

Christmas - 2017

Sing to the Lord a new song, sing praise to the Lord with melodious harp

*A new song has come upon us.
Let us sing it all the day long - our whole life long*

The date of December 25 is not derived from Christian tradition. It instead traces back to the third-century Roman feast of the Rebirth of the Sun—the Winter Solstice. The first few centuries of the Common Era had no interest in knowing when Jesus was born or even celebrating it.

It was Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) who began to make Christmas the sentimental celebration that it has become, although his intention was never at all in the direction it has taken. He would be aghast at the consumer-defining feast that Christmas has become. He merely wanted to replicate the drama of the stable with live animals and music.

The English Puritans in the New World disapproved of caroling and the celebration of religious feast-days. For almost two centuries, carols were considered an inferior art form confined to the uneducated. During the early 1800s, carols began to be collected and written down throughout the United States and Europe. Many classics, like *Adeste Fideles*, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, and *Joy to the World*, were conceived during the 18th and 19th centuries as Christian hymns. Caroling flourished throughout the 20th century.

Don't sing to the Lord the Old Song

If we are to sing a New Song, there must be an Old One. What is it? The Old Song, which is still being sung today, is about an indifferent God who is elsewhere, somewhere “out there,” distant, removed from the ongoing life of creation, occasionally intervening now and then. This is a God who has no interest in us or the doings of our world. It’s called, “Theism,” and is still commonly held today.

This Old song is a vertical, privatized type of religion whose morality and only concern is about “getting to heaven.” It is a self-preoccupied religion that has no interest or concern for God’s wider creation. It’s notation is about performance: monitoring whether others are praying appropriately; worrying about whether God will forgive me; caring only about social and political issues that affect me. It’s all about trying to get a distant and indifferent God to notice me and care about me. The Old Song is about a religion of worry and guilt; it is not about faith; it is about fear.

Sing to the Lord a New Song

Christmas - God materializing into being human - sings a New Song, a song about a God who is found in the depths of everything, including the deep fathoming of our fallings and failures. If we go to the depths of our inner being, we will find ourselves knocking upon something substantial, "real," and with a timeless quality to it. This is especially true if we have ever accompanied someone through the mystery of dying, or stood in awe before mystery, time, or beauty. This "something real" is what all the world religions point to when they speak of heaven, nirvana, bliss, or enlightenment. This doesn't happen later, this happens now.

For two thousand years, Jesus has been singing a New Song in every race, every baby, every child, every teen, every adult, every woman, every man, every senior, every Christian, every non-Christian, in the world. He promised the Samaritan woman that "*the spring within you will well up unto eternal life*" (John 4:14). In other words, heaven/union/love emerge from deep wellsprings are already within us.

Organized religion has a tendency to concentrate holy things as being only "outside" of ourselves. Holiness is also within - in the soul itself. That's you, and that's me. There is a holiness in us that we cannot escape, lose, or destroy. The New Song sings a religion of inner peace, compassion and trust. This is not some new age philosophy, it is the tradition as witnessed to by such spiritual experts as Augustine, all the Teresas, John of the Cross, and any mystic worthy of the name.

A New Song

I received this past week a copy of a Catholic Church bulletin which sings the New Song: "*We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, gay, filthy rich, dirt poor. We extend a special welcome to those who are crying newborns, skinny as a rail or could afford to lose a few pounds. We welcome you if you can sing like Andrea Bocelli or can't carry a tune at all. You're welcome here if you 'just browsing,' just woke up or just got out of jail. We don't care if you're more Catholic than the Pope, or haven't been in church since little Joey's Baptism. We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet, and to teenagers who are growing up too fast. We welcome soccer moms, NASCAR dads, starving artists, tree huggers, late sippers, vegetarians, junk-food eaters. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you're having problems, or you're down in the dumps or if you don't like 'organized religion,' we've been there too. If you blew all your offering money at the dog track, you're welcome here. We offer a special welcome to those who think the earth is flat, work too hard, don't work, can't spell, or because grandma is in town and wanted to*

go to church. We welcome those who are inked, pierced or both. We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down your throat as a kid or got

*lost in traffic and would up here by mistake. We welcome tourists, seekers and doubters,
bleeding hearts . . . and you!"*

This is singing to the Lord a New Song, and here we are singing it this Christmas as we share meals, gifts, and family-time together - and watch football. Let's sing this New Song - "*all the day long - our whole lives long.*"

Sing: "Silent Night..."

Merry Christmas!