

Isa. 40:1–11

Ps. 85:1–2, 8–13

2 Pet. 3:8–15a

Mark 1:1–8

Shepherd with a Mighty Arm

Goal for the Session

Children will listen to Isaiah's words about the comforting God and acknowledge how they can accept and give thanks for such comfort.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Isaiah 40:1–11

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective,” Kathleen M. O'Connor

This passage creates a theological terra firma for a fearful people, not in the destroyed temple, the collapsed monarchy, or the broken covenant of the past, but in God's never-failing word. At a time when other tangible and intangible ways of relating to God have collapsed, the prophetic word is their anchor. This may be why vocabulary of speaking and calling, voice and word, calling and commanding dominates the text. Though everything else fails, God's word endures forever, and that God comes to lead them home.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective,” George W. Stroup

For those who live in the midst of exile, cultural collapse, and communal disaster, there can be no true hope except in God. It is futile to hope in individuals or even in the strength of the community, for human beings are inconstant, are fickle, and break their promises. Eventually they wither and fade, not simply because they are mortal, but because they are untrustworthy. The only one who can be trusted to make right what is so badly wrong, who can lead Judah out of exile and into the promised land, is the one whose Word will alone “stand forever” (v. 8).

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective,” Cynthia A. Jarvis

The God we shall see, says Second Isaiah in this pericope, looks like this: on one hand, God will come with might and God's arm will rule; on the other hand, God will feed this flock like a shepherd. “Here is your God!” we say and so turn those who dwell in unforgiven past tenses to a Word made flesh, pregnant with God's “shall” and “will.” “Here is your God!” we shout to those whose impending death has made them demand a miracle and so insinuate the mighty Word that alone negates our mortality against its every rival. “Here is your God!” we sing, and with Handel lift up our voice with strength, heralds one and all of good tidings.

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

—From “Homiletical Perspective,” Richard F. Ward

In the face of derision and indifference, we are to speak of this God whose fierce compassion and care for humankind trumps the power of the other “gods” who seem to enjoy sovereignty in human relationships. Advent is a time to hear the promises spoken or sung to the community of faith once again and then sit with them through the season. It is also a time for that community to find its own voice, overcome its objections, and speak words of comfort and assurance to anyone who feels separated or abandoned by God that God *will* arrive and *will* come in gentle power.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE
Isaiah 40:1–11

Focus on Your Teaching

For many children, daily life is frenetic. School opening gets them out of bed early. They have activities after school and homework at night. Weekends may be filled with sports or other group activities. Think about the children in your group. What do they talk about when you ask about their week past? Where are the patches of peace and comforting words in their day-to-day lives? Remember that the approach of Christmas adds stress to their lives as well as to the lives of the adults around them.

God of peace and comforting words, help me set the priorities of this season appropriately and convey those priorities to the children. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- poster board
- marker
- purple or blue cloth
- Advent wreath
- Bible
- offering basket
- matches
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- Color Pack 1, 2, 27
- Resource Sheet 1, 2

For Responding

- option 1: 8" round paper doilies, copies of Resource Sheet 3, crayons or markers, scissors, glue sticks
- option 2: construction paper, markers, hand mirrors, white paper, scissors, tape
- option 3: small flowerpots, permanent markers, potting soil, herb seeds, craft sticks, water
- option 4: *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player; Color Pack 27

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, print the Advent ritual on poster board to use during the Sundays of Advent and underline the children's parts. If you have already done so, replace *hope* with *peace* and change *first* to *second*. Place a bookmark at Isaiah in the worship table Bible.

As the children arrive, invite them to arrange these items on the worship table: purple or blue cloth, Advent wreath, Bible, and offering basket. When it is time to begin, play "God, We Sing" (Color Pack 27; track 7 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Explain that today is the second Sunday of Advent and that a new church year began last Sunday. Light two candles on the Advent wreath. Show the children the Advent ritual on poster board. Explain that they will say the underlined lines. Lead the ritual or invite a child to lead it.

Leader: On this second Sunday of Advent,

Everyone: we remember the peace that God gives us.

Leader: And we pray:

Everyone: God of peace, we gather today to prepare for the birth of your son. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candles.

For children who were absent on the previous Sunday, particularly since it was a holiday weekend in the United States, invite the group members to review what they know about Advent. Some children will remember the Advent wreath or an Advent chain. Others may recall that the season contains the four Sundays before Christmas and that during this time the church prepares for the birth of Jesus. Encourage them to tell how they celebrate Advent in their homes. Summarize their answers so the information above is clear.

To move to the theme for the session, ask:

✠ What words make you feel better when you are sick? Lonely? Tired? Scared?

After the children have responded, suggest that they listen for comforting words in the Bible story.

