

**Dennis R. Wiles  
First Baptist Arlington  
Advent 2024**

# **FBCA: TOGETHER 2024**

## **BIBLICAL CONTEXT: Ephesians**

<sup>11</sup> So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

**-Ephesians 4:11-16**

## **ADVENT 2024**

**Together . . . *in the Light***

**December 1 - 31, 2024**

**Preaching Voice: Evangelist**

Advent – “to arrive.” Each year, followers of Jesus across the denominational spectrum celebrate this festive liturgical season. Advent officially begins the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday prior to Christmas Day. Congregational leaders traditionally use these Sundays to communicate the unique message of Christianity—*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*.

Traditionally, an Advent Wreath is used in the actual worship services during the season of Advent. There are four candles surrounding a larger, central candle. Each successive Sunday, a candle is lit to illustrate the truth that the light of Jesus Christ dispels the darkness of a sinful world. The central candle is known as the Christ Candle, and it usually is lit on Christmas Eve.

So, as the church family moves closer to Christmas Day, there is more light in the room. The imagery culminates on Christmas Eve when all of the candles in the wreath are illuminated, and the church celebrates the birth of Christ. It is a beautiful and rich tradition in which our church participates.

This year, our church has been immersed in a study of what it means to be *Together* as the people of God. Each liturgical season has been marked by highlighting a different aspect of this theme. Here is our year in summary:

<b>Winter:</b>	<b>Together . . . <i>in Christ Jesus</i></b>
<b>Lent/Easter:</b>	<b>Together . . . <i>in Ascent</i></b>
<b>Spring:</b>	<b>Together . . . <i>for God's Glory</i></b>
<b>Summer:</b>	<b>Together . . . <i>in the Gospel</i></b>
<b>August:</b>	<b><i>Together!</i></b>
<b>Fall:</b>	<b>Together . . . <i>for the Future</i></b>
<b>Missions:</b>	<b>Together . . . <i>to the People</i></b>

Our theme for Advent is: **Together . . . *in the Light.***

I have chosen the Book of Isaiah to serve as the Biblical context for the Advent Season. Isaiah is the most famous, most studied, most quoted prophetic book in our Old Testament. It would be difficult to exaggerate the role of Isaiah in any conversation about Old Testament prophecy. Biblical scholar, John Oswalt offers a brief synopsis of why this book is so influential:

There is a majesty in the book that sets it off from almost any other in the Bible. It contains an unparalleled sweep of theology, all the way from creation to the new heavens and new earth and from utter destruction to glorious redemption . . . The book's view of God is equally comprehensive: He is the austere Judge who decrees destruction on a rebellious people, but he is also the compassionate Redeemer who will not cast off a hopeless and despairing people . . . In many ways the book of Isaiah is the Bible in miniature. Like the Bible, the book has two major divisions, and like the Bible the main theme of the first part is judgment and the main theme of the second is hope. Beyond this, all the main themes of the Bible can be found in Isaiah.

-John W. Oswalt, *The NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah*, p. 17

The Book of Isaiah has been (and continues to be) the object of intense scrutiny in the hands of modern scholars. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century only heightened the intensity of the interest in this incredible prophetic work. Numerous theories have been developed by Biblical scholars to explain the sweeping scope of the book that seems to address three distinct eras in the history of Israel: Isaiah's own time, the Exile, and Post-Exilic Israel. I won't take the time here to address those discussions. There are numerous resources available for that.

The various themes woven throughout the Book of Isaiah are significant and relevant to our study as a church family. Isaiah has much to say about the holiness of God, the power of God, the wisdom of God, the grace of God and the

promises of God. His theology is rooted in his belief of the absolute uniqueness of the God of Israel. He portrays Yahweh as the supreme Lord of history. Regardless of the setting (Pre-Exile, Exile, or Post-Exilic), Isaiah communicates the message that God is still God and He is enough for His people!

Scholars like Oswalt and others often point to the contrasting themes found in Isaiah. For example: Judgment and Hope, Servanthood and Kingdom, Trust and Rebellion, Arrogance and Humiliation.

