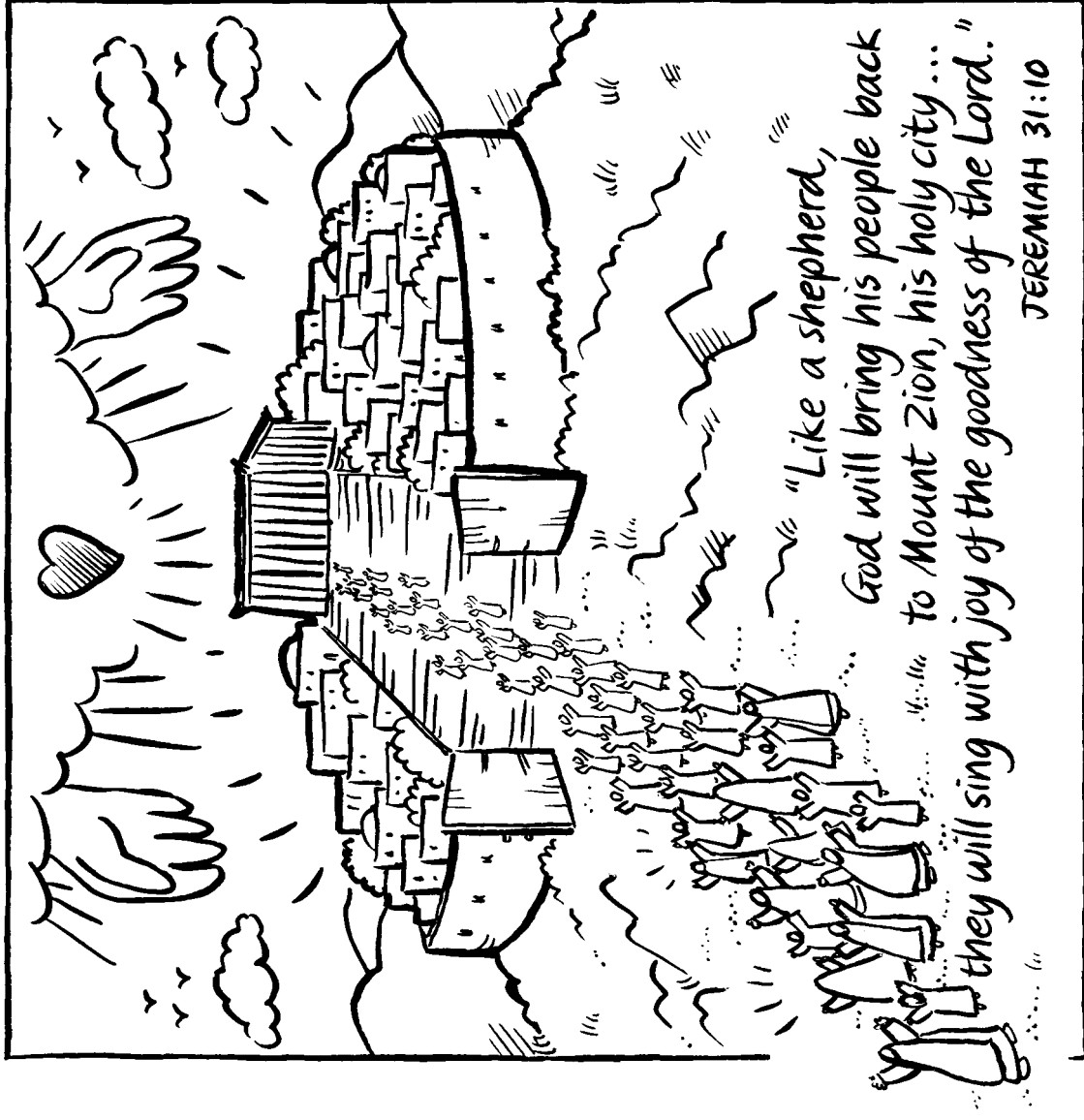


THE SUNDAY PAPER

JUNIOR

2nd SUNDAY
after
CHRISTMAS



“Like a shepherd,
God will bring his people back
to Mount Zion, his holy city...
they will sing with joy of the goodness of the Lord.”

JEREMIAH 31:10

A NOTE TO PARENTS

According to psychologists, what children most fear is abandonment. Our own experience of our children's emotions bears this out. So does our own memory of what it was like to be a child. There is no dread so terrible as the fear that everyone we know, love, care about or depend on has gone away and left us alone ... has shut us out, has turned away from us.

The Bible speaks directly to this fear. Beginning with the story of Adam and Eve, it reminds us that the human condition is one of exile. We have alienated ourselves from the source of all our happiness and security. This story says that God has turned away from us, and our way back into the Paradise where we were born is barred by an angel with a flaming sword. We are like children who have just been told, “Go to your room! And don't come out till I tell you!” Children know just what that feels like—that's why the story of Adam and Eve is so meaningful to them.

