

by Brad Jessak

Dare to Hope



“Then all people shall see God’s salvation” (Luke 3:6).

Vivid childhood memories of Christmas 1969 include my firm commitment to memorizing the epic carol, “Joy to the World,” with the help of opera star Mario Lanza’s brand new Christmas album.

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.*

Joy to the World

That Christmas Eve, I joined a host of other children—shepherd boys wearing tea towels on our heads, girls in sparkling angel gowns—

caroling this hope and joy to the world...*the whole world!*

God the Word, now “incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,” was and is all about **hope**. The birth of Christ—his “advent”—heralded the arrival of “the Savior of the world”—the whole world!

At that early age, I dared to hope that this joy would literally cover the earth...not just my family or my church or my nation.

One of the child-actors, chosen for her good memory and clear voice, recited Luke 2:10, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for **all the people**”... ah yes, **all the people!**

She continued, “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord” (v. 11). A Savior! I knew what “Savior” meant...I associated that with delicious, sugary Life-Savers! Yes, God sent his Son to be the Life-Saver *of the world* (John 4:14)! Or as I liked to say, *the whole wide world!*

Imagine! The Magi's lone star and then the myriad of angelic lights were God's promise that "the true light that gives light to *everyone* was coming into the world" (John 1:9).

Jesus—"the *Light of the world*"—would shine so brightly that he would eventually extinguish *all* darkness and then "*every eye will see him*" (Revelation 1:7).

Every Heart in the Whole World

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You see, that Christmas my parents received the gift of our first foreign "sponsor child." His name was *Phan van Phu*—a Vietnamese boy about my age. I never met him, but I prayed for him nightly for years and we helped provide for his health and education. He and I would print simple letters, color pictures and mail them to each other. He was my new brother across the sea.

I dared to hope that joy to the world included him—a boy with different skin, living in poverty across an ocean in a nation we regarded as "the enemy." I wasn't even sure which god he worshiped. But when I memorized "God so loved *the world*," *I dared to hope* that meant *the whole world*, and it included him.

I had not yet perverted the invitation to believe the good news into an ultimatum for

bad news. Imagine my joy when he wrote to tell me that his favorite song was, "I am joyful, I sing!"

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Once again, *I dare to hope* because I believe "God desires *all* people to be saved," (1 Timothy 2:4) and "he is not willing that *any*

should perish" (2 Peter 3:9).

I dare to hope because Christ himself promised, "I will draw *all* people to myself" (John 12:32). If God *desires it* and he *wills it* and he *promises it*, dare we hope that God will get his way?

Some might wonder, "Is this guy a universalist?" No, I don't believe I am, especially given the myths that churn around that label (see Robin Parry's article "Seven Myths About Christian Universalism").

Did you know? The love of God allows, motivates and even obligates us to *hope* that in the end, the Light of Christ will overcome all darkness and then, perchance, "*every heart will prepare him room.*"

Then *all* heaven and nature will join Phan van Phu and me in our songs of joy!

Dare to hope, because joy to the world is at the top of Jesus' own Christmas list! Why not add it to yours? □



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