We are going to focus on the contrast drawn frequently in the book: ***Light and Dark.***

There are numerous examples throughout Isaiah where the contrast between light and dark are found, or the imagery of either is utilized: Isaiah 2:5; 5:20, 30; 8:22; 9:2; 30:26; 42:6-7, 16; 45:7; 49:9; 50:10; 58:8, 10; 59:9-10; 60:1-3, 19-20.

Obviously, there is a natural connection between the usage of this imagery and Advent! It is this liturgical season where the Church celebrates the Light of the World Who dispels the darkness of a sinful world! God Himself is Light—in Him there is no darkness! He calls His people to the light. His light illumines our path. He uses us to serve as both salt and light in this world.

As we light the Advent candles each week in our corporate worship services, we will be tangibly illustrating the beauty of God's light sent to us through His Son. We will join *together* to celebrate the power of His light to overcome darkness in this world, and in our own individual lives. We will also be reminded that there remains much darkness in our world today. We will also express our hope and faith in the Second Advent of our Lord that will result in the final destruction of all the forces of darkness!

Praise God!

And—Merry Christmas!

**ADVENT 2024**  
**Together . . . in the Light**  
**December 1 - 31, 2024**  
**Preaching Voice: Evangelist**

**December 1, 2024:**        ***The Absence of Light***  
**Isaiah 1:1-9**

Isaiah opens with an indictment against the people of Judah. Their lack of acknowledgment of God has resulted in the judgment of God. The people were wandering in the darkness of their own sinful choices. In some ways, the condition of Judah is representative of our world today. There are so many places in our society where darkness reigns and God is not acknowledged. We desperately need the Light of the World!

**ADVENT CANDLE:**        **HOPE**

**Reading:**    **John 3:19-21**

**Script:**        Candle-Lighters will **introduce** themselves

**Read** John 3:19-21

“Today, we light the Candle of Hope. We acknowledge that much of our world lies in darkness without the presence of Jesus. We are reminded today of the dark places across our society that desperately need our Savior. He truly is our only Hope!

**Light** the first purple candle

**Pray**

**Together in Word: John 3:19-21**

As we begin the Advent Season, we acknowledge that our world is broken. Sinful behavior has real consequences. Where there is no light, darkness prevails. Were there not so much darkness in our world, there would have been no need for God to send his Son, the Light of the World. As we read and contemplate this text this week, let's spend some time reflecting on just how dark our world can be when Christ is not accepted and honored. We may want to spend some time this week praying for those we know this Advent Season who have yet to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord.

**December 8, 2024:**        ***A Light Has Dawned!***  
**Isaiah 9:2-7**

The Bible opens in darkness. We read in Genesis 1 that darkness covered the surface of the deep. And—God's Spirit was hovering in the midst of that darkness. However, God's voice brought light into being. He spoke that famous words recorded by Moses, “Let there be light!” God's Word is powerful. In this Advent Season, we celebrate the truth that God spoke again in history when He sent the Word of God to this world! Jesus Christ is the Word of God. When God sent Him into the darkness of this world, a Light dawned! His light has never diminished and darkness will never overcome it!

**ADVENT CANDLE: PEACE**

**Reading: Isaiah 9:6-7**

**Script:** Candle-Lighters will **introduce** themselves

**Read** Isaiah 9:6-7

“Today, we light the Candle of Peace. As we gather in this room today, together in worship, we acknowledge that many people in our world are living in places ravaged by war. Our hearts go out to them. We turn our hope and our hearts to Jesus today, the true Prince of Peace.

**Light** the second purple candle

**Pray**

**Together in Word: John 1:1-14**

John opens His Gospel with a bold cosmic description of the miracle of the Incarnation. This dark world needed the Light of the World and the life He brings. The light of Jesus Christ dispels the darkness of the sinfulness of humanity. He brings life to us! We are all witnesses of this light. As we read and reflect on this passage this Advent Season, let’s pause to express our gratitude to God for this incredible Christmas Gift! We are not left in darkness. We can live in the light of the life Jesus has brought to us!

