

New Year's Day: "A New Song for a New Year"

Lighting the Christ Candle

As we light our candle,
we are reminded of the Christ child,
Light of the World,
whose birth we continue to celebrate.
In this flame, see the glory of the angels shining.
In this day, may you hear their songs.

Opening Hymn

A New Year has arrived.
This might make us excited,
as we look forward to what the year ahead will bring.
Or the uncertainty of it all might make us anxious.
Perhaps we are mourning the last of last year
and the events that took place in it.
Either way, we feel a song in our souls, waiting to be sung.
What might that song sound like?

Today, we will sing and explore lots of songs.
I hope that some of them speak to you.
For when our hearts are heavy, we sing to God songs of lament.
In the midst of our pain, we find it comforting to sing songs of hope.
Our songs of praise are raised up in times of joy.
It is beautiful how we always have songs to sing.

Let's join our voices together and sing our opening hymn:
#530 VU All Beautiful the March of Days

Songs of Praise

Hymn writer Jane Parker Hubert wrote "Ours is a singing faith."
Music has been a vehicle of worship for all of recorded religious history.
The Book of Psalms records for us the songs of the Israelites.
Included in it are songs for secular and religious ceremonies;
songs of battle and victory;
songs of community;
songs of solitude;
and songs of praise, joy, and celebration.

Like those ancient, faithful people,
we sing in times of victory and triumph.
We find it easy to sing in celebration.
The hymns of praise when all is going well are full of joy,
and our songs of thanksgiving flow in beauty and hope.
But life is not always full of reasons to sing with happiness.
There are times when the lullabies are silenced
and the words catch in our throats.

We have selected a variety of hymns to sing this morning—
hymns of praise, hymns of lament, hope-filled hymns.

Songs of Praise often set the tone for worship so we will begin with those today:

#40 MV Never Ending Joy

#43 VU Go, Tell It on the Mountain

Song of Lament

*By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept
when we remembered Zion.
There on the willows we hung up our harps
when our captors asked us for songs.
Our tormentors called for entertainment, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”*

*How could we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my hands wither!
Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.*

Psalm 137 tells us about the people
who were in exile and captivity in Babylon.
Their conquerors wanted them to sing songs
as they worked in this strange and foreign land.
Perhaps the Babylonians enjoyed the music
and wanted to listen with respect.
But their motives likely were less worthy.
Perhaps they enjoyed the spectacle
of slaves singing as they toiled in captivity.

The conquered did not want to be a part of such a spectacle.
They hung their musical instruments in the trees and refused to sing.

They had sung in their own land because they felt God's presence.
In captivity in Babylon they felt abandoned
and their hearts were filled with bitter weeping.
They had lost their songs.

We will now sing a Song of Lament:
#111 VU As the Sun with Longer Journey

Song of Hope

We too lose our songs at various times in our lives.
In times of struggle, oppression, and suffering
we find it difficult to sing.
Yet God calls us to sing in the face of pain and trouble.

Christine Marie Smith, in a sermon entitled "The Redemptive Songs We Sing,"
says "To sing during abundance is an act of celebration,
to sing during moments of despair is a sheer act of faith."

Songs are a source of comfort.
How many children have been comforted
by the voice of a loving parent singing to them
in the dark hours of their fear?
Perhaps the example that touches all of us
is at the time of death.
When we gather to face that loss,
we sing in shared grief and faith.

To sing in the face of despair
is to bring hope to the situation.
To sing in the presence of fear
is to bring a sense of freedom.
To sing in the midst of sorrow
is to bring comfort and healing.

Now time for a Song of Hope:
#703 VU In the Bulb There is a Flower

Songs of Justice

Since the horrible times of slavery,
Black people have known how to sing in the face of pain.
They sang on the boats and on the auction blocks,
on the plantations and on the picket lines.

One of their hymns said,
"Over my head I hear music in the air; there must be a God somewhere."
In the midst of slavery in a foreign land they said "yes" to life.
In spite of the terrible conditions of their lives,
they held onto their deep abiding faith in God.
They stood heart to heart and sang and prayed together.
In more modern times,
members of the Black community sang
as they marched shoulder to shoulder
for their rights and for dignity and equality.

Songs of justice enable us to stand
with the oppressed all around the world.

Let us do that right now as we sing:
#88 MV Over My Head
#679 VU Let There Be Light, verses 1-4

Prayer over the Gifts

Great God, we have travelled to this time of worship,
hoping to discover the thrill of new birth.
And, indeed, we have smiles on our faces
as we lift up our eyes, look around,
and experience the presence of Jesus.
We give these gifts, our gifts, to you
and rejoice in God's radiant love. Amen.

Songs of Community:

The last meal that Jesus shared with his friends
ended with the singing of a hymn.
Jesus knew what was ahead of him
and yet he sang with his friends.

Each of us sings best when we too sing with our friends.
Sometimes we sing our songs to know who we are
and to name that which we hold onto
as important in our lives.

Let us sing with our friends:
#467 VU One Bread, One Body
#145 MV Draw the Circle Wide

Affirmation of Faith: "Song of Faith"

In 2006, the United Church developed a statement of faith.
It is called "A Song of Faith."
The seven-page poetic prayer tries to capture our faith;
it tries to sing our unique song to the world.

As its preamble says,
"This statement of faith seeks to provide a verbal picture
of what The United Church of Canada understand its faith to be
in its current historical, social, and theological context
at the beginning of the 21st century. . . .
This is not a statement for all time but for our time."
Today, we take a mere taste of it,
as we use it to affirm our faith.

Closing Hymn:

And now our time together comes to a close.
We will go out and enjoy the new year,
singing our songs, experiencing our days.
But before we go, we will sing together one more hymn:
#29 VU Hark the Glad Sound

Sharing the Light

The Light of the World goes with you,
to be reborn in each of your days.

Blessing: (Irish Blessing)

May the New Year bring
the warmth of home and hearth to you,
the cheer and goodwill of friends to you,
the hope of a childlike heart to you,
the joy of a thousand angels to you,
the love of the Son
and God's peace to you.