

Into the Neighbourhood

'The Word became flesh and moved into the neighbourhood.' (*John 1.14 - The Message*)

In a few weeks time Advent will begin. Advent - like Lent - is a time of preparation for one of the major Christian festivals of the Church calendar. In fact Advent used to be the same length as Lent, forty days of fasting. Now it is much shorter, this year it's just 22 days. This, along with the prominence of Christmas in our culture and what it has become, has led to Advent being taken over by Christmas. This is a pity because as Advent gets more and more busy and cluttered we tend to take less and less time reflecting on the theological implications of the major message of the Christmas celebrations: the Incarnation - the Word become flesh. So instead of rushing we're going to begin our Advent early and explore what the mystery of the Incarnation means and how we respond as a church family.

The first chapter of John's gospel gives us a dramatic picture of Jesus as the divine Word who took on flesh, the Word incarnate. This has several major implications. It means that God is not aloof, floating in a cloud somewhere, but he has revealed himself to humanity. God doesn't ignore us or create us and then just 'leave us to it', he knows what it is to be human, he has shared in the experience of the human condition. This is a picture of God on mission, a God prepared to 'empty' himself (Philippians 2.7), a God prepared - as Eugene Peterson puts it in the Message paraphrase - to 'move into the neighbourhood.' This Word is not distant or at arms length but is reaching out. The message of the Incarnation - the message of Jesus - is a call to mission, a call to incarnational living. This is not mission as some might understand - short term mission 'doing' good works to others and then leaving and being disconnected - but this is God taking on the nature of those whom he is reaching out to and then remaining, or as the apostle John put it - *dwelling*.

In this sermon series we will look at what the Incarnation teaches about mission and how it challenges our preconceptions about what mission is. Each talk will offer us a picture of incarnational mission from Jesus' life and how that challenges our own mission as a church. How do we move from our four walls, our comfort zones, out from the 'pews' and follow Jesus' example by moving into the neighbourhood?