



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, 2, 3, 14,
21

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

blanket or mats

Advent calendar poster
from November 27

snack

Guided Play

choice 1: child-friendly
nativity set

choice 2: small cars and
trucks

Exploring

choice 2: copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1,
yellow construction
paper

choice 4: copies of **GN 2**

GATHERING IN GOD'S GRACE

Before the Children Arrive

Designate a story corner, and lay out a blanket or individual mats for the children so their backs will be to the door.

Post **SCM i-ii**, “Your Visual Schedule.” Cut out and glue the arrow marker onto 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.

Select the activities that will work best for you and for your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

Continue the Advent calendar. The first Advent story, **SCM 13** from the Fall 2022 Color Pack, was placed in the Advent calendar poster on November 27. If you did not make the poster, gather four 9" x 12" envelopes and glue the front side to a sheet of poster board. Cut out the numbers from **SCM 1a**. Glue a number to each envelope. Place the story **SCM 1** in the envelope 2. Place **SCM 2** in envelope 3 and **SCM 3** in envelope 4. You will use this Advent calendar poster for the rest of Advent.

“Exploring God’s Grace” choice 2 and choice 3 require more prep.

Welcoming and Guided Play

SD TD F A B MS

Greet children as they arrive, and say, “Grace and peace be with you.” Prompt them to respond, “And also with you.” Be sensitive to any children who might be coming for the first time. Introduce yourself to parents/caregivers that you do not know personally. Tell the parents, today’s story is about a time when God’s people were given a message of hope, and they began to prepare for God to come and save them.

Invite the children to choose a guided-play activity to start:

- 1. Playing with a Nativity Set**—Invite children to play with the characters and animals of a nativity set.
- 2. Playing with Cars and Trucks**—Invite the children to play with cars and trucks, making roads and paths for them to travel on by using items found in the room. Have a conversation with the children about the roads they are making. Ask them, “What does the road look like? What if there are things that block the path? How might it be if the road is crooked?”
- 3. Playing with Play Dough**—With play dough, make mountains and valleys. Tell the children that today’s story is about a message from God telling people to prepare a way, to make a path easier to travel. Invite the children to squish their mountains flat and add play dough to their valleys. Ask them, “Which would be easier to travel on—mountains and valleys or flat roads?”



Transitioning to Story Time

When the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner.

Come and Hear



Say or sing the following song to the tune of “The Bear Went Over the Mountain.” Invite the children to sing and do the motions.

O come and hear God’s story. *(walk four steps to the right)*
 O come and hear God’s story. *(walk four steps to the left)*
 O come and hear God’s story. *(walk four steps to the right)*
 Sit down and fold your hands. *(fold your hands in your lap)*

Hands Go Up



Read the poem below and lead the children in the actions indicated.

Hands go up. *(raise your hands in the air)*
 Hands go down. *(move your hands down to each side)*
 I can turn myself around. *(turn around in a circle)*
 I can stand up on one foot. *(stand on one foot)*
 I can listen. *(cup your right hand by your right ear)*
 So can you. *(point to another person)*
 I can sit. I’ll show you how. *(sit on the floor)*
 Bible time is starting now. *(point a finger to your other wrist)*



Hearing the Story



Play “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”—**MM 6; SCM 14**. Review the words with the children. Sing the song as an opening to story time.

Open the Bible to Isaiah 40 so the children know the story comes from the Bible. Tell the children that the story is about a time when God’s people lived far from their home. Isaiah gave them a message of hope, and told them to prepare for God to come and save them.

Draw the children’s attention to the Advent calendar poster with the four envelopes. Tell them that today is the second Sunday of Advent, a time when we prepare for the coming of the baby, Jesus. Remind the children that there are four weeks in Advent, and each week we will open an envelope and hear a story about Jesus.

Open envelope 2, and take out the story. Read **SCM 1**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, “Amen.”

After you have read the story, read it again using the prompts in the parentheses for the children to move down and up as they hear about the people being sad and then hearing about God’s message of hope.



EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE

1. Preparing and Hoping

LG MS C

Invite children to play in the kitchen or home area. Ask them to imagine that a very special event will happen soon—a celebration of Jesus' birth. Ask the children what they would do to get ready for that event. Some ideas might be sweep, clean windows, make special food, wrap presents, and so forth. Invite the children to act out the motions for the actions they suggest.

