

Reshape, Reclaim, Remember

What would it mean to reshape and reclaim the Advent season from the current commercialized chaos it has become? As we enter this Advent season, let us remember the why, let us reclaim the who, and let us reshape the how, dismantling the current constructs that have shifted our focus from Love entering the world.



Focus scripture
Isaiah 64:1–9

Additional scriptures
Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19
1 Corinthians 1:3–9
Mark 13:24–37

Focus scripture: Isaiah 64:1–9

Just as we seek to reshape, reclaim, and remember in this season of preparation, the context of this passage from the book of Isaiah is defined by the turmoil and angst between a returning exiled people and of those who were not resettled during the Babylonian exile. As one group holds to what has always been, those who were exiled come with a different perspective on who they are as the people of God. Both groups remembering. Both groups trying desperately to reclaim what was lost during the exile. Both groups reshaping who they are as the people of God together. All the while, the prophet cries out as one voice for both groups who look for God to break open the heavens and be revealed. As the prophet laments and calls the people to confession, before the declaration of Creator and created, so should we look to confess our brokenness and reclaim some imagination in who God is reshaping and moulding us to become.

Our “re-” language continues in **Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19** as an outright plea for restoration. A people in turmoil cling to the hope that comes from the promise of God defined in the covenantal relationship between the people of Israel and God. The hope that the one to come will restore the people and bring about wholeness and healing is evident in the language of the psalm and the recurring refrain, “Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.”

1 Corinthians 1:3–9 Beginning with thanksgiving, Paul relays his deep and abiding understanding that all gifts come from God

and God alone. These gifts strengthen us in our discipleship of Jesus Christ, even to the very end. “So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 7) speaks to the waiting in which we all participate. It speaks to the equity of gifts God has given, and to the equity of power those gifts have. For a church that was somewhat cliquish, this introduction expresses the great need to live with one another in this waiting in such a way that we might be blameless on the day the Messiah is revealed again. In a world that is so divided, perhaps this is a message for us today to consider the decisions we make and the way we treat others as we look to participate in the reconciling love of God.

Mark 13:34–37 also has a focus on our actions. How do we live out our call as disciples of Christ? The servants carry on the business of the master’s house as they wait for the master to return. As we wait in anticipation, we are invited to reflect on how we take on the business of Christ into the world.

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What does it mean to reshape, reclaim, and remember during this Advent season? As with the people of this week’s texts from the Hebrew scriptures, we too are in a world in angst and turmoil, trying to understand who God is calling us to be. The epistle and gospel readings tell us to wait in heightened anticipation. How might our waiting be active in reshaping, reclaiming, and remembering this Advent?

God of creation, even in our misguided attempts to worship and praise you, you hold us as your people. In this Season of Advent, as we ready ourselves to usher in the Christ child, grant us the stillness necessary to reflect on your faithfulness. Amen.

Lecture Connection

links current events with this week’s scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

The majority of children in this age group know what it feels like to have to wait for something to happen or for someone to come. They have probably had the experience of waiting to be picked up after school, or waiting for a visit from friends or relatives, or waiting to celebrate their next birthday. Their anticipation and excitement as they wait during these weeks leading up to Christmas is probably beginning to build.

Children wait for Christmas today as they have done for centuries. They may wait in anticipation, looking forward to gifts and special times with family. Or they may wait in anxiety because of family or financial circumstances. Think about the children in your

group. How might you help them understand the deeper meaning of a time of anticipation and celebration? How might you bring the hope of the Christ child into your time together?

