



SESSION **1**

The prophets foretell



MEETING AIM

To understand the prophets' role in the Christmas story.



BIBLE PASSAGE

Isaiah 7:10-14; 9:2-7



BACKGROUND

We're going back to the Old Testament to introduce Jesus, just as God did to the Israelites hundreds of years before Jesus' birth. The Old Testament prophets gave the Jewish people messages from God of warning or comfort. They weren't always very popular, as God often spoke messages that the Israelites would have rather not heard! In this session, we're looking at some of the passages where prophets tell the Israelites about Jesus' coming - God's promise of salvation. In considering what it meant to the Israelites, we may glimpse a new perspective on who Jesus is to us today.

+ GATHERING TIME



As the young people arrive, gather them in a circle with refreshments. Ask them: "Have you ever looked forward to something happening or meeting someone, but then when it happened / when you met them it was different from what you were expecting?" Think of your own example to share with the group to start them off.

+ GUESS WHO?



You will need: Post-it notes; pens

Before the session, write down the names of famous people on Post-it notes. Alternatively, you can ask the group to write them for each other. You could go for characters in the Bible, depending on the group's Bible knowledge. It won't work if the group aren't familiar with the Bible or if it will embarrass them with their lack of Bible knowledge!

Each person needs to be given a Post-it note with a name to stick on their forehead, without them seeing it. Take it in turns to ask questions that can only be answered with a 'yes' or 'no', the object being to guess the name of your person in the fewest questions!

+ BIBLE STORY



You will need: at least two Bibles or the Bible passages printed out; large paper; felt-tip pens

Explain the role of the prophets to the Israelites, and that the passages you are looking at today are relevant to preparing for Christmas because these were among the first bits of news God was giving the Israelites that Jesus was coming. Two thousand years later, we know about Jesus' birth and who Jesus was because of the stories that have been passed on to us, but these were the first beginnings of the story of Jesus before he was even born!

Read the passages together. It may be helpful to print them out in a large font to keep them as a reference, or make sure that you have Bibles open on these passages throughout the activity. Lay out a large piece of paper and felt-tip pens.

Using the descriptions of Jesus in the passages (before we know it's Jesus), ask the group to draw the image of this person the passages talk about, and warn them not to fall into stereotypes of what they already know about Jesus. If drawing is difficult, ask them to think about or write down how this person might appear to the Israelites and what he was going to do for them.

Ask the group to think about what the people of God might have been expecting. How different is this expectation from the saviour God sends?

+ CHATTING TOGETHER



Ask the group these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

- Why do you think God used the prophets to tell the Israelites about Jesus years before his birth?
- Do you think the Israelites believed the prophets? Why? Why not?
- What is missing from the description of God's saviour?
- Do you think the passages from the prophets still have something to teach us today? If so, what?

+ CREATIVE RESPONSE



You will need: pens; paper

Ask the group to think of people they want to tell about Jesus. They might be a group of people who share characteristics, their friends or family, or even your church. Ask them to think about who Jesus might be to them, how he might change their lives, how he'd encourage them or warn them.

Ask them to write a short passage to these people, like the prophets you have read about together, and encourage them to think about the imagery and language that would make particular sense to the people they are thinking of. Encourage them to think about the picture of Jesus they are putting into words.

Give the group a few minutes to have a go at writing these passages. Bear in mind that some young people might need longer, which you can give if you have spare time, or otherwise encourage them to take their passages home and work on them. They could even bring their finished work back to share next week. Afterwards, ask the group how they found it and invite them to share their words if they would like to.

It may help the group to settle into the activity if you play some background music during the writing time.

+ PRAYER



You will need: candle and matches (or a battery-powered candle)

Ask the group to meditate on the promises of the prophets. Explain that you will light a candle as a symbol of Jesus coming to be a light in the world, and ask the group to consider what that might mean in their lives. (If you can't light a candle, use a battery-operated one.) Reread the passages you've been looking at as the group is silent, leaving a space of silence between them.

At the end of this time of prayer, you can pray a concluding prayer: *Thank you, God, for sending Jesus to be a light in our world, for the Israelites who were waiting for you, and for us still today. We pray that Jesus would continue to bring his light into the darkest parts of the world and also to the darkest parts of our life. And thank you for the hope your promise gave the Israelites. We pray that your gift of Jesus would give us that same hope today. Amen.*