

# The Vineyard and the Lawsuit

Isaiah 1-5

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## WHAT WE FOUND

Isaiah does not open his book with a prediction. He opens it with a **trial**. God summons the same witnesses Moses summoned in Deuteronomy, heaven and earth, and sues his own people for breach of covenant. The ox and the donkey know their owner; Israel does not. That single verse (1:3) is a chief reason nativity scenes have an ox and a donkey kneeling at the crib.

We watched God reject a long list of things he himself commanded: sacrifices, feasts, incense, even prayer. And we tested the strongest version of the claim that God is against ritual worship itself, then let the text answer it. The verdict rests on 1:15, “*your hands are full of blood*,” and 1:13, “*I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly*.” The target is the combination: worship divorced from life. The remedy is not to cancel the liturgy but to wash, do good, defend the defenseless, and then come. The Catechism reads the passage the same way: outward sacrifice must express the sacrifice of the heart (CCC 2100).

Then the strangest verdict in literature: the plaintiff, with an airtight case, offers settlement. “*Come now, let us reason together... though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow*” (1:18). Scarlet was a fast dye, the stain that holds. God promises the impossible, and he speaks first: even our repentance is a response to grace that goes ahead of us (CCC 2001). We respond through contrition and confession; God accomplishes the cleansing no effort of ours can. That is the logic of every Confession you will ever make, and it is why this study is printed in scarlet and pearl white.

Finally, the Song of the Vineyard (5:1-7): a love song that turns into an indictment, sharpened by a Hebrew pun, God looked for *mishpat* (justice) and found *mispach* (bloodshed), for *tsedaqah* (righteousness) and heard *tse'aqah* (a cry). And we found Jesus, in Matthew 21, rebuilding that vineyard detail by detail: the hedge, the wine press, the tower. In his telling “*the kingdom of God will be taken away... and given to a nation producing the fruits of it*” (21:43). The Church reads herself there, and CCC 755 sets Isaiah 5 and Matthew 21 side by side: not as a replacement for Israel but as wild branches grafted into Israel's own olive tree (Romans 11:17-18), for “*the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable*” (Romans 11:29). The love song is now sung over us, and so is the demand for fruit.

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## 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, 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 we have just opened.

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

St. John Chrysostom marvels at Isaiah 1:18: the Judge of the whole earth, whose case 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.

## 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)**

### MY GUESS • SEAL IT UNTIL SESSION 11

Late in this book, Isaiah will ask a question: *"Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"* Isaiah keeps returning to a mysterious figure through whom God saves. **Your guess: who, or what, is "the arm of the LORD"?**

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*Write it, fold this sheet, and do not change your answer. We will open these together in Session 11.*

### Before Next Session

Read Isaiah 6. It is thirteen verses. Read it twice, once for what happens, once for where it happens.

### Catechism References From This Session

CCC 755 • CCC 1430-1431 • CCC 2100 • CCC 2001 • CCC 839-840

# Here Am I, Send Me

*Isaiah 6*

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## WHAT WE FOUND

Isaiah's call happened *inside the liturgy*: throne, temple, incense smoke, altar, and a hymn. And we discovered the dark irony in the date. King Uzziah, whose death year anchors the vision, died a leper, struck at the altar of incense when he proudly grasped at an office God had not given him (2 Chronicles 26). A king presumed at the altar and was disfigured; a prophet confessed before it and was healed. The altar is not a place for the confident; it is a place for the confessed.

The seraphim's triple "*Holy*" is Hebrew's maximum superlative, and it has never stopped being sung: Revelation says the hymn *never ceases*, and at every Mass the Sanctus is where we step into it mid-verse (CCC 1352). We also solved last week's puzzle: Isaiah's favorite name for God, *the Holy One of Israel*, echoes the angels' song he heard at his call. And the second half of the title is the wonder: the thrice-holy One has attached his name to a people. He wants to be *ours*.

Then the anatomy of every vocation. Isaiah sees, and collapses: "*Woe is me!*", the same honest cry as Peter's "*depart from me*" (CCC 208). Purification comes to him from outside: a coal from the altar, carried by a minister, with a word of absolution. Only then the question, asked openly so it can be answered freely: "*Whom shall I send?*" Cleansing precedes commission; nobody sends themselves. And Isaiah volunteers before hearing the job: available before informed.

The job was hard: preach to a people who will not listen (6:9-10). We weighed the sovereignty question 6:9-10 raises, at its strongest, and found the fuller canon: Pharaoh hardened his own heart first, God "*desires all men to be saved*" (1 Timothy 2:4), and Jesus himself softens the grammar to "*because seeing they do not see*" (Matthew 13:13). The hardening, on the Church's long reading, is a judgment that confirms a refusal already made; the warning for us is simple: do not practice refusing. And John dares the greatest claim of all: "*Isaiah said this because he saw his glory*" (John 12:41). The King on the throne, high and lifted up, was Christ.

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## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

St. John Chrysostom dwells on the seraphim covering their faces: sinless spirits of fire cannot bear to gaze directly on the divine glory. If they veil themselves, 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*

Let us receive the Body and Blood, says St. John Damascene, 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 Church, in the Damascene's image, receives at the altar.

