



Session 1
Winter 2015–16
Junior Youth

The path to God's promise

JEREMIAH 33:14–16; PSALM 25

prepare

PRAYER

God, as I begin this holy season of Advent, quiet my heart that I might prepare for your coming among us. Amen.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

To hear the people's hopes for a righteous leader

STORY SUMMARY

Today's texts accompany the first Sunday of Advent. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God promises to bring a righteous "branch" from the line of David. The prophet spoke of God's promise to provide a leader for Jerusalem. This leader would set things right and save the land. Psalm 25 speaks of trust and waiting for God. The people sang that they trusted in God, followed God's paths, and waited for God's forgiveness, teaching, friendship, relief, and deliverance.

teaching tips for junior youth

Our culture often jumps straight into celebrating Christmas, but youth need the season of Advent, a time of waiting with patience. Events do not always happen when we expect or in a way we can easily understand. The Old Testament stories in these Advent sessions tell of those who waited for God to send the Messiah. Invite youth into this yearning emotion and the hope of God's promises.

During Advent and Christmas, you may choose to listen to suggested songs from Media connections during Peace notes. Find them on a CD, or as an MP3 download. Look through the first five sessions to find these optional songs.

You will need an Advent wreath with candles. It should include four purple or blue candles (one candle may be pink, for the third week), with a larger white candle in the middle.

Decide which Explore activities you will do, and check Supplies and To do throughout the session to see what needs to be prepared.

The faithfulness of God

Jeremiah 33 is set during the time when the Babylonians were laying siege to Jerusalem (598–597 BCE). In this chapter, Jeremiah predicts that God will restore God's people to the land, restore their prosperity, and restore a king to the throne of David. Jeremiah is told that a descendant of David will once again rule God's people with justice and righteousness.

Verse 3 is crucial for understanding the thread of this chapter. The word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah, saying, "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known." What Jeremiah does not know is that, despite the present crisis and later exile, God will eventually restore the fortunes of God's people. In spite of their unfaithfulness, God will prove to be faithful.

God's overarching commitment contrasts dramatically with the chaos that Jeremiah and Jerusalem were experiencing. Earlier, Jeremiah used the phrase "the Lord is our righteousness" in reference to a coming king (23:6). In this week's text the phrase is applied to the city of Jerusalem. This underscores the connection between the coming king and his people. Despite present circumstances, God assures the people that in the days to come they will dwell secure and safe in the land: "In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety" (33:16a).

The Branch is a title that is used in other places in the Bible to refer to a messiah.¹ *Branch* means "a royal successor"; it is a poetic term for the heir of a dynastic line. Neighboring nations used this same term for an heir to the throne who rules justly. In Jeremiah's time, the dynasty of David appeared to have come to an end. On the face of it, God's promise had failed. But here God boldly reaffirms this pledge. A Christian understanding of this promise has been that Jesus is the Messiah who will inherit David's throne and establish God's kingdom through faithfulness and righteousness.²



The structure of Psalm 25

Psalm 25 is a remarkable blend of wisdom and lament, asking for wise guidance and for deliverance. It is an alphabetical poem, with each new line starting with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is structured according to an inverted parallelism: it introduces all its themes and then returns to them in reverse order. For example, in both verses 1 and 22, the psalmist calls upon God. Verses 2–3 and 19–21 plead for salvation from enemies and from shame. Verses 4–5 and 16–18 speak of following God's path and waiting for God's salvation. Verses 6–7 and 11–15 speak of God's covenant love. The central

verses (8–10) of this psalm emphasize the steadfast love that guides one on a just path:

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

Singing of God's love

The entire psalm speaks of God's loving and faithful character. As in the promise to Jeremiah, the psalmist says that God no longer remembers people's sins. Despite the psalmist's sense of guilt and fear, God's love and faithfulness will win the day.

In the Gospels we hear Jesus announcing the fulfillment of God's covenant promise. With the advent of Jesus, God's long anticipated reign of justice and righteousness shall be realized. God will not leave people without a leader; the son of David has come to inherit the throne. That which the prophet foresaw and the psalmist longed for shall come to pass in unexpected and wondrous ways.

