



Weaving God's Promises

LESSON 13 ISAIAH PROMISES PEACE AND SALVATION

Many of the Isaiah passages are poetry. The description of the Peaceable Kingdom may be more appropriate for young children. The lesson can be divided into more than one class session.

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

Isaiah 9:1-7 is the well-known passage in which the author foretells the righteous reign of the coming king: "For unto us a child has been born..." In Isaiah 61, the prophet tells how the deliverance will take place. This is the passage that Jesus quotes in the synagogue when he announces that he is the one to fulfill the prophecy: "He has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed..."

Isaiah 11 describes the Peaceable Kingdom that will come about when the spirit of the Lord rests upon the one who comes out from the stump of Jesse.

The Servant Songs describe the savior who will bring salvation, who will be a light to the nations even as he suffers for our sins.

Finally, in Isaiah 40 we find a song of comfort to the people of Israel. This passage contains the lines "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord..."

WHERE YOU'LL FIND TODAY'S STORY

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

Isaiah 9:1-7, 61:1-4 (promise of a savior)

Isaiah 11:1-10 (Peaceable Kingdom)

Isaiah 42:1-9, 52:13-53:12 (Suffering Servant Songs)

Isaiah 40 (comfort to the people)

In Our Sunday Lectionary

Today's stories are told in church on the following Sundays:

Promise of a Savior (Isaiah 9:1-7, 61:1-4):

Year A: Christmas Day I

Year C: Christmas Day I

Servant Songs (Isaiah 42:1-9, 52:13-53:12):

Year A: Monday of Holy Week and Palm Sunday

Year B: First Sunday after Epiphany, Palm Sunday and Monday of Holy Week

Year C: First Sunday after Epiphany, Monday in Holy Week and Good Friday

Isaiah 52:

Years A, B and C: Good Friday

Comfort to the People (Isaiah 40):

Year B: Second Sunday of Advent

KEY CONCEPTS

- Salvation
- Righteousness



WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

Isaiah has played a central role in Christianity, with his focus on holiness, justice, righteousness, salvation, promise, faith and peace. We also look to Isaiah for his visions of the new age, especially the coming of an individual savior, a suffering servant who will bring righteousness, justice and peace to the earth.

The book of Isaiah, like Ezekiel, was written during the dark days of the Exile. During this time, the promises of the prophet give the people a gleam of hope that someone will come to save them from their oppression and despair. Notice that because the situation was seen as an earthly one (political oppression), even though it was seen as the consequence of Israel's sins and faithlessness to God, the people have come to expect a political savior who will set them free from their oppressors.

In Isaiah 9:1-7, the prophet promises to Israel a new and righteous Savior who will establish a kingdom of justice and righteousness, upheld by "the zeal of the Lord of hosts." In Isaiah 61:1-4, Isaiah expresses the form that his deliverance will take: "...to bring good news to the oppressed..." We know the first passage as the prophecy foretelling the birth of Jesus and the second as what Jesus quoted in the synagogue when he announced himself as the fulfillment of this scripture (Luke 4:16-21).

Many people have heard of the Peaceable Kingdom, but not many have read it. From a Christian point of view, Isaiah here proclaims the coming of Christ and the peace and righteousness that will be on the earth upon his coming.

God's promise of salvation and the vision of the kingdom of heaven on earth was a great source of solace to the Israelites during this troubling time. It is still a great comfort to us now, as we look forward to a time when war, evil and hatred will end and the reign of God in peace and love will finally prevail.

Isaiah's Suffering Servant is the one who will bring about this kingdom. The Suffering Servant is an individual who will redeem us by his suffering, while himself being without sin. It is also interpreted as a vision of Israel, itself, as God's servant through whom redemptive truth would reach all people. Isaiah's writings about the suffering servant express his confidence in the power of God to intervene on our behalf, to heal our wounds and to forgive our sins, even though the cost is great.

Isaiah was a man who faced the worst disaster and the prospect of utter devastation and still maintained faith. He could see that for his people the way to life lay not through maneuvering for security but in the discipline of obedience to God and trust in God.



THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

Isaiah's writings touch the mystic side of Anglicanism, and so Isaiah is a beloved prophet and much quoted in lectionary readings, in the *Book of Common Prayer* and even in hymns.

At the beginning of Holy Communion, the celebrant and people will always say or sing this hymn known as the Sanctus or "Holy, Holy":

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

This is what one of the seraphim called to another in Isaiah 6, when Isaiah tells of his call by God.

