

HERE AM I, SEND ME

A Catholic Journey Through the Prophet Isaiah

“And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

Isaiah 6:8 (RSV2CE)

Fourteen Sessions for Young Adults • Inductive Study • Leader's Edition

Using This Guide

Read this before Session 1

WHAT THIS STUDY IS

Here Am I, Send Me is a fourteen-session inductive journey through all sixty-six chapters of the prophet Isaiah for young adults, built on a Win-Build-Send arc: each session opens hearts (Win), digs into the text with real discovery (Build), and commissions participants outward (Send). The method is inductive: participants find things in the Scriptures themselves, in the room, in real time. The leader's job is to guide the dig, not to lecture the findings.

WHAT IS IN EACH SESSION

- **Leader Preparation Guide:** the session overview, background (What You Need to Know), Old Testament roots and New Testament fulfillment, three Voices of the Church with verified citations, Catechism connections, thread watch, session goals, and a 90-minute clock with pre-chosen cuts.
- **Discussion Guide:** opening prayer, two Win questions, numbered inductive Build questions each followed by a shaded ANSWER box (share the answer only after the group has worked the question), Live Discovery hunts where the group finds source passages themselves, a full-strength Steelman in most sessions, Dig Deeper boxes, Send questions, Live It This Week practices, a memory verse, and a closing prayer.
- **Leader Reference Card:** every passage used in the session, in order, for fast pulpit-side navigation.
- **Take-Home Sheets:** a separate two-page sheet per session, distributed AFTER the session, containing the recap, the session's Voices of the Church, Live It This Week, the memory verse, next session's reading, and Catechism references. Take-Home 1 contains the sealed My Guess box; guard it.

HOUSE RULES

- All Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition (RSV2CE). Participants should bring a Catholic Bible; the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible is ideal.
- ANSWER boxes are shared after the discussion, never read preemptively. The discovery is the formation.
- Steelman sections present objections, Protestant, Jewish, and skeptical, at full strength before answering. Teach your group to love this: we honor truth by facing the best version of every question.
- Where the Church has not defined a matter (for example, the human authorship of Isaiah 40-66), this study says so honestly and shows the permitted range.
- The sealed guess: in Take-Home 1, every participant writes a private answer to a planted question and seals it. It is opened, unedited, in Session 11. Protect the mechanic: no spoilers, no peeking, and remind the group at Session 10 to bring the guesses back.

THE THREADS

Isaiah is a single tapestry, and this study tracks its master threads across all fourteen sessions: the Holy One of Israel, Zion from harlot city to nursing mother, the light of the nations, the highway, the stone, the stump and the holy seed, the word that stands, the banquet, comfort, and the arm of the LORD. Encourage margin notes; the threads pay off, every one of them, and the final session reads the completed ledger.

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TAKE-HOME SHEETS

The fourteen two-page participant Take-Home sheets are merged separately in Here-Am-I-Send-Me-Take-Homes.pdf and as individual files, one per session, distributed after each gathering.

The Vineyard and the Lawsuit

Isaiah 1-5 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

Participants discover that Isaiah opens not with prediction but with a covenant lawsuit: God summons heaven and earth as witnesses, exactly as Moses did in Deuteronomy, and puts his own people on trial. They then find that the trial ends in the strangest verdict in literature, an invitation: *“though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow”* (1:18). Finally, they discover for themselves that Jesus rebuilds Isaiah’s Song of the Vineyard, detail by detail, in Matthew 21, and that the Church reads herself into that vineyard.

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

The Sacrament of Reconciliation. Isaiah 1:18 is the logic of the confessional: God does not merely overlook scarlet, he makes it white. And Isaiah 1:10-20 is the standing answer to the charge that Catholics reduce faith to ritual: the same chapter that condemns empty worship never condemns worship, and the Catechism itself cites this passage when it teaches that outward sacrifice must express the heart (CCC 2100).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Isaiah son of Amoz prophesied in Jerusalem for roughly forty years, from the death of King Uzziah around 740 BC through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, as the Assyrian empire rose like a flood tide over the ancient Near East. He is a prophet of the capital: educated, at home in the royal court, married to a prophetess, father of sons with sign-names. Jewish tradition holds that he was martyred under the wicked King Manasseh by being sawn in two, an ancient tradition often associated with Hebrews 11:37.

The book that bears his name is the longest prophetic book in Scripture and the prophetic book the New Testament quotes most. It falls into three great movements: chapters 1-39, dominated by judgment and the Assyrian crisis; chapters 40-55, the Book of Consolation, addressed to exiles in Babylon; and chapters 56-66, a vision of the renewed Zion. Be honest with your group about authorship: the Church has never defined whether one prophet or a school of his disciples produced the finished book, and faithful Catholic scholars hold different positions. What the Church does give us is the canonical book itself, one unified scroll that our Lord and the apostles quote simply as *Isaiah*. Its unity of theme, above all the title *the Holy One of Israel*, which spans all sixty-six chapters, is not in dispute.

Chapter 1 is a covenant lawsuit, what Hebrew scholars call a *rib*. The form matters: God does not open his book by predicting the future. He opens it by suing his own people for breach of covenant, calling the same witnesses Moses called in Deuteronomy 30-32, heaven and earth. Chapters 2-4 alternate between Zion’s glorious destiny (2:2-5) and her present corruption. Chapter 5 closes the unit with the Song of the Vineyard, a love song that turns into an indictment, followed by six woes.

One small treasure to have in your pocket: the ox and the donkey of Isaiah 1:3 are why nativity scenes have an ox and a donkey. No Gospel mentions them at the manger. Christian tradition and art put them there, reading Isaiah: the animals know their owner and their master's crib, while Israel does not know. When St. Francis staged the first live nativity at Greccio in 1223, the ox and the ass were already fixtures of the scene.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. Isaiah 1:2, “*Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth,*” deliberately reopens the Song of Moses: “*Give ear, O heavens... let the earth hear*” (Deuteronomy 32:1), and Moses' covenant summons, “*I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day*” (Deuteronomy 30:19). Isaiah is Moses' prosecuting attorney, serving papers seven centuries later. The vineyard of chapter 5 grows from Psalm 80:8-16, the vine God brought out of Egypt, planted, and watched over.

Fulfillment. Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants (Matthew 21:33-46) rebuilds Isaiah 5:1-2 piece by piece: the planting, the hedge, the wine press, the tower. His hearers knew the Song of the Vineyard, and Matthew tells us the chief priests “*perceived that he was speaking about them.*” John 15:1 completes the arc: where Israel the vine failed, Jesus declares “*I am the true vine.*” The faithful city of Isaiah 1:26 and the mountain of 2:2-4, to which all nations stream, open out, in the Church's reading, into the Church and finally the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Jerome • *Commentary on Isaiah, Prologue*

St. Jerome says Isaiah should be called an evangelist rather than a prophet, because he sets out the mysteries of Christ and the Church with such clarity that he seems to be composing a history of what has already happened rather than foretelling what is to come. This is why the tradition calls Isaiah *the Fifth Gospel*.

St. Augustine • *Confessions, Book 9*

Preparing for baptism, St. Augustine asked St. Ambrose which book of Scripture he should read. Ambrose told him: Isaiah. Augustine explains that this was because Isaiah is the clearest foreteller of the Gospel and of the calling of the Gentiles. The greatest convert in the Church's history was pointed first to the book you are opening tonight.

St. John Chrysostom • *Commentary on Isaiah (In Isaiam)*

Commenting on the opening chapters, St. John Chrysostom marvels at Isaiah 1:18: the Judge of the whole earth, whose case against his people is airtight, stops the proceedings and invites the guilty to reason with him, offering to make scarlet white. For Chrysostom this is the measure of God's love of mankind: he argues not to condemn but to win the sinner back.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 755.** The Church is God's vineyard and cultivated field. The Catechism cites Isaiah 5:1-7 and Matthew 21:33-43 side by side, exactly the connection your group will discover tonight, and adds that the true vine is Christ.

- **CCC 1430-1431.** Interior repentance: conversion of the heart, without which outward penances remain sterile. This is Isaiah 1:16-17 in the Church's own voice: cease to do evil, learn to do good.
- **CCC 2100.** Outward sacrifice, to be genuine, must express spiritual sacrifice. The Catechism here cites the prophets' denunciation of empty ritual, including Isaiah 1:10-20 by name. Keep this reference ready for the steelman discussion.
- **CCC 2001.** The preparation of man for grace is already a work of grace. Quoting St. Augustine, the Catechism guards the reading of 1:16-18 against any hint that we cleanse ourselves first and God rewards us after: God speaks first, even in our repenting.
- **CCC 839-840.** The Church's relationship to the Jewish people: to them belong the covenants and the promises, and the gifts and call of God are irrevocable. Keep this at hand for the Matthew 21 discovery, so fulfillment is never heard as replacement.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS PLANTED TONIGHT

The Holy One of Israel (1:4). Isaiah's signature title for God, used about twenty-five times in this book and almost nowhere else in Scripture. Tonight it appears for the first time, and in an accusation: they have despised the Holy One of Israel. Do not explain where the title comes from. Session 2 will show them.

Zion, the faithful city (1:21-26; 2:2-4). The harlot city will be smelted and become the faithful city again, and the nations will stream uphill to her. Let the group wonder aloud what this city is becoming. The thread resolves in Sessions 13 and 14.

Walk in the light (2:5). A single line tonight. It returns at 9:2, 42:6, 49:6, and 60:1-3.

The sealed guess. Take-Home 1 carries the My Guess box: who or what is *the arm of the LORD*? Distribute the sheets at the very end, have everyone write and fold, and collect nothing. They keep their own guess until Session 11.

SESSION GOALS

1. Recognize the covenant lawsuit form of Isaiah 1 and find its roots in Deuteronomy 30-32 by live discovery.
2. Articulate precisely what God rejects in Isaiah 1:11-15, and why it is not liturgy itself, using the steelman chain and CCC 2100.
3. Connect Isaiah 1:18 to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
4. Trace the Song of the Vineyard (5:1-7) into Matthew 21:33-46 by live discovery, and into CCC 755.
5. Plant the three threads and the sealed guess without resolving any of them.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 10 min. Build, 55 min. Send, 10 min. Live It This Week, memory verse, Take-Home distribution and sealed guess, closing prayer, 10 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 10 (the six woes) first; cut Question 6 (the smelting of Zion) second. Never cut the steelman chain (Questions 4-5) or the two live discoveries (Questions 1 and 9); they are the spine of the night.

The Vineyard and the Lawsuit

Isaiah 1-5 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, before we ever open this book, you open your mouth to call us. You have summoned heaven and earth, and you have summoned us.

Send your Holy Spirit upon this table, upon these pages, upon each heart here. Give us honest eyes for what is scarlet in us, and unshakable trust in your promise to make it white.

We ask this through Christ our Lord, the true vine, in whom we abide. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Think of a time someone gave you criticism that was hard to hear but turned out to be a gift. What made it possible to receive it?
2. When you hear the name *Isaiah*, what comes to mind? Anything at all: a verse, a Christmas reading, a total blank. All answers welcome.

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

The Courtroom (Isaiah 1:2-9)

1. Read Isaiah 1:2-4 aloud. Before God says a word to Israel, whom does he address? What kind of scene is Isaiah staging here?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

God addresses the heavens and the earth. This is a courtroom: witnesses are called, charges are read (rebellion, v. 2; not knowing their owner, v. 3; forsaking the LORD, v. 4). Isaiah opens his book not with a prediction but with a lawsuit. Israel is the defendant, God is the plaintiff, and creation itself sits in the witness box.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Heaven and earth have been summoned as witnesses before, at the most solemn moment in Israel's story. Split into pairs and hunt it down: it is in the last chapters of Deuteronomy, in Moses' farewell. Give the pairs 3-4 minutes. Do not give the reference.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Deuteronomy 32:1: "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth." Also Deuteronomy 30:19: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day." Moses named heaven and earth as the standing witnesses to the covenant. Seven centuries later, Isaiah recalls exactly those witnesses to the stand. The message could not be sharper: the covenant Moses sealed is now the covenant Israel has broken, and the trial Moses warned about has begun.

If your group finds Deuteronomy 4:26 or 31:28 instead, celebrate it; those are the same summons.

2. Look again at verse 3: “*The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib.*” What is the sting in this comparison?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The dumbest animals in the barnyard know two things: who owns them, and where they get fed. God's own children know neither. It is not that Israel lacks intelligence; it is that knowledge of God is not intelligence but relationship, and they have walked away from it.

DIG DEEPER • Why Your Nativity Scene Has an Ox and a Donkey

No Gospel puts an ox or a donkey at the manger. Christian tradition and art put them there, reading Isaiah 1:3: the animals know “*their master's crib.*” From the earliest Christian art onward, the ox and the ass kneel at Bethlehem as a silent homily: creation recognizes its Owner lying in the feeding trough, and Isaiah's accusation is finally reversed. When St. Francis staged the first live nativity at Greccio in 1223, the two animals were already essential cast members.

3. Verse 4 calls God “*the Holy One of Israel.*” Mark this title in your Bible, tonight is its first appearance in the book. What is strange about the context in which it first appears?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

It first appears in an accusation: “*they have despised the Holy One of Israel.*” Isaiah's favorite name for God, which he will use about twenty-five times, is introduced as the name of the One who has been spurned. Keep your eye on this title as the study goes on. Where Isaiah got it is a story this book will tell us soon. Say no more than that.

The Case Against Worship? (Isaiah 1:10-20)

4. Read Isaiah 1:10-15. Make a list together: what exactly does God say he cannot stand? Be exhaustive.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Sacrifices, burnt offerings, the blood of bulls and lambs and goats (v. 11); appearing in the temple courts (v. 12); offerings, incense, new moons, sabbaths, solemn assemblies (v. 13); appointed feasts (v. 14); even outspread hands and many prayers (v. 15). Every single item on the list is something God himself commanded in the Torah. Let that tension stand for a moment before the next question.

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

Before answering, make the strongest possible case for this reading: **God is against ritual worship as such.** Assign someone to argue it with conviction, using the whole canon:

Psalms 51:16-17: “*For you take no delight in sacrifice... The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit.*” Amos 5:21-24: “*I hate, I despise your feasts... let justice roll down like waters.*” Hosea 6:6: “*I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,*” a verse Jesus quotes twice in its familiar form, *I desire mercy, and not sacrifice* (Matthew 9:13; 12:7). On this reading, the prophets discovered that God wants ethics, not liturgy, and organized ritual religion, including incense, vestments, and sacrifice, is precisely what God rejects. A Catholic Mass, with its altar and its offerings, would be the very

thing Isaiah 1 condemns.

Let the case land. Then press the text with the next question.

5. Now read Isaiah 1:15-17 to the end of the sentence, and verse 13 again, slowly. On the evidence of this passage itself, what is God actually rejecting?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Verse 15 gives the verdict's grounds: "*your hands are full of blood.*" Verse 13 names the fatal combination: "*I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.*" Not solemn assembly; iniquity *and* solemn assembly. The remedy in verses 16-17 is not to cancel the liturgy but to wash, cease evil, learn good, seek justice, defend the orphan and the widow, and then come (v. 18). God rejects worship divorced from life, hands lifted in prayer while dripping with blood.

Test the steelman against the rest of the book: Isaiah's own vision of the future is nations streaming to the temple (2:2-3), and his own call comes in a temple vision filled with heavenly worship (chapter 6, next week). The same God who spoke Psalm 51:16 also spoke Psalm 51:19, two verses later: "*then will you delight in right sacrifices.*" The prophetic target is hypocrisy, not liturgy. This is exactly how the Catechism reads the passage: outward sacrifice, to be genuine, must express the sacrifice of the heart (CCC 2100, which cites Isaiah 1:10-20). The Mass does not escape Isaiah's scrutiny; it stands under it. Bring your life to the altar or you bring an empty ritual.

6. Read Isaiah 1:18. After an airtight prosecution, what does the plaintiff do? What do the two colors mean?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The plaintiff offers settlement talks: "*Come now, let us reason together.*" Scarlet was a fast dye, prized precisely because it held; the image is a stain no washing can lift. God is promising the impossible: stains that cannot be removed will be made white as snow. Notice the sequence of 1:16-18: wash yourselves, cease evil, learn good, then come and be made white. But notice also who speaks first: the whole exchange opens with God's own invitation, "*Come now.*" Even our repentance is a response to grace that goes ahead of us; as the Catechism puts it, the preparation of man for grace is already a work of grace (CCC 2001). We respond through contrition and confession; God accomplishes the cleansing no human effort can. This is the logic of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and it is why our study's colors are scarlet and pearl white. The whole book is in this verse.

7. Read Isaiah 1:21-26. The faithful city has become a harlot, and God announces judgment. Look carefully at verses 25-26: is this judgment destruction, or something else?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

It is smelting: "*I will smelt away your dross.*" Fire, but refiner's fire; the point is not to consume the metal but to purify it. And verse 26 gives the goal: "*afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.*" God's judgment on his own people, in these opening oracles, aims at restoration. File the question this raises: what will this purified, faithful city turn out to be? The book will keep circling back to her.

8. Read Isaiah 2:2-5. In the latter days, what happens to the mountain of the house of the LORD, and who comes to it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The temple mount is raised above every mountain, and *all the nations* flow to it, uphill, like a river running the wrong way. They come to be taught God's ways; the word of the LORD goes out from Jerusalem; swords become plowshares. Two verses after condemning Israel's worship, Isaiah shows the nations begging to join it. Whatever God is doing with Zion, it was never meant for one nation only. Verse 5 hands us a thread: *"let us walk in the light of the LORD."* Watch where light shows up in this book.

The Song of the Vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7)

9. Read Isaiah 5:1-7 aloud, and read it as what verse 1 says it is: a love song. List everything the owner did for his vineyard. What did he look for, and what did he get?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He chose a very fertile hill, dug it, cleared the stones, planted choice vines, built a watchtower in the middle, hewed out a wine vat: everything, in advance, at his own expense. He looked for grapes; it yielded wild grapes. Verse 7 decodes the song: the vineyard is the house of Israel. And in Hebrew the last line is a devastating pun: he looked for *mishpat* (justice) and found *mispach* (bloodshed); for *tsedaqah* (righteousness) and heard *tse'aqah* (a cry). The rhyme of what God wanted and what he got is one consonant apart, and a whole world apart.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Centuries later, Jesus stood in the temple courts and told a story that rebuilds this vineyard piece by piece, and his audience knew exactly what he was doing. Find it in Matthew 21. Pairs again, 3-4 minutes.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Matthew 21:33-46, the parable of the wicked tenants: a householder *"planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower."* Those details are lifted straight from Isaiah 5:1-2; Jesus is quoting the Song of the Vineyard, and the leaders recognized it (v. 45: the chief priests *"perceived that he was speaking about them"*).

But notice what Jesus changes. In Isaiah, the vineyard itself is the problem: bad grapes. In Jesus' telling, the vineyard is fine; the *tenants* are the problem, beating the servants (the prophets) and finally killing the son, and we know who the Son is. The vineyard is not destroyed; rather, *"the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it"* (v. 43): the vineyard stands, and its tenancy changes. The Church has always read herself here, and the Catechism makes it explicit: the Church is the vineyard of Isaiah 5 and Matthew 21, and the true vine is Christ (CCC 755; John 15:1). Read this the way the Church does: fulfillment and enlargement, not replacement. The Gentiles are wild branches grafted into Israel's own olive tree, drawing life from its root (Romans 11:17-18), and *"the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable"* (Romans 11:29; CCC 839-840). The love song God sang over Israel he now sings over us, which means the demand for fruit lands on us too.

10. (Optional, first cut for time.) Skim Isaiah 5:8-23: six woes against land-grabbers, drunkards, cynics, moral relativists (v. 20: “*woe to those who call evil good and good evil*”), the self-wise, and corrupt judges. Where does Jesus deliver his own series of woes, and to whom?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Matthew 23, the seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees, delivered in the same temple, in the same week as the vineyard parable. Jesus is not softer than Isaiah; he is Isaiah's fulfillment even in the prophetic woe. And Isaiah 5:20 may be the most contemporary verse in the chapter: a culture that renames evil as good has been sued before.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. Isaiah 1:17 names the orphan and the widow: the people with no leverage, whom it costs something to defend. Who are the orphan and the widow within your actual reach this month? Name someone specific to yourself, even if you do not say it aloud.
2. If God's complaint is worship with unwashed hands, what is one concrete thing in your life you have been carrying into Sunday Mass and leaving carefully untouched? What would it mean to bring it to Confession before you next bring it to the altar?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Make an examination of conscience using Isaiah 1:16-17 as the mirror: cease evil, learn good, seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Then go to Confession, this week if you can, and hear 1:18 happen to you.
- Pray Isaiah 1:18 aloud each morning, once, slowly.
- Do one act of justice or mercy for someone who cannot repay you, and tell no one.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”

Isaiah 1:18 (RSV2CE)

BEFORE YOU CLOSE

Distribute Take-Home 1 now. Walk the group through the My Guess box on the back: Isaiah will keep returning to a mysterious figure through whom God saves, and late in the book he will ask, “*to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*” Everyone writes their guess, who or what is the arm of the LORD, folds the sheet, and keeps it. No sharing, no changing. We open them together in Session 11.

Closing Prayer

Lord God, Holy One of Israel, you planted us, you cleared the stones, you built the tower, and you have every right to look for fruit.

What is scarlet in us, make white. What is dross in us, smelt away. And teach us this week to defend those who cannot repay us, so that when we lift our hands to you on Sunday, they are clean.

Through Christ our Lord, the true vine. Amen.

Before next session: read Isaiah 6. It is thirteen verses. Read it twice.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 1:2-4 (the lawsuit opens; heaven and earth summoned; first *Holy One of Israel*)
- Isaiah 1:3 (the ox and the donkey)
- Isaiah 1:10-15 (the worship God cannot stand)
- Isaiah 1:16-18 (wash, cease, learn, seek; scarlet to snow)
- Isaiah 1:21-26 (harlot city smelted into the faithful city)
- Isaiah 2:2-5 (the mountain raised; nations stream; walk in the light)
- Isaiah 5:1-7 (the Song of the Vineyard; *mishpat/mispach, tsedaqah/tse'aqah*)
- Isaiah 5:8-23 (the six woes; optional)

Live Discovery Targets

- Deuteronomy 32:1 and 30:19 (Moses summons heaven and earth; accept 4:26 or 31:28)
- Matthew 21:33-46 (the wicked tenants rebuild Isaiah's vineyard)

Supporting Passages

- Psalm 80:8-16 (the vine out of Egypt)
- Psalm 51:16-19; Amos 5:21-24; Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13; 12:7 (steelman texts)
- John 15:1 (the true vine)
- Romans 11:17-18, 29 (grafted branches; the irrevocable call; continuity guardrail)
- Matthew 23:13-36 (Jesus' woes; optional)
- Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 21:2 (the faithful city's destiny; background)

Catechism

- CCC 755 (the Church as vineyard: Isaiah 5:1-7 and Matthew 21:33-43)
- CCC 1430-1431 (interior repentance)
- CCC 2100 (outward sacrifice must express the heart; cites Isaiah 1:10-20)
- CCC 2001 (prevenient grace; the preparation for grace is itself grace)
- CCC 839-840 (the Church and the Jewish people; the irrevocable call)

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 1:18 (RSV2CE)

Here Am I, Send Me

Isaiah 6 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

Participants discover that Isaiah's call comes in a temple vision of heavenly worship, and that the worship has never stopped: the seraphim's "*Holy, holy, holy*" is the Sanctus they sing at every Mass, and the burning coal that touches the prophet's unclean lips is read by the Fathers as a figure of the Eucharist. They also discover the anatomy of every vocation: a vision of holiness, a collapse into honest unworthiness, a purification we do not perform on ourselves, and only then the question, "*Whom shall I send?*" Finally they solve last week's puzzle: where Isaiah got his favorite name for God.

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

The Mass, from the Sanctus to the altar. Before proclaiming the Gospel, the priest quietly prays that God cleanse his heart and his lips; the older form of the Roman Rite names tonight's scene outright, asking to be cleansed as the lips of the prophet Isaiah were, with a burning coal. Isaiah 6 is not background to the liturgy; it is inside the liturgy, every single day. And Isaiah 6 is the anatomy of discernment for every young adult asking what God wants of their life.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The date matters: "*in the year that King Uzziah died,*" around 740 BC. Uzziah had reigned fifty-two mostly prosperous years; his death was the end of an era, with Assyria massing on the horizon. But there is a darker irony your group will discover live: Uzziah died a leper, struck at the altar of incense when he proudly usurped the priests' office (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). Hold that story back for the discovery. A king was disfigured for grasping at the altar; a sinner is healed by what is taken from it. The difference is not the altar. It is presumption versus confession.

The vision itself is liturgical from the first line: throne, temple, the hem of the robe filling the sanctuary, smoke (incense), the altar, and a hymn. The seraphim, *burning ones* in Hebrew, appear by that name only here in all of Scripture. Their triple "*Holy*" is, on the plain level, the Hebrew superlative: holy to the highest degree, holiness beyond category. Many Fathers also heard in the threefold cry a whisper of the Trinity; you can share that reading as the tradition's meditation while being honest that the text's own grammar is the superlative. Both are true readings at different depths.

Then the structure every vocation follows. Isaiah does not volunteer first. He collapses: "*Woe is me! For I am lost.*" The Catechism quotes this exact cry when it describes what happens to anyone who truly encounters the living God (CCC 208). Purification comes to him, from outside, from the altar, by fire, at the touch of an angel: "*your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven.*" Only after that does he hear the question and answer it. Cleansing precedes commission; nobody sends themselves.

Do not skip verses 9-13. Isaiah's actual assignment is brutal: preach to a people who will not listen, until the land is desolate. This is one of the most quoted passages in the New Testament: Jesus cites it to explain the parables (Matthew 13), John cites it to explain unbelief (John 12), Paul cites it as his last recorded Scripture in Acts (28:26-27). It is also the site of tonight's steelman on divine hardening. And its last line hides a seed, literally: "*The holy seed is its stump*" (6:13). Plant that phrase and say nothing more. It germinates in Session 4.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The throne vision stands in the line of Sinai: glory, smoke, fire, and a mediator who cannot survive the sight unaided (Exodus 19; 33:20, "*man shall not see me and live*"). The coal comes from an altar in the vision (compare the censer coals of Leviticus 16:12), and the sequence of guilt confessed, atonement applied, and mission given mirrors the Day of Atonement logic. Uzziah's sin (2 Chronicles 26) is the dark inversion looming over the whole scene.

Fulfillment. John 12:39-41 makes the boldest claim in the New Testament's use of Isaiah: after quoting this chapter, John writes, "*Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke of him.*" Whose glory? In John's grammar, Christ's. The King on the throne, high and lifted up, is the Lord Jesus; and John has already told us the Son of Man must be "*lifted up*" (John 3:14; 12:32), his throne a cross. Revelation 4:8 shows the hymn still going: the four living creatures "*never cease to sing, 'Holy, holy, holy.'*" And the Church on earth joins that unending song at every Mass in the Sanctus (CCC 1352).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom • *Homilies on Isaiah 6 (In illud, Vidi Dominum)*

Preaching a whole series on this one chapter, St. John Chrysostom dwells on the seraphim covering their faces: the burning ones, sinless spirits of fire, cannot bear to gaze directly on the divine glory. If they veil themselves, he asks, what reverence is owed by us, who approach the same holy God in the liturgy? Awe is not the opposite of intimacy with God; it is its doorway.

St. John Damascene • *On the Orthodox Faith, Book 4*

Teaching on the Eucharist, St. John Damascene reaches instinctively for this chapter: let us receive the Body and Blood, he says, as a burning coal, for the coal Isaiah saw was not plain wood but wood united to fire, as the Bread of the Eucharist is not plain bread but bread united to divinity. What the seraph brought to one prophet's lips with tongs, the priest places on ours.

St. Thomas Aquinas • *Commentary on Isaiah*

In his very first work as a young professor, St. Thomas comments on this scene and draws out its order: purification comes before mission. No one worthily announces the word of God whose own lips have not first been cleansed, and the cleansing is God's work, offered through his ministers, not something the prophet performs on himself. Grace equips whom God sends.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 208.** Faced with God's presence, man discovers his own smallness. The Catechism quotes Isaiah 6:5 directly, alongside Peter's "*depart from me, for I am a sinful man*" (Luke 5:8). Have both texts ready; the parallel is one of tonight's discoveries.
- **CCC 1352.** In the Eucharistic Prayer the whole congregation joins the unending praise that the Church sings with the angels: the Sanctus. The seraphim's hymn is on your group's lips every Sunday whether they knew it or not.
- **CCC 1137-1139.** The liturgy we celebrate on earth is a participation in the heavenly liturgy that Isaiah and John both saw. One liturgy, two locations.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS TONIGHT

The Holy One of Israel: origin revealed. Last week the title appeared in an accusation. Tonight the group discovers what stands behind it: at his call he heard the seraphim sing holiness as God's defining attribute, and the title is his lifelong echo of that song. Every time he writes *the Holy One of Israel* for the rest of his life, he is echoing the song he heard that day. Keep tracking the title; it is not finished with us.

The holy seed (6:13). One line at the very end of a devastating commission: the felled tree's stump holds a holy seed. Do not explain it. It sprouts in Session 4.

Lips. Unclean lips cleansed by fire from the altar. Watch what Isaiah says about mouths, words, and the word from here on; and note where the group hears an echo at Mass.

SESSION GOALS

1. Discover Uzziah's death by leprosy at the altar (2 Chronicles 26) and articulate the contrast between presumption and confession before the holy God.
2. Trace the anatomy of vocation in 6:1-8: vision, unworthiness, purification from outside, commission.
3. Connect the Sanctus, the priest's pre-Gospel prayer, and the Damascene's coal to the Mass.
4. Run the hardening steelman on 6:9-10 at full strength and answer it from Scripture and CCC 311, 600, and 1037.
5. Discover John 12:41: Isaiah saw the glory of Christ.
6. Resolve the origin of *the Holy One of Israel* and plant *the holy seed*.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 10 min. Build, 55 min. Send, 10 min. Live It, memory verse, Take-Home, closing prayer, 10 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 9 (Revelation 4) first; compress Question 3 (seraphim description) second. Never cut the Uzziah discovery, the steelman, or the John 12 discovery.

Here Am I, Send Me

Isaiah 6 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory, and so is this room, whether we feel it or not.

Show us tonight what Isaiah saw, enough of your holiness to be honest about ourselves, and enough of your mercy to stop hiding. And if you ask for someone to send, give us the nerve to answer.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Describe a moment when something genuinely awed you: a mountain, an ocean, a birth, a piece of music. What did the awe do to you?
2. When you hear the word *calling* or *vocation*, what is your honest gut reaction: excitement, pressure, confusion, fear of what God might ask?

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

The Throne Room (Isaiah 6:1-4)

1. Read Isaiah 6:1-4 aloud, slowly. Verse 1 dates the vision: “*in the year that King Uzziah died.*” Isaiah could have written the year by number. Why anchor the vision of the true King to the death of an earthly one?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Uzziah reigned fifty-two years; almost nobody in Judah could remember another king, and Assyria was rising. The nation's visible throne was suddenly empty and the future dark. That is the year Isaiah is shown the throne that is never empty. The vision answers the anxiety: the LORD is sitting, not pacing; his robe's hem alone fills the temple. When your visible securities die, that is often precisely when God shows you what was holding the world up all along.

LIVE DISCOVERY

There is more to Uzziah's death than old age, and it happened in this very temple. Hunt down how King Uzziah's reign ended: 2 Chronicles 26, second half of the chapter. Pairs, 3-4 minutes.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

2 Chronicles 26:16-21. At the height of his success, Uzziah's heart grew proud; he entered the temple to burn incense on the altar of incense, an office God had given to the priests alone. Confronted by eighty priests, he raged, and leprosy broke out on his forehead. He died a leper, cut off from the house of the LORD.

Now feel the contrast Isaiah has built into one verse of dating. A king grasps at the altar in

presumption and is struck unclean at his forehead. A prophet confesses he is unclean and is healed at his lips by a coal from the altar. Same temple, an altar in each scene, opposite postures, opposite endings. The altar is not a place for the confident; it is a place for the confessed.

2. Verses 2-4: look at the seraphim. What do they do with their six wings, and what does the arithmetic of their wings tell you?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Two wings cover the face: even sinless spirits of fire do not gawk at God. Two cover the feet: creaturely modesty before the Creator. Two fly: service. Four wings for reverence, two for work. The name *seraphim* means *burning ones*, and this is the only chapter in all of Scripture where they appear by name. Their posture is a homily: adoration comes first, and mission flows out of it, twice as much reverence as activity.

3. The seraphim's song: "*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.*" Two questions. First: Hebrew has no word for *holiest*, so how does it say it? Second: where have you sung this song?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Hebrew makes a superlative by repetition, and a triple repetition is Hebrew's strongest intensification: God is not just holy, or holier, but holy in a degree beyond every category. No other divine attribute in Scripture receives the triple. Many Fathers also heard in the threefold cry a hint of the Trinity, one God thrice named; that is the tradition's meditation on a text whose plain grammar is the superlative, and both readings can be held together.

And your group has sung it, at every single Mass: the Sanctus, immediately before the Eucharistic Prayer. *Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory.* The Catechism says that at that moment the congregation joins the unending praise of the angels (CCC 1352). The song has not stopped since Isaiah heard it; at Mass you are not imitating the seraphim, you are joining them mid-verse (CCC 1137-1139).

Note also what the song claims: the whole *earth* is full of his glory. The seraphim see what we usually do not. Holiness is not God's distance from the world; the world is drenched in him.

4. And one more solved mystery: last week we marked Isaiah's favorite name for God, *the Holy One of Israel*, and asked where he got it. Now you know. Where?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

From the seraphim. Isaiah heard holiness sung as God's defining attribute in the year of his call, and he never recovered. The seraphim sing holiness itself, not the title; the title is Isaiah's own way of carrying their song for the rest of his life. Roughly twenty-five times across this book he will call God *the Holy One of Israel*, and each time he is echoing the liturgy he heard at his call. Notice the wonder of the title's second half: the thrice-holy One, before whom seraphim hide their faces, has attached his name to *Israel*, to a people. Infinite holiness, and he wants to be ours. That is the tension the whole book lives in.

Woe, Coal, and Commission (Isaiah 6:5-8)

5. Verse 5: what exactly does Isaiah say when he sees the King? Compare his reaction with Simon Peter's in Luke 5:8, the miraculous catch of fish.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips." Isaiah has pronounced woes on others (chapter 5, six of them); now he turns the woe on himself. Peter, kneeling in a boat full of fish, says the same thing in different words: *"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."* The Catechism pairs these two cries (CCC 208): the authentic mark of meeting the living God is not inflation but honest collapse. And notice what God does with neither man: he does not depart, and he does not agree to the woe. Both get cleansed and commissioned. If your prayer life has never once made you say *woe is me*, ask whether you have been meeting God or a comfortable idea of him.

6. Verses 6-7: walk through the coal slowly. Where does it come from, who carries it, where does it touch, and what is declared?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

From the altar; carried by a seraph with tongs, as if even a burning one handles it with care; to the lips, the exact site of the confessed uncleanness; and a declaration is spoken over him: *"your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven."* Isaiah does not cleanse himself. Purification comes from outside, from the altar, through a minister, by fire, with a word of absolution. If that sequence sounds familiar, it should: it is the shape of the sacraments. We confess; God's fire, carried by his ministers, does what no scrubbing of our own could do. Last week's verse is happening in front of us: scarlet made white, and God doing the whitening.

DIG DEEPER • The Coal on Your Tongue

Before proclaiming the Gospel at Mass, the priest bows and quietly prays that God cleanse his heart and his lips; in the older form of the Roman Rite the prayer names tonight's scene outright: *Cleanse my heart and my lips, almighty God, who cleansed the lips of the prophet Isaiah with a burning coal.* And the Fathers went further: St. John Damascene says we should receive the Eucharist as *a burning coal*, for as Isaiah's coal was wood united to fire, the Bread is bread united to divinity. The Eastern liturgies to this day call the Eucharist the live coal as the priest gives Communion. What a seraph once brought to one man's lips with tongs is placed on yours at every Mass. Approach accordingly.

7. Verse 8: only now does God speak, and he asks a question: *"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"* Why does the question come after the coal and not before? And notice: God does not address Isaiah directly. Why might that matter?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Before the coal, Isaiah is a man under woe; volunteers under guilt serve out of fear or self-repair. Cleansing precedes commission, as St. Thomas observes on this very verse: no one worthily carries God's word whose lips God has not first made clean, and grace equips whom God sends. And the question is left open, overheard rather than assigned, because God wants a freely offered *yes*. He could command; instead he wonders aloud, and leaves room. Isaiah's answer is the shortest vocation story in Scripture: *"Here am I! Send me."* He volunteers before hearing a single detail of the job. That is what a cleansed heart sounds like: available before informed.

The Hard Commission (Isaiah 6:9-13)

8. Read Isaiah 6:9-10, the actual assignment. State it plainly: what is Isaiah told his preaching will accomplish?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He is told, with bitter irony, to preach in a way that will not be heard: hearts will grow fat, ears heavy, eyes shut, *“lest they see... and understand... and turn and be healed.”* Isaiah's job description is faithful failure: decades of preaching to a people who will not listen. He asks the only sane question, *“How long, O Lord?”* and the answer is: until the land is desolate (vv. 11-12). God does not promise his messengers success; he promises them his word. Let that reframe every ministry disappointment in the room.

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

Make the strongest case for this reading: **God deliberately hardens people so they cannot repent, and their unbelief is his doing.** Argue it with conviction:

The grammar of 6:10 is purpose, not accident: shut their eyes *lest* they turn and be healed. John 12:39-40 sharpens it: *“Therefore they could not believe. For Isaiah again said, ‘He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart.’”* Could not. Add Pharaoh, whose heart God says he will harden (Exodus 4:21), and Romans 9:18: *“He has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills.”* On this reading, some people are simply passed over, and saving grace is not given to all. Serious Reformed Christians hold this while still preaching to everyone, since God ordains preaching as the very means of calling his elect; at full strength the position is not that evangelization is pointless but that its saving effect is reserved to those God has chosen.

Let it stand at full strength. Then press the canon with the next question.

9. Now test it. Read Exodus 8:15 and 8:32 alongside 4:21; read 1 Timothy 2:4; and look at how Jesus himself quotes Isaiah 6 in Matthew 13:13. What do you find?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Three findings. First, in the Exodus narrative Pharaoh hardens *his own* heart through the early plagues (8:15, 32) before the text says God hardened it; the divine hardening, on the Church's long reading of the whole sequence, confirms a refusal already freely made. It is judicial: God gives the persistently unwilling what they insist on. The Fathers loved an image for this: the same sun that melts wax hardens clay; the difference is not in the sun.

