

**Isa. 40:1–11**

**Ps. 85:1–2, 8–13**

**2 Pet. 3:8–15a**

**Mark 1:1–8**

# Message of Hope

**Goal for  
the Session**

*Children will observe and celebrate God as our hope in the  
midst of difficult situations.*

## ■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

### Focus on Isaiah 40:1–11

#### **WHAT is important to know?**

—From “Exegetical Perspective,” Kathleen M. O’Connor

This passage creates a theological terra firma for a fearful people, not in the destroyed temple, the collapsed monarchy, or the broken covenant of the past, but in God’s never-failing word. At a time when other tangible and intangible ways of relating to God have collapsed, the prophetic word is their anchor. This may be why vocabulary of speaking and calling, voice and word, calling and commanding dominates the text. Though everything else fails, God’s word endures forever, and that God comes to lead them home.

#### **WHERE is God in these words?**

—From “Theological Perspective,” George W. Stroup

For those who live in the midst of exile, cultural collapse, and communal disaster, there can be no true hope except in God. It is futile to hope in individuals or even in the strength of the community, for human beings are inconstant, are fickle, and break their promises. Eventually they wither and fade, not simply because they are mortal, but because they are untrustworthy. The only one who can be trusted to make right what is so badly wrong, who can lead Judah out of exile and into the promised land, is the one whose Word will alone “stand forever” (v. 8).

#### **SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?**

—From “Pastoral Perspective,” Cynthia A. Jarvis

The God we shall see, says Second Isaiah in this pericope, looks like this: on one hand, God will come with might and God’s arm will rule; on the other hand, God will feed this flock like a shepherd. “Here is your God!” we say and so turn those who dwell in unforgiven past tenses to a Word made flesh, pregnant with God’s “shall” and “will.” “Here is your God!” we shout to those whose impending death has made them demand a miracle and so insinuate the mighty Word that alone negates our mortality against its every rival. “Here is your God!” we sing, and with Handel lift up our voice with strength, heralds one and all of good tidings.

#### **NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?**

—From “Homiletical Perspective,” Richard F. Ward

In the face of derision and indifference, we are to speak of this God whose fierce compassion and care for humankind trumps the power of the other “gods” who seem to enjoy sovereignty in human relationships. Advent is a time to hear the promises spoken or sung to the community of faith once again and then sit with them through the season. It is also a time for that community to find its own voice, overcome its objections, and speak words of comfort and assurance to anyone who feels separated or abandoned by God that God *will* arrive and *will* come in gentle power.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

***Isaiah 40:1–11***

**YOU WILL NEED**

- small table or large box
- purple or blue cloth
- yellow paper
- crayons, pencils
- scissors, tape
- Bible
- Color Pack 1, 2, 27, 28
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- copies of Resource Sheet 1

For Responding

- option 1: 8" round paper doilies, copies of Resource Sheet 2, crayons or markers, scissors, glue sticks
- option 2: construction paper, stapler, tape, markers or crayons, narrow gift wrap ribbon
- option 3: *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player, Color Pack 28

Some churches use the color blue in worship during Advent as a symbol of hope. Some churches use purple, a color of royalty, to honor the coming of our king, Jesus. In your class, use the same color your church uses in worship.

## Focus on Your Teaching

When your learners hear the word *hope* during December, these concrete thinkers will likely think of their Christmas wishes. In families where money is limited or where there is animosity about parental custody arrangements for the holidays, children may not feel hopeful at all. Tune in to the feelings that learners express concerning their holiday plans. Assure them that God's gifts of love and hope are for them, however they celebrate Jesus' birth. This month, expect learners to be more restless or excitable. Try to balance energetic activities with quieter ones.

*Gracious God, help me to quiet myself and listen for your Word. When I face difficult situations, renew my strength and refresh my hope. Amen.*

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, color the candles and ribbon on Color Pack 1 with a blue or purple crayon, matching the color your church uses in worship during Advent. Make two small yellow paper flames. (If you still have Color Pack 25 from the Fall 2020 materials, hang it outside your teaching area to help others count the Sundays in Advent. Add a flame to it each week.) Set up a worship table by covering a small table or box with a purple or blue cloth, using the color your church uses in Advent. Place Color Pack 1 and a Bible, opened to Isaiah 40, on the cloth. If you are using option 2 in Responding, cut five 12" lengths of narrow gift wrap ribbon for each child.

Welcome each child as he or she arrives.

Gather learners around the worship table. Remind them that it is the season of Advent. It is time to prepare for Christmas, Jesus' birthday! On Color Pack 1, point out that there is one candle for each Sunday in Advent. Explain this is the second Sunday in Advent, and the candle this week is the candle of hope. Ask a volunteer to tape yellow paper flames to the first and second candles as the group sings "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy" (Color Pack 27; track 12 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021).

