

Generation to Generation: Different
January 8, 2023
Montavilla United Methodist
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Matthew 2:1-18 CEB

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. **2** They asked, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We've seen his star in the east, and we've come to honor him."

3 When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. **4** He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. **5** They said, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:**6**

You, Bethlehem, land of Judah,

by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah,

because from you will come one who governs,

who will shepherd my people Israel."^[a]

7 Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you've found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him." **9** When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. **11** They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

13 When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child in order to kill him." **14** Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt. **15** He stayed there until Herod died. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: *I have called my son out of Egypt.*[[]

16 When Herod knew the magi had fooled him, he grew very angry. He sent soldiers to kill all the children in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding territory who were two years old and younger, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. **17** This fulfilled the word spoken through Jeremiah the prophet:

18

A voice was heard in Ramah,

weeping and much grieving.

Rachel weeping for her children,

and she did not want to be comforted,

because they were no more.[c]

My husband Tom and I are doing some remodeling on our house. Don't worry! We actually love doing remodeling projects together! Apparently, other married couples don't love remodeling, as everyone whom we tell about our latest project always sends thoughts and prayers for the survival of our marriage! No worries! This is the third house we've remodeled together and we love projects!

Anyway... when we're in the demolishing phase of our projects we frequently sing the Diggy, Diggy Hole song, because we are nerds. It's a little ditty that a game designer sang in a gaming video that went viral. It goes like this:

"I am a Dwarf and I'm digging a hole, diggy, diggy, hole, diggy, diggy hole"

Whenever we sing Diggy, Diggy Hole, our young adult children, always respond, I can't believe you're STILL singing that song! It's soooo old! I was in middle school when that came out! Which is true - the Diggy, Diggy Hole phenomenon happened in 2014 - 9 years ago! Which is forever ago to my Gen Z children.

Meanwhile, most of you have no idea what Dwarf was digging a hole where or why, and 9 years ago in 2014 seems like it was just yesterday.

With 5 generations of adults standing on the earth right now, we're all living in the same place, but not in the same cultural context. Every generation has experienced:

- different economic circumstances,
- different major events
- Different cultural shifts
- Different technological shifts

- Different shifts in how language is used
- And each generation created and enjoyed different forms of entertainment, including Minecraft - the game that inspired “Diggy, Diggy Hole.”

Because of increases in longevity, we now have 5 generations of adults, plus a 6th generation of children sharing our communities, when for most of human history there has only been 3 generations standing - Elders, Parents and children. The rate of technological change has also increased exponentially since the beginning of the 20th century.

- There were only 66 years between the Wright Brother’s little experiment in manned flight and the Apollo Moon landings.
- But there were only 23 years between when ARPANET became operational and AOL started mailing CD’s to people’s homes to help them get online.
<https://www.darpa.mil/about-us/timeline/arpamet>
<https://www.cnbc.com/2015/05/12/timeline-aol-through-the-years.html>
- Then it took just 7 years between “You’ve got mail” to checking our email and everything else on our smart phones.
<https://sciencenode.org/feature/How%20did%20smartphones%20evolve.php>
- And of course, it took just 1 year, 2020, the year of the pandemic, for us all to become zoomers!

Churches, families, and really, our whole culture has been experiencing increasing generational tensions because we have 6 generations standing, and we’re all living in different cultural contexts shaped by our generational experiences.

We communicate differently, we participate differently, we work differently, and we share many values - but we express them differently.

So today, we’re beginning a sermon series on Generational differences loosely based on the book *Generational IQ*, by Hadyn Shaw, and seeking some wisdom from scripture on how we can get along better with people of other generations, and do a bit of dreaming about what generations we want to reach as a church.

This series, *Generation to Generation* will run through the rest of January and we’ll be having an in person discussion group after church in the fireside room at Tabor Heights, so about 12:30pm and an online discussion group on zoom Sunday nights at 5:30. You’re welcome to attend either group. You don’t need to read the book to participate, but you are welcome to read the book. It’s available on Amazon on kindle or on paper, and Joanne at Tabor Heights ordered some copies for those who don’t do online shopping.

