

# Would It Still Be Christmas?

## *A Five-Act Drama for White Gift Sunday*

*By the Rev. Sheila Campbell*

*Please credit the Rev. Campbell in your bulletin for play performances.*

*A message from the author: The theology of this play is to emphasize that Christ is the reason for Christmas. If you choose to make changes, please do so reflectively and theologically.*

### **CHARACTERS**

Narrators 1 and 2

Child

Mother

Mary (not pregnant; then very pregnant; then with Baby Jesus)

Joseph

Angel Gabriel

Baby Jesus (for “real” nativity scene)

Choir and Children’s Choir (optional; if you have no choir, the congregation sings)

Shepherds and Animals (as many as you have actors or cardboard figures to represent)

Three Wise Men (may be cardboard figures)

Stage Manager

### **PROPS**

Bible

costumes (especially for Animals)

spotlight or flashlight (to be moved around by Stage Manager)

Christmas tree and presents wrapped in white paper

box containing nativity scene characters (without baby Jesus)

desk (or table) with computer and mouse (could be painted boxes)

manger

glove

incense (to be lit by Stage Manager)

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## Act I: The Prophecy

**NARRATOR 1:** (*Reads from Bible, Isaiah 11:1–9*)

**Hymn:** O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (VU 1)

Scene 1. *Mother and Child enter.*

**CHILD:** Do you think it's going to snow soon? What if there's no snow for Christmas? Will it still be Christmas if it doesn't snow?

**MOTHER:** Of course it will still be Christmas if it doesn't snow. Think about all the Christians around the world who don't have snow for Christmas—like those who live in the Caribbean, Japan, Africa—they don't have a white Christmas.

*They see Nativity Scene and stop to look at it.*

**CHILD:** Look, Mom, it's Mary and Joseph. But there's no baby Jesus.

**MOTHER:** Well, it's good that baby Jesus isn't in the manger yet! I always think it's strange when people place the baby Jesus in the manger *long* before Christmas comes. Somehow it just doesn't seem right. It's as if some people have taken over Christmas and rewritten it to suit their purposes—like people who try to get us to buy lots and lots of Christmas presents.

**CHILD:** Mom, you *have* bought Christmas presents, haven't you?

**MOTHER:** That's supposed to be a surprise, isn't it?

**CHILD:** But, Mom, it wouldn't be Christmas without presents!

**MOTHER:** Yes, it would. Do you see any Christmas presents in that nativity scene?

**CHILD:** There have to be presents at Christmas. Christmas morning wouldn't be any good without presents. Everyone gets presents on Christmas morning!

**MOTHER:** Well, not everyone. Some people can't afford to buy their children Christmas presents, and not all Christians think that the best way to celebrate Jesus' birth is to spend money and buy into consumerism.

**CHILD:** Oh, no! You've been listening to our minister again! She doesn't believe in Christmas presents. She hardly buys any Christmas presents at all. I'm glad I'm not her kid!

**MOTHER:** I think you're missing the point. Our minister thinks Jesus doesn't want us to spend our money on things that we can't really afford and don't really need.

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**CHILD:** But it wouldn't be Christmas without presents!

**MOTHER:** Yes, it would. Jesus is the best present that anyone ever got—after all, the Bible tells us “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son...”

**CHILD:** *Mom!*

**MOTHER:** Okay, I'll put you out of your misery. Yes, I have bought you Christmas presents.

**CHILD:** And they'll be under the tree on Christmas morning?

**MOTHER:** Do we really need to get a tree this year? It's not very environmentally friendly—all those trees cut down every year.

**CHILD:** Mom, it wouldn't be Christmas without a Christmas tree! We have to have a Christmas tree! Promise me you'll get a Christmas tree this year?

**MOTHER:** I'm not so sure about the Christmas tree. Maybe we'll get an artificial one. But then they're made of petroleum products which aren't good for the planet. You're the one who's always reminding us about recycling and taking care of the planet so it'll be in good shape for you and your kids.

**CHILD:** But not at Christmas! Do you really think it could still be Christmas without a Christmas tree and presents?

**MOTHER:** Yes, I do, but I know you expect Christmas to be a certain way each year. Some things are just tradition. Let's discuss it later on.

