

In Spirit *and* in Truth



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Luke 1:46–55, 4:5–8, Deut. 11:16, John 4:1–24, Luke 19:37–40.*

Memory Text: “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (*John 4:23*).

As we have seen all quarter, the first angel's message is a call to proclaim the “everlasting gospel.” At the center of that gospel is Jesus, the incarnate God, the God who through forces and means that our minds cannot even begin to grasp came into this world as a human being.

Think through what this means: the God who created all that was created (*John 1:1–3*) became a human, and in that humanity lived a sinless life and then offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. When you think about the size of the cosmos, the billions of galaxies, each composed of billions of stars, and to believe that the One who created all this was Jesus, it defies the human mind; it is something so incredible we barely can comprehend it. No wonder Paul wrote: “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (*1 Cor. 1:18*).

With a truth like this before us, it is no wonder we want to worship such a God. This week we will explore themes of worship and praise as revealed in the ministry of the incarnate Christ, the Creator who took upon Himself the form and the flesh of the created.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 10.*

Mary's Song of Praise and Worship

Though Mary, the mother of Jesus, has been the subject of an intense amount of religious interest through the centuries, most of that interest is tradition derived from a host of sources that are not rooted in Scripture.

Nevertheless, in the question of Christ's coming to earth, Mary played a crucial and pivotal role: in her womb the Savior of the world was miraculously conceived; in her womb He grew into the infant Jesus. Looking back with all the hindsight and light given us in the New Testament, we only can marvel at the miracle. Though no doubt knowing that she was part of an incredible event that was to have important consequences for her people, the young Mary most likely had no real idea of what she was going to be part of. She knew enough, though, that she could marvel at the amazing circumstances that had so radically changed her life.

Read Luke 1:46–55, often known as the Song of Mary. What is the background to this song? Why is she singing it? What elements of praise and worship are revealed here? What appears here that we have touched on all through the quarter?

This song of praise and worship is filled with allusions and images taken from the Old Testament, the only Scripture that she would have known. Here we can see her giving glory to the Lord and acknowledging His leading not only in her own life but among her own people, as well. Her allusion to Abraham is, clearly, a reference to the covenant the Lord made with His people; she is praising God for His promises to them and sees those promises as her hope and her people's hope for the future.

Again, however much she did not know, she knew enough to see the working of the Lord. For that, she was thankful and worshipful.

How much of the miraculous do you see in your own life? Might it be there and yet you are just too hard, too closed, too wrapped up in yourself to see it as you should?

Worship and Serve

“And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (*Luke 4:5–8*).

Imagine Jesus, after 40 full days of hunger, weariness, self-denial, and privation, now facing the open and blatant temptations of the devil. It is not hard to imagine just how beautiful all “the kingdoms of the world” in their “power” and their “glory” must have appeared to Jesus in this temptation. Satan has been a master at making the things of this world always look so charming, so pleasant, so fulfilling, which is why people so readily fall for the deception this world presents.

Read the above verses carefully, especially Jesus’ response. What does Jesus mean by linking together the verbs “worship” and “serve”? How are they related?

All through the Old Testament, the concept of worshipping false gods and serving them is linked. “And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to *worship* them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven” (*Deut. 4:19; see also Deut. 11:16, Ps. 97:7, Dan. 3:12*). Basically, you serve what you worship; hence, how important it is that you worship only the Lord.

Thus, we see a crucial point about worship. It is hard to imagine someone who worships the Lord in faith, in surrender, in humility and love and fear, at the same time serving other gods, whatever form they may come in. Worship, then, can be a protection for us against idolatry. The more we worship the Lord, even in our private devotion, the better protected we are against serving self, sin, and all the other forces vying for our service.

Think about this idea more: what we worship is what we serve. How have you seen that principle manifested in your own life? How can your worship experience help you stay focused on serving only the Lord?

Worshipping What You Know Not

As we have seen numerous times, even with all the intricate and deep forms of worship that the Lord had instituted for Israel, it was not the forms alone that the Lord cared about. The forms and traditions and liturgy were all means to an end, and that end was a person surrendered in body and mind to his or her Creator and Redeemer. It is much easier, however, to make one's religion a series of formulas, traditions, and outward acts than it is to daily die to self and surrender in humility and faith to the Lord. This fact surely goes a long way in explaining why the Bible spends a lot of time dealing with those whose hearts aren't right with God, regardless of how "correct" their forms of worship are.