Second, 1 Timothy 2:4: God *“desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* Any reading of Isaiah 6 that makes God the author of unbelief collides with God's stated will for every soul. The Church teaches that God predestines no one to hell (CCC 1037), is never the author of moral evil (CCC 311), and includes each person's free response within his eternal plan (CCC 600): he permits refusal because love cannot be compelled, and he weaves even refusal into his plan.

Third, watch Jesus' own citation: Matthew 13:13 quietly shifts the wording, *“because seeing they do not see.”* Not so that: *because.* Jesus reads Isaiah's purpose-grammar as prophetic irony describing the result of a freely refused word. The hardening of Isaiah 6 is real, and it is a judgment; but it falls on those who first stopped their own ears. The message for us is not *some cannot believe* but *do not practice refusing, because refusal hardens.* And even here Isaiah's oracle ends with a seed in a

stump; God's judgments carry mercy inside them.

10. Read verse 13 to the very last line. After total devastation, ten percent remains, and that remnant is burned again. What is the final phrase? Say it and stop.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"The holy seed is its stump." A forest felled, the stump burned, and inside the dead-looking stump: a holy seed. That is the whole future of God's people in five words, and Isaiah leaves it there without explanation. So will we. Mark the phrase in your Bible and keep your eye on stumps. Say no more than that.

11. (Optional, first cut for time.) Read Revelation 4:8 and John 12:39-41. What does John dare to say about *whose* glory Isaiah saw on the throne?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Actually keep the John 12 half even if you cut Revelation. John, after quoting Isaiah 6, writes: *"Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke of him,"* and in John's Gospel the *him* is Jesus. John is claiming that the King on the throne, high and lifted up, whom Isaiah saw in the year Uzziah died, is Christ. And John has been telling us all along that the Son of Man must be *lifted up* (John 3:14; 12:32), meaning the cross. The throne Isaiah saw, high and lifted up, and the cross outside Jerusalem are, for John, one enthronement. The Catechism names Isaiah 6-12 the Book of Emmanuel (CCC 712).

Revelation 4:8 adds the timeline: the living creatures *"never cease to sing, 'Holy, holy, holy.'"* Never cease. The hymn Isaiah heard in 740 BC is still in progress, and the Sanctus is where you step into it.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. The order of Isaiah 6 is vision, honesty, cleansing, then availability. Most of us try to skip straight to figuring out our mission. Which step are you actually on, and what would it take to stop skipping?
2. *"Here am I! Send me"* was said before Isaiah knew the assignment, and the assignment turned out to be hard. Is there an area of your life where you have been waiting to see the details before saying yes to God? What would an *available before informed* yes look like this month?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- At Mass this Sunday, when the Sanctus begins, remember where you are standing: mid-verse in the seraphim's unending hymn. Sing it like Isaiah 6 is true, because it is.
- Bring one honest *woe is me* to prayer, or better, to Confession, and let the cleansing come from Christ's absolution rather than from self-improvement.
- Once this week, pray Isaiah's answer as your morning offering: *Here am I, send me*. No conditions attached. See what God does with an available person.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

Isaiah 6:8 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Holy, holy, holy Lord, we have seen tonight that your altar heals the honest and resists the proud. Touch what is unclean in us with fire from your altar. Take away our guilt in the sacrament you have provided. And then, Lord, ask your question within our hearing, and give us the recklessness of the prophet: here we are. Send us.

Through Christ our Lord, whom Isaiah saw in glory. Amen.

Before next session: read Isaiah 7:1-17 and 9:1-7. Bring your Christmas associations; we are going to test them against the text.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 6:1-4 (throne, robe, seraphim, the thrice-holy)
- Isaiah 6:5 (woe is me; unclean lips)
- Isaiah 6:6-7 (the coal from the altar; guilt taken away)
- Isaiah 6:8 (whom shall I send; here am I)
- Isaiah 6:9-10 (the hardening commission)
- Isaiah 6:11-13 (how long; devastation; the holy seed is its stump)

Live Discovery Targets

- 2 Chronicles 26:16-21 (Uzziah's presumption, leprosy at the altar of incense)
- John 12:39-41 (Isaiah saw his glory; accept 12:37-43)

Supporting Passages

- Luke 5:8 (Peter: depart from me; pairs with 6:5 via CCC 208)
- Exodus 19:16-19; 33:20 (Sinai glory; none may see God and live)
- Leviticus 16:12 (coals from the altar; Day of Atonement background)
- Exodus 4:21; 8:15, 32; Romans 9:18; 1 Timothy 2:4; Matthew 13:13 (steelman texts)
- John 3:14; 12:32 (lifted up: throne and cross)
- Revelation 4:8 (the hymn never ceases; optional)

Catechism

- CCC 208 (Isaiah 6:5 and Luke 5:8: the cry of the creature before the Holy One)
- CCC 1352 (the Sanctus: joining the unending praise)
- CCC 1137-1139 (earthly liturgy participates in the heavenly)
- CCC 311, 600, 1037 (God never the author of evil; freedom within the plan; no one predestined to hell)
- CCC 712 (the Book of Emmanuel)

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 6:8 (RSV2CE)

The Virgin Shall Conceive

Isaiah 7-9 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

Participants discover the political crisis behind the most famous verse in Isaiah: a terrified king refusing to trust, offered any sign he can imagine, hiding behind fake piety. Into that refusal God gives his own sign: “*Behold, a virgin shall conceive.*” The group then faces the oldest objection to that verse at full strength, the *almah* debate, and answers it the way St. Justin Martyr answered it eighteen centuries ago. Finally they discover that the child of chapter 9 carries a name no mere child can carry: *Mighty God*.

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

The virginal conception of Jesus (CCC 496-497) and the divinity of Christ confessed from within the Old Testament itself. This is also a session about trust: Ahaz and Mary both receive an impossible word about a child; one hides behind piety and refuses, the other asks her honest question and says yes. Every act of faith is a choice between Ahaz and Mary.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The setting is the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, about 735 BC. Syria (Aram, under Rezin) and the northern kingdom of Israel (Ephraim, under Pekah) have allied against Assyria and want Judah to join. When young King Ahaz refuses, they march to depose him and install a puppet, “*the son of Tabe-el*” (7:6). Ahaz, David’s heir, is inspecting Jerusalem’s water supply for the siege when Isaiah meets him, prophet and son (Shear-jashub, *a remnant shall return*: the boy’s name is a sermon) confronting a king whose heart, and his people’s, “*shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind*” (7:2).

Isaiah’s message is simple: do not fear these “*two smoldering stumps of firebrands*” (7:4); stand firm in faith or you will not stand at all (7:9). Then the astonishing offer: ask a sign “*deep as Sheol or high as heaven*” (7:11), a blank check on the miraculous. Ahaz refuses with a pious veneer, “*I will not put the LORD to the test*” (7:12), misquoting the spirit of Deuteronomy 6:16: it is not testing God to accept what God offers. The truth is that Ahaz has already decided to trust Assyria instead (2 Kings 16:7-8 shows him sending the temple treasury to Tiglath-pileser and calling himself the Assyrian king’s servant and son). Exasperated, Isaiah announces that God will give a sign anyway, to “*the house of David*” as a whole: the virgin, the son, the name Emmanuel.

Be ready for the layered fulfillment question, because honest readers feel it: verses 15-16 tie a timeline to the child (before he knows to refuse evil and choose good, the two kings will be gone), which happened within a few years. So the oracle has a near horizon in Isaiah’s own generation. But the oracle keeps overflowing every near candidate: the land is “*your land, O Emmanuel*” (8:8), as if the child owns Judah; and by 9:6 the promised son bears the name *Mighty God*, the very title used of the LORD himself in 10:21. No child of Ahaz’s court fits the suit. The Church reads this the way the apostles did: prophecy with a

near shadow and a far substance, exhausted only in Christ (Matthew 1:22-23; CCC 497). You do not need to deny the near horizon to confess the far one; the near horizon is what keeps the prophecy honest, and the far one is what makes it a sign deep as Sheol and high as heaven.

Chapter 8 continues the crisis (the sign-name son Maher-shalal-hash-baz, *the spoil speeds, the prey hastens*; the choice between the quiet waters of Shiloah and the Euphrates flood) and gives a thread verse: the LORD himself will be “*a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling*” (8:14-15), which the New Testament applies to Christ repeatedly. Chapter 9 turns darkness to dawn: Zebulun and Naphtali, the first regions mauled by Assyria, will be the first to see the great light, “*Galilee of the nations*” (9:1-2), and the child’s four throne names close the movement.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The sign is given to *the house of David*, and it lives inside 2 Samuel 7: God’s oath that David’s line and throne would stand forever. Ahaz’s faithlessness cannot cancel a covenant God swore. The *almah* language recalls Genesis 24:43, where the same word describes Rebekah, explicitly a virgin bride at the spring; and behind every promised miracle-child stand Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah, wombs opened by God alone.

Fulfillment. Matthew 1:22-23 quotes Isaiah 7:14 as fulfilled in the virginal conception of Jesus, following the Greek Septuagint’s *parthenos*, a translation made by Jewish scholars two centuries before Christ. Matthew 4:14-16 quotes Isaiah 9:1-2 when Jesus makes Capernaum in Galilee his base: the light rises first exactly where the darkness fell first. The stone of stumbling (8:14) reappears in Romans 9:33 and 1 Peter 2:8. And Luke 1:32-33 hands the child of 9:7 his throne: “*the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David... and of his kingdom there will be no end.*”

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Justin Martyr • *Dialogue with Trypho* (chs. 43, 67)

Around AD 155, the Jewish scholar Trypho put to Justin the exact objection your group will steelman tonight: the Hebrew means *young woman*, not *virgin*, and the prophecy pointed to a king in Isaiah’s own day. Justin’s reply still stands: a young woman bearing a child is no sign at all, for all young women bear children; the sign offered was deep as Sheol and high as heaven, and only a virgin conceiving rises to that scale. The objection is not modern. Neither is the answer.

St. Irenaeus • *Against Heresies, Book 3*

St. Irenaeus points to an inconvenient fact for those who retranslate the verse: *parthenos*, virgin, was the rendering chosen by the Jewish translators of the Septuagint long before Jesus was born, when no Christian argument existed to bias them. The Church did not smuggle the virgin into Isaiah; she found her there, in Israel’s own Greek Bible.

St. Leo the Great • *Sermons on the Nativity* (Sermon 21)

Preaching on the Nativity, St. Leo marvels that the child of Isaiah’s promise unites what no creature could: true God, born of the Father before the ages, and true man, born of the Virgin in time. The names of Isaiah 9 are not courtly flattery; they are a confession. And because God has so honored our nature by taking it, Leo bids the Christian: acknowledge your dignity, and do not return by sin

to what you were before.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 497.** The Gospel accounts understand the virginal conception as a divine work surpassing human understanding and possibility, and the Catechism cites Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew's use as the fulfillment of the promise. This is the session's spine.
- **CCC 496.** From the first formulations of her faith, the Church has confessed that Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary.
- **CCC 712.** The Catechism names Isaiah 6-12 *the Book of Emmanuel*: the section of Isaiah where the traits of the awaited Messiah begin to show. Your group is in its heart tonight.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS TONIGHT

Light (2:5, planted Session 1) develops massively: "*the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light*" (9:2), located in Galilee of the nations. Do not resolve where the light thread finally goes; it has two more stations (42:6; 60:1-3).

Emmanuel, God with us. Planted tonight: the name outgrows every merely human candidate (8:8; 9:6). It will shadow the whole book: God's answer to every crisis is not a plan but a presence.

The stone (8:14-15). The LORD as sanctuary to some and stumbling stone to others. One verse tonight; it returns as the cornerstone in Session 6. If your group did the Letters of Peter study, let them feel the recognition (1 Peter 2:8) without chasing it.

The stump. Not tonight. But 9:7 ends with a throne of David established forever, and next week a dynasty tree gets cut down. Say nothing.

SESSION GOALS

1. Reconstruct the Syro-Ephraimite crisis and Ahaz's false piety, and contrast Ahaz's refusal with Mary's fiat.
2. Run the *almah/parthenos* steelman at full strength and answer it with Justin, Irenaeus, the Septuagint, and the scale of the offered sign.
3. Articulate layered fulfillment honestly: a near horizon in Isaiah's day, exhausted only in Christ.
4. Discover Matthew 4:14-16: the light dawns first where the darkness fell first.
5. Weigh the four throne names of 9:6, especially *Mighty God* against 10:21.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 10 min. Build, 55 min. Send, 10 min. Live It, memory verse, Take-Home, closing prayer, 10 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 8 (chapter 8, Shiloah and the stone) first; compress Question 2 (Shear-jashub) second. Never cut the steelman or the Matthew 4 discovery.

The Virgin Shall Conceive

Isaiah 7-9 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, you are God with us. Not God watching us, not God advising us from a distance: God with us. Tonight we will watch a king refuse your sign out of fear dressed up as reverence. Save us from religious excuses. Give us instead the trust of the Virgin, who asked her honest question and then said yes.

Through Christ our Lord, Emmanuel. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever turned down help you actually needed, out of pride, fear, or not wanting to owe anyone? What was really going on?
2. What is a decision you are currently facing where the real question underneath is *whom do I trust?*

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

A King Shaking Like Trees (Isaiah 7:1-9)

1. Read Isaiah 7:1-9. Set the scene: who is threatening whom, where is Ahaz standing when Isaiah finds him, and what does verse 2 say the news did to the house of David?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Syria and northern Israel have allied to depose Ahaz and install a puppet king (v. 6), which would end David's line on the throne. Ahaz is out inspecting the water supply, siege preparation, when Isaiah meets him, bringing his little son Shear-jashub, whose name means *a remnant shall return*: a walking sermon Ahaz never asks about. Verse 2: the king's heart and the people's "*shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind*." God's word to the shaking king: these enemies are "*two smoldering stumps of firebrands*", nearly burnt out, and then the line to underline in your Bible, verse 9: "*If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established*." In Hebrew it is a play on one root: no faith, no footing.

2. Read 7:10-13. God offers Ahaz any sign, "*deep as Sheol or high as heaven*." Ahaz answers, "*I will not put the LORD to the test*." That sounds humble, even scriptural. What is actually wrong with it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

It is fake piety covering a decision already made. Refusing to demand a sign is reverent; refusing a sign *God himself offers* is refusal of God wearing a devout costume. And we know from 2 Kings 16:7-8 what Ahaz had already chosen: he emptied the temple treasury and sent it to the king of Assyria with the words "*I am your servant and your son*." Words a Davidic king should say only to God. Ahaz did not decline trust; he transferred it. Verse 13 shows Isaiah sees through it: you weary God himself. Watch for this move in your own life: the most dangerous refusals of grace are the ones

that sound humble.

The Sign Anyway (Isaiah 7:14-17)

3. Read 7:14. The sign is given no longer to Ahaz but to “*the house of David*.” State the sign in its three parts, and note the name.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A virgin shall conceive; she shall bear a son; and shall call his name Emmanuel, *God with us*. Notice the addressee: the dynasty, not the man. Ahaz can refuse to ask, but he cannot make God stop keeping the oath sworn to David (2 Samuel 7:12-16). And notice what kind of sign answers a succession crisis: not an army, a mother and a child. God's response to the threat against David's line is a birth.

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

This verse carries the oldest textual objection in Jewish-Christian dialogue. Build it honestly and at full strength:

The Hebrew word in 7:14 is *almah*, a young woman of marriageable age; Hebrew has a more precise word for virgin, *bethulah*, and Isaiah did not use it. And a sign in Isaiah need not be miraculous at all: Isaiah's own children are called signs and portents in Israel (8:18), so a child born on a fixed timetable and given a loaded name is already a sign in this book, with nothing beyond nature required. The sign, verses 15-16 say, has a timeline: before *this* child can tell right from wrong, Rezin and Pekah will be gone, which happened by the late 730s BC. So the child belongs to Isaiah's own generation, perhaps Hezekiah or a child of the prophet. Matthew, reading the Greek Septuagint's *parthenos* (virgin), lifted the verse out of context and built the virgin birth on a translation. And *parthenos* itself does not always carry a technical claim about physical virginity; the Septuagint can use it of a girl who plainly is not one, as at Genesis 34:3 of Dinah. Modern translations like the original RSV render 7:14 “*young woman*,” and honest Christians should admit it.

Say it with conviction. Trypho the Jew put this very case to St. Justin Martyr around AD 155, so the group is joining an eighteen-century-old conversation. Then press with the next question.

4. Now answer it from the evidence. Consider: (a) who translated *almah* as *parthenos*, and when; (b) how *almah* is actually used elsewhere, for example Genesis 24:43; (c) what scale of sign God offered in 7:11; and (d) whether the prophecy stays inside its near timeline or overflows it (read 8:8 and 9:6).

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

(a) The Septuagint's *parthenos* was chosen by Jewish translators in Alexandria roughly two centuries before Jesus, with no Christian thumb on the scale. As St. Irenaeus argued, the Church found the virgin in Israel's own Greek Bible; she did not plant her there. Yes, *parthenos* has a range, and a passage or two stretches it; but the question is what the translators meant here, where the ordinary Greek word for a young woman was available to them and they did not use it. (b) *Almah* is used of Rebekah at the well (Genesis 24:43), explicitly an unmarried virgin bride; nowhere in the Old Testament does *almah* clearly denote a married woman. The word denotes a young woman,

unmarried in its biblical usage, whose context regularly implies virginity; the Greek translators were interpreting, not blundering. (c) St. Justin's point to Trypho remains the sharpest: God offered a sign *deep as Sheol or high as heaven*. That all young women bear sons is not a sign; it is a Tuesday. Only a conception beyond nature rises to the advertised scale. The 8:18 counter proves too little: those children are signs by their names and their timing, but none of them is the sign deep as Sheol or high as heaven that Ahaz was invited to name, none of them is handed the land (8:8), and none of them is called Mighty God (9:6).

(d) And here is the Catholic both/and, which does not need to fear the timeline verses. Yes, 7:15-16 gives a near horizon: a child born soon whose infancy clocks the fall of the two kings; the prophecy was a real word to its own decade. But the oracle will not stay in that decade. By 8:8 the land of Judah is "*your land, O Emmanuel*", no ordinary child owns the country. By 9:6 the promised son is called *Mighty God*. On this reading the near fulfillment is the shadow that proves the promise live; the far fulfillment is the substance, and Matthew 1:22-23 names him. Prophecy in Scripture often works this way: a near installment guaranteeing a full payment. The Church confesses the fulfillment in Christ (CCC 497); the layered mechanism is the interpreters' account, not a defined scheme.

One pastoral note: this is a place to be gentle and confident at once. The *young woman* reading is not stupid, and our answer is not a trick; it is the same answer the Church has given since the second century, resting on Jewish translation, Hebrew usage, the sign's scale, and the oracle's own overflow.

DIG DEEPER • The 1952 Bible Controversy

When the Revised Standard Version appeared in 1952 with "*young woman*" at Isaiah 7:14, the reaction was volcanic: some American pastors publicly burned copies of the translation. The RSV's Catholic Edition, the line that leads to the RSV2CE in your hands, restored "*virgin*", judging with the Church that the Septuagint and Matthew are authentic interpreters of the verse. Check your own Bible's footnote at 7:14 tonight; you are holding evidence of a live argument.

Darkness, Then Dawn (Isaiah 8:11-9:7)

5. (Optional, first cut for time.) Skim 8:5-15. Judah is offered "*the waters of Shiloah that flow gently*" and chooses the Euphrates flood instead. And in 8:14 the LORD himself will become two opposite things to two kinds of people. What are they?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A sanctuary, and "*a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling*." Same LORD, same stone: refuge to those who trust, tripping hazard to those who will not. Isaiah 8:14; the stone returns in this study, and the New Testament will hang enormous weight on it (Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:6-8). The gently flowing Shiloah versus the imperial flood is the whole Ahaz choice in water form: God's quiet sufficiency or the impressive power that ends up at your neck (8:8).

6. Read Isaiah 9:1-2. Which two tribal lands are named, why those two, and what is promised to them?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Zebulun and Naphtali, the far north: the Galilee region Assyria gutted and annexed when Tiglath-pileser came (2 Kings 15:29 names Galilee and all the land of Naphtali; Isaiah 9:1 supplies the pairing), the first to sit in the dark. Precisely there, “*Galilee of the nations*,” the great light will dawn first. God’s pattern, worth saying aloud: the light rises first where the darkness fell first. Whatever region of your life took the first and worst hit is not last in line for dawn; it is first.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Seven centuries later, a man moves his home and headquarters to exactly this map square, and one of the Gospels stops the narrative to tell you why. Find it in Matthew 4. Pairs, 3-4 minutes.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Matthew 4:12-16. Jesus leaves Nazareth and settles in Capernaum, “*in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali*,” and Matthew quotes our verses: the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. Jesus’ choice of Galilee as his base was not real estate convenience; it was Isaiah 9 with an address. The light thread we planted in Session 1 (*walk in the light of the LORD*, 2:5) now has a person attached. It is still not finished; keep tracking it.

7. Read Isaiah 9:6-7 aloud. List the four throne names of the child. Then check who carries the name *Mighty God* one chapter later, in 10:21. What does the Church conclude about this child, and why?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Royal titulary, yes, ancient kings took throne names, but watch the second one. *El Gibbor*, Mighty God, is used in 10:21 of the LORD himself: “*A remnant will return... to the mighty God.*” Isaiah does not use divine names loosely. Within the space of two chapters, the same title names God and names the promised child. Add *Everlasting Father*, not that the Son is the Father, but that this king relates to his people as an everlasting father, and 9:7’s throne “*from this time forth and for evermore*,” and you have, inside the Old Testament, a child who is somehow God. St. Leo’s Christmas confession is already loaded in Isaiah’s syllables: true God and true man in one promised person.

Note the delivery: “*to us a child is born, to us a son is given.*” Born, from among us; given, from beyond us. And the government is on *his* shoulder, singular, which is very good news for everyone currently trying to carry it on their own.

8. One more contrast before we close, and it is the heart of the session. Two people in Scripture receive an unthinkable word about a virgin and a child: Ahaz here, and Mary in Luke 1:26-38. Read Luke 1:34 and 1:38. Mary also responds to the sign with a question. What makes her question different from Ahaz’s refusal?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Mary asks *how*: an honest question from inside surrender, seeking to cooperate with what she does not understand. Ahaz performs reverence in order to keep a decision he has already made against God. Heaven has infinite patience with honest questions and none at all with pious evasion. Mary’s “*let it be to me according to your word*” is what Ahaz was offered and refused, and through her yes the sign of 7:14 finally lands in history (CCC 496-497). Every believer standing before a hard word of God gets the same fork: Ahaz or Mary.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. Where in your life right now are you doing an Ahaz: using a spiritual-sounding reason to avoid trusting God with something you have already decided to control yourself? Name it, at least to yourself.
2. *God with us* is a name, which means presence is God's method. Who in your world is sitting in a Zebulun-and-Naphtali darkness, and what would it cost you to be present there this month, before you have any solutions?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pray with Luke 1:26-38 once this week, placing your hardest current decision in the scene, and practice Mary's sentence until you can mean it: *let it be to me according to your word*.
- Check your Bible's rendering and footnote at Isaiah 7:14. Be able to explain to a friend, in two sentences, why the Church reads *virgin* there.
- Do one act of presence, not problem-solving, for someone in darkness: show up, sit with, stay. Emmanuel is a name before it is a plan.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Isaiah 9:6 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Emmanuel, God with us: you answered a shaking king with a mother and a child, and you answer our fears the same way, with your presence before your plans.

Strip our refusals of their pious disguises. Teach us Mary's question and Mary's yes. And let the government of everything we are worried about rest on your shoulder tonight, not ours.

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace: we trust you. Amen.

Before next session: read Isaiah 11:1-10 and keep one image from Session 2 in your pocket: the holy seed and the stump.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 7:1-9 (the crisis; shaking trees; smoldering stumps; no faith, no footing)
- Isaiah 7:10-13 (ask a sign; the pious refusal)
- Isaiah 7:14-17 (the virgin, the son, Emmanuel; the near timeline)
- Isaiah 8:5-15 (Shiloah vs. the flood; the stone of stumbling; optional)
- Isaiah 8:8 (your land, O Emmanuel)
- Isaiah 9:1-2 (Zebulun, Naphtali, Galilee of the nations, the great light)
- Isaiah 9:6-7 (the four throne names; the everlasting throne)
- Isaiah 10:21 (El Gibbor used of the LORD; cross-check)

Live Discovery Target

- Matthew 4:12-16 (Jesus settles in Capernaum; Isaiah 9 quoted)

Supporting Passages

- 2 Kings 16:7-8 (Ahaz's real trust: servant and son of Assyria)
- 2 Kings 15:29 (Assyria annexes Galilee and Naphtali; Isaiah 9:1 pairs Zebulun)
- 2 Samuel 7:12-16 (the oath to David's house)
- Genesis 24:43 (almah used of Rebekah)
- Deuteronomy 6:16 (the testing text Ahaz misuses)
- Matthew 1:18-23 (parthenos; the fulfillment citation)
- Luke 1:26-38 (Mary's question and fiat); Luke 1:32-33 (the throne of David)
- Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:6-8 (the stone; background)

Catechism

- CCC 496-497 (virginal conception; Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew)
- CCC 712 (Isaiah 6-12 as the Book of Emmanuel)

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 9:6 (RSV2CE)

The Stump of Jesse

Isaiah 10-12 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

Participants watch a forest fall: proud Assyria, the axe that boasted against the hand that swung it, and the house of David itself, cut down to a stump. Then they discover the shoot: one green twig from Jesse's dead-looking stump, resting under the sevenfold Spirit, and they resolve the seed Isaiah planted in Session 2: *the holy seed is its stump*. They trace the seven gifts to their source in this chapter, find the Spirit visibly *resting* on the son of David at the Jordan, and end where chapter 12 ends: singing, drawing water from the wells of a salvation whose Hebrew name they will recognize.

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

Confirmation. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit named in the Church's Confirmation prayer (prayed, in the ordinary Latin-rite celebration, by the bishop) come from Isaiah 11:2, and the Catechism cites this verse by name (CCC 1831). Most confirmed Catholics have never met their own gifts in their native habitat. Tonight they do.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Chapter 10 completes the Assyria arc with one of Scripture's great images of the pride of empires: Assyria is merely the axe and rod in God's hand for judgment (10:5, 15), but the axe has begun to boast, "*Shall the axe vaunt itself over him who hews with it?*" When the tool claims to be the craftsman, the tool gets retired. Verses 33-34 announce it in forest terms: the LORD "*will lop the boughs with terrifying power... and Lebanon with its majestic trees will fall.*" Every towering thing goes down.

Then the pivot the whole first third of the book has been waiting for. Assyria falls like a forest never to rise; and out of a different felled tree, the house of David, reduced by exile to a stump, comes one live shoot: "*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse*" (11:1). Note the name: not the stump of David but of Jesse, David's father, as if the dynasty must go back behind its royal grandeur to its Bethlehem root and start again, small. This resolves Session 2's plant: *the holy seed is its stump* (6:13). God's future was hiding inside the judgment the whole time.

On the gifts, be precise and honest, because precision here builds trust. The Hebrew of 11:2 names six: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, fear of the LORD. The Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate render the doubled Hebrew *fear of the LORD* with two words, adding *piety*, which gives the traditional seven the Church prays at Confirmation. The Catechism cites Isaiah 11:1-2 for the seven gifts (CCC 1831), receiving the verse through the Church's own ancient versions. That is not an embarrassment; it is a small window into how Scripture lives in Tradition.

Chapter 11 then paints the shoot's reign: he judges the poor with righteousness (not by appearances, 11:3-5), and creation itself disarms: wolf and lamb, leopard and kid, the child over the adder's den (11:6-

9), Eden's ceasefire. Verse 10 universalizes it: the root of Jesse stands as an *ensign*, a battle standard, and *the nations* seek him. Chapter 12 is the response: the first full hymn of the book, six verses of thanksgiving, with a wordplay hiding in plain sight: “*God is my salvation... he has become my salvation*” (12:2), Hebrew *yeshuah*. The name Jesus, *Yeshua*, is built on this word: *the LORD saves*. When the group sings chapter 12, they are one consonant from saying his name.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. Jesse of Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16): the shoot's name reaches back to David's anointing, where the Spirit “*came mightily upon David from that day forward*” (16:13). The sevenfold Spirit of 11:2 is the Spirit of that anointing in fullness. The peaceable kingdom of 11:6-9 evokes Eden restored (Genesis 1-2), and the *ensign* for the nations picks up 2:2-4, the mountain to which the nations stream.

Fulfillment. At the Jordan the Spirit descends “*and remained on him*” (John 1:32-33; Matthew 3:16): the resting of Isaiah 11:2 made visible, which the Catechism connects to Christ's anointing as Messiah (CCC 536). Paul closes his argument in Romans by quoting Isaiah 11:10 from the Septuagint: “*the root of Jesse shall come... in him shall the Gentiles hope*” (Romans 15:12). Revelation gives the shoot the last word in the Bible: “*I am the root and the offspring of David*” (22:16). And the wells of salvation (12:3) open in John 4 and John 7:37-39, where Jesus stands up at the feast and cries, “*If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink.*”

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Jerome • *Commentary on Isaiah, on 11:1*

St. Jerome, reading the Latin of this verse, *a rod (virga) from the root of Jesse*, hears the Virgin (*virgo*) in the very sound of the word: the rod from Jesse's root is the Virgin Mary, and the flower that rises from it is Christ. The wordplay is Latin, but the instinct is exegesis: the shoot does not appear without the stem that bears him, and the dynasty reborn from Jesse's stump comes into the world through a daughter of that house.

St. Gregory the Great • *Moralia on Job*

St. Gregory arranges the seven gifts of Isaiah 11 as a ladder. The Spirit's list runs downward from wisdom to fear of the LORD, he observes, because that is how heaven descends to meet us; but the soul climbs it upward, beginning at holy fear and rising step by step, through piety, knowledge, might, counsel, and understanding, to wisdom, which is the summit: to taste and see the Lord. The gifts are not a trophy case; they are a staircase.

St. Cyril of Alexandria • *Commentary on Isaiah, on 11:10*

Commenting on the root of Jesse raised as an ensign, St. Cyril sees the standard around which a scattered world at last rallies: Christ lifted up, drawing not one nation but the nations into one army of peace. What Isaiah promised as a sign for peoples far off, Cyril reads as the daily fact of the Church, where Gentiles who once knew nothing of Jesse's house now hope in Jesse's root.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1831.** The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord, and the Catechism's citation for them is Isaiah 11:1-2. They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David, and complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them.
- **CCC 536.** At his baptism, the Spirit whom Jesus possessed in fullness from his conception comes to rest on him: Isaiah 11:2 at the Jordan, the anointing that shows him the Christ.
- **CCC 712.** The Book of Emmanuel closes here; the Catechism's own citation for the awaited Messiah's traits is *especially Isaiah 11:1-2*. Tonight the group finishes the section the Catechism singles out.
- **CCC 671-674.** The kingdom already inaugurated, not yet consummated: the frame for tonight's steelman on the unfulfilled peace.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS TONIGHT

The holy seed: resolved. Session 2 planted *the holy seed is its stump* (6:13). Tonight 11:1 sprouts it. Let a participant make the connection before you do; if no one does, ask what they remember about stumps.

The nations / light. The root stands as an ensign and *the nations seek him* (11:10): the light thread and the nations thread braid together. Two more stations remain (42:6; 49:6; 60:1-3). Do not resolve.

Zion and the Holy One. Chapter 12 ends the Book of Emmanuel with the Holy One of Israel “*in your midst, O inhabitant of Zion*” (12:6). The title from the seraphim's hymn now dwells inside the city. Note it aloud; resolution still to come.

The sealed guess. Do not mention it tonight. It stays sealed until Session 11.

SESSION GOALS

1. Trace the axe oracle (10:5-19) and articulate its doctrine of providence: empires as instruments, pride as self-retirement.
2. Resolve the holy seed thread: from 6:13 to the shoot of 11:1.
3. Meet the seven gifts in Isaiah 11:2, honestly explaining the six-to-seven history, and connect them to Confirmation (CCC 1831).
4. Discover the Spirit resting on the son of David at the Jordan (Matthew 3:16; John 1:32-33).
5. Run the unfulfilled-peace steelman with full respect and answer it with the already/not-yet and Romans 15:12.
6. Find the *yeshuah* wordplay in 12:2 and close by praying chapter 12 as the group's own hymn.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 10 min. Build, 55 min. Send, 10 min. Live It, memory verse,

Take-Home, closing prayer with chapter 12, 10 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 2 (the remnant, 10:20-23) first; compress Question 7 (peaceable kingdom imagery) second. Never cut the stump resolution, the gifts, the Jordan discovery, or the steelman.

The Stump of Jesse

Isaiah 10-12 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit: Spirit of wisdom and understanding, Spirit of counsel and might, Spirit of knowledge, of piety, and of the fear of the LORD.

You rested in fullness on the shoot from Jesse's stump; rest tonight on us, on whom you were sealed at Confirmation. Where our lives look like stumps, show us the holy seed.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Tell us about something in your life that looked finished, dead, over, and later turned out to have life still in it.
2. Quick inventory, no wrong answers: can you name any of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit from your Confirmation? (Do not correct or complete the list yet; tonight the group will find them at their source.)

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

The Axe That Boasted (Isaiah 10:5-19, 33-34)

1. Read Isaiah 10:5-7 and 10:15. What does God call Assyria, the superpower currently terrorizing the world? And what has the tool started to do?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

“Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury.” The empire that thinks it is making history is, in God’s accounting, a hand tool: an axe, a rod, a saw (v. 15). But the axe has begun to vaunt itself over him who hews with it; Assyria believes its conquests are its own genius (10:8-14). Verse 15 is the whole theology of empires in one question: does the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? God can use a proud power without approving it, and when the tool claims to be the craftsman, the tool gets retired. This is providence without fatalism: Assyria acts freely and wickedly, and God writes it into a sentence Assyria never read.

2. (Optional, first cut for time.) Read 10:20-23. A word from Session 3 walks back on stage, and it was a child’s name. What returns, and what does it now mean?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The remnant. *“A remnant will return... to the mighty God”* (10:21), and Shear-jashub, the boy Isaiah brought to meet Ahaz, means exactly that: *a remnant shall return*. The sermon Ahaz ignored becomes national policy. Note two things: the remnant returns to *El Gibbor*, Mighty God, the very title given to the child of 9:6; and the remnant idea cuts both ways, severe (only a remnant) and merciful (surely a remnant). God’s judgments always leave a stump with a seed in it, which is

precisely where tonight is going.

The Shoot (Isaiah 10:33-11:5)

3. Read 10:33-34 and then 11:1 in one breath. What falls, and what rises? And someone check your notes from Session 2: what was the last line of Isaiah 6?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Lebanon's majestic forest, the proud and (on the common reading) Assyria in tree form, is felled by the LORD. Then, against that skyline of felled giants: *"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse."* One green twig from a cut-down tree. The contrast is the point: empires fall like forests and stay down; God's people fall and sprout.

And the Session 2 seed resolves: *"the holy seed is its stump"* (6:13). The stump was never mere wreckage; it was a seed vault. David's dynasty, humiliated to nothing, cut back past its royal grandeur to plain Jesse of Bethlehem, holds the future of the world in its rings. Write the connection Isaiah invites in the margin: 6:13 – 11:1. When God lets something in your life be cut down, look for what he has preserved inside the stump.

4. Read 11:2-3a. What rests on the shoot, and what is the list? Count carefully in your own Bible, then compare with the seven gifts you named (or could not name) at the start of tonight.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him": not visit, rest, take up residence. The list in the Hebrew text: wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the LORD, with fear of the LORD doubled in verses 2-3. That is six. The ancient Greek and Latin Bibles of the Church rendered the doubled *fear of the LORD* with two distinct words, adding *piety*, and that sevenfold form is the one the Church has prayed for two thousand years and the one prayed over you at your Confirmation. The Catechism's citation for the seven gifts is this very verse (CCC 1831).

Say the honest part plainly, because it builds trust rather than eroding it: the traditional seven come to us through the Septuagint and Vulgate, the Church's own Scriptures, not from a miscount. It is a live example of how the Word of God is carried in the Church's Tradition. And notice whose gifts they are first: they rest in fullness on the Messiah, and are given to us as a share in *his* anointing. Confirmation is not a graduation; it is being fitted with the equipment of the Christ.

DIG DEEPER • Gregory's Ladder

St. Gregory the Great noticed the direction of the list: it runs downward, wisdom first, fear of the LORD last, because that is how heaven descends to us. But the soul climbs it the other way: begin at the fear of the LORD, reverence before the Holy One (your group met it in Session 2, faces covered, shoes off), then piety, knowledge, fortitude, counsel, understanding, and at the top, wisdom, which for Gregory is the taste of God himself. Try praying the gifts as a staircase this week, one step per day, and see where you actually stall.

The Peaceable Kingdom and the Ensign (Isaiah 11:6-10)

5. Read 11:3b-5. How does this king judge, and what does he wear?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Not by what his eyes see or his ears hear: no verdicts by appearance, spin, or lobbying. He judges the *poor* with righteousness and decides with equity for the meek, the two groups every human court quietly discounts. His war gear is character: righteousness the belt of his waist, faithfulness the belt of his loins. Paul echoes the wardrobe for the whole Church, girding with truth and giving righteousness as the breastplate (Ephesians 6:14). If your group is weary of leaders judged by optics, verses 3-5 read like cold water in the desert.

6. Read 11:6-9 slowly and let the pictures land: wolf and lamb, leopard and kid, calf and lion, the nursing child over the asp's hole. What is being reversed here, and how far does verse 9 extend it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Eden is being reversed back into place: predation, venom, and fear, the wreckage of the fall, stand down; a little child leads the demilitarized zoo. Verse 9 gives the mechanism and the extent: none shall hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain, "*for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*" Compare the seraphim's claim in 6:3 that the whole earth is full of his glory: what heaven already sees, earth will one day know. Peace, for Isaiah, is not the absence of conflict but the saturation of creation with the knowledge of God.

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

Now the serious objection, and it deserves your best voice, because it is the historic Jewish case against Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah, argued in good faith for two millennia:

Look out the window. Isaiah says the Messiah's reign brings wolves lying with lambs, swords into plowshares (2:4), the earth full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. The prophets give checkable criteria: universal peace, universal knowledge of God, the world visibly repaired. Twenty centuries after Jesus, there is war, unbelief, and venom in abundance; Christians themselves have waged wars. Therefore, on the prophets' own test, the Messiah has not yet come; and reinterpreting the criteria after the fact is moving the goalposts. Classical Jewish teaching presses essentially this test; Maimonides, for instance, made verifiable restoration the Messiah's credential, even while reading the wolf-and-lamb imagery itself as figurative. It is not a cheap argument.

Give it its full weight. Then press the text with the next question.

7. Answer from inside Isaiah 11 itself. Look at the sequence of the chapter: what comes at verse 1, and what at verses 6-9? Then read verse 10 and ask the historical question: has anything in verse 10 checkably happened? (Keep Romans 15:12 ready.)

