

Joy to the World!

- ✦ a song for Christians (vv.1-3)
- ✦ a song for all people (vv.4-6)
- ✦ a song for our planet (vv.7-9)

In the Name of Jesus, God's only begotten Son, the Word of God made flesh, dear rejoicing Christians:

What do you find most fascinating about Christmas? Is it the joy of the children anticipating their gifts? Or the light in their little eyes the first time they see the Christmas tree? One thing we love most this time of year are the Christmas cards and letters, pictures from loved ones of their family gatherings and travels in the year nearly past. One e-card from a former member reminded me of Christmases past. Animation enables an e-card to picture an angel lighting all the candles on the Christmas tree, then coming to rest in brilliance on the highest bough. "So have yourself a merry little Christmas now!" There you go. Swerved right into that one, didn't we? Most fascinating? It has to be the music.

Nothing else can carry the Christmas spirit to your heart and soul like the music of Christmas. For many it's "dashing through the snow..." in Jingle Bells. More modern renditions are singing to, "Santa, Baby..." for something she wants under her tree as he's "comin' down the chimney tonight."

Let me suggest that there's a **song** for Christmas that will turn dangerous candles burning on a highly flammable tree into cool, bright LEDs to color your world and not trash your electric bill. Come with me to a thousand years before the first Christmas when the Holy Spirit spoke through the Psalmist in Psalm 98. Here's "**a new song**" – "**new**" because it never grows old, "**new**" because it makes you new, and every heart that learns to sing that Jesus the Savior is born! Here's **Joy to the World!**...

✦ a song for Christians (vv.1-3)

Not so many years ago our family Christmas tree didn't make it out to the curb in time for pickup. So it lay on its side next to the house until the weather warmed in the spring. Truth be known, it sat there all summer until most of the needles fell off. Can you say, "Tinder dry in the fall"? Talking to one of my daughters on the phone, I happened to mention my intent to burn that old tree in the fire pit. "Watch out, Dad," she warned. "They're really flammable." Good thing she said something! I stood back a few feet and tossed the match into the browned out branches where it seemed safe in the fire pit. The flare out was like lantern fluid on a charcoal grill. Another bad idea! Kids, don't try that at home or up at camp!

Unfortunately for most, that's how Christmas burns for them, hot and fast. Christmas contained in worldly wealth and personal pleasure will be gone as quickly as it comes. And for many it can sear their soul like the open flames that started so many house fires back in the day when candles were lit on Christmas tree branches. We all need rescue from those fires! Good thing "angel" means messenger.

So comes the invitation from God's angel messenger of long ago: "**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.**"¹ What "**marvelous things**" has God done to set our hearts to singing? First, He "**worked salvation**" by His own power – "**right hand...holy arm.**" Look at how people try to rid themselves of fear, anxiety and guilt. We all so naturally try to find happiness that always seems just out of reach, like a

¹ Scriptures: Wartburg Project. Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV): New Testament and Psalms. NPH: 800-662-6022.

bad dream where you can't run fast enough or reach far enough to get it. What did God do to displace all doubt and fear with joy and gladness? Must be something awesome only God could do!

God did not stop with just doing it, then going off to sit comfortably by the fire. This is a **song for Christians** to sing because, *“The LORD has made his salvation known. He has revealed his righteousness to the eyes of the nations. He has remembered his mercy and his faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.”* (Luther, CW 38)

Whatever was really important God announced with angels. This time the whole sky lit up with His messenger choir. Countless angels were *“praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind.’”* And because God's *glory* and His *righteousness* could only scare the Christmas right out of hardcore *mankind*, the angels were announcing to lowly shepherds about a baby boy born in a stable real close by in Bethlehem. Who's a'scared of a baby? But not just any baby! *“Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.”*

What if the shepherds had stayed out with their sheep in the field? What if they'd been silent all the way back from Bethlehem? This song is meant for singing, kindled to spread like a wild fire, not just flare and fizzle. It's our time to tell today. Christ the Savior is born! **Joy to the World!** It's...

✦ a song for all people (vv.4-6)

“Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Break out in joyful song! Make music! ⁵Make music to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of music. ⁶With trumpets and the sound of the ram's horn shout for joy before the King, the LORD.” (Paul Gerhardt, 1653 – sorrow → joy in Jesus)

There's a problem with reading this aloud. I can just hear the kids saying to themselves, “Why would we make music with a *liar*?” How do you say the instrument “*lyre*” different than the *liar* who cannot tell the truth? Kids, really, a *lyre* is like a small harp, a musical instrument with strings. A *lyre* is the first musical instrument mentioned in the Bible. David played one. The point here is for **all people** to grab their instruments and start strumming and blowing and pounding those keys so **all people** can sing a **song** of joy and gladness. There is no *King* more awesome than *the LORD* when He comes to rule your heart by faith. He is the *joy* of *all the earth* because Jesus carried the sins of all people to the cruel cross. Yes, this Baby, the Son of God, was born with a body in order to suffer and die on the cross for our sins. That is so hateful and despicable to some folks that they can't accept the sound of this rejoicing. But if you're one of them, turned off by this Christmas message of forgiveness by sacrifice from God, stop. Think about it. Surgery for cancer isn't fun either. A root canal hurts. When God cuts out the pride and arrogance of your sinful heart, don't expect that to make you sing with delight. It's the healing that follows. It's the joy that comes from knowing Jesus truly is born a Savior for you, for me, for all!

✦ a song for our planet (vv.7-9)

And one more thing. **Joy to the World** is also a **song for our planet**. One environmentalist wrote that their family religion was nature, not God. But God reveals Himself as the Creator of nature who can change its laws at will. Jesus showed this by all His miraculous signs and wonders – stilling storms, creating fine wine from water, walking on water, giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and even life to the dead. Is it possible God will give us ears to hear His creation in the new heaven and new earth He promised to create on Judgment Day? *“Let the sea roar, and everything that fills it, the world, and all who live in it. ⁸Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the mountains sing for joy together before the LORD, ⁹for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with fairness.”* There are so many songs still needing to be sung in this “*new song*.” (Isaac Watts) This **Judge** is on your side. His *righteousness* comes as a gift along with the gift of faith to receive it. (Ephesians 2:8f) We can't say it all today. So let's keep singing: **Joy to the World!** Amen.

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