The Advent season often begins with readings from the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures (the “Old Testament”) and this year the children will be introduced to the prophet Isaiah. The story of Isaiah and the Hebrew people may be new for some in your group and the resource sheet “[Words from the Prophets](#)” offers background information. Pray that children will make a connection between their own hopes and dreams and the hopes of the Hebrew people.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, Isaiah 64:1–9, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 3).
- ❑ Review “[About this Season of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany](#)” (p. 1) and “[This Season of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany for Ages 5–12](#)” (p. 2).
- ❑ Bring Bibles, matches, [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2).
- ❑ Bring, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), and *CD player*; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring purple or blue cloth (according to the tradition of your congregation), Bible (with bookmark placed in focus passage), and offering basket; prepare an [Advent wreath](#) (see p. 100).
- ❑ Bring copies of resource sheet “[Advent Candle Ritual](#)” (p. 100); save copies for next week.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song “May You Find Peace” (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #19 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Engage

- ❑ Bring this week’s resource sheet “[Isaiah’s Prayer](#).”

- ❑ **Bible research group:** bring copies of this week’s resource sheet “[Words from the Prophets](#).”
- ❑ **Chant group:** bring resource sheet “[Chant](#)” and “noisemakers” (drums, cymbals, pots, wooden spoons).

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Art zone:** recycled Christmas cards
- ❑ **Prayer zone:** copies of this week’s resource sheet “[Chant](#),” construction paper
- ❑ **Music zone:** song “May You Find Peace” (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook* Vol. 7; #19 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7)
- ❑ **Advent zone:** half a sheet of poster board, tissue or construction paper, used magazines
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** information about service projects in the congregation or community

Bless

- ❑ Bring lyrics for the song “Invocation” (p. 19 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7).
- ❑ Bring copies of resource sheets “[Family Letter](#)” (p. 99), “[Advent at Home](#)” (p. 101), and “[Advent Candle Ritual](#)” (p. 100).



Reshape, Reclaim, Remember

Scripture

Isaiah 64:1–9

FOCUS To discover words of hope from the prophet Isaiah

Gather

Welcome the children as they arrive, introducing guests and newcomers. Explain that today is the beginning of a new season in the church year, the Season of Advent, when people wait and look forward to the birth of Jesus.

Opening ritual

Advent ritual Invite children to help set a worship space with blue or purple fabric, Bible, and an Advent wreath with candles. Explain that the blue or purple colour is a symbol for the Advent season of waiting and hope; the wreath is in a

circle shape to remind us of God's never-ending love; and the four candles represent each of the four Sundays in Advent. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Advent Candle Ritual](#)" (p. 100) and invite three volunteers to lead the group in the ritual for the first Sunday of Advent.

Song If possible, sing "May You Find Peace" (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #19 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Receive the offering and extinguish the Advent candle to signify the end of the gathering worship.

Connecting with the focus

Invite children to share stories about times when they have had to wait for something.

- **What was the hardest thing about waiting?**
- **What made it easier to wait?**

This week's Bible story is about some people who lived a long time ago. They had been waiting a long time for a special person, who would come to show them how to live in God's way.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to use the bookmark to open the Bible to the book of Isaiah. Explain that Isaiah was a prophet who lived thousands of years ago. A prophet is someone who brings messages from God.

The Bible story

Read the story from the resource sheet "[Isaiah's Prayer](#)" (based on [Isaiah 64:1–9](#)). Ask:

- **Why were the people still sad when they got back to their homeland?**
- **Why do you think God seemed far away?**
- **What helped Anna to find hope in this story?**

Exploring the story further

(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)

Bible research group The children in this group have the opportunity to learn more about prophets and about the book of Isaiah. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Words from the Prophets](#)," pencils, and Bibles and invite participants to form pairs to do the activities and answer the questions on the resource sheet.

Chant group This group will explore the prayer of Isaiah further. Invite a volunteer to read aloud the prayer on the resource sheet "[Isaiah's Prayer](#)." Invite children to examine the prayer by responding to the following questions:

■ **What does Isaiah ask God to do?**

■ **What questions does Isaiah ask?**

Then lead the group in the chant on the resource sheet “Chant.” Repeat several times, providing noisemakers and encouraging participants to sound out the rhythm of the words.

Reporting Invite the research group to report on their discoveries about prophets and invite the chanting group to present the chant.

The Bible story and us

Imagine that God wants us to share a message of hope with people today.

