

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

Joy to the World

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In 1719, English poet and clergyman Isaac Watts (1674–1748) wrote the words to this hymn, based loosely on Psalm 98 (“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises”). The psalm looks forward to the day when the Lord will come to judge the world in righteousness. The hymn was sung to various tunes for many years. Then in 1836, Lowell Mason, the leading Presbyterian hymn composer in the United States (1792–1872), set the words to the music we now associate with “Joy to the World.” The song is sometimes erroneously attributed to Handel, from whose “Messiah” Mason borrowed (a debt he acknowledged in his 1839 publication of the song).

What mood does this song evoke? Knowing that the lyrics to this song were originally intended to praise the Second Coming of Christ, not his birth, why do you think it has become associated with Christmas? How does singing this song make you feel?

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 earth! the savior 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,

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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.

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