

**Isa. 11:1–10**

**Ps. 72:1–7, 18–19**

**Rom. 15:4–13**

**Matt. 3:1–12**

# God's Perfect World

## Goal for the Session

*Third- and fourth-graders will discover Isaiah's vision of God's kingdom and imagine what a perfect world would look like.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### Focus on Isaiah 11:1–10

#### WHAT is important to know?

—From "Exegetical Perspective" by Bruce C. Birch

The vision of harmony in verses 6–10 is often referred to as the vision of "the peaceable kingdom." The image is of a return to Eden when God's reign is finally consummated. When the anointed one described in earlier verses ushers it in, broken creation becomes the completely harmonious creation God intended. The earth will now be filled with the "knowledge of the LORD" (v. 9). This Hebrew term for knowledge is more than cognitive information; it is the full entering into and experiencing of what is known. So the earth will be infused with the reality of God, and it shall be as comprehensive as the waters of the sea (v. 9).

#### WHERE is God in these words?

—From "Theological Perspective" by Noel Leo Erskine

The church is not the kingdom of God, but its relationship to the kingdom signals its mission. The realm of God shines through the witness and mission of the church as the poor have good news preached to them and are judged with righteousness and equity. The Messiah awaits the church in a future of righteousness marked off by the gifts of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of God, beckoning the church to a new future not of its own making but one made possible by YHWH. The challenge is not to be stuck in the traditions of the past but to be open to the new realm in which the proud will be punished, the humble will be exalted, and the practice of justice will be the order of a new day.

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

—From "Pastoral Perspective" by Stacey Simpson Duke

This is how hope gets its start—it emerges as a tiny tendril in an unexpected place. Where are the stumps in our own lives; where do we feel cut off? Can we imagine or believe that even now God might be nurturing the growth of something new and good from our old, dead dreams? Consider what areas of our lives most need the promise of new life, and how we might become open to such newness. Isaiah's promise is not just a future one; even now there are tiny signs of hope and life in places that look dead and discarded.

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

—From "Homiletical Perspective" by Paul Simpson Duke

What of the "little child" who leads them? Shall Christians think of Jesus again? We should not make this move too quickly. Like the calf, lamb, kid, and ox, the child stands for the vulnerable, and is joined by others even younger and more vulnerable, happily playing in a safe world at last. Why is it the child who leads the whole bleating, mooing, yipping, snuffling, roaring, giggling company? The new creation wants a human presence—new, bright, undefended, and free—to love and care for it all.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**Isaiah 11:1–10**

**YOU WILL NEED**

- blue or purple cloth
- 4 votive candles in holders
- lighter or matches
- copies of Resource Sheet 3
- Bibles
- Color Pack 1, 2, 3, 30
- copies of Resource Sheet 1, 2
- Singing the Feast*, 2022–2023; CD player

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 1, colored pencils
- option 2: photo of Edward Hicks's painting "The Peaceable Kingdom"; newspapers, drawing paper, watercolor paints, paintbrushes, water dishes, paper toweling; fine-tipped markers (optional)
- option 3: Color Pack 3, 4; mural or bulletin board paper, markers, crayons

If open flames are not allowed in your Sunday school, use battery-powered candles.

## Focus on Your Teaching

Third- and fourth-graders are beginning to understand that the world is not a perfect place. Family members get sick. Friends fight. Things happen that aren't fair. They are becoming more aware of what is happening outside the walls of their own homes and understand that bad things happen to others near and far. In the face of all this, children may feel insignificant and unable to effect change; still, children often have keen hope that things will get better. Isaiah's vision of God's kingdom can illustrate such hope for them.

*Transforming Lord, inspire me with Isaiah's vision of life in your kingdom.  
Help me to claim the awesome hope found in you. Amen.*

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, arrange the blue or purple cloth (use the color your church uses during Advent) in the center of your learning space and place the four votive candles on it. If you are using option 2 in Responding, locate a photo of Edward Hicks's painting "The Peaceable Kingdom" in an art book or from an online source.

Welcome the children as they arrive.

Announce that this is the Second Sunday of Advent. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 3 (Advent Litany). Light two candles and form groups to read the litany aloud. Save the sheets to use next Sunday. Extinguish the candles, if necessary.

Form pairs. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Frightening!) and invite learners to tell their partners which things on the sheet they find frightening. Gather the group and invite the children to think about a time they were very frightened. Ask:

- ✂ When you were in that situation, did you feel hopeful? Why or why not?
- ✂ How hard is it to be hopeful when you are afraid? Why do you think this is so?

Say that today's Bible passage is about a time when God's people were afraid and losing hope.

You may want to review how to locate a Bible passage: Look in the table of contents for the name of the book and the page number where it begins. Turn to the first page of the book. Find the beginning of the designated chapter and then look for the beginning verse of the passage.

