

Isa. 2:1–5

Ps. 122

Rom. 13:11–14

Matt. 24:36–44

Living in God's Light

**Goal for
the Session**

Youth will open themselves to God's transforming vision of hope and peace for their lives and the world.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Isaiah 2:1–5

WHAT is important to know?

— From "Exegetical Perspective," Bruce C. Birch

This oracle is often called the "floating oracle of peace" because it also appears in Micah 4:1–3. It is apparently part of a general prophetic tradition that was available to both of these prophets as a promise of the eschatological fulfillment of God's kingdom. Presumably this is especially important in times of difficulty when present circumstances seem unpromising; confidence that the future belongs to God gives hope in the present. In Advent we anticipate the birth of Jesus into a world in need of light (v. 5). Every generation needs assurance that the powers of the world—whether the Romans of Jesus' time or the principalities and powers of our present age—do not determine the future.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," Noel Leo Erskine

We are promised by God that as God's gift of peace becomes real among us, Jews and Gentiles alike will stream to the mountain of God to be instructed and directed by God. The people who are taught by God will seek peace and practice violence no more. Weapons of violence will be destroyed. To receive divine instruction is to share in a vision of a coming realm of peace in which God will judge among the nations, and nations will not learn war anymore. The way forward is to walk in the light of the Lord.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Stacey Simpson Duke

In the end, what Isaiah offers is not only a vision of global transformation, but an invitation to live toward that day. "O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!" However hard it may be to believe that a new and longed-for reality will take hold some day, there is power in walking in God's light now, one step at a time. We may feel cynical or hopeless about the prospects of Isaiah's vision, but in his invitation lies enormous and practical power. The future belongs to God, but the first step toward that future belongs to those who have glimpsed God's light and are willing to trust that enough light lies ahead.

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

— From "Homiletical Perspective," Paul Simpson Duke

We are in the presence of a mystery. God's own justice and peace will occur among the nations "in days to come." What days? How? Perhaps all we can say is that the vision describes what God is, in fact, at work in the world to do. It is what Jesus apparently meant by "the reign of God," which is already present and at work among us, though not yet in fullness. We saw it in Jesus, who converted fear to love, lunacy to sanity, enemies to friends. He died surrounded by swords; a spear stabbed him; nails tore him. They entered infinite love, which "melted them into light."

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 2:1–5

Focus on Your Teaching

Young people live with a tension between hope and cynicism, idealism and reality. Younger youth are more focused on the present or near future and the seesaw of emotions relating to social and developmental challenges. Older youth have a higher level of concern for the future and may worry about climate change statistics or the news of yet another terrorist attack. Avoid the temptation to try to talk them out of negative feelings. Acknowledging their concerns can open up opportunities for new insights.

Almighty God, may I be willing to listen to the youth as they voice their concerns and affirm for them the promise of your hope that can transform the world. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- Advent wreath materials
- matches
- taper
- blue paper
- pencils
- tape
- markers
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1

For Responding:

- option 1: old newsmagazines and newspapers, construction paper, scissors, glue sticks
- option 2: bare branch, bucket, sand or gravel, green and yellow craft foam, hole-punch, ribbon, scissors, felt markers
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2

For Images Connection:

- Internet-connected device

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, make an Advent wreath with a circle of green branches (real or artificial), four blue or purple candles (according to your tradition), and a central white pillar candle. Cut blue paper into strips the width of the paper.

Greet youth as they arrive. Point out the Advent wreath and explain that the four candles represent the four Sundays of Advent. The central candle, called the Christ candle, represents the light that came into the world at Jesus' birth. The wreath's circle symbolizes God's love that never ends. Invite a volunteer to light the first candle, representing Hope.

Distribute strips of blue paper and pencils. Invite youth to write down some hopes and dreams they have for themselves, their families, their country, and the world. Provide tape to make their dreams into a paper chain and place it around the Advent wreath. Ask:

- ✿ What is happening in the world today that gives people hope?
- ✿ What is happening in the world today that makes it hard to be hopeful?

