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Trinity Church Christmas Pageant 2008  
*“A Christmas Prayer: Whom Will You Send?”*

Shhhh.  
Listen.  
The prophets whisper tonight.

Our story begins many, many years ago...  
centuries before the birth of the baby Jesus.  
It was foretold  
by the prophet Micah when he said:  
*You, O Bethlehem,*  
*who are but one of the little clans of Judah,*  
*from you shall come forth for me*  
*one who is ancient of days...*

And at nearly the same time the prophet Isaiah said:  
*The people who have walked in darkness*  
*have seen a great light;*  
*those who lived in a land of deep darkness –*  
*on them light has shined.*

It is not a story just of old,  
or only in Bethlehem,  
or only about Jesus.

Shhh.  
Listen.  
The prophets whisper tonight.

The story of Christmas could be told anywhere,  
using the characters of many nations  
and the voices of many people  
in many languages.  
Luke’s story is about a journey to Bethlehem  
told about an impoverished family seeking refuge 2000 years  
ago.

But this year, at Trinity,  
we have been imagining the Christmas story  
as it might unfold in any of a thousand refugee camps  
scattered across the globe in our year of 2008.

Whether in Darfur or Jordan,  
Thailand or the West Bank.  
The ranks of the millions and millions of refugees the world  
over  
*are the same people* whose cry God heard  
groaning in slavery in Egypt 3000 years ago;  
*and the same people* scattered in Exile  
who God spoke to through Isaiah 2,500 years ago;  
*and the same people* forced to register for taxes and give birth  
among the animals 2000 years ago;  
*and the same people* God has heard,  
and spoken to in every generation since.

Bethlehem is a symbol.  
It was as much a symbol 2000 years ago,  
to the people telling the story of Jesus' birth,  
as it is to us in our world.

To them Bethlehem was a symbol of hope  
because they believed God could enter human history  
in an unlooked for place,  
and choose the most unlooked for people –  
even an infant, born on the margins of a powerful Empire.

Today, in refugee camps all over the world,  
people like Joseph and Mary have fled violence and poverty  
and ended up imprisoned by the power struggles of those with  
weapons and agendas and land.

But Abraham and Sarah were refugees.  
Moses was a fugitive.  
Isaiah was an exile.  
Mary and Joseph were considered refuse to an Empire.

Yet they did not despair or wallow in anxiety about who would save them.

They wondered “Whom will you send?”  
and in faith,  
they watched and waited and...

As Mary and Joseph sought refuge  
and wondered how they would ever find shelter and a place to give birth,  
perhaps Isaiah’s message of comfort and promise  
echoed in their ears.  
Perhaps even now,  
even among us,  
that promise echoes through the millennia.

The promise is this:  
Kingdoms *will* rage,  
Empires will tremble,  
Economies will crash,  
Cities will totter,  
but we are assured that God has the last word.

The God of Abraham and Sarah anoints human agents.  
The God of Moses chooses prophets.  
In every generation, in the midst of chaos,  
God hears our cries and sees our suffering,  
and God anoints human agents to *act*...  
to *transform* the world.

Still, even with all those who have been anointed  
to bring us hope and guidance,  
more often than not,  
*we* would just rather be saved.

“Come and save us!” we cry.  
“Help!” we yell.

So many times we plead for help from God  
and passively wait to be saved or delivered from our affliction.

We imagine that God will come in the shape of a knight in shining armor  
to fix the problem, right the wrong, or save us from the consequences.

But God insists that **we** play a part in our own rescue.  
The anointed one can help us  
and guide us,  
but cannot do it for us.

Global warming.  
Poverty.  
Hunger.  
AIDS.  
War.  
**We** must address the human plagues...with God's help.  
And **we** have been anointed...

From the wood of the manger where baby Jesus slept,  
to the wood of the cross on which the Messiah died,  
there is a clear trail left for us to walk,  
and it is marked by love.

On this night,  
of all nights,  
we remember Jesus assuring us:  
*And God will say to you,  
'Come, you that are blessed,  
and inherit the kingdom;  
for I was hungry and you fed me.  
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink.  
I was a stranger and you welcomed me.  
I was naked and you clothed me.  
I was sick and you cared for me.  
And whenever you did any of this  
for the least of my people,  
you did it for me.*

Suddenly, as if held in an embrace, we understand:

Most gracious God,  
you call and anoint **US**.  
You call and anoint even people like us  
to be your Mary and Joseph  
in **our** world.

You call and anoint people like **US**  
to give birth to your love in 2009.  
Kingdoms rage  
*and we are called.*  
Empires tremble  
*and we are anointed.*  
Economies collapse  
*and we are chosen.*  
Cities totter  
*and we are your hands and feet and eyes and heart.*

Like Joseph and Mary, we are your agents:  
vulnerable as we are;  
limited as we are;  
anxious as we are...  
*We are your people.*

So come among us, Beloved.  
As you were revealed in Jesus,  
*come among us.*  
As you are revealed in all he taught,  
and in his life and in his death  
even more than in his birth,  
*come among us.*

Most gracious God,  
we do not know when you will be revealed;  
we do not know where you will be met;  
we do not know who you will anoint as your agent tonight...  
tomorrow...or the next day.

We do not know who you will send.

So, most gracious God,  
open our eyes to see;  
open our ears to hear;  
open our minds to think;  
open our hearts to love;  
open our hands to give;  
open our mouths to speak...  
*and anoint us.*

God, we give you thanks for the miracle of Bethlehem,  
yesterday and today;  
in the unknown corners of the earth  
and in the unseen corners of our own hearts.

The birth of a child reminds us so clearly  
that all things can be made new.  
You can and will *transform us...*  
and we can and will *transform the world.*

Tonight or two thousand years ago...  
it is your world, Beloved,  
and we are the works of your hand.

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus  
that all the world should be registered.  
This was the first registration  
and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

All went to their own towns to be registered.  
Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea,  
to the city of David called Bethlehem,  
because he was descended from the house and family of David.

He went to be registered with Mary,  
to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

And she gave birth to her first born son  
and wrapped him in bands of cloth,  
and laid him in a manger,  
because there was no place from them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields,  
keeping watch over their flock by night.  
Then an angel of the Lord stood before them,  
and the glory of the Lord shone around them,  
and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them,  
“Do not be afraid; for see –  
I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:  
to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,  
who is the Messiah, the Lord.  
This will be a sign for you:  
you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a  
manger.”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the  
heavenly host, praising God and saying,  
“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and peace to God’s people on earth!”

So it was then,  
So it is now.  
Whom will you send now, most gracious God?  
Send us.

*All join in singing Hark the Herald Angels Sing*