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

First, honor the objection: it is honest, it takes the prophets seriously, and Session 1's guardrail still stands: the gifts and the call of God to Israel are irrevocable (Romans 11:29). But watch Isaiah's own sequence. Verse 1 is a small, datable, historical event: a shoot appears from Jesse's stump, one descendant, born in time. Verses 6-9 are creation-wide consummation. Isaiah paints them on one canvas, but he has already trained us (Session 3) to expect horizons: a near installment and a full payment. The Church's claim is not that everything in chapter 11 has happened; it is that verse 1 has, verse 2 visibly so at the Jordan, and that verses 6-9 name what his kingdom is still growing

toward. Already inaugurated, not yet consummated (CCC 671-674): the kingdom present like leaven, its universal peace awaiting his return, which is why the Church cannot stop saying *thy kingdom come* and *come, Lord Jesus*.

Second, verse 10 offers a checkable middle criterion, and it is the one Paul chose: the root of Jesse raised as an ensign, *the nations* seeking him. Has one son of Jesse's felled house, in fact, become the rallying standard of the Gentile world? Empirically, astonishingly, yes: this room full of Gentiles studying Jesse's family tree on a weeknight is itself evidence; St. Cyril already pointed to the same fact in the fifth century. Paul closes Romans by quoting exactly this verse: *in him shall the Gentiles hope* (Romans 15:12). The wolf and the lamb are not yet fully at peace; but the nations are already at the ensign, which is precisely the part of the oracle a first-installment fulfillment should show. The objection sees rightly that the story is unfinished; faith adds that it has verifiably begun.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Isaiah 11:2 says the Spirit will *rest* on the shoot of Jesse. There is a day in the Gospels when that resting became visible, in public, over water, and John the Baptist says the resting is how he recognized him. Find it: Matthew 3 or John 1. Pairs, 3-4 minutes.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Matthew 3:16: at Jesus' baptism the heavens open and the Spirit of God descends like a dove "*and alighting on him*." John 1:32-33 makes the resting the very sign: "*He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he*." Remain: Isaiah's word made visible. The Catechism reads the Jordan as the manifestation of the anointing Jesus possessed from his conception (CCC 536): the sevenfold Spirit resting on the son of David for all to see. And your Confirmation was your personal share in that scene: the same Spirit, the same gifts, sealed on you to equip you for mission, which is where this whole study's title has been pointing.

The First Hymn (Isaiah 12)

8. Read all of chapter 12 aloud together; it is six verses, the first full hymn of the book. Verse 2 says "*he has become my salvation*." The Hebrew word for salvation there is *yeshuah*. Say it out loud. What name is hiding in it, and what does 12:6 do with our oldest thread?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Yeshuah: salvation. The name *Yeshua*, Jesus, is built on this root and means *the LORD saves*, which is exactly how the angel explains the name in Matthew 1:21: "*you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*." When Isaiah sings *God has become my yeshuah*, he is one breath away from the holy Name; the Fathers loved to hear it there, and once you hear it you cannot unhear it. Verse 3, "*with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation*," opens toward Jesus at the well (John 4) and Jesus at the feast: "*If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink*" (John 7:37).

And verse 6 gathers the threads: "*Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel*." The title from the seraphim's hymn (Session 2) is now located in *the midst* of the city (Session 1's Zion thread): the thrice-holy One dwelling among his people. Emmanuel, sung. Keep tracking both threads; neither is finished.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. Which of the seven gifts, honestly, is the one your life is currently running lowest on: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, fear of the LORD? What would this month look like if you asked for it daily and expected it to be given?
2. Name the stump: an area of your life, or of someone you love, that has been cut down and looks finished. What would it mean, practically, to treat it as a place where God preserves a holy seed rather than as proof he is done?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pray Gregory's ladder: one gift per day for seven days, starting at fear of the LORD and climbing to wisdom. One sentence each morning: *Come, Holy Spirit, Spirit of ____, rest on me.*
- If you have not thought about your Confirmation since it happened, tell the Lord so plainly, and ask him to activate what was sealed. If you have not been confirmed, talk to your leader this week; the gifts have your name on them.
- Read Isaiah 12 aloud once, alone, as your own prayer, and when you reach *he has become my yeshuah*, say the Name.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him."

Isaiah 11:1-2 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord God, you fell forests and you keep stumps. Every proud axe in history has ended in your woodpile, and every hope you plant survives the saw.

Send the sevenfold Spirit who rests on the Root of Jesse to rest on us: wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge, piety, and holy fear. Make our confirmed lives look confirmed.

And with joy let us draw water from the wells of salvation, for great in our midst is the Holy One of Israel. Amen.

Before next session: read Isaiah 22:15-25. It is eleven verses about a man losing his job. Bring your questions; it may be the most surprising night of the study.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 10:5-19 (Assyria the axe; the boast of the tool; vv. 5-7, 15 read aloud)
- Isaiah 10:20-23 (the remnant returns to El Gibbor; optional)
- Isaiah 10:33-34 (the forest felled)
- Isaiah 11:1 (the shoot from the stump of Jesse)
- Isaiah 11:2-3a (the Spirit rests; the gifts)
- Isaiah 11:3b-5 (how the shoot judges; the belts)
- Isaiah 11:6-9 (the peaceable kingdom; knowledge covering the earth)
- Isaiah 11:10 (the root as ensign; the nations seek him)
- Isaiah 12:1-6 (the first hymn; yeshuah; the Holy One in Zion's midst)

Live Discovery Target

- Matthew 3:16 and John 1:32-33 (the Spirit descends and remains at the Jordan)

Supporting Passages

- Isaiah 6:13 (the holy seed is its stump; the Session 2 plant, resolved)
- 1 Samuel 16:1-13 (Jesse of Bethlehem; the Spirit comes upon David)
- Ephesians 6:14 (Isaiah's wardrobe rearranged for the Church: truth girds the loins, righteousness is the breastplate)
- Romans 15:12 (Paul quotes Isaiah 11:10; in him shall the Gentiles hope)
- Revelation 22:16 (the root and offspring of David)
- Matthew 1:21 (the name Jesus explained); John 4:10-14; 7:37-39 (the wells)
- Romans 11:29 (the irrevocable call; steelman guardrail from Session 1)

Catechism

- CCC 1831 (the seven gifts; cites Isaiah 11:1-2)
- CCC 536 (the Spirit rests on Jesus at his baptism)
- CCC 712 (the Book of Emmanuel, especially Isaiah 11:1-2)
- CCC 671-674 (the kingdom already inaugurated, not yet consummated)

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 11:1-2a (RSV2CE)

The Key of the House of David

Isaiah 13-27 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

Participants discover that buried in Isaiah's oracles against the nations is an eleven-verse account of a royal cabinet change: the steward Shebna deposed, Eliakim invested with robe, sash, fatherhood over Jerusalem, and "*the key of the house of David*" laid on his shoulder. Then they find, on their own, the day the Davidic King handed that key to a fisherman. They close on the mountain of chapter 25, where God swallows death forever and wipes tears from all faces, and hear Paul quote it over an empty tomb.

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

The papacy. Matthew 16 is not a Catholic proof-text floating in space; it is Jesus reusing the language of a standing royal office in the kingdom of David, the office of the steward, *the one over the house*, an office that survives its occupants precisely because occupants can be replaced. Keep one distinction clear in your own head, even though the group does not need it spelled out: the primacy of Peter and his successors is Catholic doctrine; the Isaiah 22 background is the argument that makes the doctrine intelligible, and it is a reading the Church has long found persuasive, not itself a defined article of faith. Tonight the group finds the office before they find Peter.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Chapters 13-23 are the oracles against the nations: Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Damascus, Ethiopia, Egypt, Edom, Arabia, Tyre, and, pointedly, Jerusalem herself (22). Do not attempt them all; the point of the collection is one truth: the Holy One of Israel is not a tribal deity. Every empire on the map answers to him, which is why he could call Assyria an axe. Two summits rise from the range: the taunt over the king of Babylon in chapter 14, source of the *Lucifer* tradition (see the Dig Deeper), and the Shebna-Eliakim oracle in chapter 22, tonight's center.

Get the office clear in your own mind. In the Davidic monarchy there was a post called *over the house* (*al ha-bayit*): the royal steward, the king's vizier or prime minister, who governed the palace and controlled access to the king. It appears across the historical books (1 Kings 4:6; 18:3; 2 Kings 18:18, where Eliakim holds it during Sennacherib's siege). It is an *office*: it has insignia (robe and sash), a defined authority (the key), and, crucially, succession. Isaiah 22 is our best window into it, precisely because we watch one man vacate it and another be installed, with the office itself untouched by the change. Shebna, the incumbent, has been carving himself a grand tomb and hoarding glory (22:16-18); God announces his eviction and names his replacement: Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who will receive the robe, the sash, the authority, will be "*a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem*," and will carry on his shoulder "*the key of the house of David: he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open*" (22:21-22).

Verse 25 is honest and important: even the sure peg gives way in time. Individual stewards fail and die, Shebna did, Eliakim eventually did, and the exile itself swept the court away. The occupants are mortal; the office is the king's to fill again. Hold that thought; it is the answer to tonight's steelman, not a problem for it.

Chapters 24-27 are often called Isaiah's apocalypse: the whole earth judged, a city of chaos brought down, and on Mount Zion a scene that out-runs everything before it: a feast of rich food and well-aged wine "*for all peoples*"; the shroud of death itself swallowed up forever; every tear wiped from every face (25:6-9); and even this, at 26:19: "*Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise.*" Bodily resurrection, in Isaiah. The New Testament will quote this material at the two places you would most want it: the empty tomb argument (1 Corinthians 15:54) and the end of the world (Revelation 21:4).

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The steward's office runs through the monarchy narratives (1 Kings 4:6; 2 Kings 18:18); Joseph over Pharaoh's house (Genesis 41:40-44), invested with the king's ring and authority so that only the throne outranked him, is its grandest prototype. The banquet on the mountain grows from Exodus 24:9-11, where the elders ascended, beheld God, and ate and drank.

Fulfillment. Matthew 16:13-19: the Son of David gives Simon a new name and "*the keys of the kingdom of heaven*," with authority to bind and loose that none may overrule, language a scripturally trained ear would trace to Isaiah 22:22. Revelation 3:7 removes any doubt that the connection is alive in the apostolic mind: the risen Christ is "*the holy one... who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens.*" Christ holds the key as King; Peter carries it as steward. And 25:8 detonates in 1 Corinthians 15:54, "*Death is swallowed up in victory*," and in Revelation 21:4, where God wipes away every tear: John and Paul both reading tonight's chapter at full volume.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage • *On the Unity of the Church*

Writing in the 250s, St. Cyprian teaches that the Lord built his Church on Peter and gave a primacy to one man precisely so that the Church's unity would have a visible source: one chair, one origin, so that the episcopate itself might be shown to be one. For Cyprian, unity is not an abstraction: one chair, established first in Peter, so that the one Church might be shown from one origin (On the Unity, 4-5).

St. Jerome • *Letter 15, to Pope Damasus*

From his desert cell in Syria, St. Jerome writes to the bishop of Rome: I follow no leader but Christ, but I am joined in communion with the chair of Peter, for on that rock I know the Church is built. The greatest biblical scholar of the ancient Church, the man who gave us the Vulgate, located orthodoxy by locating the steward.

St. Athanasius • *On the Incarnation*

In On the Incarnation, St. Athanasius declares the fact the Church stakes everything on: by the Savior's death and rising, death itself has been trampled and destroyed; it no longer holds terror for those in Christ, who trample it in turn as something already defeated. Athanasius is not

expounding Isaiah 25 in this passage; the comparison is ours, and it holds: what Isaiah saw from the mountain as a shroud still to be swallowed, Athanasius announces as accomplished news.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 553.** The power of the keys designates authority to govern the house of God, entrusted to Peter; Jesus, the Good Shepherd, confirmed this mandate after his Resurrection. The Catechism's language, *govern the house*, is Isaiah 22's language.
- **CCC 881.** The Lord made Simon alone the rock of his Church and gave him the keys; the pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope.
- **CCC 1044.** In the new heavens and new earth, God will wipe away every tear; death shall be no more. The Catechism here breathes Isaiah 25:8 through Revelation 21:4.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS TONIGHT

On his shoulder. In 9:6 the government rests *on his shoulder*; in 22:22 the key is laid *on his shoulder*. Same idiom, same kingdom. Let the group catch the echo: authority in David's house is a weight carried, not a prize held.

Zion and the mountain. The mountain the nations stream to (2:2-4) now hosts a feast *for all peoples* (25:6). The Zion thread is becoming a banquet. Do not name the Eucharist for them tonight; ask what kind of meal God serves on his mountain and let the room feel it. The thread completes in Sessions 12-14.

Death swallowed. Planted and part-resolved tonight (25:8 with 1 Corinthians 15:54). Its full weight returns when a Servant pours out his soul to death in Session 11. Say nothing of that.

The sealed guess stays sealed. Six sessions to go.

SESSION GOALS

1. Frame the oracles against the nations as one claim: the Holy One of Israel governs all history, not one nation's corner of it.
2. Reconstruct the steward's office from the text: insignia, authority, fatherhood, succession.
3. Discover Matthew 16:13-19 and Revelation 3:7 from Isaiah 22:22, and run the Protestant steelman at full strength.
4. Answer the steelman: Isaiah narrates one transfer of the office; the typological argument for succession stands on Matthew 16 and history, not on verse 25 alone.
5. Stand on the mountain of 25:6-9: the feast for all peoples, death swallowed, tears wiped, and hear 1 Corinthians 15 and Revelation 21 quote it.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 10 min. Build, 55 min. Send, 10 min. Live It, memory verse, Take-Home, closing prayer, 10 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 1's second half (touring the oracles) first; cut the Lucifer Dig Deeper second. Never cut the Eliakim reconstruction, the Matthew 16 discovery, the steelman, or the chapter 25 close.

The Key of the House of David

Isaiah 13-27 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord God, Holy One of Israel, every nation on the map answers to you, and every office in your house is yours to fill.

Tonight, teach us how your kingdom is governed: by keys given, not grasped; by fathers appointed for the household; by a King who delegates without abdicating.

And bring us at last to your mountain, where you swallow death and wipe every tear. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Think of an office or role that outlasts the people who hold it: a presidency, a team captaincy, a family role. What is the difference between trusting the office and trusting the officeholder?
2. Have you ever been given a key, literal or figurative, that represented real trust? What did carrying it feel like?

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

Lord of All the Nations (Isaiah 13-14)

1. Chapters 13-23 are eleven chapters of oracles against foreign nations: Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Egypt, Tyre, and more. Before we zoom in, answer the wide question: what does it claim about Israel's God that he issues verdicts on *every* empire on the map, including ones Israel could never influence?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

It claims he is not a national god. Ancient peoples assumed each land had its own deity with local jurisdiction; Isaiah's God audits Babylon and Egypt as easily as Judah. This is the seraphim's line with a map under it: the whole earth is full of his glory, so the whole earth is under his judgment and inside his plan. Practical edge for us: no regime, market, or superpower in your newsfeed is outside this jurisdiction either. History has one Auditor.

DIG DEEPER • How the Morning Star Got a Name

Isaiah 14:12-15 taunts the fallen king of Babylon: *"How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn!... You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven... I will make myself like the Most High.'"* The Latin Vulgate rendered *Day Star* as *lucifer*, light-bearer, the planet Venus. The oracle's primary target is a human emperor whose pride wrote checks his mortality could not cash. But the Fathers heard behind the tyrant the outline of an older fall, the pattern of pride itself, and Jesus' words, *"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven"* (Luke 10:18), sealed the association. That is how a Latin word for Venus became a proper name for the devil. Both readings instruct: every *I will ascend* ends in *you are brought down*.

The Steward Deposed and the Steward Installed (Isaiah 22:15-25)

2. Read Isaiah 22:15-19. Who is Shebna, what is his title, and what has he been caught doing?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Shebna is “*over the house*”: the royal steward, the king's vizier, highest office under the crown. It is a real, standing post in David's kingdom; you can watch it across the histories (1 Kings 4:6; 2 Kings 18:18). And he has been using it for himself: hewing a monumental tomb in the heights, glorying in chariots, building a legacy instead of serving a house. God's sentence has grim humor: the man obsessed with his grave will be whirled away like a ball into a wide land and die there. Office is trust, not property; use a stewardship for self-glory and lose the stewardship.

3. Now read Isaiah 22:20-24 slowly, and inventory the installation of Eliakim. List every element of the investiture: what is he given, what is he called, and what exactly can he do?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The inventory: (1) *your robe and your sash*, the office's insignia, transferred from the old steward to the new; (2) *your authority committed to his hand*; (3) a title of relationship: “*he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah*”; (4) the emblem of the whole office: “*I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open*”; (5) stability: a peg fastened in a sure place, a throne of honor to his father's house.

Underline three things. First, this is an *office changing hands*: same robe, same key, new man, which is the definition of succession. Second, the steward's authority is plenary but delegated: he opens and shuts *with the king's key*, in the king's name; he is not the king. Third, the title *father*: the steward's relationship to the household is paternal. Hold all three; you are about to need them. And catch the echo from Session 3: in 9:6 the government rests *on his shoulder*; here the key is laid *on his shoulder*. In David's house, authority is a weight carried.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Seven centuries later, the great Son of David stands at Caesarea Philippi and performs an investiture using this vocabulary: keys, opening and shutting that none can overrule, a new role for one man by name. Find it in Matthew 16. And for confirmation that the New Testament itself connects the scenes, someone check Revelation 3:7. Pairs, 4-5 minutes.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Matthew 16:13-19. Simon confesses, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*,” and Jesus responds with an investiture: a new name, Peter, the rock on which “*I will build my Church*”; and then, singular you: “*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*.” Keys of the kingdom; binding no one unbinds; loosing no one reverses. To an audience raised on Isaiah, this is the steward's office: the Davidic King appointing the one *over the house* (CCC 553, whose own phrase is *authority to govern the house of God*).

Revelation 3:7 closes the loop from the New Testament's side: the risen Jesus introduces himself as “*the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens*.” Christ owns the key; it is his by right as King. Which is exactly why Matthew 16

matters: the King who holds the key of David is doing with it what Davidic kings do, laying it on a steward's shoulder. Peter is not a rival to Christ's authority; he is its appointed carrier, a father to the household (22:21); the title *pope*, *papa*, derives from exactly that word, the child's word for father.

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

Now the Protestant response, and give it real muscle; these are serious arguments made by serious Christians:

(1) The rock of Matthew 16 is Peter's *confession*, not his person; some Fathers read it that way. (2) The Greek distinguishes *Petros* (a stone) from *petra* (bedrock); Jesus builds on the bedrock of faith, not on Simon. (3) Binding and loosing is given to *all* the apostles two chapters later (Matthew 18:18), so Peter received nothing unique. (4) Even granting the Isaiah 22 background, read verse 25: the peg gives way! Eliakim's office failed; if Matthew 16 echoes Isaiah 22, it predicts papal failure, not papal permanence. (5) Nothing in Matthew 16 says one word about *successors*; even a unique gift to Peter could die with Peter. (6) And the deepest problem: the steward's office belonged to the royal court of Judah, and it died with the monarchy. There was no one over the house in Israel for six centuries before Caesarea Philippi. Even a real allusion to Isaiah 22 gives Peter the dignity of an office; it does not, by itself, install a line of successors across the exile and into the Church.

Argue it like you mean it. Then press the text with the next question.

4. Answer the case point by point from the texts on the table: the grammar of Matthew 16, the shape of the office in Isaiah 22, and, above all, what verse 25 and Shebna himself actually prove about offices and occupants.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

(1) and (2): Jesus almost certainly spoke Aramaic, where one word, *kepha*, stands behind both halves: *you are Kepha and on this kepha I will build*. Greek *petra* is feminine and could not serve as a man's name, hence *Petros*; the wordplay demands identity, not contrast. And the sentence's own logic runs through the man: new name, rock, keys, binding, all in the singular, addressed to one person, in a row. Peter confesses by grace, and the confessing Peter is made rock; person and confession do not compete (CCC 881).

(3): In Matthew 18 the apostles share binding and loosing; only Peter, ever, receives *the keys*. That is not a contradiction; it is a cabinet. Israel's court had many ministers with real authority; one of them carried the key as the one over the house. Shared power among the apostles with a primacy in one is exactly the Isaiah 22 pattern, and exactly the Catholic claim.

(4): Here the objection proves our point, and this is the move to slow down for. Yes, the peg gives way: Shebna fell, Eliakim died, stewards come and go. And what happened to *the office* when Shebna fell? The king filled it again. Isaiah 22 is itself a succession narrative; the office's survival through the failure and death of its occupants is the very thing the chapter documents. An office that dies with its first holder is not an office; it is an honor. If Jesus reached for Isaiah 22's vocabulary, he reached for the vocabulary of an office, and an office is something a king fills again. That is an inference, and a strong one; name it as the argument it is rather than as a definition. (5) falls with it: no one asks where Matthew 16 mentions successors once they see that steward *means* an office with successors; and history shows the Church acting on that understanding from the

start, as St. Cyprian and St. Jerome witness, locating the Church's unity at Peter's chair.

(6) is the honest core of the case, and it should not be answered by the typology alone. Grant it: Isaiah 22 narrates one man replacing another in one court, and that court is gone. What Isaiah supplies is the shape of the office Jesus invokes, not a chain of custody. The chain is argued from elsewhere: from Jesus' own promise that the Church he builds will not be overcome, which is a claim about a lasting structure and not about one lifetime; from the apostles' own practice when an apostolic place fell vacant and they filled it by appointment (Acts 1:15-26); and from the second and third century Church, which already located unity at Peter's chair, as Cyprian and Jerome show. Say it plainly to the room: Isaiah tells you what the office is; Matthew 16 and the Church's life tell you that it continued.

Close pastorally: the papacy is not a claim that popes are impeccable; Shebna is in the Bible precisely so no one thinks stewardship guarantees sanctity. It is a claim about how the Davidic kingdom governs: the King appoints a father over the house and hands him the keys, and the King has not left his house unstaffed.

The Mountain Where Death Dies (Isaiah 25:6-9; 26:19)

5. Read Isaiah 25:6-9 aloud. On this mountain, list what God does, item by item, and note for whom.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A feast of rich food and well-aged wine, *"for all peoples"*: the nations who streamed to this mountain in 2:2-4 arrive to find a table set. He destroys *"the covering that is cast over all peoples,"* the shroud, the burial veil the whole race lives under. He *"will swallow up death for ever"*: death, the swallower of every generation, is itself swallowed. He *"will wipe away tears from all faces"*: not explain them, wipe them, a parent's gesture. And the response of verse 9: *"Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him."*

Ask the room: what kind of God answers death with a *meal*? Then let them sit with where they have seen rich food and wine on a mountain, given for all peoples, in which death is defeated. Do not rush to label it; the study will climb this mountain again.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Two apostles quote tonight's mountain at the two moments you would most want it said: one over the resurrection of the body, one at the end of the world. Find either: 1 Corinthians 15, near the end of the chapter, or Revelation 21, near the beginning. Pairs, 3 minutes.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

1 Corinthians 15:54: at the resurrection, *"when the perishable puts on the imperishable... then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'"* Paul cites Isaiah 25:8 as the headline over the general resurrection. Revelation 21:4: in the new Jerusalem, God *"will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more."* John closes the Bible with Isaiah's mountain (CCC 1044). And notice 26:19 already said the astonishing part inside Isaiah itself: *"Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise."* Bodily resurrection is not a New Testament innovation; it is Isaiah's promise kept. St. Athanasius announces the fulfillment as fact: death has been trampled, and Christians trample it after him.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. Shebna used a stewardship to build his own monument. Every one of us stewards something: a role, a talent, influence, money, a family. Where in your life has a trust quietly become a monument, and what would returning it to service look like this month?
2. Isaiah 25 says God's answer to grief is presence, a table, and a wiped face. Who in your life is under the shroud right now, grieving, afraid of death, or losing hope? What would it mean to bring them to the table, literally or otherwise, before you bring them arguments?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pray for the Holy Father by name this week, every day, as the steward carrying the key: not because officeholders are perfect (Shebna is in the Bible), but because the King staffed his house and told us to pray for those in authority.
- Read Isaiah 25:6-9 once at home, slowly, and bring it with you to Mass: rich food, wine, a mountain, all peoples, death defeated. See what you notice at the altar.
- Write down one stewardship you have been treating as a monument, and one concrete act that turns it back into service. Do the act.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”

Isaiah 22:22 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of David, holder of the key: you open and none can shut; you shut and none can open.

Thank you for not leaving your house unstaffed. Keep your steward faithful, keep your household one, and keep us loyal sons and daughters of the house.

And on your mountain, Lord, hurry the day: swallow death forever, and wipe every tear from every face we love. Amen.

Before next session: read Isaiah 28:14-16 and 29:13-14. One verse of your reading gets quoted by Jesus in an argument; see if you can guess which.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 13-23 (the oracles against the nations; surveyed, not read)
- Isaiah 14:12-15 (the Day Star taunt; Dig Deeper)
- Isaiah 22:15-19 (Shebna: the steward deposed)
- Isaiah 22:20-24 (Eliakim: robe, sash, father, the key on his shoulder)
- Isaiah 22:25 (the peg gives way; occupants fail while the text narrates the office transferring, Shebna to Eliakim)
- Isaiah 25:6-9 (the feast; death swallowed; tears wiped)
- Isaiah 26:19 (your dead shall live; bodily resurrection)

Live Discovery Targets

- Matthew 16:13-19 (the keys of the kingdom; binding and loosing)
- Revelation 3:7 (Christ holds the key of David)
- 1 Corinthians 15:54 and Revelation 21:4 (Isaiah 25:8 quoted)

Supporting Passages

- 1 Kings 4:6; 18:3; 2 Kings 18:18 (the office over the house across the monarchy)
- Genesis 41:40-44 (Joseph over Pharaoh's house; the prototype)
- Isaiah 9:6 (government on his shoulder; the echo)
- Matthew 18:18 (binding and loosing shared; the cabinet)
- Luke 10:18 (Satan falling like lightning; Dig Deeper)
- Exodus 24:9-11 (they beheld God, and ate and drank)

Catechism

- CCC 553 (the keys: authority to govern the house of God)
- CCC 881 (Peter the rock; the primacy continued under the Pope)
- CCC 1044 (God wipes away every tear; death shall be no more)

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 22:22 (RSV2CE)

A Cornerstone in Zion

Isaiah 28-35 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

Participants resolve the stone thread planted in Session 3: the stone of stumbling (8:14) meets tonight's *"tested stone, a precious cornerstone"* (28:16), and they discover the New Testament passage that stacks Isaiah's two stones with Psalm 118 into one argument, written by the man who carries the keys. They also face Isaiah 29:13, the verse most often quoted *against* Catholicism, in its strongest form, and answer it. They close in chapter 35, where the desert blooms and the blind see, and find Jesus reaching for that chapter, together with Isaiah 61, as his ID card.

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

Sacred Tradition rightly understood, and Christ the cornerstone on whom the Church is built (CCC 756). Isaiah 29:13, *"their heart is far from me,"* is not a Protestant weapon that Catholics must dodge; it is a prophetic scalpel the Church reads over herself at every Mass that risks becoming routine.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Chapters 28-33 are a cycle of six *woes*, spoken across the years when Judah's leaders were shopping for security, first flirting with Assyria, then, after Assyria turned predator, sneaking ambassadors down to Egypt with treasure on donkeys (30:1-7; 31:1-3). Isaiah's verdict on the Egypt policy is one of his flattest lines: *"The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses are flesh, and not spirit"* (31:3). The whole cycle is Ahaz's temptation again at national scale: whom do you trust? Against the scramble stands 30:15, one of the great sentences of the Old Testament: *"In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. And you would not."* Read those last four words in the room and let them ache.

In the middle of the woe against the scoffers who boast of their *"covenant with death"* (28:14-15), God announces a construction project: *"Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'He who believes will not be in haste'"* (28:16). Set beside 8:14, where the LORD himself is a stone of stumbling to the faithless, you now have Isaiah's complete stone theology: one stone, two effects. Build on it and stand; trip on it and fall. The New Testament stacks these texts, with Psalm 118:22 (*"the stone which the builders rejected"*), into a deliberate catena, and the fullest stack is 1 Peter 2:4-8. If your group has studied the letters of Peter, tonight will feel like a homecoming; if not, it will feel like a discovery either way: the keeper of the keys building with Isaiah's stones.

Then 29:13, and prepare yourself, because this verse deserves both honesty and confidence: *"This people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote."* Jesus quotes it against the Pharisees (Matthew

15:8-9; Mark 7:6-7), in an argument about *tradition*. It is probably the verse most frequently quoted at Catholics: rote prayers, human traditions, empty ritual. Tonight's steelman takes that case at full strength. The answer distinguishes what Jesus distinguishes: human traditions that void God's word (the corban dodge of Mark 7:11-12) versus the apostolic Tradition Paul commands Christians to hold, "*whether by word of mouth or by letter*" (2 Thessalonians 2:15). The Catechism itself makes exactly this distinction (CCC 83): Sacred Tradition, which carries the Word, versus changeable ecclesial customs, which serve it. And the deeper point: 29:13 diagnoses *hearts*, not liturgies; a spontaneous prayer can be rote in the heart, and a memorized one can burn.

Chapters 34-35 close the movement with maximum contrast: Edom becomes a wasteland (34), and then, without transition, the wasteland bursts into crocus (35). The desert blooms; weak hands are strengthened; "*Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God... will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart*" (35:4-6). A road runs home through it, "*and it shall be called the Holy Way*" (35:8). When John the Baptist sends from prison to ask Jesus, "*Are you he who is to come?*", Jesus answers with his morning's work, in words that echo this chapter together with Isaiah 61 (Matthew 11:2-6). Chapter 35 is on the Messiah's checklist, and the highway is a thread: hold it lightly tonight; a voice will cry about a highway five verses into next month's reading.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The cornerstone in Zion answers the false foundation of the scoffers' covenant with death (28:15): every generation builds on something. Psalm 118:22 supplies the catena's third stone. The quietness of 30:15 is Exodus faith: "*The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be still*" (Exodus 14:14). And 31:5 hides a Passover: the LORD will protect Jerusalem like birds hovering, "*he will spare and rescue,*" where *spare* is the Passover verb *pasach* (see the Dig Deeper).

Fulfillment. Jesus claims Psalm 118's rejected stone for himself at the climax of the vineyard parable (Matthew 21:42), your group's Session 1 text; Peter throws it at the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:11); Paul fuses Isaiah's two stones in Romans 9:33; and 1 Peter 2:4-8 builds the full structure: come to the living stone, be yourselves built into a spiritual house, and watch the same stone divide belief from stumbling. Isaiah 29:13 lands in Matthew 15:8-9. Isaiah 35's checklist is fulfilled item by item in the Gospels and cited by Jesus in Matthew 11:4-5, and the Catechism reads those miracles as messianic signs (CCC 547-549).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine • *Epiphany Sermons (Sermon 204)*

St. Augustine loved the geometry of the image: a cornerstone is laid where two walls meet, and Christ is the corner where two peoples, Israel and the nations, are joined into one house at last. The stone does not merely support the building; it reconciles it, holding together in himself what history had set at angles.

St. Teresa of Ávila • *The Bookmark (traditionally attributed)*

The prayer traditionally associated with St. Teresa's breviary is Isaiah 30:15 distilled by a Doctor of the Church: let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you; all things are passing, God never changes; patience obtains all things; whoever has God lacks nothing. God alone suffices. Judah ran to Egypt because it could not sit still with God; Teresa learned the strength Isaiah offered and Judah

refused.

St. John Henry Newman • *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*

Newman, converting at the cost of everything familiar, examined whether the Catholic Church's tradition was a corruption of the Gospel or its living continuity, and concluded with a line that has unsettled comfortable arguments ever since: to be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant. The Tradition that carries Scripture to us is not a growth over the Word; it is the Word's own bloodstream.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 756.** The Church is God's building; the Lord compared himself to the stone the builders rejected, and on that cornerstone the Church is built by the apostles, with Christ holding the whole together (Ephesians 2:20 adds the apostolic foundation).
- **CCC 78 and 83.** The living transmission of the Gospel, Sacred Tradition, is distinct from Scripture though closely bound to it; and Tradition itself must be distinguished from the changeable theological, disciplinary, or devotional traditions of local churches, which can be retained, modified, or abandoned under the Magisterium. This is the precise distinction tonight's steelman requires.
- **CCC 547-549.** Jesus accompanies his words with mighty works to bear witness that the kingdom is present in him: the signs of Isaiah 35, freeing some from hunger, sickness, and death, announce the deeper liberation from sin.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS TONIGHT

The stone: resolved. Planted at 8:14 in Session 3 (sanctuary or stumbling), completed at 28:16 (tested cornerstone), stacked by Peter with Psalm 118. Let the group assemble the catena themselves in the discovery.

The highway (35:8). Planted tonight, one verse, do not explain: the Holy Way through a blooming desert, for the redeemed to come home on. It gets a voice crying about it in Session 8.

Quietness and trust. 7:9 (Ahaz), 30:15 (Judah), and next session a king finally does it under siege. Do not preview; just make 30:15 unforgettable tonight.

The sealed guess stays sealed.

SESSION GOALS

1. Frame the Egypt diplomacy as the Ahaz temptation at national scale, and plant 30:15 deep.
2. Resolve the stone thread: 8:14 plus 28:16 plus Psalm 118, assembled by the group in 1 Peter 2:4-8.
3. Run the Isaiah 29:13 steelman against Catholic tradition at full strength and answer it with Mark 7's own logic, 2 Thessalonians 2:15, and CCC 83.
4. Turn 29:13 into an examination of conscience rather than a dodged bullet.

5. Discover Matthew 11:2-6: Jesus answering John the Baptist from Isaiah 35's checklist.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 10 min. Build, 55 min. Send, 10 min. Live It, memory verse, Take-Home, closing prayer, 10 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 2 (Egypt oracles detail) first; cut the Passover Dig Deeper second. Never cut the stone catena discovery, the 29:13 steelman, or the Matthew 11 discovery.

A Cornerstone in Zion

Isaiah 28-35 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord, you laid a stone in Zion: tested, precious, sure. Everything else we have ever stood on has moved. Tonight, sort our foundations. Show us where our lips have been near you and our hearts far, and do not let us leave with the distance intact.

In quietness and in trust, be our strength. Through Christ our Lord, the cornerstone. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. When life gets uncertain, what is your honest default: act fast, secure allies, gather information, control what you can? What would *being still* cost you?
2. Describe a time a routine, a commute, a workout, even a prayer, went hollow on you: you were doing it, but you were not in it. What woke you up, if anything did?

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

Horses, Flesh, and Stillness (Isaiah 30-31)

1. Read Isaiah 30:1-3 and 31:1-3. Judah is sending ambassadors and treasure to Egypt for protection against Assyria. What is Isaiah's argument against the policy, in his own words, and what does 31:3 say is the actual category mistake?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

They set out on a plan *"but not mine,"* seeking shelter *"in the shadow of Egypt"* without asking God, and the shadow will become their shame. The category mistake, 31:3: *"The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses are flesh, and not spirit."* Judah is not being condemned for prudence; it is being diagnosed for worship. When you treat a creature as a savior, you have not found security, you have found an idol with a stable. Modern translation: name the Egypts, the accounts, alliances, plans, and platforms we quietly trust to do what only God can.

2. Now read Isaiah 30:15 aloud twice, including its terrible last clause. What does God actually offer, what does each word mean in a life, and what are the four words that follow?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength." Returning: repentance, coming home. Rest: ceasing the frantic self-rescue. Quietness: a soul not run by noise. Trust: weight actually placed on God. Salvation and strength are offered on those terms, and then the four words: *"And you would not."* Not *you could not*. Judah preferred the anxiety it could manage to the stillness it could not control, and verse 16 is bitterly funny: *"We will speed upon horses... therefore your pursuers shall be speedy."* Flee on horses and be chased by faster ones. St. Teresa's bookmark is this verse lived to the end: let nothing disturb you; God alone

suffices. Assign the room the hard question: which clause is your bottleneck, returning, rest, quietness, or trust?

The Stone (Isaiah 28:14-16)

3. Read 28:14-16. The rulers boast of a “*covenant with death*.” Against their refuge of lies, what does God announce he is doing in Zion, and read the stone's inscription at the end of verse 16.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

They believe they have hedged every outcome, a deal with death itself, probably their web of alliances. God's answer to a false foundation is a true one: “*Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation.*” Tested: it has borne load. Precious: costly. Cornerstone: the stone that sets every line of the building. And the inscription: “*He who believes will not be in haste.*” The person standing on this stone does not panic, does not scramble to Egypt, does not flee on horses. Faith's signature in Isaiah is unhurriedness. Now put 28:16 beside your Session 3 note at 8:14: the LORD as sanctuary to some, “*a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling*” to others. One stone, two effects, depending entirely on whether you build on it or trip over it.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Somewhere in the New Testament, one author gathers tonight's cornerstone (28:16), Session 3's stumbling stone (8:14), and a third stone from Psalm 118:22, and stacks all three into a single argument about Christ and about us. It is in a letter, by the man who carries the keys. Find the stack: 1 Peter 2. Pairs, 4 minutes.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

1 Peter 2:4-8. Peter builds the full catena: come to him, “*that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious*”; 28:16 cited and adapted (“*Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone... he who believes in him will not be put to shame*”); Psalm 118:22 (“*the stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner*”); and 8:14 (“*a stone that will make men stumble*”). Isaiah's entire stone theology, assembled by the steward of Session 5, and aimed at Christ: chosen and precious to believers, a stumbling block to those who disobey.

But do not miss Peter's twist in verse 5: “*like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood.*” You are not spectators of the construction project; you are materials. The Church is the building whose cornerstone is Christ (CCC 756), and St. Augustine adds the geometry: a cornerstone joins two walls, and in Christ the two peoples, Israel and the nations, meet at the corner and become one house. Jesus himself claimed the rejected stone at the end of the vineyard parable (Matthew 21:42), the very parable your group discovered in Session 1. The threads are braiding.

Lips and Hearts (Isaiah 29:13-14)

4. Read Isaiah 29:13. State the diagnosis in your own words. Where does the sickness live, in the words, or somewhere else?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Mouths near, hearts far; reverence reduced to “*a commandment of men learned by rote.*” The sickness is not in the words, memorized or spontaneous; it is in the distance between the words and the heart. Note that carefully before the steelman: Isaiah is not auditing Israel's liturgy for being too structured. He is auditing hearts for being absent. A spontaneous prayer can be rote in the heart; a memorized psalm can burn. The question 29:13 asks every worshiper is not *did you compose this?* but *are you in this?*

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

Now the argument as it is actually made, because your group will meet it, and some have already: **Jesus quotes this verse against Catholicism's whole way of life.** Build it with conviction:

In Mark 7 and Matthew 15, the Pharisees attack Jesus' disciples over the *tradition of the elders*, and Jesus fires back with Isaiah 29:13, adding: “*You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men... making void the word of God through your tradition*” (Mark 7:8, 13). Now look at Catholicism with honest eyes: rote prayers repeated by the decade, obligatory rituals, a mountain of traditions, rules about fasting and holy days, doctrines like purgatory and Marian dogmas that are not on the surface of Scripture, all defended by appeal to *Tradition*, the very word Jesus weaponizes. Sola scriptura exists precisely to protect God's word from being buried under men's accretions. Isaiah 29:13 is the Bible's own warning label, and it is addressed to churches like Rome.