Quotes from Isaiah may be found in services of the Daily Offices (Morning and Evening Prayer), where some of the passages form three canticles. Quotes

also may be found in the readings at the Great Vigil of Easter and in burial services, where Isaiah sounds a note of hope and promise, liberation and healing for a hurting people. In addition, passages from Isaiah are used often during Advent, when Christians see Isaiah's promise of redemption by God as the anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ.

Hymns in *The Hymnal 1982* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, 1985) that tell of God's glory, power and majesty are reminiscent of Isaiah's message. But some hymns take their inspiration from Isaiah's words themselves. For example, in #324, "Let all mortal flesh keep silence," we sing:

At his feet the six-winged seraph;
Cherubim with sleepless eye,
Veil their faces to the Presence,
As with ceaseless voice they cry,
"Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia, Lord Most High!"

The words remind us of the vision that Isaiah saw in Isaiah 6:2. Or look at #390, "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," in which we sing about God "borne as on eagle wings, safely his saints he sustaineth." Here the words remind us of Isaiah's note of comfort in 40:31: "Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles..."



GATHERING

Check-In

Invite group members to sit comfortably, giving them an opportunity to visit with each other, establish friendships and build community. Relationships are an important dimension of Christian formation, so a few minutes of visiting will enrich their spiritual development. This is also the perfect time to "check in" with group members by asking them to share how they are feeling at the time or what kind of a week they had.



PRAYER

Materials:

- small table with cloth to cover it
- Advent wreath with Advent candles or one pillar candle
- matches
- cross

After all group members have a few minutes of fellowship time, gather them together for a simple opening prayer. If you are using an Advent wreath, light the appropriate number of Advent candles. Ask one of the members to light the candle(s) while saying these words from Psalm 119:105:

- Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Explain that you are inviting the light of God to be with all of you. (You might consider posting the word of this verse from Psalm 119 in the meeting room).

Invite the member who lit the candle to read this prayer:

- Thank you, Lord, for bringing all of us together. We give thanks for the gift of your salvation and pray that we always care for the kingdom of heaven on earth. We find joy in the expectation of the coming of your Son Jesus Christ on Christmas. In Jesus' name we pray. *Amen.*



TELLING THE STORY

Today's passages are fairly long. You may want to choose just a few to focus on, or you may read them all in the context of the expectation of the coming of Christ.

Isaiah's writings have often been described as poetic. Often, adolescents enjoy reading aloud themselves. Isaiah's writings offer the perfect opportunity for them to do just that.

Read the story from the Bible or tell it in your own words. At this time you do not need to explain or discuss the story. This is the time for the youth to hear the story. For now, simply let them absorb it in their minds and in their hearts. Later, use the discussion or arts time to help the group members draw appropriate and meaningful connections between the story and their own lives.



ACTIVITIES: ARTS, CRAFTS, GAMES, DRAMA, ETC.

Select one or more activities to supplement and enhance today's story. For each lesson, there are five suggested activities, one from each of the REACT categories. For a detailed explanation of REACT, see page 10 of the Introduction. All activities are meant to reinforce the concepts that were central to the day's lesson.

Additional activity ideas can be found on pages 2-6 in the Appendix where we've provided suggestions and directions for a variety of general activities that can be adapted to any lesson. Also included are outreach and service projects that can be done at any time.

ACTIVITIES FOR THIS WEEK'S SESSION

Area with 18 horizontal lines for writing activities.



WEAVING OUR FAITH

Lesson Box

Materials:

- 1 3" x 5" index card for the day's *scribe*
- pen or pencil
- a file box in which to store the cards

Ask for a volunteer or assign a group member to act as *scribe*. Then, ask the group to articulate the most important lesson gleaned from the day's reading. As prompts, you might ask:

- Isaiah told his people that love will prevail. What do you think?
- What, for you, is "the kingdom of heaven on earth"?

Once the group has agreed on its wording, ask the *scribe* to write the lesson on the card, date it, and file it in the box. By the end of the year, you will have a wonderful and thorough summation of the lessons covered in the participants' own words.

- How could we bring about harmony on a local, national, or world level?
- What do you think it means to be "ruled by the love of God"? What do you think some of those rules are?



