



### Rejoice

Rev. Dr. Glenda Hollingshead; November 9, 2025

22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Psalm 98; Luke 20:27-38

Recently a cartoon made its rounds on social media. It was a picture of the fairy godmother holding Cinderella's hands, looking kindly into her eyes. The caption read, "And when the clock strikes midnight, Halloween will end, then bam, Christmas carols everywhere."

Even though, it will be a few weeks before the tunes of Christmas ring out in our morning worship, I have to admit that preparing today's sermon, reading and re-reading Psalm 98—well it put me in the mood for Christmas. The words of "Joy to the World" kept running through my mind—perhaps because this is the very psalm that inspired Isaac Watts to put pen to paper over 300 years ago to write what has become a most beloved Christmas hymn.

*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 and sing;  
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing.*

Such words—don't they make you want to sing for joy? From Watt's perspective, the birth of Jesus was just the kind of event proclaimed in Psalm 98.

Indeed, joyful worship is in order. I imagine the psalmist as a dynamic worship leader, who has been given the important job of gathering God's people to worship with a new song. First, he calls the people to praise the Lord. "Make a joyful noise to Yahweh," he cries, "for he has done marvelous things." The people respond with singing and dancing but that's not adequate praise for Almighty God whose right hand and holy arm have given victory. "More! More!" The psalmist urges. "Strike up the band—let the instruments—the lyre, the trumpet, the horn—broadcast the joyful noise up to the heavens." Sounds of jubilation break forth. Still, that's not enough for the Lord who is known for steadfast love and faithfulness. "More! More!" God's cheerleader cries. "Let creation join in with seas shouting, floods clapping, and hills singing." God has done marvelous things, and all the earth must respond.

What a worship service! But a call to joyful worship isn't for the people of Israel, alone. Nor is it only for the high holy days of Advent, Christmas, and Easter. Surely, of all people, followers of Jesus should excel at raising the roof and making some noise! Praise should be our calling card. It has been said that praise is our best response to the evil in the world. Praise is the cure for despair and loneliness. Praise is contagious for praise begets praise.

What a delight to be part of the song and dance of joy for the Lord. Joining in with earth's celebration glorifying God, every creature adds its own distinct voice. The seas and rivers, meadows and hills add their response. "Sing praises to the Lord. Make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord!"

That the whole earth participates in the song reminds me of Luke's telling of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. You may recall that Jesus entered the city riding on a lowly colt. When he approached the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude began to praise God, singing and shouting for joy. Some of the Pharisees were upset by the ruckus so they tried to get Jesus to make the people stop singing and shouting. Listen to Jesus' response: "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."<sup>1</sup>

"I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." Jesus' words have often made me wonder—in this day and age, are we guilty of praising God so little, the earth may have to respond on our behalf?

Some years ago, Babbie Mason came out with a song entitled, "Keep the Rocks Silent."

*I'm gonna keep the rocks silent—one more day.  
I'm gonna keep the rocks silent—oh, one more day  
I don't know about you, but I'll keep praising his name, and I'm gonna keep the rocks  
silent—one more day!*

The words of the song continue:

*Well, there's all kinds of trouble weighing me down, I hear the voice of confusion, trying to turn me around. But I'm bound and determine to see this thing through. Until the end of my struggle—here's what I'm gonna do....I'm gonna keep the rocks silent—one more day.*

The words of the final verse are:

*Now I don't know much of nothing, about the end of my days, but I know a little something, about the power of praise. Cause I've been bound and determined, right from the start, to keep a rock in my right hand and praise in my heart.*

*I know a little something about the power of praise.* The psalmist, by all accounts, knows a little something about the power of praise.

Why should we praise Yahweh? We should lift our voices in praise because of our amazement at God and God's greatness. We should lift our voices in praise because of our awareness of the power and gentleness of the Creator. One scholar explained, "Praise enjoys and celebrates God's love, and it is our best attempt to feel, say, or sing something appropriate to God. Praise doesn't ask "What have you done for me lately?" but instead exclaims "How great Thou art!"<sup>ii</sup>

Psalm 98 calls us to praise the Lord for the marvelous things God has done. And the most marvelous of all is this: God came to us in Jesus—Emmanuel—God with us. In taking on flesh, in teaching and healing, in suffering and rising, Jesus revealed the very heart of God. He is the victory of God, the wonder of God's love made visible. And our only fitting response is praise.

"The Lord reigns! The Lord is King!" With the arrival of the Christ-child, the world was treated to the ultimate display of God's kingdom reign. It wasn't at all what the people expected—because Jesus didn't lay in a palace, but in a manger; Jesus didn't mingle with the rich and famous, but with the poor and the forgotten; Jesus didn't enter Jerusalem on a stately stallion but a lowly donkey; Jesus wasn't adorned with a crown of jewels, but a crown of thorns. One preacher put it this way:

In Christ Jesus the Lord's power is on display as never before. Want to see power? Watch Jesus touch the untouchables. Watch Jesus wash the feet of those who would gladly have washed his. Watch Jesus surrender his very life, so powerful was his love. Watch Jesus forgive the very people who just spat on him and drove nails into his flesh. Watch Jesus breathe his last and then quite fantastically show up three days later.<sup>iii</sup>

Make a joyful noise before the king, the Lord. O sing to the Lord a new song!

As one biblical scholar noted,

God's greatest gift—Jesus Christ—is the source of our joy and the song of our salvation. When we hear the night sounds of frogs and crickets, the morning sounds of birds' songs, and the evening sound of dogs barking, the whole of creation is 'making a joyful noise.' All of nature praises God as the moon waxes and wanes, as the sun rises and drops below the horizon, as the stars twinkle and frost silvers the earth. Psalm 98 reminds us that praise is given to God not only by humanity, but by all of nature and all the creatures! How can we keep from singing?"<sup>iv</sup>

The season of joy does not wait for Advent or Christmas—it begins now. Hear the rivers clap their hands, the trees sway in praise, the birds greet the morning with song, the stars twinkle in delight. Let our hearts join this symphony of creation, lifting a new song to the Lord, rising in wonder and thanksgiving as we stand together and sing *Joy to the World!*

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<sup>i</sup> Luke 19:40

<sup>ii</sup> James Howell @[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=693](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=693)

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Trisha Lyons Senterfitt, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 1, 130.

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