Make it sting. Then press the texts with the next question.

5. Answer it in three moves: (a) what *kind* of tradition is Jesus actually attacking in Mark 7:9-13, look at the corban example; (b) what does Paul command in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 and 1 Corinthians 11:2, and in what two forms; (c) who distinguishes good tradition from bad, and by what test?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

(a) Look at Jesus' own example: *corban*. A man declares his money dedicated to God, and the elders' tradition then *forbids* him to support his aging parents, nullifying the commandment *honor your father and mother* (Mark 7:10-12). Jesus' target is precise: human traditions that *void the word of God*. He does not condemn tradition as a category; in the same Gospels he keeps Passover, attends synagogue, wears tassels, celebrates Hanukkah (John 10:22), practices unwritten customs of Israel. The test he applies is not *is it a tradition?* but *does it carry God's word or cancel it?*

(b) Then hear the apostle: “*Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter*” (2 Thessalonians 2:15); “*I commend you because you... maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you*” (1 Corinthians 11:2). The same Greek word, *paradosis*, that Jesus uses negatively in Mark 7, Paul uses positively for the apostolic deposit, and explicitly in two channels: oral and written. If all tradition were the Mark 7 kind, Paul just contradicted his Lord. The Bible itself forces the distinction the Catholic Church makes: Sacred Tradition, the apostolic transmission of the Gospel, versus human customs, which the Church can keep, modify, or abandon (CCC 78, 83). Even the table of contents of the New Testament reaches you by Tradition: no verse lists the canon.

(c) The test is Mark 7's own: does it carry the Word or void it? And there must be someone competent to apply the test, which is the Magisterium's service, not its self-exaltation. Newman put the historical version bluntly: to be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant, because the closer

you get to the ancient Church, the more Catholic her traditions look. Then close where Isaiah aimed: 29:13 is not deflected, it is *received*. It is read at Catholics in the Lectionary on purpose. Every rosary can be prayed from the far country of a distant heart; every Mass can be attended by a body whose soul stayed home. The verse is not Rome's accuser to be beaten; it is every worshiper's examination of conscience to be prayed. Let it cut us first, and the steelman loses its footing without our losing its truth.

The Desert Blooms (Isaiah 35)

6. Read Isaiah 35:1-6a and 35:8-10. List the promises: what happens to the land, to weak human beings, and to the road home?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The wilderness blossoms like the crocus; glory and majesty flood the wasteland. Weak hands strengthened, feeble knees made firm, fearful hearts told: *"Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God... will come and save you."* Then the checklist: blind eyes opened, deaf ears unstopped, the lame leaping like a deer, the mute tongue singing. And through it all a road: *"a highway shall be there... the Holy Way,"* for the redeemed to walk home on, ending at Zion with *"everlasting joy upon their heads."* Mark the highway in your margin and leave it marked; this study will come back for it. And note what verse 4 makes salvation: not a program arriving, but *your God* arriving. Emmanuel again.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Years later, a prophet sits in a dungeon and sends messengers to Jesus with what has always sounded like the rawest question in the Gospels: *Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?* Jesus does not answer yes or no. He answers with a reading list, and tonight's chapter is on it. Find the exchange in Matthew 11. Pairs, 3 minutes.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Matthew 11:2-6. John the Baptist, in Herod's prison, sends his question, and Jesus replies: *"Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."* That is Isaiah 35:5-6 (with 61:1) read off as the morning's completed work. Jesus' messianic ID card is Isaiah's checklist: he does not merely claim to fulfill the prophets; he performs the specific miracles the prophets said would mark God's own arrival, and lets John's disciples do the exegesis (CCC 547-549). And he adds a beatitude with a gentle edge. The Fathers divide on whether John asked for his own sake or for his disciples' sake, and Jesus' closing line leaves room for either: *"Blessed is he who takes no offense at me,"* the stumbling-stone warning, one more time, offered kindly.

DIG DEEPER • The Passover Hiding in Isaiah 31

Isaiah 31:5 promises: *"Like birds hovering, so the LORD of hosts will protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver it, he will spare and rescue it."* The Hebrew verb behind *spare* is *pasoach*: to pass over. It is the Passover verb of Exodus 12, and Isaiah may well have chosen it deliberately: the God who once passed over the blood-marked doors of Egypt will *passover* Jerusalem again when the destroyer comes. Next session, an Assyrian army surrounds the city, and in a single night the angel of the LORD goes out and strikes the enemy camp instead (37:36); the blow that fell on Egypt falls

on Jerusalem's besiegers, and Jerusalem is passed over. Isaiah told you the shape of the rescue one page early, in one verb.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. Name your Egypt: the person, plan, account, or ability you reach for first when you are afraid, before you pray. What would it look like, concretely, to reverse that order for one month?
2. Take Isaiah 29:13 as your own examination rather than someone else's accusation: at what point in the Mass, or in your daily prayers, does your heart most reliably wander into the far country? What is one practical anchor, posture, a pause, praying one line slowly, that could close the distance this Sunday?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Memorize St. Teresa's bookmark alongside the memory verse; they are the same doctrine. Pray one of them in the moment you would normally reach for your Egypt.
- This Sunday, pick one fixed prayer of the Mass, the Gloria, the Sanctus, the Domine non sum dignus, and pray it as if you wrote it this morning. One prayer, fully inhabited, is worth more than the whole Missal recited from the far country.
- Build one still square into your week: fifteen minutes, no phone, no output, in returning and rest. Let quietness and trust do what horses cannot.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength."

Isaiah 30:15 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, tested stone, precious cornerstone: everything else we stand on shifts, and you do not. Draw our hearts as near as our lips. Take the prayers we have said a thousand times and set them on fire. And where our deserts are, where hope dried up long ago, send the crocus.

In returning and rest, save us; in quietness and in trust, be our strength. Amen.

Before next session: read Isaiah 36-37, a war story with a miracle at the end. It reads fast; read it like the thriller it is.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 30:1-3; 31:1-3 (the Egypt policy; men and not God, flesh and not spirit)
- Isaiah 30:15-16 (returning, rest, quietness, trust; and you would not)
- Isaiah 28:14-16 (covenant with death; the tested cornerstone; the inscription)
- Isaiah 8:14 (the stumbling stone; Session 3 cross-reference)
- Isaiah 29:13-14 (lips near, hearts far; the steelman text)
- Isaiah 35:1-6a, 8-10 (the desert blooms; the checklist; the Highway of Holiness)
- Isaiah 31:5 (the Passover verb; Dig Deeper)

Live Discovery Targets

- 1 Peter 2:4-8 (the stone catena: 28:16 + Psalm 118:22 + 8:14)
- Matthew 11:2-6 (Jesus answers John from Isaiah 35)

Supporting Passages

- Psalm 118:22 (the rejected stone; third stone of the catena)
- Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11; Romans 9:33 (the catena elsewhere in the NT)
- Mark 7:1-13 and Matthew 15:1-9 (the corban argument; steelman core)
- 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 1 Corinthians 11:2 (hold the traditions, oral and written)
- John 10:22 (Jesus at Hanukkah; tradition observed)
- Exodus 14:14 (be still; the roots of 30:15); Exodus 12 (Passover; Dig Deeper)

Catechism

- CCC 756 (the Church built on the cornerstone)
- CCC 78, 83 (Sacred Tradition distinguished from ecclesial traditions)
- CCC 547-549 (the miracles as messianic signs)

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 30:15 (RSV2CE)

In Whom Do You Trust?

Isaiah 36-39 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

Participants read the hinge of the whole book: four chapters of straight narrative in which everything Isaiah has preached for thirty-five chapters is put to the test by the era's dominant war machine. They discover that the Assyrian spokesman stands on the exact spot where Isaiah once confronted Ahaz, and that Hezekiah, facing the same fear on the same ground, makes the opposite choice. They watch a king pray with a letter spread open before God, face the historicity objection at full strength with archaeology on the table, sit with Hezekiah at the edge of death, and then watch him fumble the ending, which opens the door to Babylon and to everything in chapters 40-66.

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

Prayer under siege, and the harmony of faith and history. Hezekiah spreading Sennacherib's letter before the LORD is one of Scripture's great images of what the Church means by prayer of petition: bring the actual thing, the letter itself, into the presence of God. And this session is where faith gets to show its receipts: Isaiah 36-37 is among the most externally corroborated events in the Old Testament.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The date is 701 BC. Sennacherib of Assyria has swept through Judah, and 36:1 concedes the catastrophe up front: he took *“all the fortified cities.”* Lachish, Judah's second city, fell so brutally that Sennacherib wallpapered his palace at Nineveh with carved reliefs of the siege; they hang in the British Museum today. Jerusalem is the last dot on the map. The Rabshakeh, a high Assyrian royal official serving as the campaign's spokesman, arrives with a great army and takes up position, and here is the detail to let the group find live: *“by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field”* (36:2), the word-for-word location where Isaiah met Ahaz in 7:3. Same ground, same terror, one generation apart. Ahaz stood there and chose Assyria over God; now Assyria itself stands there demanding the surrender of Ahaz's son. Isaiah is a careful writer; the repetition is a thesis.

The Rabshakeh's speech (36:4-20) is a masterpiece of temptation, and worth teaching as one: he speaks Hebrew, not Aramaic, over the diplomats' objection, aiming past the officials at the people on the wall (36:11-13); he mixes real truths (Egypt is a broken reed, 36:6, exactly what Isaiah said) with strategic lies; he twists theology (claiming Hezekiah's removal of the high places offended the LORD, 36:7, when it was reform); he even impersonates revelation: *“The LORD said to me, Go up against this land”* (36:10). His refrain is one question, eight times in two chapters in various forms: on what, on whom, do you trust? He is, in short, every voice that has ever whispered to a believer under pressure: your God will not come through, your leaders deceive you, be reasonable, make peace with me. Note Hezekiah's first instruction

to the people: do not answer him (36:21). You do not out-argue the Rabshakeh on the wall; you take his letter to the temple.

Hezekiah's response sequence (37) is the session's spiritual core: he tears his clothes, goes to the house of the LORD, sends to Isaiah, and when the written ultimatum arrives, he "*spread it before the LORD*" (37:14) and prays a prayer that moves from adoration (enthroned above the cherubim, maker of heaven and earth) through honest fact-stating (the kings of Assyria really have destroyed the nations and their gods, for those were no gods) to a petition whose motive is God's glory: save us, "*that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou alone art the LORD*" (37:20). The deliverance comes at night: the angel of the LORD strikes the Assyrian camp, Sennacherib withdraws to Nineveh, and, in the throwaway line archaeology loves, is murdered by his own sons while worshiping his god (37:36-38), which Assyrian records confirm down to the succession of Esarhaddon.

Chapters 38-39 complete the portrait with two more tests. Facing death, Hezekiah weeps and prays and receives fifteen years and a sign (38); facing flattery, he fails: he shows Babylonian envoys every treasure in the house (39), and Isaiah's oracle in response, everything will be carried to Babylon, is the hinge on which the entire book turns. Chapter 39 ends with Babylon in the doorway; chapter 40 will open with God speaking comfort to exiles there. Hezekiah's closing line, relieved that the disaster will fall after his lifetime, is left hanging in the air as a warning about how even good men ration their concern. One more note for honest teaching: the king who trusted magnificently in chapter 37 fails in chapter 39. Scripture does not airbrush its heroes, and the study should not either.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The whole narrative is Exodus 14 re-run at Jerusalem's wall: the enemy at maximum strength, the people helpless, and the LORD fighting while Israel has only to be still (Exodus 14:14), the very stillness of 30:15. The angel striking the camp by night echoes Passover night; Isaiah had already used the Passover verb *pasoach* in 31:5 of the LORD sparing Jerusalem. Hezekiah's prayer stands in the line of Solomon's temple dedication (1 Kings 8), which promised exactly this: when enemies besiege, pray toward this house, and heaven will hear. And the remnant oracle of 37:31, the survivors of Judah shall "*again take root downward, and bear fruit upward,*" speaks stump language: Session 4's theology in a war dispatch.

Fulfillment. Sirach 48:17-25, in your Catholic Bible, canonizes the memory: Hezekiah fortified his city and brought water into it (the tunnel your group will meet in the Dig Deeper), the people called upon the Lord, and he saved them by the hand of Isaiah; and then Sirach says something more, which your group will discover live: Isaiah *comforted those who mourned in Zion* and revealed what was to come. That is Israel's own summary of chapters 40 and following, and it hands us next session's first word. In the Gospels, Jesus takes up the Rabshakeh's great question from the other side: "*Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me*" (John 14:1), and answers Hezekiah's deathbed lesson permanently: "*I am the resurrection and the life*" (John 11:25).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Alphonsus Liguori • *The Great Means of Prayer*

St. Alphonsus stakes everything on the lesson Hezekiah acts out: prayer is the great and necessary means of salvation, and, as he famously compresses it, the one who prays is certainly saved, while the one who does not pray is certainly lost. Hezekiah with the letter spread open is the doctrine in a

single picture: the crisis brought bodily into the presence of God, because that is where crises are decided.

St. Francis de Sales • *Introduction to the Devout Life*

St. Francis de Sales warns that anxiety is the greatest evil that can befall a soul, sin only excepted, because anxiety is the Rabshakeh's native climate: it shouts over the wall until the heart surrenders what the enemy could never take by force. His counsel is Hezekiah's practice: in every trouble, gently place the matter before God and remain at peace, refusing to negotiate with the voice of fear.

St. Benedict • *The Rule, Chapter 4*

Among his tools of good works, St. Benedict lists one that chapter 38 hands to Hezekiah without anesthesia: keep death daily before your eyes. Not morbidly, but truthfully: the man who has heard *set your house in order* and then received his years back counts them differently. Benedict would have every Christian live all their years the way Hezekiah lived his fifteen: as a gift with a number on it, spent deliberately.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 2743.** It is always possible to pray: prayer is a vital necessity, and nothing is equal to it. Hezekiah under total siege, with zero military options, retains the one act the empire cannot blockade.
- **CCC 303-304.** Divine providence is concrete and immediate; God cares for all, from the least things to the great events of world history, and the witness of Scripture is unanimous. Assyria at the height of its power is inside that care, as the axe of Session 4 already taught.
- **CCC 1007.** Remembering our mortality helps us realize that we have only a limited time in which to bring our lives to fulfillment. Chapter 38 is this article with a king's face on it.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS TONIGHT

Trust: the thread pays off. 7:9 (*if you will not believe, you shall not be established*) was Ahaz's fork; 30:15 (*in quietness and in trust*) was the nation's; tonight Hezekiah, standing on Ahaz's exact ground, finally takes the road not taken. Let the group find the location match themselves; it is the night's first discovery.

The remnant / root. 37:31: the remnant takes root downward and bears fruit upward. Stump theology in a war report. Note it aloud, one sentence, move on.

Babylon: planted. Chapter 39 opens the door the rest of the book walks through. End the night with the group feeling the cliffhanger: the next word of this book, after Babylon enters, is *Comfort*. Do not explain further.

The sealed guess stays sealed. Four sessions until it opens.

SESSION GOALS

1. Discover the location echo: 36:2 equals 7:3, and articulate the Ahaz-Hezekiah contrast it engineers.
2. Anatomize the Rabshakeh's speech as the permanent grammar of temptation, and Hezekiah's non-answer as the first move of resistance.
3. Pray through Hezekiah's letter-prayer as the model of petition: adoration, honesty, God's glory as motive.
4. Run the historicity steelman at full strength and answer it with the Taylor Prism, the Lachish reliefs, the biblical account's own candor, and the Assyrian record of Sennacherib's death.
5. Sit with chapter 38's mortality and chapter 39's failure, and set the Babylon hinge for Session 8.
6. Discover Sirach 48: the deuterocanon's own summary of Isaiah's legacy, and the bridge to *Comfort*.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 10 min. Build, 55 min. Send, 10 min. Live It, memory verse, Take-Home, closing prayer, 10 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 8 (chapter 38, the illness) first, hard as that is; compress Question 2 (the speech anatomy) second. Never cut the location discovery, the letter-prayer, the steelman, or the Sirach discovery.

In Whom Do You Trust?

Isaiah 36-39 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim: you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you made heaven and earth.

Tonight a voice will shout over the wall of your Scripture, the same voice that shouts over the walls of our lives: whom do you trust? Give us Hezekiah's answer, made with our knees.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. When bad news arrives, an email, a diagnosis, a bill, what do you physically do first? Where does it go: your pocket, your browser tabs, a group chat, your prayer?
2. Whose voice, in your life, is best at making fear sound like common sense?

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

The Same Spot (Isaiah 36:1-3)

1. Read Isaiah 36:1-3. Verse 1 concedes something enormous in one clause; what? And verse 2 gives the Assyrian commander's exact position with strange precision. Read the location phrase aloud.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Verse 1: Sennacherib took “*all the fortified cities of Judah.*” The story opens with the war already lost everywhere but here; Scripture does not soften the scoreboard. Verse 2: the Rabshakeh stands “*by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field.*” An oddly specific address for a war narrative, unless the author wants you to remember having been there before.

LIVE DISCOVERY

You have stood at that address earlier in this study. Somewhere in the chapters we have read, that exact location phrase appears, word for word, in another confrontation about trust. Hunt it down; it is in the Book of Emmanuel, chapters 7-9. Pairs, 3-4 minutes.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Isaiah 7:3: the LORD sends Isaiah to meet King Ahaz “*at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field.*” The same square yard of Jerusalem. One generation ago, on that spot, a shaking king was offered God's protection and chose Assyria instead, with fake piety on his lips. Tonight, on that spot, Assyria itself stands demanding the surrender of that king's son.

Isaiah has engineered a rhyme in geography: the place of Ahaz's refusal becomes the place of Hezekiah's test. Two kings of David's house, same ground, same terror, same question, and the study's oldest warning hanging over both: *if you will not believe, surely you shall not be established*

(7:9). Sin's consequences often return to the scene; so does grace's second chance. Watch what the son does that the father would not.

Anatomy of a Temptation (Isaiah 36:4-21)

2. Read Isaiah 36:4-10 and 36:13-20. List the Rabshakeh's techniques: what does he get right, what does he twist, and what does he dare to claim in verse 10? And what one question does he keep repeating?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

His toolkit, worth writing on a board: (1) *True premises*: Egypt really is a broken reed (36:6), Isaiah said the same thing, temptation loves borrowed truth. (2) *Theological twisting*: he claims Hezekiah's reforms, tearing down the high places, offended the LORD (36:7), spinning obedience as the offense. (3) *Bypassing authority*: he refuses Aramaic and shouts in Hebrew at the people on the wall (36:11-13), going over the leaders' heads to spread fear directly. (4) *Attractive surrender*: make your peace with me, and every man will eat of his own vine, until I take you away to a land like your own (36:16-17), captivity marketed as vacation. (5) *Statistical despair*: no god of any nation has ever stopped Assyria, why would yours? (36:18-20). (6) And most brazenly, *impersonated revelation*: "The LORD said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it" (36:10).

The repeated question, eight times across these chapters in one form or another: *in whom do you trust?* It is the study's question, the book's question, and the enemy's favorite question, because whoever sets the terms of that question usually wins it. And note the people's ordered response, 36:21: *they were silent and answered him not a word*. First rule of the wall: you do not debate the Rabshakeh. St. Francis de Sales names the weapon he is really using: anxiety, the greatest evil except sin, which conquers hearts no army could take.

The Letter on the Floor (Isaiah 37:14-20, 36-38)

3. Read Isaiah 37:14-20 aloud, all of it; it is one of the great prayers of the Bible. First, what does Hezekiah physically do with the ultimatum? Then walk the prayer's structure: how does it open, what does it honestly concede, and what is the actual motive of the petition in verse 20?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He takes the letter to the house of the LORD "and spread it before the LORD": the threat itself, unfolded on the temple floor, physically placed in God's presence. Not summarized in prayer, brought. That gesture is a whole spirituality of petition: God, here is the actual thing. St. Alphonsus built his doctrine on this instinct: prayer is the great means, and the one who prays is saved; the one who does not is lost, because prayer is where sieges are decided (CCC 2743: it is *always* possible to pray, the one act no empire can blockade).

The structure: it opens in adoration, "enthroned above the cherubim... you have made heaven and earth," establishing who is actually on the throne before mentioning who is at the gate. It concedes the facts without flinching: the kings of Assyria truly have laid waste the nations and burned their gods, "for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands": honest prayer does not shrink the problem; it re-describes it accurately, and accurately described, Assyria's undefeated record turns out to be a record against idols. And the motive of the ask, verse 20: "that all the kingdoms of the

earth may know that thou alone art the LORD.” He asks for rescue for God’s glory, not merely his own skin. Petition graduates into worship when the reason becomes *that they may know you*.

The answer comes that night (37:36-38): the angel of the LORD strikes the Assyrian camp, Sennacherib breaks camp for Nineveh and never returns, and is cut down by his own sons in the temple of his own god, the god who could not protect him being the story’s final irony. Passover at Jerusalem’s wall. Isaiah had already reached for the Passover verb in 31:5, where the LORD protects Jerusalem and spares it; here the city is passed over and the camp is struck, and the echo is hard to miss.

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

Now the modern objection, and it deserves its full weight, because it comes armed with facts:

This is pious legend, and the Bible’s own text betrays it. The parallel account in 2 Kings 18:14-16 admits what Isaiah 36-39 omits: Hezekiah surrendered, apologized (*“I have done wrong; withdraw from me”*), and paid a crushing tribute, stripping the temple doors of gold to do it. Sennacherib’s own royal annals, the Taylor Prism, sitting in the British Museum, agree: he boasts that he shut Hezekiah up *“like a bird in a cage”* and lists the enormous tribute. So the sober history is: Judah capitulated and paid; Sennacherib, satisfied or needed elsewhere, went home; and later tradition inflated the anticlimax into an angel massacring 185,000 soldiers overnight. The miracle is the legend; the invoice is the history.

Present it with confidence; it is a real scholarly position. Then press the whole body of evidence with the next question.

4. Answer it from the full evidence, and be as honest as the objection demands: (a) what does the Bible itself do with the tribute, and what does that candor tell you; (b) what is the one thing the Taylor Prism conspicuously never claims, and what do Assyrian kings normally do with victories; (c) what happened to Sennacherib in the end, in both sources; (d) what, exactly, does faith add to the record rather than against it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

(a) The tribute is *in the Bible*: 2 Kings 18:14-16 reports Hezekiah’s payment in humiliating detail, gold stripped from the temple doors included. Scripture kept the embarrassing invoice in the canon. That is not the behavior of legend-builders; whitewash deletes the surrender, it does not archive it. The sequence is coherent: Hezekiah first tried appeasement, it failed to stop the siege demand, and the crisis of chapters 36-37 followed. Candor about failure is one of the strongest internal marks of honest reportage.

(b) The Prism boasts sieges, tribute, and Hezekiah caged *“like a bird”*, and then never says the one thing every Assyrian victory text exists to say: *I took the city*. Assyrian royal annals are professional brag sheets; they record conquests in loving detail (Sennacherib carved the fall of Lachish across his palace walls, the reliefs survive). For Jerusalem, the capital of the rebellion, the annals offer a cage metaphor and a change of subject. In that genre, silence about capturing the one city that mattered is conspicuous in a genre built for boasting, and it coheres exactly with the biblical claim: he besieged it and went home without it, which is precisely the biblical claim stated from the loser’s podium.

(c) Both sources end Sennacherib the same way: Isaiah 37:38 says his sons struck him down as he

worshiped in the house of his god, and Esarhaddon reigned in his stead; Babylonian and Assyrian records confirm his violent death at a son's hand and Esarhaddon's succession. The biblical narrative's checkable claims check out, down to the obituary.

(d) So what does faith receive here? The core events stand framed by converging records, and Scripture states plainly what no archive could: *“the angel of the LORD went forth”* (37:36). Faith receives the event as Scripture tells it, and its meaning: that the deliverance was God's answer to a spread-open letter, that history's Auditor kept his word about the axe. The precise mechanism of the camp's destruction in one night, angelic stroke, plague, panic, God is not squeamish about instruments, Scripture leaves to God; a distant and disputed Egyptian tale in Herodotus, set on another front, is sometimes brought into the discussion, but the case does not need it and should not lean on it. Providence is concrete and immediate (CCC 303-304); it usually wears secondary causes as clothing. The believer's claim was never *no tribute was paid*; it is *the city the whole earth's empire could not take was the one with the letter on the temple floor*.

DIG DEEPER • Hezekiah's Tunnel

You can walk through Hezekiah's siege preparations today. Anticipating Sennacherib, Hezekiah cut a 1,750-foot water tunnel through solid rock under Jerusalem, bringing the Gihon spring inside the walls (2 Chronicles 32:30; Sirach 48:17 praises it). In 1880, boys wading the tunnel found an ancient Hebrew inscription, carved by the work crews themselves, describing the moment the two digging teams, tunneling from opposite ends, heard each other's picks and broke through. The Siloam Inscription is one of the oldest monumental Hebrew texts ever found. The king who trusted God also dug like the siege was coming: grace does not cancel engineering. Trust God, and cut the tunnel.

Fifteen Years and One Fumble (Isaiah 38-39)

5. (Optional, first cut for time.) Read Isaiah 38:1-6 and skim Hezekiah's psalm (38:10-20). *“Set your house in order; for you shall die.”* What does Hezekiah do with the sentence, and what does he do with the reprieve, verse 19?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He turns his face to the wall and weeps and prays, no stoicism, no bargaining posture, just honest tears before God, and receives fifteen years and a sign. His psalm afterward is a man who has stood at the door: *“I said, In the noontide of my days I must depart.”* And verse 19 states what the reprieve is for: *“The living, the living, he thanks thee... the father makes known to the children thy faithfulness.”* Extra time is for gratitude and transmission. St. Benedict's tool belongs to everyone, not only the diagnosed: keep death daily before your eyes (CCC 1007), not to darken your years but to number them, and numbered years get spent instead of leaked.

6. Read Isaiah 39. Babylonian envoys arrive with letters and a gift, flattery after the famous deliverance, and Hezekiah shows them what? Then read Isaiah's oracle and Hezekiah's final sentence in verse 8. What just happened to the hero of chapter 37?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He shows them *everything*: silver, gold, spices, oil, armory, storehouses, *“there was nothing... that*

Hezekiah did not show them" (39:2). The king who spread a letter before the LORD now spreads his treasures before Babylon. The siege he survived by prayer; the compliment he fails flat-footed. Isaiah's oracle: days are coming when all of it, and sons of his own line, will be carried to Babylon. And Hezekiah's response, one of Scripture's quietly devastating lines: *"The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good... There will be peace and security in my days"* (39:8). It can sound, on the common and disquieting reading, like relief that the bill falls to the grandchildren.

Two lessons, both delivered without commentary by the text. First: victories do not inoculate; the tempter who fails at the wall returns through the front door with a gift basket, and pride after deliverance is the oldest relapse. Second: Scripture refuses to airbrush its saints. The same Hezekiah is magnificent in 37 and small in 39, which means the narrative's hero was never Hezekiah; it was the God he did or did not trust. And now feel the hinge: chapter 39 ends with Babylon inside the palace, measuring the drapes. The next word in the book of Isaiah, the very next word after this cliffhanger, is *Comfort*. That is where we go next.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Israel itself wrote a review of these chapters, centuries later, and it is in your Catholic Bible, in a book many Protestant editions omit or set outside the canon. Sirach, chapter 48, near the end: find what Sirach remembers about Hezekiah and Isaiah, and read verses 24-25 very carefully. Pairs, 3-4 minutes.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Sirach 48:17-25. Sirach praises Hezekiah who *"fortified his city, and brought water into the midst of it"*, the tunnel!, recalls the Assyrian terror and the people's prayer, and says the Lord saved them *"by the hand of Isaiah."* Then verses 24-25: by a spirit of might Isaiah *"saw the last things, and comforted those who mourned in Zion. He revealed what was to occur to the end of time."*

Two treasures here. First, this passage exists only in the deuterocanonical books: a place where the Catholic Bible carries Israel's own memory that Protestant Bibles have set aside, worth noticing without gloating. Second, look at Sirach's verbs: Isaiah *comforted* the mourners of Zion and revealed what was to come, which is Israel's own one-line summary of the chapters we begin next session, the Book of Consolation, whose first word is *"Comfort."* Centuries before modern debates about the book's shape, Sirach read Isaiah whole: the prophet of 701 BC and the comforter of the exiles, one legacy. Consider the cliffhanger officially set.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. What is the letter currently sitting in your life, the threat, bill, diagnosis, conflict, or deadline you have been managing everywhere except in God's presence? Will you physically bring it, the paper, the printout, the phone with the email open, before the Lord this week, in a church, and pray Hezekiah's structure over it: who God is, what is honestly true, and *that they may know you*?
2. Hezekiah survived the siege and fell to the gift basket. Where does flattery, success, or being admired most reliably loosen your grip on God? What is one guardrail you could set before the next compliment arrives?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Do the letter prayer, literally: take your hardest current thing, in physical form if possible, before the Blessed Sacrament or into a quiet church, spread it out, and pray 37:16-20 over it with your details in it.
- Practice the wall rule once: when the anxious voice starts its speech this week, do not answer it a word. No rehearsing arguments at 2 a.m. Take it to the temple instead.
- Borrow St. Benedict's tool for seven days: each morning, one sentence: *Lord, my days are numbered; teach me to spend today.* Watch what it does to your priorities.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“So now, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou alone art the LORD.”

Isaiah 37:20 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

O LORD of hosts, enthroned above the cherubim: the voices over our walls are loud, and their question never changes: in whom do you trust?

Here is our answer, made in the temple, on our knees, with our letters spread open before you: in you, O LORD, in you alone.

Save us from every hand that threatens us, and do it in such a way that everyone watching our lives may know that you alone are God. Amen.

Before next session: read Isaiah 40:1-11 slowly, twice, and if you know Handel's Messiah, allow yourself the soundtrack. Chapter 40 is where the whole book takes flight.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 36:1-3 (all fortified cities taken; the Rabshakeh's position)
- Isaiah 36:4-21 (the speech: techniques of the tempter; the ordered silence)
- Isaiah 37:14-20 (the letter spread before the LORD; the model prayer)
- Isaiah 37:31 (the remnant: root downward, fruit upward)
- Isaiah 37:36-38 (the deliverance by night; Sennacherib's end)
- Isaiah 38:1-6, 10-20 (set your house in order; the psalm of the reprieved; optional)
- Isaiah 39 (the envoys; everything shown; the Babylon oracle; peace in my days)

Live Discovery Targets

- Isaiah 7:3 (the identical location phrase; the Ahaz echo)
- Sirach 48:17-25 (Israel's memory: the tunnel, the rescue, and Isaiah who comforted Zion)

Supporting Passages

- 2 Kings 18:14-16 (the tribute; the Bible's own candor; steelman core)
- 2 Chronicles 32:30 (the tunnel; with the Siloam Inscription, Dig Deeper)
- Exodus 14:14 (the LORD will fight; be still); Isaiah 30:15; 31:5 (the Passover verb)
- 1 Kings 8:33-45 (Solomon: pray toward this house under siege)
- John 14:1; 11:25 (Jesus answers the wall's question and the deathbed's)

Extra-Biblical Corroboration (for the steelman)

- The Taylor Prism (Sennacherib's annals: tribute, the caged bird, and no claim of capture)
- The Lachish reliefs (Nineveh palace; the fall of Judah's second city)
- Assyrian records of Sennacherib's assassination and Esarhaddon's succession
- Herodotus, Histories 2.141 (a distant, disputed Egyptian tradition; not corroboration)

Catechism

- CCC 2743 (it is always possible to pray; prayer a vital necessity)
- CCC 303-304 (providence concrete and immediate)
- CCC 1007 (mortality and the limited time given us)

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 37:20 (RSV2CE)

Comfort My People

Isaiah 40-41 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

Participants turn the great hinge of the book: after Babylon walked into the palace in chapter 39, God's first word is "*Comfort*." They resolve the highway thread when the voice cries "*prepare the way of the LORD*," and discover that all four evangelists, unanimously, hand that verse to John the Baptist. They stand under the incomparability poem (40:12-31), face the authorship question with complete honesty, and end on eagles' wings. And, quietly, a phrase makes its entrance in 40:10 that some of them wrote a guess about many weeks ago. Mark it; do not connect it.

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

The tenderness of God and the ministry of the precursor. The Church reads Isaiah 40 every Advent because it is the Gospel's overture: comfort announced, a way prepared, glory revealed, and a shepherd who carries lambs. And the honest handling of the authorship question is itself a Catholic touchstone: faith that has nothing to fear from scholarship, anchored where the Church actually anchors it.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Feel the whiplash of the page turn. Chapter 39 ends with Babylon measuring the drapes and exile guaranteed. Chapter 40 opens, without a word of transition, on the far side of the catastrophe: "*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned.*" The standpoint has shifted: Jerusalem's punishment is spoken of as served, the audience is in Babylon, and the message is homecoming. Chapters 40-55 are traditionally called the Book of Consolation, and their register changes too: less courtroom, more lyric; the LORD arguing his case not against Judah now but against the gods of Babylon, and wooing a crushed people back to hope.

The structure of 40:1-11 is a series of voices, like a heavenly liturgy of announcement: a command to comfort (vv. 1-2); a voice crying to build a highway through the wilderness for the LORD's own arrival (vv. 3-5), the road promised in 35:8, now with a construction order; a voice confronting human transience with the durability of God's word (vv. 6-8); and a herald sent up a mountain to shout to the cities of Judah the entire Gospel in two words: "*Behold your God!*" (v. 9). And then verses 10-11 hold together what we always split: he comes *with might*, and "*his arm rules for him*", and he "*will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms.*" Power and tenderness in consecutive verses: the arm that rules is the arm that carries lambs. Note the phrase *his arm* and keep your leader's poker face; it begins appearing regularly from here, and Session 11 depends on letting it accumulate without comment.

Then 40:12-31, one of the summits of the Old Testament: who measured the waters in the hollow of his hand? The nations are a drop from a bucket; the isles are fine dust; Lebanon's forests insufficient for one offering. *"To whom then will you liken God?"* The polemic against idols begins here and runs through chapter 48. And the poem lands, astonishingly, not in abstraction but in pastoral care: the God who names every star (40:26) has not forgotten the exile who feels invisible (40:27); the everlasting Creator does not faint or grow weary, *"and they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles"* (40:31). Cosmology in the service of consolation.

Chapter 41 opens God's courtroom against the idols with a new kind of evidence: prophecy. *"Set forth your case... tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods"* (41:21-23). The LORD points to one already stirred up from the east (41:2, 25), an unnamed conqueror whom most readers identify with the Cyrus the book names three chapters on (44:28; 45:1), and stakes his deity on declaring the future in advance. Amid the courtroom, one of Scripture's most quoted comforts: *"Fear not, for I am with you... I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand"* (41:10). Prepare also for tonight's steelman, which every serious reader deserves to face here: the question of who wrote these chapters.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The comfort answers the covenant curses now served (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28-30 promised exile and return); *"double for all her sins"* uses the language of full legal settlement. The highway resolves 35:8. The grass-and-word contrast (40:6-8) is Psalm 103:15-17 concentrated. The shepherd who gathers lambs is Jacob's God (Genesis 48:15) and David's (Psalm 23), preparing Ezekiel 34's promise that God himself will come and shepherd.

Fulfillment. Isaiah 40:3 is the only Old Testament text that all four evangelists apply to the same man: John the Baptist (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23), and in the fourth Gospel, John applies it to himself: *"I am the voice."* The Baptist's entire self-understanding is one verse of tonight's chapter (CCC 523). Peter quotes 40:6-8 to explain the imperishable seed of the new birth: *"the word of the Lord abides for ever"* (1 Peter 1:24-25). The shepherd of 40:11 finds his fitting fulfillment when Jesus declares *"I am the good shepherd"* (John 10). And when the voice promises that *"the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together"* (40:5), Luke extends the quotation farther than the others precisely to keep the line *"all flesh shall see the salvation of God"* (Luke 3:6): the nations thread, again.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine • *Sermon 293, on John the Baptist*

St. Augustine's Advent sermon turns tonight's discovery into theology: John is the voice, Christ is the Word. A voice sounds for a moment and passes away; the Word it carries abides. John himself said it in his own idiom: he must increase, I must decrease. Every preacher, catechist, and witness since has the same job description: be a voice that spends itself delivering a Word that lasts.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus • *Second Theological Oration*

St. Gregory, preaching on the God no mind can compass, confesses the mathematics Isaiah 40 sings: to conceive God fully is impossible, and to measure him is more impossible still, for the One who weighs mountains in scales is not weighed by minds. Yet this is not agnosticism but adoration: what we cannot comprehend we can still know, love, and trust, which is exactly where Isaiah's

poem lands its exiles.

St. John Paul II • *Inaugural Homily, 1978*

Beginning his pontificate, St. John Paul II gave the modern world the substance of Isaiah 41:10: Be not afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ. He had learned under two totalitarian empires what the exiles learned under Babylon: the command *fear not* is credible only because of the clause that follows it, *for I am with you*. Courage, for the Christian, is not a temperament; it is a conclusion drawn from a Presence.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 523.** St. John the Baptist is the Lord's immediate precursor, sent to prepare his way: the voice crying in the wilderness. The Catechism assigns him tonight's verse as his identity.
- **CCC 300.** God transcends creation and is present to it: the whole paradox of 40:12-31, the star-namer who strengthens the faint, in one article.
- **CCC 239.** God's parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of motherhood. Tonight it is a shepherd gathering lambs against his chest; the maternal image itself arrives in Session 10. Plant nothing; just have the article ready.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS TONIGHT

The highway: resolved. Planted at 35:8, built at 40:3, assigned by all four Gospels to John the Baptist. Let the group make the 35:8 connection themselves before the discovery.

The arm of the LORD: accumulating. 40:10, *his arm rules for him*, and it will recur (48:14; 51:5, 9; 52:10) until the question detonates in Session 11. Do not remind anyone of the sealed guess. Do not linger. If a participant notices the phrase and reacts, smile and move on.

The word that stands. 40:8 becomes a spine for the rest of the study: everything Babylon has is grass. Watch it pay off when the group asks what actually outlasted the empire.

The nations / light: 40:5, all flesh shall see it together. One more station next session (42:6), then 49:6, then 60:1-3.

