

Joy to the People

Christmas is coming. Those of us with small children or grandchildren sense the excitement they have for Christmas. Christmas is a special time to teach children about the birth of Jesus Christ, yet there is an important message for us, too. That message is Jesus is coming – not just in Bethlehem a long time ago but for us today.

The Advent season in the Christian church is the preparation for the coming of Christ. We think of it in immediate terms as we look forward to celebrating the birthday of Jesus Christ. That is not nearly enough. He already came. And, there is more to the story. He died for you and me. Christmas is looking forward to his “second coming,” when He will come to take us home. We will be reunited with loved ones and get to meet people of the faith who have gone before us.

The next time we see Jesus, it will be His return to take us home. Instead of just a handful of shepherds and a few wise men welcoming Jesus in a humble manger, *“every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* (Philippians 2:10).

One of today’s most famous Christmas carols wasn’t written for Christmas. Joy to the World was written in 1719 by Issac Watts, who is often called the “father of English hymnody.” He wrote Joy to the World as a celebration anticipating the second coming of Jesus Christ, not the manger scene we think of when we hear the song. It is a vision into the future, based on Psalm 98 when sin will be no more. The lyrics of the familiar hymn read:

*JOY to the world; the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her king;
Let ev’ry heart prepare him room,
And heav’n and nature sing.*

*Joy to the earth the Saviour 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.*



Even though it wasn’t written as a Christmas carol, it appropriately focuses on the fulfillment of the mission of Christ. Christmas. That was the start – His first coming. Every line in the hymn speaks to his second coming and the joy we will all feel. Enjoy this year’s Christmas celebration but prepare for what is to come. The vision of Psalm 98 is to bring joy to the people. At His second coming, we will sing: Joy to the World, the Lord is come.

Concluding Thought: When we celebrate birthdays in our family, we are not just looking in the past tense. We look at our children and are excited about their future and what they will do with their lives. Christmas is the celebration of Jesus' birthday, and looking forward to what is to come. Merry Christmas.

Psalm 98 reads:

Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.

²The LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

³He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

⁴Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music;

⁵make music to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing,

⁶with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn— shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

⁷Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

⁸Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy;

⁹let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.

Note: The melody of Joy to the World we now sing was put to music in 1836 by Lowell Mason.