**CHILD:** Mom, really. Would it still be Christmas without a tree?

**MOTHER:** Come on, let's get home. I bought a gingerbread house to make this afternoon. It'll be fun! After all, it's one of our Christmas traditions and it'll make the house smell wonderful. We'll put on some carols and start to get in the Christmas mood!

*Mother and Child exit.*

*Scene 2. Spotlight on Nativity Scene. Joseph and Mary (not pregnant) stand nearby.*

**MARY:** Joseph, what is it they're talking about? What is this “Christmas” they keep mentioning?

**JOSEPH:** I don't know, Mary. But don't worry about that—you have enough to do with planning our wedding and getting our new home ready.

**MARY:** That's true. My mother is teaching me all the ways to make a house a home. And my father is building us some furniture.

**JOSEPH:** Oh, Mary. It won't be long until we're married. It will be such a wonderful day.

**MARY:** It will be wonderful to be your wife and to raise a family together. Just like everyone else in our village.

*Lights dim on Nativity Scene. Mary and Joseph sit down.*

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## **Act II: The Annunciation**

*Spotlight on the Angel Gabriel and Mary.*

**NARRATOR 2:** *(Reads from Bible, Luke 1:26–38)*

**Hymn:** All Earth Is Waiting (VU 5)

**NARRATOR 1:** *(Reads from Bible, Matthew 1:18–25)*

**Hymn:** The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy (VU 73)

Scene 1. *Mother and Child enter.*

**MOTHER:** I can't believe I'm in trouble with your principal! Just because I put "Christmas Pageant" instead of "Holiday Pageant" in the school newsletter. She was so upset with me. She cautioned me about not respecting other people's religions, and she said that we're no longer living in a mainly Christian country.

**CHILD:** Now you know what it feels like to get yelled at by the principal! But it's always been the holiday pageant, Mom. How could you get that wrong?

**MOTHER:** No it hasn't! When I was growing up, it was the Christmas pageant. I remember one year I read the story about the little drummer boy, and every year the school choir dressed up like angels—even the boys—and we sang Christmas carols. We practised for weeks. We even got time out of class to rehearse. There would be a beautiful Christmas tree in the school foyer and paper-chain decorations all over the halls. *(sighs)* Maybe I'm just focusing on trying to keep the "Christ" in Christmas this year, and that's why I made the mistake.

**CHILD:** But, Mom, it's not just Christmas at this time of year. Now we get to celebrate all kinds of holidays—there's Hanukkah, Kwanza, and some years there's even Ramadan. And the kids get dressed up in different costumes. It's a lot of fun. And we get to do drumming and other really neat stuff! Not just sing some dumb Christmas carols.

**MOTHER:** Yes, but then it doesn't feel like Christmas. How can it be Christmas without all the wonderful Christmas carols?

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**CHILD:** I know which one is your favourite!

**MOTHER:** Which one?

**CHILD:** Hark! the Herald Angels Sing.

**MOTHER:** You're right. Just imagine...all the children for thousands of years gathered around the manger singing, "Hark! the herald angels sing, / Glory to the newborn King..."

**CHILD:** Mom, that song wasn't around when Jesus was born.

**MOTHER:** How do you know?

**CHILD:** We learned it in Sunday school. Charles Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, wrote it in 1739.

**MOTHER:** Oh, well, it just seems that it should have always been sung. Music is such an important part of Christmas. I wonder...Would it still be Christmas if there weren't Christmas carols?

**CHILD:** Sure it would, Mom. We could sing regular songs instead, like "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas." I know you like that one. Christmas carols are sappy, anyway.

**MOTHER:** Well, maybe you're right. It would still be Christmas without carols, but it wouldn't *feel* as much like Christmas. But thanks for mentioning "White Christmas." That reminds me that next Sunday is White Gift Sunday, and I have to buy some food and white tissue paper.

**CHILD:** What's with this White Gift Sunday, anyway? And what happens to those gifts that we put under the tree? I never see anyone get to open them!

