

# BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



## FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

**This unit of seven sessions in Isaiah is perfect to use at Christmastime. Consider using the first five sessions during Advent leading up to Christmas and the final two sessions (The Servant Songs) following Christmas. All are appropriate anytime during the year.**

***Enjoying God's Blessings***  
**Isaiah 61**

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

## Leaders' Responsibilities:

**Important:** Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a series of sessions needs to have access to the "Introduction" article found at the beginning of each series (Bible Teaching #....). The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

## Prior to this Coming Session:

**Gathering Time Leader:**

**Bible Study Leader:**

**Worship Time Leader:**

Ask someone to read Isaiah 61:10-11 to begin and end the Worship Time. Give a copy of the Scriptures which can be found at the end of the Worship Time materials to the reader ahead of time so that preparation can be made.

### **Music Sources:**

“Child in the Manger”, *The Worship Hymnal*, #189. CCLI #91093 Public Domain

“The Birthday of a King”, *The Worship Hymnal*, #191, CCLI #40272 Public Domain

“There’s a Song in the Air”, *The Worship Hymnal*, #185, CCLI #272136 Public Domain

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”, *The Worship Hymnal*, #196 CCLI # 1741697 Public Domain

**Gathering Time:** (Suggested time: 15 minutes)***Enjoying God's Blessings*****Focal Text**

Isaiah 61

**Background Text**

Isaiah 61

**Main Idea**

A genuine celebration of Christmas calls for recognizing and enjoying God's blessings.

**Question to Explore**

How has God blessed you?

**Teaching Aim**

To lead the class to summarize the blessings Isaiah described and identify ways in which they are blessed through their relationship to God.

**Gathering together:**

Sing "Child in the Manger" and/or other Christmas favourites.

**First thoughts:**

It is always a good reminder that we should be grateful for God's blessings. This should definitely be a part of our Advent celebrations. As we prepare for Christ's coming into the world we should list how his coming into our hearts changed our lives. This should help us count our blessings – large and small – on a daily basis. The people who had been in exile for many years and had returned to their homeland to find it much changed may have had difficulty seeing the good in their situation. Isaiah's poetic words stirred them and should stir us into renewal thankfulness.

**Closing the Gathering Time:**

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

# 2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

**Note to the Bible Study Leader:** Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

## Teacher Preparation

### *Enjoying God's Blessings*

#### **Focal Text**

Isaiah 61

#### **Background Text**

Isaiah 61

#### **Main Idea**

A genuine celebration of Christmas calls for recognizing and enjoying God's blessings.

#### **Question to Explore**

How has God blessed you?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To lead the class to summarize the blessings Isaiah described and identify ways in which they are blessed through their relationship to God.

### **Introduction to your personal study:**

Perhaps no other time of the year gives so much opportunity for real happiness and raw greed as does the Christmas season. Everything about the commercialism of Christmas calls out to our most base materialism. In the United States, Thanksgiving Day is followed by Friday – the busiest shopping day of the year. We fail to remember that the first Thanksgiving Day in what would, many years later, become the USA was celebrated in gratitude for a harvest which the early colonists “hoped” would last through the bitter winter to come. Earlier winters had involved many deaths; some of those through starvation.

These lessons are being written during a world-wide economic crisis. Many painful job and home losses are being experienced by those first world countries to whom plenty was considered a right, not a privilege. A nightly news feature on a prominent newscast

features ways in which people are finding a way to make a difference in the community of which they are a part. Small stories of human goodness encourage hope. Perhaps a deeper gratitude for the abundance which these countries enjoy will be a positive outcome of these days.

As the Christian community prepares for Christmas, may we exemplify what it means to have a grateful heart to our Lord who provides all things.

## **Background:**

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Introduction**” article found at the beginning of this series of Bible Study and Worship sessions (Bible Teaching #.....). The person who downloaded this session should have that material for you, as well.

In this, the third lesson in this series studying the book of Isaiah, we are beginning to see the scope of history that was involved in this time frame. Our first lesson involved Isaiah’s call to the prophetic ministry. In chapters 1-39 that ministry is lived out. Over and over Isaiah warns of impending doom and calls the people back to a heart-felt relationship with God. His warnings are not heeded. For Isaiah the word “believe” embraces the whole attitude of the man who perceives God in his holiness and majesty, acknowledges him and trusts and obeys him to the exclusion of all others. One way this is expressed is in the title Sovereign Lord. The prophet rejects all trust in human power and human wisdom; there is only one fear and only one trust, namely God (8:15).

The second lesson in chapter 40 is a promise that God will bring the people back from exile. He will make the way straight and he will accompany them on their return.

