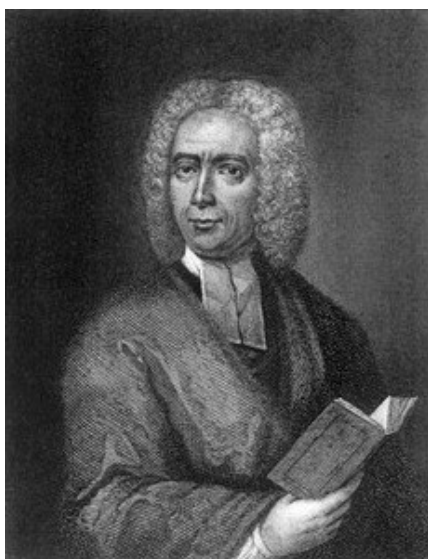


“Scriptures and Story for ‘Joy to the World’”

22 December 2020

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This article teaches about the biblical passages that Isaac Watts referred to when he wrote the poem that we now know as "Joy to the World."



Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
(Ref. 2)

Introduction

In 1719, **Isaac Watts** published a poem about Psalm 98:4-9, Psalm 96:11-13, and Genesis 3:17-18. He titled the poem, *The Messiah's Coming and Kingdom* (Ref. 1, Ref. 2). Today we know that poem by the title, "Joy to the World," from the first line of the first verse:

"Joy to the World; the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King!
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing." (Ref. 1)

More than a century later, in 1836, **Lowell Mason** set the words of the poem, "Joy to the World," to music (Ref. 3). Musically, Mason borrowed the first four notes for his tune from the chorus, "Lift Up Your Heads," in Handel's *Messiah* (Ref. 1). As of the late 20th century, "Joy to the World" was the most-published Christmas hymn in North America" (Ref. 1).

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Scriptures for "Joy to the World"

Psalm 98:4-9 KJV -- *"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise. (5) Sing unto the Lord with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm. (6) With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the Lord, the King. (7) Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. (8) Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together (9) Before the Lord; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity."*

Psalm 96:11-13 KJV -- *"Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. (12) Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice (13) Before the Lord: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth."*

Genesis 3:17-19 KJV -- *"And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; (18) Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; (19) In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."*

The beautiful carol, "Joy to the World," that we love to sing at Christmas actually is more about the *second* coming of Christ than the *first* (the incarnation - John 1:14). Psalm 98:4-9 and Psalm 96:11-13 glorify Christ's triumphant return at the end of the age. The Apostle Paul, writing after the first coming of Christ, tells us the whole creation still groans and is subject to *corruption (including destruction and decay)* (Romans 8:21-22, Ref. 4). The time still is in the future when the sea will roar in praise, the floods will clap their hands, and the "trees of the wood" will rejoice when Christ comes to judge the world (Psalm 98:7-9, Psalm 96:12-13). Verses 1 and 2 of "Joy to the World" look forward to this time of rejoicing.

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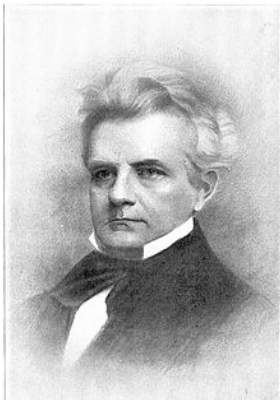
When Christ comes again he will establish his reign upon the earth. He will judge (the Hebrew word means *to act as law-giver, judge, governor*) the world with righteousness, truth, and grace (Psalm 98:9, Psalm 96:13, John 1:14, Ref. 5). Verse 4 of "Joy to the World" expresses this truth.