SESSION GOALS

1. Feel the hinge: from chapter 39's cliffhanger to *Comfort*, and Sirach 48's summary honored.
2. Resolve the highway thread through the fourfold Gospel discovery, and preach Augustine's voice-and-Word.
3. Climb 40:12-31 from cosmology to consolation, ending on 40:27-31 as pastoral theology.
4. Run the authorship steelman at full strength and answer it with honesty, the canonical book, Sirach 48, John 12, and the text's own wager on predictive prophecy.
5. Mark 40:10's phrase without comment, and send everyone home on eagles' wings.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 10 min. Build, 55 min. Send, 10 min. Live It, memory verse, Take-Home, closing prayer, 10 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 7 (chapter 41 courtroom) first; cut the Handel Dig Deeper second. Never cut the fourfold Gospel discovery, the authorship steelman, or 40:27-31.

Comfort My People

Isaiah 40-41 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Comfort your people, Lord, comfort us: speak tenderly to every exile at this table, to every heart serving a sentence, to everyone who suspects their way is hidden from you.

Tonight, lift up our eyes to the One who names the stars, and then let him stoop to carry us like lambs. Renew our strength. Give us the eagle's wings you promised to those who wait.

Through Christ our Lord, the Word who stands forever. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Who in your life has the gift of comforting well, and what do they actually do? What is the difference between comfort and mere cheering up?
2. Where in your life right now are you most tempted to say, with the exiles, “*my way is hidden from the LORD*”: God has lost track of my situation?

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

The Hinge (Isaiah 40:1-2)

1. Last session ended with Babylon in the doorway and exile decreed. Now read Isaiah 40:1-2 aloud. What is God's first word on the far side of the catastrophe, what tone is commanded, and what three things is the herald to cry to Jerusalem?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

“*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.*” Doubled, the way Hebrew underlines. The tone is commanded: “*speak tenderly to Jerusalem*”, literally, speak to her heart, courtship language. And the message: her warfare is ended; her iniquity is pardoned; she has received double, full settlement, for all her sins. Note who still owns whom after all the failure: *my people, your God*. The covenant pronouns survived the exile. Sirach's one-line review from last session, Isaiah “*comforted those who mourned in Zion,*” begins here, on this exact verse. When God's discipline has done its work, his next word is not *I told you so*. It is *comfort*.

The Voice and the Highway (Isaiah 40:3-8)

2. Read 40:3-5. A voice cries for a construction project: what is to be built, where, for whom, and with what promised result? And someone check your margin note from Session 6: where has this road appeared before?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A highway “*in the wilderness... for our God*”: valleys filled, mountains leveled, rough places made plain, a processional road for the LORD's own return to his people, with the result that “*the glory of*

the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.” And yes: this is the Holy Way planted at 35:8, now under construction orders. The stunning part is the direction of travel. Israel expected roads home for exiles; this road is for *God's* arrival. The comfort of chapter 40 is not merely release; it is that God himself is coming. Prepare accordingly.

LIVE DISCOVERY

One verse of tonight's reading is the only Old Testament text that all four evangelists, unanimously, pin on the same man, and in one Gospel the man pins it on himself. Split into four pairs if you can, one per Gospel: Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3, John 1. Find who the voice is. 4 minutes.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:2-3, Luke 3:4-6, John 1:23: all four hand Isaiah 40:3 to John the Baptist, and in the fourth Gospel, John claims it in the first person: *“I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’”* Asked *who are you?*, the greatest man born of woman answers with one verse of Isaiah (CCC 523). His clothing, his desert address, his message, his entire self-understanding: tonight's chapter.

Two treasures to add. First, St. Augustine's Advent insight: John is the *voice*; Christ is the *Word*. A voice sounds for a moment and fades; the Word it delivers abides, which John preached about himself: he must increase, I must decrease. Every witness since has the same vocation: be a voice that spends itself on the Word. Second, notice Luke quotes the longest, on purpose: he runs the citation to *“all flesh shall see the salvation of God”* (Luke 3:6), keeping Isaiah's universal horizon. And underline what the fourfold citation implies about the one whose way John prepared: the highway of 40:3 was built for the arrival of *the LORD*. The Gospels lay that road, and Jesus of Nazareth walks up it.

3. Read 40:6-8. The voice commands *“Cry!”* and the reply is almost despairing: *what shall I cry? All flesh is grass*. How does the oracle answer the despair, and what, according to this verse, is the one durable thing in the world?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The despair is granted, not refuted: grass withers, flowers fade, peoples and empires with them, *“because the breath of the LORD blows upon it.”* But: *“the word of our God will stand for ever.”* One durable item in the inventory of the universe. To exiles staring at Babylon's invincible walls, this is subversive comfort: the empire is grass; the promise is granite. Peter quotes these verses to the newly baptized (1 Peter 1:24-25) to tell them what they have been born again *from* and *into*: perishable seed versus the living and abiding word of God. Ask the room: which grass in your life are you currently mistaking for granite?

Behold Your God (Isaiah 40:9-11)

4. Read 40:9-11. The herald's whole sermon is two words: *“Behold your God!”* Then verses 10 and 11 describe the God to be beheld, and they seem to describe two different Gods. Read them side by side. What do you notice?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Verse 10: he comes *with might*, and *“his arm rules for him”*; reward and recompense in hand, a warrior's arrival. Verse 11: *“he will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”* Not two Gods: one. The arm that rules is the arm that carries lambs. Power without tenderness is tyranny; tenderness without power is mere sympathy; the God of the exiles is strong enough to matter and gentle enough to be trusted with the weak. Keep your eye, by the way, on that phrase in verse 10, *his arm*; Isaiah is fond of it, and it will keep us company for the rest of the book. Say no more than that.

Lift Up Your Eyes (Isaiah 40:12-31)

5. Skim 40:12-26 with pencil ready, and collect the measurements: what is measured in what, and what do the nations amount to on God's scales? Then read verse 26 aloud. Where does the telescope suddenly point, and what is the last clause?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Waters in the hollow of his hand; heavens marked off with a span; earth's dust in a measure; mountains weighed in scales. The nations: *“a drop from a bucket... as the dust on the scales”*; Lebanon's whole forest insufficient fuel for one worthy offering. St. Gregory of Nazianzus draws the right conclusion: the One who weighs mountains is not weighed by minds; we adore what we cannot measure (CCC 300). Then verse 26: *“Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name.”* Every star, named. And the last clause: *“not one is missing.”* Hold that clause; the next verse is about to need it.

6. Now read 40:27-31 aloud, slowly; this is where the whole cosmic poem was headed. What is Jacob's complaint in verse 27, how do verses 28-29 answer it, and who exactly gets the eagle's wings in verses 30-31?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The complaint, straight from the exile's heart and probably from several hearts at your table: *“My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God.”* God has lost my file. The answer is the poem you just climbed: have you not known? The everlasting Creator *“does not faint or grow weary”*, your case has not exhausted him, *“his understanding is unsearchable”*, your situation has not confused him, and he *“gives power to the faint.”* The star-counter of verse 26, from whom *not one is missing*, has not lost track of you. That is why the cosmology was pastoral all along: only a God that big is safe to lean on that hard.

And the wings, verses 30-31: not to the strong, *“even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted”*, a verse with a young adult group's name on it, but to *“they who wait for the LORD.”* Waiting, in Isaiah, is not passivity; it is 30:15 again, trust with its weight down. And notice the descending order of the promise: mount up with wings, run and not be weary, walk and not faint. Sometimes grace is soaring; most days grace is walking without quitting. The promise covers the whole range.

DIG DEEPER • Handel Was Paying Attention

In 1741 George Frideric Handel opened his *Messiah* with a tenor singing tonight's first words:

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people. Nearly the whole first part of the oratorio is Isaiah: the voice in the wilderness, every valley exalted, the glory of the LORD revealed, behold a virgin shall conceive, for unto us a child is born, he shall feed his flock like a shepherd. Handel and his librettist read Isaiah exactly as your group has been reading him: as the Gospel's overture. If you want a week's soundtrack for this study, it has existed for almost three centuries.

7. (Optional, first cut for time.) Read Isaiah 41:21-24 and 41:10. In God's courtroom against the idols, what evidence does he demand of them, what evidence does he offer for himself, and what is the verse-10 comfort doing in the middle of a trial?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The demanded evidence: *"tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods."* Predict something. The idols' silence is the verdict: *"Behold, you are nothing."* God's own exhibit is prophecy: he declares the end from the beginning, and has already stirred up a conqueror from the east (41:2, 25), the figure most readers identify with the Cyrus the book shortly names, a century and a half early. Keep that wager in mind; it matters for tonight's steelman. And 41:10 sits in the middle of the trial because the exiles are not spectators of the case but its beneficiaries: *"Fear not, for I am with you... I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."* St. John Paul II, who learned it under two empires, gave it to the whole modern world: be not afraid. The command is credible only because of its clause: *for I am with you.*

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

Every serious reader of Isaiah meets this question, and your group deserves to meet it here rather than from a skeptic later. Build it at full strength:

Chapters 40-66 were not written by Isaiah of Jerusalem. The evidence: the standpoint has silently jumped 150 years; Jerusalem's fall is past tense, the audience lives in Babylon, and the return is imminent, all without a word of *this is about the far future*. The style and vocabulary shift markedly. Above all, Cyrus of Persia is named, twice, before he is born (44:28; 45:1), and prophets elsewhere address their own generations. Therefore, the argument runs, these chapters were written during the exile by an anonymous prophet (call him Second Isaiah), the *predictions* of Cyrus were written as he was conquering, and Christians who claim Isaiah foresaw the future are reading a stitched-together book naively. Most modern scholars, including many Catholics, hold some form of this view.

State it fairly; it is not a fringe position. Then work the next question honestly.

8. Now sort the question like adults of the Church: (a) what has the Catholic Church actually defined about Isaiah's authorship; (b) what is non-negotiable for Catholics whichever way the scholarship falls; (c) what did we learn from Sirach 48 last session, and what does John 12:38-41 do that bears on the book's unity; (d) what happens to the *skeptical* version of the argument if you grant its premise about prophecy?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

(a) The Church has defined nothing about how many human hands produced the book of Isaiah. Faithful Catholic scholars hold single authorship, and faithful Catholic scholars hold that disciples of Isaiah, a school bearing his spirit, extended his scroll under inspiration, the way Jeremiah

worked through Baruch's pen. Both are permitted; neither is dogma. (The early Pontifical Biblical Commission urged caution against denying substantial Isaian authorship; later magisterial guidance clarified the standing of those responses, and Catholic scholars today hold both views in good standing.) What the Church canonized, and what sits in your hands, is the finished book of Isaiah: one scroll, one canonical voice. It has always been one book: the great Isaiah scroll found at Qumran, copied before Christ, preserves all sixty-six chapters as one continuous scroll.

(b) Non-negotiable: the book is inspired, all sixty-six chapters, whoever held the pen; it is true; and God can genuinely declare the future, which is not a concession we make awkwardly but the chapter's own thesis. Also non-negotiable: intellectual honesty. Do not tell your skeptical friend the question is wicked; tell them where the faith actually rests, which is not on a theory of composition.

(c) Sirach 48:24-25, which the group found last session, is pre-Christian testimony to the book's canonical reception as Isaiah's: Isaiah of the Hezekiah story is the one who *comforted those who mourned in Zion* and revealed what was to come. And John 12:38-41 quotes chapter 53 and chapter 6 back to back, attributing both to *Isaiah*, and says Isaiah *saw his glory*: the New Testament reads one prophetic witness across both halves. The canonical unity the Church stakes everything on is older than the modern debate and untouched by it: the same threads your group has been tracking, the Holy One of Israel, Zion, the light, the arm, run through the whole scroll like a signature.

(d) And here is the move worth savoring: the skeptical version, the one that *rules out* real prediction and therefore must late-date the Cyrus oracles, does not defeat the book's argument; it refuses to hear it. Chapters 41-48 stake God's deity precisely on declaring things before they happen: *tell us what is to come, that we may know you are gods*. To decide in advance that prediction is impossible is not a finding of scholarship but a premise of philosophy, and a Christian, who believes God raised Jesus from the dead, has no reason to grant it. And be fair to the scholars: many who hold exilic composition argue from language, setting, and genre, not from that premise; with them the disagreement is literary, not theological, and point (a) already gave their position its room. So hold the two things together calmly: the human authorship question is open, interesting, and undefined; the divine authorship is not. Read on with both eyes open and no fear whatsoever.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. God's first word to his failed people was *comfort*, spoken tenderly. Whose exile are you positioned to speak into this month, someone sitting in the consequences of their own choices, half-convinced God is done with them? What would speaking to the heart, rather than to the case file, sound like?
2. Verse 31 promises renewed strength to those who *wait* for the LORD, and waiting is the one thing our generation has organized its entire life to avoid. Where is God currently asking you to wait, and what would waiting *actively*, trust with its weight down, look like there this week?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pray Isaiah 40:1-11 once this week as an Advent of the heart: read it aloud, slowly, and at *Behold your God*, stop and behold.
- Find the youngest, strongest verse-30 person you know who is currently fainting, and be the comfort chapter for them: one message, one coffee, one tenderly spoken word this week.

- Memorize 40:31 and deploy it at the exact moment of your week you usually hit empty. Note what actually happens.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

Isaiah 40:31 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Everlasting God, Creator of the ends of the earth: you do not faint, you do not grow weary, and not one star is missing from your count. Neither are we.

Comfort your people. Level every mountain between our hearts and your arrival. And to everyone at this table who is done, give what you promised: wings for the soaring days, endurance for the running days, and for the ordinary walking days, the grace not to faint.

Through Christ our Lord, the Word who stands forever. Amen.

Before next session: read Isaiah 42:1-9 and 45:1-7. Watch for a job posting (verse 1 of chapter 42) and a very surprising hire (verse 1 of chapter 45).

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 40:1-2 (comfort; speak tenderly; the hinge)
- Isaiah 40:3-5 (the voice; the highway; glory revealed to all flesh)
- Isaiah 40:6-8 (all flesh is grass; the word stands forever)
- Isaiah 40:9-11 (behold your God; the arm that rules, the arms that carry)
- Isaiah 40:12-26 (the incomparability poem; stars called by name)
- Isaiah 40:27-31 (my way is hidden; wings like eagles)
- Isaiah 41:2, 10, 21-25 (the courtroom; fear not; the one from the east; optional)

Live Discovery Target

- Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23 (the fourfold voice; John's self-identification)

Supporting Passages

- Isaiah 35:8 (the highway planted; Session 6 cross-reference)
- Sirach 48:24-25 (Isaiah comforted Zion's mourners; Session 7 handshake)
- 1 Peter 1:24-25 (grass and the abiding word quoted)
- John 10:11-16 (the good shepherd); Ezekiel 34:11-16 (God himself will shepherd)
- Psalm 103:15-17 (grass and steadfast love; roots)
- John 12:38-41 (chapters 53 and 6 both cited as Isaiah; steelman)
- Isaiah 44:28; 45:1 (Cyrus named; steelman, previewed only)

Catechism

- CCC 523 (John the Baptist: the voice of one crying)
- CCC 300 (God transcends creation and is present to it)
- CCC 239 (parental and maternal tenderness; held in reserve for Session 10)

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 40:31 (RSV2CE)

Behold My Servant

Isaiah 42-45 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

Participants meet the Servant: God's job posting in 42:1-9 for one who will bring justice to the nations without shouting, without breaking a bruised reed, and they discover Matthew quoting the posting's opening lines (42:1-4) over Jesus. They hear the most tender chapter in the book, 43, spoken over exiles and over themselves: called by name, carried through waters, precious, honored, loved. They laugh at the idol-carpenter of 44, meet the most surprising hire in Scripture, Cyrus the anointed pagan, in 45, and then discover Paul doing the unthinkable: taking the fiercest monotheistic oath in the Old Testament, every knee shall bow, and placing Jesus at its center.

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

The divinity of Christ, confessed from inside Israel's strictest monotheism, and the dignity of the baptized: called by name through the waters, as the Church's font-typology hears these chapters (CCC 1220-1221). Also the Catechism's doctrine that the Messiah's identity is revealed above all in the Servant Songs (CCC 713), the trail your group begins walking tonight.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Tonight the study's most important character walks on stage. Isaiah 42:1-9 is the first of four passages scholars call the Servant Songs (42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). Read the opening as what it is, a royal presentation: *"Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him."* The Catechism says plainly that the Messiah's characteristics are revealed *above all* in these songs (CCC 713), so handle them as the treasure they are. Tonight's song gives the Servant's job description: he will bring forth justice to the nations, and his method is the strangest in the history of power: *"He will not cry or lift up his voice... a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench."* No shouting, no propaganda, no trampling of the almost-broken. And his commission widens with a phrase your group has been tracking since 2:5: God gives him *"as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind"* (42:6-7).

Now the puzzle you must set carefully and refuse to solve: who is the Servant? Because Isaiah seems to answer it, twice, in these very chapters: *"But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen"* (41:8); *"Hear now, O Jacob my servant"* (44:1). Israel is the servant. And yet the servant of the songs has Israel's job description turned toward Israel itself, and next session the tension becomes explicit. Tonight, plant the question honestly, let 41:8 and 44:1 be read aloud, and keep your leader's poker face. The sealed guesses come out in two sessions; everything between now and then should feel like evidence accumulating.

Chapter 43 is the most tender sustained passage in the book and should be read slowly and personally: *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the*

waters I will be with you” (43:1-2), and the sentence exiled Israel had stopped believing anyone could say about them: “*Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you*” (43:4). The Church’s baptismal typology naturally gathers these waters (CCC 1220-1221 read the water-crossings as baptism prefigured); let the group hear it too, but let them hear it first as what it was: love declared over people who had earned the exile they were sitting in. Add 43:25, a verse to bank for Session 11: “*I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake.*” Forgiving sins belongs properly to God, stated in the divine first person; the scribes of Mark 2:7 were voicing that same biblical conviction when they asked who can forgive sins but God alone. The question is what follows when Jesus does it.

Chapter 44 contains the Bible’s funniest sustained satire: the carpenter who cuts a log, burns half to roast his dinner and warm himself, “*and the rest of it he makes into a god*” (44:16-17). Read it for the comedy and then turn the blade: our idols are less obviously ridiculous only because we do not see ourselves kneeling. Then the hire no one saw coming: “*Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus*” (45:1), *his anointed*, Hebrew *mashiach*, a pagan emperor given the messiah-word, called “*my shepherd*” (44:28), grasped by the right hand to set exiles free, “*though you do not know me*” (45:4). God’s providence employs people who do not know him; history’s Auditor signs paychecks in every currency. And the chapter that starts with a pagan messiah ends at the widest horizon in the Old Testament: “*Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!... To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear*” (45:22-23), sworn by God’s own life, in the chapter that repeats *I am the LORD, and there is no other* like a drumbeat. Hold the group on that verse; the discovery that follows it is the summit of the night.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The Servant’s presentation formula (*behold... my chosen... my Spirit upon him*) gathers the anointings of Israel’s story: the Spirit rushing on David (1 Samuel 16:13), the shoot of 11:1-2 on whom the Spirit rests. The waters of 43:2 are the Red Sea and the Jordan remembered forward. Cyrus as shepherd stands in the line of God wielding Assyria as an axe (10:15): pagan powers as instruments, now for restoration rather than judgment; Ezra 1:1-4 records Cyrus doing exactly what 44:28 said, decreeing the return and the temple’s rebuilding.

Fulfillment. Matthew 12:15-21 quotes the opening of tonight’s Servant Song, Isaiah 42:1-4, the longest formal Old Testament quotation in his Gospel, over Jesus healing crowds and ordering silence: the unshouting Servant, identified by name. At the Jordan the Father speaks the song’s opening over Jesus, “*my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*” (Matthew 3:17), fused with Psalm 2. Mark 2:5-12 shows Jesus exercising 43:25’s divine prerogative and proving it with a healing. And Philipians 2:9-11 performs the boldest citation in the New Testament: the oath of Isaiah 45:23 with the name of Jesus installed at its center, “*that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (CCC 449).

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thérèse of Lisieux • *Story of a Soul*

The bruised reed finds a natural Doctor in St. Thérèse. Read Isaiah 42 alongside *Story of a Soul* and the resonance is immediate; her little way breathes the Servant’s method: God does not break what is bent or snuff what barely burns; he stoops to weakness, and it is precisely our littleness, offered with confidence, that draws down his mercy. Souls afraid they are too damaged for God have, on

the authority of Isaiah 42, exactly the qualifications the Servant is looking for.

St. Hilary of Poitiers • *On the Trinity*

Defending Christ's divinity against the Arians, St. Hilary insists that Scripture's monotheism is not embarrassed by the Son but expressed in him: the honors, prerogatives, and worship that Isaiah reserves for God alone are, in the Gospel, rendered to Jesus without any protest from heaven, because the Son is not a second god beside the LORD but the LORD's own eternal Son, true God from true God. Read with him, Philippians 2 is not an exception to Isaiah 45 but its unveiling.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem • *Catechetical Lectures*

Preparing candidates for baptism, St. Cyril taught them to hear Israel's water-crossings, the Red Sea above all, as their own biography in advance: the water that drowned the tyrant and carried Israel out is the water they were about to enter. Set Isaiah 43 beside that catechesis and the promise becomes personal in the font: *when you pass through the waters I will be with you*; called by name, claimed as his, brought through the water into freedom.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 713-714.** The Messiah's characteristics are revealed above all in the Servant Songs: he will pour out the Spirit not by speaking but by giving himself, taking the form of a slave. The Catechism hands you tonight's hermeneutic in advance.
- **CCC 449.** By attributing to Jesus the divine title *Lord*, the first confessions of faith affirm from the beginning that the power, honor, and glory due to God the Father are due also to Jesus. Philippians 2 is the Catechism's own exhibit.
- **CCC 2112-2113.** Idolatry is not only false pagan worship; it consists in divinizing what is not God: power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money. The carpenter of Isaiah 44 has modern franchises.
- **CCC 1220-1221.** The Church reads Israel's passages through water as prefigurations of baptism; hearing Isaiah 43:1-2 there is this study's application of that typology. The promise belongs to every baptized person by name.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS TONIGHT

The Servant: the puzzle set. Israel is named the servant (41:8; 44:1); the Servant of the song has a mission that will turn toward Israel. Plant both facts, resolve nothing, and do not say the word *guess*.

Light to the nations: 42:6, the thread's third station (2:5; 9:2; now 42:6). One more major station next session, then the sunrise in Session 13's reading.

The arm: it recurs at 48:14 in this stretch. If anyone notices, nod and move on.

Forgiveness as divine prerogative (43:25): bank it. It returns when a Servant bears sins, and when a Galilean forgives them.

SESSION GOALS

1. Present the first Servant Song as royal presentation and job description, and discover Matthew 12's full quotation.
2. Set the Servant puzzle honestly with 41:8 and 44:1 on the table, resolving nothing.
3. Let 43:1-7 be heard personally and baptismally, and bank 43:25.
4. Run the idol satire of 44 for laughter and conviction, with CCC 2113's modern inventory.
5. Meet Cyrus the anointed pagan and articulate providence working through those who do not know God.
6. Discover Philippians 2:10-11 quoting Isaiah 45:23, run the unitarian steelman at full strength, and confess the divinity of Christ from inside monotheism.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 10 min. Build, 55 min. Send, 10 min. Live It, memory verse, Take-Home, closing prayer, 10 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 6 (Cyrus detail and the Cylinder Dig Deeper) first; compress Question 5 (the idol satire) second. Never cut the Servant Song, the 43 reading, or the Philippians 2 discovery and steelman.

Behold My Servant

Isaiah 42-45 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, you have called us by name, and we are yours. Through every water we have passed, you were in it with us.

Tonight you present your Servant. Give us eyes to study him: the quiet voice, the hands that will not break the bruised, the light kindled for every nation. Teach us his method, and make us unafraid of his identity.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Think of the gentlest strong person you have ever known, someone with real power who never used it to crush. What made them safe to be weak around?
2. Fill in the blank honestly, no theology required yet: right now I feel like a bruised ____ or a dimly burning ____ in the area of my life where ____.

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

The Job Posting (Isaiah 42:1-9)

1. Read Isaiah 42:1-4 aloud, twice. This is a royal presentation: God introducing someone to the court of heaven and earth. Collect the details: what is the Servant given, what is his task, and, most carefully, what is his *method*, stated three times in negatives?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Given: God's upholding, God's choosing, God's delight, and God's Spirit put upon him, the group met that resting Spirit in Session 4 at the Jordan. The task, repeated three times in four verses: to bring forth *justice*, *mishpat*, the very thing the vineyard failed to yield in Session 1, and to bring it *to the nations*, and not to quit until it is established in all the earth.

The method, in negatives: he will not cry aloud or lift up his voice in the street, no shouting campaign, no propaganda machine; "*a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench*", the almost-broken and the barely-burning are precisely the ones he refuses to write off; and "*he will not fail or be discouraged*", gentleness with infinite stamina. Every empire the exiles had ever seen brought its justice by breaking reeds. God's Servant conquers the world without raising his voice. St. Thérèse's little way lives by this method: if you are bruised and dim, you are not disqualified; you are his specialty.

2. Read 42:5-9. The Creator himself commissions the Servant with two phrases in verse 6 that name what he *is*, not just what he does. What are they, and which one have we been tracking since Session 1?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations." Not merely a covenant messenger: the covenant in person; not a lamp-carrier: the light itself. And *light to the nations* is our oldest thread at its third station: *walk in the light of the LORD* (2:5), the great light on Galilee (9:2), and now light with a worldwide address, opening blind eyes and freeing prisoners from dungeons (42:7). Whoever this Servant is, in him God's covenant and the nations' illumination are a *person*. Say it and move on; the identity question is about to get properly complicated.

LIVE DISCOVERY

One evangelist quotes the opening of tonight's job posting in full, Isaiah 42:1-4, the longest Old Testament quotation in his whole Gospel, and hangs it on a specific behavior of Jesus that puzzled everyone: after healing crowds, he ordered people not to make him known. Find the scene and the quotation in Matthew 12. Pairs, 3-4 minutes.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Matthew 12:15-21. Jesus heals *all* who followed, then orders silence, and Matthew explains the strange publicity policy by unrolling Isaiah 42:1-4 in full: *"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen... He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will any one hear his voice in the streets; he will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick."* The no-shouting clause explains the no-publicity order: the Servant's method is constitutionally allergic to the machinery of fame. And the Father had already spoken the song's first line over him at the Jordan: *"my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:17). The Catechism says the Messiah's identity is revealed *above all* in these songs (CCC 713); Matthew evidently agreed, and tonight your group has begun the same dossier.

3. Now the complication, and it needs to be read aloud from your own Bibles: Isaiah 41:8 and 44:1. Who does God explicitly call *"my servant"* in these verses? Sit with the difficulty honestly: what tension does this create with the Servant of the song, and, for now, what should we do with it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Israel. *"But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen"* (41:8); *"Hear now, O Jacob my servant"* (44:1). The nation itself carries the title, which was always Israel's vocation: to be God's servant-people, light for the world. And yet the Servant of the song is presented with a mission of world-justice and prisoner-release that battered, exiled Israel is in no condition to perform, and the coming songs will sharpen the problem considerably. So the honest state of the evidence tonight: the Servant is Israel; and the Servant seems to be more than Israel. Do not resolve it. Write the tension in your margin, keep reading, and let Isaiah build his case. The study will open this question formally soon enough.

Called by Name (Isaiah 43:1-7, 25)

4. Read Isaiah 43:1-4 aloud slowly, and then have someone read it a second time replacing *Jacob* and *Israel* with their own name. What does God declare over exiles who fully earned their exile, and what, in verse 2, is the actual promise about waters and fire?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The declarations: I created you; I formed you; *“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”* And verse 4, the sentence the exiles had stopped believing was sayable about them: *“Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you.”* Notice the tense and the audience: this is not spoken to Israel at her best; it is spoken into the middle of the punishment. God’s love is not the wage of our performance; it is the ground under our repentance, the same prevenient grace the group met at 1:18.

And verse 2 promises presence, not exemption: *when* you pass through the waters, not *if*, *“I will be with you.”* The waters come; the promise is company and preservation through them, Red Sea and Jordan remembered forward. The Church’s font-typology belongs here (CCC 1220-1221 read the water-crossings as baptism prefigured), and St. Cyril of Jerusalem taught his catechumens to read Israel’s crossings as their own biography in advance: at your baptism, you were called by name, through water, and claimed: *you are mine*. If anyone at the table does not know the date of their baptism, finding it out is this week’s homework; it is the date this verse became yours by name.

5. Read Isaiah 43:25. Who forgives sins, on whose account, and why bank this verse? (Keep Mark 2:5-12 in your pocket.)

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

“I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.” The doubled *I* is emphatic: forgiving sins belongs properly to God alone, exercised for his own name’s sake. Which means the scribes in Mark 2:7, *“Who can forgive sins but God alone?”*, were not being legalistic; they were voicing the very conviction Isaiah 43:25 puts in God’s own mouth. The scandal is what happens next in that room in Capernaum: a Galilean rabbi says *“your sins are forgiven”* and heals a paralytic to prove the sentence stuck. Bank tonight’s verse; it is one of the quiet hinges on which the identity of Jesus, and of Isaiah’s Servant, will turn.

The Carpenter and the Emperor (Isaiah 44:9-20; 44:28-45:7)

6. Read Isaiah 44:13-17, and permit yourselves to laugh; the prophet intends it. Walk through the carpenter’s day: what does he do with the two halves of the same log, and what is the one question verse 19 says he never asks? Then turn the blade with CCC 2113: what are the respectable modern franchises of this workshop?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He cuts a cedar he watered and grew; burns half to bake bread and roast meat, *“Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!”*; *“and the rest of it he makes into a god”* and falls down to it: *“Deliver me, for thou art my god!”* The unasked question, verse 19: no one stops to say, half of this I burned for dinner, *“shall I fall down before a block of wood?”* Idolatry survives on never doing that arithmetic.

Then the blade: the Catechism refuses to let this stay a museum piece. Idolatry consists in divinizing what is not God, and it lists the franchises: power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money (CCC 2113). Our idols are less funny only because we do not see the kneeling: the account balance consulted like an oracle, the career fed like an altar fire, the phone checked with more constancy than any monk’s office. The carpenter’s test still works and still stings: identify the thing you made, or bought, or built, from which you are asking what only God can give. Half of it is already ash; the arithmetic has simply not been done.

7. (Optional, first cut for time.) Read Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1-7. What titles does God give Cyrus, why is one of them shocking, and what does 45:4-5 twice say about Cyrus's own knowledge of God? What doctrine of providence follows?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

"My shepherd" (44:28), David's own title, and "his anointed" (45:1), Hebrew *mashiach*, the messiah-word, hung on a Persian emperor. God grasps Cyrus's right hand, opens doors before him, names him by name, "though you do not know me", said twice (45:4-5). And Cyrus performed the assignment: his decree sent the exiles home and rebuilt the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). The doctrine: providence is not confined to the people who pray. God can steer an empire through a man who does not know him, for the sake of a people that emperor barely notices, and history's Auditor, whom we met holding Assyria as an axe, also holds liberators. It should make us slower to despair of secular powers and quicker to notice God's left-handed instruments. It should also recalibrate the word *anointed*: Israel now knows the category can surprise you.

DIG DEEPER • The Cyrus Cylinder

In 1879, archaeologists at Babylon unearthed a clay barrel inscribed with Cyrus's own proclamation after taking the city in 539 BC. On it, Cyrus boasts of returning displaced peoples to their homelands and restoring their sanctuaries and their gods' worship, empire-wide policy, from his own mouth, on his own clay. It is the same empire-wide policy under which Ezra 1 records Judah's own decree, go home, rebuild the house of your God; the Cylinder names other peoples, not Judah, and stands as broad corroborating context. The cylinder sits in the British Museum a few rooms from Sennacherib's prism: two emperors, one who besieged God's city and one who sent God's people home, both filed as exhibits in the case Isaiah 41 announced: ask history who declared these things beforehand.

Every Knee (Isaiah 45:22-23)

8. Read Isaiah 45:22-23 aloud, and read around it: verses 5, 6, 14, 18, 21 keep repeating one claim like a drumbeat. What is the claim, what does God swear by in verse 23, and exactly what does he swear?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The drumbeat: "*I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no God.*" Five times and more in one chapter: the fiercest monotheism in Scripture. Then the oath: God swears *by himself*, there being nothing higher, a word that "*shall not return*": "*To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.*" Universal homage, to the LORD alone, sworn on the divine life. In its own context this is the exclusion of every rival: no idol, no emperor, not even anointed Cyrus, gets the knee. Whatever receives that bow is God, and nothing else may receive it. Hold the verse exactly that tightly; you are about to watch an apostle handle it.

LIVE DISCOVERY

A Pharisee trained under Gamaliel, a man who could recite tonight's chapter from memory, quotes this exact oath in a letter, and does something with it that would be blasphemy if it were not revelation. Find it in Philippians 2, in the hymn near the start of the chapter. Read verses 5-11 and watch for Isaiah's words. Pairs, 3-4 minutes.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Philippians 2:9-11: God has highly exalted Jesus and “bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Every knee, every tongue: Isaiah 45:23, quoted by a strict monotheist, with Jesus installed at the center of the oath God swore by his own life. Paul has taken the most rival-excluding text in the Old Testament and identified Jesus inside it, not as a second god beside the LORD, but as the bearer of “the name above every name”, the Name the Church has always heard as the divine Name itself, so that confessing *Jesus is Lord* is precisely how “the glory of God the Father” is served, not rivaled (CCC 449).

And notice what the hymn says this exaltation crowned: one who “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant... obedient unto death.” The form of a *servant*. Paul is reading the same book you are, and he has connected the Servant of the songs to the LORD of the oath. The Catechism observes the same fusion: the Messiah of the Servant Songs pours out the Spirit not by speaking but by giving himself, taking the form of a slave (CCC 713-714). Keep your composure, leaders; the group is holding live cable.

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

Now the objection, and it is made today by Jehovah's Witnesses and unitarians, and pressed on different grounds by Jewish readers who take Isaiah 45 with total seriousness. Build it strong:

Isaiah 45 itself forbids what Christians do with Jesus. *I am the LORD, and there is no other.* And Isaiah 42:8, from tonight's own reading: “*I am the LORD... my glory I give to no other.*” Nothing could be plainer. So when Philippians says every knee bows to Jesus, read the last clause: *to the glory of God the Father*. Jesus is God's supremely exalted *agent*, honored the way a king's viceroy is honored, for the king's glory; the bowing terminates in the Father. To worship the man Jesus as the LORD himself is to do exactly what Isaiah 45 anathematizes: give God's glory to another. Christians did not discover the Trinity in these texts; they read it into them centuries later.

Give it full voice. Then work the next question.

9. Answer from the texts on the table: (a) what, precisely, does Philippians say was bestowed on Jesus, and what does “the name above every name” have to be; (b) does the viceroy reading survive Isaiah 42:8 and 48:11, or collide with it; (c) what does John 17:5 report Jesus asking for, and how does 1 Corinthians 8:6 handle the Shema; (d) what dilemma did the first Christians, fierce Jewish monotheists, actually face?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

(a) Not a promotion but *the name which is above every name*. In Isaiah 45's world there is exactly one name above every name, the Name God swears by, the LORD's own. Paul then applies to Jesus the LORD-formula of the oath (every knee, every tongue) and crowns it with the confession *Jesus Christ is Lord*, *Kyrios*, the very word Paul's Greek Bible uses to render the divine Name throughout Isaiah 45. The hymn does not say Jesus is honored *like* God; it places him, in the Church's confession, at the divine center.

(b) The viceroy reading collides head-on with the verses the objection itself cites. “*My glory I give to no other*” (42:8); “*My glory I will not give to another*” (48:11). If Jesus were an exalted creature,

however supreme, then heaven ordaining that every knee bow at his name would be God doing the one thing God swore never to do. The objection proves too much: it convicts the Father. The reading that keeps Isaiah's oath intact, the Church confesses, is that the Son is not *another*: not a second god, not a creature, but the LORD's own eternal Son, within the one divine life, which is exactly St. Hilary's answer to the Arians: Read with him, Philippians 2 is not an exception to Isaiah 45 but its unveiling. And *to the glory of God the Father* is the signature of that reading, not the viceroy's: within God, the Son's worship glorifies the Father; there is no rivalry to manage.

(c) John 17:5: Jesus asks to be glorified "*with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made*", glory possessed, not glory aspired to; the exaltation of Philippians 2 returns him to what the self-emptying veiled. And 1 Corinthians 8:6 shows Paul doing it deliberately: he takes the Shema, *the LORD our God, the LORD is one*, and distributes its words: "*one God, the Father... and one Lord, Jesus Christ*," placing Jesus inside Israel's foundational confession of the one God, not beside it.

(d) The dilemma the first Christians faced, and it is the pastoral close: they were Jews of Isaiah's own school, people who would die, and did die, rather than burn one pinch of incense to a divine Caesar. And within living memory of the crucifixion, these fierce monotheists were singing hymns to Christ, baptizing into his name, and praying to him. Either the strictest monotheists in history committed, en masse, the exact idolatry their scriptures scream against, or something had been revealed: that the one God of Isaiah 45 has eternally within himself a Son, and every knee that bows to Jesus is doing what Isaiah swore all knees would do, bowing to the LORD. No middle option survives contact with both texts comfortably, and tonight's group now knows the texts well enough to see why.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. The Servant's method: no shouting, no breaking bruised reeds, no snuffing dim wicks, and no discouragement. Which bruised reed in your life have you been handling like an empire instead of like the Servant, and what would his method look like there this week?
2. Do the carpenter's arithmetic on yourself, gently but honestly: name one made or bought or built thing from which you are currently asking what only God can give. What is one concrete step to take that request back to its rightful Address?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Find out the date of your baptism this week, ask your parents, call the parish, and once you have it, read Isaiah 43:1-4 aloud with your own name in it, on principle, every year on that date, starting now.
- Practice the Servant's method once deliberately: choose the most bruised person in your week and refuse, for one whole conversation, to fix, correct, or advise. Just do not break the reed. Watch what happens.
- Pray the Philippians hymn (2:5-11) slowly once this week, kneeling at verse 10, because the text says knees, and yours is one of them.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”

Isaiah 43:1 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Father, you have shown us your Servant: quiet as dawn, gentle with the bruised, unbreakable in purpose, light for every nation.

We do the arithmetic tonight: everything else we have knelt to is half ash already. So we bring the knee where the oath says it belongs: at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Call us by our names, Lord. We are yours. Amen.

