

# 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. Think about the size of the cosmos, the billions of galaxies, each composed of billions of stars. Imagine! 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 throughout 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 to 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 probably had no real idea of that which she was going to be a part. 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 throughout the quarter?

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This song of praise and worship is filled with allusions and images taken from the Old Testament, the only Scripture that Mary 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?**

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## *The Lesson in Brief*

► **Key Text:** *John 4:23*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Explain how Christ's ministry and example highlight the themes of true worship in contrast with the false worship practices of the day.

**Feel:** Sense the essence of what it means to worship God in spirit and in truth.

**Do:** Go beyond outward ritual and form and drink deeply from the living water that Jesus promises to provide as we worship and grow in our relationship with God.

► **Learning Outline:**

### I. Know: Christ and Worship

**A** How did Mary's prayer acknowledge the momentous occasion of the fulfillment of God's promises to His people?

**B** How did Christ make the boundaries of worship clear during His wilderness temptations?

### II. Feel: In Spirit and Truth

**A** How did the Samaritan woman at the well try to use differences in worship preferences in an attempt to sideline Christ's revelation to her? How might we do the same today?

**B** What did Christ identify as the unqualified formula for true worship?

**C** What does it take to worship in a way that pleases God?

**D** How do we keep a balance of spirit and truth in our worship?

### III. Do: Living Water

**A** What do we need to do in order to drink deeply of the living water that Jesus provides?

**B** What part does living water play in true worship?

► **Summary:** By His example, Christ reinforced the need for God's supremacy in our regard and service and the importance of worshiping in spirit and truth.

## 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?

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All throughout the Old Testament, the concept of worshiping false gods is linked with serving them. “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, while at the same time serving other gods, in whatever form they may come. 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 to stay focused on serving only the Lord?**

## *Learning Cycle*

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** When we spend time with the stories of Jesus, we discover the true subject of our worship, and also discover what He taught about worship.

**Just for Teachers:** Collect examples that are available to you of how Jesus has been trivialized in different ways. If possible, bring some of these to the class discussion, or print out copies of these kinds of things from Internet sites. Examples could include Jesus “action figures” or other figurines, Jesus T-shirts, music, or instances of people using Jesus to justify some kind of action or choice that seems obviously to contradict what Jesus taught. Try to discourage class members from being judgmental of things in which other believers find meaning. Instead, focus on examples that seem blatantly commercial or otherwise trivial. Lead the discussion as suggested below, seeking to lead class members to be discerning in their recognition of the positives and negatives that exist in the ways in which Jesus is portrayed in various cultures.

**Opening Activity:** Ask students to suggest examples of how Jesus is trivialized in different cultures of the world—even in church culture. Share the examples you have collected and, as a group, reflect on the possible motivations for the various items being considered. Talk about why Jesus seems to be so common in many cultures of the world, even some of those not obviously “Christian.” Discuss why Jesus seems to have become a kitsch character or marketing opportunity and how this interest in Jesus is different from authentic worship. What are the positive aspects that might come from someone wearing a Jesus T-shirt, for example? But how is worship something different and more than this? Conclude this discussion by introducing the stories of how people who actually met Jesus responded to Him.

### ► **STEP 2—Explore**

#### **Bible Commentary**

**Just for Teachers:** This section provides an opportunity to consider aspects of worship through stories of Jesus’ life and teachings.

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## 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 with which Jesus dealt 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?

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By 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 that the forms and traditions of her faith, which had deviated from the true religion of the Jews, were certainly not. 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?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**I. A Song About Jesus** (*Review Luke 1:46–55 with your class.*)

Even before Jesus was born, the good news of His coming prompted Mary to praise God for His goodness, His acts in history, His intervention in her life, and the hope of salvation in Jesus. Mary was visited by an angel with a personal message and task for her—recorded in Luke 1:26–38—but she was quick to recognize that this news was part of the bigger plan and actions of God throughout history. Her expression of worship demonstrated the depth of her understanding that something big was afoot and that she was privileged to play a part in it.

**Consider This:** What stands out to you from Mary’s song? Do you think this song was spontaneous, inspired, or perhaps carefully composed? Why? And what difference might it make in how we read it?