The traditional order of Lessons and Carols for Christmas always begins with the story of Adam and Eve, to set the context for human history. But it then goes on, to prove that though we have turned our backs on God, God has not turned his back on us after all. We are cast out ... but God seeks us in our exile, pursues us, calls to us, suffers pain for us ... and, at last, finds us and, rejoicing, brings us home. Christmas is about much more than a baby in a stable. It is about *being found by God*. In the Christmas message, we learn that God has not left us alone. God has chosen to be with us, wherever we are; and in his good time he will restore us fully to himself. We will climb back into the lap of the One who loves us, and be held and embraced and fed. For children, just as for us, there can be no better news.

Today's prophecy from Jeremiah speaks of God as a Shepherd. The image of the Good Shepherd, who knows all his sheep by name, and seeks those who are lost, is especially compelling to children. Try introducing this image as a name for God in your family prayer, or as you talk with your children about God's love for each of us.

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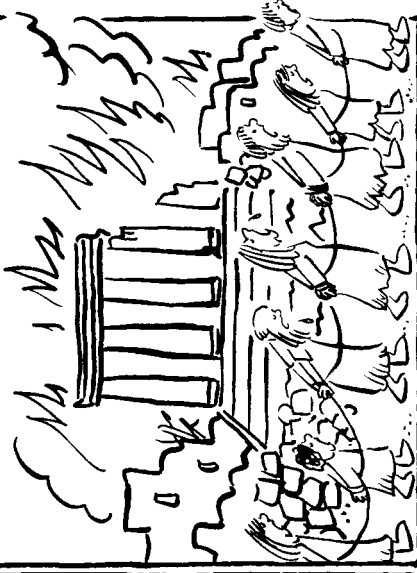
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God's prophets told the people God's plans for them. They gave warnings, and told God's promises.



God's people were sad. Enemies had destroyed their city. They were taken away to be slaves.



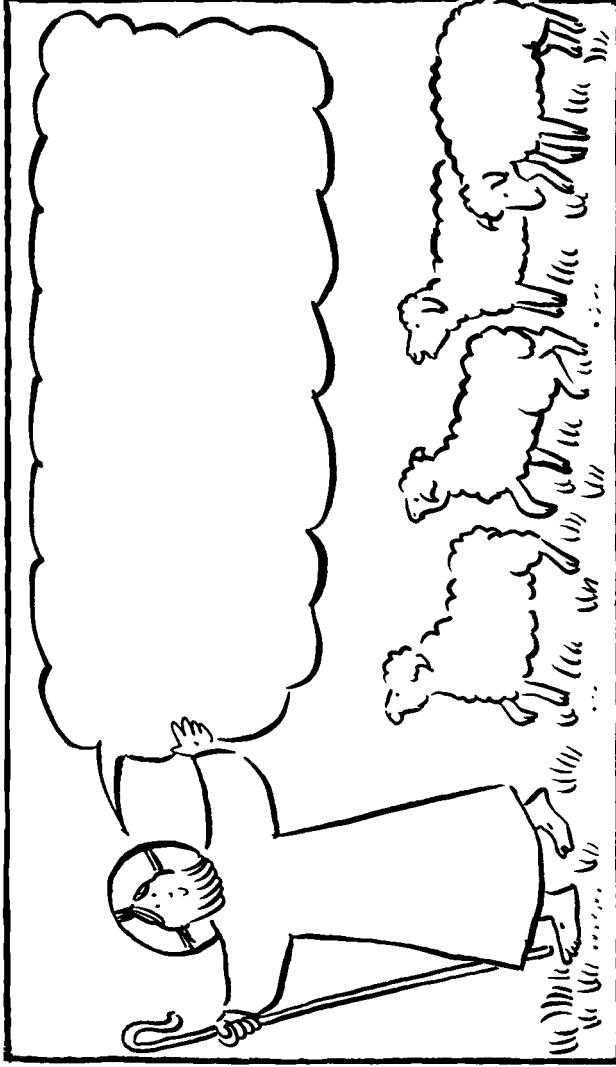
The prophet said, "Don't lose hope! God promises to bring you home..."



"God will comfort you with good things. You will dance and be glad."



When God's people disobeyed him, the prophets warned them that terrible things would happen. Terrible things did happen. But God did not give up on his people. Like a shepherd, he took care of them. He set them free and brought them home, just as the prophets had promised. We learn from the prophets that God never gives up on us. And now that Jesus has come, we know that God is with us always.



The Good Shepherd knows all his sheep. Make him call your name, and the names of people you know.