

**New earth, heavens new**

**New king, justice new, Spirit of God moving;  
New day, leader new, Spirit of life moving;  
New word, teacher new, image of God moving.**

**New love, yearnings new, Spirit of God moving;  
New light, learning new, Spirit of life moving;  
New rest, comfort new, image of God moving.**

**New eyes, vision new, Spirit of God moving;  
New mind, wisdom new, Spirit of life moving;  
New tongue, message new, image of God moving.**

**New way, journey new, Spirit of God moving;  
New truth, insight new, Spirit of life moving;  
New life, partners new, image of God moving.**

**New food, manna new, Spirit of God moving;  
New strength, blessings new, Spirit of life moving;  
New wine, table new, image of God moving.**

**New day, new management**

Today, January 1, begins a new year. But what is really new today? The naming of this day as beginning the new year is just an arbitrary designation. Nothing much is really new today. It is just another Sunday. It is just another holiday in the Western world.

But what does it mean that something is **really new**? What does it mean that we call something as “never seen or experienced before.” Inventions are “new:” radios, airplanes, computers, fitbits were once new—never experienced before. But now they are no longer new—they are just “improved.”

In the bible—both in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible—“new” is an important word. “New” refers to something that has not been seen, or heard, or experienced before. The “new” replaces and transforms the “old.”

Walter Brueggemann has noted that the common message of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible can be stated this way: “1) The world as you know it is coming to an end. 2) But God is doing a new thing; something that has not been experienced or even imagined before.”

Isaiah says this most clearly, speaking as God’s messenger:  
“Forget the former things;

do not dwell on the past.  
See, I am **doing a new thing!**  
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the desert  
and streams in the wasteland (Isa. 43:18-19)

Later he reports that God says:  
From now on I will tell you of **new things**,  
of hidden things unknown to you.  
They are created now, and not long ago,  
you have not heard of them before today,  
So you cannot say, 'Yes I knew of them.' (Isa. 48:6b-7)

Of Zion, the city of God's people, God says:  
The nations will see your righteousness,  
and all kings your glory;  
you will be called by a **new name**  
that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. (Isa, 62:2)

Later God speaks of cosmic newness:  
Behold, I will create a **new heavens** and a **new earth**.  
The former things will not be remembered,  
nor will they come to mind.  
But be glad and rejoice forever  
in what I will create,  
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight  
and its people a joy.

Did you hear that? Do you actually think that that might be the case today? **New things! A new name! New heavens and new earth!** Not the "same old, same old." Not just "improved."

Many around the world begin this year with a sense of foreboding. Amid the desires and arrogant claims of "returning to greatness," there is the haunting sense that this greatness is based on oppression, violence, and the haughty maintenance of privilege for the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor and weak.

The message of "newness" is always implicit and explicit in the words that stretch from Abraham to Moses through the prophets and then finding a new embodiment in Jesus and his followers. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he "must be born anew." Nicodemus can understand that he can be "improved," but not that he can become a new person with new eyes and ears, new heart and mind, new yearnings and new wisdom. Jesus is calling on Nicodemus (and us) to follow him and become "new persons, with new names, and new life,"

Often we, like Nicodemus, find this almost impossible to believe; we find it impossible to trust Jesus that he really meant that we could become new persons..

But Jesus again and again showed the way toward this newness. Everything about Jesus pointed toward and New Way, a New Truth, and a New Life.

For a long time Paul could neither see nor believe that there was any need for newness. But Paul had an amazing epiphany on the road to Damascus: the new light broke in and shattered his old world. The new light totally shifted the paradigm by which Paul had been living to a totally new paradigm. His life was forever changed—and he became the clarion advocate for this **new life**.

Paul came to speak persistently rhapsodically about what life “in Christ” meant (2 Cor. 5:16-17):

From now on, therefore,  
we regard no one from a human (old) point of view;  
even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view,  
we know him no longer in that way.

So if anyone is in Christ, **there is a new creation**:  
everything old has passed away;  
see, **everything has become new!**

All this is from God who has reconciled us to himself through Christ,  
and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is an extended celebration of this “mystery” where walls—instead of being built and protected—are broken down. Those who were outside now become united with those who at one time were on the other side of the wall. Those who were on the outside are not only “let in;” they “become one” with those who are inside.

There is no better way to celebrate “**God’s newness**” on this Sunday before Epiphany than to sing about the newness that we experience in and with Jesus Christ. (Sing stanzas 1 and 2 of *New earth, heavens new*)

Let us sing a song that celebrates that we have a new leader, a new king, and new management. This new king is the Messiah that Isaiah has described so frequently. (Sing the following stanza of *New earth, heavens new*)

**New king, justice new, Spirit of God moving;**  
**New day, leader new, Spirit of life moving;**  
**New word, teacher new, image of God moving.**

Let us sing a song that declares that we have new commitments and new desires—not for “every earthly thing,” the “old things.”—but for the new things that we see coming with Jesus Christ: communion, community, companionship,

conversion, confidence, and comfort. (Sing the following stanza of *New earth, heavens new*)

**New love, yearnings new, Spirit of God moving;  
New light, learning new, Spirit of life moving;  
New rest, comfort new, image of God moving.**

Let us add to our song that we have new bodies and new ways of seeing and living. Let us sing of the new life and the new birth that Jesus invites us to experience. (Sing the following stanza of *New earth, heavens new*)

**New eyes, vision new, Spirit of God moving;  
New mind, wisdom new, Spirit of life moving;  
New tongue, message new, image of God moving.**

Let us celebrate that we live with confidence and hope in spite of the darkness that seems to be intruding upon us. We sing that God will take care of those who arrogantly boast and bully the weak and poor. Let us celebrate that God is “with us” on our journey through the “valley of the shadow of the death star.” (Sing the following stanza of *New earth, heavens new*)

**New way, journey new, Spirit of God moving;  
New truth, insight new, Spirit of life moving;  
New life, partners new, image of God moving.**

Let us sing and dance as God provides for us now with blessings and “daily bread” as we journey through the desert on God’s highway to a land where “justice and righteousness flow down like everflowing streams,” our water in the wilderness. (Sing the following stanza of *New earth, heavens new*)

**New food, manna new, Spirit of God moving;  
New strength, blessings new, Spirit of life moving;  
New wind, table new, image of God moving.**

Finally let us return to the last stanza in the *Hymnal: Worship Book* to sing of our hope and faith that summarizes our confidence in what God is doing with our world.