



The real Christmas story

## God...in the worst neighborhood

**G**od did not yell from heaven to earth, "I LOVE YOU." He did not drop the Bible by helicopter on the peoples of the world. He did not beam a satellite program from Heaven. Christ did not commute. There was not an ascension before supper every night. Jesus didn't come for a weekend mission trip. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

God did not love us from a distance. He did not move to Pluto and drive in for work every morning. Sure,

We wonder why we are having such little gospel impact. We are trying way too hard to stay alive. Jesus made it plain; if we try to save our lives, we'll lose them. Only by losing them will we find them. He modeled this in His ministry. Jesus said, "I came not to be served, but to serve." Oh, he had plenty to say. He came as the very Word of God — that is, the very message of God — but He lived it out serving. He served the weak, the sick, the poor, and the disenfranchised. He had harsh words for the religious establishment,

God did not merely give us gospel information. He gave us Jesus and Jesus gave the world His church. God forever determined that the kind of evangelism He believed in was incarnational. The incarnation means God's gospel is more than information — it is God physically present, personally loving. The information travels over the bridge of relationship. Relationship means risk, vulnerability.

We are to be God in the "hood," Christ in the community, truth in the public square, righteousness in society and light in the culture. We are to advance, charge, invade and penetrate. We are never told to isolate ourselves or to insulate our lives. Jesus didn't. The early church didn't.

The real Christmas story doesn't have a twinkling light in sight. It's not warm and fuzzy. It's cold and dangerous. It's not home by the fireplace. On the first Christmas, nobody was home — Jesus wasn't home, his mother wasn't home, the shepherds weren't home, and the wise men weren't home. People seeking to carry out ministry while pursuing comfort and convenience don't have New Testament religion. The church that tries to stay safe, mixing and mingling only with its own kind and doing everything in its power to stay alive, is missing it by a million miles. The New Testament church that launches out of its comfort zone, seeks to be among the people who are the neediest and constantly gives itself away will come closest to being the church of the New Testament and closest to carrying out the mission of Jesus in our dark world.

Jesus said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

## When Jesus came, he came to the population center of the universe.

it's safer on Pluto, but this mission was not about safety. When Jesus came, he came to the population center of the universe. The fact is, God wrapped Himself in flesh and moved into the worst neighborhood in the galaxy. More than that, He moved into one of the worst neighborhoods on the planet. The danger and violence doesn't let up very often in the Middle East. His mission was not modified in the face of the difficulty and downright danger. He came to die.

Trouble is, we rant and rave about our sound theology but have separated our theology from our methodology. Good theology is the basis of good methodology. We want our sacrifice for sin bloody but the sacrifice of our lives bloodless. We love the Savior who wades into the press of the crowd. We keep moving away from the people, calling it "looking for a better location."

who also happened to be the elite and more economically well off of the day. Criticized for hanging out with prostitutes and tax collectors, He made it clear that the people who thought they were healthy didn't need the doctor. He came for those who recognized they were sick.

In my 30 years of serving in the city, I discovered that, yes, the gospel was available but not Jesus' way. Jesus' way is, "Here I am at the wedding. Here I am with the tax collector. Here I am with the woman with the bad reputation." People in the city could turn on the TV and maybe get somebody's version of the gospel. Perhaps someone handed them a tract on the street, but meaningful contact with a living, breathing Christian was something that rarely happened. In other words, gospel information was available, but not the gospel on two legs.

[charles.lyons@armitagechurch.org](mailto:charles.lyons@armitagechurch.org)