■ **What message of hope would you like to give to the world?**

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

❑ **Art zone: Messages of hope** During Advent we can share messages of hope and love in the world. Provide used Christmas cards, scissors, and felt markers. Invite children to cut the cards into shapes and write messages of hope and love on the backs of their cards and decorate with felt markers. Encourage them to share their messages with family and friends, or to offer them to the church’s pastoral team to distribute during visits.

❑ **Prayer zone: Writing prayers** Prayer helps us express our feelings to God. Provide copies of the resource sheet “Chant,” construction paper, glue sticks, and felt markers. Invite children to talk together about times when they have wanted God to “break through” into their world to set something right. Have each person cut out the chant, glue it onto construction paper, and write another verse or two in the empty square as their own prayer.

❑ **Music zone: Advent song** The song “May You Find Peace” will be used during the gathering ritual each Sunday of Advent. Read the words



aloud, one phrase at a time, with the group repeating each phrase. Invite children to choose an action to symbolize peace, hope, joy, love, and rest and use these actions as they sing the song several times together.

❑ **Advent zone: Advent banner:** To help children further explore the scripture readings for Advent, invite them to create a banner, adding a new section each week. This week have them use the materials provided to create an image of “tearing open the heavens” and then add a collage of images of hope, using words and pictures from magazines.

❑ **Outreach zone: Service project** Many congregations and communities have Advent or Christmas service projects. Provide information about possible projects and talk together about ways for the children to participate. Or initiate a group project such as making cards for church members who cannot leave their homes or those who are working overseas on behalf of the church. Provide families with information about the project chosen and include conversation about it in each session during Advent.

Bless

Gather in the worship space and relight the first Advent candle, symbolizing hope. Invite children to name some of the things they hope for, for their families, and for the world.

Pray Invite two volunteers to read the lyrics for verse 2 and 3 of the song “Invocation” as a closing prayer, or invite those who wrote additional verses for the “Chant” to share their prayers.

Blessing Send each child out saying, “(Name), may you be filled with God’s hope.”

Distribute copies of the resource sheets “[Family Letter](#)” (p. 99), “[Advent Candle Ritual](#)” (p. 100), and “[Advent at Home](#)” (p. 101) for children to take home. Encourage families to participate in Advent rituals during this season.

Reflect

What did you learn about the children as they expressed their hopes for themselves and for the world? If this group is new to you, what did you discover about how they work together? Who are natural leaders in the group?



Isaiah's Prayer

(based on Isaiah 64:1-9)

**Change your voice to indicate
that Isaiah is
speaking.**

Let's pretend that a very, very long time ago there lived a girl named Anna, who was maybe your age (*point to a child*) or your age (*point to another child*). Anna came from a time and place where a whole family lived together – aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, brothers, and sisters. Her people lost a war and were forced to leave their homes and go to a strange place called Babylon. This all happened before Anna was born. So Anna was born in Babylon. But now Anna's people were able to return to their home country. Everyone had been excited about going home, but now it didn't seem as good. The temple had been torn down and the land just didn't look like the home the older people remembered. And they still had to pay taxes to the king of Babylon.

On many nights, Anna's family, and the aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents, gathered at a campfire at the end of the day. They sang and danced and told stories. Often the stories were about God and how God was with them. Always they prayed together too. Sometimes a prophet, a speaker for God, would have a message from God for them.

Now let's pretend that the prophet Isaiah, a speaker for God, was with them at the campfire one night. Isaiah knew that the people were glad to be home, but he also knew that they were tired of being ruled by the king of Babylon. Suddenly he began to pray to God:

God, I wish you would tear open the sky and come down here, right now!
Show the Babylonians your power in shaking mountains and burning fires.
You are our God and we are waiting.
Are you angry with us? Is that why you have gone away? Are you hiding from us? You made us; we are your people.

All around the campfire, people, Anna too, nodded their heads and whispered, "Yes, God, please come down!"