**St. Thomas Aquinas** • *Commentary on Isaiah (Expositio super Isaiam, an early work)*

In this early commentary, written while he was still a young teacher, St. Thomas draws out the order of Isaiah 6: purification 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, brought to the prophet by a minister sent from the altar. Grace equips whom God sends.

## 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)**

### 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.

### Catechism References From This Session

CCC 208 • CCC 1352 • CCC 1137-1139 • CCC 600 • CCC 712

# The Virgin Shall Conceive

Isaiah 7-9

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## WHAT WE FOUND

Behind the most famous verse in Isaiah stands a terrified king. Syria and northern Israel were marching to end David's dynasty, and Ahaz's heart "*shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind*." God's word: stand firm in faith or you will not stand at all (7:9). Then a blank check: ask any sign, "*deep as Sheol or high as heaven*." Ahaz refused with a pious-sounding excuse, "*I will not put the LORD to the test*," while his trust lay with Assyria, where 2 Kings 16 records his appeal and payment with the temple treasury (2 Kings 16). The most dangerous refusals of grace are the ones that sound humble.

So the sign went over his head, to the whole house of David: "*Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel*." We faced the oldest objection to that verse at full strength, the argument that the Hebrew *almah* names a *young woman* of marriageable age and does not by itself require virginity, and that the oracle had a near horizon in Ahaz's own decade, and answered it the way the Church has since the second century: the *virgin* rendering was chosen by Jewish translators of the Septuagint two centuries before Christ; *almah* nowhere clearly names a married woman; a routine birth is no sign on the scale God offered; and the oracle itself outgrows every candidate in Ahaz's day, until the promised child owns the land (8:8) and carries the name *Mighty God* (9:6), the very title used of the LORD one chapter later (10:21). A real word to its own decade, exhausted only in Christ (Matthew 1:22-23; CCC 497).

We found the great light of 9:2 dawning first in Zebulun and Naphtali, the first lands Assyria devoured, and then found Matthew 4 planting Jesus' home address exactly there: the light rises first where the darkness fell first. And we ended with the fork every believer faces: Ahaz and Mary both received an unthinkable word about a child. Ahaz performed reverence to protect a decision already made. Mary asked her honest *how*, then said "*let it be to me according to your word*." Every act of faith chooses between them.

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## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Justin Martyr** • *Dialogue with Trypho*

Around AD 155 the Jewish scholar Trypho argued that Isaiah's word need mean no more than *young woman* and pointed to a king of 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.

**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 Jewish translators of the Septuagint long before Jesus was born. 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)*

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. And because God has so honored our nature by taking it, St. Leo bids the Christian: acknowledge your dignity, and do not return by sin to what you were before.

## 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)**

### Before Next Session

Read Isaiah 11:1-10, and keep one image from Session 2 in your pocket: the holy seed and the stump.

### Catechism References From This Session

CCC 496-497

# The Stump of Jesse

Isaiah 10-12

## WHAT WE FOUND

First, a theology of empires in one question: “*Shall the axe vaunt itself over him who hews with it?*” (10:15). Assyria, the superpower of the age, is in God’s accounting a hand tool, and when the tool claims to be the craftsman, the tool gets retired. The forest of Lebanon falls (10:33-34), and against that skyline of felled giants rises one green twig: “*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse*” (11:1). And the seed from Session 2 sprouted: *the holy seed is its stump* (6:13). The stump was never wreckage; it was a seed vault. Empires fall like forests and stay down; God’s people fall and sprout.

On the shoot rests the sevenfold Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, piety, and fear of the LORD. We were honest about the history: the Hebrew lists six, and the Church’s ancient Greek and Latin Bibles rendered the doubled *fear of the LORD* as two gifts, giving the traditional seven the bishop prayed over you at Confirmation (CCC 1831 cites Isaiah 11:1-2 by name). The gifts belong first to the Messiah; Confirmation is being fitted with *his* equipment. We watched the resting become visible at the Jordan, where the Spirit descended “*and remained on him*” (John 1:32-33; CCC 536).

We also faced the most serious objection with full respect: the world is manifestly not at peace, so how can Messiah have come? Read with the Church, the chapter answers in layers: verse 1 is a small historical event, a shoot in time; verses 6-9 are creation-wide consummation still ahead; and verse 10 gives a checkable middle criterion that has, astonishingly, happened: the root of Jesse raised as an ensign and *the nations* seeking him, which Paul quotes as Isaiah’s promise now opened to the nations (Romans 15:12), and which a room of Gentiles studying Jesse’s family tree quietly proves. The kingdom is already inaugurated, not yet consummated (CCC 671-674), which is why the Church never stops praying *thy kingdom come*.

And we sang. Chapter 12, the book’s first pure hymn of praise, hides a name in plain sight: “*he has become my salvation*,” Hebrew *yeshuah*, sharing its root, y-sh-‘, with the name *Yeshua*, Jesus, *the LORD saves* (Matthew 1:21). With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation, and great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

Reading the Latin, *a rod (virga) from the root of Jesse*, St. Jerome 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 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 as a ladder: the Spirit’s list descends from wisdom to fear of the LORD, because that is how heaven comes down to us; but the soul climbs it upward, beginning at

holy fear and rising step by step to wisdom, the taste of God himself. The gifts are not a trophy case; they are a staircase.

