

Isa. 40:1–11

Ps. 85:1–2, 8–13

2 Pet. 3:8–15a

Mark 1:1–8

Shout It Out

Goal for the Session

Third- and fourth-graders will listen to Isaiah proclaim God's comfort and plan how they will announce God's love this Advent.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

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

Focus on Your Teaching

Even though children this age are moving toward independence, they still like to be comforted by a caring adult when life is hard. At the same time, they are able to understand why others need to be comforted and can offer such comfort themselves. This week's story is a call to announce God's love to those who are looking for hope. Isaiah's call to shout is not restrictive. Assure learners that everything from shouting the good news on a "mountaintop" to quiet acts of compassion help to announce God's love to people in need of comfort.

Loving God, draw me close to your comfort this Advent. Guide me as I encourage the children to be witnesses to your love. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- blue or purple cloth
- Advent wreath with candles
- matches
- Color Pack 1, 2, 28
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- Bibles
- sticky notes
- pen
- step stool or sturdy chair

For Responding

- option 1: construction paper, markers, mirror, scissors, tape
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 2 on card stock, markers, scissors, hole punch, glue sticks, yarn, small wrapped treats
- option 3: Color Pack 3, *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player; Internet-connected device

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if you are using option 2 in Responding, make arrangements to deliver the finished baskets to church members who are homebound or living in a care facility.

Welcome learners and invite them to help you spread the blue or purple cloth in the center of your learning area, using the color your church uses during Advent, and place the Advent wreath on it. Recall that during Advent, we look back in time as we think about God coming to the world as a baby. We look forward to the day when God's kingdom will fully come to earth. It is a great time to open our hearts so God can help us grow. Light two candles on the Advent wreath. Ask a volunteer to pray aloud:

Dear God, thank you for loving us so much that you sent your Son, Jesus. As we wait to celebrate his birthday, help us to learn more about living in his ways. Amen.

Extinguish the candles.

Display Color Pack 1. Ask:

- ✧ How do you think this boy is feeling? What tells you this?
- ✧ When do children need comforting? Who or what might offer comfort to them?

Challenge the children to listen for messages of comfort in the Bible passage.

EXPLORING

Distribute Bibles and help learners find Isaiah 40:1. Ask the children to recall what they know about prophets in the Bible. Explain, if necessary, that a prophet was someone chosen by God to speak God's message. Isaiah was a prophet.

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

Tell learners that this prophet spoke to God's people at a difficult time. The army of another country had marched into Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. Soldiers captured many of the people and took them to a faraway land called Babylon. These words in Isaiah were spoken to the captives.

Look again at Color Pack 1 and invite learners to imagine that this child was one of the captives forced to go to Babylon. Ask:

- ✧ What would it be like to be taken as a captive?
- ✧ What would it be like to know your home had been destroyed?
- ✧ What might this young captive be thinking?
- ✧ How might he be comforted?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Raise Your Voice). Ask for volunteers to read the parts of Narrator and Isaiah. Form two groups from the remaining learners, assigning them to be Group 1 and Group 2. Direct Group 1 to stand at one side of your learning space and Group 2 at the other side. Have Narrator and Isaiah stand between the two groups. Perform the reading.

Gather the group. Show Color Pack 2 and have learners read the verse in unison. Suggest that learners refer to Resource Sheet 1 for help as you discuss:

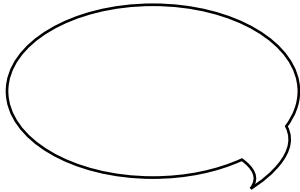
- ✧ What are the words of comfort in Isaiah's message? (Write the words on sticky notes and place them on the poster.)
- ✧ How do you think God's people in Babylon felt when they heard this message?
- ✧ Where do you see evidence of God's love in the message?
- ✧ Why did the people in Babylon need to be reminded of God's love?
- ✧ Who is told to shout out the good news of God's saving love?

Invite learners to take turns climbing up a "mountain" (step stool or sturdy chair) and shouting the Bible verse on Color Pack 2.

Look again at Color Pack 1 and invite the children to pose their bodies to look like the boy. Ask them to sit quietly and think about what it is like to feel scared or lonely as they listen to "Behold, I Am with You" (track 2 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). After the song, invite learners to return to a normal sitting position and discuss:

- ✧ Where is comfort needed in our world today?
- ✧ How might the people in those places be comforted?
- ✧ How might Isaiah's message offer comfort to people today?
- ✧ In what ways does our church announce God's love?
- ✧ What might you do to announce God's love during Advent?

