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**Joy to the World!**

Series: **God With Us**

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The Village Church at Shell Point

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I. Introduction

A. **Joy to the World! The Lord Has Come**

1. The most published Christmas carol in the English language
  - a. One of the all-time favorite hymns to be sung in churches and homes during the Christmas season

B. It is an interesting collaboration between three people who never actually worked together

1. Actually – an international collaboration

C. Isaac Watts was the poet and pastor who penned the words

1. He included them in one of his famous collections and published them in 1719
2. Someone, we don't know exactly who, borrowed motives from Handel's Messiah to create the rudiments of the tune we sing
  - a. "Lift up your heads" – gives us the opening to "Joy to the World!"
  - b. The instrumental introduction of the famous aria "Comfort Ye" is the basis for the repetitive portion of the carol – "Let heaven and nature sing" and its parallels in the subsequent stanzas
3. I say, borrowed; you might say steal
  - a. After all, when did he give them back to Handel
  - b. But the practice of borrowing fragments of great composers' music in new compositions was quite common in their day
  - c. In fact, I was on a doctoral committee of a composer at WVU whose dissertation studied that very practice
4. I also say, this was an international collaboration, because Watts was English and Handel was German
  - a. Though Handel was in England and the time
  - b. But as far as we can tell, they never directly collaborated

D. But then the final collaborator came along later – and he was an American!

1. Lowell Mason was a Boston music educator
  - a. He took Watts' poem
  - b. And Handel's motives
  - c. And arranged the tune we know of today
2. And the repetitive portion – "Let heaven and nature sing" – was a particularly distinctive practice in early American music

E. So *Joy to the World!* is a most beloved Christmas hymn

1. The beautiful result of three wonderfully gifted believers
  - a. Who never actually met
- F. But I have a secret to tell you
  1. Promise you won't tell anyone
- G. *Joy to the World!* is arguably the most beloved Christmas carol in the English language
  1. And here's the secret
    - a. It's not a Christmas carol!
- H. Watts didn't base his text on any of the portions of the Christmas story
  1. He didn't base it on Luke's narrative in Chapter 2
  2. He didn't base it on anything in Matthew's account that we were studying together this Advent
  3. He didn't even base it on any of the Christmas or Advent songs in the biblical text – Mary's Song, Zechariah's Song, the Angels' song
  4. And he didn't even base the text on John's wonderful narrative of the incarnation in Chapter 1
  5. He didn't have Christmas in mind at all
- I. When Watts wrote the text he wrote it as part of a project that occupied much of his literary work
  1. He put to English verses the book of Psalms
  2. And *Joy to the World!* is his poetic paraphrase of Psalm 98
  3. While Psalm 98 bears the essence of the message of the coming of Christ
    - a. It is not particularly Messianic
    - b. And it is never included, for instance, as an Old Testament text used in Lessons and Carols services
  4. So Psalm 98 – and *Joy to the World!* are not about Christmas!
- J. But it is about Advent
  1. What?
  2. That's right
    - a. *Joy to the World!* is about Advent
    - b. But it's not primarily about the first Advent
  3. In Watts' mind, it's more about the Second Advent
    - a. The Second Coming of Christ!
  4. Now you can't have the second coming without having the first coming
    - a. The first coming of Christ – that we celebrate at this time of the year – gives us the firstfruits of all the blessings that are described in *Joy to the World!*
    - b. And there is no reason not to use *Joy to the World!* to celebrate His first coming
    - c. But there is also even more reason to heighten our joy even more and use our celebration of the First Advent to look forward with even more joy to its consummation in the Second Advent
- K. Let me say one more thing about what *Joy to the World!* is about
  1. While *Joy to the World!* may not be about Christmas explicitly
    - a. It is about the emotions of Christmas

2. And that is no small thing
    - a. It is a time for great joy!
    - b. And we must remind ourselves that what God has done in sending His Son in the flesh, in the incarnation, ought to make God's people erupt in joyful expression, in exuberant praise!
  3. But we know that the Christmas holiday season is not an inherently joyful time for many people
    - a. Many people have lost loved ones in recent years
    - b. There are empty seats at tables where we used to enjoy laughter and camaraderie and sweet fellowship
    - c. So now, an emptiness threatens to suck the joy out of this season
  4. Others have suffered losses – especially in our community this fall
    - a. Are displaced
    - b. Have lost homes; some temporarily, some permanently
    - c. And the places that have embodied so many memories of joyful times are taken away
    - d. So it's hard to have joy
- L. We realize that
1. We all need to be sensitive to that dimension of the Christmas season
    - a. And we ought to be quick to weep with our brothers and sisters as we are to laugh with them
  2. But dear, friends, I'm here to tell you this morning, that Christmas is still the time for joy
    - a. And maybe it takes great faith for you who have losses
    - b. But part of your healing is to participate in the expressions of joy that are legitimately a part of this Christmas celebration
  3. Because – do you realize what God has done?
    - a. He has condescended to send His Son
    - b. To come to this earth
    - c. To experience all the sufferings and sorrows that we experience
    - d. And then to suffer the ultimate suffering – taking upon Himself the just punishment for our sins
    - e. And then finally, to destroy sin and death in His resurrection
    - f. And give us all the promise of new life to come
  4. So that we do not grieve as those who have no hope
- M. So even in your struggles, I implore you, as an act of your will
1. Take joy
    - a. Joy to the World!
  2. And join in the exuberant expressions of that Joy
    - a. Even as you weep
  3. It is part of what you need
    - a. Part of what we need

## II. Psalm 98

- A. Psalm 98 (ESV) — A PSALM.

