

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Tuesday, December 24, 2019
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

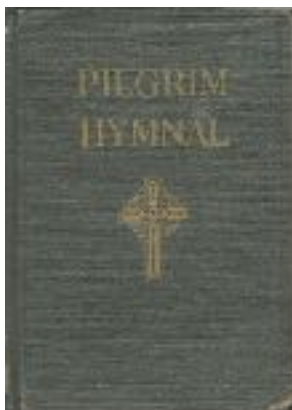
The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper

“Have We Seen the Star Proclaiming God’s Glory?”

Hebrew Scripture: Psalm 96



Friends in Christ, our service is rightfully one of “Scripture and Song”. We gather in this place because we desire to hear the familiar scriptures and to sing the traditional carols. We so enjoy our carols, especially those of ol’.



We enjoy our familiar carols so much that I chose half of them from the Pilgrim Hymnal. The carols date back to The Year of Our Lord 1958, and some, no doubt, all the way back to the Pilgrims themselves!

Friends, it is (as so often phrased in ancient creeds) “right and just” that we sing these favorite carols and read these familiar scriptures. It is ‘right and just’ because it is these carols and these scriptures that *bring us in*. And I want nothing more than to be brought in here to be with you.



Yet, our scripture reading from Psalm 96 begins with an instruction to “Sing a *new* song to the Lord” (96:1a). It says sing a ‘*new*’ song. So, I ask this evening, on this night that a new-born child entered our world to usher in a new era, a new covenant, and a new faith: What *new* song will our church will sing?



Though the scripture asks us to sing a new song, the message will be the same. We are to proclaim God’s triumph (96:2b). We are to declare God’s glory (96:3a). We are to ascribe to the Lord the glory due (96:8a). More than that, we are called to give gifts (96:8b), to bow

down (96:9a), and to dance (96:9b). We are to declare among the nations, “God has fixed the earth firm, immovable; he will judge the *peoples* justly (96:10).



Last night, Dennis Newman and Bill Pearson and I attended the Chanukah lighting service in our parlor. We heard from our Hebrew brothers and sisters how the earth praises God with us during these nights.



In the last three verses of our psalm, we hear how, one, the heavens rejoice (96:11a); two, the earth exults (96:11a); three and four, the sea and the creatures in it roar (96:11b); five, the fields exult (96:12a); and six, the trees shout for joy (96:12b). God comes to judge, not just peoples, but also the Earth, with righteousness (96:13).



It is right and just to sing our long familial carols. However, as we celebrate the Christ child, recognize a *new* covenant of faith with our God and proclaim it to the world. In this new era, recognize that the scriptures include the Earth, and indeed the *entire cosmos*, in the celebration, recognition, and proclamation as Jesus the Christ as the way, the truth, and the life.



So, in about two weeks as we begin our new Christian year with the season of Epiphany, I ask you to begin to ask with me: What will be the *new song* Centre Congregational Church will sing? Though the singing of old songs brings us in tonight, it will be the singing of a *new song* that will inspire us out of this sanctuary to be relevant to the world. Will we include the Creation as our partner in declaring God's glory among the nations (96:3a)? If we believe Creation is not a partner

in our task, then perhaps we are lost. For we have not yet seen The
Star!



This was the Word of God, and it was preached to the people of
God and the people of God responded, “Amen”.