

The Isaiah Poems

Isaiah 7:10-16

Session 4: Oh, A Sign!

PREPARING THE SPACE

You may wish to create an "alter-table" with a purple or blue cloth, a candle, a picture of a pregnant woman or place a child's toy or other symbol of birth.

WELCOME & LIGHTING A CANDLE

As you light the candle say:

*"He is not standing afar off waiting for us to draw nigh,
but is a God who sought us out, striving ever to enter,
trying doors, strategically planning
making himself as small as a child
and lying down on the doorstep of the world." (Walt Whitman)*

Let us enjoy the light! Take a few moments of silence.

CIRCLE TIME

This is a time for all participants to "check in." There is no cross talk or discussion. Start with yourself and then go around the circle.

There are lots of characters, real and imagined, that are part of our Christmas celebrations. With which of the following do you most identify, and why?

The amazed shepherds
Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer
The wise men
The Grinch
Mary or Joseph
Frosty the Snowman

(from www.smallgroups.com)

PLANNING YOUR SESSION

Gather items to help create your space.

You will need a Bible and to print the text from *The Massage*. See Bible Gateway in Supplemental Resources.

Make copies of Participant Sheet #4. It has the Entry Points to be read during the session.

Make copies of "The Story and Practice of the O Antiphons" found in Supplemental Resources.

Bring copies of the carol "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" to sing or read.

If you decided to have a feast of cookies or fruitcake, set out what you need. Keep it simple. It is a feast of sharing and conversation.

Download the Evaluation. We appreciate your feedback!

THE POEM OF THE PROPHET

Read Isaiah 7:10-16, and leave a moment of silence.

Read it a second time from *The Message* translation. (See Resources for a link to Bible Gateway where you can select *The Message* as a translation.)

ENTRY POINTS

See the Participant Page #4 for Entry Points. Invite the group to read the Entry Points silently or by taking turns reading aloud.

WONDERING QUESTIONS

Wondering questions have no right or wrong answers. It is important to stress this with the group. The questions help start a conversation. Use as many as you like or ask participants what questions they have and discuss possible responses.

1. How important (or not!) are signs in your life? Have you ever yearned or asked for a sign?
2. Isaiah's sign was a mixed blessing. The child would come but so would the conquering Assyrians. What are some mixed blessings our church/ your congregation is experiencing?
3. King Ahaz pretended to be brave. What are some ways you, or your congregation, tries to hide fear or uncertainty? What might a modern day prophet say to you?
4. As we come close to the Mystery of Christmas where do you see or experience signs of God's faithfulness today? Where do you see signs of goodwill? Talk about why Christmas seems to bring out the best in people. How might we continue to see signs when Christmas is past? Consider this: Do the signs stop or do we stop expecting them?
5. What is the one thing you can do to prepare for Mystery to enter your Christmas?

A PRAYER PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

Praying the O Antiphons

Read the story about "O Antiphons" using the information on found on page 3-4 (or in the Supplemental Resources.)

You might want to sing or read the words of the carol "O come, O Come Emmanuel." (Voices United #1) This carol is based on the O Antiphon prayers.

Share a copy of the " O Antiphons" handout (Supplemental Resources) and encourage participants to pray the O Antiphons each evening, beginning December 17, knowing that they join hearts with many throughout the world in this ancient prayer.

BLESSING

Your group may have chosen to share a simple feast, perhaps a Christmas cookie or piece of fruitcake and a glass of juice or tea. Keep it simple. Enjoy conversation and sharing Christmas plans.

Group Blessing: *[Extinguish Candle]*

Leave with Light lingering about you and know that God is always coming into the world.

EVALUATION

You will find an evaluation to use with your group in the Supplemental Resources. I do pay attention to feedback!

PRAYER PRACTICE: PRAYING THE O ANTIPHONS

By Janice MacLean

Story

Dating back to the 4th century the “O Antiphons” are a series of short prayers based on seven titles for the Coming One. They were chanted during Vespers (Evening Prayer) from December 17 through 23. There are other prayers for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

The Benedictine monks arranged these antiphons as an acrostic. Starting with the last title and taking the first letter of each Latin title - **E**mmanuel, **R**ex, **O**riens, **C**lavis, **R**adix, **A**donai, **S**apientia - the Latin words “ero cras” are formed, meaning, “Tomorrow, I will come.”

As we pray the O *Antiphons* we join a much larger community gathered in convents and cathedrals, in living rooms and small groups, and like you, in front of computer screens.

I am deeply attracted to this ancient liturgical tradition of praying with the O Antiphons. I pray my way through most every year.

As much as I love the O Antiphons, the traditional titles and images are a struggle. Sometimes I find them difficult to hold, but I always come back to them. There is always something intriguing to be found in these Hebrew scripture titles whether they comfort or disturb. O for wonder and surprise, O for noticing God among us, O for hope and justice.

The One who was coming is still coming. Look. Listen. Pay attention. The Coming One is hidden in plain sight.

O Antiphons as Spiritual Practice

You may want to pray the Antiphons each evening. If you have time, you might also “doodle” images that rise in you as you pray. You may want to try chanting them. The easiest

chant is simply to sound the words in one tone. Or you may want to write your own "O Antiphons" based on your favourite images for the Coming One.

Dec. 17

O Wisdom,
O Holy Word of God,
You govern all creation with your strong, yet tender care.
Come, and show your people the way to salvation.

Dec.18

O Adonai of ancient Israel,
who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush,
who gave him the holy law on Sinai mountain:
Come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free.

Dec.19

O Root of Jesse.
You have been raised up as a sign for all peoples;
Kings stand silent in your presence;
the nations bow down in worship before you.
Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid.

Dec. 20

O Key of David,
O Royal Power of Israel
you open and none can shut; you shut and none can open:
Come, break down the prison walls of death
for those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death;
and lead your captive people into freedom.

Dec.21

O Radiant Dawn,
Splendor of eternal light,
Sun of justice:
Come, shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death.

Dec.22

O King of all the nations,
the only joy of every human heart;
You are the Cornerstone, and you make all people one.
Come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust.

Dec. 23

O Emmanuel,
Our Ruler and Giver of the Law
Desire of the nations,
We await you, our savior.
Come and set us free.