

Christmas 2022 Joy to the World

Bishop Frank Schuster

Joy to the world! I love that hymn. No Christmas celebration would be complete without this famous carol. I was fascinated to hear the history of this song and I think you will too. The lyrics were written in the 1700's by Isaac Watts, who is regarded as the father of English hymns. He composed over 700 hymns at a time when chant was being replaced by more modern music as a way of proclaiming the psalms. The melody these lyrics were put to isn't the one we sing today. The melody we sing these lyrics to was arranged a century later as a tribute to Handel's Messiah. The most interesting aspect of the hymn Joy to the World is that Isaac Watt's lyrics are based on Psalm 98. In fact, the next time you sing this song, notice that there isn't a single mention of the Christmas story throughout the hymn because it wasn't meant to be a Christmas Carol. The song is about the second coming of Jesus at the end of time.

Joy to the world the Lord is come; let earth receive her king. Joy to the world the Savior reigns; let us our songs employ. He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove. Do you see it? Joy to the world is perhaps the most beloved Christmas Carol and yet it is a song that is more about Easter than it is about Christmas. And this is why I love the hymn, Joy to the World. Celebrating Christmas makes no sense without our Easter hope.

[Vigil] And we see this in our Gospel Reading tonight. What does the angel tell Joseph? The angel says, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." See it? Everything about Christmas points us to Easter.

[Midnight] And we see this theme in our Gospel Reading tonight. What did the angel say to the shepherds in the field? The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord." Do you see it? Everything about Christmas points us to our Easter Hope.

[During the Day] And we see this theme clearly in our second reading from Hebrews today, the author writes, "Brothers and sisters: In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he has spoken to us through the Son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe, who is the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being, and who sustains all things by his mighty word. When he had accomplished purification from sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, as far superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is

more excellent than theirs.” Do you see it? Everything about Christmas points us to our Easter Hope.

My friends, we don't celebrate Christmas because Jesus was an intriguing historical figure or because he was a remarkable philosopher. We don't celebrate a man who lived 2000 years ago because he was a nice guy. We celebrate Jesus' birth because when the world could not get any darker, God gave us his only Son to be our savior. This is only good news if we truly recognize that, at a very basic level, that we in fact need saving. If we don't recognize that we need saving, if we don't need Jesus as our savior, celebrating Christmas makes absolutely no sense whatsoever.

However, when we are honest with ourselves, we know that at a basic level there is a brokenness inside of us that we cannot fix. It manifests itself in the poor decisions we sometimes make to how nations treat other nations. We cannot save ourselves. We can't do it. We need Jesus. We need Jesus. Whatever darkness we are contending with right now, it is very good medicine to remember what, at the end of the day Christmas ultimately means. What does Christmas mean? Christmas means this: God loves you. No matter how you feel about yourself right now, God loves you. No matter what it is you are going through right now, God loves you. God loves you enough to give you his only Son. Believe it. Believe it.

Yes, my friends, everything about Christmas points to our Easter hope and should therefore fill our hearts with joy. How do we go about that? The hymn Joy to the World gives us good advice. Let every heart prepare him room, so to hear heaven and nature sing, as fields and floods, rocks hills and plains repeat the sounding joy about the glories of his righteousness, and the wonders of his love, the wonders of his love. In this Spirit, may God bless you and your loved ones. Merry Christmas!