*Mother and Child exit.*

Scene 2. *Spotlight on Nativity Scene with Mary (pregnant) and Joseph.*

**MARY:** Oh, Joseph, and just when I thought they were getting it! There's only one thing we can't do without for it to be Christmas (*cradles her round tummy*). Can't they feel the peace of Christ surrounding them? Why do they need all these other things to "get in the Christmas spirit"?

**JOSEPH:** You're right, Mary. It would still be Christmas without Christmas trees and presents and carols. After what the angels have told us, we know that those things don't make it Christmas. People get so caught up in the busyness and consumerism of Christmas today. It's sad, because they miss what truly matters. If only they knew what it really takes to make it Christmas. If only they could feel the Christmas spirit all year round, rather than just thinking about it when the stores advertise it.

**MARY:** But they are at least thinking about it, Joseph. I think they do want Christmas to mean more than decorations and presents. I think people just need to slow down and listen to their hearts. Listen to God whispering to them the true meaning of Christmas. I think that's what will really make people happy. Not all these presents.

**JOSEPH:** You're right, Mary. We'll pray that they find real meaning in the true "reason for the season." We'll pray that they feel the Christmas spirit each and every day.

*Spotlight off Nativity Scene.*

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### **Act III: Bethlehem**

**NARRATOR 2:** *(Reads from Bible, Luke 2:1-4)*

**Hymn:** Once in Royal David's City (VU 62)

**NARRATOR 1:** *(Reads from Bible, Luke 2:5-8)*

**Hymn:** Go, Tell It on the Mountain (VU 43)

*Scene 1. Mother and Child enter. Walk to Christmas tree. Hang decorations. Box containing pieces for small nativity scene is near tree.*

**MOTHER:** Oh, the house is starting to look so beautiful!

**CHILD:** See, Mom, I told you we needed a Christmas tree to make it feel like Christmas. And it's so cool that there are already so many presents under the tree!

**MOTHER:** Well, don't peek! You need to have some surprises. And besides, Santa Claus will bring most of the presents after you're asleep on Christmas Eve.

**CHILD:** Um, Mom. You keep saying Christmas is about more than presents and trees, but you still want to pull that Santa Claus fairy-tale stuff?

**MOTHER:** Maybe you're right. I don't know how Santa got into Christmas in the first place. I think it must have had something to do with a legend about Good King Wenceslas. So...do you want a Christmas stocking this year or not?

**CHILD:** Can I have another big present if I don't have a stocking?

**MOTHER:** No! You're getting enough stuff, anyway. Besides, it's always a hassle shopping for things for stockings. I end up buying stuff just because it fits in a stocking and not because you really want or need it. I think I'm going to do away with stockings this year. That's one thing

we can do to be more “Christmas-like.” How about if we donate the money we’d spend on stockings to a charity? You pick which one. Or we could make our White Gift bigger this year.

**CHILD:** Why do we give for White Gift, anyway? I still don’t get what it’s all about. And I still don’t know who gets those gifts. What happens to them, anyway?

**MOTHER:** Well, White Gift Sunday’s been around for as long as I can remember. Why don’t you search for it on the Internet and find out more about it?

*Child goes to desk with computer and mouse. Surfs the Internet.*

**CHILD:** Hey, Mom. Come check this out. White Gift Sunday started from the story of a king who had a birthday party and invited all his subjects. Some of them were rich and some were poor. He didn’t want the poor people to feel bad if they couldn’t give him a big gift so he asked everyone to wrap their gifts in white paper so no one would know who gave the king which gift. Cool.

**MOTHER:** But that doesn’t explain how we got White Gift Sunday. Keep looking.

**CHILD:** Here it is! A Methodist church used to do a gift exchange with the children of the congregation. But some kids were rich and could give neat gifts and other kids were poor and gave not-so-neat gifts. In 1903, two of the minister’s daughters came up with the idea of wrapping all the gifts in white paper so that no one knew who gave what and so that the gifts got distributed randomly. So everyone felt good. That’s kind of cool.

**MOTHER:** So that’s why we wrap gifts in white tissue paper. It makes sense now. Some people in our congregation can give a really big gift on White Gift Sunday, and other people can’t. But no one can tell what anyone gives because they’re all wrapped the same. So everyone can give the way the Spirit calls them to give. I like that.