Today’s lesson is written from a post-exilic viewpoint. The people are back in Palestine: Jerusalem is built up again to some extent. The subject-matter of these prophecies is no longer the great longing for deliverance and for the return home, but miserable conditions, details and quarrels in the life of the community. We hear of shortcomings of bad leaders of the people in 56:9ff. These include syncretistic (including worship of God along with and in addition to worship of other deities) religion, laziness, injustice, and immorality.

The prophetic writer comes again to call the people to honour God. One way we honour God is to remember his blessings. The verses in Isaiah 61 give specific ways in which God has blessed the people even though their expectations for his blessings may have differed from their reality.

Like the ancient Israelites, we often fail to understand our true blessings because we have in our minds ways in which we want to be blessed. We feel those “wants” are “oughts” which God should provide. May the study of the lesson today help us focus on the many real blessings which we experience.

## **Focusing on the Meaning:**

The main idea which we are to understand from today's lesson is that a genuine celebration of Christmas calls for recognizing and enjoying God's blessings.

**1** ***"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,***

**2** ***to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,***

**3** ***and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow of them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour."*** (Isaiah 61: 1-3)

If the author here is not Isaiah, it is a disciple who shares the same kind of call from the Lord which Isaiah had in Isaiah, Chapter 6. He openly declares **"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."** This is God's messenger not just someone with encouraging words to help the people out in a hard time.

This messenger is to comfort the broken-hearted. The word picture here is **"bind up the brokenhearted"**. The wound or wounds suffered are emotional and spiritual, rather than physical, but the picture is one of careful medical attention. An 11 year old recently broke her arm jumping on a trampoline. A long night in the emergency room on Easter Sunday Eve while in great pain – was followed by receiving a bright green cast which she was to wear for at least six weeks. It was a definite sign to her family and friends that she had suffered and was paying a significant price. The word picture in Isaiah "bind up the brokenhearted" seems to say that the prophet understands the pain the people have suffered and the "binding up" is a public acknowledgement of that pain – a bright green cast as it were.

He proclaims freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners. Remember that the people had now returned from their captivity in Babylon. However, many may still have been captive to the bitterness, unforgiveness and hopelessness of those years in captivity. They stayed in Babylon emotionally. They could not move on with their lives.

The prophet proclaims the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all who mourn. "The contrast between year and day is important: grace is God's constant attitude toward men; vengeance is an occasional judgment necessary to remove obstacles to his grace. The restoration to their homeland had been a year of grace; now another was needed to bring deliverance to these politically, economically and spiritually bound people" (**The Interpreter's Bible**, Volume 5, p. 710).



Every year is the year of the Lord's favour for those who will receive it. Apparently, there were those who were incapable of receiving it. Perhaps they had imagined their victorious return to Jerusalem. Life would pick up where it left off forty-eight years before. Perhaps their children did not want to return to Jerusalem or were not adjusting well to the homecoming.

Immigrant churches often struggle with first generation believers worshipping in their native language and second and third generation believers wanting to worship in the language and culture of their new home. Perhaps some of that was happening here. They had been away from Jerusalem for many years; it was not home to some of those who returned.

The author remembers that soon after her family left Mexico after living there for fifteen years, she was worshipping with her oldest daughter who had grown up in Mexico. A familiar hymn was sung and the mother commented, "It's been a long time since I've sung that song in English." The daughter replied, "Mom, I've never sung that song in English". What for the mother was a comforting, homecoming experience was for the daughter a foreign experience. It is not unrealistic to understand that some of the returning exiles from Babylon had never experienced Jerusalem as home.

This helps us understand the words ***"and provide for those who grieve in Zion"***. The prophet says that the Lord will help with the adjustment these sad people must make. Beautifully poetic images follow – ***"to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair."*** These sad people will become ***"oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor."***

The Lord often takes our most difficult human experiences and transforms them into deeply meaningful life adventures. Only as we look back on those experiences do we see how God was giving us a crown of beauty and the oil of gladness as well as a garment of praise. The young woman mentioned earlier who grieved for her homeland of Mexico found her parents' new home in Canada was to become her home. She met her husband, had three daughters and serves God joyfully there.

Isaiah continues the prophecy:

***4They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.***

***5Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards.***

***6 And you will be called the priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast"*** (verses 4-6).

Here the prophet describes a reversal in the roles of the Israelites and other nations. Israel has been called to be a “kingdom of priests” and the emphasis is on her exercising her priesthood for mankind. In return the nations serve her by performing life’s ordinary labour. Rich and powerful peoples minister to Israel and this despised people ministers to them in the things of God.

