An Evening with Isaiah
by Naomi Schmidt

# Words of Welcome/Opening Prayer

Opening Anthem (Immanuel or Advent Gathering Rite- see last pages for music info)

Hymn 23 - O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

**O come, O come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here, Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, O Root of Jesse, free Your own from Satan’s tyranny;
From depths of hell your people save, And bring them vict’ry o’er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, O Day-Spring, from on high, And cheer us by your drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

Opening Litany (spoken, chanted or sung - Hymn 18, public domain, adapted)

Leader: Oh Lord, how shall we greet you and welcome you tonight?

**Group: We’ve gathered here to praise you, O Christ Child, our delight.**

Leader: Lord, draw us to the manger to see the Savior’s face,

**Group: Remind us that we need you and fill us with your grace.**

Leader: In love you dwelt among us, a man that we could see

**Group: Our Brother, Teacher, Savior, you came to set us free**

Leader: Oh, love beyond all telling, the Lord has brought us grace!

**Group: Now righteous and forgiven, we dwell in Love’s embrace. Amen.**

Light 1st Advent Candle

(Each person lighting a candle or a reader recites a verse from Isaiah while the candle is lit. The music could begin quietly as the candle is being lit if the musical introduction is long enough.)

 **Lighter: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.**

Anthem-Great Light or The People Who Walk in Darkness (see last pages for music options)

A Moment with Isaiah

Have you ever met an elderly gentleman radiant with dignity, weathered by war, wise with lessons of life and faith, and rich in humility and insight? It may have been your grandfather, a favorite uncle or just a neighbor on your street. Maybe you sat listening to his deep voice speaking words that you now treasure, stories of long ago, or insights you could barely fathom. It is a great blessing to be in the presence of such a man.

You might have also read the words of Isaiah and thought of him the same way. Strengthened in faith and called by God, Isaiah was a living testament and honorable prophet who proclaimed the Lord’s message. He wrote God’s words of warning and judgment, he spoke about war and justice. But he also recorded tender glimpses of the Savior and amazingly precise prophecies which spoke about God’s plan of salvation. These words are familiar to us and they resound in our churches throughout the Christmas season as we worship the Christ Child.

Join me as we read some of the magnificent verses from this ancient man of God:
(L: Leaders; G: Group)

L: Therefore, the Lord himself will give youa sign:

G: The virginwill conceive and give birth to a son, andwill call him Immanuel.

L: A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;

**G: from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.**

L: The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might.

**G: Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.**

L: Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

**G:See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the people,**

L: but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.

**G: Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.**

L: I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;

G: I will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles,

L: to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison,

G:   and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

L: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;

G: on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

L: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

G:And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

L: Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, from that time on and forever.

G: The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Light 2nd Advent Candle

**Lighter: Darkness covers the earth but the LORD rises upon you and His glory appears over you.**

Hymn 90 - The People that in Darkness Sat

**The people that in darkness sat
A glorious light have seen;**

 **The light has shone on them who long**

 **In shades of death have been, In shades of death have been.**

 **To us a child of hope is born,**

 **To us a son is giv’n,**

 **And on his shoulders ever rests**

 **All pow’r in earth and heav’n, all pow’r in earth and heav’n.**

 **His name shall be the Prince of Peace,**

 **The Everlasting Lord,**

 **The Wonderful, the Counselor,**

 **The God by all adored, the God by all adored.**

**His righteous government and pow’r
Shall over all extend;**

 **On judgment and on justice based,**

 **His reign shall have no end, His reign shall have no end.**

A message from Isaiah

Isaiah’s prophecies about Christ were written hundreds of years before the first Christmas. God was teaching His people about the Messiah who would come to be their Savior from sin. Some of those prophecies were hard for the people to understand and they weren’t sure exactly what God was describing. Of course now we see every detail of those prophecies fulfilled and they make perfect sense! Hymn writers still talk about Isaiah’s prophecies centuries later, like the hymn we just sang or the verse from Behold a Branch is Growing that says, “*Isaiah had foretold it in words of promise sure, and Mary’s arms enfold it, a virgin meek and pure.”* A more contemporary hymnist captured this poetic thought, “*How should I not have known Isaiah would be there, his prophecies fulfilled? With pounding heart, I stare: A child, a son, the Prince of Peace for me, A child, a son, the Prince of Peace for me.”* Isaiah has given us rich words to worship the Lord and celebrate the Christmas season.

