

Remind, Reveal, Reinforce

Through story and healthy tradition that reveal God's love to the world, we remind people of what has been. Let us drop the unnecessary. Let us break away from the stagnant and stale and be invigorated by reinforcing those practices that bear joy and cast our eyes upon the coming of the messiah.

Focus scripture: Isaiah 40:1–11

Isaiah 40:1–11 reveals the voice of God through the prophet. "Prepare the way of the Lord!" Amid the Babylonian exile, the people Israel are grasping at straws to understand the place they have in their new reality. With Judah crushed and the temple in Jerusalem destroyed, what future is there for a people held captive in a far-off land where cultures mingle, and identity is redefined. The voice of the prophet comes as a reminder to hold fast to who they are as God's people and to make use of this time in exile to prepare. Verse three emphasizes the importance of continuing to work and prepare amidst the wilderness location. The length of time for this preparation is uncertain, but the prophet refers to humanity being like grass and flowers that wither and fade, yet God's word remains. This could perhaps reference an extended period or could refer to the eternalness of God. In either case, God's provision is the final word of this text and gives comfort to the people of Israel that all will be provided, even in the wilderness, as they prepare the way of God.

Psalm 85:1–2, 8–13 was most likely written in the post-exilic era when God has restored the people to their homeland. Yet these were years of hardship and uncertainty. The voice of this psalm cries out, "with everything we have been through, surely our salvation is at hand." The activity of God will reach from the heavens to the very ground upon which the people of Israel stand, and that activity is bringing about peace and righteousness. In the context of Advent, our expectation is

the same. God's activity stretches from the heavens to the ground upon which we stand.

2 Peter 3:8–15a Peter's emphasis in this text is on our misunderstanding of time and how things will unfold. Peter helps the reader to understand better that our time is not God's time. God's desire is for all of creation to participate in this moment of "the day of the Lord." He emphasizes a disclosure, a revealing that will come of all Earth, where our reality is transformed into God's reality. Who will we be when that day comes?

Mark 1:1–8 One of the most commonly used biblical passages during the Advent season pulls from Isaiah 40 to introduce John the baptizer proclaiming repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. As the people were in the midst of Roman occupation and heavy taxation, a word of liberation and redemption would have been popular. John reminds the people that repentance is a preparatory act for the coming One.

• • • • •

As we call on the connections between Isaiah and Mark, we look for opportunities for preparation. We remind ourselves of the restoration that we hope for ourselves and the world. We expect God to show up, to be revealed, in the everyday, the ordinary. And we know the faithfulness of God. God will show up, God restores, and God's provision is never-ending. How can our actions become daily acts of worship that reinforce a God whose nature is love?



Focus scripture
Isaiah 40:1–11

Additional scriptures
Psalm 85:1–2, 8–13
2 Peter 3:8–15a
Mark 1:1–8
On this second

Holy One, grant us a stillness to silence the chaos around us, to allow for self-examination. In our introspection may we find courage, that our courage would move us to action, and that our actions would reflect Love come into the world. Amen.

Lesson Connection
links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 3–5

All children have times when they feel sad and need comfort. Although they might not know the actual meaning of the word “comfort,” they also are very likely to have offered it to people they care about – spontaneously but genuinely.

Their developing imaginations help young children begin to see beyond their own worlds, and their growing self-awareness makes it possible to empathize with others. The comfort they offer may be in the form of a hug, a giggle, or a bouquet of dandelions rather than words. Still, young children are learning to appreciate the power of words, especially stories, promises, and personal messages.

In the Gathering time in this week’s session, “Priscilla” shares an experience of being comforted and children are invited to do the same. Later, children can blow a feather in a game, and might decorate a pillowcase or create a greeting card to share God’s comforting love and care. Pray that the children will recognize the presence of a comforting God in both the care they receive from and give to people they love.

Please note that the Nativity story will be explored in the December 20 session. If you will not be meeting together on December 20, plan when you will share this session with the children.

Prepare

Before the session

- ☐ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, Isaiah 40:1–11, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 9).
- ☐ Review “[About this Season of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany](#)” (p. 1) and “[This Season of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany for Ages 3–5](#)” (p. 2).
- ☐ Bring items for worship area: purple or blue cloth, Advent wreath from last week, offering basket, Bible with a bookmark placed in the book of Isaiah.
- ☐ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), resource sheet “[Additional Songs](#)” (p. 76) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Songbook*, *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Music CD*, and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available for purchase at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ☐ Bring poster board with stars from last week and construction paper stars (see resource sheet “[Patterns](#),” p. 80, one for each child and extras for visitors).
- ☐ Bring a puppet (see information on p. 2) or a doll.