**CHILD:** Okay, I think it’s a good idea to put the stocking money toward White Gift Sunday. But where does the money go after we donate it?

**MOTHER:** That part I do know. If people give non-perishable food, like canned tuna, peanut butter, and baby formula, the church takes it to the food bank. If people give money, the church sends it to the Mission and Service Fund and they use it where there’s the most need. Some of the money might go to United Church partners in Haiti so they can help people recover from the earthquake, or it might go to partners in Pakistan to help people rebuild after the flood.

**CHILD:** How about we spend half of the stocking money buying food for the food bank and then give the other half to the Mission and Service Fund?

**MOTHER:** That’s a great idea. I’ll tell the ladies at the UCW what we’re doing this year.

**CHILD:** I can tell the kids in Sunday school and maybe they’ll do it, too!

*Fade spotlight off Mother and Child.*

**Hymn:** Prepare the Way of the Lord (VU 10) (*Sing three times*)

Scene 2. *Spotlight on Mother and Child. Child picks up box of nativity scene characters; opens it.*

**CHILD:** Look! I found the nativity scene (*pulls out pieces one by one*). But where's baby Jesus?

**MOTHER:** I hid him. He doesn't belong in the manger yet. I'll put him in the manger after the church service on Christmas Eve.

**CHILD:** Where do you want the three wise men to go?

**MOTHER:** Hmm...They shouldn't go out yet, either. They don't arrive until 12 days after Christmas, when we celebrate Epiphany. You can put out the animals and the shepherds. Oh, I love the nativity scene. It just wouldn't feel like Christmas without it.

**CHILD:** Yes, it would.

**MOTHER:** Not for me. Nativity scenes have helped people remember the story of the birth of the Christ child for centuries! It wouldn't be Christmas without a nativity scene.

**CHILD:** You're not going to like what we learned in Sunday school last week.

**MOTHER:** What do you mean?

**CHILD:** Well, you know how there weren't Christmas carols back in early Christian times?

**MOTHER:** Yes, but what's that got to do with nativity scenes?

**CHILD:** No nativity scenes either. Not a one.

**MOTHER:** You're kidding!

**CHILD:** Nope. Not until St. Francis of Assisi. He created the first one in Italy in the year 1224. So they're kind of "new" in terms of us celebrating Christmas.

**MOTHER:** Oh. Well, we have them now. And that's what matters.

**CHILD:** So, are you saying that it wouldn't be Christmas without nativity scenes?

**MOTHER:** Well, it would still be Christmas; it just wouldn't *feel* as much like Christmas.

*Spotlight off Mother and Child.*

Scene 3. *Spotlight on Nativity Scene. Mary cradles Baby Jesus.*

**MARY:** Joseph, do you understand what this “feeling like Christmas” is all about?

**JOSEPH:** Not really, Mary. But it seems that people today need *things*—presents, trees, nativity scenes, and decorations—for them to feel like it’s Christmas. I wonder what they’re really feeling. I don’t think it has much to do with this Christ child. (*Kneels beside Mary and touches Baby Jesus. Mary and Joseph smile at each other.*)

**MARY:** I can’t believe they’re *not* feeling the Christ child’s spirit with them. After all, you don’t need *things* to feel loved. Being near Baby Jesus, it’s hard to believe that not everyone can feel it.

**JOSEPH:** You’re right, Mary. People have picked up a lot of bad habits over the centuries when it comes to Christmas. I hope they can learn that the Christ child doesn’t care about any of these things. He cares only that people love God and one another.

**MARY:** Oh, Joseph. Maybe it’s easier for us to feel Christ’s spirit with us. We had the angels to guide us and, of course, we have Baby Jesus right here with us.