Genesis 3:17-19 describes the curse that God announced to Adam after Adam had sinned by eating the fruit from the forbidden tree. This passage specifically mentions the curse on the ground, the sorrow that Adam (mankind) will have toiling the ground, and that the ground will grow thorns (Genesis 3:17-18). In Verse 3 of "Joy to the World," the hymn looks forward and says, "No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground." When Christ comes, he "will make his blessings flow ... far as the curse is found." We can receive Christ's blessings now and become free from the eternal curse of sin by putting our faith, confidence, and trust in him today (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 3:23-24, John 11:25-26).

Hymn Writer and Composers for "Joy to the World"

Three different men from three different backgrounds have collaborated in mind and spirit to create the carol, "Joy to the World," that people have enjoyed for more than 180 Christmases.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) was an English Independent (Congregational) minister, theologian, and a prolific and popular hymn writer. Watts composed more than 700 hymns (Ref. 2). Many of his hymns remain in use today including "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," "From All That Dwell Below the Skies," and "Marching to Zion" (Ref. 2).



Lowell Mason (Ref. 3)

Lowell Mason (1792-1872) was an American choir director, music educator, and composer in Boston and New York City (Ref.3). In 1836 he rearranged a section of Handel's "Messiah" to fit the words of "Joy to the World." That familiar hymn tune we sing today for "Joy to the World" is named Antioch (Ref. 1). Lowell Mason also is known for his hymn tune, "Nearer, My God, to Thee," and for the melody he created for the nursery rhyme, "Mary Had a Little Lamb" (Ref.3).



George Frideric Handel
(1685-1759) (Ref. 5)

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) was a German, later British, Baroque composer who spent the bulk of his career in London (Ref. 6). Handel composed his masterpiece oratorio, *Messiah*, in 1741 (Ref. 7). Lowell Mason's Antioch tune for "Joy to the World" borrows the first four notes from the chorus, "Lift Up Your Heads," in Handel's *Messiah* (Ref. 1).

Even though Isaac Watts wrote "Joy to the World" about the *second* coming of Christ, "Joy to the world" applies to us today when we celebrate the *first* coming of Christ. First, our hearts are to "prepare him room" (Luke 2:7, Verse 1). Second, we are to celebrate the "wonders of his love" (Verse 4). The Bible tells us about God's wonderful love -- "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16).

Consider

Have you prepared room in your heart for Jesus? (Luke 2:7)

Have you received Jesus who came to save you and me from our sins?
(Matthew 1:20-21)

Are you prepared to meet Jesus Christ joyfully when he comes to judge the world? (Psalm 98:4, 9; Psalm 96:11, 13)

References

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joy_to_the_World
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Watts
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lowell_Mason
4. <https://biblehub.com/greek/5356.htm>
5. <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8199.htm>
6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Frideric_Handel
7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messiah_\(Handel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messiah_(Handel))

“Joy to the World”

Verse 1:

**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.**

Verse 2:

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

Verse 3:

**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,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.**

Verse 4:

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

Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come

D
A7
D
G
A

1 Joy to the world! the Lord is come: let earth re - ceive her
 2 Joy to the earth! the Sav - ior reigns; let all their songs em -
 3 No more let sin and sor - row grow nor thorns in - fest the
 4 He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the na - tions

D

King. Let ev - ery heart pre - pare him
 ploy, while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and
 ground; he comes to make his bless - ings
 prove the glo - ries of his right - eous -

A

room, and heaven and na - ture sing, and heaven and na - ture
 plains re - peat the sound - ing joy, re - peat the sound ing
 flow far as the curse is found, far as the curse is
 ness and won - ders of his love, and won - ders of his
 and heaven and na - ture sing,

and

D
D/A
A7
D

sing, and heaven, and heaven and na - ture sing.
 joy, re - peat, re - peat the sound - ing joy.
 found, far as, far as the curse is found.
 love, and won - ders, won - ders of his love.
 heaven and na - ture sing,

Text: Isaac Watts, 1719; based on Psalm 98
Tune: Lowell Mason, 1848



CM with repeats
ANTIOCH
www.hymnary.org/text/joy_to_the_world_the_lord_is_come

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