

Isa. 6:1–8

Ps. 29

Rom. 8:12–17

John 3:1–17

Holy Encounter

**Goal for
the Session**

Children will join Isaiah in the temple and find their own way of responding to the awesome presence of God.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Isaiah 6:1–8

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Michael H. Floyd

Jerusalem’s royal temple is imagined as the earthly representation of YHWH’s heavenly throne. Because the temple is the axial point at which heaven and earth come together, Isaiah can see from this location into the throne room above. Isaiah is surrounded by the smoke from burning sacrifices and incense, and by the noise from the festive throng of worshipers. This mirrors the praise of the heavenly attendants—represented by the seraphim—that surround YHWH’s throne (cf. Ps. 29:1–2, 9b–10). The mythic imagery of the heavenly council is the antecedent of Trinitarian thinking: Christians are reminded that such a notion of God points to a mysterious divine-human encounter with sociopolitical consequences.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Donald K. McKim

From early times, Isaiah 6:1–8 has been viewed as pointing to what became the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The passage itself, of course, does not lay out a full-fledged view of God as eternally existing as three coequal persons. But taken with other biblical passages (especially from the New Testament) it anticipates what the early church gradually came to understand as the Trinity. The vision and call of Isaiah is one illustration of the way the triune God has been at work in history, as attested by the Scriptures. The Isaiah passage is a witness, pointing to the triune God’s revelatory actions in calling Isaiah, and in the biblical story of salvation.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Kristin Emery Saldine

Isaiah’s vision accentuates at least three characteristics of God’s relationship with us: God encounters us in our historical context, God’s word is revealed in our worship, and God calls us to serve. The elements of our worship—gathering, praising, confessing, praying, hearing, and responding—all are appropriate responses to the holy God who claims us. We should not be afraid to name the sins of our time, just as Isaiah did. Think of the image of the seraph cleansing Isaiah’s lips with a live coal. That is how vibrant and powerful God’s forgiveness is, drawing us into service and drawing our attention to the needs of the world beyond our own.

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

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” G. Lee Ramsey Jr.

The faithful frequently wonder about vocation. How does God call the believer? How does one listen for the call of God, and how do we know if what we hear is the voice of God? The Isaiah account invites the congregation to hear and see how God calls the believer: from an awareness of the mysterious and frightening presence of God, to conviction and confession of sin, to reception of forgiveness, and finally to surrender to God’s direction. The verses that follow (vv. 9–13) get Isaiah into a mess of trouble. Rather than a call to a settled ministry, God summons Isaiah to prophetic engagement with faithless Israel.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 6:1–8

YOU WILL NEED

- Resource Sheet 1
- Singing the Feast*, bit.ly/SingingTheFeast
- white cloth
- battery-powered tall white candle
- Color Pack 1, 2, 3, 30, 31
- Bibles
- flat bedsheet
- Internet-connected device (optional)

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, crayons or markers
- option 2: Color Pack 36; *Singing the Feast*, bit.ly/SingingTheFeast; scarves or streamers
- option 3: Color Pack 3, light construction paper, markers in bright colors, scissors, glue sticks
- option 4: paper, pens, Color Pack 3

If you are unable to light a candle, invite children to share experiences of watching smoke twist, swirl, and disappear. Note that candles are often used in worship. Then finish the conversation as suggested.

Focus on Your Teaching

Most children have vivid imaginations and use them. Not constrained by the real world, they can enter into realms where anything is possible. As a consequence, it is sometimes easier for them to enter into biblical stories and encounter God than it is for adults. Although children do have a strong sense of God's presence, they do not always have the language skills to articulate the experience, especially the younger children in this age range. We can help by sharing our own experiences and by providing the children with a variety of ways to respond.

Holy God, grant that I may be gifted with a strong sense of your presence as I prepare and lead this session, responding to you with joy and love. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Welcome the children by name as they arrive. When ready to begin, gather the group at the worship table. Display Color Pack 1, 2, 3, and 31 nearby. Sing together the gathering song for the season after Pentecost, "God, We Sing" ([Singing the Feast](http://bit.ly/SingingTheFeast)). Lead the following ritual:

Leader: Today is Trinity Sunday, the day we celebrate the different ways we know God (*place white cloth on table*).

We will hear the stories of God the creator (*place Bible on table*) and follow the light of Jesus (*light candle*) as the Spirit helps us to live in God's love.

All: We will learn and grow together.

Wonder together about the word *holy*. Ask:

✠ What does *holy* mean to you?