Engage

- ☐ Bring resource sheet “[God is Here](#)” and a feather.

Respond

Choose from the options provided. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ☐ **Comfort messages:** copies of resource sheet “[Comforting Message](#),” self-adhesive stickers of happy faces
- ☐ **Comfort snacks:** bread slices (cut into circles), sliced cheese, tomato sauce in squeeze container, carrot circles
- ☐ **Comfort covers:** white pillowcases, unscented fabric markers, newsprint, paint smocks; place a sheet of newsprint into each pillowcase; use markers to print “God is with (child’s name)” on each pillowcase.

Bless

- ☐ Bring a bell.
- ☐ Bring, if possible, songs “May You Find Peace” (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #19 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) or “A Little Peace Song” (p. 5 in *SGF Songbook*; #1 on *SGF Music CD*).
- ☐ Copies of “[Letter to Families](#)” (p. 75)



Remind, Reveal, Reinforce

Scripture

Isaiah 40:1–11

FOCUS To share the comfort of God's love and care with others

Gather

Welcome children by name and invite them to talk about things they and their families have been doing to get ready for Christmas.

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship table. Invite a child to help spread the blue or purple cloth and place the Bible on the table. Explain that we can read stories about God's love in the Bible. Receive the offering.

Advent wreath Point out the candle for hope "lit" last week. Explain that this week we light a candle for peace. We can feel comfort and peace inside and all around us when we know that God loves us. Invite a child to "light" the candle by gently pulling up the yellow tissue inside.

Sing "We Are Waiting" (on resource sheet [Additional Songs](#), p. 76)

Pray Dear God,
thank you for bringing us together.
Thank you for caring about us, always.
Amen.

Poster ritual Look together at the poster board of stars and notice the stars added last week. Distribute more construction paper stars and use a glue stick to help children add these around the edges of the poster. Explain that they will add more stars each week as we wait to celebrate Jesus' birth.

Moving into the theme

Choose one of the following:

☐ Puppet conversation

Priscilla: Hi everybody! How is everyone today?

Leader: Is everyone feeling comfortable? (*provide time for responses*)

Priscilla: I sure wasn't comfortable last night because I had a bad dream. I woke up crying and I didn't know what to do.

Leader: It sounds like you needed some comfort. What happened, Priscilla?

Priscilla: My mother heard me crying and she came and cuddled me. Then she sang to me until I fell asleep again. And I didn't wake up again until this morning!

Leader: It sounds like your mother gave you lots of comfort. One way we show God's love is by comforting each other.

Priscilla: Hmm. I never thought of that. I'm going to try to comfort someone today. Bye, everyone. (*Say goodbye to Priscilla.*)

☐ **Talking about comfort** Hold a doll in your lap and invite children to imagine the doll had a bad dream. How could we help the doll go back to sleep? (*Provide time for responses.*) Invite children to take turns holding the doll in their arms as you talk together about what helps us to feel better when we feel sad or unwell or scared.

Engage

Before the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Isaiah. Explain that Isaiah was a prophet, a messenger from God. Isaiah gave the people comfort and helped them know that God was always near. Use the resource sheet "[God is Here](#)" to present the story.

After the story

Game Gather in a circle. Place a feather on the palms of your hands and gently blow it to the child beside you. That child catches it and blows

it to the next child. Continue passing the feather around the circle until all have had a turn. Talk together about ways we can pass on God's love and care to others.

Sing "God Is With Us" (on resource sheet [Additional Songs](#), p. 76)

Calming ritual Introduce children to a ritual they can use at bedtime or when they feel sad or lonely. Start at the top of your body and say, "God's love and care to you, hair." Gently touch different parts of the body, saying "God's love and care to you, _____" all the way down to the toes.

Respond

Choose from the following activities.

- ☐ **Comfort messages** As Isaiah did, children can also share messages of God's comforting love. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Comforting Message](#)" and follow the instructions to help children make the cards and place a happy face sticker to seal together the corners. Talk together about who might receive the cards.
- ☐ **Comfort snacks** Sharing food together is one way of sharing God's comforting love. Help



children to place cheese on circles of bread and create happy faces using the tomato sauce and carrot circles. Enjoy the snack together!

- ☐ **Comfort covers** Pillows can provide a cozy and concrete reminder of God's love and care. Help children make a pillow cover by taping prepared pillowcases to the table. Read the message aloud. Help children trace their hand shapes onto the covers and use the markers to decorate further. (Note: have them wear paint smocks to protect clothing)

Bless

Gather in the worship space and invite children to take turns ringing a bell as the group says, "God is near, God is here!"

