

If you are like me, and you grew up with church as a regular part of your life, then you have probably seen countless Christmas pageants. You've probably been in a few yourself in fact. And if you're a preacher's kid, you've been in all of the Christmas pageants! And every pageant has a story, doesn't it?! I still remember being 7 or 8 and playing the crucial role of the little drummer boy. And no, the drummer boy is not in any of the Gospels. And then there was the year Lisanne and I were given responsibility for the pageant and so, of course, we adapted the teen movie High School Musical to fit the story of Joseph and Mary. We called it Sunday School Musical. The Christmas pageant is a fun way to portray the events commonly associated with the birth of the Christ. And the intent of each unique pageant is to inspire us to recall the purpose of his birth.

Mary's song in the Gospel of Luke does the very same thing. It gives voice to the beauty of God's presence through the anticipation of his mother. It's purpose is to remind us that God recognizes our worth, and invites us to be courageous in the face of all that is expected of us as followers of Christ. Her song is also meant to inspire us to recall the purpose of his birth.

I love how this translation of the text says that "none are beyond the borders of God's transforming compassion". For some reason that line makes me

immediately envision a large body of people gathered in one place. Maybe something like when people gather for marches in Washington DC or at the State House in Augusta, or big outdoor concerts in New York City. But, in my vision this gathering of humanity has no barriers or fences or police to keep people out or to keep people in. And in this *imaginary* body of people, it's those on the edges of the group that truly understand why it is important that they all stay so close together. The folks on the edges can see what could happen if they were to leave the group or be pushed out of the group. They can see the vast wilderness that stretches outward beyond them much better than those who are in the center of the group, so they know that their survival depends on staying connected; staying a part of the whole.

The people in the middle of this *imaginary* mass cannot comprehend the danger of being on the margins because all they have ever known is the safety of being surrounded and insulated by others. Holding this image in mind, consider the suggestion from Mary's song that "God's Wisdom is revealed in the lives and truths of those on the margins." Those on the margins can see what happens to people who are pushed out or forced to work for the sole benefit of the others. Those on the margins are the first to experience hunger because the food that belongs to the whole never makes it all the way to the edges. And when wars, or

hurricanes or violence erupt - those in the middle hunker down and those on the fringe take the first blows.

This is the kind of world into which Jesus was born; a world familiar with loss and with evil. A world in need of restoration and re-education. A world of humanity that desperately needs to be reminded that we are meant to be companions and deliverers for one another. To touch the life of each one in ways that bring healing as did Jesus.

So, when we watch the retelling of this birth story every December, we are being invited to consider just how drastically this one little baby changed the way we see things, or at least the way we MIGHT see things. As representatives of Christ, as people blessed with the presence of the Holy Spirit, we are called to labor for justice, to redistribute wealth and resources, and to bring an end to excessive and destructive production so that all the earth might rest. How each of us does that will likely look different. There is no one right way.

We believe Earth is a sanctuary, a sacred planet filled with God's presence, a home for us all to share. And we believe that God became flesh and blood,

became a piece of Earth, a human being, who lived and breathed and spoke among us, suffered and died, for all human beings and for all creation.

And we also believe that that risen Christ is at the core of creation reconciling all things to God, renewing all creation and filling the cosmos.

May the Spirit, who groans in empathy with a suffering creation, and waits with us for the rebirth of creation, empower us to do this work.

I want to thank all of our actors this morning, and our pageant director Kayleigh Amerman, for helping us remember this mandate: we are called to be the hands and feet, the heart and mind of Jesus. May we answer God's call with faith and compassion. Amen.