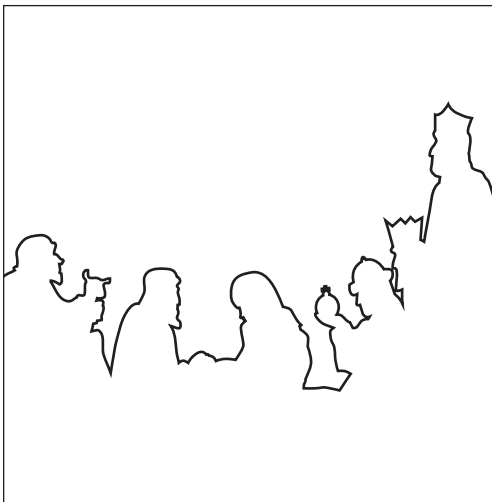
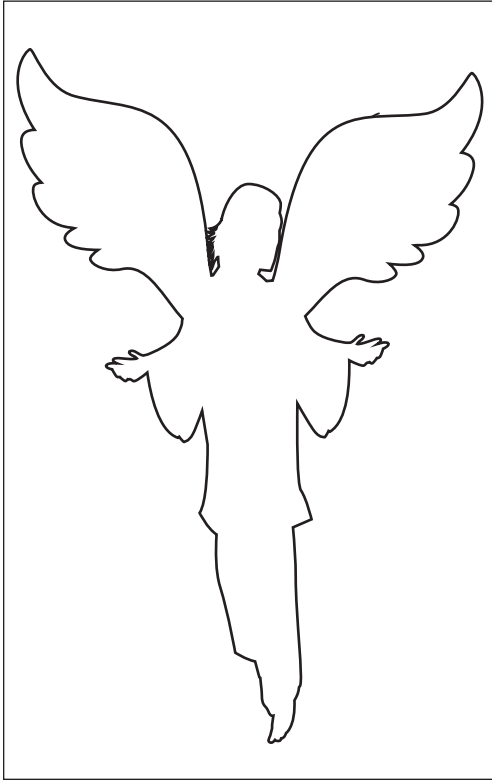




THE PROMISE OF A
Saviour

Colour me!



Isaiah 40:1-11

Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah announced God's promise of a saviour, in order to bring hope and comfort to God's people.

Our God has said: "Encourage my people! Give them comfort. Speak kindly to Jerusalem and announce: Your slavery is past; your punishment is over. I, the Lord, made you pay double for your sins." Someone is shouting: "Clear a path in the desert! Make a straight road for the Lord our God. Fill in the valleys; flatten every hill and mountain. Level the rough and rugged ground. Then the glory of the Lord will appear for all to see. The Lord has promised this!"

Someone told me to shout, and I asked, "What should I shout?" We humans are merely grass, and we last no longer than wild flowers. At the Lord's command, flowers and grass disappear, and so do we. Flowers and grass fade away, but what our God has said will never change. Your God is here!

There is good news for the city of Zion. Shout it as loud as you can from the highest mountain. Don't be afraid to shout to the towns of Judah, "Your God is here!" Look! The powerful Lord God is coming to rule with his mighty arm. He brings with him what he has taken in war, and he rewards his people. The Lord cares for his nation, just as shepherds care for their flocks. He carries the lambs in his arms, while gently leading the mother sheep.

Commentary

God never gives up on those he calls to be his people. Even though the people of Judah and Israel had broken his laws and turned to other so-called gods, God still loved them. Their disobedience had led to defeat in battle and the nation being taken away as prisoners and scattered across the Middle East and beyond, but God still had plans for them.

In this piece of poetry from Isaiah, the prophet assures everyone that God will come and rescue them. There will be a messenger to prepare the way and then God himself will arrive to put things right again. God's coming will be good news and whatever has been taken away from them will be given back. God will be like a shepherd caring for his sheep.

This last image of God meant such a lot to the farming community of Israel. It is a picture of a gentle loving rescue, and this is exactly the way Jesus describes himself (as the good shepherd) in the New Testament. The lost sheep of Israel will be found again and the vulnerable lambs of Judah will be safe. The scene is set for the arrival of Jesus, God's rescue plan for the whole world.

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Questions

- ▶ What signs of hope are there for Israel in this passage?
- ▶ Which part of this promise of good news do you think would be most encouraging for those far from home?
- ▶ What words of hope has God spoken to you?
- ▶ How can God be both a powerful ruler and a gentle shepherd?
- ▶ Which part of these verses can you link with what you know about Jesus?



Visual aid

Roll up a heavy piece of paper and use it as a loudspeaker so that 'good news' can be shouted out loud.



Activity idea

Pour some sand or dirt into a shallow tray to be the desert described in this poem. Make a route that is at first twisty, with hills and valleys going up and down. Then reshape it all, to create a route through the desert that is flat and straight like the one that God will walk along.



Prayer idea

There are at least three images in this passage that help us pray:

- flowers that blossom and fade
- a powerful and victorious ruler coming with a reward
- a shepherd carrying baby lambs

These remind us that God's words are for ever, God's power can put things right, and God's love can rescue us. Choose an image and use it as the basis of a prayer for yourself, your family and your friends.

Key verse

"The glory of the Lord will appear for all to see. The Lord has promised this!" (Isaiah 40:5).

New Testament story link

Mark 1:1-4: Mark uses Isaiah's prophetic poem to introduce us to John the Baptist, who in turn points us towards Jesus.



Colour me!

