

The Songs of Christmas

ADVENT: Day 24

“JOYFUL, JOYFUL WE ADORE THEE”

*Joyful, joyful, we adore thee,
God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before thee,
Opening to the sun above.*

*Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,
Drive the dark of doubt away.
Giver of immortal gladness,
Fill us with the light of day.*

By now, after having read so many stories about the origins of these Christmas hymns, it shouldn't be surprising that so many were written in *hope*.

Spurred by personal tragedies or the fear of worldwide catastrophe, the writers who composed these poems and songs found solace in looking outside of themselves for a hope that transcends all.

And isn't that the central theme of Christmas? That hope came down in the form of Jesus, driving the dark of doubt away?

This is why our hearts swell when we sing these songs. The nostalgia of past Christmases mingles with our present-tense fears, then, through the Holy Spirit's inspiration of these lyrics, our doubts are turned to faith, our sorrow to joy, and our despair into eternal hope in the only One who can save us. Joyful, joyful indeed.

The story behind the song

When pastor Henry van Dyke wrote “Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee” in 1907, he was also a well-known professor of English literature at Princeton University.

While visiting a friend's church, Van Dyke was inspired by the beauty of the Berkshire Mountains in Williamstown, Massachusetts. He wrote the words to “Joyful, Joyful” and handed them to his friend, insisting that the words be sung to the music of Beethoven's “Ode to Joy.”

“Joyful” was written just before World War I. People were worried about the future, but the poet wanted them to consider the Presence of God, even in the most difficult of times. That's why we have insightful, timeless lyrics like, “Melt the clouds of sin and

sadness, Drive the dark of doubts away. Giver of immortal gladness, Fill us with the light of day."

Henry van Dyke knew there were reasons to be worried, but he also knew there were reasons to be joyful. Our God is a God of glory and a Lord of love.

Our eternal wellspring

Later in the hymn, we sing words that remind us of the character and love of Christ for all of us:

*Thou art giving and forgiving,
Ever blessing, ever blest,
Wellspring of the joy of living,
Ocean depth of happy rest!
Thou our Father, Christ our Brother,
All who live in love are Thine;
Teach us how to love each other,
Lift us to the joy divine.*

I encourage you to read those lyrics again, pausing after each line to consider what van Dyke is saying and what the Holy Spirit may want to teach you through those words. What often springs out to me in this stanza is that Jesus is the "wellspring of the joy of living."

We belong to him, and he will take good care of us this Christmas. Our job is simply to love one another as Jesus has loved us.

That is how we live with the joy of Jesus, this Christmas and always.

"The Songs Tell the Story"
An Advent Devotional By: Janet Denison