Invite the children to tell about times they were really hoping for something. Follow up by asking what happened. Say that today's Bible reading is about hope.

### EXPLORING

Show Color Pack 2 to introduce Isaiah. Explain that Isaiah was a prophet. God chose him to speak God's word to the people in his nation. Open your Bible to Isaiah 40:1–11 to show where Isaiah's words are recorded. Read aloud the following version of the text:

**I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy**

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy  
down in my heart,  
Down in my heart, down in  
my heart;  
I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy  
down in my heart,  
Down in my heart to stay.

God is with us, God is with  
us, praise ye the Lord;  
Praise ye the Lord, praise ye  
the Lord.

God is with us, God is with  
us, praise ye the Lord;  
Praise ye the Lord always.

The people in Isaiah's nation, Israel, had lived through a long time of war. Jerusalem, their capital city, had been destroyed. Their enemies had captured them and taken them to a faraway land. They thought there was no hope.

God told Isaiah to comfort Israel. Isaiah sang a song: "Comfort, comfort my people!" says your God" (Isaiah 40:1, CEB). God had Isaiah tell the people that their hard times would come to an end. God would lead them back to Jerusalem and help them rebuild.

Isaiah told the people that God's power would save them. He told them to trust God, because "God's word will exist forever" (v. 8, CEB).

Isaiah told the people to be on the lookout for the ways God was working to lead them back home. He said, "Go up on a high mountain, messenger Zion! Raise your voice and shout, messenger Jerusalem! Raise it; don't be afraid; . . . Here is your God!" (v. 9, CEB).

Isaiah said that God will treat God's people like a shepherd treats his sheep.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Like a Shepherd). Ask learners to trace the dot letters with a finger as the group reads the word *shepherd* in unison several times. Read aloud the Bible verse, inviting learners to join in. Discuss:

- ✿ Why did Isaiah say that God treats us like a shepherd would? What kinds of things does God, our shepherd, do?
- ✿ What good news of hope did Isaiah speak to the people?

Distribute pencils and have learners to use them to trace the dots in *shepherd* and then to complete the dot-to-dot puzzle. Invite them to imagine they are this sheep, and they are sitting on God's lap. Ask:

- ✿ What are you saying to God?
- ✿ What is God saying to you?

Summarize that God stays close to us in our hearts, keeps us safe, and shows us how to live. We can trust God to take care of us, and this gives us hope! Discuss:

- ✿ What helps you to have hope when you are feeling sad, scared, discouraged?  
(Responses may include: receiving a hug, having someone listen to their problem, being with a friend, singing, praying.)

## RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Doily Sheep** This activity will help the children identify God as their shepherd and a source of hope. Give each child a 8" round paper doily. Have learners fold their doilies in half. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Doily Sheep), crayons or markers, scissors,

EASY  
PREP

Some messages children might shout: God loves you! Don't give up! Our hope is in God! Trust the Lord! God will help us!

and glue sticks. Tell children to color the head and legs of the sheep and cut them out. Also have them cut out the verse. After learners glue the head and legs to the doily, have them glue the verse on the sheep, wherever they choose. When all have finished, invite learners to hold their sheep and close their eyes. Tell them you will ask them some questions; they will answer to themselves, inside their heads: When do you feel close to God, your shepherd? What words of hope and love do you sense God is whispering to you today? Encourage them to take time to listen for God's words of hope and love at home too.

- 2. Good News Megaphone** Children will make megaphones to help them to shout out messages of God's love and hope. Distribute construction paper and crayons or markers. Invite learners to decorate one side of the paper with happy designs and the words *hope* and *love*. Show learners how to lay the paper on a flat surface, decorated side down, and then start rolling the paper from one corner to make a cone shape with a small opening at one end and a large opening at the other. For each child, staple the edge of the paper cone at the large opening. Have children tape the seam to prevent the megaphone from unrolling. Give each child five 12" pieces of narrow gift wrap ribbon to tape around the large opening as streamers. Talk about what messages of hope learners might shout through their megaphones. Invite each one to deliver several messages to the group.
- 3. Music of Hope** Music can help children recall and experience messages of hope. Play "The Whole World Is in God's Hands" (Color Pack 28; track 19 of *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Review the words and invite learners to sing along as you play it again. Work as a group to create motions to accompany the words of one or two of the stanzas. Sing the song again with the motions. Discuss: What message of hope do you hear in this song? Who might like to hear this message of hope from you?

