

# Joy to the World

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by Ben Purves

*Joy to the World* is one of our oldest and most popular Christmas hymns. First published in 1719, this beloved hymn was written by Isaac Watts, a prolific English hymn-writer and theologian. It was published in a collection of hymns with a lengthy title typical of its time, which is a poetic reworking of the Psalms — *The Psalms of David, Imitated in the Language of the New Testament, and Applied to the Christian State and Worship*.

## **PSALM 98 PART 2**

*The Messiah's coming and kingdom.*

Joy to the world! the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare him room,  
And heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns!  
Let men their songs employ,  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,  
Repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make his blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of his righteousness,  
And wonders of his love.

Interestingly enough, if you pay attention to the lyrics of Joy to the World, you will notice that this song was not written with the intent of celebrating first advent and the nativity of Christ, but it was written about Christ's second advent. These lyrics are not about a baby in a manger, but about the Lord ruling and reigning as King of kings from Psalm 98. All of creation celebrates Christ's coming, the curse is removed, and all nations worship Him.

Did you notice the heading up above? Did you know that we typically neglect the first half of this two-part hymn? Read the first half of the hymn below.

## **PSALM 98 PART 1**

*Praise for the Gospel*

To our Almighty Maker, God,  
New honors be addressed;  
His great salvation shines abroad,  
And makes the nations blest.

He spake the word to Abraham first;  
His truth fulfills the grace;  
The Gentiles make his name their trust,  
And learn his righteousness.

Let the whole earth his love proclaim  
With all her diff'rent tongues,  
And spread the honors of his name  
In melody and songs.

This hymn speaks of God's salvation in history and through the nations, starting with Abraham's justification by faith (Gen 15:6), moving to the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 1:8), and then calling on the whole earth to glorify God. As you read Psalm 98, God's salvation is seen through the ends of the earth, and all of creation responds with joyous worship as God comes to judge the world with righteousness.

As we think and meditate on the first coming of our Savior this Christmas, we should also be reminded and encouraged by the promise of His second coming. It will be a day of great joy when all creation will rejoice, the seas will roar, the rivers will clap their hands, and the mountains will sing (Psalm 98:1-9).

May your Christmas be filled with joy as you celebrate our Savior's first advent, and as you look forward to His glorious and joyous return. And as we head into this new year, let us praise God for His great salvation in the Gospel, and may the overflow of our joy proclaim Christ to the ends of the earth!

Pastor Ben