

**Instructions:**

Group leaders, take some time before your gathering to look over these questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you pick 3-5 questions to discuss that pertain to your group's unique style and needs.



**Series: Grateful for...**

What are the promises of God revealed to God's people through the prophets? How were these words received then? Have they been fulfilled in Christ? What promises are we still waiting for? Join us this Advent and Christmas as we journey back to the words of Isaiah to hear the promises of God again, so that we might look to the future with hope, love, and joy. Because God always keeps God's promises.

**Message description:**

The people of Israel face the beginning of a disaster; the Babylonians have conquered Jerusalem, the temple is destroyed, the economy disrupted, and prominent leaders and citizens have been exiled to Babylon. Judah is feeling defeated, devastated, and estranged. The prophetic word of God to the people comes, "Comfort, comfort, O my people." Really? The conflict and struggle are far from over, and yet Israel can find hope because God promises to be present with them like a shepherd who gathers and carries their flock.

This promise of divine presence is fulfilled again in the incarnation, when God came to be with us in the disaster, in the mess of humanity. Emmanuel, God with us. We can experience peace, even in the middle of the disasters when God's peaceable kingdom is still being revealed, because Christ promises to be with us. The words of the prophet Isaiah became the words of John the Baptist which becomes our charge today- prepare a way for the Lord in the wilderness! Do not give up. Christ is coming. Live and work toward that Kingdom now, for blessed are the peacemakers.

**Key Scripture**

*Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 23; Luke 2:47-55; Philippians 4:4-7*

### Questions Related to This Week's Message:

1. What is bringing you peace today?
2. Share about a time you experienced peace in the middle of a disaster.
3. Read Luke 2:47-55. Why do you think Mary had this response to the announcement of her pregnancy? What do you think these verses teach us about the Kingdom of God, which Jesus comes to announce?
4. What should the work of peace look like today?
5. Read Matthew 16:13-18. What hope do you have in the work of the Church toward peace?
6. How can we keep from growing weary, even as it feels like we are at the threshold of hell?

### Going deeper:

"The implication in this text is that Judah can hope because God is present, but Judah is not yet at home in Zion. Hope, therefore, must live in the tension between the Word that is present and the promise which is not yet, but is coming." -George W. Stroup in *Feasting on The Word, Year B Vol. 1*

### Questions for reflection:

- As followers of Jesus Christ, what promises are "already, but not yet;" spoken, but still waiting for them to be fulfilled?
- How can hope and faith help us live in this tension?

### Close in prayer:

Pray together. Create intentional time and space to offer prayers for one another, that we might share in the comfort of Christ together and experience the Spirit's presence.

### Consider the simple acronym of ACTS to guide your time of prayer together:

- A- Adoration.** *Share praise reports or reasons to praise God. (Reading a psalm together can help)*
- C- Confession.** *Leave space to pray silently or individually to confess sins.*
- T- Thanksgiving.** *Share something in the group that you are thankful for this week.*
- S- Supplication, or petition.** *Share concerns and prayer requests you have.*