



*Joy
to the
World*



Advent Resources 2019 - Joy to the World!

It's the 300th Anniversary of the lyrics for "Joy to the World!" 2018 saw many churches focus their celebrations around the anniversary of Silent Night. This year consider using "Joy to the World" as your anchor. Below you will find some theme ideas and sermon starters to get your thoughts going. There are also some non-MCC resources including a complete series on this carol with worship elements, sermon starters, music suggestions and other resources (See "Repeat the Sounding Joy" below). Why re-invent the wheel? We MCC'ers have skills at inclusifying and adapting resources! There are also links to other denominational resources and to excellent subscription resources.

It is acknowledged that there are no resources listed in languages other than English. This is primarily due to a lack of time to solicit resources and recommendations from others who are familiar with the resources, culture and language. It is hoped that the Themes listed here may be translated and interpreted to fit your local cultural contexts.

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JOY TO THE WORLD - Background

2019, marks the 300th Anniversary of the lyrics composed by Isaac Watts in 1719! This very well-known carol was set to several different tunes and finally to music by Lowell Mason (1792-1872) which became the most popular. It was not originally written as a Christmas Carol however its theology lends itself to the Christmas celebration. Isaac Watts based his lyrics on Psalm 98 (particularly verses 4-9), 96:11-12 and Genesis 3:17-18

Stanza 3 is not based on the Psalm, which is why many leave out this verse. The "curse" is a reference to Genesis 3:17 "As a part of *five-point Calvinism*, the *total depravity of [man]*, the curse is a significant part of classic Reformed theology, Isaac Watts' theological perspective." (From history of hymns on www.umcdiscipleship.org)

The hymnal of the United Reformed Church in the UK, *Rejoice and Sing (1991)*, altered the stanza as follows:

No more let thorns infest the ground,
Or sins and sorrows grow;
Wherever pain and death are found
He makes his blessings flow.

THEME IDEAS

OPTION ONE – "Joy to the World" – spend the four weeks of Advent on the four phrases of the first verse. You might also consider the phrases in reverse order beginning with how "heaven and nature sing" the Divine Presence, proclaiming the both/and of God being with us and coming into our awareness! The reverse order would leave you with proclaiming the "Lord"/Christ/God/Divine IS come on the Sunday before Christmas. It works in either order. Think about it.

- Joy to the world the Lord is come
 - o Dig into the "IS"
 - o we celebrate that which already is as well as that which we anticipate
 - o what does "Joy to the world" even look like or sound like?
- Let earth receive her king
 - o We would inclusify "king" how might you change it? What insight does the change offer?
 - o What is a progressive understanding of receiving the "king", the God of gods?
 - o How do we receive that which is already here or already given?
- Let every heart prepare him room
 - o we might inclusify as "let every heart prepare Christ room"
 - o notice the "every heart" – how do we help ALL prepare, not just church members?
 - o what does it mean to "prepare Christ room"?
- And heaven and nature sing
 - o All of creation breaks into song!
 - Notice the "Let" in the previous two lines. Do we LET all creation sing or do we suppress the song(s) of Creation?

- There is a Church of the Latter-Day Saints version that says “And saints and angels sing!”
 - What does that bring up or offer?

OPTION TWO – “Start Singing!”

- Sing HOPE into the world
- Sing JUSTICE into the world
- Sing PEACE into the world
- Sing LOVE into the world
- Sing JOY into the world – Christmas Eve

- Stop “sinning” and start “singing” – stop “missing the mark,” missing the point, believing we are separate – instead “sing”, “vibrate”, “resound” with hope, justice, peace, love and joy
- speak up, sing out, be proactive – this is part of preparing for the coming of Christ into our daily lives – living into that which we believe is already here – preparing for the awareness of that which already is
- adjust the weekly order as best fits your context

OPTION THREE – “Fear Not! Sing for Joy”

This option focuses on the Advent songs of Luke 1 and 2 noting the fear that is overcome with a song of joy and praise. Consider talking about the co-existence of fear and joy or fear and praise. What are your church members fearing or worrying about? How might songs of joy be transformative for them? We praise and sing despite our fears thus acting and speaking ourselves into a new way of being. Consider partnering with verses of Psalm 42 & 43. Use the carol “Joy to the World” in various settings/styles/arrangements each week of this series. This may also work for small group discussions or house church conversations.

Zechariah was gripped with fear. You might say scared speechless. He comes to sing a song of praise for God who has come to the people and redeemed them. Read the story of Zechariah and then the song of Zechariah.

What strikes you about the song of this older priest?

How would you describe the content of this song?

What does this song say about Christmas?

How does it contribute to your understanding of Christmas?

What do you learn about “joy to the world” from this song?

Elizabeth really doesn’t have a song, but she does burst out in “blessing”! It is from Elizabeth that we get a portion of the “Hail Mary”. The older Elizabeth might well have feared carrying a baby to term.

How do you understand the reference to the leaping of the baby John in Elizabeth’s womb? Is this factual or myth? Does it matter?

