

Joy to the World: A Christmas Carol?

Whenever Christmas rolls around it's traditional for churches to sing "Joy to the World." It's a very well-known song, and many people know its first verse by heart:

*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.*

At first glance this does look very much like a Christmas carol. One could imagine that "Joy to the World" is talking about the angels' proclamation to the shepherds of "peace on earth, good will toward men," and that "the Lord is come" is a reference to Christ's birth in Bethlehem. However, if you take a look at the next few verses it becomes obvious that this song is actually talking about Christ's *second* coming, not His first:

*Joy to the World, 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,
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.*

Do you see what I mean? Think about it: do those verses better describe the Lord's birth or the Lord's return? For example, look at verse 3. It triumphantly declares that the Lord has come to put an end to sins, sorrows, and "the curse." This is a reference to the time the Lord cursed the ground after mankind sinned in the Garden of Eden:

Genesis 3:17: "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all

the days of thy life;”

Did Jesus remove the curse at His first coming? No. Did He put an end to sin and sorrow? No. His first coming was about providing mercy, forgiveness, and salvation – *not* about revoking the curse and ending all suffering. It isn't until after His Second Coming that He will put an end to war, sorrow, and sin, and will finally repeal the curse. Verse 3 is a great description of the Lord's *return*. It joyously declares things that the Lord *will* do in the future. It does *not* talk about the events that surrounded His birth!

Or consider verse 2. It declares “Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!” and verse 4 talks of Jesus ruling the world “with truth and grace.” In Jesus' first coming He did not do any reigning at all; in fact, the Bible says that He was a poor man with no place to lay His head! He was persecuted, he was tortured, he was executed, he rose from the dead, and he ascended to Heaven. But this song speaks of a time when the Lord will come to Earth and *reign over it*. The Bible says that this will indeed happen – but it will not take place until after the Second Coming:

Revelation 20:4: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

I realize that “Joy to the World” is a popular Christmas song, but I cannot escape the idea that this song is actually talking about the Second Coming. It provides a beautiful picture of things the Lord will do *after He returns*. If you'll notice, the song doesn't even mention anything the Lord did in His first appearance! There is no mention of the cross, or forgiveness of sins, or even the resurrection. Nor is there any mention of His birth, or the wise men, or the shepherds, or the baby in the manger. Instead the song exclusively focuses on things that are yet to come.

This is why I don't believe that this song was intended to be a Christmas song. I think it's actually meant to celebrate the Lord's return. It makes a great deal more sense when you look at it from that perspective.