

# FAR

# ABOVE RUBIES



## Joy to the world

Every year, usually around November time, I promise myself that I am going to be really

organised for Christmas. I will buy my Christmas presents early, write the cards and prepare as much as possible to ensure that I can relax and really enjoy Christmas. It has yet to happen!

There is a story told of a lady who was out doing some last minute Christmas shopping and was tired and weary fighting her way through the crowds, and looking for gifts that had sold out days before. With her hands full of bulky toys she struggled to get on the escalator, and exasperated she blurted out, "Whoever is responsible for this Christmas thing ought to be arrested, strung up and killed." From behind her a single voice shouted out "Don't worry – they already crucified Him!" Sadly there will be many who will engage in a "Christmas thing" which will be far removed from the true meaning of Christmas. They will be so caught up with the busyness, stress and financial pressure, that they won't even give the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who came to bring us joy and peace, a second thought.

One of my favourite carols is "Joy to the World" written by Isaac Watts in 1719 and based on Psalm 98 v 4. Although sung primarily at Christmas and it fits in well, this hymn is not actually about the incarnation but about Christ's Second Coming. Isn't that a good reason to sing it more often? When Watts wrote this hymn, it was in response to the lack of joy and emotion he saw in the congregation, as they sang the songs of his day. It was his desire to see the church get excited about the Second Coming of our Lord and so he made it his lifelong pursuit to write stirring lyrics that would exalt Jesus and His saving work on the cross. I believe that it blesses the Father when we get excited and emotional about His Son Jesus. He is worthy of all the praise and honour that we can give Him. In Zephaniah 3 v 17 we read that "*He (God) will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing.*" If Almighty God can rejoice over us with joy and singing, surely we can do the same for Him!

In Isaiah 12 v 3 we read *“Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.”* I believe that we can only know true and everlasting joy through salvation. As Christians we have the joy of knowing that our sins are forgiven and the assurance of eternal life through Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary. Paul writes in Rom 15 v 13, *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing....”*

In Psalm 51 v 12, however, we see that it’s possible to lose your joy. Here David prays for forgiveness and asks God to *“Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.”* When we are disobedient and sin it’s virtually inevitable that we will lose the joy of our salvation. You know in your heart that things just aren’t right between you and God as the Holy Spirit brings conviction upon you. That is why, like David, we need to ask God for forgiveness, knowing that, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1 v 9).

We may also lose our joy during times of sickness or adversity and can become overwhelmed. It’s then that we should make a conscious effort to praise and thank the Lord, not for the sickness or adversity, but for His goodness and faithfulness. We can also lose our joy when we lose hope. In such moments we need to remind ourselves that with God nothing is impossible! Even in the most difficult circumstances it’s possible to experience the peace and joy that only the Lord can give, and that no-one can take away (John 16 v 22).

In Psalm 100 v 2 we are exhorted to *“Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into His presence with singing!”* There is a hymn which states *“There is joy in serving Jesus .....every hour and every day.”* We sing it but do we really mean it? Do we joyfully serve the Lord or do we grumble and regard service as an inconvenience or intrusion in our daily routine? Can I say that God does not appreciate moaning and complaining, as we can see from the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites in Exodus. If we could just grasp what a real privilege it is to serve the Lord God Almighty, who gave His only Son for us, then we would have no difficulty serving the Lord with gladness.

As we sing *“Joy to the World”* this Christmas let us give thanks for Jesus’ birth and the joy that His salvation brought to the world. Let us also remember that Jesus is coming back again very soon and I pray that we will all be found watching and waiting with joyful anticipation for His return.