As you play, have a conversation about hope as a feeling of wanting and waiting. Hope gives people joy, as they are waiting to see someone they love very much.



2. Preparing the Manger

L FM

Before the session, cut yellow construction paper into ¼" strips about 6" long. Cut enough for each child to have at least 15–20 strips, and place them in ziplock bags.

Remind the children that we are in a time called *Advent*. Ask the children who we are waiting and preparing for during Advent. Tell the children that there is a tradition in some places to place hay in the manger each day to prepare a soft place for the baby Jesus to lay. A child places a piece of hay when they have done something kind for another person.

Give the children copies of **GN 1** and invite them to color the star, manger, and baby's face. Help the children cut the figures and the note for home from **GN 1**. Provide each child a sandwich bag with hay strips.

Invite the children to share something kind they have done for another person today. Then have them glue or tape a piece of hay to their manger. Remind them that they are preparing a place for Jesus. Read the note for home to the children and have them put the note and the baby Jesus in their bag. Encourage the children to take their stars home and to add hay each day until Christmas as they prepare a soft bed for Jesus with their acts of kindness.

FM *To help children build fine motor skills, encourage children to try activities that require eye-hand coordination, such as coloring in the lines, cutting, and gluing or taping in place. Cheer their efforts even if the outcome is not perfect.*



ransom—set free
mourns—feels sad
exile—sent away from
home

3. Prepare a Path

MS F D A B

Before the session, using painter's tape on the floor, make a winding road that ends with a straight line. Add several obstacles to be cleared along the road, such as a chair, book, or ball.

Remind the children that Isaiah gave the people of Israel a message of hope. God would help them to return home. The song "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"—**MM 6**—reminds us of their prayers. They are called to get ready and to prepare a road through the wilderness. They are to make it straight and smooth.

Play "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"—**MM 6**—repeating it several times. Invite the children to form a line and walk slowly with the music, following the winding road. Every time they find an obstacle, ask them to put it aside. Make sure to switch leaders so that all children get a chance to clear an obstacle. When the children hear the word *rejoice*, invite them to stop and to make a circular motion twice with their arms, then continue along the path. Celebrate when you get to the straight path by trying to sing the whole song with the children. Teach them the meaning of words like *ransom*, *mourns*, and *exile*.

4. Coloring Page

Hand out copies of **GN 2** and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture of Isaiah telling of the path being cleared. Engage the children in conversation as they color by using the following wondering questions.

- ▼ I wonder, "What are the people doing?"
- ▼ I wonder, "How do we prepare for a big event?"
- ▼ I wonder, "How can we prepare for the baby Jesus?"

T *Transitions can be difficult. This may be a good time for some quick physical activities, such as reaching up to the sky and bending down to touch toes, clapping hands, and so forth.*

Use "wonder" questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wondering questions help a child think aloud. Answers are neither right nor wrong. They help teach children to speak from their hearts.



Keep the Advent calendar poster for the next two sessions.



