

“SING A NEW SONG”

The Nativity of Our Lord (Christmas Eve)

December 24, 2023

Zion Lutheran Church

Fort Wayne, Indiana

TEXT:

Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless His name; tell of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all the peoples! Psalm 96:1-3 (ESV)

I'm one of those people who likes to sing whether he can sing or not. If you can't tell that from my chanting when I serve as deacon, just ask my wife (or my son when he's in town) how entertaining I used to be during long and boring road trips! I suspect I'm not alone in this, especially at Christmastime. It seems that at this time of year even people who don't like to sing like to sing. The songs of the season are so much a part of what makes Christmas so special. Those familiar carols have a way of making the season come alive even if you're not in the mood for it and even if the rest of the trappings of Christmas aren't there.

In this evening's text the psalmist tells us about singing “a new song.” What is he talking about? What's this “new song” and how is it different than any of the old songs? The psalmist is speaking prophetically. Writing centuries before the birth of the Savior, he is looking ahead to the day when God's people will praise their Lord not according the old way—the way of the Law—but according to the new way, with praise motivated not by fear but by thanksgiving for the grace and mercy that God has shown toward His people by becoming One of them in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ. As we contemplate this “new song,” we realize that it is a song to be sung to the Lord and also to all people.

The “new song” is to be sung first of all “to the Lord [by] all the earth.” It's no accident that the incarnate Word—God Himself—entered human history under the most unlikely circumstances. The Lord of whom we sing is One who reaches down to the dregs of society—places Himself in the midst of people and circumstances that most of us would consider to be beneath us. He isn't born in a palace or even in a house. No, He is put to bed in a manger—among animals and all the smells that go with them. He isn't the spoiled child of aristocrats. Most of His contemporaries considered Him to be illegitimate. And the angels of God herald the Savior's birth not to royalty or religious professionals, but to earthy shepherds. The message in all of this is that there is no one on the face of the earth for whom this Savior is not intended. Everyone can sing this “new song” “to the Lord” because everyone has been reconciled to Him by His Christ.

The essence of this song is really quite simple. The psalmist tells us: “Bless His name.” It is to the Lord’s praise and glory that the Savior has come to bring the mercy and grace of God to the hopeless and helpless sinners who have offended Him and earned His condemnation and punishment. Contrary to what self-righteous people may want to think, the Lord takes no pleasure in the damnation of those who deserve it. His glory is in showing mercy to the lost and restoring them as His dear children. Because we are forgiven—acquitted—reconciled to God—we are able to bless Him. Both we and our worship are acceptable to Him because of what Christ has done for us in His perfect life and His innocent suffering and death.

But the “new song” of salvation in Jesus is also to be sung “among the nations”—“among all the peoples.” The glory of God, revealed in the incarnation of His Son, is not something to be kept to ourselves or shared with only a select few. We are to “sing [this] new song” to all people because it is intended for all people and because all people need to hear it. And how do we sing it? We are to “proclaim His salvation.” At this time of the year many people get wrapped up into the sentimentality of the Christmas story, but the story of Jesus—the Gospel—is more than a sentimental story. It is, as the Word tells us, “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit creates faith in the hearts of sinners so that they might receive not just a warm feeling at Christmastime but the forgiveness of their sins and the assurance of everlasting life.

These wonderful gifts didn’t just fall out the sky. They came to us, as do all of God’s blessings, through means. The means through which God has revealed His glory and brought salvation to sinners are the “marvelous deeds” that He performed in the One born in Bethlehem—of the virgin—in meanest poverty—so that He might bring the riches of His grace to those who deserve His condemnation. Because this incarnate Son of God, “fulfill[ed] all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15) in His perfect life and His atoning suffering and death and because God confirmed it in His resurrection, forgiveness and hope are now realities for those who because of their sin are without hope but who through faith in Christ receive the benefits of what He did for them.

The best thing about the “new song” is that we have something to sing about—not only at Christmas but always. From beginning to end, our “new song” is the song of our salvation, accomplished for us by our newborn Savior, the God-Man Jesus Christ. It is about the salvation won for us and for all sinners by the One born of the virgin in Bethlehem. It is He alone who moves us to sing and it is He alone through whom our song is heard. We sing it to God and we sing it to the whole world so that God may be glorified in the salvation of sinners. And we need

not worry about how well we sing, since the singing is not really our own; it is the Lord's—because “He has done marvelous things” (Psalm 98:1). Merry Christmas! Amen.

May the true Light which enlightens everyone, which has come into the world, shining brightly in the darkness, be your very life. And may the Word become flesh, Jesus Christ Himself, continue to make known to you His redeeming grace and truth now and always. He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it. Amen.