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

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 for peoples far off, Cyril reads as the daily fact of the Church.

## 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 stir up 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)**

### Before Next Session

Read Isaiah 22:15-25. Bring your questions; it may be the most surprising night of the study.

### Catechism References From This Session

CCC 1831 • CCC 536 • CCC 712 • CCC 671-674

# The Key of the House of David

Isaiah 13-27

## WHAT WE FOUND

Eleven chapters of oracles against the nations make one claim: the Holy One of Israel is not a tribal god. Babylon, Egypt, Tyre, every empire on the map answers to him. And buried in those oracles we found an eleven-verse account of a cabinet change in David's kingdom. The steward Shebna, "*over the house*," was caught building his own monument and evicted; Eliakim was installed in his place, receiving the office's robe and sash, its authority, the title "*a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem*," and its emblem: "*the key of the house of David*" laid on his shoulder, to open what none can shut and shut what none can open (22:20-22).

Then we found the day the Son of David reused that vocabulary. At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus gives Simon a new name, calls him the rock, and hands him, singular, "*the keys of the kingdom of heaven*," with authority to bind and loose that heaven itself stands behind (Matthew 16:19). Revelation 3:7 confirms the connection from inside the New Testament: the risen Christ "*has the key of David*." The King owns the key; the steward carries it. We tested the strongest Protestant objections, and the sharpest of them, *the peg gives way* (22:25), turned out to sharpen the Catholic point rather than blunt it: Isaiah narrates the office passing from a failed steward to a new one, and the Church reads Matthew 16 as Christ filling that steward's chair for his own house. Isaiah supplies the typology; Matthew and history carry the succession. The papacy is not a claim that popes are impeccable; Shebna is in the Bible so no one thinks that. It is a claim about how David's kingdom is governed: the King appoints a father over the house (CCC 553, 881).

And we ended on the mountain of chapter 25: a feast of rich food and well-aged wine *for all peoples*; the shroud over the nations destroyed; death itself "*swallowed up for ever*"; every tear wiped from every face. Paul quotes that verse over the resurrection of the body (1 Corinthians 15:54), and John quotes it at the end of the world (Revelation 21:4; CCC 1044). Isaiah even says the astonishing part himself: "*Your dead shall live, their bodies shall rise*" (26:19). What kind of God answers death with a meal? Sit with where you have seen rich food and wine, on a mountain, given for all peoples, in which death is defeated.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

The Lord built his Church on Peter and gave a primacy to one man so that the Church's unity would have a visible source: one chair, one origin, that the episcopate itself might be shown to be one. For Cyprian, unity has a visible shape: one chair, established first in Peter, 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, 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 Church's greatest biblical scholar located orthodoxy by locating the steward.

**St. Athanasius** • *On the Incarnation*

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. What Isaiah saw as a swallowed shroud, Athanasius announces as accomplished news.

## 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)**

### 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.

### Catechism References From This Session

CCC 553 • CCC 881 • CCC 1044

# A Cornerstone in Zion

Isaiah 28-35

## WHAT WE FOUND

Judah under threat went shopping for security, smuggling treasure to Egypt, and Isaiah named the category mistake: *“The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses are flesh, and not spirit”* (31:3). Against the scramble stood one of the great sentences of Scripture: *“In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength,”* followed by four aching words: *“And you would not”* (30:15). Not could not. Would not. Each of us found our own bottleneck in that verse: returning, rest, quietness, or trust.

In Zion God laid his answer to every false foundation: *“a tested stone, a precious cornerstone,”* inscribed *“He who believes will not be in haste”* (28:16). Faith's signature is unhurriedness. And we assembled the New Testament's stone catena where Peter stacks tonight's cornerstone with the stumbling stone of 8:14 and the rejected stone of Psalm 118 (1 Peter 2:4-8): one stone, Christ, with two effects, depending entirely on whether you build on him or trip over him. Peter's twist: *“like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house.”* We are materials, not spectators (CCC 756). St. Augustine adds the geometry: the cornerstone is where two walls meet, and in Christ, Israel and the nations join into one house.

Then we faced Isaiah 29:13, the verse most often quoted at Catholics: lips near, hearts far, worship *“a commandment of men learned by rote,”* which Jesus fires at the Pharisees in an argument about tradition (Mark 7). We built the objection at full strength and answered it with the text's own distinctions: Jesus condemns human traditions that void God's word, like the corban dodge, while Paul commands Christians to *hold* the apostolic traditions, *“by word of mouth or by letter”* (2 Thessalonians 2:15). The Church makes exactly that distinction: Sacred Tradition versus changeable customs (CCC 78, 83); even the canon of Scripture reaches us through Tradition (CCC 120). And then we let the verse do its real work: 29:13 diagnoses hearts far from God while lips still perform: the target is heartless worship and human precepts displacing God's word, never fixed prayer as such. A spontaneous prayer can be rote in the heart; a memorized one can burn. The question is never *did you compose this?* but *are you in this?*

We closed in chapter 35, where the desert blooms, weak hands are strengthened, and the checklist runs: blind eyes opened, deaf ears unstopped, the lame leaping. When John the Baptist sent his rawest question from prison, *“Are you he who is to come?”*, Jesus answered by reading his morning's work off that page (Matthew 11:2-6; CCC 547-549). The desert road home even has a name: the Holy Way (35:8). Keep it marked in your margin.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

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)*

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*

Examining whether the Catholic Church's tradition was a corruption of the Gospel or its living continuity, Newman 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.

## 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)**

## 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.

## Catechism References From This Session

CCC 756 • CCC 78, 83 • CCC 547-549

# In Whom Do You Trust?

Isaiah 36-39

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## WHAT WE FOUND

In 701 BC the era's dominant war machine stood at Jerusalem's wall, every other fortified city in Judah already taken. And we discovered where its spokesman chose to stand: *"by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field"* (36:2), the very spot where Isaiah confronted the terrified King Ahaz a generation earlier (7:3). Same ground, same fear, opposite kings: where the father refused to trust, the son was given a second chance at the identical crossroads.

We anatomized the Rabshakeh's speech as the permanent grammar of temptation: borrowed truths, twisted theology, fear shouted over the heads of authority, surrender marketed as comfort, statistical despair, even impersonated revelation (*"The LORD said to me..."*). His one repeated question is the enemy's favorite: *in whom do you trust?* And the first rule of the wall was given by the king: answer him not a word. You do not out-argue anxiety at 2 a.m.; you take its letter to the temple. Which is exactly what Hezekiah did: he spread the ultimatum physically before the LORD and prayed the model petition, adoration first, the facts stated honestly, and the motive of the ask: *"that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou alone art the LORD"* (37:14-20). The deliverance came that night, and Sennacherib went home to be murdered by his own sons, exactly as Isaiah said (37:38).

We faced the modern objection at full strength: that the miracle is legend and the real history is the tribute Hezekiah paid (2 Kings 18:14-16). The answer stood on the evidence: the Bible itself preserves the embarrassing tribute, which whitewash would have deleted; Sennacherib's own annals, the Taylor Prism, brag of caging Hezekiah *"like a bird"* yet never claim the one thing Assyrian victory texts exist to claim, the capture of the city; his assassination by his sons and Esarhaddon's succession are confirmed in Assyrian records; and his own annals fall conspicuously silent about taking Jerusalem. Faith does not strain against this record; it receives the event as Scripture tells it, and names its meaning: the one city with the letter on the temple floor was the one city the empire never took (CCC 303-304, 2743).

Chapter 38 gave us mortality without anesthesia, *"Set your house in order,"* and a king who wept, prayed, and received fifteen numbered years. Chapter 39 gave us the fumble: the hero of the siege showed Babylon's flattering envoys every treasure in the house, and heard the future: all of it carried to Babylon. Victories do not inoculate, and Scripture does not airbrush its saints. The book ends the chapter with Babylon in the doorway, and then turns the page to its next word. The next word is *Comfort*. Sirach saw it whole centuries ago: Isaiah, who saved the city by prayer, also *"comforted those who mourned in Zion"* (Sirach 48:24), a verse waiting in your Catholic Bible.

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## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

Prayer is the great and necessary means of salvation: the one who prays is certainly saved; 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*

Anxiety is the greatest evil that can befall a soul, sin only excepted, for anxiety is the Rabshakeh's native climate: it shouts over the wall until the heart surrenders what the enemy could never take by force. In every trouble, gently place the matter before God and remain at peace.

**St. Benedict** • *The Rule, Chapter 4*

Among the tools of good works: keep death daily before your eyes. Not morbidly, but truthfully: the one who has heard *set your house in order* counts the years differently. Live all your years the way Hezekiah lived his fifteen: as a gift with a number on it, spent deliberately.

## 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 Isaiah 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)**

### 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.

### Catechism References From This Session

CCC 2743 • CCC 303-304 • CCC 1007

# Comfort My People

Isaiah 40-41

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## WHAT WE FOUND

Chapter 39 ended with Babylon in the doorway and exile decreed. And God's first word on the far side of the catastrophe is "*Comfort, comfort my people,*" spoken *tenderly*, to the heart, with the covenant pronouns intact: *my people, your God*. When God's discipline has done its work, his next word is not *I told you so*.

A voice cried for a highway in the wilderness, the road planted back in chapter 35, and we discovered that Isaiah 40:3 is the only Old Testament verse all four evangelists pin on the same man: John the Baptist, who pinned it on himself: "*I am the voice*" (John 1:23; CCC 523). St. Augustine gave us the theology: John is the voice, Christ is the Word; a voice sounds and fades, the Word abides, and every witness since has the same vocation. We heard that all flesh is grass and only one thing in the universe is durable: "*the word of our God will stand for ever*" (40:8). And we beheld the God of verses 10-11: the arm that rules is the arm that carries lambs; power and tenderness are one God.

We climbed the incomparability poem, nations like a drop from a bucket, stars called by name with "*not one missing,*" and found it was pastoral all along: the star-counter has not lost your file (40:27). The wings belong to those who *wait*: soaring some days, running others, and on most days the plain grace of walking without fainting (40:31). We also faced the authorship question with open eyes: the Church has defined nothing about how many hands wrote Isaiah, and faithful Catholics hold different views; what is non-negotiable is that all sixty-six chapters are inspired and true, that the book is one canonical scroll (Qumran's great Isaiah scroll preserves the book whole; Sirach 48 and John 12 receive it as Isaiah's), and that the God who names stars can also declare what is to come, the very evidence chapter 41 stakes his deity on; the book later names Cyrus outright (44:28; 45:1).

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## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

John is the voice, Christ is the Word. A voice sounds for a moment and passes away; the Word it carries abides. John 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*

To conceive God fully is impossible, St. Gregory teaches, and to comprehend him more impossible still; in Isaiah's idiom, the One who weighs mountains in scales is not weighed by minds. Yet this is adoration, not agnosticism: 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*

Be not afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ. Those are the homily's own words; the connection is ours to draw: he had learned under two totalitarian empires what the exiles learned under Babylon, that *fear not* is credible only because of Isaiah's clause, *for I am with you*. Courage, for the Christian, is not a temperament; it is a conclusion drawn from a Presence.

## LIVE IT THIS WEEK

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- 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)**

### Before Next Session

Read Isaiah 42:1-9 and 45:1-7.

### Catechism References From This Session

CCC 523 • CCC 300 • CCC 239

# Behold My Servant

Isaiah 42-45

## WHAT WE FOUND

God presented his Servant: upheld, chosen, delighted in, Spirit-carrying, and tasked with bringing justice to the nations by the strangest method 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”* (42:2-3). Matthew quotes the heart of the job posting, Isaiah 42:1-4, his longest formal Old Testament citation, over Jesus healing crowds and refusing publicity (Matthew 12:15-21): the unshouting Servant, identified by name (CCC 713). And a complication we are not yet allowed to resolve: Isaiah also calls *Israel* the servant (41:8; 44:1), while the Servant of the songs seems to be more than Israel. We wrote the tension in our margins and kept reading.

Chapter 43 was spoken over exiles who had earned their exile, and over us: *“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... Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you.”* The Church’s baptismal typology naturally gathers these waters (CCC 1220-1221 read Israel’s crossings as baptism prefigured): read the passage with your own name in it, for it describes what your baptism did. We banked 43:25 for later: forgiving sins is God’s own doubled-emphatic prerogative, *“I, I am He who blots out your transgressions,”* which makes a certain scene in Capernaum (Mark 2) more explosive than it looks.

We laughed at the carpenter who roasts dinner over half a log *“and the rest of it he makes into a god”* (44:16-17), and then did the arithmetic on ourselves with the Catechism’s inventory of modern franchises: power, pleasure, money, the state (CCC 2113), and their modern cousin, image. We met the most surprising hire in Scripture: Cyrus of Persia, called *“my shepherd”* and *“his anointed,”* God’s instrument *“though you do not know me”* (45:1-5). And we ended at the summit: the fiercest monotheistic oath in the Old Testament, *“To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear”* (45:23), and Paul, a strict Pharisee, quoting it with Jesus installed at its center: *“at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”* (Philippians 2:10-11; CCC 449). We tested the strongest objection, that this makes Jesus a mere exalted agent, and found it collides with Isaiah himself: *“My glory I give to no other”* (42:8). Either heaven broke that oath, or the Son was never *another*: true God from true God, within the one divine life. The first Christians, fierce monotheists who died rather than worship Caesar, sang hymns to Christ. That is either mass idolatry or revelation.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

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*

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

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** • *Catechetical Lectures*

Israel's water-crossings are the baptized person's biography in advance: the waters that could not overwhelm because God was in them. What Isaiah promised the exiles, *when you pass through the waters I will be with you*, the font makes personal: called by name, claimed as his, brought through the water into freedom.

## 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)**

### Before Next Session

Read Isaiah 49:1-7 and 50:4-9, closely.

### Catechism References From This Session

CCC 713-714 • CCC 449 • CCC 2112-2113 • CCC 1220-1221

# A Light to the Nations

Isaiah 46-50

## WHAT WE FOUND

Isaiah's oracle sets two religions side by side: Bel and Nebo hauled on carts, gods their worshipers must carry, versus the God who says, *"I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save,"* from the womb to gray hairs (46:3-4). You can usually identify your idols by your exhaustion. The LORD's cargo policy runs the other direction: you were never the porter; you are the carried.

Then the Servant spoke for himself: called from the womb, named before birth, a polished arrow hidden in God's quiver, and named, explicitly, *"Israel"* (49:1-3). We heard him confess what no one expects in a Messiah's mouth, *"I have labored in vain,"* and watched him deposit the discouragement with God (49:4). Then the verse that breaks the identity question open: his mission is *to bring Jacob back*, to raise up the tribes of Jacob (49:5), and a rescuer is not simply the rescued. Scripture keeps showing us one man standing in for the whole people, David fighting as Israel against Goliath, and on the Church's reading that pattern holds it together here: the Servant is Israel-in-person, one true Israelite performing the nation's whole vocation for the nation and then flinging it wide: *"It is too light a thing... I will give you as a light to the nations"* (49:6). Simeon sang that verse over a forty-day-old baby (Luke 2:32; CCC 529), and Paul and Barnabas quoted it as *their own* marching orders: *"the Lord has commanded us"* (Acts 13:47). The light is Christ, and in Christ the light is us.

God answered Zion's *"the LORD has forgotten me"* with the deepest image he has: *"Can a woman forget her sucking child?... Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands"* (49:15-16). Womb-love, from the Hebrew womb-root, and a name engraved where the owner cannot avoid seeing it (CCC 239). Christian eyes have long read *graven on the palms* in the light of the nails; the question was always how far this love would go to keep from forgetting you, and the answer had hands.

And the Servant's road darkened on schedule. The third Song gave us his rule of life, ear wakened morning by morning, tongue trained to sustain the weary, and then its cost, in grammar that is itself theology: *"I gave my back to the smiters... I hid not my face from shame and spitting"* (50:6). I gave. The violence is real and voluntary, endured with a face *"set like a flint"* because vindication is certain (50:7-8). Presented in glory (42), commissioned and discouraged (49), beaten by consent (50): the arc is bending somewhere, and next session we follow it all the way down.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Bede the Venerable** • *Commentary on Luke*

Simeon 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, faith recognized in forty days of flesh; and the Church sings Simeon's discovery every night at Compline, so that no day ends without the nations' light being named.

**St. Catherine of Siena** • *The Dialogue*

God names himself mad with love for creatures who forget him daily, pursuing the forgetful with a mother's unreasoning fidelity. 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, Ignatius begged the Roman church not to rescue him: let me be ground as wheat, 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. Shame endured with God as your justifier is not shame at all.

## 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. 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)**

### BRING YOUR SEALED GUESS

Next session we open the My Guess boxes from Take-Home 1, together, before we read a single verse. Find yours this week and bring it. If you have lost it, write from memory what you guessed back then, and mark it *from memory*. Do not update your answer; honest guesses are the whole game.

### Before Next Session

Read Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12, once, alone, slowly. Come ready.

### Catechism References From This Session

CCC 239 • CCC 529 • CCC 64

# He Was Pierced

Isaiah 51-53

## WHAT WE FOUND

The sealed guesses opened, and then the sleeve came up. We walked the arm's trail, *his arm rules for him* (40:10), Zion praying to the arm that split the sea (51:9), "*The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations*" (52:10), and every line promised spectacle. Then 53:1 asked our sealed question, "*To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*", and showed us a man: no beauty, despised, rejected, a man of sorrows. The arm of the LORD is revealed in a person: omnipotence bared looks like self-gift. Most of our guesses were right; the astonishment is *how*.

The pronouns of 53:4-6 would not let us stay spectators: *our* griefs, *our* transgressions, the chastisement that made *us* whole, and the sentence at the center: "*the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all*." The silent lamb died among the wicked and was buried "*with a rich man*", a case-file detail kept by a council member from Arimathea. And the summit, 53:10: "*when he makes himself an offering for sin*." The Hebrew is '*asham*, the guilt offering of Leviticus 5, the sacrifice of reparation, and the subject of the verb is the Servant himself: no unwilling victim anywhere, a priest self-offering, who after pouring out his soul to death *sees his offspring*, prolongs his days, and *made intercession*, work Hebrews 7:25 shows continuing. Expiation, satisfaction, propitiation, substitution: the Church's vocabulary of atonement, anchored where the Catechism anchors it (CCC 601, 615, both built on this Song), and made present at every Mass, which is one single sacrifice with the cross and, in Trent's words, truly propitiatory (CCC 1367).

We faced the moral objection to the atonement at full strength, that punishing an innocent is monstrous, and answered it from the Song's own grammar: *he makes himself* the offering; the Offerer is God the Son, one in will with the Father, so the Judge is serving the sentence and the offended party is paying the debt; what the Father willed was not pain for its own sake but the love that shone in it (St. Thomas: a superabundant satisfaction, ST III q. 48); and even among humans, forgiving a real wrong always means absorbing its cost yourself. The cross is what *simply forgiving* looks like when God does it. And we found the Ethiopian in Acts 8, reading this exact passage, asking our sealed question in substance, and Philip "*beginning with this scripture*" preaching Jesus. We have spent eleven weeks becoming Philip; someone we know is in the chariot.

## 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, 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. The New Testament had already read the Servant of Christ, and here the identification stands in one of the earliest surviving Christian writings outside it.

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

The debt of sin is owed by man and 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 the answer walking.

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

Christ's Passion was a superabundant satisfaction: the love and obedience with which he suffered were greater than all the malice of all sin. The Passion saves not because suffering is precious but because such love is.

## LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Attend one Mass 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*.

### 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)**

### Before Next Session

Read Isaiah 54:1-10 and 55:1-3.

### Catechism References From This Session

CCC 601 • CCC 615 • CCC 608 • CCC 1367

# Come to the Waters

Isaiah 54-55

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## WHAT WE FOUND

Last week's riddle, the childless Servant who "*shall see his offspring*", was answered, read canonically, by a page turn: a barren woman commanded to *sing*, because "*the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married*" (54:1). Paul names her "*the Jerusalem above... our mother*" (Galatians 4:26-27), whom the Church has always understood of herself, teeming with children born of the Servant's travail: read whole, we are the offspring of 53:10. And God flood-proofed the covenant with a Noah oath: the exile was a *moment*; the compassion is *everlasting*; mountains may depart, "*but my steadfast love shall not depart from you*" (54:10).

Then the free market: "*Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!*" (55:1). Thirst and bankruptcy are the entire admission criteria; the goods are real (*buy*, twice) and the price is paid (last week's chapter was the invoice). Verse 2 diagnosed our whole economy: "*Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread?*", the question St. Augustine turned into the most famous autobiography ever written: our heart is restless until it rests in you. And the feast has an address: the Eucharist, the Lord's own standing invitation (CCC 1384), where the penniless buy, the mountain banquet of chapter 25 and the Servant's self-offering at one table.

We faced a chapter the Reformers loved, at full strength, is free grace something Rome forgot?, and answered from the Church's own books: grace is *free and undeserved*, justification depends entirely on *God's gratuitous initiative* (CCC 1996-1998); no one has a strict right to merit, and our merits are themselves God's gifts (CCC 2007-2009); the indulgence abuses were real; Trent ordered the evil traffic abolished, and St. Pius V afterward suppressed the sales. The verse's own paradox settles the deeper point: *buy... without money*: the gift is free and the receiving is active; sacraments are how the feast is eaten, and nobody calls eating the price of dinner. The Bible's last page renews the invitation almost in Isaiah's own words: "*take the water of life without price*" (Revelation 22:17). And the Book of Consolation closed its frame: the word that stands forever (40:8) is the word that never returns empty (55:11). Everything between was that word, working.

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## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Ambrose** • *On the Mysteries (paraphrase)*

You have come to the altar; the sacraments you now receive are greater than the manna your fathers ate in the wilderness, for they ate and died. Our reflection: what the prophet cried in the street, come, buy without money, the Church performs at every liturgy, and the poorest communicant leaves richer than kings.

**St. Augustine** • *Confessions*

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 and found each hunger intact. The

restlessness was not a defect but an address label: the heart is shaped like the feast.

**St. Ephrem the Syrian** • *Hymns*

The Eucharist is the Medicine of Life: bread that heals the eaters, a cup in which immortality is mixed for mortals. Where merchants sell what perishes to those who perish, the Physician sets out, free of charge, the one food that cures the disease of death.

## 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 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)**

### Before Next Session

Read Isaiah 56:1-8 and 58:1-12.

### Catechism References From This Session

CCC 1996-1998 • CCC 2007-2009 • CCC 1384

# A House of Prayer for All Peoples

Isaiah 56-60

## WHAT WE FOUND

The doors opened. The foreigner was forbidden to say “*The LORD will surely separate me,*” and the eunuch forbidden to call himself a dry tree: to him, “*a monument and a name better than sons and daughters... which shall not be cut off*” (56:3-5). And the study’s debt was paid: the man in the Acts 8 chariot was a eunuch, returning from worship at a Jerusalem whose assembly the old rules excluded him from, and his baptism reads like Isaiah 56 kept in person; his story has outlasted every family tree of his generation. The house was renamed, “*a house of prayer for all peoples*” (56:7), and Jesus quoted the verse as he drove out the traders (Mark 11:17; the whip of cords belongs to John 2:15), enraged *for* the nations, whose one prayer-courtyard, by the common reconstruction, had become a currency exchange. We faced the Deuteronomy 23 objection honestly: not a contradiction but a trajectory, the old boundary laws a holy preparation whose own destination the prophets announced (Matthew 5:17; CCC 1961-1964); the fence was protecting the field for a harvest it could not yet see, and the door opened from the inside.

Chapter 58 gave us the fast God chooses: loose the bonds, share your bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into your house, cover the naked. The Catechism cites these verses when it defines the works of mercy (CCC 2447), and Jesus made the list the Last Judgment’s announced exam (Matthew 25). St. John Chrysostom fused altar and door forever: honor Christ in the sacrament, and do not despise him naked outside it. And the promise stapled to the fast was the light itself: “*Then shall your light break forth like the dawn*” (58:8). Mercy is how the light gets out of the building.

Then came the postscript, “*he saw that there was no man... then his own arm brought him victory*” (59:16), and we know how the Church reads the arm; God dressed for the rescue in the armor Paul later issued to us all: the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation (59:17; Ephesians 6). And the light thread, planted at 2:5 thirteen sessions ago, resolved in a sunrise: “*Arise, shine; for your light has come*” (60:1), nations and kings streaming to the brightness, camels from Sheba carrying “*gold and frankincense*” (60:6), an inventory the Magi would one day unpack at Bethlehem (Matthew 2; CCC 528). The chapter ends beyond the sun itself, a promise Revelation 21 keeps: the city whose light is the glory of God.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. John Chrysostom** • *Homilies on Matthew*

Honor Christ in the sacrament, 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.

