

Grand introductions: Isaiah 49:1-7; John 1:29-42

by [Lillian Daniel](#) in the [January 2, 2002](#) issue

When members of my family introduce someone, they always give that person an automatic promotion. If she's a doctor, they will exaggerate, introducing her as a brilliant surgeon. A teacher's aide becomes a full professor. I am told that I do the same thing, even after ten years of living in New England, the land of understatement. I still turn an ordinary singer into a brilliant musician, a plain-looking person into a great beauty. When I'm talking about a dog, a mutt becomes a golden retriever who can juggle.

In my family, we see life as a series of grand stories that simply must be populated with larger-than-life characters. The problem is that we can get it wrong, and lose the essence of who a person is. For instance, when a labor union organizer is introduced as the head of a corporation's labor relations department, he has switched sides. If someone is called the perfect mother, she loses the right to tear her hair out when the baby throws raspberry yogurt across the room. In our grand descriptions, however generously offered, we may strip our characters of the right to be who they really are.

We are told that when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming, he declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Talk about a grand introduction! What could Jesus have felt in that moment? Did he want to say, "Stop. I'm not all that"? Or was he comfortable with the introduction?

Elsewhere Jesus turns the tables and asks John to baptize him. But in this reading the focus is not really on Jesus, but on how others introduce Jesus. Jesus says remarkably little. The introductions are so massive, with descriptions of doves and anointing by the Holy Spirit, what more can Jesus say?

There's always the old testimonial dinner standard: "Thanks for that generous introduction. If only my parents could have heard it." In Jesus' case, his Father had created the whole scenario before time began. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Again, what an introduction!

In his Old Testament world, Isaiah does not wait for others to introduce him. "Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away!" Prophets tend toward self-introduction. They are so seldom believed that they get used to repeating themselves.

Although Isaiah is caught in a bog of palace politics and national struggles, he won't be defined by the slippery world around him. He won't be named by his detractors. He is named by his purpose, and it is not an easy one. "The Lord called me before I was born; while I was in my mother's womb, he named me."

He has been called into an identity in which he may not be loved by anyone other than God. "He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me. . . . And he said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'"

"And what do you do?" we ask one another at a party. We get a list of accomplishments or a résumé, and sometimes we are caught off guard by the resigned description of a sad life. When that happens, we want to find another guest, one who follows the rules and says, "I'm in real estate. And you?"

What if we asked more of one another in our introductions? What if we skipped the world's definitions and moved instead to God's? The guest responds, "I work in real estate, but what I really am is a creature that God knit together in my mother's womb. My family wants me to move into commercial development, but sometimes I wonder if I'm an arrow God hid away in a quiver, and I'm about to be shot out into creation. The world tells me I don't make enough money to get my monthly credit card bills down, but my faith tells me I could be a light to the nations."

Isaiah wanders over from the canapé table and says, "I couldn't help but overhear your words, and I know exactly what you mean. I have labored in vain, yet surely my cause is with the Lord."

"And our reward with God," says the realtor. The party goes on around them, but they have been caught up in something new.

Jesus hears John introduce him again. This time John is standing with two men who will turn out to be the first disciples, and John announces, "Here is the Lamb of God." That's enough to make the men follow him, but Jesus seems to want to clarify.

"Who are you looking for?" he asks.

The disciples aren't interested in the question. "Rabbi, where are you staying?" they ask. The disciples are not looking for small talk, or more introductions. They are looking for a way of life.

"Come and see," Jesus says, as if to suggest that we do know one another not by titles or names but ultimately by how we live. How ordinary. Jesus has gone from being the Lamb of God to a guy having some other guys over to his place.

But then Simon Peter's brother brings him to Jesus and says, "We have found the Messiah." Is Jesus irritated with the grand introduction? Apparently not, for he responds by giving Simon an entirely new name. In the end, it is Jesus who makes the introductions and Jesus who gives the new life.