

JOY TO THE WORLD

Lyrics, Isaac Waats, 1719;
Music: ANTIOCH, G. Frederick Handel, 1742

"Joy to the World" has become the most-published Christmas hymn in North America. The words were written by English hymn writer Isaac Watts, based on Psalm 98 in the Bible. The song was first published in 1719 in Watts' collection, *"The Psalms of David: Imitated in the language of the New Testament, and applied to the Christian state and worship"*. Watts wrote the words as a hymn glorifying Christ's triumphant return at the end of the age, rather than a song celebrating His first coming. Today, only the second half of Watts' lyrics are still used.

In 1839, Lowell Mason adapted and arranged Frederick Handel's tune: ANTIOCH (1742) to Watts' lyrics. This seemed a good fit, not least because the theme of the refrain (*And heaven and nature sing...*) appears in the orchestra opening and accompaniment of the recitative *'Comfort ye'* from Handel's *Messiah*, and the first four notes match the beginning of the choruses *'Lift up your heads and Glory to God'* from the same oratorio.

This song has been recorded by many musicians. In 1965, The Supremes recorded the song for their album, *"Merry Christmas"*. Andy Williams recorded the tune in a medium-slow ballad style in his 1974 *"Christmas Present"* LP. Mariah Carey re-recorded this song for her 1994 album, *"Merry Christmas"*. Whitney Houston recorded the song for *"The Preacher's Wife: Original Soundtrack Album"* (1996), and also included it on *"One Wish: The Holiday Album"* (2003). In 2002 Patty Loveless & Jon Randall recorded a duet of the song for Patty's Christmas album *"Bluegrass & White Snow: A Mountain Christmas"*. Clay Aiken recorded it on his 2004 album *"Merry Christmas with Love"*. In 2008, Faith Hill recorded the song for her Christmas album *"Joy to the World"*.

~ Tull