**St. Peter Chrysologus** • *Epiphany Sermons* (paraphrase in our words, not a verbatim quotation)

In the wise men 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 travelers at the door: the nations already arriving at the light of their rising. Tradition counts the wise men three from their three gifts; Matthew gives no number.

**St. Teresa of Calcutta** • *The Witness of Her Life*

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. The fast God chooses, run (as we put it tonight) as a supply chain from the altar to the gutter and back.

## 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)**

### Before Next Session (the Last)

Read Isaiah 61:1-3 and 65:17-19. Bring whoever you have been meaning to bring. We finish where a certain carpenter began.

### Catechism References From This Session

CCC 2447 • CCC 528 • CCC 1961-1964

# New Heavens and a New Earth

Isaiah 61-66

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## WHAT WE FOUND

The anointing of 61:1-3 gathered everything the study had met, and then we found Jesus, in his hometown synagogue, handed the scroll of Isaiah, reading from chapter 61 (with a line of 58:6 folded in), sitting down, and preaching a one-sentence first sermon: *“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”* (Luke 4:21; CCC 714). He stopped mid-verse, before the day of vengeance, a clause many have heard held for his return: the year of favor is now. And the anointing presses outward, as the Church's chrismal tradition makes explicit: the Christ shares his chrism, and the job description of 61:1-3 is ours.

Zion was renamed Hephzibah and Beulah, delight and married, and the exiles' bold prayer, *“O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down”* (64:1), was answered, in Mark's telling, by one Greek verb used twice: the heavens *torn* open at the Jordan (1:10) and the veil *torn* top to bottom at the cross (15:38): heaven ripped open so God could come down; the veil, so we could come in. Then the new creation (65:17-19; CCC 1043-1045): no more the sound of weeping, the wolf and lamb of chapter 11 closing the book's own frame, and chapter 40's *comfort* delivered in a mother's arms: *“As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you”* (66:13), the Jerusalem above, our mother, the Church (Galatians 4:26; CCC 757).

We faced the book's actual last verse, 66:24, without flinching: Jesus himself quotes it of Gehenna (Mark 9:48). The Church holds both truths the book holds: God predestines no one and desires all to be saved (CCC 1036-1037); hell is definitive self-exclusion (CCC 1033), *“and you would not”* followed to its terminus, possible because, as the Church's pastors have often put it, love that cannot be declined is not love. The warning is one of love's urgent forms: seek the LORD while he may be found. Then the ending almost no one knows: God sending *survivors* to coastlands that have never heard, and, in the book's closing paragraph: *“some of them also I will take for priests... says the LORD”* (66:21). A priesthood from the nations, in which the Church has always heard her own: the parish down the street, glimpsed in Isaiah's final paragraph. The book that began with one volunteer ends with God sending a whole people. We answered together, out loud: here am I. Send me.

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## THE THREAD LEDGER (COMPLETE)

- **The Holy One of Israel:** heard from the seraphim (6), dwelling in Zion's midst (12:6), looking at the last to the humble and contrite (66:2).
- **Zion:** harlot city smelted faithful (1); banqueting mountain (25); barren mother singing (54); house of prayer for all peoples (56); bride (62); nursing mother (66): the Church.
- **Light:** walk in it (2:5); dawn on Galilee (9:2); a person (42:6; 49:6); breaking forth through mercy (58:8); sunrise (60:1); a city beyond the sun (Revelation 21).
- **The arm of the LORD:** guessed, sealed, revealed (53:1-12): the Servant, pierced (53:5), alive beyond death (53:10-12), and 59:16 for a postscript: his own arm brought him victory.
- **Comfort:** commanded (40:1), embodied (61:2), delivered in a mother's arms (66:13).

- **Here am I, send me:** one volunteer (6:8); Philip's chariot (Acts 8); beautiful feet (52:7); a sent people with priests from the nations (66:19-21). The title was the assignment.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Ambrose** • *Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*

The Anointed One reads the prophecy of his own anointing, and the eyes of all are fixed on him. The Church's chrismal tradition presses the anointing outward: the Christ shares his chrism, and the mission read aloud in that synagogue is read over everyone she anoints. The scroll of Isaiah 61 is quietly handed to the baptized.

**St. Cyprian of Carthage** • *On the Unity of the Church* (5-6)

He cannot have God for his Father who does not have the Church for his mother. We are born of her womb in baptism, nourished at her breast in the sacraments, and there is no such thing as a motherless Christian.

**St. Irenaeus of Lyons** • *Against Heresies* (4.20.7)

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, and the creature fully alive, beholding God, is the point of the entire project.

## LIVING IT FROM HERE

- Pray Isaiah 61:1-3 over your own life this week: the Anointed shares his anointing, and the job description is now yours, in your coastland.
- Write tonight's date and Isaiah 6:8 on the back of your old sealed guess, and keep it in your Bible at Isaiah 53: a relic of your own formation.
- Begin the book again, alone: one chapter a week, sixty-six weeks. It is a different book now, because you are a different reader.

### 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 STUDY IS COMPLETE

Fourteen sessions, sixty-six chapters, one commission. The seraphim are still singing; the feast is still free; the coastlands are still waiting. Here am I, send me.