



## Introduction

Isaiah lived in precarious times for the people of God. The kingdom had split in two and there was rivalry between the tribes of Israel in the north and the tribe of Judah in the south. Furthermore, there were dangerous forces at work abroad, as the power of the Assyrians in the east was on the increase. This nation was the up-and-coming empire at the time and little kingdoms like Israel or Judah could be easily swallowed up or end up in the no-man's land between Egypt and Assyria.

Into this situation Isaiah is called to be a priest for God. He had to remind them to serve the true Lord and not be tempted to turn to other alternative gods or rely on their own strength. Isaiah tells the story of how God called him to this job with frankness and honesty in chapter 6. He had an amazing experience of God's presence that dramatically changed his life and which must have sustained him through the dark times that lay ahead. He never forgot the bright vision of heaven that he was called to reflect in his day and age.

Isaiah's work spanned the reigns of four kings, some of whom were very hostile to God indeed. To each one he spoke God's message of judgment and hope and in particular he proclaimed the promise of the great light that one day would come for those who walked in darkness (Isaiah 9:2).

## Preparation

Use a child-friendly retelling of this story from re-telling of Isaiah 6:1-9.

## Development

1. Talk with the class about what in their lives so far have been the most exciting and the most frightening experiences that they have had to face. The conversation may touch on dramatic thunderstorms, scary fairground rides or seeing some amazing natural phenomena such as shooting stars. Make sure you share your experiences, too.

How did they feel?

What difference did these experiences make?

How will they remember them in future?

Or would they rather forget them?

Link this conversation to the amazing experience that Isaiah tells us about in his own words in today's Bible story.

Have there been times that the children have felt close to God in a similar mysterious way?

2. Create some sound effects and atmosphere for the story of the calling of Isaiah, involving the children with the following objects:



A large piece of stiff card that when wobbled sounds like thunder  
A large sheet of kitchen foil that when shaken makes its own distinct sound and sparkles  
Arrange to have a kettle (or two?) boiling to create some steam like the smoke in the story  
Hand out six pieces cut from a white sheet, which can be flapped to represent the wings of the angels  
Have a large bright yellow or gold-coloured cloth, which can be held at the four corners, to represent 'the train that filled the temple'  
Play some heavenly music such as Thomas Tallis' *Spem in alium* to catch the atmosphere of the angels' song  
Finally, if you can arrange it, turn on one of those electric fires that have some mock artificial coals to represent the place from which the burning coal was taken - take care that it is only the light that is on, not any of the electric bars.

Build up the atmosphere of the story with all these sound effects and visuals.

Also explore some of the feelings that Isaiah must have gone through by asking the children to adopt expressions of sadness, shock, amazement, horror, guilt, excitement and so on.

Use all this to lead into a re-telling of Isaiah 6:1-9.

3. And what about the next day? And the next week?

Ask the children to imagine that he or she is Isaiah, who is trying to tell his families or friends some time later what happened that day.

What would he say? What does he now think about it all, at a distance? Has he worked out what it all means?

In other words, invite the children to step into Isaiah's trembling shoes!  
Why do you think God chose to speak to Isaiah so dramatically?

4. Isaiah now had a difficult job before him.

King Ahaz in particular was especially wicked according to the stories (you can read about some of his deeds in 2 Chronicles 28) but Isaiah was told to speak to him, challenging him to put his trust in God and telling him some home truths about his behaviour. Isaiah had to reflect God's light into some very dark places.

But God had prepared him for the fact that very often people would not listen to what he had to say (see Isaiah 9:9-12).

To catch the flavour of this experience, play a game with the class, in which they have to do the exact opposite of anything the leader says. Can they be caught out?

This must have been what it was like for Isaiah talking to someone like Ahaz or even to one of the better kings like Hezekiah, who did not always take Isaiah's good advice.



Another game to play is a question and answer one, in which the person questioned can only answer yes or no, *but* must shake his/her head for 'yes' and nod for 'no'. This can be very difficult! Who can answer in this mixed-up way the longest?

5. According to the story the seraphim are six-winged angels.

Can the children imagine what these must look like?

For a creative response, suggest that children draw their own pictures of how they imagine these angels.

The burning coal that the angel picks up with tongs from the fire is often used as a symbol for Isaiah. This burning coal touches his lips and brings him forgiveness. Christians have likened it to the gift of forgiveness that Jesus brings because of the cross.

The children could make their own version of this burning coal by scrunching up some black tissue paper into a tight ball and then attaching with clear tape some small pieces of bunched-up yellow, orange and red wool to be like the glowing embers.

This burning coal is a picture of being accepted by God, so Isaiah need no longer fear to be in God's presence. For him the burning coal becomes a sign of God's love and welcome. It is as if God is saying to him, 'I accept you and I want you to speak for me.'

Maybe the coals the children have made could be attached to their pictures of the amazing angel, with their own ideas of the meaning of this experience written beneath.

6. Isaiah had had a glimpse of the glorious light of heaven, which he now needed to reflect for God on earth. The message he had to share wasn't an easy one but it did contain hope. Even though the people would eventually be defeated and taken into exile, there would still be a 'stump' left - that part of the tree left in the ground when it has been felled. It is from this stump that a new beginning would come. God promises that in Isaiah 6:13 and the image comes again in 11:1.

As a time of reflection about what we can learn from this story, focus on the hope, which God promises. As a symbol of this use a plant pot with a tiny plant growing - ideally one that is just pushing above the surface of the soil. Here is Isaiah's picture of hope from God.

Talk together about situations that seem hard and hopeless in the world and in their own experience and as a way of showing how Christians put their trust in God, encourage each child in turn to pick up the plant pot at some stage in the conversation and then everyone could say together:  
*Thank you, God, that you give us hope.*