

Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church

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Isaiah 40:9-11
Luke 2:8-14

WHY ARE WE SINGING?

There are over 7 billion people with whom we share this planet. According to the Population Reference Bureau, something over 60 billion humans have been born since the time of the birth of a particular child who by a combination of circumstances was born in Bethlehem and placed in a manger as a newborn. ¹ The vast majority of all of those births were celebrated at least by the parents of the child. I remember the great joy I felt when each of our two children was born. As I heard their birthing cries, I felt like singing. The nature of my joy may have been a little different from Nancy's joy, but there was a deep sense of celebration for both of us. Sixty billion birth celebrations since Jesus' birth and yet that one nativity from over 2000 years ago in a far-away place is the one about which we still sing. Why?

Could a birth from so long ago have relevance for our lives today? Could it be that somehow God comes to us through that birth? Did God's love and mercy come in such a way that they impact our daily lives here toward the end of 2015? Could the primary meaning for the lives of people who call themselves Christian actually come through one who was born two millennia ago? Could our clearest revelation about who God is really have arrived through someone who did not speak our language? Can we really get clarity about who we are called to be from one who never published a book, never sat under an electric light, never rode in a car, and never used a phone? If the answer is 'no' to these questions, then an open-mouth response to the observance of his birth should be a yawn instead of a song.

Almost ninety years ago, a poem that may well have been part of the inspiration for Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech was written by Harlem Renaissance poet, Langston Hughes.

*I dream a world where man
No other man will scorn,
Where love will bless the earth
And peace its paths adorn
I dream a world where all
Will know sweet freedom's way,
Where greed no longer saps the soul
Nor avarice blights our day.
A world I dream where black or white,
Whatever race you be,
Will share the bounties of the earth
And every man is free,
Where wretchedness will hang its head
And joy, like a pearl,
Attends the needs of all mankind-
Of such I dream, my world! ²*

Some may hiss and screech in response to such dreaming, but it is the kind of possibility opened by the birth of the one who embodied God's best intentions for all humanity, who made manifest that love for God must be expressed through love for others. We sing this day not just about what was, but of what could be. We sing because his coming into this world not only brings the possibilities of joy to us, but to the world as a whole. We sing because he comes as someone who can save us from ourselves and from despair. So thanks to the choir for singing on our behalf and let's allow our hearts and voices to join in on the rest of the hymns and carols of this birthing season.

¹ <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2002/HowManyPeopleHaveEverLivedonEarth.aspx>

² Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, Arnold Rampersad, editor (London: Vintage Classics, 1995)