Before next session: read Isaiah 49:1-7 and 50:4-9. The Servant is going to speak in the first person, and something is going to start going wrong for him. Read closely.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 42:1-4 (the first Servant Song: presentation, task, method)
- Isaiah 42:5-9 (covenant to the people, light to the nations; my glory I give to no other)
- Isaiah 41:8; 44:1 (Israel named the servant; the puzzle set)
- Isaiah 43:1-7 (called by name; through the waters; precious, honored, loved)
- Isaiah 43:25 (I, I am He who blots out; banked for later)
- Isaiah 44:9-20 (the idol-maker satire; vv. 13-17, 19 read aloud)
- Isaiah 44:28-45:7 (Cyrus: shepherd, anointed, though you do not know me; optional)
- Isaiah 45:22-23 (turn to me, all the ends of the earth; the oath: every knee, every tongue)

Live Discovery Targets

- Matthew 12:15-21 (the first Song's opening, 42:1-4, quoted in full over Jesus)
- Philippians 2:5-11 (the oath of 45:23 with Jesus at its center)

Supporting Passages

- Matthew 3:17 (the Father speaks the Song's opening at the Jordan)
- Mark 2:5-12 (Jesus exercises 43:25's prerogative)
- Ezra 1:1-4 (Cyrus's decree; with the Cyrus Cylinder, Dig Deeper)
- Isaiah 42:8; 48:11 (my glory I give to no other; steelman core)
- John 17:5 (the glory I had before the world); 1 Corinthians 8:6 (the Shema distributed)
- 1 Samuel 16:13; Isaiah 11:2 (the Spirit on David and the shoot; roots)

Catechism

- CCC 713-714 (the Messiah revealed above all in the Servant Songs)
- CCC 449 (the divine title Lord given to Jesus)
- CCC 2112-2113 (idolatry's modern franchises)
- CCC 1220-1221 (water crossings prefigure baptism)

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 43:1 (RSV2CE)

A Light to the Nations

Isaiah 46-50 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

Participants weigh two kinds of gods: the ones you carry and the One who carries you (46). They hear the Servant speak in the first person for the first time (49): called from the womb, named Israel, and yet sent to Israel, the puzzle at maximum tension, and they discover Simeon and Paul both claiming the Servant's light-to-the-nations line. They receive the most maternal verse in Scripture (49:15-16), and then watch the Servant's story darken: in the third Song (50:4-9) he is beaten, spat upon, and sets his face like flint. The session ends on the edge of a cliff, one week before the sealed guesses open.

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

The maternal tenderness of God (CCC 239) and the Church's share in the Servant's mission: when Paul and Barnabas quote 49:6 as *their* commission, the light to the nations becomes the baptized Church's job description, shared according to each vocation. Tonight is also the session that teaches young adults what vocation feels like from the inside: called from the womb, tempted to say *I have labored in vain*, and answered with a bigger assignment.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Chapter 46 opens with a scene the exiles could watch from their windows: Babylon's high gods, Bel and Nebo, loaded onto ox-carts in procession, *"these things you carry are loaded as burdens on weary beasts"* (46:1). The satire has a hinge: *"Hearken to me... who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am He, and to gray hairs I will carry you"* (46:3-4). Two religions, permanently distinguished: gods you must carry, and the God who carries you. Every idol eventually rides on its worshiper's back; the LORD puts his worshipers on his. Chapter 47 sings Babylon's funeral in advance, and chapter 48 closes the Cyrus cycle with God's bracing honesty about why he saves: *"For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it... My glory I will not give to another"* (48:11), and with a command that turns the exile inside out: *"Go forth from Babylon... declare this... The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!"* (48:20). One oddity worth a light touch: in 48:16 the speaker says *"And now the Lord GOD has sent me and his Spirit."* Sender, sent one, and Spirit in a single verse; Christian readers have long heard a whisper there of what Pentecost would make audible. Offer it as a whisper, hedged, not a proof.

Then the second Servant Song, 49:1-7, and the voice changes: the Servant himself speaks. Inventory his testimony carefully, because every clause matters for what is coming. Called from the womb, named while still inside his mother (49:1), a vocation older than his choices. Made a polished arrow, hidden in God's quiver (49:2), a weapon prepared and held in reserve. Named directly: *"You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified"* (49:3), the corporate title, explicitly, on this individual voice. Then the Servant's astonishing honesty: *"I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing"* (49:4), ministry discouragement, in the Messiah's own mouth, resolved not by denial but by deposit: *"yet surely*

my right is with the LORD.” And then the verse that breaks the puzzle open: his mission is “*to bring Jacob back to him... to raise up the tribes of Jacob*” (49:5-6). The one named Israel is sent to restore Israel. A thing cannot be simply identical to what it is sent to rescue. And before the logic can settle, God enlarges the assignment: “*It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob... I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth*” (49:6). Restoring Israel, the greatest hope the exiles owned, is called *too light a thing*. God's answer to the Servant's discouragement is a bigger mission.

The chapter then turns to Zion's own discouragement: “*The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me*” (49:14), and God reaches for the deepest human image available: “*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands*” (49:15-16). The Catechism cites this verse when it teaches that God's parental tenderness can be expressed by the image of motherhood (CCC 239). Christian devotion has long lingered on the engraved palms with the crucifixion in view; offer that as the devotional reading it is, a meditation the wounds invite, while the verse's own image is a name tattooed where the owner cannot avoid seeing it.

The third Servant Song, 50:4-9, darkens the trajectory on schedule. The Servant has “*the tongue of those who are taught*” and a wakened ear, morning by morning, the portrait of perfect docility, and that docility now costs: “*I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting*” (50:6). Note the voice: *I gave*. Not *they took*. The violence is real and it is voluntary, endured with a confidence set like stone: “*I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame*” (50:7). The Servant's arc across the songs is now visible and ominous: presented (42), commissioned and discouraged (49), beaten (50), and the fourth song waits across next session's threshold. End the night there, deliberately, with the guesses coming out of drawers at home. Logistics matter this week: the Take-Home carries the reminder in print, and you should say it aloud twice: bring your sealed guess to the next session.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. Called from the womb is Jeremiah's call (Jeremiah 1:5) and behind it every miracle-child of the promise. The polished arrow hidden in the quiver recalls the anointed David, kept in Jesse's fields until his hour. The mother who cannot forget stands on the Exodus confession of the God “*merciful and gracious*” (Exodus 34:6), whose Hebrew vocabulary of compassion grows from the womb-root, *r-ch-m*. The smitten back and plucked beard were the standard degradations of ancient justice (compare 2 Samuel 10:4-5): the Servant absorbs the treatment of the guilty and shamed.

Fulfillment. Simeon, holding the forty-day-old Jesus in the temple, answers tonight's commission: “*a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel*” (Luke 2:32; CCC 529), an Isaian composite: the nations' light of 49:6 joined to Israel's glory in one breath. Paul and Barnabas at Pisidian Antioch quote 49:6 as *their own* marching orders: “*So the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles'*” (Acts 13:47), the Servant's mission extending through his people. Luke 9:51 echoes the flint: “*he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*” And the details of 50:6, the struck back, the spitting, the uncovered face, return in the Passion narratives: struck, scourged, spat upon (Matthew 26:67; 27:26, 30); the beard given to the pluckers and the face not hidden are details Isaiah alone records.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Bede the Venerable • *Commentary on Luke*

Expounding Simeon's canticle, St. Bede marvels at the economy of the old man's arms: he holds one small child and names him with Isaiah's widest words, light for the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of Israel. What the prophet promised to the ends of the earth, Bede observes, faith recognizing, as Bede's tradition never tired of noting, the light of the nations in an infant; and the Church sings Simeon's canticle every night at Compline, so that no day ends without the nations' light being named.

St. Catherine of Siena • *The Dialogue*

God speaks to St. Catherine as the verse speaks to Zion: with a love that cannot un-know its own. She hears God name himself mad with love for creatures who forget him daily, pursuing the forgetful with a mother's unreasoning fidelity. Catherine's whole doctrine is 49:15 lived forward: our amnesia does not amend his memory; we are held in a love that has our names where it cannot lose them.

St. Ignatius of Antioch • *Letter to the Romans*

Marched under guard to execution around AD 107, St. Ignatius begged the Roman church not to rescue him: let me be ground as wheat, he wrote, that I may be found pure bread of Christ. His face was set, to our eyes, like the Servant's flint: not stoic hardness, but certainty of vindication. The disciple had learned the third Song's arithmetic: shame endured with God as your justifier is not shame at all.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 239.** God's parental tenderness can also be expressed by the image of motherhood, which emphasizes God's immanence and the intimacy between Creator and creature. The Catechism's own footnote territory is Isaiah 49:14-15.
- **CCC 529.** At the Presentation, Jesus is recognized as the long-expected Messiah, the *light to the nations*: Simeon's arms, tonight's verse.
- **CCC 64.** Through the prophets God forms his people in the hope of a salvation destined for all nations, kept alive by the poor and humble of the Lord. The remnant thread and the light thread, braided in one article.
- **CCC 900.** By Baptism and Confirmation the laity are entrusted with the apostolate, with the right and the duty to work so that the message of salvation is known and accepted everywhere. Acts 13:47 in the Church's mouth: the Servant's light carried outward by every baptized person, each according to his or her vocation and state of life.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS TONIGHT

Light to the nations: the fourth station. 2:5, 9:2, 42:6, and now 49:6, with Simeon and Acts 13 attached. One station remains, a sunrise, in Session 13. Do not preview it.

The Servant: maximum tension. Named Israel (49:3), sent to Israel (49:5), enlarged to the

nations (49:6), and now suffering voluntarily (50:6). Run tonight's steelman on the identity question honestly, and end the session on the cliff edge. Next week the guesses open; say so aloud, twice, and confirm the Take-Home reminder.

The arm. 51:5 and 51:9 sit just across next session's border; tonight it does not recur prominently. Let it rest.

Carried from the womb (46:3-4) quietly answers the idols carried on carts; it will braid with 49:15's mother. God's constancy has a body-shaped vocabulary: womb, arms, palms.

SESSION GOALS

1. Contrast the carried gods and the carrying God (46:1-4), with the idol inventory of Session 9 extended.
2. Inventory the Servant's first-person testimony in 49:1-6, and set the identity tension at maximum honestly.
3. Run the servant-identity steelman, the corporate Israel reading, at full strength and answer it from 49:5-6's own logic.
4. Discover Luke 2:32 and Acts 13:47: the light claimed by Simeon over Christ and by Paul over the Church.
5. Let 49:15-16 be heard as the maternal heart of God (CCC 239), pastorally, by name.
6. Read the third Song's darkening (50:4-9), mark the voluntary voice and the flint face, and set next session's logistics: sealed guesses come back.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 10 min. Build, 55 min. Send, 10 min. Live It, memory verse, Take-Home, closing prayer, 10 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 2 (chapter 48) first; compress Question 1 (the carried gods) second. Never cut the second Song inventory, the steelman, the Luke 2 and Acts 13 discovery, 49:15-16, or the third Song.

A Light to the Nations

Isaiah 46-50 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, you have carried us from the womb, and you will carry us to gray hairs; our names are graven where you cannot lose them.

Tonight your Servant speaks for himself. Let us listen the way Simeon held: expecting light. And where his road darkens, do not let us look away; we are close now to the heart of everything.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What is the heaviest thing you are carrying right now that, honestly, you chose to pick up? (No fixing each other's answers; just name the cargo.)
2. Was there ever a season you worked hard at something good and concluded, *I have labored in vain*? What did you do with that feeling?

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

Gods You Carry, God Who Carries (Isaiah 46:1-4)

1. Read Isaiah 46:1-4. Verses 1-2 describe a scene from Babylon's streets; verses 3-4 answer it. What are Bel and Nebo doing, who is doing the work, and what four times over does the LORD say he does instead?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Bel and Nebo, Babylon's chief gods, are being hauled on ox-carts in procession, “loaded as burdens on weary beasts”: the worshipers and their animals do all the carrying, and in the end the gods “themselves go into captivity”, luggage in their own city's fall. Against the freight scene, the LORD: “who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am He, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.” Two religions, permanently distinguished: gods you carry, and the God who carries you. Extend last week's arithmetic: every idol, the career, the image, the account, ends up riding on its worshiper's back, and you can usually identify your idols by your exhaustion. The LORD's cargo policy runs womb to gray hair: you were never the porter; you are the carried.

2. (Optional, first cut for time.) Read Isaiah 48:10-11 and 48:20, and glance at the oddity in 48:16. Why does God say he saves, what is the command of verse 20, and what three parties stand in the last line of verse 16?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

“For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it... My glory I will not give to another” (48:11): salvation is anchored in God's own faithfulness to his name, which is the best possible news, because his name

outlasts our deserving; refined “in the furnace of affliction” (48:10), Israel is saved because of who God is. The command: “Go forth from Babylon... declare this with a shout of joy... The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!” Redemption comes with a megaphone attached; saved people are sent people, which is this study’s title working. And 48:16’s last line: “And now the Lord GOD has sent me and his Spirit.” Sender, sent one, and Spirit in one breath. Christian readers have long heard a whisper here of what Pentecost would say aloud; take it as a whisper, hedged and lovely, and keep reading.

The Servant Speaks (Isaiah 49:1-6)

3. Read Isaiah 49:1-4 aloud; for the first time, the Servant himself is talking. Inventory verses 1-3: when was he called, what was he made, where is he kept, and what is he named? Then sit in verse 4: what does the Servant confess, and what does he do with it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Called “from the womb,” named “from the body of my mother”: a vocation older than any résumé, Jeremiah’s call (Jeremiah 1:5) spoken over a greater prophet, and, note well, a verse that quietly dignifies every life from the womb onward: God names people before the world meets them. Made “a polished arrow” and hidden “in his quiver”: prepared with care and held in reserve for a chosen hour; if your life feels like the quiver right now, hiddenness is not shelving, it is aiming. And named, explicitly: “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” The corporate title, placed on this single first-person voice. Keep that on the table; it is tonight’s whole question.

Verse 4, the confession no one expects in a Messiah’s mouth: “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity.” Ministry discouragement, canonized. And his move with it: “yet surely my right is with the LORD, and my recompense with my God.” Not denial, deposit: he files the discouragement with the only Judge whose verdict matters. Anyone at this table who has poured strength into people who did not change has prayed verse 4 without knowing it was Scripture; now you know what the Servant does next.

4. Read Isaiah 49:5-6 slowly. Verse 5 states the Servant’s mission; verse 6 enlarges it. What is the mission, why does it strain against verse 3, and what does God dare to call the restoration of Israel?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The mission: “to bring Jacob back to him... to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel.” The one named *Israel* in verse 3 is sent to Israel in verse 5. Hold the strain; do not release it yet. Then the enlargement, one of the most breathtaking sentences in Scripture: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob... I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” The greatest hope the exiles possessed, national restoration, is called *too light a thing* for this Servant. And notice the shape of God’s pastoral care: the Servant just said *I have labored in vain*, and God’s answer to his discouragement is a *bigger assignment*. Sometimes the cure for weariness in a vocation is not a smaller field but a truer horizon. The light thread reaches its fourth station here: 2:5, 9:2, 42:6, 49:6, and it is now aimed at *the end of the earth*.

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

Now the identity question deserves its strongest non-Christian answer, and it is the mainstream Jewish reading, held in good faith for centuries. Build it with respect and full force:

The Servant is Israel. The text says so, and keeps saying so. *You are my servant, Israel* (49:3), and a dozen times around the songs: 41:8, 44:1, 44:21, 45:4, 48:20. The songs are poetry, and poetry personifies: the nation speaks as one voice, called from the womb (Israel's election), a light to the nations (Israel's vocation among the peoples), suffering and despised (Israel's actual history in exile, and since). Reading a single future individual into corporate poetry is Christian retrojection: the Church needed Jesus in Isaiah, so the Church found him there. On this reading, the songs are Israel's mission statement and Israel's lament, and they need no messiah to make sense. A refined version sharpens it further: the servant is the faithful remnant within Israel, servant-Israel distilled and sent to the rest, and on that reading even a mission to Israel fits a corporate subject.

Give it its full dignity; Session 1's guardrail still governs: the gifts and call of God to Israel are irrevocable. Then work the next question from inside the second Song itself.

5. Answer from the evidence, beginning with 49:5-6 itself: (a) can the Servant be simply identical with Israel, given his stated mission; (b) how does the concept of corporate personality, think of David and Goliath, hold the both/and together; (c) what happens to the Servant's profile across the four songs that strains the corporate reading further; (d) what do Luke 2:32 and Acts 13:47 add about who finally shares this identity?

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

(a) Start where the steelman is strongest, verse 3, and read two verses further: the Servant's mission is *to bring Jacob back, to raise up the tribes of Jacob*. A rescuer is not simply identical with the rescued; whatever is sent to restore Israel cannot be, without remainder, the Israel being restored. The corporate reading is not wrong about verse 3; it is incomplete by verse 5, and the incompleteness is Isaiah's own construction, not a Christian import.

(b) The Old Testament already owns the category that holds both truths: corporate personality, one figure who *is* the people in concentrated form. When David faces Goliath, Israel fights in him; his victory is legally and really theirs. The king embodies the nation; the nation lives in the king. Read the songs that way and every text fits: the Servant is Israel, Israel-in-person, one true Israelite in whom the nation's whole vocation, elect from the womb, light to the nations, is gathered up and finally performed, and performed *for* the nation that could not perform it exiled and bruised. Verse 3 and verse 5 stop fighting: he is Israel embodied, sent to Israel scattered.

(c) And watch the songs individuate as they advance, because the strain on the purely corporate reading grows with each one: a mother's womb and a personal naming (49:1); a single back given to smiters, one face, one beard, one man's spitting-shamed cheeks (50:6); and next session, a figure with a grave, an appearance, a silence before accusers, buried in a specific tomb, arrested from prison and judgment, cut off from the land of the living "*for the transgression of my people*", distinguished, in the song's own words, from the *my people* he dies for. Nations are not buried in a rich man's tomb. Say only that much tonight; the text itself is next week.

(d) Then the New Testament's double claim, which is subtler than the steelman allows: Simeon holds one child and names him the light for the Gentiles and the glory of *Israel* (Luke 2:32), the individual reading; and Paul and Barnabas quote the same verse 6 as *their own* commission, "*the Lord has commanded us*" (Acts 13:47), the corporate reading, reborn. The Church's answer to

individual or nation? has never been *individual instead of nation*; it is *one Israelite, and in him, a people*: the Servant's identity flows outward to everyone baptized into him, Jew and Gentile grafted together (Romans 11 again), so that Israel's vocation is not revoked but fulfilled and flung wide. That is why this session's title is also your job description, each according to his or her vocation and state of life (CCC 900); hold that thought for the Send.

Graven on His Palms (Isaiah 49:14-16)

6. Read Isaiah 49:14-16 aloud. What does Zion say, what comparison does God reach for, what is the astonishing concession in the middle of it, and where does he say your name is written?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Zion's lament, and it is the lament of half the people you know: *"The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me."* God's answer goes to the deepest human bond available: *"Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?"* The Hebrew verb for compassion here comes from the root that also gives the word for womb: womb-love, the love that cannot help itself. Then the concession that makes the verse immortal: *"Even these may forget."* God does not sentimentalize mothers; he grants the unthinkable exception and out-promises it: *"yet I will not forget you."* His fidelity exceeds the strongest love the creature knows. The Catechism stands exactly here when it teaches that God's tenderness can be spoken in the image of motherhood (CCC 239), and St. Catherine of Siena heard God name himself mad with love for creatures who forget him daily: our amnesia does not amend his memory.

And the location of the writing: *"Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands."* Not on a ledger, on himself, engraved, permanent, and on the palms, where the owner cannot avoid seeing it, where everything he does is done with your name under it. Christian eyes have long read *graven on the palms* in the light of the nails; take that as the devotional meditation it is, the wounds have made the metaphor literal in a way Isaiah's exiles could not foresee, and it is no strain on the text: the question was always *how far will this love go to keep from forgetting you?* The answer had hands.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Two people in the New Testament take up tonight's verse 6, the light to the nations, and they aim it at two different targets. One is an old man in the temple holding a baby; the other is a pair of missionaries getting thrown out of a synagogue. Find both: Luke 2, in Simeon's canticle, and Acts 13, near the end of the chapter. Pairs, split the targets. 4 minutes.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Luke 2:29-32: Simeon, promised he would not die before seeing the Lord's Christ, takes the forty-day-old Jesus in his arms and sings the substance of 49:6 over eight pounds of infant, joining the nations' light to Israel's glory: *"a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel"* (CCC 529). St. Bede marveled at the economy: what the prophet promised to the ends of the earth, faith recognized in forty days of flesh, and the Church has sung Simeon's discovery at night prayer ever since; no day of the Church ends without the nations' light being named. The Servant of the song is, first, him.

Acts 13:46-47: Paul and Barnabas, rejected in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch, turn to the Gentiles and justify it from tonight's verse, and look at the pronoun: "*So the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.'*" Commanded us. The Servant's commission, quoted as the missionaries' own orders. Both citations are right, and together they are the whole Catholic answer to tonight's steelman in two texts: the light is Christ, and in Christ the light is us. Which means 49:6 is not only tonight's title; it is, each according to vocation, your job description too, and the study's title, *Here am I, send me*, has been heading here since Session 2.

The Face Like Flint (Isaiah 50:4-9)

7. Read the third Servant Song, Isaiah 50:4-9. Verses 4-5: what has the Servant been given, and on what schedule? Verse 6: read it slowly and note the grammar of the violence: who is the subject of the verbs? Verses 7-9: where does his composure come from?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Given: "*the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him that is weary,*" and an ear wakened "*morning by morning*": the portrait of perfect docility, a life that listens before it speaks, daily. If your group wants a rule of life from Isaiah, it is 50:4: ear first, then tongue, then the weary.

Verse 6, and the grammar is the theology: "*I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting.*" I gave. I hid not. The Servant is the *subject* of the sentence, not merely the object of the abuse: the violence is entirely real and entirely voluntary; his obedience walks into it with open eyes. The docile ear of verse 5 and the given back of verse 6 are one movement: "*I was not rebellious, I turned not backward.*" Readers of the Passion narratives will meet these details again: Jesus is struck, spat upon, and scourged (Matthew 26:67; 27:26, 30). Matthew does not narrate the plucked beard or the face deliberately not hidden; those stay Isaiah's own. Note it and hold it.

Verses 7-9: "*For the Lord GOD helps me... therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.*" Flint is not stoicism; it is certainty of vindication: "*he who vindicates me is near.*" Luke reaches for the image at the hinge of his Gospel: Jesus "*set his face to go to Jerusalem*" (Luke 9:51). And St. Ignatius of Antioch, marched to the lions, had learned the third Song's arithmetic: shame endured with God as your justifier is not shame at all. Now step back and see the Servant's arc across three songs: presented in glory (42), commissioned and discouraged (49), beaten and spat upon, by his own consent (50). The trajectory is bending somewhere, and next session we follow it all the way down. Two logistics sentences, say them now and again at the close: next session, bring your sealed guess from Take-Home 1. We open them together before we read.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. Acts 13 puts the Servant's light-to-the-nations commission in the Church's mouth: *the Lord has commanded us*. Name your Pisidian Antioch: the actual room, group chat, workplace, or family table where you are the only light currently installed. What would one deliberate act of light look like there before we meet again?

2. *Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.* Who in your life is living in 49:14, certain they have been forgotten, by God, by everyone? You cannot engrave them on your palms, but you can put them in your calendar. What is the concrete act of remembering, and when?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Pray with Isaiah 49:15-16 once this week, hands open, palms up, and let God say the verse to you before you say anything to him.
- Adopt the Servant's schedule for seven mornings: ear first. Five minutes of listening prayer before your phone, that you may have a word to sustain the weary you will meet by noon.
- Find your sealed guess from Take-Home 1 and put it with your keys or your Bible tonight, unopened. Next session we read it together. Do not rewrite it; the whole point is what you thought then.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

“Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands.”

Isaiah 49:15-16 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Father, you carried us from the womb and you will carry us to gray hairs; our names are cut into your palms, and you have never once forgotten.

Your Servant has set his face like flint, and the road ahead of him is darkening. Give us the courage not to look away next week, and the honesty to bring our old guesses with us.

Make us light where you have placed us, to the end of our own small earths. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Before next session: read Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12, once, alone, slowly. And BRING YOUR SEALED GUESS from Take-Home 1. We open them together.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 46:1-4 (Bel and Nebo on carts; carried from the womb to gray hairs)
- Isaiah 48:10-11, 16, 20 (for my own sake; the threefold whisper; go forth and declare; optional)
- Isaiah 49:1-4 (the Servant speaks: womb, arrow, quiver, named Israel; labored in vain)
- Isaiah 49:5-6 (sent to Israel; too light a thing; light to the nations)
- Isaiah 49:14-16 (can a woman forget; graven on the palms)
- Isaiah 50:4-9 (the third Song: the wakened ear; I gave my back; the flint face)

Live Discovery Targets

- Luke 2:29-32 (Simeon: light for the Gentiles, glory for Israel)
- Acts 13:46-47 (Paul and Barnabas: the Lord has commanded us)

Supporting Passages

- Jeremiah 1:5 (called from the womb; roots)
- Isaiah 41:8; 44:1, 21; 45:4; 48:20 (Israel named servant; steelman texts)
- Romans 11:17-18, 29 (grafting and the irrevocable call; the standing guardrail)
- Matthew 26:67; 27:26, 30 (the third Song's details in the Passion)
- Luke 9:51 (he set his face to go to Jerusalem)
- Exodus 34:6 (the womb-root r-ch-m; roots of 49:15)

Catechism

- CCC 239 (God's tenderness in the image of motherhood)
- CCC 529 (the Presentation: light to the nations recognized)
- CCC 64 (hope of salvation for all nations through the prophets)
- CCC 900 (the baptized share the apostolate; the light carried by each vocation)

Session Logistics

- Say twice, and confirm the Take-Home carries it: BRING YOUR SEALED GUESS to Session 11.

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 49:15-16 (RSV2CE)

He Was Pierced

Isaiah 51-53 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

The sealed guesses open tonight, before a single verse is read. Then the group follows the phrase they guessed about to its detonation: Zion cries *“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD”* (51:9); God *“has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations”* (52:10); and then 53:1 asks the question they wrote answers to weeks ago: *“To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”*, and answers it with a man: despised, rejected, pierced, silent, buried, and alive. God’s saving power, bared before the nations, turns out to look like the Suffering Servant. They discover Philip answering the Ethiopian’s exact question with Jesus, and they learn what *“an offering for sin”* means: the fourth Song’s own word for the sacrifice made present at every Mass.

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

The atoning sacrifice of Christ, in full: expiation, propitiation, substitution, and priestly intercession, exactly as the Catechism reads this chapter (CCC 601, 615), and its perpetuation in the Sacrifice of the Mass, which the Council of Trent calls truly propitiatory (CCC 1367). Isaiah 53:10’s *’asham*, the guilt offering of Leviticus, is the Old Testament type the Church has always seen fulfilled in what the altar makes present.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Run the reveal first. Before any reading: guesses out, unfolded, and shared around the table, including wrong ones, lost ones, and reconstructed ones; celebrate all of it. Then, and only then, walk the arm’s trail with them: 40:10, *his arm rules for him*; 51:5, *my arm will rule the peoples*; 51:9, where Zion prays to the arm as to a person, *“Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD... Was it not thou that didst cut Rahab in pieces?”*, the arm did the Exodus; 52:10, *“The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations”*, God rolling up his sleeve in public. Every expectation points to spectacular power. Then 53:1: *“Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”*, and what follows is not a thunderbolt but a man with *“no form or comeliness,”* despised and rejected. That is the reveal the Church has always read here, and it is bigger than any guess: the arm of the LORD is revealed in a person, and God’s baring of his saving power looks, to the eyes of the nations, like a marred and suffering Servant. The group’s guesses were probably right (many will have written *Jesus* or *God’s power*); the payoff is not gotcha but astonishment at *how* they were right: omnipotence revealed as self-gift.

The fourth Song (52:13-53:12) is built in five stanzas of three verses, and its frame matters: it opens and closes in exaltation. 52:13: *“Behold, my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high”*, the same vocabulary as the throne of Isaiah 6, *high and lifted up*, and John sets this Song and that vision side by side, citing 53:1 and 6:10 in one breath and saying Isaiah saw his glory (John 12:38-41); the shared *high and lifted up* is the observation waiting inside his juxtaposition. The Song’s

middle descends through rejection (53:1-3), substitution (53:4-6, where the pronouns hammer: *our* griefs, *our* sorrows, *our* transgressions, *our* iniquities, and the summary, “*the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all*”), silent suffering and death (53:7-9, with two forensic details: “*stricken for the transgression of my people*”, the Servant distinguished from the people he dies for, and a grave “*with a rich man in his death*”), and then rises: 53:10-12, where after pouring out his soul to death he “*shall see his offspring, shall prolong his days*”, is satisfied, divides spoil, and “*made intercession for the transgressors*”. A dead man with a future: the Song asserts, without using the word, what 26:19 promised.

The theological center is 53:10, and be precise with it: “*when he makes himself an offering for sin.*” The Hebrew is *'asham*: not a generic word for sacrifice but the specific *guilt offering* of Leviticus 5, the sacrifice of reparation, offered when guilt has incurred a debt that must be made good, with restitution attached. Isaiah has reached into the sacrificial system and selected the offering whose whole logic is *amends*. And note the voice of the English rendering, which the Gospel vindicates: he makes *himself* the offering (the Hebrew construction can also be heard as his life being made the offering; John 10:18 settles whose act it is). Not a victim seized; a priest self-offering, which 53:12 confirms: he “*made intercession*”, priestly work, with his own life as the matter of the sacrifice. This is where the Church's full vocabulary belongs, and the Catechism uses this very passage for it: Christ's death is the sacrifice that *expiates* sin (wipes it out), *makes satisfaction* to the Father (repairs the offense, as Anselm taught: offered by one who owed nothing on behalf of those who owed everything), is *truly propitiatory* (it avails before God for the forgiveness of sins, Trent's word for the Mass, which is this same sacrifice made present, CCC 1367), and is *substitutionary* in the precise sense the Song states: the chastisement we deserved rested on *him*, and by his stripes we are healed (CCC 601, 615). Tonight's steelman takes on the modern moral objection to all of this; prepare by holding one clause firmly: *he makes himself* the offering. The Catholic doctrine of the atonement has no unwilling victim in it anywhere.

One more braid to have ready: the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 is reading this exact passage in his chariot, and his question to Philip is the sealed question in substance: “*About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about some one else?*” Philip, “*beginning with this scripture,*” preached Jesus, and the man asked for baptism on the spot. Your group has spent weeks becoming Philip. And hold one thread quietly: the eunuch went home rejoicing, and Isaiah 56, two sessions of text away, contains a promise addressed to eunuchs by name. Say nothing tonight; Session 13 collects it.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The *'asham* guilt offering: Leviticus 5:14-6:7, reparation with restitution. The silent lamb: the Passover lamb (Exodus 12) and the daily offerings, now walking on two feet. The sprinkling of many nations (52:15) is priestly aspersion language (Leviticus 16). Sin-bearing (“*he shall bear their iniquities*”) is the scapegoat's verb (Leviticus 16:22). The Song gathers the whole sacrificial system into one biography.

Fulfillment. The New Testament returns to the fourth Song as often as to any passage in the prophets: Matthew 8:17 (he took our infirmities); Luke 22:37 (numbered with transgressors, cited by Jesus of himself; the longer text of Mark 15:28 carries the same citation); John 12:38 (who has believed); Acts 8:32-35 (the eunuch); Romans 10:16; 1 Peter 2:22-25, where the keeper of the keys walks the Song nearly line by line: “*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree... By his wounds you have been healed.*” John the Baptist's “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29; CCC 608) is the

Song in one sentence, and the Church repeats it at every Mass, moments before Communion, over the 'asham made present.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Clement of Rome • *Letter to the Corinthians (1 Clement 16)*

Writing from Rome in the first generation after the apostles, St. Clement (1 Clement 16) holds up the humility of Christ and proves it by quoting Isaiah 53 at length as the Lord's own portrait. Among the earliest surviving Christian documents outside the New Testament, it already reads tonight's chapter exactly as your group will: this is he. The identification is there in one of the Church's earliest surviving writings.

St. Anselm of Canterbury • *Why God Became Man*

St. Anselm asks the question underneath the fourth Song: why must the repairer of sin be both God and man? Because the debt of sin is owed by man and yet exceeds what any creature can pay; only one who is man can offer it, and only one who is God can afford it. The Servant who makes himself an offering, owing nothing and paying everything, is Anselm's answer walking: satisfaction offered from inside our nature, worth more than all it repairs.

St. Thomas Aquinas • *Summa Theologiae III, q. 48*

St. Thomas teaches that Christ's Passion was not a bare penalty but a superabundant satisfaction: the love and obedience with which Christ suffered were greater than all the malice of all sin, so that his offering did not merely balance the ledger but flooded it. What the Father willed was not pain for its own sake but the love that shone in it; the Passion saves not because suffering is precious but because such love is.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 601.** The Scriptures had foretold the divine plan of salvation through the putting to death of the righteous one, my Servant, citing this Song by name: Jesus' redemptive death fulfills Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Servant.
- **CCC 615.** Jesus atoned for our faults and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father: the Suffering Servant who makes himself an offering for sin, bearing the sin of many and making intercession for them. The Catechism's atonement article is built on tonight's verses.
- **CCC 608.** John the Baptist's Lamb of God gathers the Passover lamb and the Servant who silently lets himself be led to the slaughter and bears the sin of the many.
- **CCC 1367.** The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice; in the Mass the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner is offered in an unbloody manner, and this sacrifice is truly propitiatory. Trent's words; tonight the group learns their Old Testament address.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS TONIGHT

The arm of the LORD: resolved. Run the trail (40:10; 51:5, 9; 52:10; 53:1) after the guesses open. The reveal: the arm is the Servant; omnipotence bared looks like self-gift.

Death swallowed (25:8, Session 5): tonight death swallows the Servant and finds him indigestible: he pours out his soul to death and then sees his offspring, prolongs his days, and is satisfied. Connect it aloud.

The Servant's offspring (53:10): who are the children of a man who died childless? Do not answer; Session 12 opens with a barren woman singing. Plant only the question.

Forgiveness banked (43:25, Session 9): the God who alone blots out transgressions has been walking toward this chapter; the Servant bearing sin is how the blotting is done.

The eunuch: if the group notices what the Acts 8 reader was, smile; Session 13 keeps a promise to him.

SESSION GOALS

1. Open the sealed guesses first, with celebration, and run the arm's trail to 53:1.
2. Walk the fourth Song stanza by stanza: exaltation frame, rejection, substitution, silent death, and the future after death.
3. Teach 53:10 precisely: the 'asham, self-offered; expiation, satisfaction, propitiation, substitution, intercession (CCC 601, 615), and their presence in the Mass (CCC 1367).
4. Discover Acts 8: the sealed-guess question asked again in substance, and answered with Jesus.
5. Run the moral objection to the atonement at full strength and answer it with the Song's own grammar of self-offering.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Guess-opening ceremony, 10 min (this replaces Win tonight; the two Win questions below are woven into the ceremony). Build, 55 min. Send, 8 min. Live It, memory verse, Take-Home, closing prayer, 12 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 8 (52:7, beautiful feet) first; compress Question 2 (the arm trail can be three verses instead of five) second. Never cut the guess ceremony, 53:4-6, 53:10-12, the Acts 8 discovery, or the steelman.

He Was Pierced

Isaiah 51-53 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, weeks ago we wrote our guesses and sealed them, and tonight we open them before the chapter your Church has treasured above every other page of the prophets.

Bare your holy arm before our eyes. And if what we see is not what we expected, give us the eunuch's honesty, Philip's clarity, and the joy of the man who rode home baptized.

Through Christ our Lord, wounded for our transgressions. Amen.

THE OPENING OF THE GUESSES

CEREMONY

Before any reading: everyone produces their sealed guess from Take-Home 1. Around the table, each person unfolds and reads exactly what they wrote, no edits, no apologies, to the question: *who, or what, is the arm of the LORD?* Lost guesses reconstructed from memory count; say so and share anyway.

Leader: receive every guess warmly and keep score of nothing. Then ask the two questions below, and only then start the Build.

1. What did you write, and what do you remember about why you wrote it?
2. Between then and now, ten sessions have happened. Has your answer changed, sharpened, or stayed put? No spoilers from anyone who peeked ahead.

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

The Trail of the Arm (Isaiah 51:9; 52:10; 53:1)

1. Walk the trail together, out loud, in order: 40:10 (*his arm rules for him*), 51:5, then read 51:9 and 52:10 in full. What does Zion ask the arm to do, what did the arm do in the past, and what does 52:10 say God has now done with it, before whom?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Zion prays to the arm as to a person: “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD... Was it not thou that didst cut Rahab in pieces?”: the arm did the Exodus, split the sea, defeated the dragon of chaos. And 52:10: “The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” God rolling up his sleeve, in public, before the whole world. Every line of the trail sets one expectation: when the arm is revealed, expect the Exodus again, only bigger: spectacle, power, the enemy shattered. Hold that expectation tight as you turn the page.

2. Now read Isaiah 53:1-3 aloud, slowly. The question of verse 1 is the question you all guessed at: *“To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”* What does the text show us when the sleeve comes up? List every descriptor in verses 2-3.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A young plant; a root out of dry ground, stump language, one last time; *“no form or comeliness... no beauty that we should desire him”*; *“despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”*; one from whom men hide their faces; *“we esteemed him not.”*

That is the reveal, and it is stranger and greater than any guess at the table: the arm of the LORD is revealed in *a person*: God’s baring of his saving power looks, to human eyes, like a man being despised. Most of your guesses were right, *God’s power, the Messiah, Jesus*, and the astonishment is *how* you were right: the omnipotence that split the sea is revealed as self-gift; the new Exodus is won not by drowning an army but by a Servant absorbing everything. Verse 1 doubles as a warning: *“Who has believed what we have heard?”* Power disguised as weakness is missable; the nations’ kings shut their mouths at it (52:15), and plenty of eyes slide right past. Yours no longer can.

The Pronouns (Isaiah 53:4-6)

3. Read Isaiah 53:4-6 aloud twice, and the second time, have everyone tap the table at every first-person plural: *our, we, us*. Count them. Then state, in one sentence each, what he carried, what it accomplished, and what verse 6 says the LORD did.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The pronouns hammer ten times and more: *our* griefs, *our* sorrows, *our* transgressions, *our* iniquities, the chastisement that made *us* whole, *we* are healed, all *we* like sheep, every one to *his* own way, the iniquity of *us all*. The Song will not let anyone at the table stay a spectator; the grammar itself indicts and includes you.

What he carried: not only sins but their whole harvest, griefs and sorrows included. What it accomplished: *“upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed”*, an exchange: his wounds, our healing; his chastisement, our peace. This is substitution in the text’s own words, and note that the chastisement is *medicinal* in its aim: it *made us whole*. And verse 6, the sentence at the Song’s exact center: *“the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”* The initiative is God’s own; the remedy comes from the offended party. Session 1 promised scarlet made white and told us God does the whitening; tonight we watch what the whitening costs.

The Silent Lamb and the Rich Man’s Tomb (Isaiah 53:7-9)

4. Read 53:7-9. What does the Servant not do, twice noted? What two details in verse 8 and verse 9 read like case-file entries, and what is strange about the burial?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

He opens not his mouth, twice: *“like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb.”* The sacrificial system stands up and walks: Passover lamb, daily offering, now with a human face, which is exactly what the Baptist announces at the Jordan: *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29; CCC 608), the sentence the Church repeats at every Mass. The case-file entries: *“stricken for the transgression of my people”*, the

Servant is distinguished from the very people he dies for, the corporate reading's last handhold gives way here, and "*they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death*": executed among criminals, buried in a rich man's tomb, an oddity with no obvious poetic reason, until a member of the council named Joseph, a rich man of Arimathea, asks Pilate for a body (Matthew 27:57-60). Nations are not buried in rich men's tombs. Individuals are.