It would be difficult to identify a time and place in Jewish history where this has been true for the whole of the Jewish nation. Yet, Jewish influence in many countries of the world is disproportionate to the number of Jewish people in the country. They have always kept alive their passionate belief in being God’s chosen people and for devout Jews that chosenness has deep meaning for service to God and others.

The New Testament teachings contain this concept in the proclamation of Jesus as Messiah. As people left Jerusalem after Peter’s mighty sermon in Acts 2, they carried the “Good News of Salvation” to many parts of the known world. Today, Christians are taught that they are responsible for others – to minister to them, to teach them, to share with them that Jesus is Saviour. The “priesthood of all believers” is a strong New Testament teaching. Since Isaiah 61 clearly foretells the coming Messiah, this passage may foretell a coming role for the Jewish people who believe in that Messiah.

***7Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs.***

***8For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. In my faithfulness, I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them.***

***9Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed*** (verses 7-9).

The reference to Israel’s double portion echoes 40:2. A second possibility is that Israel is to be treated as a first-born among the nations, receiving a double portion of the Lord’s inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17).

Verses 8-9 complete the picture of the future blessedness of the people of Zion. The Lord hates robbery and iniquity. We can be sure that God will be fair in our treatment. The whole picture is one in which people outside the Israeli community will acknowledge God’s special blessing.

We work hard to provide for our descendants. We save for a child’s education almost from the day of his/her birth. Each culture expresses this desire according to values which they hold. But very universally providing for the future of children is held as a strong value. A strong earthquake hit central China in May of 2008. Many of the victims of the earthquake were children trapped in buildings which proved to be unsafe. TV images of the despair of the parents remain in our minds. On the anniversary of that

event, reporters interviewed parents. One parent said, “Now that my son is dead, I have nothing to live for.”

What an amazing promise God gave the Israelites that their descendants would be acknowledged as a people the Lord has blessed. We can be very thankful for that promise.

***10 I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.***

***11 For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations*** (10-11).

The writer closes this particular session with this beautiful affirmation of his delight and rejoicing. It is like a wedding celebration which symbolizes happiness, family togetherness and hope for the future. The writer anticipates growth in the picture of the garden where seeds sprout. Like that garden there will be righteousness and praise springing up.

These are words of encouragement for a discouraged people. The writer would want the people to place their faith in a Sovereign Lord. A Sovereign Lord is caring for people even when outward circumstances appear to be to the contrary. A Sovereign Lord sees the big picture of time – the beginning and the end. A Sovereign Lord knows how difficult circumstances work for good in our lives. A thankful heart may only be possible when we acknowledge a Sovereign Lord who watches over the events of our daily life.

### **Your goal as the leader of this study:**

As a leader you will help participants consider the blessings in their own lives.

### **For Personal Reflection:**

**What have I learned from this study?**

**What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**

**What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

## **Bible Study Plan** (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

### ***Enjoying God's Blessings***

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

**Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.**

#### **Focal Text**

Isaiah 61

#### **Background Text**

Isaiah 61

#### **Main Idea**

A genuine celebration of Christmas calls for recognizing and enjoying God's blessings.

#### **Question to Explore**

How has God blessed you?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To lead the class to summarize the blessings Isaiah described and identify ways in which they are blessed through their relationship to God.

#### **Connect with Life:**

Leader, tell this story to the group: A child of a missionary family (missionary kid) wrote an article after she was an adult in which she said, "We were rich. Mom and Dad always taught us to be thankful for what we had and we always felt rich. We got to meet lots of interesting people; many of them stayed in our home. We got to see people helped and people come to the Lord. We never talked about things we didn't have; we were just glad for the beautiful place we lived and the work God had given us to do." A thankful heart helps us understand how blessed we are – we are rich!

#### **Guide the Study:**

Recall for the group the three parts of the book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39 deal with the issues of the country and Isaiah's constant warnings to the leaders and to the people to place their faith in the Lord and return to him. Chapters 40-55 are written when the people were in exile in Babylon before 538 B.C. and Chapters 50-66 were written to the people in post exilic Palestine after 538 B.C.

State: Chapter 40 was an encouragement to the people in exile in Babylon to let them know that their exile was about to end and they would be returning to Jerusalem.

Tell the class: Chapter 61, which is today's study, is an encouragement to the post-exilic people. They have returned to Jerusalem and have discovered that all is not well.

State that we will focus on God's blessings and how our appreciation of those blessings transforms our attitude toward life.

Have someone read Isaiah 61: 1-3.