This, too, was a problem that Jesus dealt with when here in the flesh.

Read John 4:1–24. What important point about worship was Jesus making to the Samaritan woman in verse 21? Why was He pointing her away from specific places of worship?

In pointing out some of her deepest secrets, Jesus got the woman's attention. He then used that moment to point her to something better than what she had. Jesus uses the powerful phrase "Woman, believe me" in order to show her that true worship went far beyond the outward forms and places of worship. "This mountain" was Mount Gerizim, where the Samaritans had built a temple. Of course, that would be what one would expect a Jew to say to a Samaritan.

But Jesus did not stop there. He included even Jerusalem, the site of the sacred temple that He, Himself, had picked. Thus, early on in His earthly ministry, Jesus was, in a very broad way, pointing to what He later came right out and said in reference to the temple, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (*Matt. 24:2*). In all this, Jesus was working to give the woman the "living water" (*John 4:10*), which is Himself. He wanted her to see that a personal relationship with her Creator and Redeemer was the foundation of worship, and certainly not the forms and traditions of her faith, which had deviated from the true religion of the Jews. His reference to Jerusalem (*John 4:21*), however, proved that He was pointing to something even beyond the system of sacrifice and worship that He Himself had created.

In what ways can all the aspects of your worship experience help you deepen your relationship with God?

The True Worshipers

“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (*John 4:23*).

After pointing the Samaritan away from specific places of worship and then telling her of the superiority of the Jewish faith over hers, Jesus then tells the woman about “the true worshippers.” In verse 21, Jesus said that the hour “is coming” when people will not worship either in that mountain or in Jerusalem; in verse 23, however, He says that the hour “now is” that all true worshippers will worship in spirit and in truth. In other words, do not look to some past glory, and do not look to some future event. Rather, the time “now is” to give the Lord the worship He deserves, and through that worship, experience the love, the grace, and the salvation that He offers.

Jesus said that all true worshippers will “worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” What do these two elements represent, and how are we to apply this to our worship experience today? See also *Mark 7:6–9*.

Jesus here is calling for a balanced form of worship: a worship that comes from the heart, that is sincere and deeply felt, that comes from the love and the fear of God. There is nothing wrong with emotions in worship; after all, our religion calls upon us to love God (*1 John 5:2, Mark 12:30*), and how can that be separated from emotions?

At the same time, God calls upon His true worshippers to worship Him “in truth.” God has revealed His will, His truth, His law—truth that we are expected to believe and obey. True worshippers will love God, and from that love seek to serve Him, obey Him, and do what is right. Yet, how can they know what is right without knowing the truth about faith, obedience, salvation, and so forth? The idea that beliefs do not matter, that only a sincere spirit matters, is misguided. It is only half of the equation. Correct beliefs do not save, but they will give us a greater understanding of the character of God, and that should make us love and serve Him all the more.

Is your worship more spirit than truth, or more truth than spirit? How can you learn to incorporate and balance both these aspects of worship?

Worshipping at His Feet

Throughout the long years of Christian history, the church has been divided over the issue of Christ's divinity. Was He truly the eternal God, One with the Father since eternity? Or was He created later, a being who came into existence through the creative power of the Father?

Though early on in our own church, some confusion on this matter existed, Ellen G. White made it very clear years ago what her position was—a position that, as a church, we have fully accepted today:

“ ‘His name shall be called Immanuel, . . . God with us.’ ‘The light of the knowledge of the glory of God’ is seen ‘in the face of Jesus Christ.’ From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was ‘the image of God,’ the image of His greatness and majesty, ‘the outshining of His glory.’ It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God’s love,—to be ‘God with us.’ Therefore it was prophesied of Him, ‘His name shall be called Immanuel.’ ”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 19.

Read the following texts. What do they tell us about the deity of Christ?

Matt. 2:11, 4:10, 9:18, 20:20, Mark 7:7, Luke 24:52, John 9:38.

Jesus was very clear in His response to Satan (*Matt. 4:10*) that the Lord alone should be worshiped, which leads to the important point shown in the texts above: Christ never refused their worship. No example is given in the numerous times when people worshiped Him where He told them, Don't worship Me, point your worship only toward the Father. In fact, the opposite is the case.