Although some of Isaiah’s prophecies weren’t understood until Christ was born, others were piercingly clear. His enduring messages are still relevant for us today and one of those timeless verses is tucked away in the beginning of Isaiah. It doesn’t prophecy about Christ, it speaks directly to us about sin and forgiveness. Listen to these words from chapter 1, verse 18.

 “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;

though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

Read them with me again, they are printed in your service folder.

“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;

though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

We’re going to talk about the red and white in Isaiah’s text because there is an important message for us as we begin preparing for Christmas. But first, let’s sing one more beautiful hymn enriched with the inspired words of Isaiah.

Hymn 54 – Where Shepherds Lately Knelt

 **Where shepherds lately knelt and kept the angel’s word,**

 **I come in half belief, a pilgrim strangely stirred;**

 **But there is room and welcome there for me, (repeat)**

 **In that unlikely place I find him as they said:**

 **Sweet newborn Babe, how frail and in a manger bed,**

 **A still, small voice to cry one day for me, (repeat)**

 **How should I not have known Isaiah would be there,**

 **His prophecies fulfilled, with pounding heart I stare:**

 **A child, a son, the Prince of Peace for me, (repeat)**

Light 3rd Advent Candle

Lighter: And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

**The Red of Our Sin**

In the season of Christmas, it is easy to see the red theme of the holiday. Red gift wrapping and giant red bows, red lights and poinsettias, red dresses, shoes and lipstick. Some of us long for the colors of this holiday all year long. One look and we know what is coming - and it fills us with joy. Look at all the red you see as you are out shopping and running errands. Think about it - Christmas red, crimson red and scarlet red. Do you have the picture in your mind?

Now I want you to think about the words of Isaiah that we just read. Because Isaiah is calling us to see red a little differently, not like the red velvet cape with white trim in a Bing Crosby film, or an exquisite ruby necklace from Jared’s. Isaiah is helping us understand our sin. Let your mind transition to what he is telling us – he’s not talking about Christmas – he’s talking about the reason we need Christmas. He’s telling us we need that baby in a manger to be our Savior. The red is our sin.

Scarlet and crimson are deep colors. You know how hard it is to get a red stain out of a white blouse! You are extra careful with your glass of merlot when you are wearing a new outfit. Don’t spill the cranberry sauce on the carpet or you’ll have to rearrange the furniture to cover the stain! Red sharpies, roasted beets, fingernail polish… you get the picture. You understand what Isaiah is saying to us. The sin in our hearts is red like scarlet and crimson that stain so deeply we cannot remove the mark. We can try to cover the stain of our sin and hide it, like a scarf covering a stained blouse or a decorative rug on a tainted carpet but the stain is there and it cannot be removed. The blouse is worthless and needs to be tossed, the carpet needs to be replaced.

Wouldn’t it be nice if the sin in our hearts were as simple to deal with as buying a new blouse or getting new carpet? God is telling us through Isaiah that sin stains our hearts and we cannot remove it or hide it no matter how hard we try. We can’t deny it because we know in our hearts we are guilty. 1 John tells us that if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves. We can’t cover it or make up for what we do wrong. The good things we do cannot compensate for our sin or remove its condemnation. Isaiah is saying it runs deep. God is saying you are a sinner. This is the message: our sins are like scarlet.

Maybe it’s appropriate that Christmas is filled with red – let’s see the deep red around us as reminder of how desperately we need Christ to pay for our sin. Remember that because of our sin we need the Savior born on Christmas. We don’t need to hide our sin or work harder to be good. We can merely confess our sin and cling to His forgiveness.