**JOSEPH:** Yes, Mary. But so do they.

*Spotlight off Nativity Scene.*

**Hymn:** It Came upon the Midnight Clear (VU 44)

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## Act IV: Shepherds

**NARRATOR 2:** (*Reads from Bible, Luke 2:8–10*)

**Hymn:** While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks (VU 75)

**Hymn:** Angels, from the Realms of Glory (VU 36)

**NARRATOR 1:** (*Reads from Bible, Luke 2:11–14*)

**CHOIR:** (*sings*) Angels We Have Heard on High (VU 38)

**NARRATOR 2:** (*Reads from Bible, Luke 2:15–20*)

**CHILDREN’S CHOIR:** (*sings*) The Friendly Beasts (or any other appropriate carol)

Scene 1. *Mother and Child walk slowly toward live Nativity Scene.*

**MOTHER:** That was a wonderful Christmas Eve service. I loved the hymns and Christmas carols. And the sanctuary is always decorated so beautifully—all the white gifts under the Christmas tree...the decorations, the candles, the smell of evergreen branches. Oh, the music! It's beginning to feel a lot like Christmas.

**CHILD:** That's not what you said last night!

**MOTHER:** Well, I was tired and there was so much to do. Then the stores were crowded and we had all those people coming for dinner. I was just swamped. And of course, it had to be busy at work too. You're just lucky that you get two weeks for Christmas vacation!

**CHILD:** Winter break, Mom.

**MOTHER:** What?

**CHILD:** It's not Christmas vacation. It's winter break.

**MOTHER:** Oh. Well, at least you're having a holiday. I have had so much to do, I can hardly wait for Christmas to be over.

**CHILD:** But you say you look forward to Christmas for the whole year!

**MOTHER:** Well, maybe I shouldn't. It's so much work!

**CHILD:** Look, Mom. There's that really lifelike nativity scene again. And look—the baby Jesus is there too now!

*Shepherds enter and take their places around the manger.*

**MOTHER:** And shepherds. The shepherds are there now. They weren't there the last time we saw this. They all look so peaceful.

**CHILD:** And relaxed. They look a lot more relaxed than you do, Mom.

**MOTHER:** Well, maybe they just kept Christmas simple. Maybe they didn't have 37 people on their Christmas list to shop for. Maybe they didn't invite 20 people to a Christmas party last Saturday night. Maybe they didn't have to decorate the house, and do Christmas baking, and...

**CHILD:** Wow, Mom! I thought you said you were feeling in the Christmas spirit after the church service tonight! You're still stressed out!

**MOTHER:** You're right. I guess I'm having trouble feeling like it's Christmas. It feels more like "Consumer-mas." You know, the only thing that really made me feel like it was Christmas was when we decided not to buy stocking gifts and instead focused on our White Gift service. It

was great how the women in the UCW got excited about it, and organized the food drive at our church. That felt like Christmas.

**CHILD:** So many kids in Sunday school helped, too. I've never seen that many White Gifts under the Christmas tree before.

**MOTHER:** And we raised a lot of money to send to the Mission and Service Fund.

**CHILD:** Yeah, it feels good to know that. And when I don't see anything in my stocking on Christmas morning this year, I think it's going to feel really good to know that some other kid has a Christmas dinner, and that we did something to help people all around the world.

**MOTHER:** You know, every time we see this nativity scene, I get more in the "real" Christmas spirit. There's something about this nativity scene that's different.

**CHILD:** I think I know what you mean. I'm feeling happy about giving this year. I still want the presents under the tree, but it all seems different somehow.

**MOTHER:** So, I wonder... Would it still be Christmas if we hadn't got a tree?

**CHILD:** Yeah, it would. It wouldn't look as nice, but it would still be Christmas.

**MOTHER:** Hmm. Would it still be Christmas if we hadn't got presents?

**CHILD:** I'm not so sure about that one! (*laughs*) But it wouldn't be Christmas if we hadn't done something for someone else.

**MOTHER:** That's a good point.

**CHILD:** Okay, would it still be Christmas if we hadn't gone to church and sung Christmas carols tonight?

**MOTHER:** Yes, it would still be Christmas. Even without Christmas carols. Somehow, I think I have some beautiful music playing in my heart tonight. I think the tune is called Christmas spirit! (*laughs*)

**CHILD:** So it would still be Christmas without music?

**MOTHER:** Christmas needs music, but I'm willing to say I'll go for a heavenly choir.

**CHOIR:** (*hums*) Silent Night (VU 67)

**CHILD:** Okay, now you're just getting corny!

**MOTHER:** You're right. But I'm in such a joyful mood. I feel filled with the Christmas spirit! (*throws arms up happily, then hugs Child*)

**CHILD:** That's it. We're going home.

*Mother drops glove (without noticing) as they walk away.*

Scene 2. *Spotlight on Nativity Scene.*

**MARY:** Oh, Joseph. I think they are beginning to understand what it truly means to be filled with the Christmas spirit.