1. Jeremiah 23:5–6; Isaiah 4:2; 11:1–5; Zechariah 3:8; and 6:12.
2. Luke 1:32–33 (see also 2 Samuel 7:12–16).

gather

supplies

- *Shine Songbook and CD*
- *Year Two Songbooks* (optional)
- CD player
- Advent wreath and candles (one larger and white, four purple/blue)
- Blue/purple fabric and ribbon
- Evergreens and more additional candles
- Matches/lighter
- Chime or bell

poster pack

- Bible memory poster (Luke 1)
- Advent poster

to do

- Gather blue and/or purple supplies to decorate the room for Advent.
- Gather materials to make a simple Advent wreath. Instead of four purple/blue candles, you may use three purple/blue candles and one pink candle (for the third week).

media connections

- Image search for "King David's family tree"
- YouTube search for "Advent in 2 Minutes"
- Third Day song "My Hope Is You" from *Conspiracy No. 5 CD*
- Image search for *O Root of Jesse* by Ansgar Holmberg

BUILD COMMUNITY

As youth enter, invite them to use decorations to transform your meeting space for Advent. Include purple or blue cloth and/or ribbon, candles, and evergreens. Talk about how the decorations (which can include your group's Advent wreath) are like or unlike decorations you see in your community. Share that today begins the season of Advent—a time of preparing and waiting expectantly for the birth of Christ. Today's stories from the Old Testament tell of people long ago who longed for God's promise to be fulfilled.

WORSHIP TOGETHER

If possible, dim the lights in the room before lighting the first candle on the Advent wreath. Explain that each week in Advent you will light an additional candle, watching the light grow as you anticipate the coming of Christ.

The first candle is called the candle of hope. Invite youth to speak any words that come to mind when they hear the word *hope*. Share that this is a key word in today's Bible stories.

Listen to or sing along with the verse 1 of "Hope Is a Light" from the Shine CD (track 9, page 16 in the *Year Two Songbook*). Lyrics are also found in the back of *L.E.D.*

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Keep the lights dim as you direct attention to the Advent poster (raise the lights, if necessary, to see and read it). Share that for centuries Christians have focused on the spiritual practice of waiting during Advent. Point out the first quote from Psalm 62:5 on the poster. Invite youth to spend 30–45 seconds sitting and waiting in silence. Signal the beginning and end of the silence by ringing a chime. At the conclusion of the time, offer this prayer or one like it:

Lord, in the silence we wait for you with hope. Come be with us today.

Bible memory

Point out the new Bible memory poster in the room. Invite youth to read the words together. Then break into four groups and have each group choose a motion to go with one line of the verse. Say the verse together again with each group doing its motion.

For smaller groups: Divide into just two groups, with each group taking an entire verse.

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

—Luke 1:78–79

teaching tip

A new Shine product, the *Year Two Songbook* (without the CD), is now available for purchase in sets of five. Singing with music notation can make singing more appealing to youth. It also prepares them for other choral opportunities in church and beyond.

experience

SHARE THE STORY

Share with the group that you will begin the Advent season with the cries of God's people in the Old Testament. Remind them of the leaders they learned about last quarter. After suffering under so many disappointing human leaders, the people longed for a great leader—someone who could show them God's way.

Invite youth to read today's passages from Psalms and Jeremiah as a conversation, with the people praying and God responding. Explain that the prophet Jeremiah is relaying God's words to the people. Divide the group into two sides, with one side reading the Jeremiah passage (God), and the other reading the Psalms passage (people). Groups can choose individuals to read, or each side can read their part in unison. Have the groups read back and forth as follows:

- **People:** Psalm 25:1–7
- **God:** Jeremiah 33:14
- **People:** Psalm 25:8–14
- **God:** Jeremiah 33:15
- **People:** Psalm 25:15–22
- **God:** Jeremiah 33:16

WONDER AND REFLECT

Invite youth to keep their Bibles open to Psalm 25 and place a marker in Jeremiah 33 so they can flip back and forth. Wonder together about the following questions:

- I wonder which line of the people's prayer in Psalm 25 you can imagine yourself praying.
- If you set Psalm 25 to a tune, what would the music sound like? What types of instruments or voices would you use?
- I wonder which of God's promises in Jeremiah 33 brings you the most hope. I wonder which one the Israelites found most encouraging.
- Why would God say "the days are surely coming" without telling the people exactly when the promise would be fulfilled?
- I wonder what you are hoping or waiting for today.

PEACE NOTES

Throughout history, people have expressed their desire for change and peace through music. Explain that during Advent and Christmas you will not be singing the usual Christmas carols, but songs from the scriptures that express people's hopes, dreams, fears, and desire for God's peace. Point out the blurb about Psalms on the "Songs of the season" poster. Sing a familiar psalm-based song that you regularly sing in worship.

