

A week ago, the children of this congregation presented their annual Christmas pageant. I know many of you were there—so I'm not alone in saying that they did an awesome job as they always do, singing Christmas carols old and new, making us laugh either with scripted lines or spontaneous actions, and moving us deep in our being by presenting to us once again the story so many of us know all too well: of Mary and Joseph and the Baby Jesus. Of the shepherds and the wise men. Of the choir of angels singing Peace on earth, good will to all.

The twist this year was that the Sunday school kids presented this pageant this year by introducing the tradition from Latin America called Las Posadas. In this tradition, as the children both told and showed us, Mary and Joseph (accompanied by a throng of carolers singing along) go from door to door seeking Posada—which could either be translated as an Inn, a place where a traveller can spend the night, or Refuge, Shelter, in a more general place. And, as the story goes, they are continually turned away, until finally one kind innkeeper, despite his having no room in his inn, offers them posada, refuge, in his humble barn.

And as one of the characters says at the end of this children's play, the message of Las Posadas is that despite our hesitations and fears, we are called to offer kindness to strangers. We are called to open ourselves, open our hearts, open our homes to those in need all around us, like the innkeeper—the one who finally offers Posada to the holy family—we are called, at times, to improvise—to make room for something unexpected, unforeseen, unimagined. And, as the children in the pageant reminded us, too, that when we, like the innkeeper that night show such love, such compassion, such kindness to the least, the last and the lost of our world today, it is actually to Jesus himself that we are offering that love, that compassion, that kindness.

If there is a simple message to be gleaned from that presentation of Las Posadas, it is that **Love is always looking for a place to be born.**

It was true when the angel first came to Mary—and told her that her that she would bear a child whose name would be Jesus, the chosen one of God most high. That angel told her that God had chosen her to help bring this love into the world. And while this must have been overwhelming to her, a teenaged girl living a simple life in a village in Nazareth, still she said yes—let it be to me according to your will. She may not have fully known exactly what she was getting herself into, but still she believed, she trusted, she opened herself to love.

Love is always looking for a place to be born.

It was true for Joseph, too, who considered quietly walking away from Mary in order to spare her whatever social stigma might get attached to her as an unwed mother-to-be. That is, until the angel visited him, and told him of God's promise, God's plan that Emmanuel, God-with-us would be born in and through his own fiancée. See, he would not have been required to bring Mary along to be counted in the census, but showing great courage and faith, he decides to tie his name to hers, tie his reputation to hers. He doesn't often get a lot of credit in this story, but Joseph is wise, he planned ahead, and is a hero, one who opens himself up to this possibility of helping provide a place for love to be born.

Because Love is always looking for a place to be born.

It is true in our world, too, a world scarred by seemingly endless wars, where the whims of empire still tend to displace people caught in the middle and refugees go from country to country seeking Posada, refuge, shelter, asylum. Where single mothers risk scorn and stigma to provide for the needs of their children. Where political differences can quickly turn from polite disagreements, differences of opining and reasoned debate to the demonizing of one another,

to set-in-stone divisions, and permanent entrenchment away from the other side. We can give in to these temptations, we can choose to live in fear, we can choose to see only the brokenness of the world today, or we can hear the angel's words as if there were addressed to us: Do not be afraid. I bring you glad tidings of great joy for you and for all people. Tonight, once again, Love has been born among us. God is with us.

Love is always looking for a place to be born.

It is true for us, as individuals, as families, as a congregation, as a community. Love is always looking for a place to be born. In our brokenness, in the mess that our own lives can be, Love looks for a place to be born, and God is with us—imperfect, unworthy, unprepared as we may be to receive that love. God has already decided to make a home among us, to be born as one of us—to be born in us, so that we can in turn bring God's love, share God's love, **be** God's love for a world that so desperately needs it.

Christian Spiritual “guru” Richard Rohr writes, “The True Self does not choose to love as much as it *is* love itself already. The True Self does not teach us compassion as much as it *is* compassion ... We were made in love, for love, and unto love. This deep inner ‘yes,’ that is God in me, is already loving God through me.” Or as another of my Spiritual Gurus, Kid President aptly puts it: “You are Awesome—and you were made that way. You were made from love, to be love, to be loved and to spread love. Love is always Loud,” he says. Even on this silent night, I might add.

And Love is always looking for a place to be born.

In a few minutes, we'll light candles, and we'll pass that light along in order to mark some of the many places God is with us, some of the many places Love has found a place to be born. As we do so, as we note how thoroughly the light

is shared, how quickly the light spreads, think about the unexpected, unprepared, unimaginable ways God is with us. Think about the millions of places Love is still looking to be born. Remember this each time you light candles, not just tonight, but throughout this season, and well into the new year.

“Let us light Candles this Christmas.

Candles of joy, despite all the sadness.

Candles of hope where despair keeps watch.

Candles of courage where fear is ever present.

Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days.

Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens.

Candles of love to inspire all of our living.

Candles that will burn all the year long.” *

Love has been born.

God is with us.

Merry Christmas.

* Adapted from “*I Will Light Candles This Christmas,*” by Howard Thurman