

Isa. 2:1–5

Ps. 122

Rom. 13:11–14

Matt. 24:36–44

Come to the Mountain

Goal for the Session *Adults will imagine the hopeful and peaceful future prophesied by Isaiah and express confidence that God is leading them into that day.*

■ 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

While adults may feel that a sense of goodwill should be permeating their lives this time of year, worries and news of the day may be eroding their sense of well-being. “Peace on Earth” can seem to be a pipe dream or unattainable goal. As they dig into Isaiah’s prophecy, adults may wonder how to trust that God is in control or to hope that God’s peace will prevail. Together, look for ways that God is active in your lives and leading you into that perfect reign. How might you bolster one another’s confidence in the Lord’s goodwill?

Eternal God, when I feel overwhelmed by problems of the day, quiet my fears and guide me in your paths of hope. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- blue or purple cloth or placemat
- Advent wreath with candles or four votive candles
- lighter or matches
- whiteboard or newsprint
- markers
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- hymnals or songbooks
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for the next session

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, colored pens or pencils
- option 2: hymnal or songbook, newsprint, markers
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 1, Bibles, sticky notes, fine-tipped markers

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, place a blue or purple cloth or placemat in the center of your space, using the color your church uses in worship during Advent. Place the Advent wreath or votive candles on it. If open flames are not allowed in your church, use battery-powered candles.

Welcome the group to the season of Advent. Explain the meaning of the blue or purple cloth, referring to the sidebar. Dim the lights, if possible. Light one candle. Invite participants to take a few deep breaths and release any worries they have brought with them today, and then to gaze at the candlelight for a quiet moment of reflection on God’s gift of hope, given through Christ Jesus. Conclude this time by praying aloud:

Come to us today, Lord Jesus. Amen.

If it is not safe to leave the candle lighted, extinguish it and light it again for Closing. Turn up the lights.

Begin a conversation by asking if, during their lifetimes, adults expect the world to: 1) grow more peaceful, 2) grow less peaceful, or 3) stay about the same. Ask for a show of hands to indicate each of the three possible responses. Ask a few volunteers to offer reasons for their responses.

Say that today’s Bible reading is a word of hope for those who are weary of conflict.

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

EXPLORING

Ask adults to turn in their Bibles to Isaiah. Review that Isaiah of Jerusalem prophesied God's word in Judah (Israel's Southern Kingdom) about 750 years before Jesus was born. At that time, the reach of the Assyrian Empire was spreading and threatening both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

Read aloud Isaiah 2:1. Discuss:

- ✎ How do you understand the explanation that this prophecy is “the word” that Isaiah “saw”? In what sense do you think the prophet “saw” this word about Judah and Jerusalem? (See below for more information.)

“God shares the word with God's people, and they not only listen to the word, but also ‘behold the word.’ Quite often in the Old Testament we are told that God's word is enacted. God's word does not return empty but accomplishes its intent. God's word happens as the word becomes deed. The word, as promise, is always looking toward fulfillment.” (Noel Leo Erskine, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 1*; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009, 2.)

Form two groups to read aloud verses 2–5, alternating verses between groups. Invite adults to imagine they are looking at photos of the community Isaiah describes.

- ✎ What does this place look like? What are the people doing? (Ask “what else?” several times to broaden the conversation.)
- ✎ What additional information do you wish Isaiah had included in this vision?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Isaiah 2:1–5) and ask volunteers to read aloud the “What?” and “Where?” excerpts. As you discuss the following questions, invite adults who have study Bibles to offer information from the notes for these verses:

- ✎ To where will the nations stream “in days to come” (v. 2)? What details does Isaiah give about this place?
- ✎ Why will “the peoples” (v. 3) be going there?
- ✎ Why does Isaiah say Mount Zion—which actually is a hill—will be “the highest of the mountains” (v. 2)?
- ✎ In this place, how will conflicts be resolved?
- ✎ Why do you think God gave this vision to Isaiah?
- ✎ How do you imagine people in Isaiah's day reacted to this prophecy?

Read aloud the “So What?” excerpt from Resource Sheet 1. Discuss:

- ✎ What does it mean to “walk in the light of the Lord” (v. 5) in your life today?
- ✎ What might you say or do to encourage others to have confidence that God is leading the way into the future world of peace that Isaiah prophesied?

**EASY
PREP**

Ask worship leaders in your church if it is possible to include this litany during a worship service in Advent. If it isn't, ask about publishing it in your church newsletter or on its Web site.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

- 1. Advent Prayer Calendar** Adults will express confidence that God is leading them by making time for personal devotions during Advent. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Advent Prayer Calendar) and colored pencils or pens. Read aloud the directions. Ask each person to think of a prayer request he or she would like to make to the group and write it on a square on his or her calendar. Rotate the pages among group members so that each person can record his or her request on each of the calendars. As a group, identify other prayer requests that adults might note on their calendars, such as for leaders of Christmas worship, Sunday school program participants, or people affected by natural disasters. Encourage group members to offer ideas about how to make time for personal prayer and reflection in the busy weeks leading up to Christmas.
- 2. O Come, O Come** As adults explore Advent hymns and songs, they will compose a litany to express hope and confidence in God's "now" and "not yet" reign of peace. Distribute the hymnal or songbook your church uses. Work together to locate hymns and songs for the season of Advent. Invite adults to look for phrases that describe God's reign of peace or express hope in God's leading. Choose five or six of these phrases to use in a worship litany. Decide on a common refrain to say after each one, such as: "Come, Lord Jesus, and make it so." Write the litany on newsprint to use during Closing.
- 3. Advent Hope Sticky Notes** Adults will express confidence that God is leading them into God's realm as they create sticky notes with words of Advent hope. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Isaiah 2:1-5) and ask adults to read the "Now What?" excerpt to themselves. Ask: What about God's reign is most mysterious to you? Ask adults to turn again to Isaiah 2:2-4. Point out that the imagery here would have been meaningful for God's people of that time. Discuss what pictures or words might be used today to convey this message of hope in God's reign through the coming of Jesus Christ. Set out sticky notes and fine-tipped markers. Work individually or in small groups to write messages of Advent hope on sticky notes. Encourage each group member to take several notes to post at home, at work, in a care facility, or on a neighbor's door.

CLOSING

Gather around the Advent wreath or votive candles. Invite participants to offer a word or phrase that summarizes how they understand Isaiah's prophecy of peace and hope.

Sing or read in unison one or two stanzas of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" or another Advent hymn from your church hymnal or songbook. If the group composed a litany in Responding option 2, pray it now. Otherwise, pray aloud:

Come, Lord Jesus, and fill us with hope. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for the next session, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

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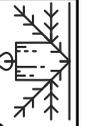
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Advent Prayer Calendar

Directions: During Advent, take some time each week to separate yourself from distractions and sit quietly. Light a candle. Read and reflect on the psalm appointed for worship each week. Pray for people you know, for people you don't know, and for yourself. Jot down prayer requests you want to remember on this calendar.

<p>First Sunday of Advent</p> <p>This week's theme: Hope For reflection: Psalm 122</p> 	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>Second Sunday of Advent</p> <p>This week's theme: Peace For reflection: Psalm 72</p> 	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>Third Sunday of Advent</p> <p>This week's theme: Joy For reflection: Psalm 146</p> 	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>Fourth Sunday of Advent</p> <p>This week's theme: Love For reflection: Psalm 80</p> 	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday