



2024 | CHILDREN'S LESSON DECEMBER 1-22

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

— Isaiah 40:3b

Goals and Purpose

- Children will explore verses from Isaiah 40 and what it means to prepare the way of the Lord during the Advent and Christmas season.
- Children will learn about the Christmas Joy Offering.

Supplies

- Items to make a “highway” (use what you have: blocks, paper strips, books, ribbon, streamers, cardboard, tape, scissors, etc.).
- Crayons, colored pencils or markers.
- Several copies of the **Road Signs Resource Sheet**, scissors, tape.
- Optional supplies, depending on your choices:
 - tables, chairs, books, etc. to make an obstacle course; a blindfold
 - copies of the **Christmas Joy Coloring Sheet** for each participant
 - music links and a way to play music
 - copies of the **At Home Resource Sheet**.

Gathering (10 minutes)

As your group gathers, have them build a “highway” using blocks, strips of paper, books, ribbon and any other supplies you have. Challenge your builders to imagine it is a highway in a rugged wilderness, and make the highway multi-leveled and complicated: go up and over tables, through tunnels, around obstacles, etc. It doesn't need to support a toy car — it can be a suggestion of a road. If you have a small room or a large group, this activity can be done on tabletops, using smaller items to create levels.

Talk about what they've built.

- Which sections would be the easiest for travelers in a car or truck?
- Which would be the most difficult, and why?
- What if you had to ride a horse? Walk? Use a wheelchair?

Tell the children that in our Bible story today, we will learn what God imagines for a kind of highway that is for everyone. (Leave the highway in place until later in the lesson.)

Exploring the Bible Story (15–20 minutes)

Using your own words, say something like:

Long ago — years before Jesus was born — the people of God were in a time of trouble. They had been taken from their homes and their land and sent into exile in Babylon. They were forced to work for a foreign king, far from home, and they cried when they remembered Jerusalem. They felt lost and separated from God. But God had not forgotten them! God sent prophets to remind the people of hope.

Listen to what the prophet Isaiah said to them.

If you have older children, a volunteer could read from Isaiah 40:1–5. For younger children, read this adaptation based on Isaiah 40:1, 3–5:

God says: “**Comfort** my people.”

Listen, a voice is saying, “**Prepare the way of the Lord**, even in the **wilderness!**”

Make a **straight** highway in the desert for **God**.

Lift up the valleys and **lower the mountains and hills**.

Make the **uneven ground level** and **smooth out the rough patches**.

Then **everyone** will **see God's glory!**”

Invite the children to create movements for the bolded words and repeat the reading.

Ask:

- What do you think a “highway” or road was like in the time of Isaiah?
- How would it be similar to or different from a highway today?
- Isaiah talks about a “highway ... for God.” What do you think he meant? (Talk about how this was not an actual highway like a road, but a way for people to see or know God was with them, even when they felt lost in a wilderness.)
- What did Isaiah say this highway for God should be like? Why would a highway for God be like that? (This kind of highway would be level, straight, smooth and easy, so everyone can travel it.)
- Tell the children that many years later, John the Baptist repeated Isaiah's words when he said that Jesus was coming. In Advent and throughout the year, we try to prepare the way of the Lord so all people can see Jesus.

Turn back to your group-built highway. Imagine together that it is Isaiah's kind of highway in a wilderness, and all kinds of people need to travel it in order to see God.

- Why might people feel lost or like they are in a wilderness today?
- Make signs for those reasons using the **Road Signs Resource Sheet**, then add the signs to the most difficult parts of your highway. You might have Illness Alley, Sadness Street, Hunger Highway, Trouble Tunnel, War Corner, etc.
- Put Isaiah's words into action and "prepare the way of the Lord." Start at one end of your highway and have the children make changes until it is smooth, straight and level.
 - Younger children might just adjust the highway.
 - Older children might pause at each street sign and brainstorm ways to help in each situation before adjusting the highway. How could you help smooth the rough path for someone who is sick so they know God is with them? How could you level the mountain of hunger for someone in a food desert?
 - Finish with a prayer that you might find more ways to help prepare the way of the Lord at Christmas time.

More Activity Choices (15–20 minutes)

Choose from the following activities to further explore the lesson.

1. Obliviating Obstacles

Set up a simple obstacle course in the classroom: an overturned chair, a table to crawl under, stacks of books on the path, etc. Pair up volunteers to go through the course. One will be blindfolded and the other will be their partner.

Try it several ways:

- First, have one or more teams where the blindfolded person goes through the course on their own while their partner tells them how to navigate. No touching, but verbal instructions are allowed. (Safety first, of course!)
- Next, let one or more teams try the course with the partner physically (gently!) leading the blindfolded person around or through the obstacles.
- Finally, let one or more teams send the blindfolded person through the course, but their partner can go first, removing obstacles, smoothing the path and helping in any other way.
- Talk about the levels of difficulty in each approach. Which was harder or easier for each of the team members?
- What are ways we as the church can help our friends and neighbors with obstacles? What are ways your congregation is doing that during Advent and Christmas?

2. Engaging with the Christmas Joy Offering

Give each child a copy of the **Christmas Joy Coloring Sheet** to color. While they work, talk about the Christmas Joy Offering, using some of the following points and questions.

- For close to 90 years, the Christmas Joy Offering has been collected in PC(USA) churches to help us share God’s gifts and prepare the way of the Lord for past, present and future leaders of the church.
- Half of the offering goes to Presbyterian-related schools and colleges to help equip and lift up communities of color.
 - Three of those schools are Menaul School in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Presbyterian Pan American School in Kingsville, Texas; and Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Locate those cities on a map.
 - Which one is closest to your congregation?
- Half of the offering helps smooth the path for church workers in times of financial need.
 - Who are some of the church workers (pastors, educators, other leaders) who are important to your students?
 - Share a story from the Minute for Mission handouts, perhaps Jenni Whitford’s story: Jenni is a Presbyterian Christian Educator whose husband died suddenly when her children were 9 and 12 years old. The family was about to lose their health insurance when the PC(USA) stepped in to help smooth the difficult path ahead of them. Gifts from the Christmas Joy Offering helped the family pay for health insurance for two years. Jenni said, “People who I don’t know or never will meet ... gave generously to the Christmas Joy Offering to help support people like me.” Our gifts from the Christmas Joy Offering — like those that helped Jenni’s family — spread Christmas Joy, Hope, Peace, and Love and bring comfort to God’s people.
 - Older students might like to add words of prayer along the arched lines of the coloring sheet.
 - ~ God, I hope that ...
 - ~ God, your love is ...
 - ~ God, bring Christmas joy to ...
 - ~ God, we pray for peace in ...

You might also play some of the music inspired by Isaiah’s words. “Comfort Ye” and “Ev’ry Valley Shall be Exalted” from Handel’s “Messiah,” or “Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord” from the musical “Godspell.” Try these YouTube links: [“Comfort ye, Every Valley \(Handel’s Messiah\) Gramophone Chorus feat. Ebenezer ANTWI” \(6:57\)](#) and [“Godspell – The New Broadway Cast: Prepare Ye” \(2:13\)](#).

Extending the Lesson:

Use the **At Home Resource Sheet** for ideas to extend the lesson, or send the sheet home with each child, along with a fresh copy of the **Christmas Joy Coloring Sheet**.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Close with a prayer in your own words or use words like these below. If your group made up motions to the Scripture earlier, use them again with the bolded words, or make up motions now:

God, you are always with us, even when we feel lost in a **wilderness**.

Help us listen to Isaiah and bring comfort to your people who are in need.

Help us **lift up the valleys** and **lower the mountains**.

Help us make the **uneven ground level** and **smooth out the rough patches** and **prepare the way** for all your people to see you this Christmas.

We pray in the name of Jesus, who is the perfect gift!

Amen.

Prepared by the Rev. Julie Coffman Hester. Julie is a pastor and writer in North Carolina who has served in faith formation with all ages for over 30 years. Her current ministry focuses on writing curriculum and resources and teaching workshops on writing as a spiritual practice and writing through grief.



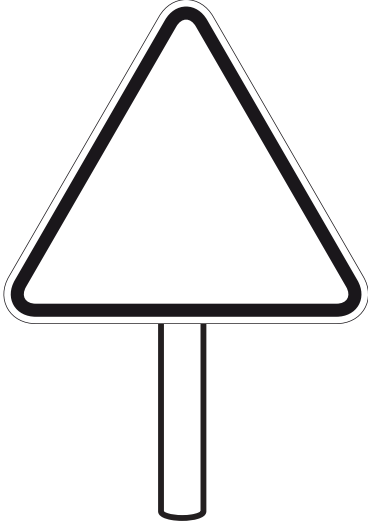
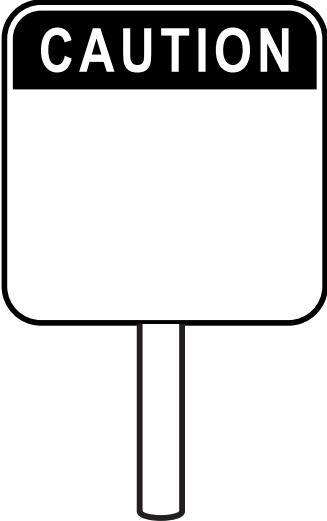
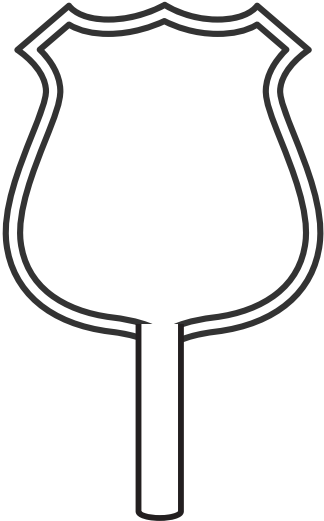
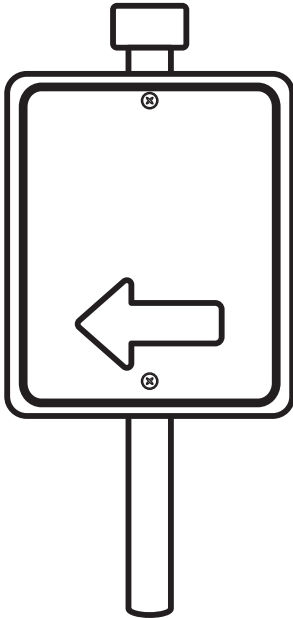
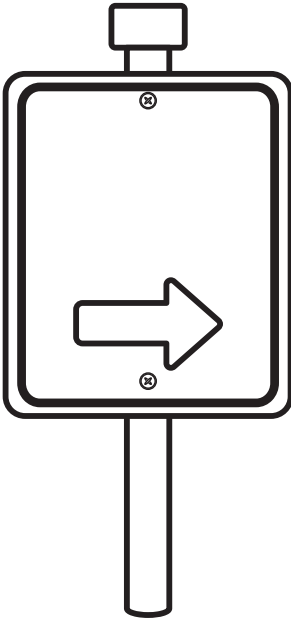
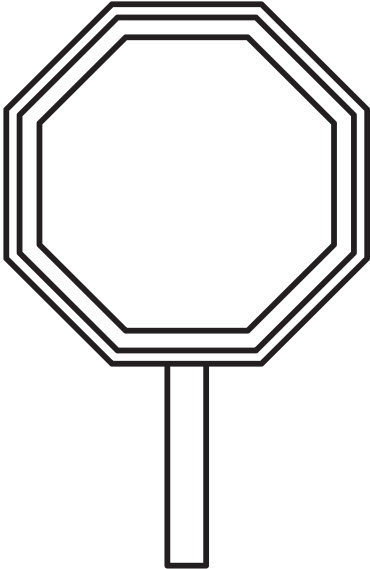
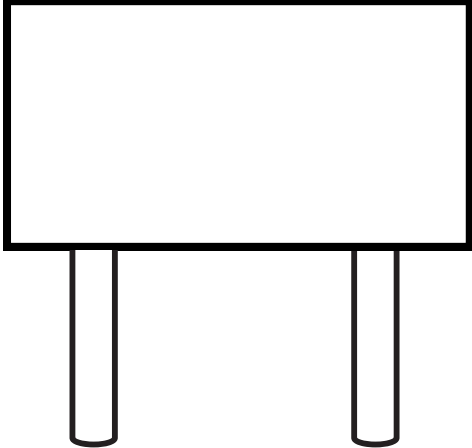
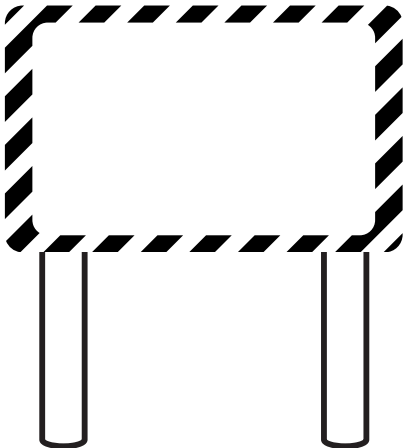
QUESTIONS?

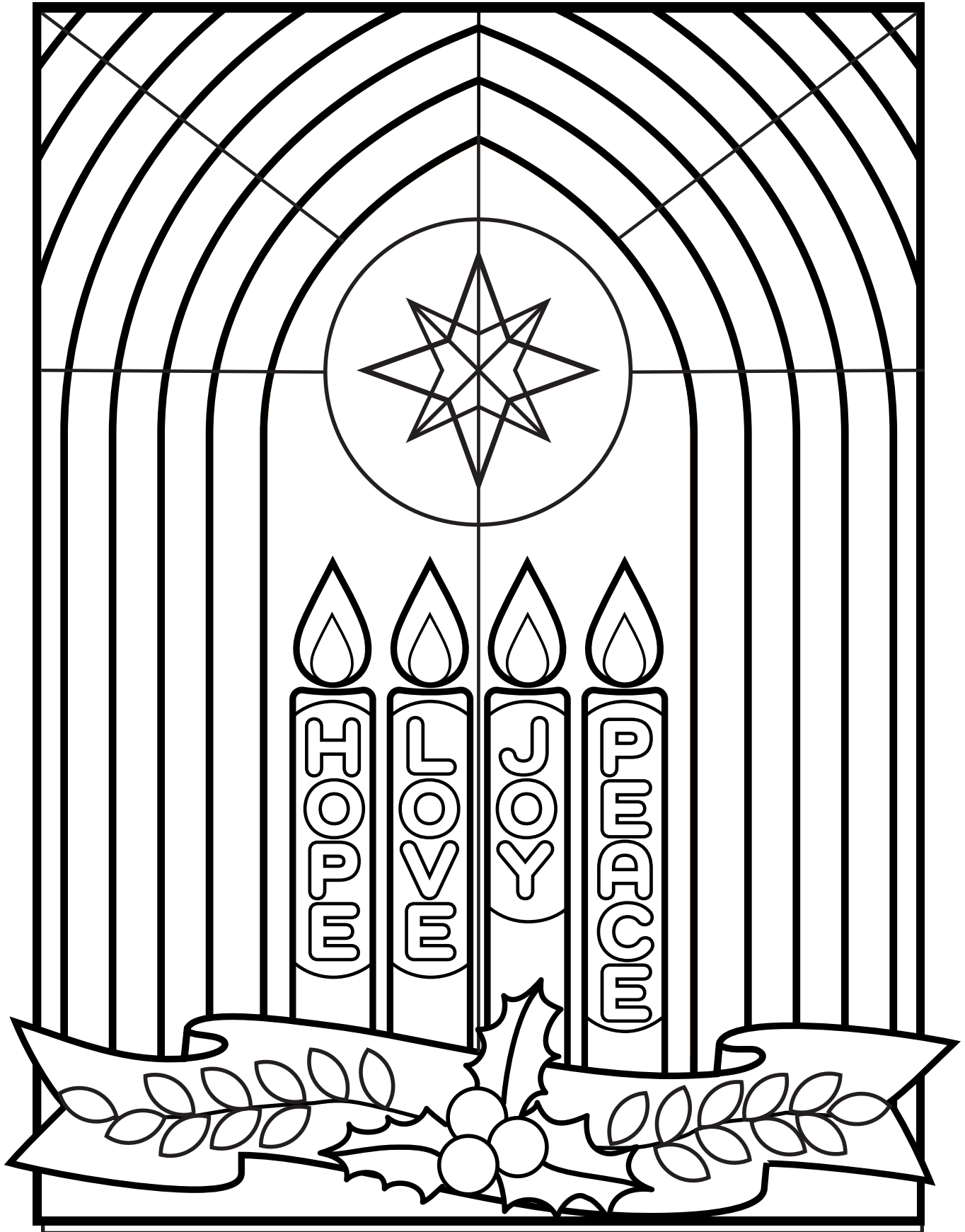
Feel free to contact us at

800-728-7228, ext. 5047

or email special.offerings@pcusa.org
pcusa.org/christmasjoy

Road Signs Resource Page





We are there