

# Advent

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FAITH FORMATION FOR CHILDREN | YOUTH | FAMILY | ADULT

Week 3 of Advent - Come into our Sinfulness!

## **KEY POINT**

The world often looks like a dark sinful place, but God promises to come into that world and bring out a new way of life. Jesus will grow into the one who will bring healing and forgiveness to the world!

## **KEY VERSE**

Isaiah 61:11  
For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

## **OPENING PRAYER**

Begin your time together with this, or another, prayer:

Faithful God, you are always working through us to bring your purposes to light. Be with us as we study your Word together. Help us to hear your promises and to be encouraged by them to do your work in the world. In your name. Amen.

## **READ**

Isaiah 61:1-11

## **ABOUT THE STORY**

In 586 BCE, the city of Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonian Empire after an extended siege. The city was destroyed and the people of Israel were sent into exile in Babylon. The Book of Isaiah was written in stages, before, during, and after the siege and exile. Its message shifts from warning to comfort to exhortation, based on the needs of the people who would have first received it.

Today's passage comes from what is known as "Third Isaiah," indicating that it is addressed to a community who has returned from exile around the year 538 BCE, and is now coming to terms with the extraordinary task of rebuilding a city and a nation. They have waited for more than a generation, and have finally been granted the right to return to their beloved Jerusalem. However, their initial elation and excitement has been replaced by disappointment, frustration, and even anger. The land that was once theirs (or their ancestors') has been claimed by foreigners. The city and the temple have been razed. The population has been decimated. The long-awaited return has been a letdown.

Into this context, Isaiah speaks a word of hope and encouragement. This passage reminds the people that God's promises do not end with their return from exile. There is more to come! Drawing on language from elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, especially Leviticus 25, God promises through Isaiah that a time is coming when God's order will replace humanity's order. The people are urged to commit themselves to the daunting task ahead, trusting that God is working even through this setback toward God's purposes.

## SHARE

- Share a story about a time when you waited anxiously for something good, only to find yourself frustrated or disappointed by the actual outcome. Did you wish you had never gotten what you wanted at all? How did the experience change the way that you wait? What advice would you give to others who wait?
- What are the metaphors being used in this passage? Do they still work today?
- Does this passage bring comfort or distress? Do you hear good news or bad? Does the news feel like it is meant for only one time and place, or could it apply to the present day?

## PRAY

God of promise, we know that our human motivations do not always match your plans for us. Help us to see and hear your purposes, and give us the courage to act for your justice. Turn our hearts to you, and bring us into your peace. Amen.

## BLESS

Share this verbal blessing with one another: In Christ, you are forgiven. Amen.

## FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION AT HOME:

- Look for examples of justice each day. Do they illustrate God's or humanity's justice?
- Is there a prison ministry in your community? Consider volunteering or visiting with and supporting those who work there.
- Isaiah presents a vivid image of the world that God's justice is bringing about. Draw a picture or make a collage depicting what this world looks like.