Anna stared into the campfire. A warm breeze floated across her shoulders and brushed her cheeks. The breeze seemed to whisper, "Anna, I am here. Keep hoping. Keep waiting. Keep praying. I am with you."

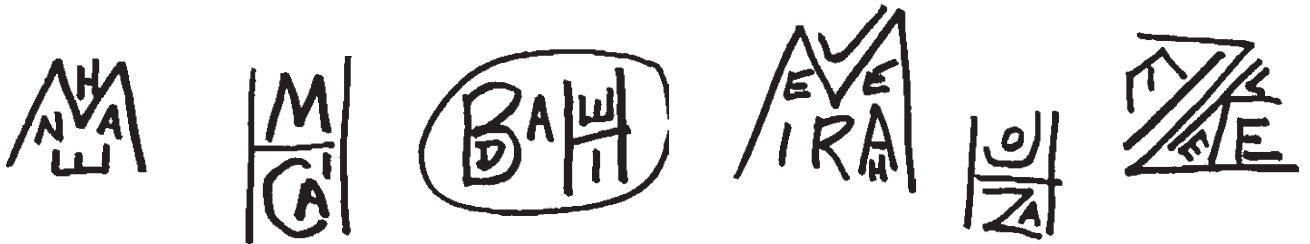
Whenever we wonder where God is, we can remember this story and Isaiah's prayer. We can remember this story and the breeze that floated over Anna. And we can keep hoping and keep waiting and keep praying, because God is with us too.



Words from the Prophets

Through the centuries, God has chosen men and women to speak God's message to the people. Most of the books of the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures are the words that prophets spoke, messages they were given by God.

Open your Bible to the table of contents. Find Isaiah. All the books following Isaiah, except Lamentations, are books of prophets. Rearrange the letters in each group below to find the names of some prophets in the Bible.



Prophet =
a person who
speaks for God

Isaiah

Isaiah is the longest book of prophecies. How many chapters are in Isaiah?

The Book of Isaiah was probably written over many years, so many years that most people think more than one person wrote it. One way to divide the book of Isaiah is like this:

Isaiah 1–39: These chapters are for God's people in Judah.

Isaiah 40–55: These chapters are for the people who have been taken as captives to Babylon.

Isaiah 56–65: Now the people are back in Judah. However, life is not as good in their homeland as they expected it to be.

For which group of people was the scripture for this session, Isaiah 64:1–9, probably written?



O God, we are sad and blue.
Where, oh where, oh where are you?
Tear the heavens, come down to us.
Help us in our great distress.

Break through!

Shake the mountains, show your
might.
Be with those who love what's right.
You're the potter, we're the clay.
Shape us by your hand each day.

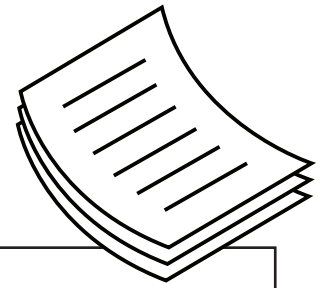
Break through!

Please forget the wrongs we've done.
We're your people, we're as one.
Oh, God, what are we to do?
We will put our trust in you.

Break through!

by Fred Joblin ©Seasons of the Spirit, 2002

Family Letter



Dear Families,

Welcome to the seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany! We are looking forward to exploring these seasons and their scripture readings together with the children. We recognize that this is probably a very busy time for your family, but we hope that you and your children will be able to take some time to experience the religious significance of these seasons. In order to help you, we have provided two resources, "[Advent at Home](#)" and "[The Twelve Days of Christmas](#)." We encourage you to choose some of these activities to share the spirit of Christmas with family and friends.

During Advent the group will be exploring readings from the prophet Isaiah and the Psalms, and the story of Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel in the first chapter of Luke. These readings will help us reflect on the themes of longing, comfort, and hope.

During the weeks of the Season after the Epiphany (referred to as "ordinary time" in the church year) most of the focus scripture readings come from the gospel of Mark. Children will have an opportunity to explore stories of Jesus' baptism, the call of the fishers, and the beginning of his ministry. The stories of healing and teaching will help children learn more about who Jesus is and discover the ways in which they too are called to share God's light and love in the world.