Read Luke 19:37–40. What does Jesus' response to the Pharisees say about His attitude toward those who worshiped Him?

The point here is to reiterate a theme seen all this quarter, which is how crucial it is that Jesus be the center and focus of all our worship. Every song, every prayer, every sermon, everything that we do should, in one way or another, ultimately direct our minds toward Christ, the incarnate God who offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sins. Worship that leaves us with a sense of awe, love, and reverence for our Lord is worship that is no doubt pleasing in His sight.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “God With Us,” pp. 19–26, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Not by seeking a holy mountain or a sacred temple are men brought into communion with heaven. Religion is not to be confined to external forms and ceremonies. The religion that comes from God is the only religion that will lead to God. In order to serve Him aright, we must be born of the divine Spirit. This will purify the heart and renew the mind, giving us a new capacity for knowing and loving God. It will give us a willing obedience to all His requirements. *This is true worship*. It is the fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 189; emphasis supplied.

“One equal with God, acted as servant to His disciples. . . . He to whom every knee shall bow, He whom the angels of glory count it honor to serve, bowed down to wash the feet of those who called Him Lord.”—p. 649.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 The religious leaders of Christ’s day claimed to know the Scriptures but were oblivious to the greatest miracle in history, the birth of the Messiah. Meanwhile, the wise men of the East came looking for Him in the right place at the right time. What significance does this story hold for us today as Christians, and as a church? How can we avoid the mistakes of the people in Christ’s day, as we see the prophecies of the last days being fulfilled?
- 2 Talk about the deity of Christ, why that is so important to our faith and worship. What do we lose if we, in any way, make Christ anything other than fully God?
- 3 Think again about Mary and what must have been going through her mind at this incredible turn of events. Think how much she didn’t understand and how hard some of this might have been for her (being pregnant without ever knowing a man certainly must have been stressful). And yet, even amid all this, she was able to praise the Lord and worship Him, despite so many unanswered questions, so many troublesome thoughts, so many unknowns. How can we learn to do the same: to worship and praise the Lord amid times of uncertainty and unknowns? In fact, why might that be of all times the best time to be wholeheartedly in an attitude of worship?

The Priest Who Helped the Adventists

Ernesto is a farmer and a community leader in central Philippines. He was a devoted member of his church. As he read the Bible, Ernesto discovered some things that didn't seem right. He learned that our bodies are the temple of God, yet his own priest smoked. Ernesto asked the priest about this, and the priest only responded, "Leave me alone." Dissatisfied, Ernesto went home.

A few days later, some Seventh-day Adventists asked Ernesto for permission to hold evangelistic meetings in the area. Ernesto agreed. The Adventists didn't have a sound system, so Ernesto offered his personal sound system. The Adventists thanked Ernesto and asked him to operate the sound system to be sure that it was properly cared for. Ernesto agreed. Ernesto attended the meetings and operated the sound system for the Adventists. He also invited others to attend the meetings as well.

The Adventist leader asked Ernesto to let his teenage children read the Bible texts at the meetings. Again Ernesto agreed, though some warned him it could be trouble. When the meetings ended, 25 people were baptized, including Ernesto, his wife, and two of their children. Ernesto learned to give Bible studies, and a year later he held another evangelistic series after which 14 people were baptized, including three more of his children.

The priest gave Bibles to his parishioners and told them to read the Bible so they would be prepared if Ernesto tried to beguile them away from their church. As some members read their new Bible, they noticed things. One woman asked, "The Bible says we shouldn't worship idols. Then why do we bow to statues?"

The priest answered, "You're right. The Bible forbids it. Adventists cannot be faulted for refusing to worship idols." Another asked why they eat pork when the Bible forbids it. The priest said, "We cannot fault those who refuse to eat pork."

A third member asked him, "We worship on Sunday, but I can't find Sunday mentioned in the whole Bible. Are the Adventists right to worship on Saturday?" The priest answered, "The Adventists are right to worship on Saturday, but our tradition is to worship on Sunday."

As a result of the priest's responses, several families studied the Bible with Ernesto, and eventually they were baptized into the Adventist Church.

Thanks to the priest's distribution of Bibles and his answers to his members' questions, more than fifty members of Ernesto's former church have become Seventh-day Adventists. Ernesto is teaching them how to give Bible studies so they can help their church grow.

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