## EXPLORING

Tell learners that today's reading comes from the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Isaiah). Ask for volunteers to read the information aloud. Invite learners to tell what they find most interesting about Isaiah.

Show Color Pack 1. Invite them to tell what they know about stumps. Ask:

✿ Do stumps usually grow back into trees? Why or why not?

Tell learners that Isaiah says something surprising about a stump. Pass out Bibles and work as a group to find Isaiah 11. Read verse 1 in unison. Show Color Pack 2 and hold it next to Color Pack 1. Wonder together about why Isaiah describes the nation of Judah as a stump. Read aloud verses 2–5, 10 to learners as they look at the photos. Ask:

✿ What is different about the stump Isaiah is describing?

✿ What does Isaiah say about the shoot that will grow from this stump? (Let learners know that Christians often think of Jesus when they read these words.)

✿ Do you think these verses are a hopeful word-picture for God's people? Why or why not?

Ask for volunteers to read aloud verses 6–9. Ask:

✿ What are some surprising things in these verses?

Show Color Pack 3. Invite comments on how well this picture captures Isaiah's vision in verses 6–9. Ask what they would add to it. Discuss:

✿ What are your favorite word-pictures in Isaiah's verses?

✿ How do you think the people of Judah felt when they heard God's message from Isaiah?

✿ When you imagine a world filled with God's peace and hope, what does it look like?

## RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Fear to Hopefulness** Invite the children to imagine what peace and hopefulness look like. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Frightening!) and colored pencils. Ask learners to recall their earlier conversation about things that frighten them. They may want to add their own ideas of what is frightening. Working in the same pairs, have learners use colored pencils to modify the drawings of things that frighten them into pictures of peaceful or hopeful things. (For example, the storm might be modified by adding a drawing of people safe inside a house or storm shelter.) When they are finished, invite pairs to show their altered images to the rest of the group. Discuss how God might work through them to bring about such peace and hope.

**EASY  
PREP**

One Web site with this painting is [bit.ly/HicksPeaceableKingdom](https://bit.ly/HicksPeaceableKingdom).

- 2. Peaceable Kingdom** Works of art can provide additional images of God's reign of peace and hope for learners. Show a photo of Edward Hicks's painting "The Peaceable Kingdom." After learners have had a quiet moment to study it, invite them to open their Bibles to Isaiah 11:1–10 and look for phrases that are represented in the painting. Point out the people in the background. This grouping represents the Quaker people who signed a peace treaty with the Native Americans. Edward Hicks hoped that this treaty would bring peace to his area. Invite the children to think of where peace and hope are needed in their school or community. Cover the work space with newspapers and set out watercolor paints, paintbrushes, dishes of water, and paper toweling. Option: Provide fine-tipped markers instead of paint. Encourage learners to create paintings about what peace in their school or community would look like. Display these on a church bulletin board or in a hallway with a copy of Isaiah 11:9 next to them.
- 3. Advent of Peace** Third- and fourth-graders can grow in understanding that during Advent, Christians not only prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth, but also wait and pray for the time when God's perfect world is complete. Pass Color Pack 3 and Color Pack 4 around the group, inviting learners to consider how each one captures a vision of God's kingdom of peace. As a group, brainstorm ideas of what else God's perfect world might look like. Roll out a long piece of mural or bulletin board paper. Ask learners to work together to draw scenes of this perfect and peaceful world. Have a volunteer print the words of Isaiah 11:9 somewhere on the mural. When they have finished, display it where it will inspire other church members.

## CLOSING

Gather with learners around the candles and light two, if necessary. Show Color Pack 30 and sing the first two stanzas of "Four Candles" (track 8 on *Singing the Feast, 2022–2023*). Review that today's focus scripture from Isaiah is a hopeful message about God's peace. Invite learners to tell their favorite image of God's perfect kingdom from the reading. Tell learners you will pause during the prayer so they can add their prayers for people who need God's peace. Pray aloud:

*God of light, we long for the day when our world will be ruled completely by your loving power and peace. Hear our prayers for (pause for learners to add their prayers). Be with us as we wait to celebrate the birthday of your Son, Jesus. Amen.*

Invite learners to exchange high fives as they bless one another, saying: "God bless you with Advent peace."

### Four Candles

Light one candle, Messiah is coming; wait and watch for his Advent is near.

He will meet us on God's holy mountain; how shall we prepare for his coming?

One. One candle to light the darkness. One. One candle to light his way.

Light two candles, Messiah is coming; wait and watch for his Advent is near.