**Note to the Leader of the Bible Study:**

The Messianic prophecy in this verse will be addressed in the Worship Time, but it is well to mention that these verses seem familiar because we connect them with Jesus in the synagogue in Luke 4:17-21. Have someone read that passage, but do not spend time on it since it will be covered in the Worship Time.

Emphasize: Many prophetic passages speak to the people of Israel who were alive at the time of the writing, but also have a larger meaning for later days.

Discuss the concept of Sovereign Lord.

Now ask: How important is this for us to live happily as Christians?

Discuss with the group: Why were the people broken-hearted?

Have someone read verses 4-6.

Say: Although the meaning of the passage is clear enough, it is difficult to see how it has been realized in Jewish life. Comment that Jewish people have often had places of influence in many countries of the world as well as terrible difficulties and tragedies.

Have someone read verses 7-9. What characteristics of God are mentioned here (loves justice; hates robbery and iniquity; is faithful: makes and keeps covenants.)

Now ask: What does the prophet promise the Israelites in this passage? Do you think this promise extends to believers today?

Have someone read verses 10-11.

Question the group: What is the overall feeling of these verses? (rejoicing).

Ask: What are some of the word pictures which the prophet uses? (clothed with garments of salvation; robe of righteousness; bridegroom adorns his head like a priest; the bride has jewels; seeds sprout and grow.)

Then ask the group: What is the final promise included in the chapter? (The Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.) Are there times when we experience this even in this imperfect world in which we live?

### **Encourage Application:**

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Close with sentence prayers expressing thankfulness for something good that has blessed participants this week. Explain to the group that “sentence prayer” consists of those who wish to pray do so with brief sentences expressed one at a time, giving opportunity for all who wish to do the same until the leader determines that it is appropriate to conclude the prayer time.

**Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time.** Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

# Youth!!! Take Ten

## Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

### *Enjoying God's Blessings* Isaiah 61

**A youth will lead the following activity and comments.** No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

#### **The Joy of Christmas in Song**

Use a hymnal or the internet to find words for some of your favourite Christmas songs. Even though we may tire of Christmas music in the mall and stores during the Christmas season, it seems that we never have enough time to sing our very favourite Christmas songs. How could you encourage your family to enjoy the songs of Christmas more this season?



**Worship Time** (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Enjoying God's Blessings***  
**Isaiah 61****Beginning the Service:**

Begin the service with a reading of the final verses of Isaiah 61. These verses can be copied from a page at the end of the Worship Time.

Sing "*The Birthday of a King*"

**Offering:****Praying for the World:**

The Kalagan people live along the southeastern coast of the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. They are subsistence farmers who produce almost all of their own food. They are staunch Muslims with many folk Islamic beliefs and practices. Ask the Lord to send Christians to minister among the Kalagan and to make His Word available to them through radio broadcasts, evangelical literature, and the Jesus film. Pray for the Kalagan to turn to Christ.

**Sharing Guide:**

**This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.**

**Isaiah's Prophecy Fulfilled**  
**Luke 4: 17-21**

***“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow of them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour.” (Isaiah 61: 1-3)***

***“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.***

***He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:***

***“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
Because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor,  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
And recovery of sight for the blind,  
To release the oppressed,  
To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”***

***Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”***

Isaiah wrote Jesus’ job description many years before his birth. And on a fateful day in the little town of Nazareth, Jesus read it to friends and family and said, “I will do this”.

It is hard for us to place ourselves in the place of those synagogue attendees. They knew the Scripture. They may have had little other formal education, but since childhood they had studied, memorized, and sung Scripture. The men may themselves have read the Scripture in the synagogue.

Stories about Jesus were circulating throughout the countryside. In Luke we read of Jesus’ miraculous birth, of his presentation in the Temple at age 12 and his intelligent conversation with temple leaders, of his baptism by his cousin John and the evidence of God’s favour by the Holy Spirit’s descending on him in bodily form like a dove. Prior to this synagogue experience, Jesus had spent forty days in the wilderness where he had been tempted to fulfill his physical needs and his human desires for fame and worship for himself rather than for the Father.

On this Sabbath day in Nazareth, he says ***“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”***

We all have certain roles that we play and that we attribute to others. A woman recently attended the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her high school graduating class. She introduced herself to people of whom one was a former teacher. “Hello, Mr. Dyck”, she said. He replied, “Wally, call me Wally.” Later the former student said, “There’s no way I’m calling him Wally. He’ll always be Mr. Dyck to me!” To that woman, a sincere expression of respect for her teacher would always be required.