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



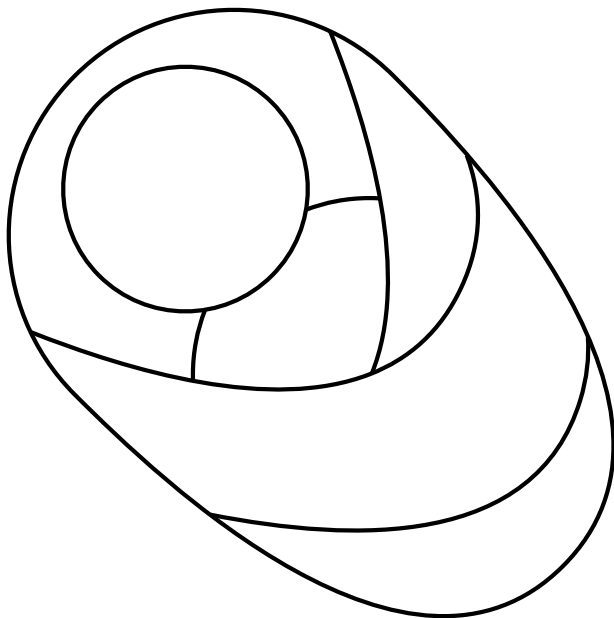
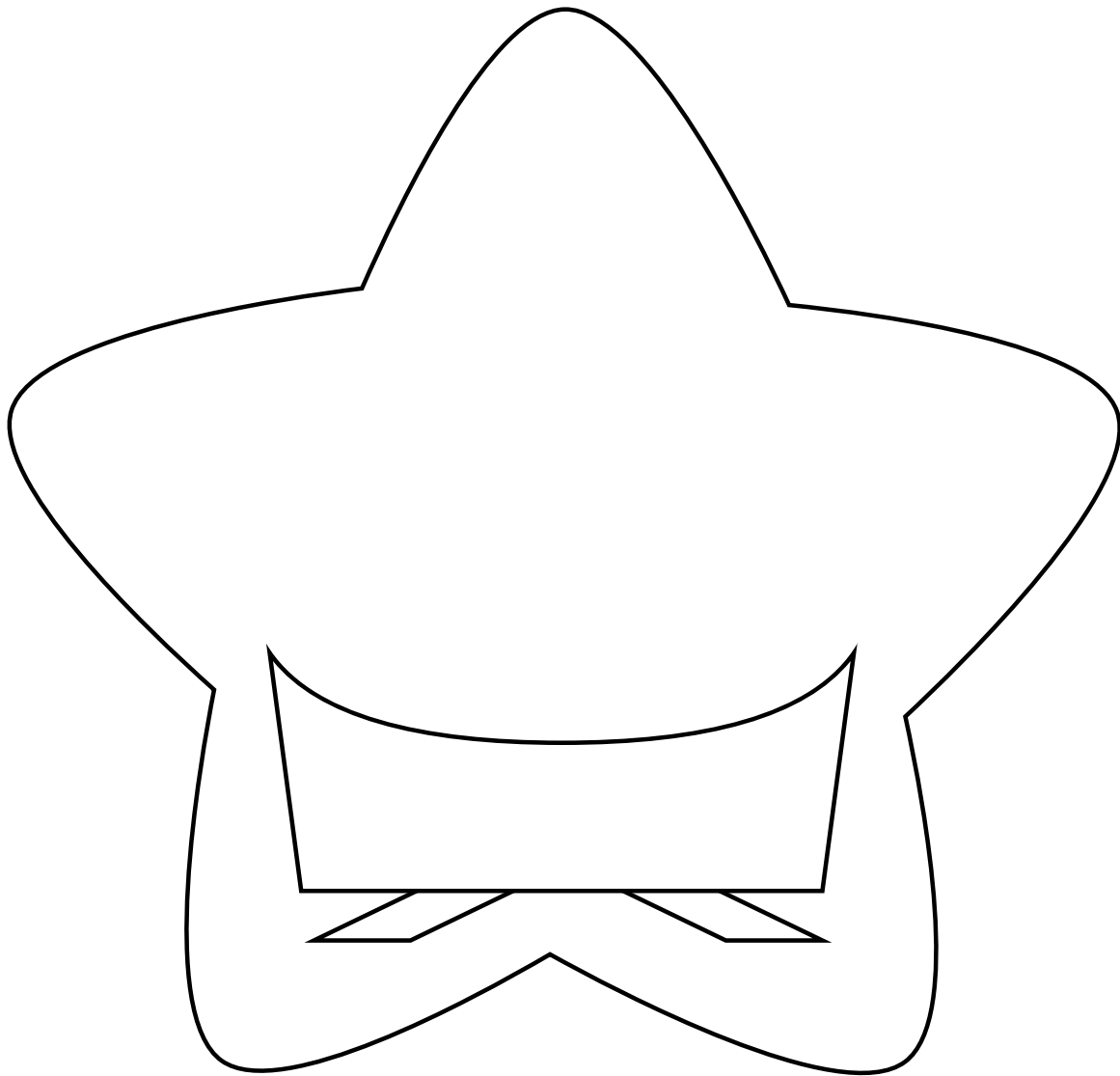
Call the children together, singing “Thank You, God, for Loving Me”—**MM 25; SCM 21**. Repeat words and phrases as appropriate.

If you would like to share a snack, now would be a good time. Pray:

God, we give our thanks:
for food that fills our tummies,
for time with friends and family,
for homes where we find love.
We give our thanks for these.
Amen.

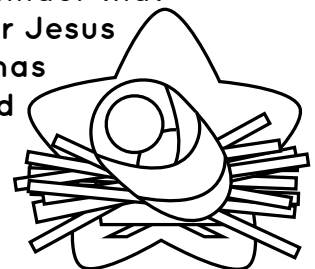
Remind the children that Isaiah had a message of hope for the people of God. God takes care of us too. Ask the children how they might thank God for being with them this week.