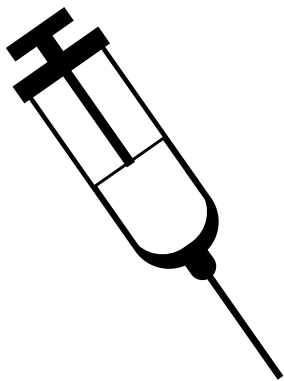
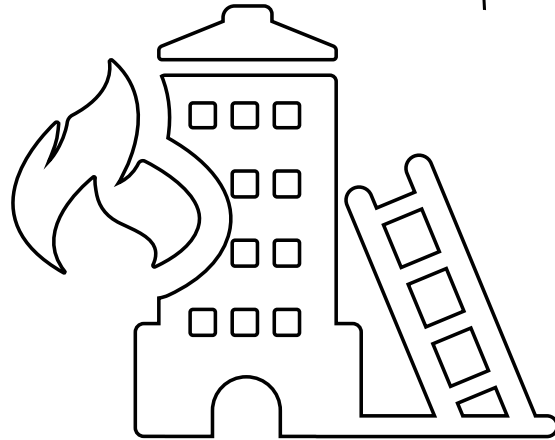
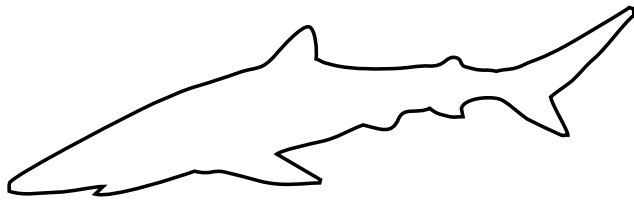
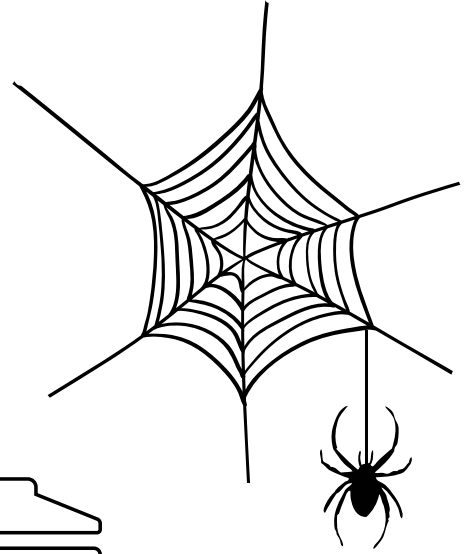
He will come from the family of Jesse; how shall we prepare for his coming?

Two. Two candles to light the darkness. Two. Two candles to light his way.

December 4, 2022  
God's Perfect World

Grades 3–4  
Resource Sheet 1

### Frightening!



My Own Idea

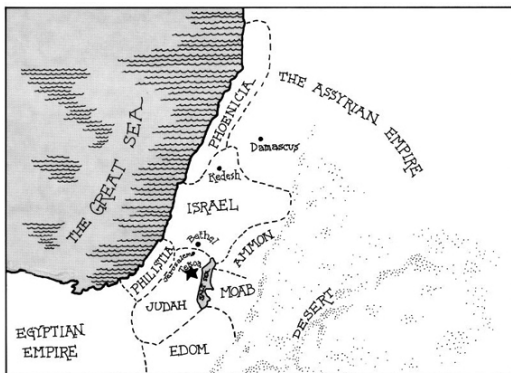
## Isaiah

### ***What is a prophet?***

In Bible times, a prophet was a person called by God to deliver a message to God's people.

### ***Who was Isaiah?***

Isaiah was one of God's prophets. He lived about 740 years before Jesus was born. Isaiah delivered God's message to people who lived in Judah.



### ***What was going on in Isaiah's community?***

There were many wars in Isaiah's time. The nations of Assyria, Egypt, and Babylonia were struggling to gain power in that part of the world.

The people of Judah were God's people, but the leaders of Judah were not trusting God. They were turning to the leaders of other nations for help and putting all their trust in them.

God's people in Judah were not living in God's ways. They were worshiping other gods. They were not treating one another with fairness and kindness.

Isaiah warned the people that the nation of Judah would be taken over by a foreign army. The city of Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed.

### ***What is the heart of Isaiah's message?***

God's people can be safe and secure only when they trust in God alone and live in God's ways. Only in God's kingdom is there true and lasting peace.

## Advent Litany

Group 1: Advent is a time of hope,

Group 2: God's people long for a savior.

Group 1: Advent is a time of peace,

Group 2: God's people seek the peace of Christ.

Group 1: Advent is a time of joy,

Group 2: God's people rejoice in the gift of Jesus Christ.

Group 1: Advent is a time of love,

Group 2: God's people are given love through God's Son,  
Jesus.

All: Let us live in the hope, peace, joy, and love of  
our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Note: Save this sheet to use in future sessions.

