

December 3, 2006

## What is Christian Worship?

Unchurched visitors or newer Christians can experience worship as a weird and alien moment. Long ago John the Baptist fervently helped prepare hearts and minds to worship Jesus. After all these centuries, not much has changed. Do we even know what it means to worship Jesus?



**Matthew 3: 1-6** In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."' Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

### Reflection

Have you ever heard a message you didn't want to listen to? Someone trying to help you with information and suggestions in a way you didn't think was relevant, would work or was just plain wrong?

Years ago when my oldest daughter was a high school freshman she had to write one her first long essays. She was struggling with the project, even forgot it in her locker, which we had to go and retrieve. Tensions were high at our house as she complained about how she didn't have enough time to prepare (she did, but she procrastinated); the teacher didn't explain the assignment properly (he did, his instructions, once rescued from her locker were clear) and generally was a stupid waste of time (it was a challenging assignment). Then a messenger (me, her father) came into her life with a difficult message.

"If you outline your paper first, the paper will write itself!" I proclaimed. Well this message took some explaining of course and was soundly and loudly rejected. "Who has time? That is a lot of work for something I don't turn in! I've never done this before, it can't work!" The messenger was insistent and unwavering.

Being prepared to write the paper takes this unusual step of outlining first she was told over and over.

At first she complained, and continued to point out that this could not possibly work. Soon however, it started getting quiet and suddenly a paper was produced that was submitted and received high marks. Her comment was: "when I finished outlining the paper, it practically wrote itself!" The messenger smiled to himself and said a small thanks to God for a small triumph, the message of being prepared and making a straight path worked!

John the Baptist, the messenger telling the world that the Kingdom of God is at hand, telling us to repent, proclaiming Jesus was a messenger easy to ignore. Dressed in wild animal skins, eating bugs and honey, his looks could scare. But his message was clear, and it IS true. So people listened, people were baptized. The strange and unusual news of the coming of Jesus was becoming real to the people of Jerusalem, Judea and surrounding areas. How do you listen to messengers? As a Christian what do you need to do today to prepare the way for the Lord in your life? In your family? And in your heart?

### Readings

#### Monday, December 4

Matthew 5: 38-42. Following the teachings of Jesus challenges us to rise above our human feelings. How do you work through your personal challenges to following Jesus' teachings?

#### Tuesday, December 5

Matthew 6: 1-4. We live in an age where being recognized and rewarded is everything. Jesus teaches us in this passage to quietly serve, without recognition. Where are you in shunning recognition for your work as a child of God and following Jesus teachings?

#### Wednesday, December 6

Mark 10: 17-31. What does it mean to worship Jesus? Here we see that following rules and traditions are not truly worshipping and believing. How can you make your heart open up and let the love of Christ be your strength?

#### Thursday, December 7

Matthew 7: 15-20. False prophets will lead a Christian astray. In what ways can this community of faith help you stay true to Christ and reject false teachings?

#### Friday, December 8

Proverbs 4: 1-9. Wisdom is found in loving the Lord, believing in Jesus Christ and working towards changing our lives to meet his will, not our own.

On Thanksgiving Eve we introduced our congregation to the Rev. Dr. Robert Mbinda. Dr. Mbinda is serving in Mbeya, Tanzania, a town in the south/central region of that East African nation. Several years ago Father Robert and his wife Mariam took into their home the children of a couple who had both died from the effects of AIDS. Over the course of several years, other children joined them and eventually the numbers grew. To meet the needs of these children, Father Robert left his position as a seminary professor and opened a full-time ministry called Good Samaritan Orphanage. They are currently caring for 79 children and has a plan to grow capacity for 200 children as soon as possible. We have recently been welcomed into partnership with several other congregations to support this ministry.



This partnership is bound to change the lives children who will be the future leaders of Tanzania. It is also bound to change our lives, too. It offers us an up-close and personal connection to the greater needs of this world, a perspective desperately needed by ourselves and by our children.

During this Advent Season, we invite you to give 10%, or a tithe, of the amount you spend on Christmas gifts and celebration to help meet the basic needs of these orphans in Tanzania: shelter, food, clothing, education, health care, and the love of Christ.

100% of these gifts will be transferred to Good Samaritan Orphanage.

Make a gift in honor of someone on your Christmas list. Gift cards are available in the church entry or printable from our website.

Make your check out to St. John Lutheran Church and write "Tanzania" in the memo section of your check. A special offering envelope is also available. For more information, please contact Pastor Brian Hughes at [Brian@stjohnmd.org](mailto:Brian@stjohnmd.org) or Karen Heist at [Karen@stjohnmd.org](mailto:Karen@stjohnmd.org) or call the church office.