The Offering He Makes Himself (Isaiah 53:10-12)

5. Read 53:10-12, the summit. Three questions. First: verse 10 says "*when he makes himself an offering for sin*"; who is the subject of that verb, and why does it change everything? Second: what does a dead man do in verses 10-11 that dead men do not do? Third: verse 12 ends the Song with what ongoing activity?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

First: *he makes himself* an offering, as our translation rightly renders a disputed Hebrew construction, and the Gospel removes the ambiguity about whose act it is. The Servant is not a victim seized by God or man; he is the priest of his own sacrifice, which Jesus states as his own self-understanding: "*No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord*" (John 10:18). The Hebrew word for the offering is precise: '*asham*', the guilt offering of Leviticus 5, the sacrifice of *reparation*, offered when sin has incurred a real debt that must be made good. Isaiah reached into Israel's whole sacrificial system and chose the one offering whose entire logic is *amends*. Here the Church's full vocabulary belongs, and every word of it is doing a different job: his death *expiates* sin (wipes it away), *makes satisfaction* (repairs the offense: St. Anselm's insight, offered from inside our nature by one who owed nothing, worth more than all it repairs), is *propitiatory* (it avails before God for the forgiveness of sins), and is *substitutionary* exactly as verses 4-6 said: the chastisement we deserved rested on him (CCC 601, 615). And St. Thomas adds the measure (Summa Theologiae III, q. 48, a. 2): a *superabundant* satisfaction, because the love and obedience in the offering outweighed all the malice of all sin; the Passion saves not because pain is precious but because such love is.

Second: after pouring out his soul *to death* (v. 12), "*he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days*"; he shall see the fruit of his travail and be satisfied. A dead man with descendants, a future, and satisfaction: the Song asserts resurrection without pausing to argue it, exactly as 25:8 and 26:19 promised. File one question for next week: who are the offspring of a man who died childless?

Third: the Song's last clause: he "*made intercession for the transgressors*." Priestly work the New Testament shows still in progress, "*he always lives to make intercession for them*" (Hebrews 7:25). And now say the Mass connection plainly, because tonight is its home: the sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the altar are *one single sacrifice*; the same Christ who offered himself once in blood is offered in an unbloody manner, and this sacrifice, Trent's own words, is *truly propitiatory* (CCC 1367). When you kneel at Mass, the '*asham*' of Isaiah 53:10 is not remembered from a distance; it is made present, and the Intercessor of 53:12 is on the altar interceding. This chapter is why the Mass is called the Holy *Sacrifice*.

DIG DEEPER • The '*Asham*: Anatomy of a Guilt Offering

Leviticus 5:14-6:7 legislates the offering Isaiah names in 53:10. It is the most juridical sacrifice in the system: prescribed when guilt has created a measurable debt, against God's holy things or a

neighbor, and it uniquely requires restitution plus a fifth: the wrong must actually be made good, not merely regretted. By selecting the *'asham*, Isaiah says something exact: the Servant's death is not a tragedy God salvages nor a gesture of solidarity only; it is reparation, the debt of the world made good, with interest. When the Catechism says Christ *made satisfaction* for our sins (CCC 615), it is speaking fluent Leviticus.

LIVE DISCOVERY

About a decade after the resurrection, a foreign official rides home from Jerusalem reading tonight's exact passage aloud in his chariot, and he asks a passing deacon the very question this study sealed in an envelope. Find the scene in Acts 8, and note carefully: what is his question, word for word, and what does Philip do with it? Pairs, 4 minutes.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Acts 8:26-39. An Ethiopian court official, returning from worship in Jerusalem, is reading Isaiah 53:7-8. His question to Philip is your sealed question in substance: *"About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about some one else?"* And the answer: *"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus."* Beginning with this scripture: the fourth Song is, on the New Testament's own record, a complete on-ramp to the entire Gospel. The man's response is the only sane one: *"See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?"* And he went on his way rejoicing.

Two notes to land. First: your group has just spent eleven weeks becoming Philip; you can now do from this chapter what he did, and someone in your life is currently the man in the chariot. Second, notice quietly what Luke tells us the reader was: a eunuch, a man whom the old law barred from the assembly (Deuteronomy 23:1), riding home from worship at Jerusalem. Hold that detail gently; this book has not forgotten him, and neither will this study. Say no more than that.

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

Now the modern moral objection, and it is felt sincerely by many, including many Christians. Build it with real force:

The atonement, as described tonight, is monstrous. An innocent man is tortured to death so that a deity can forgive other people: that is not justice, it is the miscarriage of it; punishing the innocent to acquit the guilty is the definition of injustice in every human court. Worse, if the Father *willed* to bruise him (53:10), then the doctrine puts violence at the heart of God: a Father venting wrath on his Son, which critics have bluntly called cosmic child abuse. A truly loving God would simply forgive, as Jesus told us to do, freely, without demanding blood first. The whole apparatus of wrath, debt, and substitution is ancient legal mythology projected onto God, and morally serious people should say so.

Let it land with its full weight; someone at your table has felt it. Then answer from the Song's own grammar.

6. Answer it from the texts already on the table: (a) who, grammatically and theologically, offers this sacrifice; (b) what is the relationship between the Father's will and the Son's in the Passion; (c) what does the objection get right that the Church also insists on; (d) what does *simply forgive* actually cost, even among humans?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

(a) Begin where the Song itself blocks the caricature: *he makes himself an offering* (53:10); *he poured out his soul to death* (53:12). There is no unwilling victim anywhere in the Catholic doctrine of the atonement. Jesus says it in the first person: “*No one takes my life from me... I lay it down of my own accord*” (John 10:18). A third party punished against his will for others' crimes would indeed be injustice; a person freely offering his own life for those he loves is the thing every human culture recognizes as the *summit* of justice's older sister, love. Greater love has no man than this.

(b) And the offerer is not a creature drafted by God; he is God the Son, one in being and one in will with the Father. The cross is not the Father doing something *to* someone else; it is God, in the person of the Son, taking the cost of sin into his own life. The Trinity is why *cosmic child abuse* misfires as a description: there is no unwilling third party because there is no third party at all: the Judge is serving the sentence, the offended party is paying the debt. St. Anselm's logic, from the leader's guide, holds: only man owes it, only God can pay it, so the payer became man. And what the Father *willed*, as St. Thomas teaches (ST III, q. 48), was not suffering for its own sake but the obedient love that shone in it, permitting the violence men freely chose: the Passion saves because such love is infinite, not because suffering is currency (CCC 615, which says Jesus *makes satisfaction*, the language of repair, not of venting).

(c) Concede what is true in the objection, because the Church herself insists on it: any account that makes the Father bloodthirsty and the Son his appeasement is a heresy, not the Catholic faith. “*God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8): the cross is the Father's love in action, not the price extracted before he could love. The initiative in 53:6 is God's: *the LORD laid on him*: the offended party providing the remedy, the same movement as 1:18. The chastisement was *medicinal*: *it made us whole*.

(d) Finally, interrogate *simply forgive*. Even among humans, forgiveness is never free for the forgiver: to forgive a real wrong is to absorb its cost yourself, to eat the debt rather than collect it. Scale that to the sin of the world, and the cross is what *simply forgiving* looks like when God does it: the wronged One absorbing, in his own body, the full weight of everything he pardons, so that mercy is not the pretense that evil did not matter but the defeat of evil at the pardoner's expense. Isaiah saw it whole seven centuries early: with his stripes we are healed. The objection wanted a God who forgives without cost; the Gospel gives us something better: a God who pays the cost himself.

7. (Optional, first cut for time.) Read Isaiah 52:7. Before the Song descends, one verse about feet. Whose feet, doing what, and where has this study heard the job description before?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

“*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace... who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'*” The herald of Session 8 (40:9) is back, and Paul quotes this verse of every preacher of the Gospel (Romans 10:15). The feet are beautiful because of the cargo. After tonight, your feet qualify: you now carry, from this chapter, the news Philip carried to the chariot. The study's title has been a job posting all along.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. Read 53:4-6 once more silently, and put one specific transgression of yours, this year's, not childhood's, inside the pronouns: *he was wounded for this*. What happens in you when the atonement stops being a doctrine and becomes an address? If it has been a while, the confessional is where this chapter is applied by name.
2. Who is your Ethiopian: the person in your life closest to the chariot, reading, wondering, one honest conversation from joy? Philip's whole method was to walk up and ask what they were reading. What is your version of that opening move, and when this month?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Attend one Mass this week, or this Sunday, with Isaiah 53:10-12 in your pocket, and at the elevation, pray the verse where it lives: *he makes himself an offering for sin... he made intercession for the transgressors*.
- Go to Confession and bring the pronouns with you: name what he was wounded for. Leave healed: his stripes, our healing, is the exchange the chapter publishes.
- Read the fourth Song aloud once, alone, replacing *our* and *we* with *my* and *I*. It will take four minutes and you will not forget it.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed."

Isaiah 53:5 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: we wrote our guesses, and you exceeded all of them.
The arm of the LORD has hands, and they are wounded, and our names are graven on the palms.
You made yourself the offering; you bore what was ours; you make intercession for us at this hour.
Receive our gratitude, our confession, and our commission: send us to the chariots.
By your stripes we are healed. Amen.*

Before next session: read Isaiah 54:1-10 and 55:1-3, and carry one question with you: who are the offspring of the man who died childless?

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 40:10; 51:5, 9; 52:10 (the trail of the arm)
- Isaiah 53:1-3 (to whom revealed; the descriptors of the despised)
- Isaiah 53:4-6 (the pronouns; the exchange; the LORD laid on him)
- Isaiah 53:7-9 (the silent lamb; stricken for my people; the rich man's tomb)
- Isaiah 53:10-12 (the 'asham self-offered; offspring after death; ongoing intercession)
- Isaiah 52:13-15 (exalted and lifted up; sprinkling many nations; kings shut mouths)
- Isaiah 52:7 (beautiful feet; optional)

Live Discovery Target

- Acts 8:26-39 (the eunuch's verbatim question; Philip begins with this scripture)

Supporting Passages

- Leviticus 5:14-6:7 (the 'asham guilt offering; Dig Deeper)
- Leviticus 16:22 (sin-bearing; the scapegoat's verb)
- John 1:29 (Behold, the Lamb of God); John 10:18 (I lay it down of my own accord)
- John 12:38-41 (the Song and the throne vision cited together)
- Matthew 27:57-60 (the rich man's tomb); Matthew 8:17; Luke 22:37 (Jesus cites the Song)
- 1 Peter 2:22-25 (Peter walks the Song line by line)
- Romans 5:8; 10:15-16; Hebrews 7:25 (love demonstrated; the feet; the living Intercessor)

Catechism

- CCC 601 (the redemptive death foretold: the righteous one, my Servant)
- CCC 615 (atonement and satisfaction; the offering for sin)
- CCC 608 (the Lamb of God)
- CCC 1367 (one single sacrifice; the Mass truly propitiatory)

Session Logistics

- Guess ceremony FIRST, before any reading. Every guess honored; reconstructed guesses count.

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 53:5 (RSV2CE)

Come to the Waters

Isaiah 54-55 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

Participants answer last week's planted question, who are the offspring of the man who died childless?, when chapter 54 opens with a barren woman commanded to sing over children she never bore, and they discover Paul naming her: the Jerusalem above, our mother, whom the Church has always understood of herself. Then chapter 55 throws open the doors of an economy with no cash registers: wine and milk without money and without price, an everlasting covenant, a word that never returns empty. They find the invitation still standing, taken up almost word for word, in the Bible's final chapter, and they face the sola gratia objection at full strength: is free grace something Rome forgot?

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

The absolute gratuity of grace (CCC 1996-1998) and the Eucharistic banquet (CCC 1384): the feast glimpsed on the mountain in Session 5 gets its street address tonight. Also the Church as fruitful mother: the Servant's offspring, born of his travail.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Read canonically, chapter 54 answers 53:10's riddle before the ink dries. The Servant, cut off childless, *"shall see his offspring"*; turn the page and a barren woman is commanded to *"Sing... For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married"* (54:1). Enlarge the tent, lengthen the cords: the family is about to outgrow the house. Zion the abandoned wife is remarried to her Maker: *"For your Maker is your husband... For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you"* (54:5-7), sealed with an oath modeled on Noah's: as God swore the flood waters would never return, so *"my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed"* (54:9-10). Paul reads the riddle's answer aloud in Galatians 4:26-27: the barren woman who sings is *"the Jerusalem above... our mother"*, whom the Church has always understood of herself, teeming with children born of the Servant's travail. The exile's most private grief, barrenness, becomes the image of the world's largest family.

Chapter 55 is the invitation to the table: *"Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!... wine and milk without money and without price"* (55:1). Note the paradox held in one verse: *buy*, real goods, really received, and *without price*, no currency accepted. Then the aching diagnosis of every consumer economy since: *"Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?"* (55:2). The feast connects backward and forward: rich food on the mountain for all peoples (25:6), and the study should now say aloud what Session 5 left hanging: the Church has always recognized this table; the Eucharist is the banquet where the poor buy without money (CCC 1384). Verse 3 anchors the meal in covenant: *"I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David"*, which Paul, in his synagogue sermon at Antioch,

quotes as fulfilled in the Resurrection: the *“holy and sure blessings of David”* given when God raised Jesus never to see corruption (Acts 13:34): the everlasting covenant requires a living David.

Then the summons and the physics of the word: *“Seek the LORD while he may be found”* (55:6), with real urgency and real mercy, *“for he will abundantly pardon”*; the transcendence clause, *“my thoughts are not your thoughts”* (55:8-9), aimed in its immediate context at mercy beyond our pettiness, whatever wider uses it also bears: we would not pardon abundantly; he does. And 55:10-11 closes the Book of Consolation's great inclusio: the word that goes out of God's mouth *“shall not return to me empty”*, rain and snow that water the earth. Chapter 40 opened the section: the word of our God will stand forever; chapter 55 closes it: and it works. Everything between was that word, working.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The barren woman gathers Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah: every empty womb God ever opened, now nationalized. The Noah oath (54:9) makes the new covenant flood-proof. *Sure love for David* is 2 Samuel 7 again, the oath beneath the whole book. The feast recalls Wisdom's banquet: *“Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine I have mixed”* (Proverbs 9:5).

Fulfillment. Galatians 4:26-27 quotes 54:1 of the Church, our mother. Acts 13:34 quotes 55:3 of the Resurrection. Jesus stands up at the feast and personalizes 55:1: *“If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink”* (John 7:37), and *“I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger”* (John 6:35). And the Bible's last chapter renews Isaiah's invitation almost in his own words: *“let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price”* (Revelation 22:17): Scripture's closing invitation takes up tonight's verse.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose • *On the Mysteries*

Leading the newly baptized from font to altar, St. Ambrose narrates their arrival at the altar: the sacraments you receive are richer than the manna your fathers ate, for here is the true bread and the cup that gladdens. What the prophet cried in the street, come, buy without money, the Church performs at every liturgy: the connection is this study's to draw, and the poorest communicant leaves the altar wealthier than kings.

St. Augustine • *Confessions*

The first page of the Confessions is Isaiah 55:2 turned into autobiography: you have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. Augustine spent his money and labor on everything that is not bread, pleasure, ambition, philosophy, and found each purse emptied and each hunger intact. The restlessness, he learned, was not a defect but an address label: the heart is shaped like the feast.

St. Ephrem the Syrian • *Hymns*

The deacon-poet of Syria sang of the Eucharist as the Medicine of Life: the bread of the table that heals the eaters, the cup in which immortality is mixed for mortals. Where merchants sell what perishes to those who perish, the Physician, in Ephrem's image, sets out the one food that cures the disease of death itself; that it stands free of charge is Isaiah's own addition to the signage. He would

have recognized chapter 55 at once.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 1996-1998.** Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help God gives us; our justification comes from grace, and this vocation to eternal life is supernatural, depending entirely on God's gratuitous initiative. *Without money and without price* is the Church's own doctrine, stated by the Church herself.
- **CCC 2007-2009.** With regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man; between God and us the disproportion is infinite. Even our merits are God's gifts: the free feast is not contradicted by the Christian life; it funds it.
- **CCC 1384.** The Lord addresses an invitation to us, urging us to receive him in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Isaiah's street-cry has a liturgical address.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS TONIGHT

The Servant's offspring: resolved. 53:10's riddle answered by 54:1's singing barren woman, named by Paul as our mother the Church. Let a participant make the page-turn connection first.

The banquet: resolved and named. 25:6's mountain feast and 55:1's free market meet at the altar (CCC 1384). Session 5's held question, what kind of meal defeats death?, is answered aloud tonight.

The word: resolved. 40:8 (it stands forever) closes with 55:11 (it does not return empty): the Book of Consolation's frame.

Zion the mother: advancing; her final portrait, nursing and comforting, waits in Session 14. Do not preview.

SESSION GOALS

1. Resolve the offspring riddle: 53:10 into 54:1, and discover Galatians 4:26-27.
2. Preach the flood-proof covenant of 54:7-10 to everyone who fears God's brief-moment absences.
3. Open the free market of 55:1-3, diagnose the not-bread economy, and name the Eucharistic address (CCC 1384).
4. Run the sola gratia steelman at full strength and answer with the Church's own doctrine of gratuitous grace and grace-funded merit.
5. Close the word inclusio (40:8 with 55:10-11) and send everyone out in joy (55:12).

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 10 min. Build, 55 min. Send, 10 min. Live It, memory verse,

Take-Home, closing prayer, 10 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 6 (55:8-9, thoughts and ways) first; compress Question 2 (the Noah oath) second. Never cut the offspring resolution, the free market, the steelman, or the word inclusio.

Come to the Waters

Isaiah 54-55 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, we come thirsty, and some of us come broke: no currency, no leverage, no case. Which, tonight we learn, is exactly the dress code.

Seat us at the table your Servant's travail set. Teach us to stop spending ourselves on what is not bread. And let your word do in this room what you promised: not return to you empty.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. What is the best free thing anyone ever gave you, and why was receiving it harder or easier than paying would have been?
2. Fill in honestly: the thing I keep spending money, time, or energy on that never quite satisfies is ____.

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

The Barren Woman Sings (Isaiah 54:1-10)

1. Last week ended with a riddle: the Servant died childless, yet “*he shall see his offspring*” (53:10). Now read Isaiah 54:1-3. Who is commanded to sing, about what, and what construction order follows? What has this to do with last week's riddle?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

A barren woman, the ancient world's deepest private grief, is commanded to *sing*, because “*the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married.*” The construction order: enlarge the tent, lengthen the cords, strengthen the stakes; the family is about to outgrow the house, spreading to possess the nations. And read whole, the placement is the answer: the page after the Servant pours out his soul and yet *sees offspring*, a childless woman is buried in children. His travail (53:11) is her labor; the offspring of the man who died childless are the children of the woman who never bore. The riddle has become a birth announcement, and the delivery room is a tomb.

LIVE DISCOVERY

Paul quotes tonight's opening verse and names the barren woman outright: who she is, and whose mother she is. Find it in Galatians 4, near the end of the chapter. Pairs, 3 minutes.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Galatians 4:26-27: “*the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother,*” and Paul proves it by quoting Isaiah 54:1: “*Rejoice, O barren one.*” The singing barren woman, in the reading the Church has always made of Paul's words, is the Church: Zion reborn from above, mother of everyone baptized

into the Servant. Which lands two truths at once. First, you are the offspring of 53:10: the fruit the dying Servant was promised he would live to see is sitting around this table. Second, the Church is not an institution you use but a mother who bore you; the ancient Fathers said it plainly, and Session 14 will let one of them say it. Enlarge the tent is now the family business: evangelization is helping mother set more places.

2. Read Isaiah 54:7-10. God speaks with startling honesty about the exile: what does he admit, what does he promise, and what natural disaster does he use as the model for the new covenant's security?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He admits the abandonment was real: *"For a brief moment I forsook you... in overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face."* No gaslighting; the exile happened. But the proportions are the point: a moment, versus *"with everlasting love I will have compassion on you."* Then the Noah oath: as God swore the flood waters would never again cover the earth, *"so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you"*; mountains may depart and hills be removed, *"but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed."* The new covenant is flood-proofed: geology is negotiable; the covenant is not. For anyone at the table living through a hidden-face moment, this paragraph is the exchange rate: moments of absence, everlasting compassion, and an oath older than the mountains under your feet.

The Free Market (Isaiah 55:1-3)

3. Read Isaiah 55:1-2 aloud like the street-vendor's cry it is. Who is invited, what is on sale, what currencies are accepted, and what is the question of verse 2 asking you, personally, this year?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Invited: *"every one who thirsts"* and *"he who has no money"*: thirst and bankruptcy are the entire admission criteria. On sale: water, wine, milk, bread, staples and luxuries, survival and joy. Currencies accepted: none: *"without money and without price,"* and yet the verb is *buy*, twice: real goods, really transferred, really owned, just not paid for by the buyer. Someone paid; the invoice was last week's chapter.

Verse 2 is the most contemporary sentence in Isaiah: *"Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?"* St. Augustine turned it into the most famous autobiography ever written: our heart is restless until it rests in you; he spent everything at every other stall first. The question is not rhetorical for anyone with a bank statement and a calendar: name the not-bread. Then hear the alternative: *"eat what is good, and delight yourselves in fatness... hear, that your soul may live"* (vv. 2-3). And say the address aloud, because Session 5 left it hanging over the mountain feast: the Church has always known where this table is set. The Eucharist is the banquet where the penniless buy: the Lord himself urging the invitation (CCC 1384), St. Ambrose walking the newly baptized from the font straight to it, St. Ephrem calling what is served there the Medicine of Life. The feast that swallows death (25:6-8), the Servant's self-offering (53:10), and the free market of 55:1 are one table, and you are on the guest list under the only qualification printed: thirsty.

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

Now a chapter the Reformers loved, argued the way your Protestant friends would argue it, and they argue it from love of grace. Full strength:

Isaiah 55 is the Protestant Reformation in one verse, and Rome forgot it. Salvation is *without money and without price*: free, sola gratia, sola fide. Now audit Catholicism against that verse: indulgences, which were literally sold by Tetzel until Luther objected; Mass stipends and offering envelopes; penances assigned like invoices; merit accumulated like a wage; purgatory as a debtor's prison for the insufficiently paid-up. A system of priests, obligations, and works has been built on top of a free gift, exactly the not-bread economy Isaiah mocks. The Reformation happened because somebody reread Isaiah 55 and noticed the price tag Rome had attached. Grace plus anything is not grace.

Say it with a Reformer's fire. Then audit it against the actual books.

4. Answer with the Church's own doctrine on the table: (a) what does the Catechism actually teach about the gratuity of grace and about merit (CCC 1996-1998, 2007-2009); (b) what happened historically with the indulgence abuses, and who condemned them; (c) what does the verse's own paradox, *buy without price*, teach about how free gifts are received; (d) what is the honest difference that remains?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

(a) Read the Church's own words, because the steelman argues against a Catholicism that does not exist on paper: grace is *free and undeserved*; justification *comes from grace* and depends entirely on *God's gratuitous initiative* (CCC 1996-1998). On merit: *with regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man*; the disproportion between us and God is infinite; and our merits themselves *are God's gifts* (CCC 2007-2009). Trent, the very council that answered Luther, opened its decree on justification by teaching that nothing before justification, neither faith nor works, merits it. Sola gratia, in the sense that grace is the free, unearned source of the whole Christian life, is not the Reformation's discovery; it is the Church's constant teaching, and Isaiah 55 has been read at her lecterns for two millennia.

(b) Be honest, because honesty is the apologetic: the indulgence *abuses* were real, Tetzel-style preaching was a scandal, and the Catholic Church herself condemned it: Trent ordered the evil traffic in indulgences abolished (Session 25, Decree on Indulgences), and St. Pius V afterward suppressed the sales outright. A doctrine's corruption is not the doctrine: an indulgence was never the purchase of forgiveness (forgiveness is God's free gift, ordinarily received for grave sin in the sacrament of Reconciliation); Mass stipends support a priest and buy nothing from God; assigned penances are medicine for the forgiven, not fees for forgiveness. Where churchmen sold what God gives freely, they sinned against this very chapter, and the Church said so.

(c) Now the verse's own paradox, which answers the deeper question: *buy... without money*. Free is not the same as automatic. A feast freely spread must still be come to, eaten, digested: "*come... buy... eat... hear, that your soul may live.*" A cascade of imperatives: the gift is free and the receiving is active. That is the whole Catholic grammar the steelman mistakes for a price list: sacraments are how the free feast is eaten; faith working through love is what nourished people do; merit is the strength the food gives, credited by a Father's generosity (CCC 2008-2009), not a wage that funds the meal. Nobody calls eating the price of dinner.

(d) The honest remaining difference is real but smaller than the steelman thinks: not *whether* salvation is free, both confess it is, but whether justification itself transforms from within, grace making our actions really good and really ours, or is a forensic declaration with real renewal following as its fruit, as classical Protestants hold. The Catholic claim is the more radical grace: God gives so freely that he even makes our cooperation his gift inside us. Then end where the chapter ends the argument for you: the Bible's final page renews Isaiah's invitation almost in his own words, "*let him who desires take the water of life without price*" (Revelation 22:17), written within the apostolic Church, canonized by her, and answered at her altar every morning.

The Word That Comes Back Full (Isaiah 55:6-13)

5. (Optional, first cut for time.) Read Isaiah 55:6-9. What is urgent in verses 6-7, what is the promise attached to returning, and what, in context, are the *thoughts* of verses 8-9 actually about?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Urgency: "*Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near*": the invitation has a while-supplies-last clause, not because mercy expires but because seekers do; hearts harden, as Session 2 warned. The promise: let the wicked return, "*for he will abundantly pardon*", abundantly, the same overflowing measure as the feast. And verses 8-9 in their immediate context aim first at mercy, whatever wider applications they also bear: the reason given for *my thoughts are not your thoughts* is the abundant pardon of verse 7. We would not forgive like that; our thoughts keep score. His do not. The transcendence of God, in this chapter, is measured in forgiveness.

6. Read Isaiah 55:10-11, and set it beside the verse this whole section opened with, 40:8. What is the word compared to, what is guaranteed about it, and what does the pairing of 40:8 and 55:11 say about everything you have read between them?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Rain and snow: they do not bounce off the earth back to heaven; they soak in, water, germinate, "*giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater*." So God's word: "*it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose*." 40:8 opened the Book of Consolation: the word of our God will stand forever. 55:11 closes it: and it works. Durability and efficacy: the frame around chapters 40-55, and everything between them, comfort, the Servant, the arm, the feast, was that word, working. Application in two directions: every promise this study has read is rain already in the ground of your life, on schedule whether you feel germination or not; and every seed of the word you plant in someone else, the Ethiopians and the exiles you know, carries the same guarantee. Sowers are not responsible for the harvest's timing; the Sender has underwritten the seed. And so the chapter ends with the recession: "*You shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace*" (55:12), mountains singing, trees applauding: creation itself cheering the exiles home.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. Name your not-bread, specifically: the purchase, scroll, pursuit, or performance you keep feeding money and labor for a satisfaction that never arrives. What would it look like to take that exact hunger to the actual table, starting with this Sunday's Communion received on purpose?

2. Enlarge the tent is the family business: mother is setting more places. Who is one person you could bring, literally, physically, to the feast: to Mass, to this study's next cycle, to a meal at your table where grace is said? Name them and pick the date.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Receive Communion this Sunday with Isaiah 55:1-2 prayed in the pew beforehand: come thirsty, come broke, and buy without money.
- Fast once this week from your chief not-bread, one day, one app, one habit, and give the reclaimed time or money to someone hungry for actual bread.
- Plant one seed of the word deliberately, a verse shared, an invitation made, and then release the harvest schedule: 55:11 has underwritten it.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near."

Isaiah 55:6 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Father, you have admitted the moment and sworn the everlasting: mountains may move; your covenant of peace will not.

We bring you our thirst and our empty wallets, the only tickets your feast requires. Feed us with what is bread. Wean us from what is not. And send your word through us like rain, guaranteed not to return empty.

We go out in joy; lead us forth in peace. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Before next session: read Isaiah 56:1-8 and 58:1-12. One promise in chapter 56 keeps a debt this study incurred two sessions ago. See if you can spot the creditor.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 54:1-3 (the barren one sings; enlarge the tent)
- Isaiah 54:5-10 (your Maker is your husband; the brief moment; the Noah oath)
- Isaiah 55:1-3 (the free market; not-bread; the everlasting covenant, sure love for David)
- Isaiah 55:6-9 (seek while he may be found; abundant pardon; thoughts and ways; optional)
- Isaiah 55:10-13 (rain, snow, the word that returns full; going out in joy)

Live Discovery Target

- Galatians 4:26-27 (the Jerusalem above, our mother, quoting 54:1)

Supporting Passages

- Isaiah 53:10-11 (the offspring riddle; last session's plant)
- Genesis 9:11 (the Noah oath modeled)
- 2 Samuel 7 (sure love for David); Acts 13:34 (55:3 quoted of the Resurrection)
- Proverbs 9:5 (Wisdom's banquet invitation)
- John 6:35; 7:37 (Jesus personalizes the invitation)
- Revelation 22:17 (the Bible's closing invitation: without price)

Catechism

- CCC 1996-1998 (grace free and undeserved; God's gratuitous initiative)
- CCC 2007-2009 (no strict right to merit; merits are God's gifts)
- CCC 1384 (the Lord's invitation to the Eucharist)

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 55:6 (RSV2CE)

A House of Prayer for All Peoples

Isaiah 56-60 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

Participants watch the doors open: foreigners and eunuchs, the old law's excluded, are welcomed by name into a temple renamed "*a house of prayer for all peoples*," and they discover Jesus quoting that verse as he cleanses the temple (the whip of cords belongs to John's account, 2:15), and the study paying its debt to the Ethiopian of Session 11. They learn the fast God chooses (58): bread shared, the homeless housed, the naked covered, and hear the Catechism call these the works of mercy. They meet the armor of God at its original address (59:17). And the light thread, planted at 2:5 thirteen sessions ago, resolves in the sunrise of chapter 60, complete with camels, gold, and frankincense that the Magi will one day carry up the same road (Matthew names three gifts; tradition counts three travelers from them).

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

The catholicity of the Church, *catholic* meaning according-to-the-whole, for all peoples, and the corporal works of mercy (CCC 2447), which quote tonight's chapter 58. Epiphany also lives here: the Magi of Matthew 2 are chapter 60 arriving on schedule (CCC 528).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Chapters 56-66 turn to the community rebuilding after the return, with all its compromises and hopes. Chapter 56 opens with two case rulings that would have astonished the old assembly. The *foreigner* who joins himself to the LORD must not say, "*The LORD will surely separate me from his people*"; and the *eunuch* must not say, "*Behold, I am a dry tree*," for to eunuchs who keep the covenant God promises "*a monument and a name better than sons and daughters... an everlasting name which shall not be cut off*" (56:3-5). This matters doubly. First, Deuteronomy 23:1-8 barred emasculated men and specific neighboring nations from the assembly; tonight's steelman lives in that tension, and the answer is fulfillment, not contradiction. Second, this study owes a debt: the man in the chariot in Acts 8 was a *eunuch*, riding home from worship at Jerusalem, and his baptism reads like Isaiah 56:5 kept in person. The section crowns with the verse Jesus made famous: "*my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*" (56:7), which he quoted while cleansing the temple (Mark 11:17); by the common reconstruction of the temple courts, the commerce filled the Court of the Gentiles, the one space the nations had.

Chapter 57 passes quickly in the session but leave one jewel on the table: "*For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit*" (57:15). The God of the Isaiah 6 throne room keeps a second address, and it is not a palace. Chapter 58 is the session's moral engine: the people complain that their fasting goes unnoticed; God replies that fasting while oppressing workers and quarreling is theater. Then the fast he chooses: "*to loose the bonds of wickedness... to share your bread with the hungry, and*

bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him" (58:6-7). This is Session 1's lawsuit resolved into a program: worship and justice, finally one fabric, and the promise attached is the light thread itself: *"Then shall your light break forth like the dawn"* (58:8, 10). The Catechism cites these verses when it defines the works of mercy (CCC 2447).

Chapter 59 diagnoses the wall between the people and God, *"your iniquities have made a separation"* (59:2), and then, when no man can be found to intervene, gives the study's resolved thread a magnificent postscript: *"He saw that there was no man... then his own arm brought him victory"* (59:16). The group now knows how the Church reads the arm; let the sentence land. God then dresses for the rescue: *"He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head"* (59:17), armor Paul later issues to the whole Church (Ephesians 6:14-17): the armor of God is, first, the armor God wears. Chapter 60 is the sunrise: *"Arise, shine; for your light has come"* (60:1-3), nations and kings streaming to the brightness of Zion's rising, camel caravans from Midian and Sheba bringing *"gold and frankincense"* and proclaiming the praise of the LORD (60:6). Matthew 2 is this page with names attached, which is why the Roman Lectionary appoints Isaiah 60:1-6 as the first reading for Epiphany; CCC 528 gives the feast its meaning. The chapter ends beyond the sun itself: *"The sun shall be no more your light by day... but the LORD will be your everlasting light"* (60:19-20), a promise Revelation 21:23 keeps in the new Jerusalem.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. Deuteronomy 23:1-8 (the old exclusions, tonight's steelman); Solomon's dedication prayer already asked God to hear *the foreigner* who prays toward the house (1 Kings 8:41-43); 56:7 answers Solomon. The fast of chapter 58 stands on Session 1's Isaiah 1:11-17 and the Torah's constant triad: the sojourner, the orphan, the widow. The mountain the nations stream to (2:2-4) has been waiting thirteen sessions for chapter 60's caravans.

Fulfillment. Mark 11:17: Jesus quotes 56:7 at the temple cleansing, defending the nations' courtyard. Acts 8: the eunuch baptized, 56:4-5 kept. Matthew 25:31-46 sets chapter 58's fast at the center of the Last Judgment scene: I was hungry, naked, a stranger. Ephesians 6:14-17 issues God's own armor from 59:17 to the Church. Matthew 2:1-11: the Magi with the gold and frankincense, the firstfruits of Isaiah's kings-to-the-brightness image (CCC 528). Revelation 21:23-26: the city needing no sun, the nations walking by its light, the kings bringing their glory in: Isaiah 60, kept forever.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom • *Homilies on Matthew*

Preaching to a congregation that adorned its altar while beggars shivered at the church door, St. John Chrysostom refused to let worship and mercy divorce: honor Christ in the sacrament, he thundered, but do not despise him when he is naked outside; the same Lord who said *this is my body* also said *I was hungry and you gave me no food*. Adorn the table within, and do not neglect the brother without, for the temple of the afflicted brother is more precious than the ornaments of any church.

St. Peter Chrysologus • *Sermons for Epiphany*

The golden-worded Doctor preached the Magi as chapter 60 in motion: in the wise men (tradition counts them three from their gifts), the whole Gentile world bent its knee early, bringing the

prophet's own inventory, gold for the King, frankincense for God. What Isaiah saw as caravans on the horizon, Bethlehem received as a few tired travelers; and in them the nations were already arriving at the light of their rising.

St. Teresa of Calcutta • *The Witness of Her Life*

St. Teresa of Calcutta built a religious family on the syllogism of Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25: the Christ she received in the Host each morning she served all day in what she called his distressing disguise, the hungry, the naked, the dying stranger. A saying long associated with her runs: the fruit of silence is prayer, of prayer faith, of faith love, of love service: the fast God chooses, run (as this study may put it) as a supply chain from the altar to the gutter and back.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 2447.** The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities: feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked. The Catechism's own citations here include Isaiah 58:6-7. Tonight's chapter is where the list comes from.
- **CCC 528.** The Epiphany: the Magi's coming means that pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as Son of God and Savior of the world; in them the full number of the nations begins its journey. Isaiah 60's caravans; the Lectionary sets that chapter at the head of the feast.
- **CCC 1961-1964.** The Old Law is holy, a preparation for the Gospel: it prophesies and presages the work of liberation, and its ceremonial prescriptions awaited fulfillment. The frame for tonight's steelman on Deuteronomy 23 and Isaiah 56.

THREAD WATCH

THREADS TONIGHT

Light: resolved. 2:5 (walk in the light), 9:2 (Galilee's dawn), 42:6 and 49:6 (the Servant as light), 58:8-10 (your light breaks forth), and 60:1-3 (arise, shine: the sunrise). Walk the whole trail aloud; it is the study's longest thread and it ends in a sunrise. 60:19's beyond-the-sun clause hands the baton to Revelation 21.

The mountain / house of prayer: resolved. 2:2-4's streaming nations arrive at 56:7's renamed house and 60's caravans. The Zion-as-mother finale still waits for Session 14; do not touch 66 tonight.

The arm: postscript. 59:16, his own arm brought him victory: say it and let the room enjoy knowing.

The eunuch's debt: paid. Acts 8 meets Isaiah 56:4-5. Let a participant make the connection if possible; it is the study's sweetest callback.

SESSION GOALS

1. Open the doors of 56:1-8: foreigner and eunuch welcomed, the house renamed, and the debt to Acts 8 paid.

2. Run the Deuteronomy 23 steelman, Scripture contradicting Scripture?, and answer with fulfillment, trajectory, and CCC 1961-1964.
3. Discover Mark 11:17: Jesus quoting tonight's verse at the temple cleansing.
4. Preach the fast God chooses (58:6-10) as the works of mercy (CCC 2447), with Matthew 25 as its final exam.
5. Land the arm's postscript (59:16) and issue God's own armor (59:17 with Ephesians 6).
6. Resolve the light thread in the sunrise of 60:1-6, with the Magi (CCC 528) and the city beyond the sun.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 10 min. Build, 55 min. Send, 10 min. Live It, memory verse, Take-Home, closing prayer, 10 min.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 6 (59:16-17, the arm and the armor) first, painful as that is; compress Question 1's second half second. Never cut the eunuch's debt, the steelman, the fast, or the chapter 60 sunrise.

A House of Prayer for All Peoples

Isaiah 56-60 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

High and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: you dwell in the high and holy place, and also with the contrite and humble. Dwell here.

Tonight, open the doors you have opened: to the far-off, the excluded, the ones who call themselves dry trees. Teach us the fast you choose. And let our light break forth like the dawn.

Through Christ our Lord, the light of the nations. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Describe a time you were welcomed somewhere you expected to be turned away, or turned away somewhere you expected welcome. What did it do to you?
2. When you hear the word *fasting*, what is your honest association: diet culture, Lent, hunger, holiness, guilt? One word each around the table.

