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FBC Arlington
Advent 2023

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

A Plan for First Baptist Arlington

2023

BIBLICAL CONTEXT: The Gospel of John

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

-John 20:30-31

Advent 2023

December 3 - 31, 2023

Incarnation: Why Does It Matter?

Core Text: John 1:1-18

Christmas is a time for family and traditions. Most of us have many memories associated with our family celebrations. During this holiday season, we will draw our attention to the incredibly profound Christian doctrine known as the Incarnation.

We will read through the Gospel of John as we journey through Advent together. John offers a unique perspective on the Christmas story. He does not elaborate on the details of the birth of Jesus in the same vein as Matthew or Luke. He chose not to provide his readers with the earthly details of angelic visits or the journey to Bethlehem.

Instead, John boldly declares that God has become flesh and lived among us! This message is at the very heart of Christianity. The miracle of the Incarnation is a unique tenet of our faith.

N.T. Wright reminds us that the Advent occurred at a time when the world faced “trouble, tension, violence and fear.” He writes:

Banish all thoughts of peaceful Christmas scenes. Before the Prince of Peace had learned to walk and talk, he was a homeless refugee with a price on his head ... No point in arriving in comfort, when the world is in misery; no point having an easy life, when the world suffers violence and injustice! If he is to be Emmanuel, God-with-us, he must be with us where the pain is. [p. 14-15, *Matthew for Everyone, Part One.*]

For us, we will have several special experiences of worship and fellowship. We will also host events aimed at sharing the good news of the Incarnation with our unchurched friends.

Let's join together in prayer and ask God to lead us through this Season of Advent with His anointing and blessing. Let's pray that we will celebrate and share the incredible news of this truth:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . .
The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

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December 3 - 31, 2023

Incarnation: Why Does It Matter?

Core Text: John 1:1-18

December 3, 2023: ***The Hope of Glory***
Colossians 1:15-27

The Son of God is the image of the invisible God! This is the powerful truth of the Incarnation. In Him, we have found our hope. As Christmas, we celebrate the birth of our Savior, who has made it possible for us to be reconciled to God and it is through Him that the hope of glory becomes a reality.

THEME: HOPE (or Promise)

Light a PURPLE candle.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and

righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”

Daily Bible Readings

December 4:	John 1
December 5:	John 2
December 6:	John 3
December 7:	John 4
December 8:	John 5
December 9:	Reflection

December 10, 2023: ***The Hope of the Ages***

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

The Incarnation was not an afterthought or a hastily hatched scheme. God spoke to the prophets of Israel centuries before the birth of Christ to prepare the hearts and minds of His people for the coming of the Messiah. What Israel was not expecting was the reality of God in the flesh! Yet, there are titles of divinity included in the prophetic pronouncements that provide Old Testament support for the New Testament reality of the Incarnation.

THEME: PREPARATION (or waiting, or prophecy)

One candle pre-lit: Purple.

Light a PURPLE candle.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:3-5

“A voice of one calling: ‘In the wilderness 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.’”

Daily Bible Readings

December 11:	John 6
December 12:	John 7
December 13:	John 8
December 14:	John 9
December 15:	John 10
December 16:	Reflection

December 17, 2023: ***The Eternal Son of God***

John 1:1-5

The opening of the Prologue to John's Gospel sets the stage for the declaration of the Incarnation. His Gospel has obvious connections to Genesis expressed most plainly in the first sentence, "In the beginning . . ." Genesis contains the story of creation. John's Gospel is the accounting of the re-creation. He uses the theologically faceted term "Word" (Greek, *Logos*) to refer to the Second Member of the Trinity, namely the Son of God. He is eternal in His essence and being. He is fully God!

THEME: JOY (or peace)

Pre-lit candles: 2 purple candles.

Light the PINK candle.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:10-11

"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh."

Daily Bible Readings

December 18: John 11

December 19: John 12

December 20: John 13

December 21: John 14

December 22: John 15

December 23: Reflection

December 24, 2023: *The Word Became Flesh!*

John 1:14-18

So—here it is! The bold declaration of the Incarnation! The Eternal God became flesh. This essential truth of Christianity is stated clearly, boldly, succinctly, yet beautifully in this beloved text. This powerful truth separates Christianity from all ancient pagan religions and all modern religions. Heaven came to earth. Everything has changed as a result. This is THE Christmas story!

THEME: LOVE (or adoration)

Pre-lit candles: 2 purple and the pink.

Light the 3rd PURPLE candle.

Scripture Reading: John 3:16-19

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."

Daily Bible Readings

December 25: John 16

December 26: John 17

December 27: John 18

December 28: John 19

December 29: John 20-21

December 30: Reflection

Christmas Eve:

The One and Only

John 12:37-50

As we gather for our Christmas Eve services, I will offer a brief reflection on the profound truth of the Incarnation.

December 31, 2023:

The Profound Humility of the Incarnation

Philippians 2:5-11

Was this text an early Christian hymn? Regardless, it is one of the most beloved texts in all the New Testament. Paul offers his theological reflection on the Johannine declaration that “The Word became flesh!” Paul expresses the profound humility of the Incarnation!