Pray Thank you, God, for caring for us while we wait for Christmas. Amen.

Sing if possible, "May You Find Peace" (p. 26 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #19 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) or "A Little Peace Song" (p. 5 in *SGF Songbook*; #1 on *SGF Music CD*).

Send each child out with the words "(child's name), God's peace be with you."

Distribute copies of the "[Letter to Families](#)" (p. 75) for newcomers to take home.

Reflect

In what ways did you feel comforted by the children today? How might you offer comfort and support to each child?





Story Tip

Words are often chosen to comfort a specific audience. The more you know about the children in your group the more comforting will be the words you choose to offer them.

God Is Here

(based on Isaiah 40:1–9)

(Practice the words in bold type and the actions with the children before telling the story.)

Long, long ago the people of Israel were tired and sad. They had worked many years for the king of Egypt – and they wanted to leave. The people called to God for help and comfort.

And God said, “I love you. I will care for you.”

God is here! Hooray for God! *(Smile, wave hands high.)*

God sent a leader to help the people. The people left Egypt and walked into the desert. They were going to find a new home. But the people felt lost. They called to God for help and comfort.

And God said, “I love you. I will care for you.”

God is here! Hooray for God! *(Smile, wave hands high.)*

The people spent forty years in the desert – a long, long time! The people worried that they would be travelling forever, but they kept on going.

They called to God for help and comfort.

And God said, “I love you. I will care for you.”

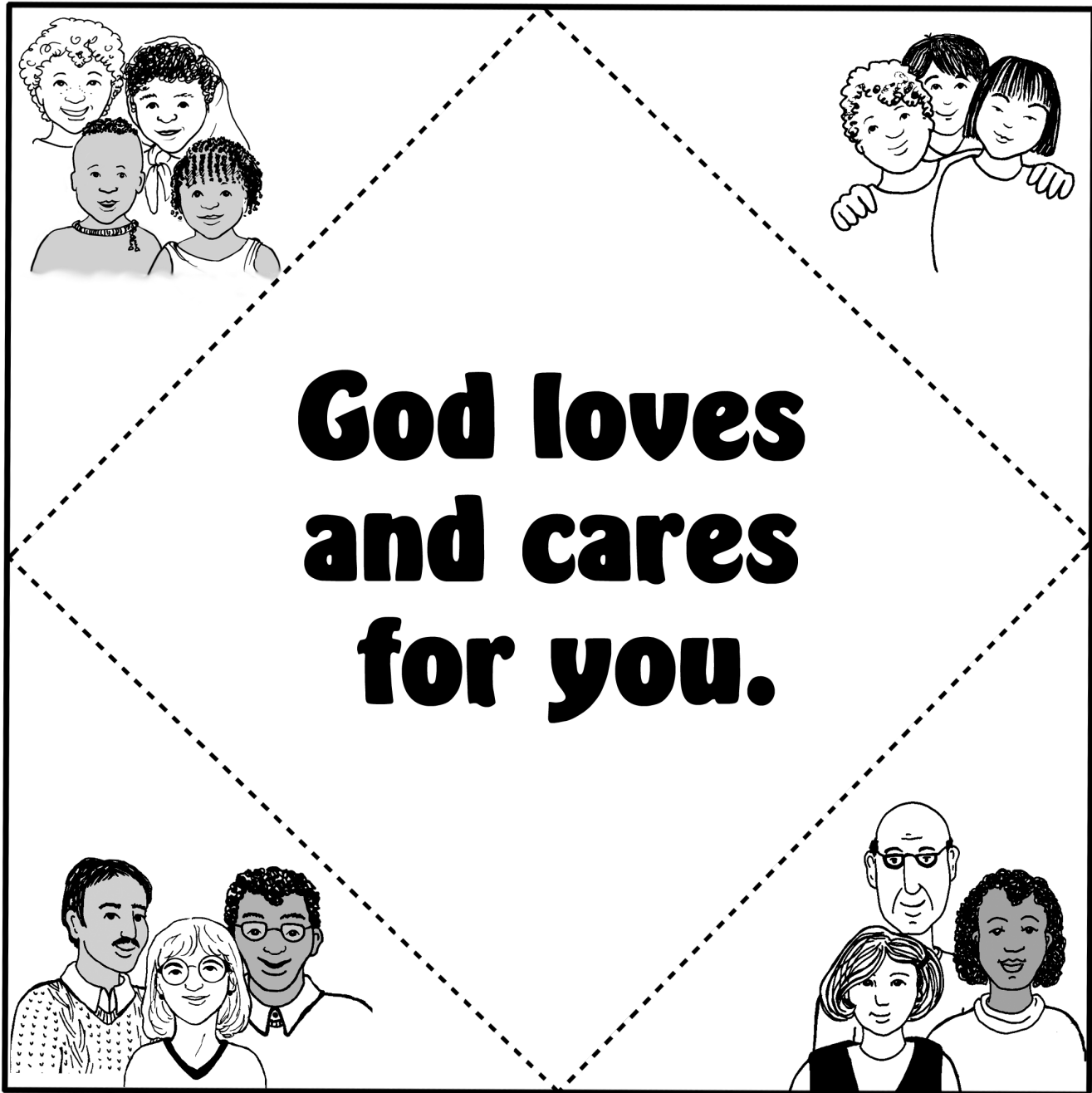
God is here! Hooray for God! *(Smile, wave hands high.)*