EXPLORING

Show a short video of sheep being herded, such as: [youtube.com/watch?v=VdrBX3cqF6U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdrBX3cqF6U)

Ask a child to retrieve the Bible from the worship table and open it to the bookmark. Read or invite a volunteer to read the name of the book. Invite a child to turn to Isaiah 64, the focus scripture for the previous session. Show Color Pack 1 and invite the children to tell what they remember about Isaiah. Supplement what they say with this information:

Isaiah was a prophet of God during a time when the Israelites, the people of God, were taken to another country and forced to stay there. The verses from Isaiah in the previous session, near the end of the book, are a lament, a crying out in great sorrow and sadness referring to what they found when they returned to Jerusalem.

To include prereaders, appoint readers for each group and have each group echo the words.

Have a child turn to Isaiah 40. Explain that this part of the story occurs before the people returned, when they are sad about being away from their homeland. Tell the story on Resource Sheet 1 (A God of Strength and Tenderness). Ask:

- ✪ How did the people of Israel feel at the beginning of the story?
- ✪ How did they feel at the end?
- ✪ What helped them change?
- ✪ How did this change bring them peace?

Another way for the children to experience the story is with the choral reading on Resource Sheet 2 (Raise Your Voice). Leaders or older confident readers can take the parts of Narrator and Isaiah. Form two groups with the other children. After the choral reading, show Color Pack 2. Ask:

- ✪ What does it mean that “God will gather us up like lambs and carry us home”?
- ✪ Who is strong and caring in your life?

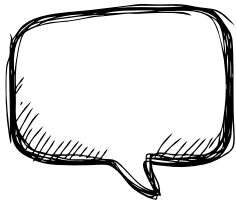
RESPONDING

If possible, provide two options so children have a choice. Select one that is more challenging for children who are able to work on their own.

1. **Doily Sheep** These sheep with words from Isaiah will remind the children during the week of a strong, comforting God. Give each child an 8" round paper doily. Have the children fold their doilies in half. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 3 (Doily Sheep), crayons or markers, scissors, and glue sticks. Have the children color the heads and legs for their sheep and cut them out, along with the verse. After they glue the head and legs to their doilies to make the sheep, they can glue the Bible verse on the sheep, wherever they wish. Read the verse together. Ask:

- ✪ What words of peace and comfort might God be whispering to you today?

Suggest that the children display their sheep at home to remind them of God's peace and comfort.



Speech bubble

**EASY
PREP**

God, We Sing

1. God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *hope*
anew;
Light this candle, light the
way,
Bring *hope* into our hearts
today.
Jesus, near us as we pray,
Let *hope* be in our hearts
today.

2. God, we sing with praise
to you,
Light the flame of *peace*
anew; . . .

- 2. Comforting Words** The children will create comforting messages for themselves. Distribute construction paper and markers for them to draw portraits of themselves. Have hand mirrors available for them to look at themselves closely. Urge them to include details such as eyebrows, freckles, and eyelashes. From a sheet of white paper, have the children cut speech bubbles (see example in sidebar). On the speech bubble, each learner is to write a comforting message from God and tape it to his or her portrait. Place the portraits on the worship table.
- 3. Plant Gift** Thinking about those who give comforting words may bring memories of people special to the children. Provide small flowerpots for them to decorate with colorful designs using permanent markers. Fill each pot about three-quarters full with potting soil. Plant herb seeds according to the package directions. Write “Isaiah 40:8” in large letters at one end of a craft stick. Insert the stick in the center of the pot. Lightly water the soil. Encourage the children to keep the plants in sunlight and water them regularly. Invite them to give away the plant when the herbs cover the stick or give it to a special person now with instructions to keep it in the sunlight and water regularly.
- 4. Song** The children seek God’s hope through song. Read the first stanza of “God, We Sing” (Color Pack 27; track 7 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Talk together about what from God gives hope. Then read the second stanza and ask the same question about peace. After the conversation, sing stanzas one and two together.

CLOSING

As the children gather at the worship table, play “God, We Sing” (Color Pack 27; track 7 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Light the candles on the Advent wreath that were lit earlier. Explain that one candle represents the hope that comes from God and the second one represents the peace that God provides.

Sing the first and second stanzas of “God, We Sing.”

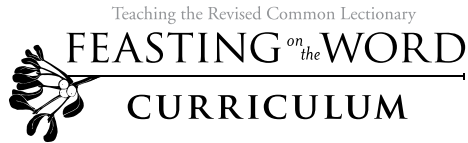
Pray:

God of strength and gentleness, we leave this time of learning and thinking to prepare for the birth of Jesus. Help us remember the hope and peace that come from you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

As each child leaves, say: “(Name), go with peace in God. Prepare for the birth of Jesus this week.”

