

THE REASONS WHY WE SING

(Matthew 2: 1-12)

The more I am exposed to the history of human beings on this earth—a history that I am being taught spans about 2 million years—the more I have become convinced that humans have always had a need to *worship something*.

I think it comes in part from the common experience we all have of waking up one day and being aware of our existence; and then realizing at some point that we had *absolutely nothing to do with our existence!* From there we slowly begin to reason that there must be *something* or *someone* outside of ourselves that we owe our existence to; and the paths of discovery that humans have traveled to enter into that mystery of existence have been many and varied indeed. All throughout human history—including the present history we are making—humanity has always needed and always found different people, places and things to worship.

In the history of humanity, we have worshipped the sun, the moon, the stars and the planets—including planet Earth. We have worshipped trees, rocks, bodies of water and parcels of land. We have worshipped angels, spirits, saints, and signs. We have worshipped philosophies, ideologies, perspectives, points of view, and political parties. We have worshipped comets, meteors, imaginary space-beings, and unidentified flying objects.

We have worshipped war, weapons of war, and rumors of war. We have worshipped emperors, dictators, presidents and potentates; prophets, priests, queens and kings. We have worshipped our *bodies*, and *parts* of our bodies, and things that we put *in* our bodies, and things that we put *on* our bodies.

We have worshipped sex, money, drugs and alcohol, and the unlimited irresponsibility that accompanies them. We have worshipped upward mobility, and the jobs, ambition, and power it sometimes brings; as well as the disregard for other people that it sometimes fosters.

We have worshipped “the Joneses,” and have spent a great deal of our resources—including some of our phoniness—trying to keep up with them. We have worshipped every precious gem that we have been able to extract from the earth, as well as all the other little gods (with a small “g”) that glitter right before our very eyes. We have worshipped God (with a big “G”), God’s progeny, God’s words, and all the wondrous things we believe God’s presence brings. And we have also worshipped the powers of evil in a variety of their manifest forms, in a variety of unimaginable ways.

Why have we historically done this? Because as human beings in our existence on this earth, we have always had the need to believe in something *beyond ourselves*; particularly as we realize more and more what little power and control we actually have over things. So, not only do we have a need to discover the *origin and purpose of our existence*, but we have also needed to know *who or what to blame or thank* for

the reasons that we cry our songs of sadness, and the reasons that we sing our songs of joy.

II.

Uncountable generations of humanity have gone before us, asking the same questions, seeking the same answers, trying to figure out how to *turn on* the divine blessings and how to *turn off* the divine disappointments in our lives. Who or what do I have to appease, or bow down to, or do a holy dance in front of? On whose altar do I need to make a sacrifice? To whom or what do I need to cry aloud, or sing praises, or throw myself on the mercy of? What version of what story do I need to believe in order to be granted safe and blissful passage into the afterlife?

In that regard, we usually learn to *imitate and assimilate* what has gone on before us, as it gets passed down to us in various ways. For example, when I was growing up, I learned who Jesus WAS through the religious traditions I was exposed to in the Lutheran church; but I

learned what Jesus COULD DO through the religious traditions I was exposed to in my grandparents Pentecostal church! I learned to imitate those different traditions, and assimilate them into my life and spirit and soul in ways that work for what I am constantly being led to believe is the purpose and direction of my life. And the learning and leading never stops.

My point is that our beliefs start from somewhere, come from some origin that has gotten passed down to us, and we reflect, reject, adapt, prune, water, feed, believe and grow with those beliefs, and the sense and self-interest they uncover for our lives. As we do that, we can get closer to the *who, what, where and why* of not only the *origin* of our beliefs, but the *orientation* of our lives TO our beliefs.

How is it, for example, that some of the owners of Southern plantations and some of the enslaved people that worked on those plantations could believe in the same God? The *orientation* of the *slaveholder* to their belief in God was an orientation that allowed them to enslave

other human beings of a different hue. Evidently, they believed they served a God who actually condoned that kind of treatment of others. The *orientation* of the *enslaved person* to their belief in that SAME GOD was an orientation that allowed them to eventually be able to say “*Hallelujah, anyhow!*”, knowing that even as they were being *mistreated in life*, their God was being *misrepresented in faith* by the slaveholders; and that one of these old days, God was going to turn it around. In both cases—slaveholder and enslaved person—the situation of their *lives* led them to their orientation in their *faith*.

III.

