

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.*

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...” (John 1:14)

Here is an incredible message for us to hear; announced by the angels, received by the shepherds, pursued by the wise men, feared by Herod, ignored by the world, loved by Mary and Joseph.

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”

Here, wrapped in swaddling clothes in an obscure Palestinian village, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”

Here is God in human form, God expressing God’s self in a language that we can all understand. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”

Here is God becoming one with the frailty and the vulnerability of creation. Here is God becoming one *with* us, becoming one *of* us. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”

And this word, ‘dwelt’, is an interesting one. There’s a modern translation of the Bible called ‘The Message’, which translates this verse: “The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood.” And that’s not a bad translation actually, because the word ‘dwelt’ in Greek derives from the word for ‘a tent.’ “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” God became human and pitched his tent among us.

If you’ve ever spent a holiday in a tent that’s being battered by wind and rain, you will know what it’s like. Hardly sleeping all night for fear of being blown away before the time the sun comes up. It’s to know how very vulnerable, fragile and breakable a tent can be. But the Word became human and pitched his tent among us.

For too many years, the Israelites had been waiting on God in a huge temple, strong to the elements, invincible to invading powers. But God became human and pitched his tent among them.

For too many years, we have expected to confine God in beautiful, mostly old buildings, as if only the grandeur of such places is worthy of him. But God became human and pitched his tent among us.

Even now, we want to house God in the fine church, the majestic Cathedral, the glorious mega-church. But God became human and has pitched his tent among us.

God has moved into the neighbourhood in the frail and vulnerable tent of humanity; exposed to the elements, at the mercy of the whims of human nature.

God became human and pitched his tent among us.

God has moved into the neighbourhood.

And, as a result, we learn that God is not a theological doctrine, but a relationship. Jesus is not a principle but a person: he has moved into the neighbourhood.

We can’t talk about Jesus in the abstract. He’s not some story to wheel out for the kids at Christmas and Easter. Jesus has moved into the neighbourhood. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And he knows this neighbourhood: he knows the loneliness, he knows the grieving, he knows the fears and the anxieties, he knows how you are hurting, and he knows when you rejoice.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God has moved into the neighbourhood. He has pitched his tent in St Marys – maybe on the grass here, in between the grape arbour and the rain garden.

Emmanuel - God with us.

Sometimes, when we talk about God, we look upwards, we point to the sky. God's not in the sky: God has moved into the neighbourhood. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And this is the incredible message of Christmas, what we celebrate here today: the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. God in the neighbourhood, God with you and me.

Whatever your joys, whatever your sorrows, whatever your hopes, whatever your fears - the Word has become flesh and dwells with us.

It's through this Jesus that we are able to enjoy a relationship with God. If we want to make sense of our lives, make sense of our hopes and joys, make sense of our disappointments and sufferings, we need to go back 2000 years to that stable in Bethlehem where the Word became a human being and dwelt among us and realise afresh that, through his Holy Spirit, he dwells with us still.

He has pitched his tent.

That baby who was born in a manger 2000 years ago, that man Jesus who died on the Cross, that Word of God who was raised from the dead three days later, is alive and with us today by his Holy Spirit.

And just as he came to live amongst us 2000 years ago, so he stands among us and wants us to let him into our lives this evening; to give our lives over to him so that we might live for him.

And if we do that, so our lives can be transformed. Those without hope can find hope for the future. Those who are sad can receive joy. Those who are sick can receive healing.

Christmas is a time of peace and joy - but it's also a time of challenge: a challenge to find new life in the loving arms of the God, who became a human being in Bethlehem all those years ago. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us".

If you need God's love – then be assured of it.

If you need God's comfort – then allow him to put his arms around you.

If you need God's challenge – then respond by turning to him.

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us".

That is the greatest truth any of us will ever need to hear - and we celebrate it this evening.

AMEN