

It was 75 years ago this month -- 1944 -- when a young music teacher named Donald Gardner was leading a class of second grade students. While they were gathered around, he asked them a simple and common question that adults ask children: What do you hope to receive for Christmas? As they took turns responding, he noticed a common element in their answers. I should clarify; it wasn't what they wanted that was closely related -- they all wanted various gifts -- but the common element was the way they answered the question. Nearly all the children gave their answers with a lisp, due to the fact that they were missing teeth. Pondering that, Donald Gardner sat down later that day and wrote the song, "All I Want For Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth." It was clever enough and silly enough to catch on, and it is still a beloved tune 75 years later.

Any composer will tell you that the inspiration to write a new song can come from very interesting places. One composer I know once told me that had been struggling for days to find a short motif that would fill a gap in the melody for a hymn he was writing. He awoke one night with an epiphany of the perfect motif to fill the gap. Surely it had been a gift from God. A week later he realized that the motif was the same -- but in half-time -- as the tune used by that very annoying, electronic toy that his toddler had recently received. The composer kept the motif in the hymn. So like Donald Gardner and the mispronounced words of goofy-smiled children, inspiration in music can come from surprising places.

The writer of Psalm 96 found inspiration somewhere else entirely. God is the psalmist's inspiration. "Sing to the Lord a new song!" is how it all begins. "Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless the name of the Lord; proclaim God's salvation from day to day." "Sing to the Lord a new song!" It is interesting to hear that on Christmas Eve, when probably all of us here -- myself included -- appreciate the fact that we sing old songs that have been cherished by generations past. But for the writer of Psalm 96, only a new song is a worthy vessel to carry the praise that God deserves. In summary, it says "Sing a new song because God is God." God is God, and that means you and I are not.

We should start there and acknowledge that is good news. I mess up way too often and I am prone to act selfishly on a daily basis, so I am glad to acknowledge that God is God and that none of us are. I mean, to create and fashion all of heaven and the entire cosmos; imagine that, and to know it is all still unfolding in the grand scope of time. It is a marvelous and beautiful creation. However, there has come to be a lot that is broken in this world. This consists of our destructive tendencies that we apply toward ourselves, toward our neighbors, and toward our planet. Yet, it is more than just the brokenness that we cause. The fact is that from the smallest of creatures to the largest of stars, all things have a lifespan and come to an end. To be honest, it is the only way we've known and I have difficulty imagining it any other way. But God is God, and we are not. And God shows far more creativity than we do. God imagines a way of redeeming the whole cosmos from brokenness and death that involves entering this creation in the meek and humble form of a baby. To bear a material body, that ultimately through this one's death and resurrection, everything now has hope that death will not have the final word.

There any number of reasons why we are here tonight. +We like the idea of worshipping late at night. +We like this family tradition. +We had no choice but to come. There is no judgment when I say I'm glad you are here, no matter what the reason is. And the honest truth is that God is giddy that you are here tonight. Because on this night we can hear the good news that God brings: Jesus Christ is born. Tonight is about hearing the news that the one who created and fashioned you comes as an infant child to love you more than you could ever imagine. Tonight is about allowing ourselves to be open to the unfathomable idea that the hopes and fears of all the years -- imagine that -- are met in this baby tonight. So as we gather for whatever our reason may be, and as we come together with various beliefs or unbeliefs about all of this Christmas stuff, I simply ask that you take this moment to ponder what the appropriate response should be if the power that is behind all this cosmos... is mindful of us... cares for us... is closer to us than we are to ourselves... and even loves us beyond our understanding. Is a new song not fitting for that?

The psalm calls upon all the families of the earth to ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. But what are we to sing when tonight reveals that God's glory and strength are seen in the most unremarkable yet astounding ways: That the one through whom all things are created, fashioned a tree that would become the manger that would carry him upon his birth. Where is glory and strength in that image? That the one through whom all things are created, even fashioned the tree that would become the cross that he would carry to his death. Where is glory and strength in that image? They are seen in Jesus' submission to his own creation so that we may witness the depth of God's love for this world. The glory and strength of God aren't revealed in a vengeful warrior with the wrath to smite armies and a voice that can destroy mountains. Rather, God's glory and strength are witnessed in a baby who needs to be

carried, fed, and bathed by the likes of ordinary people. The voice of God doesn't crumble mountains, but sounds like an infant's cooing. That God is revealed in such a way is both mysterious and humbling, and it deserves nothing less than a new song from our lips. God is God, and we are not. The psalm calls us to sing a new song because God judges creation by His truth: not by an abstract concept of truth, nor by my truth, nor by anyone else's truth. God judges by His truth, and His truth alone. How can we not be overcome with a new song when the judge who has come to us this night is full of compassion, mercy, and grace? We should rejoice at the opportunity to be judged by His truth!

Sing to the Lord a new song, all of the earth! The psalm invites us to imagine the chorus made when our voices combine with the praise of bison bellows, the rustle of wild grasses, the lapping of oceans' waves, and the roar of stars. We can sing with all of creation the good news that the one who comes via a lowly manger is God, and none of us are.

Sing with delight on this night. The heavens are glad, and the earth rejoices! The psalm says "Sing to the Lord, bless his name, tell of his salvation, ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name, bring an offering, worship the Lord." The psalmist has put words to our deep desires for this night. On this night, God offers us -- and the whole of creation -- a gift. It is the gift of pure love, revealed in the savior's birth, life, death, and resurrection. As we continue our worship here tonight, singing songs of old, may our ponderings of God's great and pure gift for us and this cosmos, instill a new song in our hearts to carry with us into this world.

Amen.