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Shepherd with
a Mighty Arm



Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 1

A God of Strength and Tenderness

based on Isaiah 40:1-11



Long before the people of Jerusalem were permitted to return to their homes, they were discouraged and filled with sadness that they could not live in Jerusalem. They needed words of comfort and the assurance that God had not forgotten them.

The prophet Isaiah, a prophet of God, was given words by God to say to the people. These words told of God's love for the people. After they had been waiting many years, God told Isaiah to tell them:

*God says, "I will comfort my people."
Speak kindly to the people of Jerusalem.
Tell them that their lives as slaves here will be over.
Tell them that I have forgiven them twice over.
A voice cries out in the desert, "Clear a path for God!
Make the highway smooth for God.
God's glory will be seen by everyone."
This is from God's mouth.*

The people listened and some of their sadness lifted, but Isaiah had more to say.

*God will come with strength, with a strong arm.
And God will come like a shepherd.
God will gather the lambs tenderly and carry them,
and God will guide the sheep gently.*

The people knew about strong armies and they knew about good shepherds. They felt better knowing that God would be both strong and gentle for them. Now they were certain that God would lead them home to Jerusalem.

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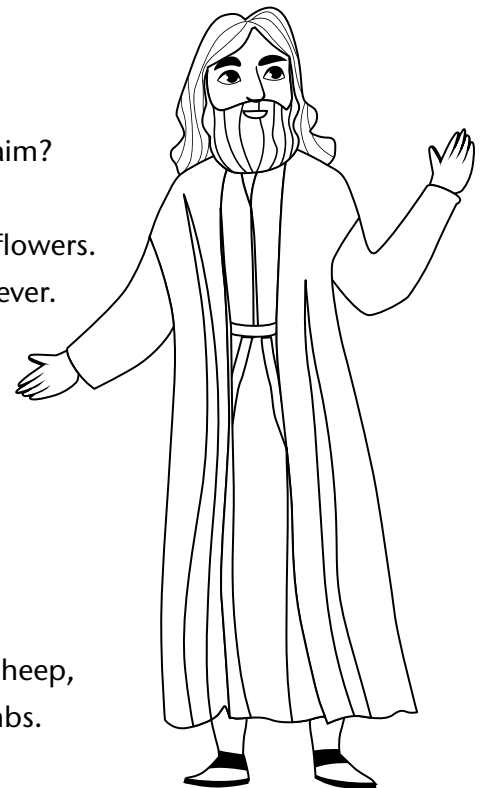
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Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 2

Raise Your Voice

(Groups 1 and 2 stand on opposite sides of the learning space. Isaiah and Narrator stand in the center.)

- N** Narrator: It was a hard and difficult time for the people of God.
- 1** Group 1: Alone in exile.
- 2** Group 2: Far from home.
- A** All: Cut off from God.
- N** Narrator: Then God spoke:
- I** Isaiah: Comfort, comfort my people.
- 1** Group 1: Encourage them.
- 2** Group 2: They have suffered long enough.
- I** Isaiah: A voice cries out in the wilderness:
- 1** Group 1: God is coming!
- 2** Group 2: Get ready!
- I** Isaiah: Clear the way for God!
- 1** Group 1: Make the road smooth and straight.
- 2** Group 2: Fill in the bumps.
- I** Isaiah: God is coming!
- A** All: God is coming!
- I** Isaiah: A voice calls out:
- 1** Group 1: Proclaim a message.
- 2** Group 2: What message shall we proclaim?
- I** Isaiah: All humankind is like grass.
- 1** Group 1: They last no longer than wildflowers.
- 2** Group 2: But God's love stands firm forever.
- I** Isaiah: Climb a high mountain.
- 1** Group 1: Tell the good news.
- 2** Group 2: Shout it out!
- I** Isaiah: Raise your voice!
- 1** Group 1: Don't be afraid!
- 2** Group 2: God is coming!
- I** Isaiah: God will take care of us.
- 1** Group 1: Like a shepherd cares for the sheep,
- 2** Group 2: God will gather us up like lambs.
- A** All: And carry us home.