Pray:

God, sometimes it is hard to believe in your promise of hope. During this Advent season help us to find signs of hope in our daily lives. Help us to be signs of hope in the world around us. Amen.

EXPLORING

During the season of Advent the Bible readings often come from the books of the Old Testament prophets. This week, and for the next two weeks, the readings come from Isaiah, the first and longest prophetic book. Recall that last week's Bible reading came from Jeremiah, another prophetic book.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Isaiah Who?) and read the information together. Distribute Bibles and have youth find the book of Isaiah. Ask:

✧ How many chapters are there?

Point out that many biblical scholars believe this long book is divided into three sections, probably composed by at least three different writers.

During Isaiah's time four different kings ruled in the southern kingdom, Judah. Ask:

✧ What were the names of these kings? (Hint: look at Isaiah 1:1)

Although the kingdom was being threatened by Assyria, a powerful neighboring country, Isaiah believed that the real threat was from within Judah and its capital city Jerusalem. He pointed out the weak leadership of the kings and accused the religious leaders of not doing their job. Invite a volunteer to read Isaiah 1:16–17. Ask:

✧ What problems does Isaiah name?

✧ What message does Isaiah bring to these leaders?

For the rest of the chapter Isaiah preaches a message of “bad news” about what is going to happen if the people and their leaders don't change their ways. Then Isaiah offers a vision of what life could be like.

“Mountain” in verse 2 refers to Jerusalem, a city that was on a hill, with the temple built at the highest point.

Read Isaiah 2:1 and invite four volunteers each to read a verse from Isaiah 2:2–5. Ask them to stand as they read and proclaim the words, as if they were prophets speaking to the people. Ask:

✧ What kind of transformation does Isaiah see?

✧ What hope does this message offer to the people?

In *The Message*, a Bible paraphrase by Eugene H. Peterson, verse 4 states that God will “settle things fairly between nations” and “make things right” so that “They'll turn their swords into shovels, and their spears into hoes. No more will nation fight nation, they won't play war anymore.” The purpose of Isaiah's vision was to offer hope and inspiration to a world surrounded by violence and uncertainty. Ask:

✧ What “swords” and “spears” need to be transformed today?

✧ What transformation would you like to see in the world today?

The last part of Isaiah's message invites people to live in the light of God. Ask:

✧ What do you think it means to walk, or live, in God's light?

RESPONDING

Choose one of the following learning activities:

1. **Transforming Mosaics** Youth will explore the image of transformation offered in Isaiah's vision by creating peace mosaics. Distribute old magazines and newspapers and invite youth to find images of things they would like to see changed in the world (images of poverty, war, depression, pollution). They are to cut their pictures into small pieces and glue the pieces onto construction paper to form mosaics in a shape that symbolizes

EASY
PREP

peace (such as a dove, a peace sign, a sunrise). Invite them to cut out letters to create the words from Isaiah 2:4b and glue them around their creations.

Option: This activity could be adapted to use a tree outside the church building.

- 2. Advent Tree** Youth will reflect on Isaiah's vision of hope and transformation by making a "Vision Tree" for the congregation. Plant a branch in a bucket of sand or gravel. Invite youth to cut leaf-shapes from craft foam. Punch a hole at one end and thread with a length of ribbon. Look again at the hopes and dreams written down during the Gathering activity. Brainstorm a list of hopes and dreams for the world for participants to write on craft foam leaves and attach to the tree. On a craft foam star, print "Living in the light of God" and attach it to the top of the tree. Place the tree in the church hall with extra leaf shapes, markers, and a sign inviting people to write their prayers, hopes, and dreams for the world and add them to the tree.
- 3. Advent Service** Youth will share the light of God's hope and transformation by engaging in one or more service projects during this season. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Advent Activities) and review the suggestions. Choose one or more and make plans for carrying out the project together. Or, brainstorm other ideas for Advent service projects and plan how the group might carry these out.