1. The only Psalm which inscription is simply “A Psalm”
  - a. As if this Psalm among all psalms is the pattern for the proper expression of praise for God’s people
- B. Psalm 98, even though not primarily about Christmas
  1. Does embody the essence of Christmas – the coming of Christ
  2. Because it celebrates the coming of Christ – in His first and second Advents – in three ways
  3. Christ the Savior
  4. Christ the King
  5. Christ the Judge
- C. **Christ the Savior**
  1. **Psalm 98.1-3** Oh 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.
    - a. Salvation is the primary focus of this first stanza
  2. 2 The LORD has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.
    - a. Not only is salvation the primary focus, salvation provides the righteousness that we all need, and none of us has, by nature
    - b. Only Christ has the righteousness we need – and His coming brings us that righteousness
    - c. And it is a salvation, not reserved just for the Jewish people, and not even for religious people
    - d. But for the nations!
  3. 3 He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.
    - a. Both Israel and the ends of the earth experience the salvation of Christ in His coming
    - b. All flowing from the steadfast love – the covenant love – of the Triune God
  4. It is a salvation that truly saves; saves us from
    - a. The penalty of sin
    - b. The power of sin
    - c. The tyranny of Satan, the enemy of our souls
  5. “Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns”
    - a. “Let men their songs employ”
  6. “No more let sins and sorrows grow,
    - a. “Nor thorns infest the ground;
    - b. “He comes to make His blessings flow
    - c. “Far as the curse is found...”
  7. The curse – oh yes – the one text that Watts had in mind that doesn’t come from Psalm 98, but from Genesis 3
    - a. The curse on Adam and Eve as the result of the fall
    - b. A curse on labor; a curse of relationships; a curse on nature
    - c. All part of the our sin-infested world
  8. Christ came to dissolve the curse

- a. He came as our Savior!
- D. **Christ the King**
1. The second stanza glorifies Christ as King
    - a. He came as King is His first Advent; will come again and manifest His reign and rule fully in His second Advent
  2. **Psalm 98.4-6** Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!
  3. 5 Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody!
  4. 6 With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD!
  5. The focus in this stanza is on how we worship the King
    - a. Essentially – with everything we’ve got!
    - b. Lyres and trumpets and horns
    - c. With joyful noise!
    - d. Yes – this is not the time to think about whether you’ve got a decent voice
    - e. Just sing!
    - f. Loudly!
    - g. Because what God has done in sending Jesus is worth your most exuberant expression!
  6. John Wesley: Sing lustily, and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead or asleep; but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sang the songs of Satan.
  7. “Joy to the World!”
    - a. “Let earth receive her king...”
  8. “He rules the world with truth and grace...”
  9. Sing
    - a. Loudly
    - b. Use instruments
    - c. Because the King has come!
- E. **Christ the Judge**
1. And then Christ has come, and will come again, as the judge of all the earth
    - a. Perhaps more a second Advent than first; but still present in the first
  2. **Psalm 98.7-9** Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it!
  3. 8 Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together
  4. 9 before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.
  5. Notice that the scope of praise expands
    - a. From Israel
    - b. To the people of the world

- c. Now even to nature!
    - d. The rivers and the hills join the exuberant chorus
  - 6. Recall that nature was included in the curse as well
    - a. But now in the coming of Christ nature will be relieved of its turmoil
    - b. Even as we in our sin are saved
  - 7. **Romans 8:19–24** (ESV) —
    - a. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.
    - b. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.
    - c. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.
    - d. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.
    - e. 24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?
  - 8. “And heaven and nature sing...”
  - 9. “While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
    - a. Repeat their sounding joy...”
  - 10. “No more let sins and sorrows grow,
    - a. “Nor thorns infest the ground;”
  - 11. And don’t forget Christ the Judge – Watts didn’t
  - 12. “He rules the world with truth and grace,
    - a. “And makes the nations prove
    - b. “The glories of His righteousness...”
- F. We join our voices with heaven and earth and all creation
  - 1. In celebrating what God has done in sending Jesus
    - a. As the incarnate Son of God
  - 2. Who alone can save us from our sin
    - a. And the creation from its turmoil

### III. Will you now sing!

- A. There is a time and place for every kind of emotive expression in worship
  - 1. For weeping
  - 2. For tears
  - 3. For contemplation
  - 4. For lament
  - 5. For pleading and petition
- B. But this is the time for joy
  - 1. Joy to the World! The Lord is Come

## Benediction

Romans 11:33–36 (ESV) —

33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

35 “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Nehemiah 8:10 (ESV) —

10 Then he said to them,

“Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready,

for this day is holy to our Lord.

And do not be grieved,

for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”