Light 4th Advent Candle

**Lighter: Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;**

**though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.**

Hymn 304 vs. 4, 6 - Jesus Sinners Does Receive

 **Come, O sinners, one and all, Come accept his invitation.**

 **Come, obey his gracious call; Come and take his free salvation!**

 **Firmly in these words believe-Jesus sinners does receive.**

 **Oh, how blest it is to know, Were as scarlet my transgression,**

 **It shall be as white as snow By your blood and bitter passion,**

 **For these words I do believe-Jesus sinners does receive.**

**The Whiteness of Our Forgiveness**

Thankfully, there are other colors that brighten the holidays like silver and gold and green, all adding to the splendor of Christmas. But Isaiah calls us to see the color white. Remember? He wrote,

 “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;

though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

Here’s the thing about white – it looks best when it is with a sharply contrasting dark color, you know, like scarlet or crimson. Funny thing, but that’s something very important for us as Christians. It’s important to see the dark stain of sin so we appreciate the glorious white of Christ’s righteousness. We talked about the red of Christmas because we see ourselves as sinners who need a Savior. And now Isaiah draws us to the pure, brilliant message of the Gospel - and the “white as snow” is the righteousness of Christ. These two colors don’t merely make Christmas beautiful, they give Christmas its purpose. The red and white of Christmas show us we need a Savior and then reveal Him as Christ the Lord.

This inspired, wise prophet tells us that our sins are white as snow. I wonder if Isaiah ever saw snow? Maybe he saw it on the top of a mountain as a majestic peak glistening in the sun. That would be a fitting picture of what our righteousness in Christ would look like – radiant sun on sparkling snow – you know, the kind that makes you grab your sunglasses in January! It almost foreshadows the brightness of Christ when He was transfigured before Peter and John…

We also know there are times that snow seems endless – like grace. It keeps coming and coming, covering everything – and if we don’t have to shovel ourselves out it is delightful to sit back and just watch God in action. Our lives are no different as the Lord gives us grace upon grace, forgiving with mercy, seeing in us only the perfect righteousness of Christ. God put “snow” in Isaiah’s mind as he penned these words because the Lord wanted us to understand the cleanness and purity we are given in Christ.

This Christmas, you may think of your red sins as you get irritated while you’re shopping, or frustrated with slow shipping and expired coupons. You may be reminded of red as you deal with a family member who has deeply hurt or betrayed you. Angry words about finances, inappropriate behavior at the company Christmas party, and sins we just don’t want to let go of – these are the things we think of in the quiet of darkness. Satan wants to point at the stains in your heart, he wants you to see them and feel the condemnation, guilt and isolation.

But the truth coming from our dear brother, Isaiah is that we ARE white. Sin does not rule over us – the stain is gone because Christ has paid the price! The joy of this Christmas season is the white gift of grace, it is the robe of righteousness given to us by our Savior! ALL our sins are forgiven! As we celebrate Christmas we are looking in the manger at the Prince of Peace – He is the light that has dawned in our darkness to bring us eternal life! Are we white as snow? YES! We glisten with the righteousness of Christ!

Praise God for the abundant blessing of forgiveness and grace in Christ! He is the gift and celebration in our hearts this Christmas season. May we proclaim His love and joyously sing His praise!

Light 4th Advent Candle

**Lighter: The final candle in the wreath is the Christ candle. It is lit as the pinnacle of what we have been waiting for and so desperately need – a Savior. This white candle symbolizes Christ’s purity, righteousness and radiant light. It is beautiful and simple; it warms our hearts as it shines with God’s love. It brightens the darkness with the hope of forgiveness and peace with God as a free gift of grace. It draws our hearts to worship the Child who has been born to us; the Son who has been given to us. It proclaims the majesty of the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace. This is the light of Christ.**

### White as Snow – (See information about purchasing this song at the end of the service. A soloist will sing it once and then the ladies are invited to repeat the anthem twice. The anthem music can continue quietly in the background during the prayer.)

**White as snow, white as snow, though my sins were as scarlet,**

**Lord I know, Lord I know, that I’m clean and forgiven.**

**Through the power of Your blood, through the wonder of Your love,**

**Through faith in you I know that I can be white as snow.**

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Prayer
Heavenly Father, you have washed us clean and made us white as snow. We praise you for the grace that covers us so richly with the righteousness of Christ. When we feel discouraged, guilty or overwhelmed bring the pure white snow of the Gospel to our minds. Help us always remember that our goodness and purity comes from you! Our lives are perfect in your eyes because you see Christ’s holiness given to us. Free our hearts from the condemnation that we must do better and deafen our ears to words which point us inward for security and worthiness. Our hope is in you Lord, only in you. Allow this Advent and Christmas season to radiate with the true message of Christ born for sinners, Christ born for me. Make our hearts and minds a clean bed of straw as we look in great anticipation and readiness for your coming. Use us to share the precious message of the Gospel to your glory and the growth of your Kingdom. Amen.