The people in the synagogue were having a reaction to the role of this rabbi named Jesus. Jesus was a home town boy. He had done carpentry work in their homes with his father, Joseph. They may have realized that there was something about him which was different. He probably did not participate in some of the mischief that other lads did and some may have remembered that far away time in Jerusalem when it was said he conversed with the leaders of the Temple. But really, this was Jesus of Nazareth. What could he mean by declaring ***“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”?***

And what did it mean to Jesus? He knew he would be misunderstood and maligned. That job description written so many years ago by Isaiah contained many obligations.

**He is to preach good news to the poor.** The people of Nazareth were poor and he was to preach to them and to the surrounding villages. But he is also to preach to those who are wealthy in monetary goods, but poor in spirit. He is to preach to those who do not even know how needy they are.

**He is to proclaim freedom for the prisoners.** Like the temptations he endured in the desert, there will be the temptation to free the Jewish prisoners who have been unfairly imprisoned by Roman officials. After all, later in Isaiah 61, the prophet says that the Sovereign Lord hates injustice and iniquity. Surely, Jesus’ task is to clean up the injustices committed by the Romans. What will the proclamation of freedom for the prisoners look like for Jesus’ ministry?

**He is to proclaim recovery of sight for the blind.** Certainly Jesus’ earthly ministry involved healing the blind and healing many other physical diseases. As we look back from the medical advances of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century we cannot even begin to imagine how desperate to be cured the people who suffered from illness were. Like many who live in poverty around the world today or whose lives have been so severely impacted by AIDS and other horrific illness, the people of Jesus’ day longed for someone who could bring a cure. Jesus could have spent his whole ministry just curing people of physical illness. But he knew that recovery of sight for the blind had a spiritual implication and the Jewish people who had so long worshipped God were very blind indeed.

**He is to release the oppressed.** Again, we are reminded of those oppressed by Rome’s cruel governing. But Jesus understood other kinds of oppression. Slavery in

the Roman Empire was a reality; the rich people oppressed the poor. And within the individual heart, there was the oppression of unconfessed sin, of rampant materialism, or open greed and immorality. Like people of all the ages, these people were the oppressed.

**Jesus was to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.** However, meaningful that concept may have been to the Jewish people in the past, it is about to take on a whole new meaning. For the Lord's favour includes his sending his own Son to die for the sins of the world. The Jewish people had tried to live righteous lives; they had given sacrifices to God through their temple worship. Now their sins will be forgiven once for all. It was indeed the year of the Lord's favour.

### **Call to Commitment:**

Our theme for today's Bible study and worship has been "Enjoying God's Blessings". We have examined the promises made in Isaiah 61 to the returned exiles and we have studied the same passage in the context of Jesus announcing his fulfillment of the prophecy of that same passage.

Isaiah mentioned many reasons that the people should be grateful in that day. They were to be comforted; their brokenheartedness was to be healed. They would be released from a prison of darkness. They were to rebuild Jerusalem and to have a ministry to others. They would receive a double portion of God's blessings. Their descendants would be known as a people the Lord has blessed.

The announcement by Jesus that he is the fulfillment of the prophecy brings thankfulness to our hearts. Jesus will preach salvation to the poor and will proclaim freedom to those captive to sin. He will bring sight to those who are spiritually blind and release from oppression. He was the fulfillment of the Lord's favour to those who believe in him. This ministry formally began in a synagogue in Nazareth and it continues today. One of our greatest reasons for thanksgiving is that this message has transformed our lives and we get to be a part of sharing the message with the rest of the world.

An old Christmas song captures the joy of the season and the joy of our lives. (Read the words or sing the song "There's a Song in the Air", ***The Worship Hymnal***, #185.

There's a song in the air!  
There's a star in the sky!  
There's a mother's deep prayer  
And a baby's low cry!  
And the star rains its fire while the beautiful sing,  
For the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!

There's a tumult of joy  
O'er the wonderful birth,

For the virgin's sweet boy  
Is the Lord of the earth.  
Ay! The star rains its fire while the beautiful sing,  
For the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!

In the light of that star  
Lie the ages impearled;  
And that song from afar  
Has swept over the world.  
Every hearth is aflame, and the beautiful sing  
In the homes of the nations that Jesus is King!

We rejoice in the light  
And we echo the song  
That comes down through the night  
From the heavenly throng.  
Ay! We shout to the lovely evangel they bring  
And we greet in His cradle our Saviour and King!  
Public Domain

(Evangel means good news.)

### **Concluding the Service:**

Conclude by singing "O Little Town of Bethlehem" or another Christmas favourite and having Isaiah 61: 10-11 read again by the reader who read at the beginning of the worship time.

Worship leader: Make copies of this page for the church to read aloud together at the beginning and at the conclusion of the Worship Time.

Isaiah 61: 10-11

***“I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.”***

++++++(Cut here)++++++

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