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

The Doors Open (Isaiah 56:1-8)

1. Read Isaiah 56:3-8. Two groups of people are told to stop saying something about themselves. Who are they, what are they forbidden to say, and what is promised to each, in detail? Then read verse 7's famous sentence and verse 8's last line.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The foreigner may not say, "*The LORD will surely separate me from his people*"; and the eunuch may not say, "*Behold, I am a dry tree*." To the covenant-keeping eunuch, the childless man whose name dies with him, God promises the unthinkable: "*in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters... an everlasting name which shall not be cut off*", and the Hebrew has a tender edge: the *name that shall not be cut off* is promised to the man who was. To the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD: their offerings *accepted on my altar*, full liturgical citizenship. Then the house is renamed: "*my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*," and verse 8 leaves the door propped: the God who gathers Israel's outcasts says, "*I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered*." The guest list has a *yet others* clause, permanently.

Now pay the study's debt. Two sessions ago, a man rode home from Jerusalem reading Isaiah 53 in a chariot, and Luke's narrative keeps naming him by one word, again and again: the *eunuch*, returning from worship at a Jerusalem whose assembly the old rules excluded him from. Philip baptized him, and he went on his way rejoicing. Acts 8 reads like God keeping Isaiah 56:4-5 in person: the dry tree given, in the house of the Church, a memorial that has outlasted every family tree of his generation: we are telling his story tonight, on another continent, twenty-seven centuries later.

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

But wait. Open Deuteronomy 23:1-3 and read it, because the objection writes itself, and skeptics use exactly this pair of texts:

Scripture contradicts Scripture, and the God of the Bible changes his rules. Deuteronomy 23, the Law of Moses, God's own word, expressly bars eunuchs and certain foreigners from the assembly of the LORD. Isaiah 56, also God's word, welcomes both by name, with honors. These are not different emphases; they point opposite directions across overlapping cases. So either God changed his mind, awkward for an unchanging God, or the Bible is a human anthology of competing policies, and appeals to *what Scripture says* are naive: it says both. And if these rules could flip, the skeptic continues, every rule can flip; the Bible is a wax nose.

Sharpen it fully. Then answer from the shape of the whole story.

2. Answer it: (a) what was the old exclusion actually protecting, and what kind of law was it (CCC 1961-1964 helps); (b) what does Isaiah 56 itself say the welcomed must hold fast to, and what does that reveal; (c) what does Jesus say he came to do with the Law, and how does Acts 8 embody the resolution; (d) what is the difference between a contradiction and a trajectory?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

(a) Distinguish what the Church has always distinguished: the moral law (permanent: the Decalogue) and the ceremonial and boundary laws (temporary by design: holiness fences for a young nation surrounded by paganism, CCC 1961-1964: the Old Law is holy, a *preparation*, prophesying the work to come). Deuteronomy 23's assembly rules were boundary markers: they guarded Israel's distinctness, and the eunuch exclusion in particular is commonly read as guarding the assembly against the pagan cults whose priests were castrated, and against any hint that mutilation consecrates. The fence was protecting the field for a harvest it could not yet see.

(b) Now read what Isaiah 56 actually requires of the welcomed: keep my sabbaths, choose what pleases me, *hold fast my covenant*, three times. The welcome is not the abolition of holiness but its extension: the same covenant, now offered to the very people the fence once excluded. That is the tell that this is not a policy flip: the *center* never moved, one LORD, one covenant, one house; what moved was the perimeter, exactly as the prophets always said it would: nations streaming to the mountain (2:2-4, Session 1), a Servant as light to the nations (49:6), Solomon already praying for the foreigner's prayers to be heard (1 Kings 8:41-43). Isaiah 56 is not Deuteronomy repealed; it is Deuteronomy's own destination announced.

(c) Jesus states the hermeneutic in one sentence: "*I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them*" (Matthew 5:17). A scaffold is not contradicted by the finished cathedral; a fence is not refuted by the harvest it protected. And Acts 8 is the resolution with a face: the Ethiopian eunuch, excluded by Deuteronomy's letter, promised by Isaiah's oracle, is baptized into Christ, in whom, Paul will write, there is neither Jew nor Greek (Galatians 3:28). The old rule served its season; the promise it protected has arrived; the door opens from the inside.

(d) So name the difference for your skeptical friend: a *contradiction* is two final answers to one question; a *trajectory* is one plan unfolding in stages, each stage announced in advance by the stage before it. The exclusion was never the last word, and Scripture itself says so, in Isaiah, centuries before Christ. Far from a wax nose, this is the strongest kind of evidence that one Mind wrote the whole story: the early chapters contain the later ones in promise. And a caution for us, not just for

skeptics: every generation of God's people is tempted to mistake its fences for the field. The test, then and now, is 56:8: does your instinct sound like *yet others will I gather*, or like the dry-tree sentence God forbade a man to say about himself?

LIVE DISCOVERY

Jesus quoted tonight's renamed house, out loud, once, and he was overturning tables when he did it. Find the scene: Mark 11. What was happening in the temple, in which courtyard, and what two texts does Jesus splice together? Pairs, 3-4 minutes.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Mark 11:15-17, the cleansing of the temple. The buying, selling, and money-changing had, by the common reconstruction of the temple courts, colonized the Court of the Gentiles, the nations' one courtyard, the square of earth where a God-seeking foreigner could stand. Jesus drives out the commerce and splices Isaiah 56:7 to Jeremiah 7:11: *"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."* Read his anger precisely: it is Isaiah 56 enforced. The rage is not against the temple but *for* the nations: their one prayer-space had been turned into a currency exchange, the *all peoples* clause buried under livestock pens. Every parish inherits the audit: is there anything in our common life currently parked on the square footage where the outsider was supposed to be able to pray?

The Fast God Chooses (Isaiah 58:1-10)

3. Read Isaiah 58:3-7. The people file a complaint in verse 3: what is it? What does God's answer expose, and then list, item by item, the fast he actually chooses in verses 6-7.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The complaint: *"Why have we fasted, and thou seest it not?"* Religious performance with no receipt. The exposure: *"in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers... you fast only to quarrel and to fight."* Hungry and mean is not holy; a fast that leaves the fists closed has only rearranged appetite. Session 1's lawsuit, iniquity *and* solemn assembly, one more time, in case fourteen weeks dulled it.

The fast God chooses, itemized: loose the bonds of wickedness; undo the thongs of the yoke; let the oppressed go free; *share your bread with the hungry; bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, cover him;* and do not hide from your own flesh and blood. Your group has met this list before, in church: these are the corporal works of mercy, and the Catechism cites tonight's verses when it defines them (CCC 2447). And Jesus set the list at the center of the Last Judgment's announced exam: I was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked (Matthew 25:31-46). St. John Chrysostom fused the altar and the door forever: honor Christ in the sacrament, and do not despise him naked outside it; St. Teresa of Calcutta ran the same syllogism as a supply chain, the Christ received in the morning Host served all afternoon in his distressing disguise. And the promise stapled to the fast is our oldest thread: *"Then shall your light break forth like the dawn... then shall your light rise in the darkness"* (58:8, 10). Mercy is how the light gets out of the building.

4. (Optional, first cut for time.) Read Isaiah 59:15b-17. God surveys the field before the rescue: what does he find missing, what does the study's most famous phrase do in verse 16, and what does God put on in verse 17? Where has your Bible seen that outfit reissued?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He finds no justice, and, verse 16, “*he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intervene; then his own arm brought him victory.*” The room may smile together: they know Whom the Church names here. When no intercessor could be found, God supplied one from his own life; 53:12’s Intercessor is this verse kept. Then the wardrobe: “*He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head.*” Paul reissues the same equipment to every baptized Christian: the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:14-17). Read the label: the armor of God is not armor about God; it is armor *belonging to* God, his own battle dress, lent to the Church. You are wearing his kit into his fight.

Arise, Shine (Isaiah 60:1-6, 19-20)

5. Read Isaiah 60:1-3 aloud, and then walk the whole light thread from your margins: 2:5, 9:2, 42:6, 49:6, 58:8-10, and now this. What has the thread been doing for thirteen sessions, and what happens in verse 3? Then read verse 6 and name what is on the camels.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

“*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.*” The trail: an invitation (*walk in the light*, 2:5), a dawn over Galilee (9:2), a person (*a light to the nations*, 42:6; 49:6), a promise stapled to mercy (58:8-10), and now a sunrise over Zion while “*darkness shall cover the earth.*” And verse 3: “*nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising*”: the streaming nations of Session 1’s mountain (2:2-4) arrive at last, uphill, toward the glow. The thread’s logic, complete: the light is the LORD’s; it dawned in a person; it breaks out of his people through mercy; and it ends as the gravity of the nations.

Verse 6: camel caravans from Midian and Sheba, “*they shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.*” If that inventory sounds familiar, it should: Magi from the East, a rising light followed, gold and frankincense unpacked at Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1-11). The Magi are Isaiah 60 arriving on schedule, the nations’ firstfruits, as St. Peter Chrysologus preached them, which is why the Lectionary appoints this chapter for Epiphany; CCC 528 gives its meaning. And verses 19-20 promise a city beyond the sunrise itself: “*The sun shall be no more your light by day... the LORD will be your everlasting light,*” a promise the Bible’s last page keeps: the city has no need of sun, “*for the glory of God is its light... and the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it*” (Revelation 21:23-26). Isaiah 60, kept forever.

DIG DEEPER • The Missing Myrrh

Isaiah 60:6 inventories the caravans: gold and frankincense. Matthew’s Magi carry three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The Fathers noticed the arithmetic. Gold for the King and frankincense for God are the tribute of the nations arriving at the light, exactly what Isaiah foresaw. Myrrh, the burial spice, belongs to a page of the story Isaiah 60’s sunrise does not show, though Isaiah 53 already had: the light of the nations would first be a man of sorrows. The Magi’s third gift is the fourth Servant Song, wrapped. Take it as the Church’s meditation, not a proof: even the gift registry of Epiphany confesses the whole Gospel.

SEND • TAKING IT OUT

1. Run 56:8 on yourself gently: where in your instincts, your parish, or your group is there a fence being mistaken for the field, a person or kind of person quietly filed under *dry tree*? What is one concrete act of *yet others will I gather* you could perform this month?
2. Choose your fast from God's own list, and schedule it: bread shared with a specific hungry person, one homeless or displaced person concretely helped, clothing actually taken from your closet to someone cold. Not charity in general: one item, one name, one date. Whose light breaks forth like the dawn? Yours does (58:8). Mercy is also how God heals the one who gives it.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Do one corporal work of mercy from Isaiah 58:6-7 this week, personally, not by proxy, and tell no one except God.
- Pray Isaiah 60:1-3 on one dark morning this week, at an actual window, at actual dawn. Let the sunrise preach it.
- Find the outsider's square footage in your world, the place where the seeker is supposed to be able to pray, ask, or belong, and clear one table from it: one invitation, one introduction, one welcome that costs you something.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you."

Isaiah 60:1 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

High and holy One, you dwell in eternity and with the contrite: dwell with us.

Make your house in us a house of prayer for all peoples: doors open, tables cleared, dry trees given names. Teach us the fast you choose until our light breaks forth like the dawn.

And on the dark mornings, remind us of the caravans: the nations are already on the road, and the gold and frankincense are already packed. Arise, shine. Amen.

Before next session, the last: read Isaiah 61:1-3 and 65:17-19. Bring your Take-Home 1 memory verse, and bring whoever you have been meaning to bring. We finish where a certain carpenter began.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 56:3-8 (foreigner and eunuch; the everlasting name; house of prayer for all peoples; yet others)
- Isaiah 57:15 (the high and holy One's second address; quoted in prayers)
- Isaiah 58:3-10 (the complaint; the fast God chooses; light like the dawn)
- Isaiah 59:2, 15b-17 (sin the separator; his own arm; the armor of God; optional)
- Isaiah 60:1-6, 19-20 (arise, shine; nations and kings; gold and frankincense; beyond the sun)

Live Discovery Target

- Mark 11:15-17 (the temple cleansing; 56:7 quoted, spliced with Jeremiah 7:11)

Supporting Passages

- Deuteronomy 23:1-8 (the old exclusions; steelman text)
- 1 Kings 8:41-43 (Solomon prays for the foreigner)
- Acts 8:26-39 (the eunuch baptized; the debt paid)
- Matthew 5:17 (fulfil, not abolish); Galatians 3:28 (neither Jew nor Greek)
- Matthew 25:31-46 (the works of mercy as the final exam)
- Ephesians 6:14-17 (the armor reissued)
- Matthew 2:1-11 (the Magi; CCC 528); Revelation 21:23-26 (the city beyond the sun)

Catechism

- CCC 2447 (the works of mercy; cites Isaiah 58:6-7)
- CCC 528 (Epiphany: the nations begin their journey)
- CCC 1961-1964 (the Old Law as holy preparation)

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 60:1 (RSV2CE)

New Heavens and a New Earth

Isaiah 61-66 • Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

DISCOVERY AIM

The finale. Participants read the anointing of 61:1-3 and discover a carpenter in Nazareth standing up, reading these exact verses, and sitting down with the words *“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”* They hear Zion renamed and married (62), watch the heavens torn open on request (64:1) at a river in two Gospel scenes, and arrive at the new heavens and new earth (65-66): the wolf and the lamb returning from Session 4, mother Jerusalem nursing her children, and, in the book's closing paragraph, God taking priests *“from the nations.”* The study ends where it began: with the question of Isaiah 6 put to the whole table, and fourteen weeks of evidence behind the answer.

CATHOLIC TOUCHSTONE

The Church as our mother (CCC 757), the priesthood among the nations, the new creation (CCC 1043-1045), and the honest last word about judgment (CCC 1036-1037). And the study's own title, finally paid in full: the sent people of 66:19 are the room.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Chapter 61 opens with the anointing: *“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted... to proclaim liberty to the captives... to comfort all who mourn... the oil of gladness instead of mourning”* (61:1-3). The speaker gathers everything the study has met: the Spirit that rests (11:2; 42:1), the herald of good tidings (40:9; 52:7), the comfort of the mourners (40:1; Sirach 48:24). The Catechism quotes these verses and says plainly: these are the words Jesus makes his own at Nazareth (CCC 714). Luke 4:16-21 is tonight's crown discovery: Jesus, handed the Isaiah scroll in his hometown synagogue, finds this place, reads it, rolls the scroll, sits, and says: *“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”* If your group has alumni of the *Today* study of Luke, let the recognition ring: Luke's *sēmeron*, the today of fulfillment, is planted here first, in the reading of tonight's chapter. Jesus' first public sermon was one sentence long, and it was an Isaiah citation with a timestamp.

Chapter 62 is nuptial: Zion gets a new name, *“You shall no more be termed Forsaken... you shall be called My delight is in her (Hephzibah), and your land Married (Beulah)... as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you”* (62:4-5). Chapter 63 opens with the divine warrior in crimsoned garments from the wine press, judgment imagery the Church's tradition has also read at the foot of the cross, and then turns to one of the Old Testament's most intimate prayers: *“Thou, O LORD, art our Father”* (63:16), *“we are the clay, and thou art our potter”* (64:8), and the cry that gives the session its second discovery: *“O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down”* (64:1). Mark answers with a verb: at the Jordan, Jesus saw the heavens *torn open*, Greek *schizō*, and the Spirit descending (Mark 1:10), the request of 64:1 granted, and Mark uses that violent verb exactly once more, at the moment the

temple veil is *torn* from top to bottom (15:38). See the Dig Deeper; it is one of the New Testament's quietest masterstrokes.

Chapters 65-66 are the summit. God was *“ready to be found by those who did not seek me”* (65:1, quoted by Paul of the Gentiles, Romans 10:20). Then: *“Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth”* (65:17), Jerusalem created a joy, no more the sound of weeping, and the wolf and the lamb of Session 4 return to graze together (65:25); the book closes its own inclusio with 11:6-9. Chapter 66 gives the study its final portraits: the God whose throne is heaven looking to *“he that is humble and contrite in spirit”* (66:2); Zion in labor, delivering her children in a day, and the maternal finale: *“that you may suck and be satisfied with her consoling breasts... As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem”* (66:11-13); chapter 40's *comfort* thread resolves in a mother's arms, and the mother is Jerusalem, whom Paul already named ours (Galatians 4:26; CCC 757). Then the ending almost no one knows is there: God gathers *“all nations and tongues”*, sets a sign, and sends survivors *“to the coastlands afar off, that have not heard my fame... and they shall declare my glory among the nations”* (66:18-19), bringing the nations as an offering, *“and some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD”* (66:21). Gentile priests: a promise in the book's closing paragraph which the Church has long heard as the dawn light of her own priesthood among the nations. And be honest about the actual last verse: 66:24 ends the book with the unquenched fire and the undying worm, the verse Jesus himself quotes of Gehenna (Mark 9:48). The synagogue custom is to reread verse 23 after 24 so the public reading ends in worship; tonight's steelman faces the hard verse instead of skipping it, because a study with 100% fidelity owes its people the whole book.

End the night as a commissioning. The final Send returns to Isaiah 6: the study's title question, *“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”*, put to a table that now knows the Sender, the Servant, the message, and the mission field. The closing prayer has the whole group answer it aloud, together, in Isaiah's own words. Fourteen weeks were the preparation; the last five minutes are the point.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Roots. The anointing of 61:1 is the Spirit-resting of 11:2 and 42:1 arriving in the first person; jubilee release (*liberty to the captives*) is Leviticus 25 proclaimed at last. Mother Zion completes the barren woman of 54:1. The new heavens and earth answer Genesis 1 as re-creation; the wolf and lamb close the arc opened at 11:6.

Fulfillment. Luke 4:16-21 (Nazareth: today, fulfilled); Mark 1:10 and 15:38 (the heavens and the veil torn, *schizō*); Romans 10:20 (found by those who did not seek); Galatians 4:26 with CCC 757 (Jerusalem above, our mother); 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1-4 (new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells; the holy city, no more tears, drawing on Isaiah 65:17-19 and 25:8); Revelation 2:17 (the new name promised); Mark 9:48 (Jesus quoting 66:24). The Bible does not merely end after Isaiah; it ends *with* Isaiah.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose • *Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*

Commenting on Nazareth, St. Ambrose lingers where Luke lingers: the Anointed One reads the prophecy of his own anointing, and the eyes of all are fixed on him. And the anointing presses outward, as the Church's chrismal tradition, which Ambrose's Milan knew well, makes explicit: the Christ, the Anointed, shares his chrism; from his fullness Christians are anointed in him, so that the

mission read aloud in that synagogue is henceforth read over everyone the Church anoints. The scroll of Isaiah 61 is quietly handed to the baptized.

St. Cyprian of Carthage • *On the Unity of the Church* (5-6)

St. Cyprian states the household rule of Isaiah 66's nursing Jerusalem in one unforgettable sentence: he cannot have God for his Father who does not have the Church for his mother. The maternal imagery of the prophets is not decoration; it is doctrine: we are born of her womb in baptism, nourished at her breast in the sacraments, and animated by her Spirit, and there is no such thing as a motherless Christian.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons • *Against Heresies* (4.20.7)

Surveying the whole sweep from creation to new creation, St. Irenaeus coins the line that could stand over Isaiah 65-66: the glory of God is a living man, and the life of man is the vision of God. The new heavens and new earth are not God's escape from his creation but its healing: what he made, he remakes; what sin ruined, glory fills; and the creature fully alive, beholding God, is the point of the entire project.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- **CCC 714.** The Catechism quotes Isaiah 61:1-2 and states: these are the words Jesus makes his own at Nazareth. Tonight's crown discovery, pre-certified.
- **CCC 757.** The Church is our mother: the Jerusalem above, the bride of the Lamb, the spotless mother of holy children. Isaiah 66:13's comfort has an ecclesial address.
- **CCC 1043-1045.** The new heavens and the new earth: the universe itself renewed, the human race's unity consummated, God's dwelling among men. The Catechism's eschatology article teaches the same hope, citing 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21.
- **CCC 1033, 1036-1037.** Hell as definitive self-exclusion from communion with God (1033); the affirmations of Scripture as a call to responsibility and conversion (1036); God predestines no one to hell, which requires a willful turning away persisted in until the end (1037). The frame for tonight's steelman on 66:24.

THREAD WATCH

FINAL THREAD LEDGER (READ IT WITH THE GROUP AT THE CLOSE)

The Holy One of Israel: heard from the seraphim (S2), tracked through sixty-six chapters, dwelling in Zion's midst (12:6), and at the last, looking to the humble and contrite (66:2). The thrice-holy One ends the book at eye level with the lowly.

Zion: harlot city (S1), smelted faithful (1:26), banqueting mountain (S5), barren woman singing (S12), house of prayer for all peoples (S13), and tonight: bride (62), and mother nursing her children (66): the Church (CCC 757).

Light: resolved at the sunrise (S13); tonight the city beyond the sun stands confirmed in Revelation 21.

The arm of the LORD: guessed, sealed, revealed (S11): the Servant, pierced and risen, interceding still.

Comfort: commanded (40:1), embodied (61:2: *to comfort all who mourn*), and delivered in a mother's arms (66:13).

Here am I, send me: Isaiah's brief answer (S2), the Servant's whole career, Philip's chariot (S11), the beautiful feet (52:7), and tonight, 66:19: *I will send survivors to the nations*. The title of the study is its last assignment.

SESSION GOALS

1. Discover Luke 4:16-21: the anointing read and claimed, today, and the handshake with the Gospel of Luke honored.
2. Hear Zion renamed and married (62:4-5), and connect the new name to Revelation 2:17.
3. Discover the torn heavens: 64:1 answered by Mark's schizō at the Jordan and the veil.
4. Stand in the new creation (65:17-25) with the wolf-and-lamb inclusio closed, and receive mother Jerusalem's comfort (66:10-13; CCC 757).
5. Face 66:24 honestly in the final steelman, with CCC 1036-1037 and the mercy of the warning.
6. Land 66:18-21: the sent survivors and the priests from the nations, and close with the commissioning: the whole table answering Isaiah 6:8 aloud.

TIME NOTE (90 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED CLOCK

Gather and opening prayer, 5 min. Win, 8 min. Build, 52 min. Send, 8 min. Final thread ledger, memory verse, Take-Home, 7 min. Commissioning and closing prayer, 10 min: do not let this get squeezed; it is the study's destination.

Pre-chosen cuts if running long: cut Question 3 (chapter 62) first; compress Question 4 (the torn heavens) second. Never cut Nazareth, the new creation, the steelman, 66:18-21, or the commissioning.

New Heavens and a New Earth

Isaiah 61-66 • Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, fourteen weeks ago you summoned heaven and earth and put your people on trial, and we sat down at the defendants' table. Tonight you are creating new heavens and a new earth, and you have made us witnesses.

Anoint this last evening with the oil of gladness. Read your scroll over us one more time. And when the reading ends, ask us your question; we have been practicing our answer.

Through Christ our Lord, the Anointed. Amen.

WIN • OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Fourteen sessions: name the single moment, verse, or discovery from this study that you know will still be with you in ten years.
2. If you could rename a hard season of your life the way God renames Zion tonight, what would the old name be, and what new name would you give it?

BUILD • INDUCTIVE STUDY

The Anointed One Reads His Anointing (Isaiah 61:1-3)

1. Read Isaiah 61:1-3 aloud. Whose voice is this? Inventory the anointing: what is the speaker anointed to do, item by item, and which items has this study met before?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The Spirit-anointed herald: *"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me,"* anointed, *mashach*, the messiah-verb. The commission: good tidings to the afflicted; bind up the brokenhearted; liberty to the captives, jubilee language from Leviticus 25, the economy-resetting release proclaimed at last; opening of the prison; the year of the LORD's favor; *comfort all who mourn*; the oil of gladness instead of mourning; a garland instead of ashes. The study recognizes nearly every line: the Spirit that *rests* (11:2; 42:1), the herald with beautiful feet (40:9; 52:7), and the comfort of Zion's mourners, which is Sirach's own one-line summary of Isaiah's legacy (48:24, Session 7) and chapter 40's first word. The whole Book of Consolation has been compressed into one speaker's job description, in the first person. The only question is whose voice it is, and someone answered it, out loud, in a small synagogue in the hills of Galilee.

LIVE DISCOVERY

The crown discovery of the study. Jesus' hometown congregation hands him the scroll of Isaiah (a carpenter of about thirty, the Gospels tell us elsewhere: Mark 6:3; Luke 3:23). He finds tonight's passage, reads it, rolls the scroll, hands it back, sits down, and preaches a one-sentence first sermon. Find it in Luke 4. Read verses 16-21 and report his sermon word for word. Pairs, 3 minutes.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Luke 4:16-21, Nazareth. Jesus stands, receives the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, finds the place, and reads 61:1-2 (with a line of 58:6 folded in: *to set at liberty those who are oppressed*, the fast God chooses, on his lips). Then: closed the scroll, sat down, every eye fixed on him, and the sermon: “*Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*” One sentence. The Anointed One reading the prophecy of his own anointing and stamping it with a timestamp. The Catechism certifies the reading: these are the words Jesus makes his own at Nazareth (CCC 714).

Three landings. First, note where he stopped reading: mid-verse, before *the day of vengeance of our God* (61:2b). Many Christians have heard the scroll's next clause held for his return; the year of favor, at any rate, is now, which is why the Church still calls this the acceptable time. Second, for anyone who has made the journey through Luke's Gospel: this is where Luke's great *today*, *sēmeron*, is planted, the today that will sound at Zacchaeus's house and from the cross to a thief; the timestamp of Nazareth runs to Paradise. Third, the anointing presses outward, as the Church's chrismal tradition makes explicit: the Christ shares his chrism; the scroll read that morning is read over everyone the Church anoints, which means the job description of 61:1-3, good news to the poor, the brokenhearted bound up, is now, quietly, yours. Hold that; the end of the book is about to make it explicit.

2. (Optional, first cut for time.) Read Isaiah 62:2-5. What happens to Zion's name, what are the new names, and what is the closing image? Where does the New Testament keep the new-name promise personal?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The renaming: no more *Forsaken* (Azubah) and *Desolate*; instead *Hephzibah*, my delight is in her, and *Beulah*, married. And the image: “*as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.*” Not tolerates: *rejoices over*. The covenant's final register is nuptial, which is where the Bible ends: the marriage supper of the Lamb, the new Jerusalem “*prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*” (Revelation 21:2). And the promise goes personal in Revelation 2:17: to the one who conquers, “*a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it.*” The God who renames cities renames people; ask the room what old name, forsaken, failure, dry tree, he may be in the middle of retiring for them.

Rend the Heavens (Isaiah 63:16; 64:1, 8)

3. Read Isaiah 63:16 and 64:8, and then the cry of 64:1. What does Israel dare to call God, twice? What is the potter image asking for? And what, exactly, does 64:1 beg God to do?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

“*Thou, O LORD, art our Father*”: twice, 63:16 and 64:8, some of the Old Testament's clearest Our-Father language, centuries before a Galilean hillside made it a prayer. The potter: “*we are the clay, and thou art our potter; we are all the work of thy hand*”: surrender to being shaped, and a quiet argument: a potter does not abandon his own workmanship mid-vessel. And 64:1: “*O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down.*” Not open, gently: *rend*, tear, rip. Stop transmitting through prophets; tear the ceiling of the world and come down here yourself. It is the boldest prayer in the book, and the New Testament's answer to it is one Greek verb, used with surgical

precision.

DIG DEEPER • Schizō: The Verb Mark Uses Twice

Mark's Gospel uses the violent verb *schizō*, to tear, rip, rend, exactly twice. At the baptism: Jesus "*saw the heavens torn open and the Spirit descending*" (1:10): Isaiah's plea answered in Mark's telling, the heavens rent, God come down (the verb is Mark's own; the Greek Isaiah says *open*, so the allusion is Mark's art, not quotation). And at the death of Jesus: "*the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom*" (15:38): the veil between God and man rent, from the top, from God's side. Two tears, bracketing the whole Gospel: heaven torn open so God could come down, the veil torn open so man could come in. Mark composed the frame; Isaiah wrote the prayer it answers.

New Heavens, New Earth, and a Mother (Isaiah 65:17-25; 66:10-13)

4. Read Isaiah 65:17-19 and then verse 25. What does God announce he is creating, what sound is banished from the new Jerusalem, and who shows up in verse 25 that this study has met before, thirteen chapters and ten sessions ago?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth," and the verb is *bara*, Genesis 1's verb, used in Scripture only of God's own creating: not a renovation of Eden but creation's own sequel, and note what the new creation does not do: it does not scrap the old for a bare heaven; God remakes *heavens and earth*, matter included, bodies included (26:19 already told us), which is why the Creed says *resurrection of the body* and the Catechism speaks of the universe itself renewed, God's dwelling among men (CCC 1043-1045). St. Irenaeus gave the project its motto: the glory of God is a living man, and the life of man is the vision of God. Banished from the city: "*no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress*" (65:19), the acoustics of the new Jerusalem, which Revelation keeps at the end of the Bible: God "*will wipe away every tear... neither shall there be mourning nor crying*" (Revelation 21:4), Session 5's mountain, arrived. (Be honest about the canvas: Isaiah's own picture still contains long life rather than deathlessness at 65:20; prophetic imagery reaching toward what Revelation, drawing on this page and on 25:8, states absolutely.)

And verse 25: "*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together.*" Session 4's peaceable kingdom (11:6-9), returned to close the book's own frame: what the shoot of Jesse inaugurated, the new creation completes. The already/not-yet the group learned in the Session 4 steelman has been the book's architecture all along, and tonight is the *yet*.

5. Read Isaiah 66:10-13. The study's Zion thread reaches its last portrait, and chapter 40's first word comes home. What is Zion in these verses, what are her children doing, and what does God say in verse 13, in his own voice?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Zion is a mother: her children nursing, "*that you may suck and be satisfied with her consoling breasts,*" carried on the hip, dandled on the knees, prosperity flowing to her like a river. And verse 13, God speaking: "*As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.*" The *comfort* commanded in 40:1 is delivered here, in a mother's arms, and the mother is Jerusalem, whom Paul has already named for us: "*the Jerusalem above... she is our mother*"

(Galatians 4:26), the barren woman of Session 12, nursing at last. The Church is where God mothers his people (CCC 757), and St. Cyprian wrote the household rule over the whole scene: he cannot have God for his Father who does not have the Church for his mother. Notice, fourteen weeks in, how the threads have braided: the maternal God of 49:15, the singing barren one of 54:1, and the nursing Jerusalem of 66:13 are one continuous revelation: the tenderness at the center of omnipotence, which is what the arm of the LORD turned out to mean too.

STEELMAN • BUILD IT AT FULL STRENGTH

Now the honest ending. Read Isaiah 66:24, the actual last verse of the book, aloud: the dead bodies of the rebels, *“their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched.”* And build the objection at full strength, because someone at your table carries it:

A book of comfort that ends in unquenchable fire refutes itself, and so does a God of love with a hell. Sixty-five chapters of scarlet-made-white, bruised reeds unbroken, mothers who cannot forget, a Servant who bears everyone's iniquity, and the final image is corpses and fire? Either the love was not serious or the fire is not: a genuinely loving and omnipotent God would simply ensure that everyone, eventually, is saved; eternal punishment is infinite penalty for finite crimes, morally monstrous on its face. The synagogue itself flinches, rereading verse 23 after 24 so the public reading ends in worship. Honest modern people should flinch harder, and drop the doctrine.

Give it its full weight; it is felt in good faith. Then answer from the whole book you have just read.

6. Answer it: (a) who quotes 66:24 in the New Testament, and why does that matter; (b) what does the Church actually teach hell is, and who is predestined to it (CCC 1036-1037); (c) what has this very study shown about the anatomy of refusal; (d) what is the warning, at the end of a book of comfort, actually for?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

(a) The uncomfortable fact first: the person who quotes Isaiah 66:24 is Jesus, of Gehenna, verbatim: *“where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched”* (Mark 9:48). The same voice that said *let the children come to me*. You cannot recruit Jesus against this verse; the Lamb who bears the sin of the world is also the one who kept its warning in circulation. Whatever hell is, the most loving man who ever lived thought you needed to know about it, which reframes the question: the warning is not the opposite of the love; it is one of the love's urgent forms.

(b) What the Church teaches, precisely, against every caricature: hell is *“definitive self-exclusion from communion with God”* (CCC 1033), the state of those who refuse, freely and to the end; God *predestines no one* to it (CCC 1037), desires *all* to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4, the group's own Session 2 text), and died to make it so. Hell is not God's torture chamber appended to the Gospel; it is the possibility that love's offer can be finally declined, because, as the Church's pastors have often put it, a love that could not be declined would be coercion, and coerced love is not love. The fire imagery is Scripture's language for what it is to be a creature set against the only Source of joy there is; the door, as the Church's teachers have long observed, is barred from within.

(c) And this study has already shown you the anatomy, from the inside: Isaiah 6's hardening that follows practiced refusing; Ahaz declining an offered sign with piety on his lips; *and you would not* (30:15); the vineyard given every advantage and yielding wild grapes; the carpenter who never asks

the question about the half-burned log. Sixty-six chapters of grace pursued, and every rejection in them freely made. 66:24 is not a new god appearing in the last verse; it is the trajectory of *and you would not*, followed to its terminus. The same book holds 25:8 and 66:24 without contradiction because both are what love's freedom makes possible: death swallowed for all who will come to the mountain, and the standing possibility of refusing to come.

(d) So what is the warning for? Exactly what warnings are for: to be heeded, not suffered. The Church asserts the *possibility* of final loss and has never once asserted the damnation of any individual; she prays at every Mass for all the dead and hopes with a wide hope, while refusing the presumption that would make the warning meaningless. Note the pastoral genius of the synagogue custom the objection cited: rereading verse 23 after 24 does not delete the warning, it refuses to give the warning the last word in worship, which is the exact balance to strike: sober about the stakes, singing about the Savior. And notice, finally, whom the book's closing verses are actually addressed to: not the far-off but the religious, we who have spent fourteen weeks in the scroll. The last question Isaiah asks his readers is not *is God nice?* but *which line are you in?*, and the whole point of asking is that, tonight, the answer is still yours to give: seek the LORD while he may be found.

Priests From the Nations, Survivors Sent (Isaiah 66:18-21)

7. Read Isaiah 66:18-21, from the book's closing paragraph, and read it slowly, because almost no one knows it is there. What does God gather, whom does he send, where, to do what, and what office does verse 21 hand out, to whom?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He gathers "*all nations and tongues... and they shall come and shall see my glory*": Session 1's streaming mountain, one last time, now universal. He sends *survivors*, the remnant, the stump-people, "*to the nations... to the coastlands afar off, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations.*" World mission, in Isaiah's own final paragraph: the sent people carrying the glory to those who have never heard, and bringing the nations home "*as an offering to the LORD.*" Every mission trip, every missionary order, every Philip beside every chariot, was filed here first.

And verse 21, the sentence to read twice: "*And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.*" Them: the gathered nations, Gentiles. God's promise in the book's closing paragraph is a priesthood drawn from the nations, which the Church has long heard as her own priesthood among the Gentiles: twenty-seven centuries later, the parish down the street: men of every nation and tongue at altars on every coastland, offering the '*asham* made present. If anyone at this table has ever wondered whether the Catholic priesthood was a late invention, here is the promise the Church has always heard behind it, in the same book that gave us the key, the cornerstone, the Suffering Servant, and the house of prayer for all peoples. And feel what the verse does to the study's title: the book that began with one volunteer, *here am I, send me*, ends with God sending a whole people, and taking priests from among the sent.

SEND • THE COMMISSIONING

1. The final thread ledger is in your leader's guide: walk it aloud together, thread by thread, and let people say where each one caught them. Then the last question of the study, and take it slowly: fourteen weeks ago, Isaiah heard, "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*" You now know the Sender, the Servant, the message, and your coastland. Name your coastland out loud: the actual place, table, or person to whom you are sent when you leave tonight.
2. Who is one person you will invite into the next study, meal, or Mass, this month, by name, so that the tent keeps enlarging after tonight?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK (AND AFTER)

- Pray Isaiah 61:1-3 over your own life once this week, as St. Ambrose says you may: the Anointed shares his anointing, and the job description is now yours: good news to the poor, the brokenhearted bound up, in your coastland.
- Go back to your sealed guess one last time, and on the back of it, write tonight's date and Isaiah 6:8 in full. Keep the paper in your Bible at Isaiah 53. It is now a relic of your own formation.
- Begin the book again, alone, one chapter a week, sixty-six weeks. You will find it is a different book now, because you are a different reader. That was the plan all along.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives."

Isaiah 61:1 (RSV2CE)

The Commissioning and Closing Prayer

Leader: In the year that King Uzziah died, one man saw the Lord, high and lifted up, and heard the question that has waited on every page of this study.

Leader: And the voice of the Lord says still: Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?

All, together, aloud: HERE AM I. SEND ME.

Leader: Then go: to your coastlands and your chariots, your tables and your Nazareths. The Spirit of the Lord is upon you. The scarlet has been made white. The arm of the LORD has been revealed to you, and his name is Jesus.

All: Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory. Amen.

The study is complete. Take-Home 14 carries the full thread ledger and a map for reading Isaiah again on your own. Thank you for fourteen weeks of showing up; the sending starts now.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used tonight, in order

Primary Text

- Isaiah 61:1-3 (the anointing; jubilee; comfort for mourners; oil of gladness)
- Isaiah 62:2-5 (Hephzibah and Beulah; the bridegroom rejoices; optional)
- Isaiah 63:16; 64:1, 8 (our Father; rend the heavens; the potter)
- Isaiah 65:1 (found by those who did not seek); 65:17-19, 25 (new creation; no weeping; wolf and lamb return)
- Isaiah 66:2 (the humble and contrite); 66:10-13 (mother Zion; as one whom his mother comforts)
- Isaiah 66:18-21 (all nations gathered; survivors sent; priests from the nations)
- Isaiah 66:24 (the last verse; the steelman text)

Live Discovery Target

- Luke 4:16-21 (Nazareth: today this scripture has been fulfilled)

Supporting Passages

- Leviticus 25 (jubilee; liberty proclaimed)
- Mark 1:10 and 15:38 (schizō: heavens and veil torn; Dig Deeper)
- Romans 10:20 (65:1 quoted of the Gentiles)
- Galatians 4:26 (Jerusalem above, our mother; Session 12 handshake)
- Revelation 2:17 (the new name); Revelation 21:1-4, 23-26 (the Isaian hope taken up)
- 2 Peter 3:13 (new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells)
- Mark 9:48 (Jesus quotes 66:24); 1 Timothy 2:4 (God desires all to be saved)
- Isaiah 11:6-9 (the inclusio closed); Isaiah 6:8 (the commissioning)

Catechism

- CCC 714 (Isaiah 61:1-2: the words Jesus makes his own at Nazareth)
- CCC 757 (the Church our mother)
- CCC 1043-1045 (new heavens and new earth)
- CCC 1033, 1036-1037 (hell as self-exclusion; a call to conversion; God predestines no one)

Session Logistics

- End with the commissioning: the whole table answers Isaiah 6:8 aloud, together. Protect the last ten minutes.

Memory Verse

- Isaiah 61:1 (RSV2CE)