Video clip (about 4 minutes long – please consider showing this)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HN-QH3m_Wsg> (or search You Tube for “A Great Light”).

This clip shows 3 children getting ready to meet someone special. The Isaiah text is read while the children are preparing. It has a pretty powerful ending.

Hymn 47 – Behold, a Branch is Growing

**Behold, a Branch is growing Of loveliest form and grace,
As prophets sang, foreknowing; it springs from Jesse’s race
And bears one little flow’r In midst of coldest winter, At deepest midnight hour.**

**Isaiah had foretold it In words of promise sure,**

**And Mary’s arms enfold it, A virgin meek and pure.**

**Through God’s eternal will This child to her is given At midnight calm and still.**

**This flow’r so small and tender, With fragrance fills the air;
His brightness ends the darkness That kept the earth in fear.
True God and yet true man, He came to save His people From earth’s dark night of sin.**

**O Savior, Child of Mary, Who felt our human woes
O Savior, King of glory, Who conquered all our foes,**

**Bring us at last we pray, To the bright courts of heaven And to the endless day.**

Isaiah’s Tenderness

There is a quiet tenderness in the words of Isaiah that bring calmness and spiritual rest. His words speak peace and comfort to us today just as they have touched believers for thousands of years. God calls to each of us personally through Isaiah’s writings. Listen for these messages in the priceless words from Isaiah 40. He says, “I am here for you! I have washed away your sins and made you my own. Everything that needs to be done for your salvation is finished, I have paved the road to heaven with the blood of my Son. I will walk with you through your journey in this life and dwell with you forever in the life to come. I am your loving Father that will tenderly care for you always.” He assures us, “I am the Almighty God who does not grow weary or tired. I will renew your strength!”

Selected Readings from Isaiah 40:

Reader 1

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her sin has been paid for.

Reader 2

There is a voice of one calling: “Prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Reader 3

All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.

Reader 4

He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Reader 5

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Hymn 11 - Comfort, Comfort All My People (or music selection from “Anthems that fit the reading of Isaiah 40” listed at the end of the service).

**“Comfort, comfort all my people; Speak of peace,” so says our God.**

**“Comfort those who site in darkness, Groaning from their sorrows’ load.**

**Speak to all Jerusalem Of the peace that waits for them;**

**Tell them that their sins I cover, That their warfare now is over.”**

**All their sins our God will pardon, Blotting out each dark misdeed;**

**All that well deserve his anger He no more will see or heed.**

**They have suffered man-y a day; Now their griefs have passed away.**

**God will change their aching sadness Into ever-springing gladness.**

**John the Baptist’s voice is crying In the desert far and near,**

**Calling people to repentance For the kingdom now is here.**

**Oh, that warning cry obey! Now prepare for God a way;**

**Let the valleys rise to meet him And the hills bow down to greet him.**

**Straighten out the crooked highway; Make the rougher places plain.**

**Let your hearts be true and humble, Ready for his holy reign.**

**For the glory of the Lord Now o’er earth is spread abroad,**

**And all flesh shall see the token That his word is never broken.**

Responsive Prayer

L: O gracious and almighty Father, we praise you that you have kept your ancient promises by sending your everlasting Son in human flesh.

**G: Receive our thanks and devotion, our songs and prayers.**

L: You sent Jesus to demonstrate your love for all people, the weak and lonely, the troubled and frightened, the timid and helpless. No one is overlooked by your ever-seeking eyes. No one is excluded from your strong, protective arms. No one is denied the comfort and help of your outstretched hand.

**G: Bless us with a childlike faith that confidently knows you love and care for us always.**

L: You sent Jesus as the Savior of the world to deliver all from the curse of sin and the power of death. He came to die and rise again that we might live eternally. Firmly plant this good news in our hearts, and fill us with an eager desire to spread the Word concerning what we have heard tonight.

**G: May all who hear the message, in every nation under heaven, be amazed and believe what is told them about this child.**

L: You sent Jesus as the light of the world to drive out all darkness. Christ brings us the full life that you intend for us. May the “*joy that will be for all people*” be our joy. May the “*peace to all on whom his favor rests*” be our peace. May the treasure that Mary “*pondered in her heart*” be our treasure.

