




December 12th

JOY TO THE WORLD!

The classic Christmas hymn “Joy to the World” was written by the English minister Isaac Watts (1674-1748) and is an all-time favorite hymn sung during the Christmas season. The hymn’s obvious theme is “joy.” But what exactly is joy? We’re all familiar with the joy we feel when our favorite football team wins, our birthday is celebrated (for some), or when we receive an unexpected gift. These are all wonderful experiences, but the joy the Bible speaks of—the joy found in Jesus Christ—goes far deeper and is far more lasting. In fact, it’s everlasting (John 16:22), and is the kind of joy of which Isaac Watts wrote in his hymn.

The joy the Bible speaks of is a joy that “rises above circumstances and focuses on the very character of God” and “looks beyond the present to our future salvation.” In other words, this joy doesn’t depend on our life circumstances but rather on our God and is grounded in the future hope of salvation we have in His Son, Jesus Christ.

In his hymn, Isaac Watts lists several reasons believers in Jesus Christ can be joyful. Let’s look at a couple of them. In the first stanza he writes, “Joy to the world! The Lord is come; let earth receive her King!” So, first, we can be joyful because Jesus Christ has come! Reflect on this a moment. He is the One the prophets spoke of who came as “Immanuel” (Isa 7:14; 8:10; 9:6-7), which means “God with us” (Matt 1:23). But more than that, He came to complete an important mission from God—to take away our sin (John 1:29), to reconcile lost people to God (2 Cor 5:19), and to make available eternal life to those who believe in Him (John 3:16). Forgiveness...reconciliation...eternal life...these are truly great reasons for joy!



Secondly, the last stanza of the hymn ends with praising “the wonders of His love.” It was God’s love that moved Him to forgive, reconcile, and grant eternal life. The Bible tells us God is love (1 John 4:8). William D. Mounce says, “Because He is love, He acts with love toward an undeserving world to save them from their sins.” Moreover, God made the first move; He loved us when we were not even interested in knowing Him. Romans 5:8 tells us, “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (NIV, italics mine). Now that is the kind of love only God could give and exactly the kind people need most. Joy to the world, indeed!

May your joy overflow this Christmas season as you spend time with friends and family. And may this season also remind us of the many reasons to have joy in our God and in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Contributed by Ira Cutting