God helps and comforts us, too. God loves us and will care for us – forever.

God is here! Hooray for God! *(Smile, wave hands high.)*



Comforting Message



Instructions:

- Cut out the square.
- Decorate the pictures of the people in the corners of the square.
- Add designs around the message with markers or self-adhesive stickers.
- Fold the four corners into the middle of the square to hide the message.
- Option: decorate the triangles hiding the message as well.

Letter to Families



Dear Families,

Welcome to the seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany! We are looking forward to exploring these seasons and their scripture readings together with the children. We recognize that this is probably a very busy time for your family but we hope that you and your children will be able to take some time to experience the religious significance of these seasons. In order to help you, we have provided resources for Advent Calendar, with Advent Calendar faces, that you and your children can use to mark the days until Christmas.

During Advent, the group will be exploring readings from the prophet Isaiah and the Psalms, and the story of Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel in the first chapter of Luke. These readings will help us reflect on the themes of longing, comfort, and hope.

During the weeks of the Season after the Epiphany (referred to as "ordinary time" in the church year), most of the focus scripture readings come from the gospel of Mark. Children will have an opportunity to explore stories of Jesus' baptism, the call of the fishers, and the beginning of his ministry. The stories of healing and teaching will help children learn more about who Jesus is and discover the ways in which they too can share God's light and love in the world.

On February 14, the last Sunday of the season, we celebrate the story of Jesus' Transfiguration and the importance of listening to Jesus.

During these seasons we will be praying for each child in our group and we ask that your family also include us in your prayers. You are welcome to visit our meeting area any time. If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions about the church school program, please feel free to contact us. We are always happy to hear what is working well and what could be changed.

Sincerely,

Suggested resources: The *Family Story Bible* and *Family Story Bible Colouring Book*, illustrated by Margaret Kyle, or *The Lectionary Story Bible, Year B*. For older children, *Read, Wonder, Listen: Stories from the Bible for Young Readers*. All are available from the publisher of *Seasons of the Spirit* at www.woodlakebooks.com.



Additional Songs

We Are Waiting

(tune: "Frère Jacques" or "Are You Sleeping?")

We are waiting, we are waiting,
every day, every day,
to celebrate a birthday,
to celebrate a birthday,
Jesus' birth! Jesus' birth!

Ring the Bells

(tune: "Row, Row, Row Your Boat")

Ring, ring, ring the bells.
Ring the bells today.
Jesus comes to share God's love.
Ring the bells today.

God Is With Us

(tune: "Frère Jacques" or "Are You Sleeping?")

God is with us, God is with us,
all the time, all the time,
comforting and loving,
comforting and loving,
Thank you, God. Thank you, God.

If You're Happy and You Know It

The musical notation is in 4/4 time, key of F major. It consists of four staves of music. The lyrics and actions are as follows:

Staff 1: If you're hap - py and you know it, clap your hands. stamp your feet. snap your fingers. If you're

Staff 2: hap - py and you know it, clap your hands. stamp your feet. snap your fingers. If you're

Staff 3: hap - py and you know it, then your face will sure - ly show it. If you're

Staff 4: hap - py and you know it, clap your hands. stamp your feet. snap your fingers.

Other verses:

If you're sad and you know it, cry boo hoo.
If you're tired and you know it, give a yawn.
If you're angry and you know it, stamp your foot.
If you're excited and you know it, give a jump.
If you're loving and you know it, throw a kiss.

God Loves Us

(tune: "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star")

We are all God's family. (Open arms wide.)
Look around and you will see.
(Shade eyes with one hand and look around.)
God loves you and God loves me.
(Place hands over heart.)
We are all God's family. (Open arms wide.)
Look around and you will know.
(Shade eyes with one hand and look around.)
God's love helps us all to grow.
(Bring arms up and hold hands above head.)

