, especially in verses 3-4, 6-7 – which will be developed as the book unfolds.

### **Prayer**

**Loving God,**

**your wonderful light can shine in the darkest of nights.**

Refreshing hope, thank you.

**Your justice can stand firm against the worst corruption.**

Refreshing hope, thank you.

**Your comforting spirit can reach the depths of despair.**

Refreshing hope, thank you.

**You call us to share that hope as we praise you.**

Refreshing hope, thank you.

Amen.

### **A prayer to conclude**

God, you bring hope today,

as well as to so many through the ages.

May we be open to the hope that you bring:

refreshing, restoring, renewing,

and be ready to share that hope with others.

Amen.