

Christmas Is Here

Joy

Series Overview

As we celebrate Advent, the Scriptures remind us that with Jesus' birth, there came a new possibility of peace, joy, and hope for us all.

Sermon Introduction

The lyrics to “Joy to the World,” were written by the English pastor and hymnwriter Isaac Watts in 1719, inspired by Psalm 98. It's a psalm of celebration, calling the whole world to rejoice in God's coming reign and the restoration he brings. Of course, the psalm never mentions Jesus or his birth or incarnation. So, what does Psalm 98 have to do with Christmas? Everything.

Passage: Psalm 98 (NIV)

Psa. 98:1 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.

Psa. 98:2 The LORD has made his salvation known
 and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

Psa. 98:3 He has remembered his love
 and his faithfulness to the house of Israel;
 all the ends of the earth have seen
 the salvation of our God.

Psa. 98:4 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,
 burst into jubilant song with music;

Psa. 98:5 make music to the LORD with the harp,
 with the harp and the sound of singing,

Psa. 98:6 with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—
 shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

Psa. 98:7 Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
 the world, and all who live in it.

Psa. 98:8 Let the rivers clap their hands,
 let the mountains sing together for joy;

Psa. 98:9 let them sing before the LORD,
 for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples with equity.

Personal Reflection and Group Discussion Questions

1. Read the passage. What stood out to you? Was there anything that you found surprising or confusing?
2. According to vv. 1-3, what are the “marvelous works” God has done that have so inspired the psalmist that he feels compelled to sing a new song to the Lord?
3. Why do you think the psalmist finds these “marvelous works” so amazing? What do they mean for the world (vv. 2-3)? What do they mean for you?
4. Verses 4-8 express the most exuberant and expressive celebration imaginable. The whole earth “shouts for joy to the Lord” –singing, shouting, music, and clapping, echoing throughout all of creation. Has the reality of God’s love and faithfulness for you ever moved you to this kind of joy?
5. When do you feel most joyful in your life? Do you think it’s possible to have joy that’s increasing, even overflowing, even when life’s not going well at that moment?
6. Verse 9 foresees (and celebrates) God’s coming judgment. What is it about God’s judgment that the psalmist finds so hopeful?
7. The psalm never mentions Jesus or even the Messiah promised to Israel. Why do you think Isaac Watts chose this psalm as the inspiration for his Christmas carol? How do the “marvelous works” of God the psalm celebrates find their fulfillment in Jesus?

Prayer

Often a position of submission helps us physically connect with the spiritual reality of meeting God. A posture of kneeling with open hands can demonstrate our willingness to submit to God’s power.

- Along with the writer of Psalm 98, praise God for his marvelous works that provide salvation for us and for the world.
- Admit to God any situations or struggles that have robbed you of your joy recently.
- Thank him for his love and faithfulness to you.
- Ask him to give you a new measure of joy this Christmas season as you celebrate Jesus’ coming that anticipates his future return when he will make all things new.