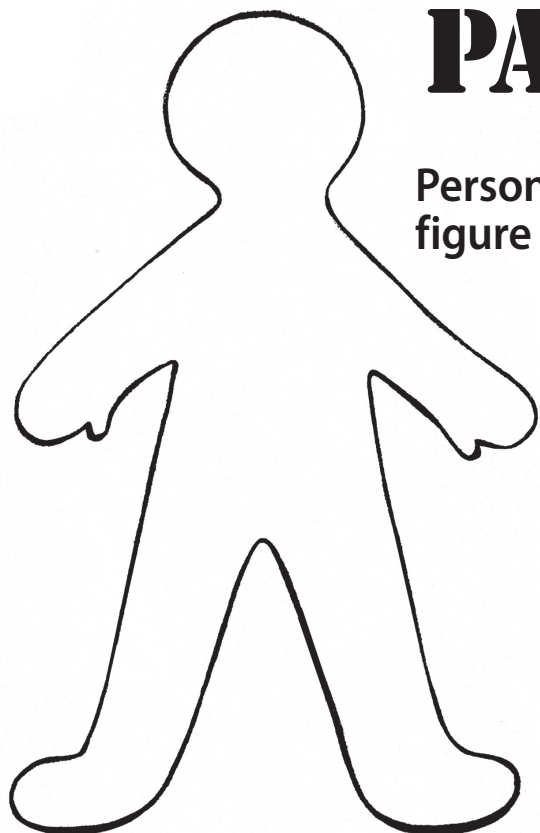
We Will Follow Jesus

(tune: "The Bear Went Over the Mountain")

We will follow Jesus
We will follow Jesus
We will follow Je - sus
and do what Jesus did (clap clap).
and do what Jesus did (clap clap).
and do what Jesus did (clap clap).
We will follow Jesus
We will follow Jesus
We will follow Je - sus
and do what Jesus did.



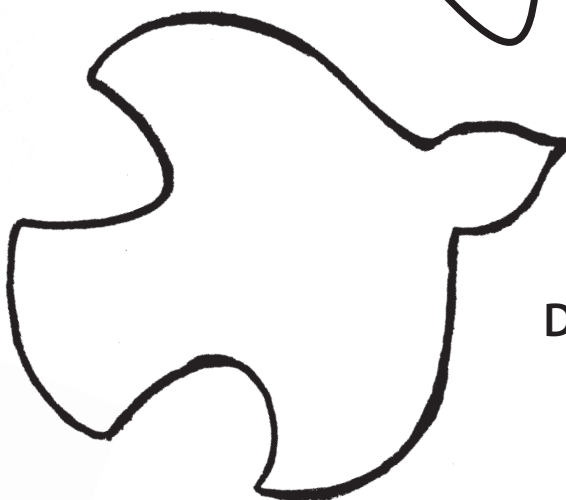
PATTERNS



Person
figure



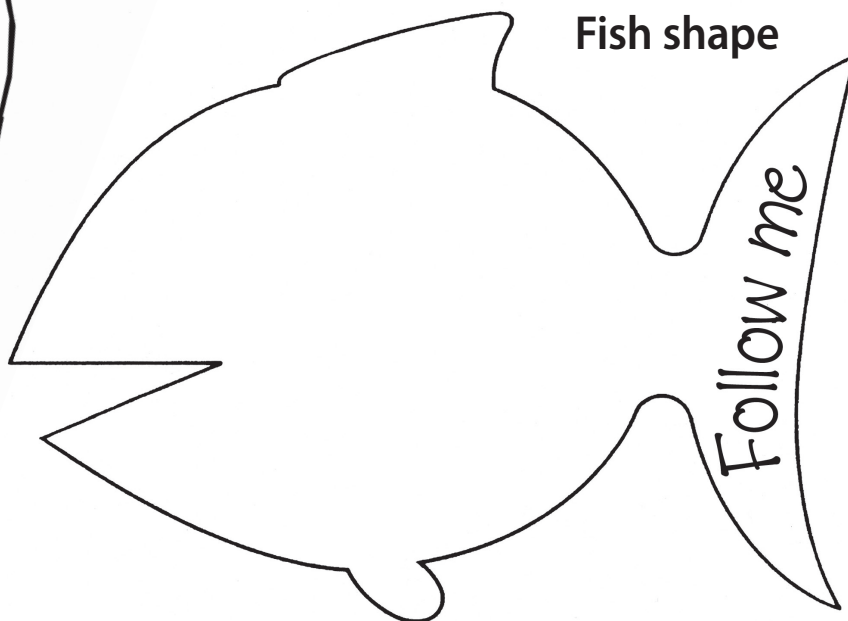
Star shape



Dove shape



Footprint shape



Fish shape