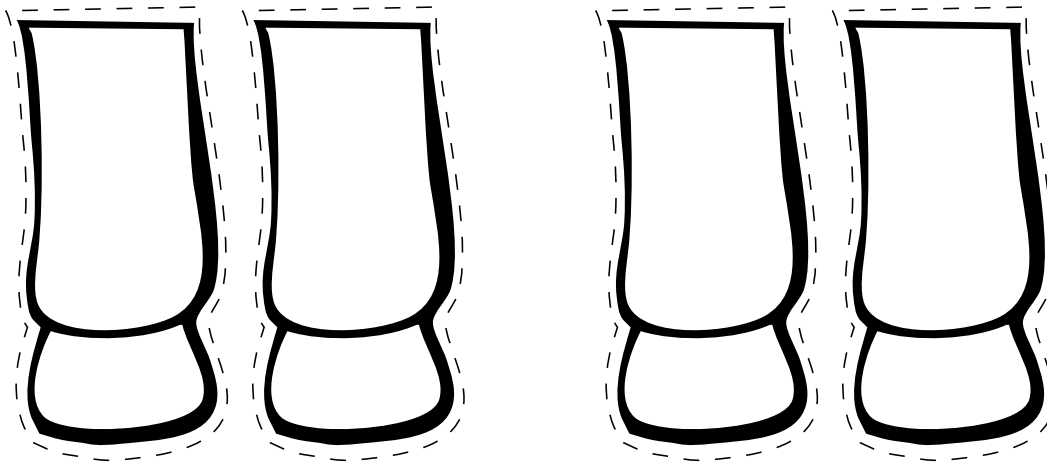
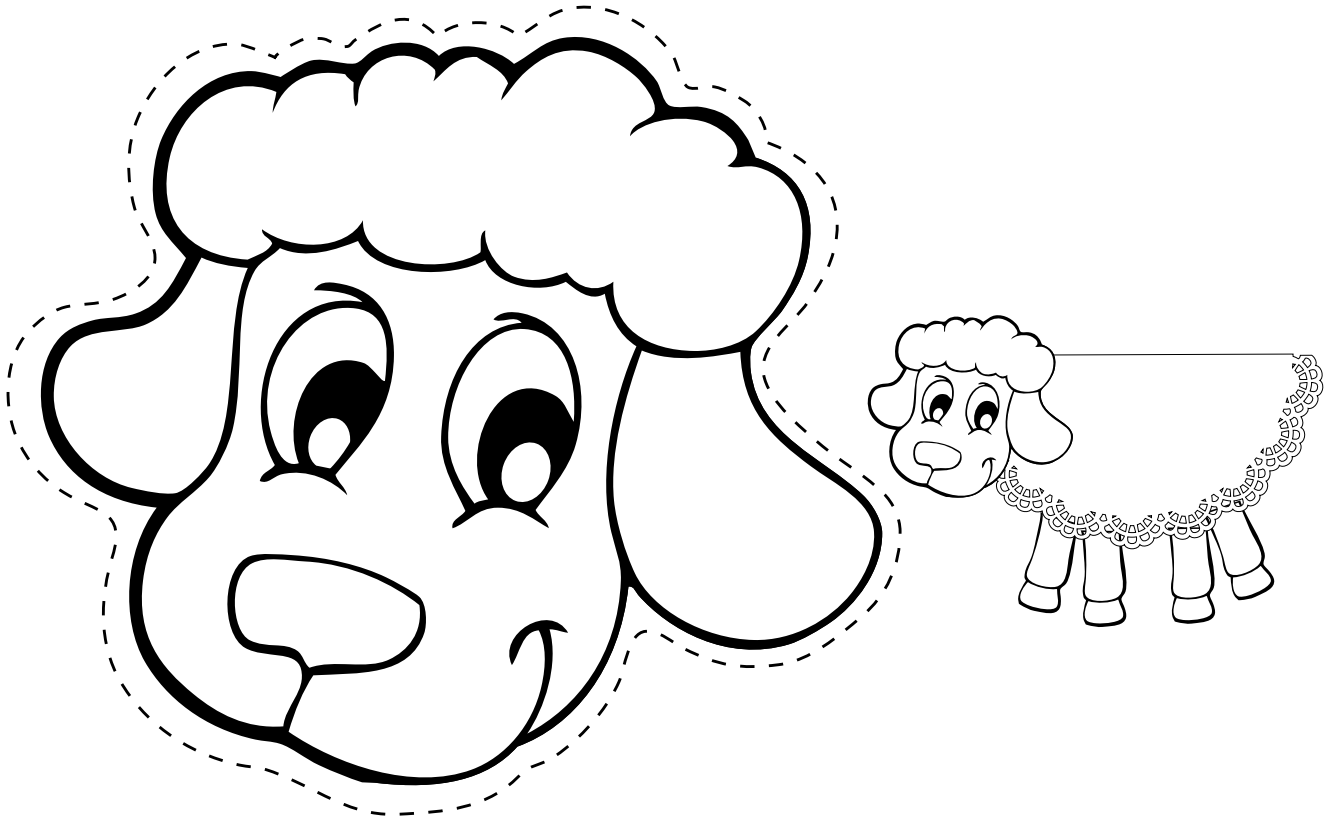


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Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 3

Doily Sheep



Like a shepherd, God will
tend the flock.

—Isaiah 40:11, CEB