



Prepare a Road

Goal: To hear the message of Isaiah that God will bring God's people home.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Isaiah 40:3-11

The Advent season is a time of anticipation. We will celebrate the coming of God's Messiah, Jesus Christ. Old Testament prophets record what God will do, and—we believe—has done in sending Jesus Christ.

To the people of Israel in exile in foreign Babylon, the prophet Isaiah proclaims good news. God is preparing a road to lead the people home from exile. Then “the LORD's glory will appear, / and all humanity will see it together” (v. 5, CEB). What an incredible promise! Human life is like “grass,” it “dries up,” and withers away. But believe that “our God's word / will exist forever” (v. 8). God will lead the people tenderly: “like a shepherd, God will tend the flock; / he will gather lambs in his arms / and lift them onto his lap” (v. 11).

People who have been forced to live in a foreign place will have a homecoming—established by God. By God's grace, the people will be led along the road to their land. They will be liberated and rescued by God's tender, loving grace. Imagine the gratitude for this precious promise! In Advent, God's grace and our gratitude are focused on the coming of Jesus Christ.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

Waiting for Christmas is sometimes hard for children because of the Santa culture in which we live. Helping them participate in the season of Advent, which requires both waiting and preparing for Christmas, is a good spiritual practice. In this second Sunday of Advent, we continue to learn about the prophet Isaiah. Hearing the story of his words of promise to the Israelites, who were away from their home, will have some immediate connections for children. They will be able to tell stories about being away from home and what they looked forward to when they returned.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Lighting the candles in the Advent wreath each week provides a moment for pausing and hearing the story from the prophets, old stories that still have meaning for us today. Children in your group may know about people who are homeless, especially if your church supports people with a place to stay and warm meals in the winter. Helping them connect with contemporary stories of being away from home will deepen their understanding of the longing of the Israelites to go home. Just like the Israelites, the parents of Jesus wandered, looking for a home where Jesus could be born.

Dear God, when I feel homeless or homesick, reassure me of your commitment to be home for the children and for me. Amen.



Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2022–2023

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 1, 1a, 14, 15

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

e-book or story audio
(see p. vii)

purple cloth

Advent wreath with
four battery-operated
candles

20-ft. piece of different-
colored yarn for every
two or three children

Responding

Offering

SCM 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e

Extra

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1, salt or sand

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Before the children arrive, post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule.” Cut out and glue the arrow marker on a clothespin. Use the schedule to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

“Extra Activity” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

C VI

Greet the children by name and with the words, “The grace of Christ be with you.” Prompt the children to respond with the same words. Invite children to help set the scene. This is the second Sunday of Advent. Provide a Bible, a purple cloth, and an Advent wreath with four battery-operated candles.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities and suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Ask for a volunteer to practice reading today’s Scripture passage.

Ask the children to imagine how far their homes are from the church building. Ask them to imagine that many obstacles keep them from getting home. Ask them to name possible obstacles. Accept all responses. Wonder together how it feels if you can’t get home.

Display **SCM 1a** and ask the children to describe what they see. Ask them to imagine how it would feel to have your home in a desert. Ask them to imagine what it takes to build a road through a desert. Wonder together why roads are important and how they help us live.

Singing and Praying

SD T

Invite the children to gather around the Advent wreath. Consider darkening the room for the prayer.

Sing the first two verses of “God, We Sing”—**MM 7; SCM 15**. Turn on two candles. Remind the children that the candlelight is a reminder of God’s presence and Jesus as the light of the world.

If the room is darkened, turn on the lights after the first line of the prayer. Pray:

Dear God of the light, we praise you today for bringing light to the world. We go on many roads to go many places. You guide us around the bends, you strengthen us going uphill, you comfort us over the bumps. Thank you, God, for always bringing us home. Amen.

T *Activity during times of transition can lend focus to children. Challenge them to lift one foot and balance. See how long they can stand on that foot and then switch feet.*



Preparing to Hear the Story MS

Help children explore what it means to make a straight path by observing the difference between a cluttered path and a clear path. Using furniture and objects found in your room, have the children build an obstacle course. Then have them take turns finding a path through the obstacles.

If your group enjoys competition, form teams and see which group can make it through the obstacle course (without knocking anything down) the fastest. Ask how God's ways are like a straight path.

Tell the children that today's story is about a prophet who told people to make a road for God. Isaiah was writing when the Israelites were in exile thousands of years ago. They had been conquered and sent far away from their homes to live in Babylon. There were many miles between Jerusalem and Babylon.



Hearing the Story L

Invite a child to find Isaiah 40 in the Bible. Ask a volunteer to read Isaiah 40:3-11. Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God." Place the open Bible on the worship table.

Read **SCM 1**, pausing after each paragraph. Invite the children to express, with their face and motions, how they imagine the Israelites may have felt.

Reflecting on God's Grace

Form groups of two or three children, and give each group a different-colored, 20-foot piece of yarn. Tell them that today's Scripture passage talks about paths through the wilderness. Such roads would have been winding and crooked, weaving between landforms and plant life.