**The Whole World Is in God's Hands**

*The whole world is in God's hands,  
 The whole wide world is in God's hands,  
 The whole world is in God's hands,  
 The world is in God's hands.*

*The wind and the wave are in God's hands . . .*

*The fish and the bird are in God's hands . . .*

*All of the animals are in God's hands . . .*

*All the world's people are in God's hands . . .*

*You and me are in God's hands . . .*

**CLOSING**

Gather around the worship table and invite learners to tell what they know about hope and the hope God gives us. Sing the following words to the tune of "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy" (Color Pack 27; track 12 of *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021) to emphasize the Advent theme for this Sunday:

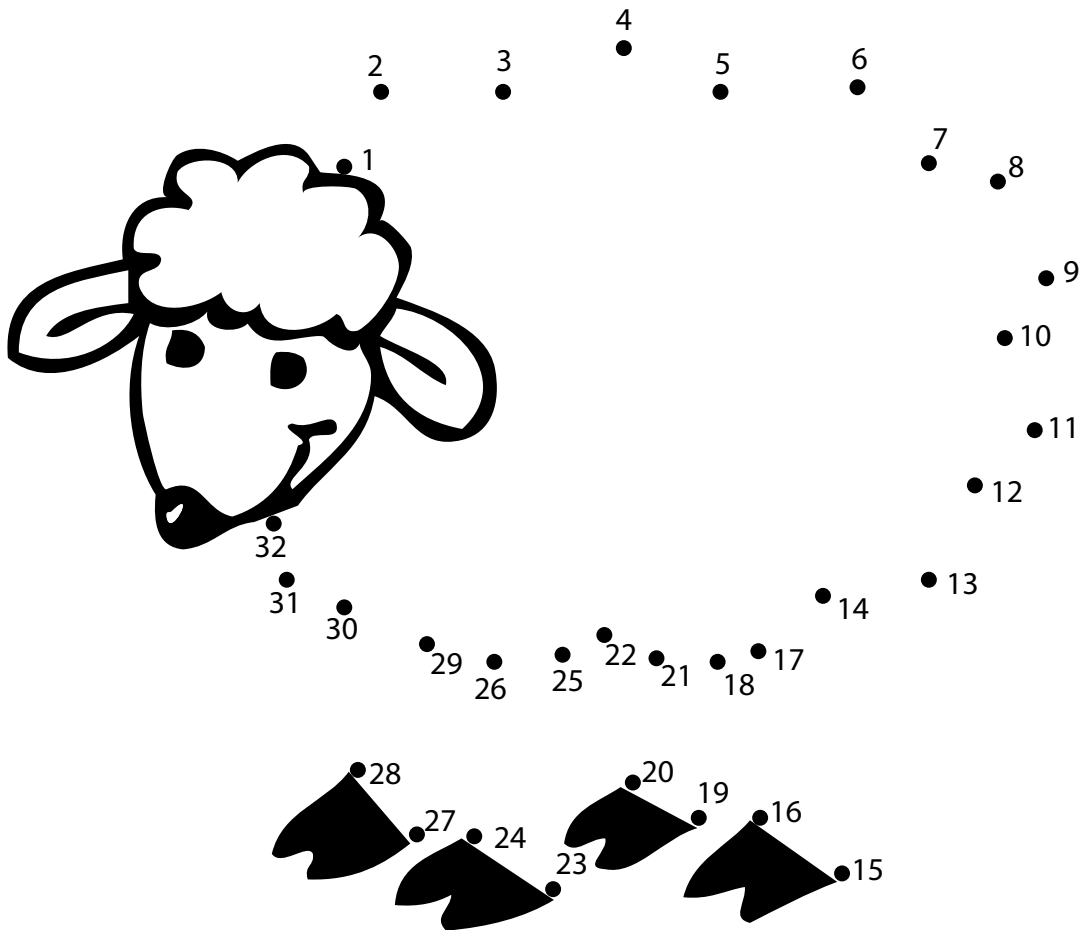
I've got the Advent hope, Advent hope, down in my heart,  
 down in my heart, down in my heart.

I've got the Advent hope, Advent hope, down in my heart,  
 down in my heart to stay.

Bless each child, saying: "(Name), God blesses you with hope."

