

Eastern Mission

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America

December 2023

Dear Friends,

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise. ⁵ Sing unto the Lord with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm. ⁶ With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the Lord, the King. ⁷ Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. ⁸ Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together ⁹ Before the Lord; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.” Psalm 98: 4-9

The great hymnwriter Sir Isaac Watts is credited with having composed over 750 hymns, including beloved favorites such as “*Am I a Soldier of the Cross?*,” “*I Sing the Mighty Power of God*” and “*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*.” As a result of his popularity and inspired genius, Watts has been referred to as “the father of English hymnody.” Watts was a member of the Congregational Church in England, which emphasized the singing of psalms in public worship. Although Watts embraced this practice, he believed that the psalms “... ought to be translated in such a manner as we have reason to believe David would have composed them if he had lived in our day.” Watts set out to do that very thing, composing a collection of the psalms written in the contemporary language for the English people. However, when Watts was writing this “English Psalter”, he did so with an eye toward the truths of the New Testament. It was important for Watts to show how the Old Testament promises were fulfilled in Christ. In fact, the title of his composition was the “*Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*.”

It is believed that Watts composed “*O God Our Help in Ages Past*” based on Psalm 90, “*Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun*” by Psalm 72 and “*Joy to the World*” by Psalm 98. It is also easy to see the impact of Romans 5 in Watts composition of his most familiar Christmas hymn, “*Joy to the World*”:

*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.*

“For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) ¹⁸ Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. ¹⁹ For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. ²⁰ Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: ²¹ That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 5:17-21

The suffering, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ has triumphed over the forces of darkness. Indeed, God's grace is much greater than our sin.

May the God richly bless you this Advent and Christmas season with the assurance of the abundant blessings in His Son, Jesus Christ, the One who rules with truth and grace. Merry Christmas!

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Chuck Bylkas