

Hope

Oh that you would rend
the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake
at your presence **Isaiah 64:1**

*O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer,
Our spirits by Thine advent here.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.*

Some Christmas gifts seem too big to ask for. Why get your hopes up for an original Nintendo Entertainment System with a zapper gun? Especially after the first quarter's English report card? It's safer just to ask for a handheld LED Pinball. It's on clearance after all.

Some prayers, too, feel too big to pray. Hope seems dangerous. Wouldn't it be better to ask small things of God rather than get your hopes up? God is in the heavens, but heaven feels a long, long way away. And we could only wish that the worst sin dirtying our filthy hearts was a botched English assignment. How should we pray when God feels distant and we feel dirty?

I imagine that's how captive Israel felt after they rebelled against God, and God delivered them over to their enemies. God sent the prophet Isaiah both to warn them that he is a jealous God and also to encourage them that God is with us, mighty to save. But that was years ago. Would captivity ever end or had God forgotten them?

What does Isaiah pray when God feels distant and Israel is undeserving? Isaiah prays no junior-sized prayer and offers up no hesitant request. The clearance aisle will not do. Isaiah aims for the heavens and prays one of the boldest, most wrenching prayers of the Bible: "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down!"

Come! Come down among us! Tear open the skies like a curtain, and shake the earth again! Surprise us, O God! Surprise us again like when our backs were against the Red Sea. Lord, we need you to rescue us.

How do you pray in hope when hope seems shrouded behind a dreary December sky? Advent reminds us that God tears open the clouds in the most surprising ways. He did come down! He will rend the heavens and come again. So cast away caution and ask God to surprise you again.



Talk together: What was the most surprising gift you've ever received?



Sing together: O Come, O Come Emmanuel



Read together: Isaiah 64:1-8



Pray together: God, surprise us in new and awesome ways this year! You surprised the world with a baby in a manger. You surprised us again by rolling away the stone. And God, we are waiting for the day you will surprise the whole world and send Jesus. So we pray, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And come quickly, Lord Jesus.