**December 15, 2024: Christmas Lights**

**Isaiah 42:1-9**

The birth of Jesus Christ has changed everything! His birth was the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy from the Old Testament. His birth signaled the beginning of The Age to Come. This Present Evil Age was no longer the only reality on earth. The Messiah ushered in a new era where the light of the Gospel transcended the boundaries of Judaism and extended to us—Gentiles! The light of Jesus Christ is now reflected through the Christmas Lights of all His people and continues to dispel darkness across our world.

**ADVENT CANDLE: JOY**

**Reading: Luke 2:8-12**

**Script:** Candle-Lighters will **introduce** themselves

**Read** Luke 2:8-12

“Today, we light the Candle of Joy. On that very first Christmas night, the Angel of the Lord announced that Christ’s birth would bring great joy to all people. We thank God today for the joy we experience through Jesus Christ our Lord!

**Light** the pink candle

**Pray**

**Together in Word: Luke 2:1-20**

The Story of Christmas is the most endearing story ever told! The Son of God born as a little baby in Bethlehem! Wow! This week, as we read and reflect, let’s take time to

contemplate how this story has changed everything! Nothing has ever been the same since Jesus was born that night in Bethlehem. The Angel of the Lord was right—He was sharing good news! How has that good news shaped your life? How can God use you to share that good news with others this Christmas Season? Can you live as Christmas Lights in your circle of influence?

**December 22, 2024:      *For God so Loved!*  
**Isaiah 53****

Now we come to the why of Advent! Why did God send the Light of the World into this dark and desperate world? Because He loves us all so much! Isaiah paints an unforgettable portrait of our suffering Savior in Isaiah 53. Here we come face to face with the incredible expression of God’s love for us. The Cradle of Christmas is connected to the Cross of Calvary. Today we express our deep gratitude to Jesus as we are reminded of the reason for His birth!

**ADVENT CANDLE:      LOVE**

**Reading:      John 3:16-18**

**Script:      Candle-Lighters will **introduce** themselves**

**Read John 3:16-18**

“Today, we light the Candle of Love. At Christmas, we celebrate the hope we have in Christ, the peace He offers us, and the love we have experienced in Him. We praise God today for His deep, abiding, healing, and saving love!

**Light** the third purple candle

**Pray**

**Together in Word: Matthew 2:1-12**

This week we read the story of the visit of the Wise Men to Bethlehem to pay homage to Jesus, the King of the Jews. The magi came from the east, bearing gifts to this baby King. This week is Christmas! We will be sharing gifts with family and friends. This tradition arose from the original gifts given to Jesus by these visitors. As we make our way through this week, let’s reflect upon the true gift of Christmas—the gift of love from God wrapped up in His Son! Merry Christmas!

**Christmas Eve:      *The Son of Man, Son of David, Son of God!*  
**Isaiah 11:1-9****

As we gather on Christmas Eve, we will celebrate the birth of our Savior—the Son of Man, the Son of David, the Son of God! Isaiah’s prophecy pointed to the birth of this special child. He would emerge from the line of Jesse, David’s father. He would be anointed with the Spirit of God in a special and unique manifestation of the presence of God. He will usher in a new Kingdom and He will signal the launching of a new day when the knowledge of the LORD will fill the earth. Wow! Merry Christmas!

**ADVENT CANDLE: CHRIST**  
**Reading: Luke 1:1-7**  
**Script:** Candle-Lighters will **introduce** themselves  
**Read** Luke 1:1-7  
(Dr. Wiles and his family will light the Candle)  
**Light** the Christ Candle  
**Pray**

**December 29, 2024:      *Our Guiding Light***  
**Isaiah 50:10-11**

As we bring this year to a close, we will focus on the light that God provides His children. We all face the temptation to live our lives in the light of our own wisdom and insight. While God has given us a mind and the ability to reason, He also invites us to a spiritual journey where He provides His counsel and guidance. His desire is for us to live according to His will and not our own.

**Together in Word: Isaiah 61:1-3**

We end this year with this text that was so important to Jesus. In Luke 4, Jesus will read this text in His hometown synagogue in Nazareth. He will claim it has been fulfilled with His appearing! As we focus on this text, let's reflect upon how God used Jesus to fulfill His will. Let's reflect upon this past year and consider how closely we have followed God's will. How has God used us in His work? How are we planning to be used by Him in this new year?