**G: For today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to us. He is Christ the Lord, Amen.**

Lord’s Prayer sung to “Away in a Manger” (Hymn 68)

**Our Father in heaven, all praise to your name!
Your kingdom among us, your will done the same
By mortals and angels. Come, Lord, reign, alone;
Oh, hear us and bless us from heaven’s high throne.**

**The bread that we yearn for provide us each day;**

**As we forgive others, our sins take away;**

**In times of temptation, to lead us be near;**

**From evil deliver your children most dear.**

**For yours is the kingdom, o’er all things you reign.
And yours is the power; all things you maintain.**

**To you be the glory, resounding again
From all of creation, forever! Amen!**

Closing Comments or explanation for lighting individual candles

Hymn 60 - Silent Night! Holy Night (see additional music options that partner with Silent Night)

 **Silent Night! Holy Night! All is calm, all is bright,**

 **Round yon virgin mother and child.**

 **Holy infant, so tender and mild,**

 **Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.**

**Silent Night! Holy Night! Shepherds quake at the sight.**

**Glories stream from heaven afar;**

**Heav’nly host sing, Alleluia;**

**Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, is born!**

**Silent Night! Holy Night! Son of God, love’s pure light.**

**Radiant beams from thy holy face**

**With the dawn of redeeming grace,**

**Jesus, Lord, at thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.**

Opening Anthem ideas:

Immanuel, by Michael Card

 Listen to it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrmMQdkBPwY>

 Solo sheet music <https://www.jwpepper.com/sheet-music/score-preview.jsp?pepnum=90525540E>

 Choral or solo sheet music <https://www.jwpepper.com/Immanuel/10030002.item#/>

Come, Come Emmanuel, by James Chepponis

 Listen to it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1ZBGF1zui4>

 Sheet music <https://www.giamusic.com/store/search?elSearchTerm=advent+gathering+james+chepponis&x=0&y=0>

The People Walking in Darkness:

Great Light (if you have a flute player)

 <https://www.jwpepper.com/Great-Light%21/3132016.item#/>

A Great Light by Lloyd Larson

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Od__y6pVEA>

People Who Walk in Darkness, by David Angerman, Michael Barrett

 <https://www.jwpepper.com/People-Who-Walk-in-Darkness/8067554.item#/submit>

The People Who Walk in Darkness, by Pepper Choplin
 <https://www.jwpepper.com/The-People-Who-Walk-in-Darkness/8067524.item#/>

White as Snow:
(these are just three examples – if you Google it, you will find many options).

<http://www.onlinesheetmusic.com/white-as-snow-p206937.aspx>

<https://www.praisecharts.com/songs/details/20040/white-as-snow-sheet-music/piano-vocal>

<https://www.musicnotes.com/sheetmusic/mtd.asp?ppn=MN0054098>

PLEASE NOTE: You will ALSO need to get a CCLI event license if you plan to print the words in the service folder or project them for the ladies to sing.

General anthem suggestions:

He Is Mighty (listen and purchase here-if you’re looking for something new try this!):

<http://sovereigngracemusic.org/music/songs/he-who-is-mighty/>

Behold a Branch is Growing, Koine Music

<http://www.shop.koinemusic.com/Sheet-Music-AD-Behold-a-Branch-Is-Growing-AD-10-PS.htm>

Any “For Unto Us a Son is Born” anthems

Anthems that fit the reading of Isaiah 40 include:

Comfort, Comfort All My People, Koine Music
 <http://www.shop.koinemusic.com/Sheet-Music-AD-Comfort-Comfort-All-My-People-AD-04-PS.htm>

Hear the God of Love and Comfort by Sarah Lambrecht

<http://www.sarahlambrechtmusic.com/store/p35/Hear_the_God_of_Love_and_Comfort.html>

He Shall Feed His Flock from Handel’s Messiah

Silent Night ideas:

These anthems include partner songs with countermelodies for Silent Night

Night of Silence by Daniel Kantor

 <https://www.jwpepper.com/Night-of-Silence/3185287.item#/>

Peace, Peace by Fred Bock

 <https://www.jwpepper.com/Peace%2C-Peace/1707496.item#/>

On a Starlit Night by Jill Gallina

 <https://www.jwpepper.com/1917608.item#/submit>

Hymns included in service are from Christian Worship A Lutheran Hymnal.