

REJOICE OH JOY OF HEAVEN

BY JOHN MURCHISON

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14

With so many wonderful songs about the birth of Christ, one may well wonder if the church really needs new Christmas songs. Yet, because the fallen human heart is prone to grow tired of repetition, I am thankful for the work of Jimmy McNeal and Aaron Ivey to put the amazing, timeless truth of Christmas in a fresh context. “Rejoice, Oh Joy of Heaven” is a worshipful reflection on the truth that a transcendent God took on our humanity for His glory and our good, and leads us to rejoice as we ponder anew the miracle of the incarnation.

The first verse reminds us of the deity of Christ when it refers to Him as the “Great I Am.” “I Am” is the name God gives Himself when speaking to Moses, beginning the redemption of His people Israel from slavery. He again and again showed His sovereignty and power through such acts as the ten plagues and through the parting of the Red Sea. The “Great I Am” is a supremely powerful being, which makes it all the more amazing that He would humble Himself and take on flesh to dwell with His people. He left His heavenly throne, where He was worshiped by angels day and night, to be placed in the humble throne of a manger. This baby is truly more than He appears. He is the Son of God, and the fullness of deity dwells within Him.

The first verse also speaks of “Christ the Spotless Lamb,” a reference to the Passover lamb of Exodus 12. God had proclaimed that all the firstborn sons of all the families in Egypt would be killed, unless they sacrificed a lamb “without blemish” and placed its blood on the doorposts. For all the families that believed what God said, God’s judgment passed over them, for the blood of the lamb was seen and accepted as a substitute.

The second verse makes this connection more clear, stating that this baby would be slain, taking our place, bearing our sin and shame. Because of our

sin, God's judgment is coming for the whole world. Yet for those who believe God's Word, the gospel, the sacrifice of the Spotless Lamb Christ is accepted as a substitute for us. He indeed takes our place.

These two truths, the Christ's humility in the Incarnation and His substitutionary death for His followers are celebrated in the chorus. As we meditate on the greatness of Christ, the natural response in the heart of believers is worship and joy. The angels sing to the shepherds in Luke 2 because they know who Jesus truly is, and we join with them. He is Heaven's joy, and He is our joy as well, because He has given Himself to us.

Our culture has certainly put its spin on the Christmas holiday, and we can find ourselves pulled along with its current. It is far too easy to think that the joy of Christmas is found in such things as gifts, decorations, holiday parties, and red cups of holiday-themed coffee drinks. These things can certainly be blessings from God that we are free to enjoy. Yet we must be careful not to miss the true joy of Christmas, and the true joy of eternity, Jesus Christ. "Rejoice oh Joy of Heaven" centers our joy on the person and work of Jesus Christ, leading us to worship at His throne. And that is reason to sing indeed.