CLOSING PRAYER

Before participants leave, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service or back to their homes with God's love and blessing. The prayer can be very simple, such as this one:

- Gracious and merciful God, you prepare us for the coming of your only Son Jesus Christ to live with us and in us. Help us to keep you in our hearts this week so we can always remember to walk in his steps and follow his path of peace and justice. This we ask in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

End the lesson with a dismissal that is used in church, such as:

- The peace of the Lord be always with you.

The youth respond:

- And also with you.



WEAVING GOD'S BELOVED COMMUNITY

The peace that Isaiah promises is one which is established by the fulfillment of God's dreams of justice and righteousness, and of faithfulness to God's values of compassion and mercy. When it comes, it will be "good news to the oppressed." He envisions a land ruled by the love of God.

This is the image of God's Beloved Community, where all creation—like the animals in his Peaceable Kingdom—live together in harmony and without harming one another. Central to this image is the savior who will redeem the world by the savior's example of humility and service.

- What are some examples of disharmony in our world?



Weaving God's Promises

REFLECTING ON THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

Group members watch the TV holiday special *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video; remastered DVD released 2008) and talk about the true meaning of Christmas. Even though it is an animated TV show, it has a simple but significant message for children and adults alike.

Materials:

DVD or digital copy of *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (**Note:** For a small group, this TV special can be purchased online and easily downloaded for playing on a computer.)

TV and DVD player or streaming device

snacks

Directions:

1. Since this show is so short, it might be a good idea to spend a little time talking with the group about what Christmas means to them.
 - Do you like the Christmas season? Why?
 - What does Christmas mean to you?
 - How do you and your family celebrate?
 - Where is God in your celebrations?
 - What has society in general “done” to Christmas? How do you feel about that?
2. Show the TV special. When you’ve finished, let the group share their reactions freely. You might ask:
 - At what point do we hear Isaiah’s words come to life?
 - Why was Charlie Brown so frustrated? Have you ever felt that way?

Close:

- Have one of the members jot down some of those reactions for the Lesson Box.



Weaving God's Promises

JESSE TREE

Group members will make a Jesse Tree for their meeting space as well as one for each of them to take home. They can read Matthew 1 for a complete genealogy.

This craft does not need to be done all at one time. The tree and a few ornaments could be made today, then additional ornaments made in the following weeks during Advent. If the participants do make all the ornaments today, some could be hung on the tree today and the rest added a few at a time each Sunday in Advent.

The Jesse Tree represents Jesus' family tree. The name is taken from Isaiah 11:1, in which Jesus is referred to as a shoot coming up from the stump of Jesse, the father of David.

The ornaments on the Jesse Tree tell of Jesus' ancestors and of the events leading to Jesus' birth. While it is hard to establish when and where the custom of the Jesse tree began, it most likely started in the Middle Ages as a way to teach Bible stories.

Some of the symbols frequently used on the tree are: *angel, lamb, star, candle, cross, crown, manger, apple, shepherd's staff, etc.* Some of Jesus' ancestors (who could be depicted on the tree) include: *Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesse, David, Solomon, etc.*

Materials:

- pot of sand or small rocks
- large bare branch
- cardboard or construction paper
- markers and crayons
- glue
- glitter, sequins and other decorative material
- string
- hole punch
- scissors
- large Post-it® notes, assorted colors
- Bibles

Directions:

1. Take a large bare branch and secure it in a pot of sand or rocks.
2. Out of cardboard or construction paper create ornaments that trace Jesus' royal line by making symbols for some or all of the people listed above. Decorate the ornaments. Punch a hole in the top of each ornament and run a string through it for hanging on the tree.
3. Turn to Matthew 1 in the Bible. Copy down at least 12 names to be used to make garland or streamers for the tree.
4. Take one of the Post-it notes and begin cutting at one edge. Keep cutting from the outside edge inwards until you have formed a paper spiral.
5. Write the names from your list of Jesus' ancestors on the spiral. Use it as garland on the Jesse tree.



Weaving God's Promises

MY PEACEABLE KINGDOM

Group members work individually or in pairs to create artwork reflecting Isaiah's "peaceable kingdom."

Isaiah 11 is loved for its promise of a righteous, fair and loving God who brings peace and harmony to the earth. In the activity, the group members will design their own peaceable kingdoms. Participants will decide how best to express their designs: in writing, through music or in any art medium.

Materials:

paper, pens and pencils
art paper, paints, brushes
markers, colored pencils
charcoal, pastels
clay
butter knives (for clay)
Bibles
miscellaneous art materials (scissors, glue, felt, glitter, etc.)