I've invited our seminary intern, Drew Hogan to preach about his generation, the Millennials on January 29th and my daughter, Gwen Riggs, will preach about her generation, Gen Z, on Jan 15 at Tabor Heights and Jan 22 at Montavilla. They will also join each discussion group for some Q & A about their generation after they preach.

So who are these 5 generations of adults standing?

Traditionalists 1900-1945 - Great Depression. WWII. Farm to City.

Baby Boomers 1946-1964 - The Baby Boom. Affluence. Individualism.

Generation X 1965-1980 - Community. Recession. Digital.

Millennials 1981-1999 - Wanted. Recession. Digital Natives.

Generation Z 1995-2010 - Instability. Apocalypse. Low Wages/High Housing.)

Please take all of this with a grain of salt, or maybe a whole shaker! These are vast generalizations meant to sum up the trends of a generation, not describe any particular individual!

Traditionalists - you were born before 1945, lived through the Great Depression and World War 2. It was your generation who moved from the farm to the cities, largely because of access to free college from the GI bill. You may have moved to the city, but at heart, your generation ascribed to small town values like cooperation, volunteerism, and generosity. You were also the first generation to experience mass marketing through radio and then Television, which brought not only advertising but experts on everything from parenting to science to your living room.

What this meant for the church was that most people belonged to a church, even if they didn't attend regularly, and the women who were being forced out of the workforce as the men came home from war had a lot of energy to give to church and other social and charitable causes.

Boomers - you were born between 1946 and 1964. You are the largest generation ever born - that's why we call you the Baby Boomers. The sheer size of your generation meant that everybody was listening to you. Boomers reshaped childhood, created teen culture, changed politics, business, and invented "contemporary worship." You were also the most affluent generation ever. You have more than your parents and far more than the next 3 generations. Having more than enough, allowed you to move up on Maslow's hierarchy from basic needs to self-actualization, which led some people to call you, "the me generation."

What this meant for the church was the growth of “seeker sensitive” churches, to satisfy the Boomer’s desire for their style of music, a personal relationship with God, and their search for, shall we say, a “purpose driven life.”

Generation X - I am a Gen Xer! We were born between 1965-1980. We were the children of the early Boomer’s who were the first generation to have easy access to divorce, and our mothers worked, so we mostly raised ourselves. We formed strong bonds of friendship, because quite frankly, our friends were there for us when our parents, our schools and other institutions weren’t. Most of our adult life has been plagued by economic recessions and wages have remained flat while the cost of living continues to rise. We are the first generation in a long while to be downwardly mobile. We entered the job market while Boomers were still working and there were few openings, so many of us are just finally getting into family wage jobs as Boomers retire. We are not digital natives but, we have never had job security, so we expect to keep our computer skills up to date in order to make a living.

What this meant for the church is that we were looking for community - for a friend group to be there for us as we moved far from home for jobs, however, most churches were too busy serving the preferences of Boomers and Traditionalists to make space for us. There are very few Gen Xer’s left in the church.

Millennials - were born between 1981 and 1999. Millennials were wanted by their later Boomer parents. Their parents had reliable birth control and chose to be involved and loving parents. Millennials were in all the sports, drama, music, dance, etc, which also meant that they grew up overscheduled and constantly expected to perform well. Many Millennials feel like they aren’t good enough, because they have not been able to achieve adult milestones like family wage jobs and home ownership, and have therefore chosen to delay marriage and children until they might be able to afford them. They are also the first generation of digital natives. Their world has always had computers.

What this means for the church is that this generation largely didn’t grow up going to church because they were always at sports or dance, or another activity. They are still overscheduled, often working strange hours and multiple jobs, so they aren’t looking for church, but they are often lonely and want to do meaningful service activities. They want a group to be in community with and do service projects with, but they don’t know that group could be called church.