**II. Tempted to “Worship”** (*Review Luke 4:5–8 with your class.*)

The second temptation of Jesus, as recorded in Luke 4 (third temptation in Matthew’s account), was perhaps the greatest offer to Jesus. The core of His mission on earth was to reclaim the kingdoms of this world as God’s domain. This temptation seemed a shortcut to that goal. But Jesus stood firm, asserting that God, and only God, is worthy of worship. He also set the example of maintaining true worship no matter what the cost or how alluring the offer, looking forward to the promise held out in John’s vision in Revelation: “Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices shouting in heaven: ‘The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever’ ” (*Rev. 11:15, NLT*).

**Consider This:** Why might Jesus have found this temptation attractive?

■ *How does it change our perspective on worship to remember the promises we have for the future—such as this one in Revelation—whatever our current circumstance?*

**III. Jesus Talks About Worship.** (*Review John 4:1–24 with your class.*)

When Jesus answered questions that were the topic of theological discussions of His day, He often sidestepped the questions, choosing instead to reframe the conversation and give His listeners a new way of considering the topic. One of these instances is found in John

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## 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 tells the woman about “the true worshipers.” 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 worshipers 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 worshipers 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*.

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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 love be separated from emotions?

At the same time, God calls upon His true worshipers to worship Him “in truth.” God has revealed His will, His truth, His law—truth that we are expected to believe and obey. True worshipers 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?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

4:19–24, in which the Samaritan woman raised a common discussion about where God can be truly worshiped. Jesus explained that how we worship—the attitude with which we come to worship—is much more important than where. He reminded the woman that God is accessible to everyone who genuinely seeks Him. But Jesus also demonstrated that asking the right questions is more important than answering the lesser questions that can easily distract us.

**Consider This:** What do you understand that Jesus meant when He talked about worshipping “in spirit and in truth”?

- *What are some of the questions by which we might get distracted?*

### ► **STEP 3**—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Jesus is the center of our worship, so understanding what He said about it and how He lived it is vital to creating a healthy life of worship, individually and as a church. It is interesting that Jesus did not seem to say much about worship directly, and we have only occasional reports of His involvement in what we would recognize as worship. Yet, He lived a life of worship and service to God, His Father, and constantly pointed others to Him, which is what worship must be about.

#### Application Questions:

- 1 Compared to other parts of the Bible and to its role in our church life, worship might be considered to play a relatively small role in the life of Jesus. Do you agree or disagree?
- 2 How does worship in the life and teaching of Jesus compare with worship in the life of the church today?
- 3 Do you think worship is more effective or engaging when it is spontaneous or when it is carefully planned? Why? What are the advantages of spontaneous worship? What are the advantages of a more planned form of worship?
- 4 How are we sometimes tempted to worship in ways that lead us away from God? How do we guard against this?

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## 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.*

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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. There is no example of Jesus telling the numerous people who worshiped Him, 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?

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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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

5 Do you think Jesus was saying to the woman at the well that places of worship are unimportant? Why, or why not? How might places dedicated to worship be helpful or unhelpful to worship?

► **STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** These activities are intended to prompt class members to worship in ways they might not usually do—to praise God in written form and to look for echoes of Jesus and prompts to praise in their local area.

**Individual Activities:** Provide paper and pens or pencils and ask class members to compose their songs of praise to God and His actions in their lives and the world in the style of Mary’s song in Luke 1. This could be written as poetry, prose, or even just notes, using the introductory words from Mary’s song as a starting point and prompt:

“Oh, how I praise the Lord.

How I rejoice in God my Savior!

For He . . .”

If members of the class are willing to share their “songs,” take some time to read these as a closing prayer for the class.

**Group or Team Activities:** As a class, plan a walk in a local neighborhood or nearby natural area. This could take place during class time or at another time, perhaps a Sabbath afternoon. Plan to have a prayerful attitude and to walk gently, with an awareness of the presence of God and alertness to echoes of God in the world around us. Look for prompts to prayer or praise as the group walks, pausing to point out or acknowledge them. Remember, Jesus often used images and stories from the natural world to illustrate what the kingdom of God is like. After an agreed time, finish the worship time with group prayer and perhaps share a meal together or visit with class members in the place you have explored.

**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.”—Page 649.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ Talk about the deity of Christ—why it is so important to our faith and worship. What do we lose if we, in any way, make Christ anything other than fully God?
- ❸ 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, of all times, be the best time to be wholeheartedly in an attitude of worship?