Directions:

1. Read aloud Isaiah 11:1-10. Discuss:
 - According to Isaiah, what will this better world be like? What will it look like?
 - Think about what you would like to see in your peaceable kingdom. What does it look like? sound like? feel like?
 - Without worrying about how you would solve the world's biggest problems, think about how best to represent your image of peace on earth: a poem? a painting? a sculpture? a musical composition?
2. Allow time for group members to work on their chosen artwork. Let them know that it may take more than one session to finish their projects, and that's okay.

Close:

- Collect the artwork and store it for safekeeping. If these pieces are started at the beginning of Advent, the pieces could go on display for Christmas.



Weaving God's Promises

PEACE PINS

Group members make beaded “Peace Pins” to sell to the congregation, family and friends. In the spirit of the holiday, the monies raised will go to a charity of the group’s choice.

Materials:

- jumbo safety pins
- small safety pins
- thin ribbons in rainbow colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple
- scissors

Directions:

Give each group member one large safety pin and 6 small ones.

1. Cut the ribbons into lengths of varying size depending on the design that you want for your pin. The shortest length should be 1". See below for illustrations.
2. Poke a small safety pin through the end of each ribbon. Then hang the smaller safety pins from the large one, in rainbow order (red-orange-yellow-green-blue-purple).
3. Wear the pin as a reminder of God’s promises to us.

Variation:

Provide a variety of colors and allow group members to make peace pins out of any color combination they wish.

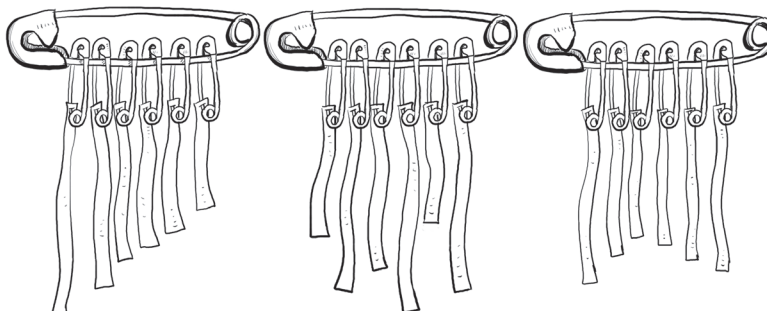
Advent pin:

Provide deep blue or purple ribbons and have children can make Advent pins.

Close:

- Sell the pins to the congregation, friends and family and donate the money to your chosen charity before Christmas.

Note: For more information on patterns and materials, go to <http://www.brightlingsbeads.com/beading-safety-pins>.





Weaving God's Promises

PEACE PLEDGE

Group members learn the Prayer of St. Francis and present it to the congregation in a readers' theater format. As a means of showing their commitment to peace, group members will sign the Peace Pledge and invite others to do the same.

Materials:

- copies of "The Prayer of St. Francis" (p. 12), 1 per participant
- a large copy of the prayer on poster board (12" x 24")
- felt tip pens

Preparation:

Copy "The Prayer of St. Francis" (p. 12) for each group member.

Make a larger copy of the prayer on a sheet of poster board.

Invite a group member or a member of the congregation who knows some American Sign Language (ASL) to prepare to sign the prayer when presented to the congregation.

Directions:

1. Read through the prayer several times with the group, then discuss:
 - What does this prayer say to you?
 - What are your favorite sentences or phrases in the prayer?
2. Read the prayer again, each member taking a turn reading a line. Encourage readers to add emphasis where they see fit. These lines will be what each reader reads when presenting the prayer to the congregation. (If necessary for larger group, have multiple readers read the same line in unison; in smaller groups, assign more than one line to each reader.) Readers may choose to memorize their lines, but it is not required in readers' theater.
3. When presenting the prayer to the congregation, first explain that your class has been reading the writings of Isaiah, the famous prophet who comforted his people and promised that they would one day live in peace.
4. The group then reads the Prayer of St. Francis as prepared before the service.
5. After the group finishes the presentation, each member signs the poster-sized prayer. Then they invite the congregation to do the same after the service. Those who sign this "prayer pledge" are promising to do their best to live peaceful lives.

Close:

- Post the Peace Pledge where the entire congregation can see it.

THE PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love:

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is discord, union;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

To be understood as to understand;

To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.