Explain that the word *holy* is often used to describe something that has been set apart for God. Draw attention to the candle on the worship table and comment that it is holy, as it has been set aside for worship. Marvel at the flame and the way it provides light and heat. As you extinguish the candle, invite the children to imagine blowing it out and watching the smoke twist, swirl, and disappear. Comment that holy things can be full of wonder and mystery as in the Bible story for this session.

EXPLORING

Ask a child to get the Bible from the worship table. Comment that today's story comes from the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament. Show children how to use the table of contents to

Option: To increase the sense of mystery, darken the room slightly and play the sounds of Tibetan singing bowls before and after the story. Search on iTunes or YouTube for a recording.

God, We Sing

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.

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

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

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

God, we sing with praise to you,
 Light the flame of Christ anew;
 Light this candle, light the way,
 We celebrate new life today.
 Christ, be near us as we pray
 And celebrate new life today.



find the book of Isaiah. Mention that Isaiah was a prophet who lived about 700 years before Jesus was born. Explain that the story today takes place in a special place in Jerusalem called the temple. Look together at the picture of the temple (Color Pack 2). Ask what they know about the temple, explaining as necessary that it was a holy place for the Hebrew people and it was a special place of worship. The people believed they could meet God in the temple. Note how small the people are compared to the building, and observe that the temple was large and beautifully decorated with gold and amazing carvings. Ask the children to point to some of the special decorations in the picture. Ask:

✧ How might you feel as you walked through the door of the temple?

Spread the sheet on the floor. Have the children all kneel around it and hold the edges. If possible, alternate shorter and taller learners. Show them how to make the sheet billow up and settle down by raising and lowering it. Teach this response: “Holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is filled with God’s glory.” Arrange for a cue, so the children know when to say the response during the story. Tell the story of Isaiah in the temple with the movements suggested on Resource Sheet 1 (Isaiah Has a Vision).

After the story, sit quietly for a moment. Ask:

- ✧ How did Isaiah know it was God?
- ✧ How do you think Isaiah felt?
- ✧ What made this event holy?
- ✧ Where do you think God sent Isaiah?
- ✧ What do you think God wanted Isaiah to do?

Show Color Pack 3. Observe that uplifted hands are often associated with worship and joy as we reach up to say how wonderful we think God is. Invite children to pretend they are Isaiah and think about how amazing God is. At your signal, have them whisper the response from the story: “Holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is filled with God’s glory.” Repeat these words, getting louder and louder as you raise your arms. Finally, shout the response loudly, jump into the air, with arms raised, to praise God.

Explain to learners that every time they hear a Bible story they can grow closer to God. One way is to grow in understanding God. Ask:

- ✧ What did today’s story teach you about God?
- ✧ How do you respond to the awesome presence of God?

RESPONDING

Offer at least two options so children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest older children who can work on their own.

1. **Drawings** Isaiah encountered God in an amazing way. Invite children to imagine what it might be like to be in God’s presence. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Imagine). Provide markers or crayons for them to draw pictures of how they might feel or react inside the head on the resource sheet. Display the pictures with a title, such as “The Wonder of God” or “Awesome God.”

**The Whole World
Is in God's Hands**

The whole world is in God's
hands,
The whole wide world is in
God's hands,
The whole world is in God's
hands,
The world is in God's hands.

The wind and the wave are
in God's hands . . .

The fish and the bird are in
God's hands . . .

All of the animals are in
God's hands . . .

All the world's people are in
God's hands . . .

You and me are in God's
hands . . .

**Every Time I
Feel the Spirit**

Refrain:
Every time I feel the Spirit
moving in my heart I will
pray.
Yes, every time I feel the Spirit
moving in my heart I will
pray.

Upon the mountain, when
my Lord spoke,
out of God's mouth came
fire and smoke.
Looked all around me, it
looked so fine,
till I asked my Lord if all was
mine. (*Refrain*)

Jordan River, chilly and
cold,
it chills the body but not
the soul.
There is but one train upon
this track.
It runs to heaven and then
right back. (*Refrain*)

2. **Worship Dance** We can respond to God's glory with movement, as did the flaming creatures in Isaiah's vision. Play "The Whole World Is in God's Hands" (Color Pack 36, [Singing the Feast](#)). Invite the children to explore the ways their bodies can move to music. Distribute scarves or streamers for the children to wave while they dance. Then suggest that they imagine they are moving with the angels around God's throne.
3. **Bulletin Board** Encourage the congregation to join the flaming creatures and respond to God's holiness with worship. Cover a bulletin board in a common area with light paper. Invite learners to place their forearms and hands (fingers outstretched) on paper, similar to the image on Color Pack 3. Have them help each other trace the outline of their hands and arms. Decorate the arms and hands with markers in bright colors and cut them out. Glue the arms on the bulletin board so that the arms look like those on Color Pack 3. Print the words *Holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is filled with God's glory* across the top. Invite the children to print words that describe God between the arms. Encourage older children to act as scribes for younger ones.
4. **Shape Writing** Through the ages, writers have voiced their awe of God through poetry. Invite children to imagine that they were with Isaiah in the temple. How would they describe what they saw and heard? Have them write descriptions and then copy their words in the shape of smoke curling upward, such as a spiral. Make a display of the poems and Color Pack 3.

