



CARING AT CHRISTMAS

Let's get back to basics and peel back the layers of **how** we celebrate Christmas – the turkey, tinsel, parties, presents, family and friends – to remember **why** we celebrate Christmas. This year, it is likely that the **how** of our Christmas celebration may be different under current restrictions – but this creates room for the Church to remember and refresh **why** we celebrate!

Christ-mas is literally a celebration of Jesus Christ our King; that in His incarnation, the long awaited Emmanuel promise was made real – God Himself, The Word, became flesh and dwelt among us. Or as Eugene Peterson phrases it: *"The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood"*.

Incarnation is not just a belief of the Christian life, but it is the way of the Christian life. Jesus calls His followers not just to *believe* the good News of the Kingdom as a doctrinal fact in a way that is other-worldly and detached from our ordinary everyday, but to *live out* the good news of the Kingdom in the fabric of our daily lives, amongst our places and spaces.

In this changing culture, integrity is so important. Our lives and actions, our lifestyles and behaviours, must match our words. We must truly love our neighbour before we speak truth to our neighbour.

Jesus repeatedly moved His disciples towards the people around them to meet their needs and to walk them towards Himself. As followers of Jesus, we have this great privilege of being ambassadors and carrying His presence to the world. Each day we must be conscious of where we are, who we are among and how we might take our faith and 'move into the neighbourhood' towards families and friends, work colleagues, at school gates, local shops, gyms and libraries etc.

Ask yourself these questions:

Who lives around you?

What has been their journey?

What is their previous experience of Jesus or church?

What are they living through?

What are their needs?

For 2 weeks, we have been praying, but now the invitation is to move towards people around you with the love, person, hope and joy that comes with life in Christ.

Some Ideas:

- Make some Christmas decorations that clearly celebrate the birth of Jesus (e.g. stars or angels), and bring them to the neighbours in your street – tell them you have been praying for them!
- During lockdown, the rainbow of hope in the window created community and solidarity – make some Joy to the World stars and deliver them among your neighbours to create a Christmas connection.

- Depending on restrictions, invite neighbours to mini celebrations at the gate of your home. Use games, nativity scenes, bake offs, carol services or simply host a coffee morning in aid of a local charity with mince pies and coffee.
- In the absence of Christmas parties and celebrations in the workplace – how can you create some team building experiences? Maybe you could do Zoom games/quizzes, cook-offs, alternative ideas for Secret Santa present giving?
- Engage neighbours, local community or work colleagues to raise funds and serve charities/ causes that meet the needs of the most vulnerable. You could collect food for foodbanks or clothes for shelters.
- This season has been a difficult time for nursing homes and the elderly. How might you gather the families in your church or community to deliver a collection of drawings, letters and stories to the local nursing home? Might you be able to sing some Christmas carols through the windows to the nursing home staff/ residents or to the elderly neighbours in your community?
- Have you been prayer walking in your area? You could move towards the staff in your local business community, schools, charities or GP surgery. Express your appreciation for them and their work, tell them that you are aware of their challenges during this season and encourage them that you have been praying for them. Maybe write a card to them and deliver it with flowers or a tin of chocolates.
- Take some time to really get to know neighbours who have previously been a quick hello. Find out what they are walking through and provide practical help where possible; prepare a meal, run some errands, do some shopping. Sometimes caring is a listening ear. Make time, don't rush.

Get creative and let us know what you are doing! As Nick highlights in his video, this is a great time to share our ideas and resources.