The path to God's promise

Jeremiah 33:14–16;
Psalm 25

supplies

- Bibles

poster pack

- "Songs of the season" poster

teaching tip

For Peace notes, you might play "My Hope Is You" by Third Day, listed in Media connections. As youth listen, invite them to think of popular songs that express people's hope. How are the hopes in those songs like or unlike those in Psalm 25?

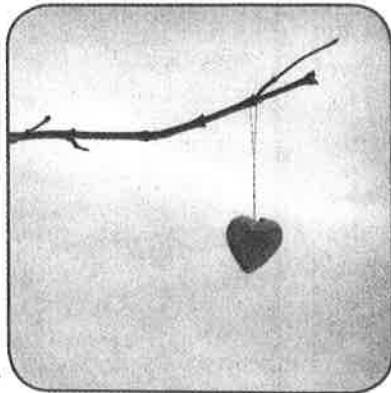
explore

CREATE

The people were waiting for a “righteous branch to spring up for David”—that is, for a leader from David’s line chosen by God. Invite youth to consider things they are waiting for and hoping for, either in the near future or some time from now. Have them work together to create a “Christmas branch tree” by sticking bare branches into a pot of soil. They can use art supplies to create ornaments representing things they are hoping or waiting for, and hang them on the branches.

supplies

- Large pot of soil
- Large bare branches/sticks
- Variety of art supplies (glue, scissors, construction paper, ribbon, markers, feathers, sequins)



MOVE

The people hoped for a righteous leader who could guide them on God’s path. Have one youth volunteer leave the room while the rest of the group creates a path through the room with twists and turns and obstacles. Then choose two leaders—one who will give the right directions to the person traveling the path, and one who will give poor directions that lead the person astray. Bring the volunteer back in, blindfolded, and have the two leaders give their instructions. Other youth may line the path and keep the traveler from getting injured by wandering off the path. What difference does it make if you can trust your leader?

supplies

- Blindfold
- Masking tape to make a path
- Chairs, pillows, and other items for obstacles

other ideas

- Create an Advent calendar to keep in your room or take home. Add ideas for projects or activities that prepare for Jesus.
- Psalm 25 is an acrostic poem, each line starting with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Create acrostic poems with your names that express your hopes for the future.

RETELL

Divide the group into trios. (If your group does not divide neatly into trios, include a fourth person to read God’s reply in scene 2.) Hand each group a copy of “Then-and-now retell” from page 90 of this guide. Assign roles of readers: “Resident of Jerusalem,” “God,” or “Resident of where you live.” Each youth should complete the assigned character’s reply, basing it on scripture or on what they think the character would say today. Then have trios perform their readings for each other as you read the part of narrator. Note the different ways groups completed the story.

For smaller groups: Work as a whole group on the story, then perform it.

supplies

- Bibles
- “Then-and-now retell” (from Additional resources)
- Pencils

L.E.D.

Have youth get together in groups of two or three and play the “Path to God’s promise” game on pages 2–3 in *L.E.D.* They will use their Bibles to look up verses from Old Testament prophets that speak of unjust leaders and promise a future righteous leader. Be available to offer opinions if youth need help.

supplies

- *L.E.D.* magazines
- Bibles
- Dice
- Coins or other items for playing pieces

bless

PRAY

Dim the lights again and gather around the lighted Advent wreath. Listen to or sing along with “Dios de la esperanza” (May the God of Hope), track 5, page 10 in the *Year Two Songbook*. Lyrics are also found in the back of *L.E.D.*

Invite youth to join you in a responsive prayer, repeating the phrase in italics: “God of hope, be with us.”

*As we long for truth and justice,
God of hope, be with us.*

*As we prepare for Christ’s birth,
God of hope, be with us.*

*As we wait for all that is yet to be,
God of hope, be with us.*



SEND

Bless the youth with these words adapted from Romans 15:13 (*The Message*):

**May God fill you up with joy
and peace, so that your lives will
brim over with hope!**

supplies

- *Shine Songbook and CD*
- *Year Two Songbooks* (optional)
- CD player
- Advent wreath

It’s hard to not have all the answers when teaching youth. The good thing is, the more we point to the One who knows instead of giving the answers, the better we are preparing them for what is to come.

—Aaron Lee
Richmond, Virginia

looking ahead.

Next session’s Move activity requires freezing objects in water a few days ahead of time. Read that section and make plans to freeze your items now.

leader’s closing prayer

What good news are you waiting for or needing this Advent? How might you clear quiet space in your life to be renewed by the God of hope?

God, fill me with your light, that I may fix my eyes on you in this sacred season. Amen.