As we ponder the origin as well as the orientation of faith and belief, and what makes us sing our songs, I want to suggest and explore a likely place of origin for our own Christian beliefs, rituals and symbols in general, as well as a likely place of origin of our gospel story this morning in particular.

Because as we have agreed to spend some intentional time looking at parts of our lives, beliefs and histories through an African-centered lens, we find ourselves on the continent of Africa *this very morning*, in the vast history of the country of Egypt. Now, I want you to intentionally connect this bridge with me between Africa and Egypt if you haven't already; because even though Egypt has always *been* a country on the African continent, we have not always been *taught* that Egypt is *part* of the African continent or culture. In fact, there are native Egyptians who are living in Egypt even as we speak, standing on African soil, who would swear to you *right where they stand* that they are not a part of the continent or culture of Africa! It just goes to show you that geographical and geopolitical racism and prejudice—and the self-hate that it engenders—is a real thing that remains alive and well, and as insidious as ever.

However one may feel about or regard Egypt, it certainly has been convincingly and historically shown that from many of the religious beliefs of ancient Egypt, some of our own Christian beliefs have come.

“Look out preacher! You better watch what you saying!”

There is an old, old religious story, known to have existed in the regions of ancient Nubia and Egypt more than 3,000 years before the birth of Jesus, that tells of a *holy royal family, an immaculate conception, a virgin birth, AND a resurrection*. It is the story of Ausar, Aset and Heru; more commonly known by their Greek names as Osiris, Isis, and Horus. Because we have known them by their Greek names, we have also been led to believe that they come to us through a story from Greek mythology, because the Greeks didn't tell us where they got the story from. But since the Greeks ruled Egypt for over 300 years until the Romans overthrew them about 30 years before Jesus was born, we know that the Greeks took A LOT from Egypt that they didn't tell us about!

And so did Rome—especially in the formation of the beliefs and rituals and traditions and symbols that ended up in the Roman Catholic Church, from where we as Christians, whether Protestants or Catholics, have received some of our beliefs, and rituals, and symbols, and traditions.

In this old, old story, Ausar, known to us as the Greek character Osiris, is a divine manifestation of the Supreme God; and at his birth a voice was heard to proclaim that the lord of creation was born. He is recognized as a great mythical king of ancient Egypt, who established a code of laws and instruction for the worship of God. Ausar is murdered by his brother, but is eventually resurrected by his wife. In the meantime, Ausar's wife Aset—better known to us as Isis—is appeared to by another divine manifestation of God (what we might call an angel), who spoke words to her that caused her to become immaculately impregnated by the spirit of her husband Ausar, and gave birth to a son, named Heru (better known to us as Horus). When Heru

was born, *three kings brought him gifts*, and presented them while the child was being adored by a host of both divine and human beings.

IV.

How probable does it seem that the first two poetical and miraculous chapters of Luke may have been borrowed and adapted from the Egyptian accounts of the miraculous births of their kings?

How probable does it seem that some of the stories that we use to remind ourselves how wondrous God is, are taken and adapted from some of the *same* stories that those who lived millennia before us were using to speak of the *same* wondrous God? The God who has always been God? The God who is the same yesterday, today and forever?

The God who was known to be in the resurrection business over 3,000 years before God did it through Jesus?

How probable is it that even as we travel back to the edges of human time on this earth, that we would encounter people with souls and spirits just like ours; made in the image of an eternal creator God just

like we are; with joys and sorrows just like us; who were trying to figure out WHO they were, and WHOSE they were, and WHAT they were, and WHY they were—just like we are; so that they could know who to cry their songs of sorrow to, and who to sing their songs of joy to?

I submit to you this morning, that in every age, in every eon, in every millennium, in every century, in every generation, in every moment, the God who has always been God, has given the inhabitants of the earth their reasons to sing.

And the songs that are sung are songs in the key of life. Whether they are sad songs or joyful songs; songs of questioning or songs of curiosity; songs of anger or songs of love; songs of lament or songs of praise;

They are songs sung to the God of life; to the God of breath; to the God of existence; to the God who makes the sun shine and the stars twinkle; the God who makes the moon glow and the rains come; the God who covers us in our sorrow, and rewards us with our joy!

The God who has been revealed to US through Jesus Christ our Lord as the God who has loved us from the very beginning, and the God who will keep on loving us through to the end that will never come, because with God each ending is a new beginning.

Whether on this continent or on another; whether in this life or in the next . . .

THOSE are the reasons why we sing.

Amen.

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