*Enter Animals. They crowd around the manger making animal noises. Mary and Joseph pat them.*

**JOSEPH:** Well, Mary, with choirs of heavenly angels singing, shepherds coming to pay homage to the Christ child, and animals bowing down before him, it's kind of hard not to get it.

**MARY:** Yes, Joseph. But sometimes when people look at us, all they see is another Christmas decoration. They don't get that we're really here to spread the message that "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son."

**JOSEPH:** Tonight I think they saw past the decorations to the real meaning of Christmas. Doesn't it make you feel wonderful, Mary?

*Spotlight off Nativity Scene.*

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## **Act V: The Magi**

**NARRATOR 1:** *(Reads from Bible, Matthew 2:1-6)*

*When Narrator 1 gets to the line "For from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel," sing:*

**Hymn:** Angels, from the Realms of Glory (VU 36)

**NARRATOR 2:** *(Reads from Bible, Matthew 2:7-12)*

*When Narrator 2 gets to the line "When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy," sing:*

**Hymn:** We Three Kings

Scene 1. *Three Wise Men enter, carrying gifts. Stand to one side (not beside Mary and Joseph). Mother and Child enter, looking at the ground, searching for something.*

**MOTHER:** I know I dropped my glove around here somewhere.

**CHILD:** There it is. Over by the nativity scene. Mom, what's going on? This looks different already! (*looks at Nativity Scene*)

*Spotlight on Nativity Scene.*

**MOTHER:** It looks like someone has added more pieces to the scene. There are... (*names the Animals gathered around the manger*).

**CHILD:** Mom, look over there! (*points at Three Wise Men*)

**MOTHER:** Oh, I think those are the three wise men. It looks like they're on their way to the stable in Bethlehem. They might be a little early, though. They're not supposed to show up for another 12 days.

**CHILD:** But if they waited until then someone would be taking this nativity scene down before they even got here.

**MOTHER:** You have a point. This is so peaceful. Let's just enjoy this for a few minutes. (*They stand quietly gazing at the Nativity Scene.*)

*Stage Manager lights incense—actors pause, waiting for it to waft gently around.*

**CHILD:** Mom, do you smell something?

**MOTHER:** Yes, it smells like some kind of incense. You don't think someone is burning frankincense out here, do you?

**CHILD:** I think it's time to go, Mom.

**MOTHER:** But it feels so good here, doesn't it?

**CHILD:** You're right. But the sooner I get home and get to sleep, the sooner tomorrow morning will come.

**MOTHER:** Right. Christmas morning.

**CHILD:** Mom, do you really think it would still be Christmas without all the stuff? Would it still be Christmas without presents? Would it still be Christmas without a Christmas tree? Would it still be Christmas if we hadn't had White Gift Sunday? Would it still be Christmas without Christmas carols and Christmas decorations and snow?

**MOTHER:** What do you think?

**CHILD:** I think you still need presents.

**MOTHER:** Why's that?

**CHILD:** Because I think Christmas is about giving. And you have to have presents to give.

**MOTHER:** I think it would still be Christmas, even without presents.

**CHILD:** How could it be?

**MOTHER:** Because I'm learning that Christmas is about giving of ourselves. We can give peace and joy and good cheer. We can share the real spirit of Christmas with everyone around us.

**CHILD:** So, what do we really need for it to be Christmas, Mom?

**MOTHER:** Just the Christ child. Just the baby Jesus. Jesus is everything we need for it to be Christmas.

*Mary and Joseph hold Baby Jesus. Animals, Shepherds, and Wise Men gather around.*

*Mother and Child look on for a minute and then exit.*

*Lights fade.*

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**Hymn:** (*all sing*) Joy to the World (VU 59)