

Joy to the World

Introduction – This paper was written by a high school and college mathematics instructor. It was not written or produced by any particular church or denomination. It is provided free of charge as an expression of God's love for mankind.



Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.

Isaac Watts 1719

Isaac Watts was born on July 17, 1674, in Southampton, England. His father was imprisoned on two occasions for his nonconformist religious beliefs. Although a promising student, Isaac was not allowed to attend Oxford or Cambridge University because his family would not conform to the governance and rituals of the Church of England. After his graduation from the Dissenting Academy at Stoke Newington, he served as pastor of a large independent church in London. Isaac Watts is credited with the writing of some 750 songs.

"Joy to the World" is largely based on Psalm ninety-eight with segments of the music bearing similarity to various works of George Frederic Handel. It is part of an extensive collection authored by Watts, *Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*. Historically, singing in church had been limited to singing Psalms. In his day, it was actually controversial to paraphrase scripture in song. In 1719, songs like "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," "Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed," "I Sing the Mighty Power of God," and "Our God, Our Help in Ages Past," were considered contemporary music. There were also a significant number of ministers who felt that music should be void of any emotional component. Nevertheless, we are encouraged to sing new songs unto the Lord with all of our heart. Psalm 96:1 (KJV) says, "O sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth."

Although Christmas was not observed by the early New Testament believers, more than two billion people worldwide celebrate Christmas each year. As a child, I remember Christmas in Ohio with mounds of snow, heavy coats, Christmas trees, shopping, presents, cookies, candy, relatives, holiday feasts, holiday music, and the baby Jesus in a manger. Everyone did what they could to have a merry Christmas, a perfect Christmas. They sought a Christmas celebration that would fulfill their expectation of what Christmas should be for them. The bar for holiday fantasy was usually set rather high. Sadly, as I look back, most people approached Christmas with a strong sense of entitlement, thinking, "I deserve this holiday." Even the children were trained with the question, "What do you want for Christmas?" Each year, the world moves a little further in the same direction. The commercialization of Christmas grows stronger and the baby Jesus in the manger is frequently removed from public view.

When the holiday season finally passes, many are sad and disappointed. Holiday reality often fails to deliver the holiday fantasy that was imagined. For others, the holiday passed in a moment. They spent too much. They ate too much. Now they face the same old problems with little hope in sight. Unfortunately, Post-Christmas Depression is all too common, especially in affluent societies.

About two thousand years ago, God sent His only begotten Son to this earth, the greatest gift ever. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16 KJV). He was born in Bethlehem. "Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" (John 7:42 KJV). He did not come as a warrior in a chariot of fire. He came as a humble sacrifice for mankind. ⁷"But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:7-8 KJV). Bethlehem was the first stop on His way to the cross of Calvary.

The angels of God appeared at the birth of Christ with the greatest news to ever be announced, a message of joy to the world. ¹⁰"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good

tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ¹⁴Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:10-14 KJV). How would man respond to the announcement of the Savior? The Messiah was despised and rejected by men who were determined to have their own way, "and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6 KJV).

Without Christ, all mankind is lost. Since the time of Adam, all have sinned. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23 KJV). Death entered through the sin of Adam and man walked in darkness, but Jesus Christ is the light of the world. "For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many" (Romans 5:15 KJV).

Every day should be a time of worship and thanksgiving for the gift of God's love and grace, a time to share the message of God's love, and a time to help those in need. ³⁷Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? ³⁸When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? ³⁹Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? ⁴⁰And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:37-40 KJV). Will you help those who are in need and give to them as unto Christ?

Finally, Isaac Watts did not write "Joy to the World" as a Christmas carol. It was to be sung throughout the year. The words of the hymn speak most directly of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Consider these words from verses three and four, "No more let sins and sorrows grow. He comes to make his blessings flow. He rules the world with truth and grace." People ask, "Why doesn't Jesus come back and straighten everything out?" In God's time, Christ will return. Have you put your trust in Jesus Christ? He alone is the way, the truth, and the life. As Isaac Watts declared, "Let every heart prepare Him room."

If the Spirit of God is speaking to you today, then today is your day of salvation. Second Corinthians 6:2 says that at just the right time, God heard you. If you cry out to God, He will hear you. On the day of salvation, He will help you. He will send the Holy Spirit to guide you and draw you to Him. Certainly, the "right time" is now. Today is the day of salvation! There is no guarantee of tomorrow. Your heart may become hard and your ears deaf to His call. Today, if you are fortunate enough to hear His voice, I urge you to say yes to Christ and His love.

You can experience a spiritual rebirth today. Romans 10:9 (KJV) says, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Will you pray today and begin your journey with Christ? "Lord Jesus, I confess with my mouth today that You are the only begotten Son of the living God. I repent and turn from my sins. I believe that You died on the cross to save me from my punishment and I receive You as Savior and Lord of my life. Please help me to grow in Your fellowship and serve You all the days of my life. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen."

If you prayed that prayer today from your heart, then you have become a child of God. You have been born again and your adventure with Christ begins. Read the Bible each day, beginning with the book of John. Talk to God each day and ask for His help. Find a church that loves Jesus, loves people, worships God with enthusiasm, and teaches the Bible. They will help and encourage you on your journey with Christ.

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