On February 14, the last Sunday of the season, we celebrate the story of Jesus' Transfiguration. Children will have a chance to ponder the mystery and wonder of this story and reflect on their own experiences of God's presence in those "thin places," where the dividing line between the holy and the ordinary is very thin.

During these seasons we will be praying for each child in our group, and we ask that your family also include us in your prayers. You are welcome to visit our meeting area any time. If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions about the church school program, please feel free to contact us. We are always happy to hear what is working well and what could be changed.

Sincerely,

Suggested resources: The *Family Story Bible* and *Family Story Bible Colouring Book*, illustrated by Margaret Kyle, or *The Lectionary Story Bible, Year B*. For older children, *Read, Wonder, Listen: Stories from the Bible for Young Readers*. Both are available from the publisher of *Seasons of the Spirit* at www.woodlakebooks.com.



Advent Candle Ritual

Making an Advent wreath

Materials: real or artificial evergreen branches, or green garland; five candle holders; four blue candles, or three purple candles and one pink candle; one white candle

1. Form the branches or garland into a circle (symbolizing God's love which never ends).
2. Place the four coloured candles in a circle evenly spaced around the wreath.
3. Place the white candle (Christ candle) in the middle.



First Sunday of Advent

Reader 1: Today is the first Sunday of Advent.

Reader 2: We light the first candle, the candle of hope.

Light the first blue or purple candle.

Reader 3: We wait in hope and longing for Jesus' birth.

Second Sunday of Advent

Reader 1: We light the first candle again, the candle of hope.

Light the first blue or purple candle.

Reader 2: Today is the second Sunday of Advent and we light the second candle, the candle of peace.

Light the second blue or purple candle.

Reader 3: We wait in hope and longing for Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Third Sunday of Advent

Reader 1: We light the first two candles again, for hope and peace.

Light two blue or purple candles.

Reader 2: Today is the third Sunday of Advent and we light a candle for joy.

Light the third blue or the pink candle.

Reader 3: We wait in hope and longing to celebrate Jesus' birth.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Reader 1: We light the first two candles, for hope and peace.

Light two blue or purple candles.

Reader 2: We light the third candle again, for joy.

Light the third blue or the pink candle.

Reader 3: Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent and we light the last Advent candle, for love.

Light the fourth blue or purple candle.

Reader 4: We wait in hope and joy as we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ child.

Advent at Home

Travelling Nativity

Try setting up your nativity scene in stages this year:

- move the Mary and Joseph figures on a journey through the house until Christmas Eve, when they arrive at the manger
- add angel figures beside the manger on Christmas Eve
- place the baby Jesus figure in the manger on Christmas morning
- add the figures of the shepherds later on Christmas Day
- keep the nativity scene for the twelve days of Christmas
- have the magi figures travel through the house from Christmas Day until the Day of the Epiphany (January 6)
- place the magi figures beside the baby Jesus on the Day of the Epiphany.

Advent surprise gifts

There is a German tradition of secret gift giving during the Advent season, called “christkindl” (Christ child):

- write the name of each member of the family on a slip of paper
- each person chooses a name (without telling who it is) on the first Sunday of Advent
- throughout Advent each person does secret “good deeds” for the person whose name they drew (such as helping with a task without being asked, making a small gift, leaving a note or poem on a pillow or in a pocket)
- reveal the names on Christmas Eve or Day and celebrate the gifts each has received.

Advent bookmark

Make a bookmark to remind you of the Advent Bible stories. Cut out the bookmark, colour it, and glue it to heavier paper.



Advent Bible stories

Stories of events that happened before Jesus' birth

Elizabeth and Zechariah

Luke 1:5-25

The birth of John the Baptizer

Luke 1:57-80

Mary and the angel

Luke 1:26-38

Mary and Elizabeth

Luke 1:39-56

Joseph's dream

Matthew 1:18-24