How does Elizabeth’s chorus contribute to your understanding of Christmas?

Is there something to be learned about fear and joy in this intergenerational connection?

What do you learn about “joy to the world” from Elizabeth?

Mary was greatly troubled and wondered what the angel proclamation might really mean for her life. Yet despite the fear of the unknown, Mary soon burst out in song praising the power and justice of the Divine.

What strikes you about the song of this young teenager?

How would you describe the content of this song?

What does this song say about Christmas?

How does it contribute to your understanding of Christmas?

What do you learn about "peace on earth" from this song?

The **Angel's** song is the most well-known of these Christmas story songs from the Gospel of Luke. It is the last part of the angelic announcement to the **shepherds**, who were terrified, according to the text. Yet after this song of Joy, they got up and went to seek the Child. They overcame their fear and went on glorifying God.

How would you describe the content of this song?

What does this song say about Christmas?

How does it contribute to your understanding of Christmas?

What do you learn about "joy to the world" from this song?

NON-MCC RESOURCES – These are listed to spur on your creativity. They may or may not be included and may not reflect Progressive Christianity or the diversity we desire for MCC. Still, they have many ideas and worship elements you could draw upon and adapt.

Repeat the Sounding Joy – a full Advent Series by Pastor Larry Leland – a United Methodist District Superintendent. This resource lays out a full 4-week Advent series plus Christmas Eve complete with Worship elements, both traditional and contemporary music recommendations, and suggestions for Visual Elements.

<https://pastorlarryleland.files.wordpress.com/2019/08/worship-resources-repeat-the-sounding-joy-full-series.pdf>

Repeat the Sounding Joy seeks to help congregations rediscover, experience and share the joy that come in the midst of both the celebration of Christ's birth, and the awaiting of his return. Each week will center on a passage from Luke's gospel, leading up to and including the birth of Jesus, but will also incorporate the passages from Isaiah representing the Old Testament lectionary readings for Advent Year A. Each week during Advent's theme also ties into one of the four verses (in order of the UM hymnal) for #246, "Joy to the World."

Any congregation who wishes to use any or all of the series are free to do so, without charge. I simply ask that you acknowledge authorship when appropriate. And if you find the resources helpful and/or useful, let me know. If you feel really moved, you could offer a gift to a local mission where you are who works with children, and offer it in honor of Henry, who planted the seed in the first place.

Advent Unwrapped – United Church of Canada featured theme

<https://www.united-church.ca/worship-theme/advent-unwrapped>

Get ready to make room for Christ and the radical, countercultural messages that Christ brings. Weekly Advent resources with worship elements, sermon starters, visual and music suggestions.

***enfleshed* – Bringing what matters back to the gospel for justice, liberation and delight.**

- <https://enfleshed.com/pages/advent-wreath-litany>
- An LGBTQ+ affirming site – sign-up for their newsletter, blog and more
- Check the resources in their **Liturgy Library**

O Antiphons Reflections

https://s3.amazonaws.com/dfc_attachments/public/documents/3245530/O_Antiphons_Reflections_Final__1_.pdf

For those of us in the Northern Hemisphere, Advent is the time of year when the days are the shortest and darkest. This helps us to see that Jesus was born into a world of Roman oppression and economic inequality. Jesus leads us from despair to hope, this is a part of the Advent theme. We invite you to read and ponder the following reflections on the O Antiphons written by individuals across the country fostering the hope Jesus brings to despair everyday as we encounter people in our daily lives: immigrants, low wage workers, targets of hate crimes and those fighting corporate greed which threatens sacred lands with environmental destruction.

Human Trafficking Advent Focus

<https://www.presbyterian.org.nz/for-ministers/worship-resources/church-seasons>

These Advent reflections, prepared by Council for World Mission [Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand], focus on the issue of Human Trafficking. The resource reads the genealogies of Jesus through the Sundays leading to Christmas. Find how trafficking featured in the family history and story of Jesus. The reflections include the lighting of an advent candle each Sunday through Advent.

Homelessness and Hospitality Advent Focus

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/support-our-work/advent-offering-2019/>

The Methodist Church, the Reformed Church and the Baptist Union in the UK are focusing their Advent Offerings on Homelessness and Hospitality. They have worship resources available related to this theme.

SUBSCRIPTION WORSHIP RESOURCES – for Advent or all Year!

***enfleshed* – Liturgy That Matters** - <https://enfleshed.com/blogs/services/liturgy-that-matter>

- a subscription service for \$8 a month
- each Monday receive worship resources based on the lectionary text two weeks ahead.
- includes worship elements and sermon starters as well as poetry and creative ideas

WORSHIP DESIGN STUDIO with Dr. Marcia McFee – <http://worshipdesignstudio.com/landingpage.cfm> a subscription resource with complete seasonal resources, plus access to worship planning webinars, and coaching. \$299 annual subscription gets you access to over 218 resources. You can view the ideas and plans for this Advent plus previous Advent resources.