

What About ... Joy to the World

By Dr. David A. DeWitt

Isaac Watts (1674-1748), author of around 750 songs, is commonly called “The Father of Hymns” due to his popularity as the first English hymn writer. A few of his most well-known songs still sung today include: *Come Ye that Love the Lord*; *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*; *At the Cross*; and ... *Joy to the World*. Isaac Watts was a young man when hymns other than the Psalms were allowed to be sung in the Church of England. This gave way to Watts developing many beloved songs. Watts still based many of his songs on the Psalms, but he was especially interested in writing hymns based on the “Christian experience.”

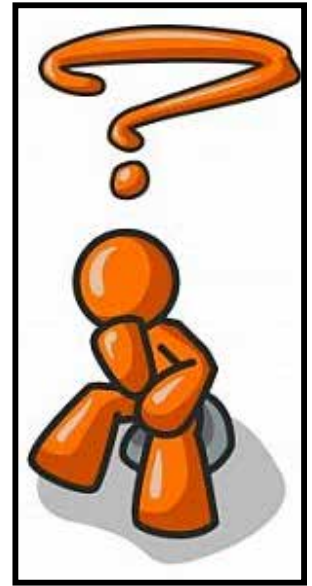
Joy to the World was written in 1719 and based on Psalm 98:4-9.

Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; Break forth and sing for joy and sing praises. Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre; With the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn Shout joyfully before the King, the Lord. Let the sea roar and all it contains, The world and those who dwell in it. Let the rivers clap their hands; Let the mountains sing together for joy Before the Lord; for He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

If you notice the lyrics of the song, *Joy to the World*, you will see nothing about shepherds, a manger, wise men, angels, or any other character or element that we normally associate with the Christmas story. The reason being that Isaac Watts did not write *Joy to the World* to be a Christmas song. The original theme of this song was the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. Christmas won't always be a joyful time, but when Jesus comes back, even the rocks will sing!

Over 100 years later, in 1839, Lowell Mason adapted and arranged this song into a melody many believe to have been written by Handel. In my research, however, I have not been able to establish when or why this hymn became associated with Christmas. Certainly, we can look at the message in the song and see that it can be applied to Christ's appearance as a babe in Bethlehem. We must prepare room for Him in our hearts and lives. This is a joyous occasion!

As you hear and sing this beloved carol this season, think about the words. Yes, they apply to the Christmas story in that the Lord is come! We should rejoice! But, let the lyrics all point you to the reason Jesus came: to save the world. Be ready because He is coming again! What a glorious day THAT will be when the whole earth celebrates His appearing!
[The Story, <http://agodlyheritage.org>]



Joy to the World

*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.*

*Joy to the world! the Saviour 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*

*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.*

*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*