

**Psalm 96**

December 24, 2006 – CHRISTMAS EVE

**SING THE “NEW SONG” OF CHRISTMAS**🔔 **Proclaim God’s glorious salvation. (vv.1-6)**🔔 **Worship in the splendor of His holiness. (vv.7-13)**

In the name of Jesus, the Christ of Christmas, dearly redeemed believers:

Do you know anyone who loves to record Christmas music? Ancient songs still ring out from stations playing Christmas 24/7 throughout December. Most are in English, but you could probably find CDs in Spanish, Italian and German to keep your cross-cultural candles burning brightly. Isn’t it amazing the variety of subjects? From old classics like “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear” to newer versions of “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer” – some composers are hard up for Christmas. But then if we’re supposed to **SING THE “NEW SONG” OF CHRISTMAS**, do we need to ask, “Which one?”

Tonight let’s look at some of the characters of Christmas and hear their answer in the **“NEW SONG”** they were singing. It’s not calendar-“new” as you can tell from our sermon text. Psalm 96 dates back 1000 years before the first Christmas Eve. Words and melodies change, but as we **SING THE “NEW SONG” OF CHRISTMAS**, it makes everything, including our minds and hearts, all **NEW** to...

🔔 **Proclaim God’s glorious salvation. (vv.1-6)**

Can you think of a character of Christmas who fits these words? *“Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.”* (Psalm 96:1-3 NIV)

One song about her keeps ringing in my head. The music of “Ave, Maria” moves your heart and soul. “Ave, Maria,” means, “Hail, Mary.” It’s how the angel Gabriel greeted Mary when he was sent with news that she would be the virgin mother of our Lord Jesus. Unfortunately, Franz Schubert wrote “Ave, Maria” as prayer to Mary for us sinners, something the Bible never commanded nor encouraged. Since I don’t understand the Latin anyway, I make up my own words, thanking God for this beautiful Jewish maiden who heard the angel say, *“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”* Pure and innocent Mary asked, *“How will this be...since I am a virgin?”* The angel answered, *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God....For nothing is impossible with God”* (Luke 1:31-37 NIV) – not even God taking on human flesh and blood in the womb of a virgin.

Who would believe God’s miracle in Mary? Her life would be turned upside down. Yet she pressed forward in faith and holy fear. The Song of Mary, the *Magnificat*, still proclaims God’s glory and salvation, His most marvelous of deeds, the Incarnation. God came down to earth to free us from all fear.

To match the next few verses with a character you have to think someone more sinister: *“For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.”* (Psalm 96:4-6 NIV) People make up their own gods and mostly worship self.

Who was more sinister than King Herod? For forty years he built a magnificent temple into the largest structure of the ancient world. A puppet of the Romans, the Jews did not trust Herod’s grandiose plan to put a roof on top of Mount Zion and extend the temple area over twenty-five football fields. Herod had to spend seven years cutting all the stones before they let him demolish the tiny temple dating back 400 years to the Return from Babylonian Exile. Finally the golden roofs and plastered stones could

be seen from miles around in magnified, candle powered spotlights. But Herod, the Not-So-Great, did not believe in the LORD whose strength and glory were proclaimed in all the temple sacrifices foreshadowing the coming Messiah. Worshiping his own power, Herod tried to kill the Christ by murdering all the baby boys in Bethlehem. Herod eventually met his Creator in a horrible, gruesome death. Now Herod knows from hell that *“the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.”* To SING THE “NEW SONG” OF CHRISTMAS and escape Herod’s hell we must confess our sins against God and bend the knee to ...

 **Worship in the splendor of His holiness. (vv.7-13)**

Like many Americans today, we tend to worship our work, work at our play and play at our worship. We think we’re too busy to *“ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.”* (Psalm 96:7-9) Somehow *“tremble”* and *“worship”* don’t go together in our modern age of entertaining worship. We try to soften God’s command, *“Be holy, because I the LORD your God, am holy.”* (Leviticus 19:2) But the Bible tells us, *“Without holiness no one will see the Lord.”* (Hebrews 12:14)

In order to SING THE “NEW SONG” OF CHRISTMAS and **Worship in the splendor of God’s holiness**, we need to understand who really started Christmas and why. I *“tremble”* to think of that mother so tired and upset after a long day of shopping. The elevator was almost too full for her child’s stroller. As the doors closed, she sighed in frustration, “Who started Christmas anyway?” From the back of the elevator came a firm, quiet voice, “Don’t worry. We already crucified Him.” Yes, dear friends, by our anger at family, our grudges at work, our lack of holiness, we crucified the Christ of Christmas.

But that is why they came, those third characters of Christmas, with gold, frankincense and myrrh. Wise Men, Magi, came as Gentiles, non-Jews, to worship their Savior. They gave offerings in gratitude at the holy “court” of His Humiliation, a lowly cattle stall. They trembled before Him in humble faith to **Worship in the splendor of His holiness**, Gentile sinners like you and me, made holy in Christ.

Ah, and then there was Joseph not willing to disgrace Mary though all the evidence pointed to her cheating on him. I think of Joseph whom God called *“a righteous man”* (Matthew 1:19), when I read Psalm 96:10: *“Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns.’ The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.”* Joseph calmly committed his cause to God as the righteous Judge. He found *“equity”* from God’s own Son. God declared Joseph to be *“righteous”* by faith. And Joseph showed faith in his life that believed God’s Word, kept Mary, and raised Jesus as his stepson.

And who else but the shepherds in these last three verses? *“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.”* The heavens were rejoicing with angel light and praises to the newborn King. The fields and forests were jubilant as the shepherds raced to Bethlehem to see their Savior, then returned *“glorifying and praising God.”* Jesus, the Lord our righteousness, gives us by faith everything God demands to throw heaven’s gates open wide. He is *“the way, the truth and the life”* (John 14:6) through whom alone we come to the Father.

Dear friends, can you see how simple it is to SING THE “NEW SONG” OF CHRISTMAS? Mary and Joseph, the Wise Men and Shepherds, all had melodies of Jesus ringing in their hearts as they put their faith in Him as their personal Lord and Savior. Every language and people cannot help praising God in songs forever NEW – not of foolish sleigh rides and collisions with reindeer, but of God’s grace to cover our sin with love that overflows our hearts from that tiny manger in Bethlehem so long ago. SING THE “NEW SONG” OF CHRISTMAS, and your heart will be forever NEW, as one of our cards proclaims: “Christmas reminds us that God keeps His promises, that miracles do happen, that His love never fails.” SING THE “NEW SONG” OF CHRISTMAS, for Christ the Savior is born! Amen.