DEEP-DIVE LESSON · ABOUT 80 MINUTES

Tear Open the Heavens: Four Readings, One Question

BIG IDEA	All four readings ask one question: Will God come? The answer is yes: he came at Bethlehem, he comes now in Word and Sacrament, and he will come again.
READINGS	Isaiah 64:1–9, Psalm 80, 1 Corinthians 1:3–9, Mark 13:24–37
MEMORY VERSE	Psalm 80:3, "Turn us again, God. Cause your face to shine, and we will be saved."
YOU WILL NEED	Bibles, four large sheets of paper, markers, a long paper timeline strip marked 1000 BC to AD 100
BACKGROUND TO READ	How the readings tie together and The Great Isaiah Scroll

1 Three comings 8 min

Draw three circles on the board labeled *Bethlehem*, *Now*, and *The Last Day*. Explain that Advent celebrates all three comings of Christ. Fill in the first and last together.

Ask: "How does Jesus come to us *now*?" Help them find: in his Word read and preached, in Baptism, in the Lord's Supper, and through other Christians. Bernard of Clairvaux called this the hidden "middle coming."

2 Four stations 30 min

Split the class into four groups. Give each group one reading and a large sheet. They answer the three questions below on the sheet, then each group reports back in two minutes. Circulate and help.

Isaiah 64:1 Oh that you would tear the heavens, that you would come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence.

Psalm 80:3 Turn us again, God. Cause your face to shine, and we will be saved.

1 Corinthians 1:7–9 so that you come behind in no gift; waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ; who will also confirm you until the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Mark 13:26 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

1. **Who is speaking, and to whom?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE

   Isaiah: the prophet praying for a ruined people back from exile in Babylon. Psalm 80: Asaph, a Temple musician, praying for Israel under attack by Assyria. 1 Corinthians: Paul writing to a quarreling church in a rich Greek city. Mark: Jesus speaking privately to Peter, James, John and Andrew.

2. **What is wrong in their world?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE

   Isaiah: a burned city and a guilty people. Psalm 80: enemies laughing, "bread of tears." Corinth: divisions and pride. Mark: a Temple about to be destroyed and false messiahs coming. Help students see these are real problems, like ones today.

3. **What do they ask for, or promise, about God coming?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> Isaiah: "tear the heavens… come down." Psalm 80: "cause your face to shine." Paul: God "will confirm you until the end." Jesus: "they will see the Son of Man coming." All four point to God coming to rescue.

3 Timeline 10 min

Put the readings on the timeline: Psalm 80 (around 722 BC, Assyria conquers northern Israel), Isaiah 64 (after 538 BC, return from Babylon), Mark 13 (spoken around AD 30; the Temple falls in AD 70), 1 Corinthians (around AD 54).

Ask: "God's people waited about 500 years between Isaiah's prayer and Bethlehem. How does that help us wait now?"

Bonus story: tell them about the Great Isaiah Scroll, found by a Bedouin shepherd in a cave by the Dead Sea in 1947. It is a copy of Isaiah written before Jesus was born, and it reads almost exactly like our Bibles.

4 Grace and growth 12 min

> **Isaiah 64:6** For we have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteousness is like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

> **1 Corinthians 1:8** who will also confirm you until the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. **How can people with "polluted garments" end up "blameless"?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> God gives us Christ's righteousness as a gift, like a clean robe over dirty clothes (Isaiah 61:10). Lutheran and Reformed Christians agree completely on this. We don't make ourselves clean.

2. **If it's all a gift, does it matter how we live while we wait?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> Yes! Jesus says "Watch." God forgives us so that he can make us like his Son (1 John 3:2–3). Christians in the Eastern churches love to say God became man so we could share his life (2 Peter 1:4). We stand with the Reformers on how we are saved, and with the whole Church on what we are saved for.

Keep the balance. Christ's coming is good news because he comes to save sinners, not to reward the good. But "watch" is a real command. Grace that makes no one watchful is not the grace of the New Testament. God forgives us in order to make us like his Son (1 John 3:2–3).

5 Shine your face 10 min

Psalm 80's refrain asks God to "cause your face to shine." Teach the blessing from Numbers 6:24–26, which many churches speak at the end of worship. Have students write it out and decorate it as a gift for someone at home.

> **Numbers 6:24–26** The LORD bless you, and keep you. The LORD make his face to shine on you, and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up his face toward you, and give you peace.

6 Pray Psalm 80 10 min

Pray Psalm 80 responsively: the teacher reads verses 1–2, 4–6 and 17–18, and the class answers each time with the refrain. End with: "Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen."

> **"Turn us again, God. Cause your face to shine, and we will be saved."**

Scripture: World English Bible (public domain). Free to print and copy.