If the group is large, form small groups according to interests. Plan a time at a future session to hear reports on their projects.

CLOSING

Gather around the Advent wreath and give each person a tea light candle. Invite youth to take turns lighting their candles from the Hope candle in the Advent wreath. As they do this, invite them to complete this sentence: "As I go out into the world today, I can bring hope by _____."

Pray:

Loving God, may the light of your hope shine in us and through us, helping to transform the world into your vision of peace. Amen.

■ ENHANCEMENT

IMAGES CONNECTION

Outside the United Nations headquarters in New York City is a bronze sculpture of a man holding a hammer high in one hand and a sword in the other. He is pounding the sword into a plowshare. Another sculpture is a large bronze replica of a revolver with the barrel tied into a knot. Search for "Swords into Plowshares" and "Non-violence" sculptures on the UN Photo Digital Asset Management System at bit.ly/UNphotos. These sculptures are symbols of peace, of hope that there will be no more wars. Ask:

✿ If you were going to create a peace sculpture, what symbol would you use?

Isaiah Who?



“I am Isaiah, the son of Amoz” (Isaiah 1:1a, CEV). That’s how the book of Isaiah begins. Isaiah was a prophet and his name means “God gives salvation.” In the Bible, a prophet is a person called to speak for God and to deliver God’s messages to God’s people. Isaiah’s wife was a prophet too and they lived near Jerusalem around 750 years before Jesus was born. Verses from the book of Isaiah are quoted or referred to more often (419 times!) in the New Testament than any other book in the Hebrew Scriptures, or Old Testament.

“I have some good news and some bad news . . .” This is basically the message of Isaiah, and all the other prophets whose words are included in the Bible. Prophets looked at what was happening in their world and delivered the bad news, warning people that they were going to be judged, maybe even punished because they weren’t living in God’s way. They also delivered the good news that God still loved them and that everyone could turn their lives around.

“The Lord says . . . you are a sinful nation loaded down with guilt” (Isaiah 1:4, CEV).

The first thirty-nine chapters contain quite a bit of “bad news.” Isaiah doesn’t mince words and the people who were listening would have definitely known that God was not pleased. But there was “good news” too, a message of hope. Chapter 2 begins with a vision of what life could be like if people began to live by the light of God’s love.

Advent Activities

Advent is a great time to think about doing something to help others. Here are some ideas for service projects that you can do together.

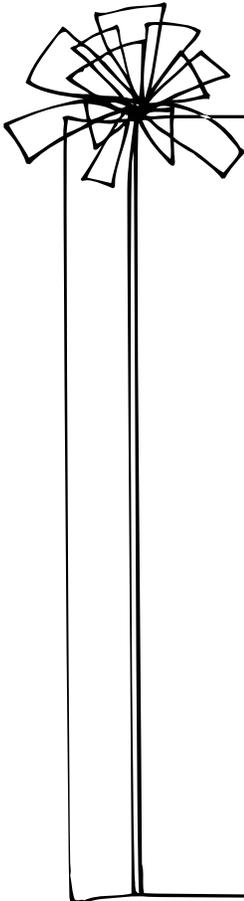
Connect with seniors: Make arrangements to visit a seniors' residence one afternoon. Bring card games and board games to play with the residents; sing Christmas carols together.

Care for children: Provide child care at the church one Saturday morning for families in the congregation so that parents can have a few hours to shop. Bring toys, games, and snack foods.

Pack hampers: Contact a local service organization responsible for distributing Christmas hampers and offer to help bag groceries and gifts.

Wrap gifts: Contact a local service agency and offer to help wrap gifts that will be given to families in need.

Make cards: Create Christmas cards and give them to the Pastoral Care Committee of your church for distribution to seniors.



Your ideas here . . .