

The Story Behind “Joy to the World”

Scripture:

“Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.

Sing unto the LORD with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm.

With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the LORD, the King.

Let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together before the LORD;

For he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.” (Psalm 98:4-9, KJV)

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.” (Luke 2:10, KJV)

Background:

The words to “Joy to the World” are by English hymn writer, **Isaac Watts** (1674-1748). Isaac Watts was an English Christian minister, theologian, and a prolific and popular hymnwriter. 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.”



Isaac Watts

Like most young people, Watts found church music of the period to be uninspired and monotonous. He saw no joy or emotion in the standards sung by choirs and congregation. Isaac complained bitterly to his father about the archaic language of the psalms sung in church. The elder Watts, never one to stand on tradition, challenged his son to come up with something better. This challenge initiated a creative burst that would not end until Isaac had composed more six hundred hymns (Ref 2).

Isaac Watts based “Joy to the World” on the second half of Psalm 98 in the Bible. The song was first published in 1719 in Watts' collection; *The Psalms of David: Imitated in the language of the New Testament, and applied to the Christian state and worship* (Ref 3).

Watts wrote the words of "Joy to the World" as a hymn glorifying Christ's triumphant return at the end of the age, rather than a song celebrating his first coming. The nations are called to celebrate because God's faithfulness to the house of Israel has brought salvation to the world (Ref 3).

In 1836, **Lowell Mason** (1792-1872), an American choir director and composer in Boston, rearranged a section of Handel's “**The Messiah**” to fit the words of “Joy to the World.” (Ref 4)

Copyright 2016 Whitney V. Myers. The hymn lyrics and tune for “Joy to the World” are in the public domain. This devotion can be freely downloaded from the www.whitneytunes.com website and be reproduced for not-for-sale applications. Please include this copyright notice. 17Dec2016

George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) composed the masterpiece oratorio in 1741. The tune for “Joy to the World” is named “Antioch” and borrows musical phrases from Handel’s Messiah choruses, “Lift Up Your Heads” and “Glory to God.” (Ref 1)

Three different men -- Isaac Watts, George F. Handel, and Lowell Mason -- from three very different backgrounds united their hearts and minds to produce this beautiful Christmas carol that has lifted spirits heavenward for more than 150 Christmases. Their joint inspiration has truly brought joy to the world! (Ref 5)

The attached score for “Joy to the World” is provided by the Timeless Truths website (Ref 6).

References:

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Watts
2. Ace Collins, “Stories Behind the Best-Loved Songs of Christmas,” Zondervan, 2001
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joy_to_the_World
4. <http://www.plymouthbrethren.org/article/10154>
5. Pamela J. Kennedy, “Hymns of Faith & Inspiration,” Ideals Publishing Corporation, 1990
6. http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Joy_to_the_World/

Lyrics for “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 heav’n and nature sing,
And heav’n and nature sing,
And heav’n, and heav’n, 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.**

The hymn lyrics for “Joy to the World” are in the public domain. These lyrics can be freely downloaded from the www.whitneytunes.com website. Please include this notice. 10Dec2016

Joy to the World

*The angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold,
I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. Lk. 2:10*

1. Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth re - ceive her King;
 2. Joy to the earth, the Sav - ior reigns! Let men their songs em - ploy;
 3. No more let sins and sor - rows grow, Nor thorns in - fest the ground;
 4. He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the na - tions prove

Let eve - ry heart pre - pare Him room,
 While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
 He comes to make of His bless - ings flow
 The glo - ries of His right - eous - ness,

And heav'n and na - ture sing, And heav'n and na - ture sing,
 Re - peat the sound - ing joy, Re - peat the sound - ing joy,
 Far as the curse is found, Far as the curse is found,
 And won - ders of His love, And won - ders of His love,

1. And heav'n and na - ture sing, And heav'n and na -

And heav'n, and heav'n, and na - ture sing.
 Re - peat, re - peat, the sound - ing joy.
 Far as, far as, the curse - ing joy.
 And won - ders, won - ders, of His found.
 love.

ture sing,