## Like a Shepherd

shepherd



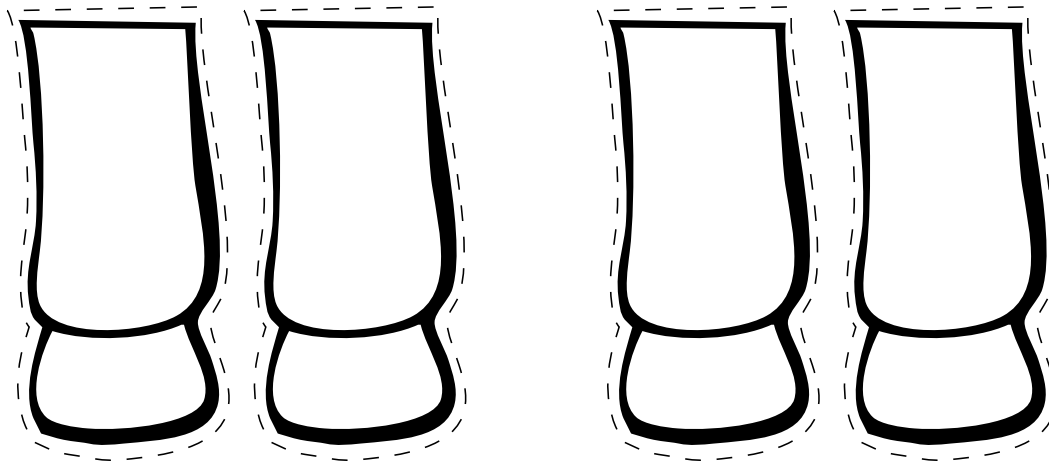
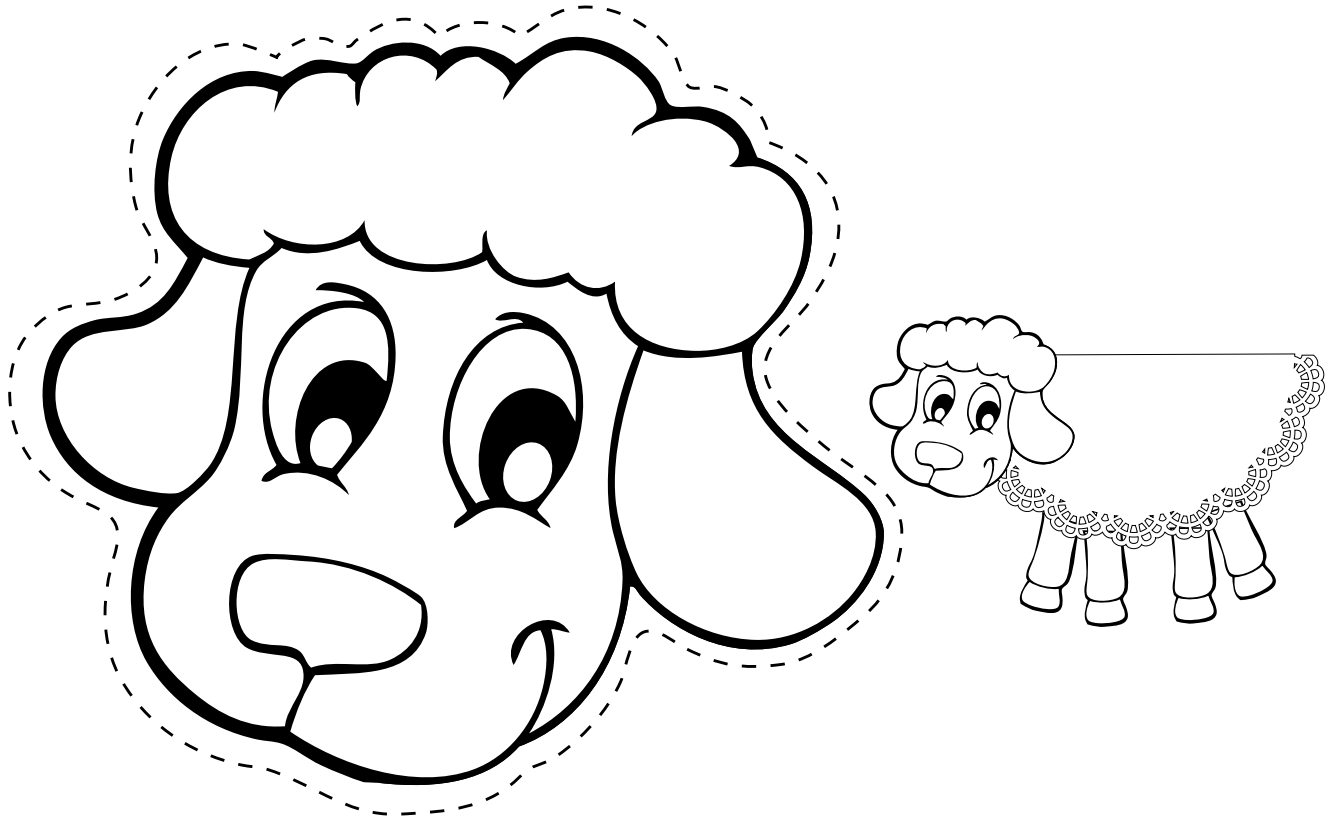
Like a shepherd, God will tend the flock; he will gather lambs in his arms and lift them onto his lap.

—Isaiah 40:11, CEB

December 6, 2020  
Message of Hope

Grades (K) 1–2  
Resource Sheet 2

## Doily Sheep



Like a shepherd, God will  
tend the flock.

—Isaiah 40:11, CEB