EASY
PREP



Speech Bubble

God, We Sing

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *hope*
anew;
Light this candle, light the
way,
Bring *hope* into our hearts
today.
Jesus, near us as we pray,
Let *hope* be in our hearts
today.

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *peace*
anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *love*
anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *joy*
anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of Christ
anew;
Light this candle, light the
way,
We celebrate new life today.
Christ, be near us as we
pray
And celebrate new life
today.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Self-Portraits** Children will create a personalized message of God's love. Distribute construction paper and markers and invite children to create self-portraits. Encourage them to fill the whole sheet of paper with their head and shoulders. Provide a mirror and remind them not to forget details like eyelashes, eyebrows, and freckles. From a second sheet of paper, have each child cut a large speech bubble, write an encouraging message about God's love on it, and tape it to his or her portrait. Create a display of portraits and speech bubbles on a wall or bulletin board where other church members will see the messages.
- 2. Advent Baskets** Children will make gift baskets to announce God's love. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Advent Basket). Tell learners about the individuals who will receive the baskets. Ask: What encouraging messages about God's love could we write on these baskets? Have children use markers to write a message on two of the four sides of the basket. (Be sure words will be right side up after the basket is folded!) They can draw Christmas designs on the other two sides. Lead learners in the following steps: Cut out baskets. Cut side slits on solid lines and fold the dotted lines in. Glue where indicated. Punch holes in the tops as indicated. Fill baskets half full with wrapped treats. Lace yarn through the holes and tie a bow. Say a prayer for the individuals who will receive the baskets. Tell learners how they will be delivered.
- 3. Dance of Joy** Learners will imagine how an announcement of God's love might be made through music and dance. Show Color Pack 3 and invite learners to tell what message this group is sending. Have learners stand in a circle. Play "We Are Dancing in the Light of God" (track 21 on *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*) and encourage children to clap to the music. Discuss: What does this music communicate to you about God's love? Watch the YouTube video "Jewish Circle Dance Instruction" www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNiAuCAbMnQ to learn a traditional dance to accompany this song. Practice until the children are comfortable with the dance. Discuss when you might perform your dance for another class or in worship.

CLOSING

Gather around the Advent wreath and light two candles. Recall how Isaiah announced God's love to people who needed comfort. Invite learners to offer ideas of how Jesus' followers today can deliver messages of God's love to others.

Sing "God, We Sing" (Color Pack 28; track 7 on *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*).

Close with a circle blessing. In turn, have each learner turn to the person on her or his right and say: "(Name), you are one of God's people. Go out and announce God's love."

Thank learners for coming and affirm positive contributions they have made.

Raise Your Voice

(Groups 1 and 2 stand at opposite sides of the learning space. Isaiah and Narrator stand in the center.)

- N** Narrator: It was a hard and difficult time for the people of God.
- 1** Group 1: Alone in exile.
- 2** Group 2: Far from home.
- A** All: Cut off from God.
- N** Narrator: Then God spoke:
- I** Isaiah: Comfort, comfort my people.
- 1** Group 1: Encourage them.
- 2** Group 2: They have suffered long enough.
- I** Isaiah: A voice cries out in the wilderness:
- 1** Group 1: God is coming!
- 2** Group 2: Get ready!
- I** Isaiah: Clear the way for God!
- 1** Group 1: Make the road smooth and straight.
- 2** Group 2: Fill in the bumps.
- I** Isaiah: God is coming!
- A** All: God is coming!
- I** Isaiah: A voice calls out:
- 1** Group 1: Proclaim a message.
- 2** Group 2: What message shall we proclaim?
- I** Isaiah: All humankind is like grass.
- 1** Group 1: They last no longer than wildflowers.
- 2** Group 2: But God's love stands firm forever.
- I** Isaiah: Climb a high mountain.
- 1** Group 1: Tell the good news.
- 2** Group 2: Shout it out!
- I** Isaiah: Raise your voice!
- 1** Group 1: Don't be afraid!
- 2** Group 2: God is coming!
- I** Isaiah: God will take care of us.
- 1** Group 1: Like a shepherd cares for the sheep,
- 2** Group 2: God will gather us up like lambs
- A** All: And carry us home.



Advent Basket