Generation Z - This is my kid’s generation. Born between 1995 and 2010, you’ll notice some overlap with the Millennials. The main difference is in who your parents are. Gen Z are primarily the children of Gen X, while Millennials are primarily the children of Boomers. These are today’s teens and 20-somethings. Their childhoods were transient, as their parents moved an average of every 5 years following work. Their

childhoods were also shaped by school shootings, budget cuts, and they have never known a world without Homeland Security. This is also the most depressed and anxious generation ever. Many wonder if they will live to be 50, since those in power continue to ignore climate change and we have already passed the point of irreversible change. And the war in Ukraine has reawakened the threat of nuclear war. As Gen Z enters the workforce, the gap between wages and the cost of housing leaves them feeling like they can't afford to be adults.

What this means for the church is that this generation is almost entirely unchurched, especially here in the Northwest. They need community and support and want to be a part of something meaningful to help them deal with the existential dread, but they don't really enjoy mid-twentieth-century worship, either "traditional" or "contemporary," so we need to create more relational and service based ways to connect with them.

So what does any of this have to do with the Magi, Herod or Jesus?

One of the biggest problems both in church and in our personal lives is that these 5 generations of adults are having some serious difficulties communicating.

One of the things that I hear the most from younger generations is that they want to be talked WITH not talked TO. Gen X Millennials and Gen Z are all very aware of and willing to accept generational differences and they are very good at compromising and collaborating.

But when older generations hear compromise and collaborate, they often respond with fear.

Fear that compromise means that they will lose and someone else will win.

Fear that you will be pushed out and replaced.

Fear that you are unwanted.

Which leads us to Herod.

When Herod hears of the birth of the Messiah, his immediate reaction is fear.

Fear of being replaced as King.

Fear of his dynasty coming to an end.

Fear of what God was going to do with the next generation.

Herod's fear led him to violence. Killing every child under the age of 2, to prevent the Messiah from displacing him from the throne of David.

Now that's a pretty extreme example of Juvenioia, but the reason why so many of our churches have so few Gen Xer's, Millennials, and Gen Zers, is Juvenioia - the fear and overt criticism of younger generations.

Every generation rebels against the excesses of the previous generation. And every previous generation complains about those who are younger.

Even Pliny the Younger who lived at the turn of the first centuries complained that, "those young whipper-snappers tied their toga's funny!" That's my own translation of Pliny.

But what has happened in most mainline churches is that we have become Herod.

We felt so threatened by:

- the Baby Boomer's different music
- Gen X's theological questioning
- Millennials desire for quality children's programming, and
- Gen Z's unchurchedness

...that we too often told them to stop asking for something different and just accept the ways of doing church that worked for us. Our music, our Adam Hamilton bible studies, our cluttered old nursery and our complaints about, why don't they just come to church?

So the younger generations fled to Egypt, metaphorically. They didn't leave faith, but they left church. Sometimes to go to larger churches with better programming. Mostly to go to no church.

And yet, I believe that God continues to show up with every generation.

I believe that the Christianity has been around for over 2000 years and that there will be Churches and there will be a United Methodist Church for my great-grandchildren's generation.

I also believe that God's vision for the church is a church for All People.

All Generations.

All sexual orientations and gender identities.

All races.

All socio-economic classes.

I also know that some local churches will be better at reaching some people better than others.

So as we discuss generational differences over the next few weeks, I'd like to ask you to set aside your inner Herod and:

- 1. Listen with an open heart.**
- 2. Don't be afraid.**
- 3. Listen for Spirit.**

1. Listen with an open heart. As John Wesley said, "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike?" God isn't asking us to agree with everything. God is asking us to love everyone!
2. Don't be afraid. Jesus said don't be afraid a ton of times because he knew fear can lead to Herod-like behaviors. Younger generations are seriously not trying to push you out, they want to be in relationship with you. So when you start feeling fear, take a deep breath and wonder why.
3. Listen for Spirit. As we talk about generational differences, be listening for something that resonates with your soul, then bring those resonances to our discussion groups. As Methodists we believe that God speaks through and among us, so let us Holy Conference together.