As the children leave, bless them: “(Name), God is with you all the time. Go and tell others God is with them too.”

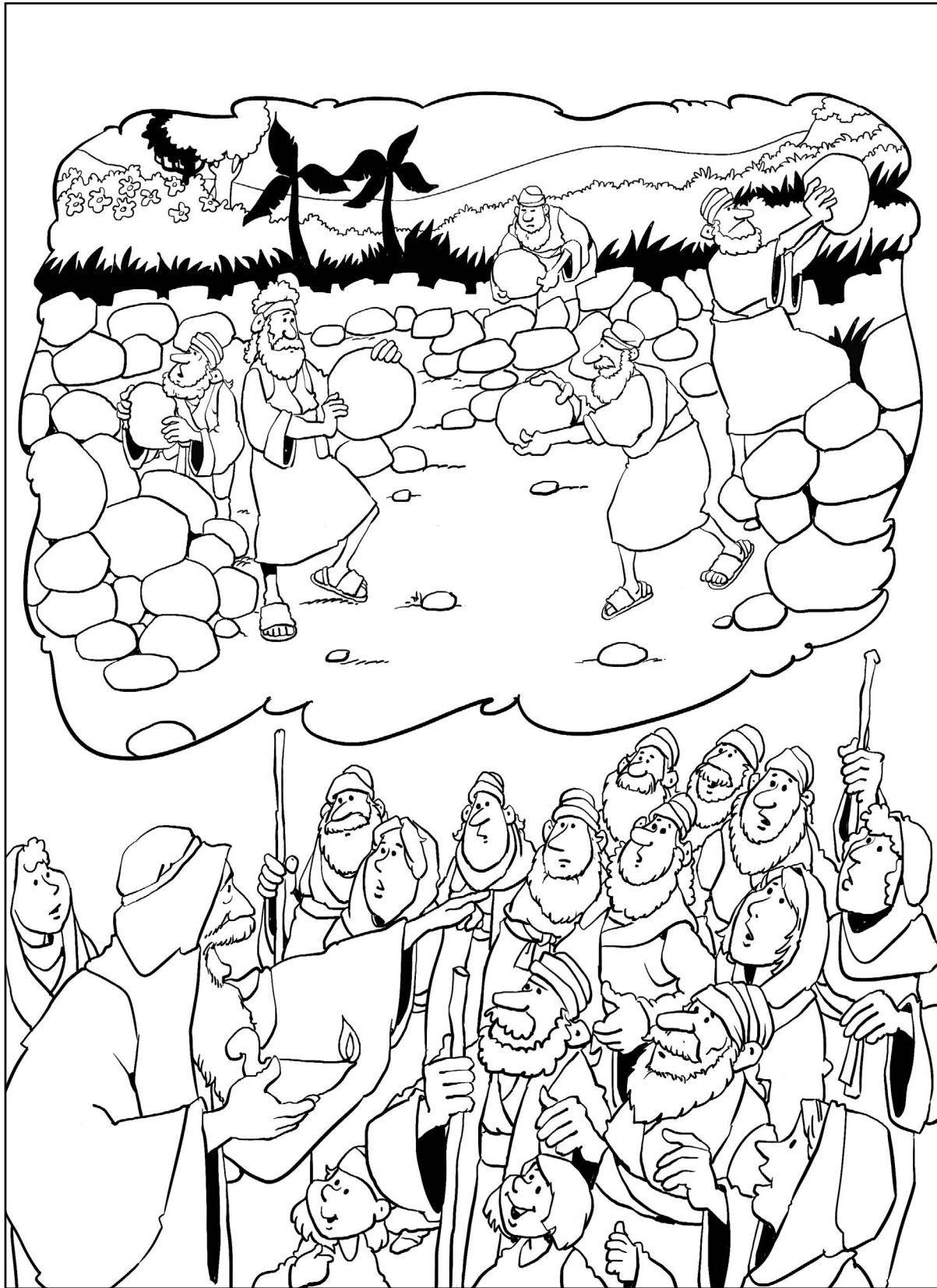


Note for home:

Help your child add hay to the manger each day until Christmas. This will serve as a daily reminder that we are preparing for Jesus to come. On Christmas day, Invite your child to add the baby Jesus.



Prepare a Road



Isaiah shared God's message to prepare for God to come and bring the people home.