CLOSING

Gather the children around the Christ candle and light it, if necessary. Invite them to say the words of praise from the Bible story:

Holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is filled with God's glory.

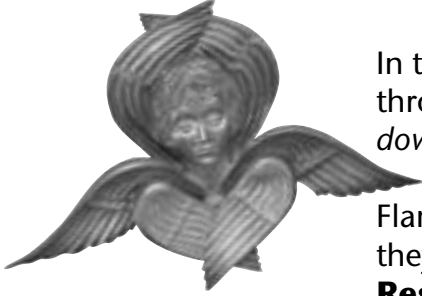
Sing "Every Time I Feel the Spirit" (Color Pack 30, [Singing the Feast](#)). As the children sing, lead them in a line dance around the room. Say the following prayer:

Loving God, thank you for this time together. Thank you for stories that help us to grow and learn more about following in your ways. Amen.

Extinguish the candle.

Try to have a quick word with each learner as the children leave. Thank them for coming and encourage them to return.

Isaiah Has a Vision (Based on Isaiah 6:1–8)



In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah saw God sitting on a big throne and the glory of God filled the temple. (*Lift the sheet up and down slowly to make the cloth billow.*)

Flaming creatures with six wings were flying overhead. As they flew, they sang.

Response: Holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is filled with God’s glory. (*Lift the sheet up and down slowly to make the cloth billow.*)

The creatures sang so loudly that the doorposts of the temple shook, and the temple was filled with smoke.

Response: Holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is filled with God’s glory. (*Move the sheet up and down energetically.*)

When Isaiah heard how holy God was and felt God’s glory, he became afraid. (*Increase the movements of the sheet.*)

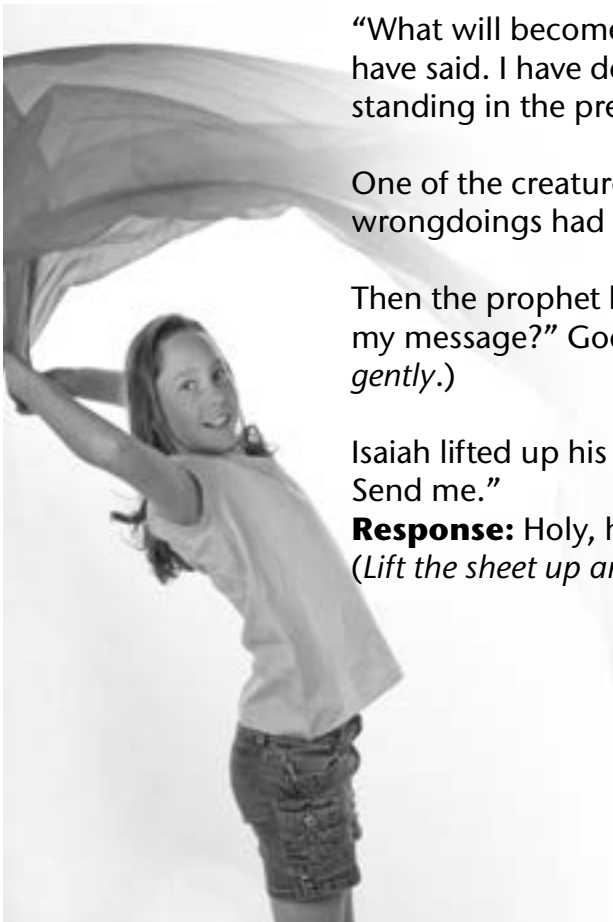
“What will become of me?” he cried. “I have said things I shouldn’t have said. I have done things I shouldn’t have done. Now I am standing in the presence of God who is holy.”

One of the creatures came over to Isaiah and told him that his wrongdoings had been forgiven. Isaiah knew that God loved him.

Then the prophet heard God’s voice. “Is there anyone I can send with my message?” God asked. “Who will go for me?” (*Move the sheet gently.*)

Isaiah lifted up his arms and declared, “Here I am, God. I will go. Send me.”

Response: Holy, holy, holy, the whole earth is filled with God’s glory. (*Lift the sheet up and down slowly to make the cloth billow.*)



Imagine . . .

You are in the presence of God. Draw inside this head what you might see and feel.