Invite the groups to create winding pathways through your room from one end to the other. The paths need to be in clear floor space, not through furniture. When they have finished their paths, have them exchange with another group and follow each other's pathways.

Once everyone has had a chance to walk the winding paths, ask a person to stand on one end of one of the pieces of yarn. Once the person is standing on it, pull the piece of yarn out of its winding path until it is straight and taut across the floor. Wonder together why Isaiah's message from God is that God will make the crooked paths straight. Ask them what they think is the hope that the message gives the people.

Singing

Play and sing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”—**MM 6; SCM 14**—to remember the Jewish people’s hope that the waiting would be over and God’s promise would come true.

Help the children understand the line, “ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here.” Remind the children that the prophet Isaiah had shared God’s message of hope when the people were far from home in a foreign land. This line reminds us of that part of the Jewish people’s story and their desire to be saved.

Turn off the candles.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.

Claiming God’s Grace



Divide play dough into three large pieces. Form three groups and give each group one of the pieces of play dough. Have the children work together to create the following:

Group 1: a landscape with a road that bends and winds

Group 2: a landscape with a road and at least two hills

Group 3: a landscape with a bumpy road

Afterward, invite the children to talk about their roads and explain the techniques they used to shape the clay. Ask the children to recall a difficult or unfamiliar situation and consider the following questions:

- ▼ How is this situation like a windy, hilly, or bumpy road for you?
- ▼ What are the challenges this situation presents?
- ▼ Where do you look for help?

Have each group move to a different landscape and make that path smooth and straight. Ask:

- ▼ What did you do to make the path smooth and straight?
- ▼ What would make your situation easier?
- ▼ What would make you feel better?
- ▼ What promise could you rely on?
- ▼ How can we make difficult or unfamiliar times easier for others?

C Give children time to respond and to share; for some children, listening and speaking may take longer.



Praying God's Grace



Tell the children that many years after the Scripture passage from Isaiah was written, when Jesus was a grown man, but before he was baptized and began his ministry, there was a man baptizing people in the Jordan River. This man was named John and many called him John the Baptist. John was a follower of God who wanted people to turn from their sins and wrongdoings and turn back to God. He would use the word *repent*, which means “to turn from sin.”

Wonder together why John would refer to this Isaiah text about roads being made straight and valleys lifted up when he talked about the coming of Jesus. Invite the children to consider the word *repent*, and what in our lives might need changing or turning from.

Lead a prayer of repentance, inviting the children to turn around and look in a different direction each time you say *repent*. Tell the children they may respond aloud at the pauses or say a prayer silently.

Repent! (*turn around*)

Change your ways for the coming of Jesus.

Help us, O God, to change . . .

Repent! (*turn around*)

Prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus.

Help us, O God, to rely on . . .

Repent! (*turn around*)

Know that no matter where we are,

no matter what we see,

and no matter what we do,

God will find us,

turn us around,

and bring us home.

And all God's children say,

Amen! (*raise your hands to the sky*)

Offering God's Grace



As an offering to your church, create a path for congregation members to experience Isaiah's message.

Invite four volunteers to read **SCM 1b-1e**. Help as necessary. Provide painter's tape for children to create a path in the fellowship hall or a large space. Remind the children that the path in the story began windy and became straight. Suggest that they plan to make their path the same way. Tape the four SCM signs on chairs and set them at different spots along the path.

Invite congregation members to walk the path, stopping to consider each sign and experience Isaiah's message.

If you are using a building that is not your own, talk to your pastor or session to see if the congregation can use the path after worship, so that you can plan time to pick everything up later on the same day.



Extra Activity



Cover the tables where the children are working with newspaper or mural paper. Provide copies of **GN 1** and glue for each child. Pour salt or sand on paper plates for the children to share.

Invite the children to put a thin layer of glue on only the gray path, then sprinkle the salt or sand over the glue. Show them how to gently lift the paper and tap off the excess salt or sand. Allow time for the path to dry.

Tell the children that one way to pray is to meditate or think deeply in silence. Encourage the children to follow the path, thinking of ways they can go from a time of uncertainty to a time of comfort. Wonder about making paths.

- Have you ever walked along a path?
- What kinds of paths have you seen?
- How do you think the path was made?
- How can you make a path for Jesus in your life?



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit gracesightings.org. Remind the parents and caregivers about the e-book and story audio (see p. vii).

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Invite the children to gather, and lead them in cleaning the worship space.

Invite the children to collect the yarn used in “Reflecting on God’s Grace” and wind the strands together to make one solid path. Ask everyone to stand on the path.

End the session with each child becoming a messenger of good news. Have the children point their hands and fingers in different directions and say, “Peace be with you and you and you!” As they say this, encourage them to point in many different directions to include the whole group in their departing message of peace.

Challenge them to look for opportunities to walk God’s path this week.



