

**“How Does Jesus Worship?”**  
**Brentwood First Presbyterian Church**  
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**The Third Sunday of Epiphany**  
**Reverend Michael J Magee, MD**

**Introduction**

Today is the sixth and final message in a series on spiritual formation in our church. A sermon about spiritual practices. And it is the third Sunday after Epiphany, the church season describing the public appearances of Jesus. Our first epiphany is the announcement to Herod of Jesus’ birth. Our second epiphany is Jesus’ appearance as a boy in the temple. Last week, we had an epiphany when we understood his first miracle of changing water into wine not as a magician’s trick, but as a teaching moment. The equivalent in today’s terms of turning 150 gallons of water into 150 gallons of extra hot, low fat, double shot latte. An enacted parable signifying the abundance of God. And between now and Lent, we will discuss the epiphany at Jesus’ Baptism.

But today we are talking about Jesus’ first public sermon, and about his view of worship. On a Saturday morning, in Nazareth, the town gathers in the synagogue to listen to Jesus read and preach. It was no big surprise. He was well known in the area: it was his hometown. He was raised there. They wanted to learn from him. So when he read from the Isaiah scroll, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor,” everyone understood these words to be the words of Isaiah. It is how that prophet from 600 years earlier defined his ministry.

When Jesus finished reading he handed the scroll to the attendant and sat down. In that day you sat in the Moses Seat to teach in the synagogue. So all

eyes were on Jesus, waiting for him to begin his teaching. What would he say about the prophet Isaiah's words. Would the emphasis be on the bad news? That Israel had sinned and was taken into captivity by the Babylonians? Or would he emphasize the good news? That one day God will restore his people? Is the message here that Jesus is Lord, with no rejoinder? Or is the message also what Jesus would do? Can you see the faces of the worshippers? Can you see Jesus smile?

### **Going to church is a habit God wants us to have**

I like the slogan, WWJD. No matter what decision I have to make, I can always go back to WWJD. Deciding what movie to watch. What website to visit. How to behave toward my sons, toward Debbie, toward my patients, toward the nurses and doctors with whom I work. WWJD. You have heard me say how important the incarnation is to my theology of God. That in Jesus, God put on the clothes of humanity to feel our pain, to show us how to behave, and to show us that no one is beyond the power of reconciliation. Because God put on the clothes of humanity, you and I have permission to put on the clothes of Jesus to continue his ministry. This is not something we are obliged to do. It is our honor to do so. WWJD.

Some of you know how involved I was with Boy Scouts as a child and as an adult. There is an award called the "God and Country." It is the highest award for religion in scouting. In the God and Country pamphlet, one of the questions is "How would Jesus worship?" That is the subject of today's message.

So how does Jesus worship? Well, among other things, we know for a fact that he habitually goes to the synagogue, as a both child and as an adult. When Jesus is 12 years old, his parents “misplaced” him. They went to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover, and on their way home they discovered he was missing. They hurried back to Jerusalem and “after three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.’ ‘Why were you searching for me?’ he asked. ‘Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’ Even as a child, Jesus considered all other commitments to be secondary to his relationship to the Father. Jesus never missed being in worship.

Today, we hear Jesus’ first public sermon. “He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom....” Jesus never missed church! It was his custom to be in the synagogue every Sabbath. Why would Jesus never miss worship? He was God’s son – after all – you think he could have skipped out a couple of times! But he never missed worshipping in his Father’s house. Worshipping in church is important to Jesus, so he set us an example for us to follow. Worshipping in church is important to Jesus - more important than any other earthly activity.

The strength of Jesus’ church is its dedication to keeping Sunday a sacred time of worship. Even self-professed atheists understand this. Let me digress about atheists for a moment. I think there is no such thing as a true atheist. Self

professed atheists, yes. But no true atheists. To say you do not believe in something tacitly implies something exists in which you do not believe. I think the word “believe” is not a precise word. Jesus’ brother James writes, “Even the demons believe, and shudder.” “Trust” is the word Christians mean when they say, “believe.” People either trust or do not trust in God’s promises. They either trust or do not trust the scripture. They either trust or do not trust in God. But regardless whether they admit it to themselves or not, everyone believes that God exists. Voltaire, a self professed atheist in the 1700s, predicted that within 100 hundred years, Christianity will be nothing but a relic of the past. Nothing but a historical blip. He said before that happens, the world will first quit worshipping on Sunday. He said: "Christianity will not go away as long as the Christian Sabbath is kept a sacred day."

**In worship, you declare God worthy and God’s Word raises your self-esteem**

The word “worship” means to declare worthy. Jesus declares his Father worthy. You gather to worship because this is where you find Jesus. You gather to hear, see, and in communion, to touch and taste the body of Christ. You sing “How Great Thou Art.” You confess your messiness and your need for God’s Word. You confess your inability to solve your own problems by yourself. You gather around the Word.

Jesus preaches and heals in worship. “He went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, ‘Stand up in front of

everyone.’ Then Jesus asked them, ‘Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil?’ But they remained silent. He looked around at them and, distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.” (Mark 3:1-5). This man was physically broken, and received affirmation from Jesus. Some of you are also spiritually broken. The Word of God heals both kinds of brokenness. People with both kinds of brokenness find affirmation. The Word of God is the fire in your furnace. Without it, your house is cold. It is the fuel in your car. Without it, your motor quits running. The Word of God builds your esteem and it gives you meaning. From the inside out.

Jesus prays the Lord’s Prayer. Certainly in one Gospel he uses the word debt, in another trespasses, and in another sin. But quibbling over the exact words is not the point. The point is, he prays. He becomes one with God in prayer, and invites you to do the same. You commune with God in prayer, using the prayer he taught you to say.

You respond to God’s Word with thanksgiving, and with declaration of trust in God’s promises. God lights the fire in your furnace, and you declare that God is the source of all your blessings. You give glory to God because without God’s Word, you are, frankly, nothing but dust. God’s Word in Genesis creates. And God’s Word throughout scripture gives meaning.

### **In worship God’s Spirit anoints you**

In worship, Jesus declares God’s worth. Jesus preaches, heals, and prays. But Jesus also teaches in worship. When Jesus is challenged by the High Priest, he answers, "I spoke openly to the world. I taught in synagogues and in

the temple, and in secret I have said nothing” (John 18:20). You listen to the Word of God proclaimed in rhythm, pitch, and prose. And you hear Jesus’ mission statement. Jesus receives the Spirit, and the Spirit anoints Jesus to proclaim good news to the poor, release to the captives, healing to the sick, freedom for the oppressed, and proclaim the year of God’s favor. The Word of God challenges you to adopt Jesus’ mission statement as your own. In worship, Jesus reads from scripture. He interprets scripture. And the Word of God allows the spiritually blind to see visions of how the world could be. Because of the Word, you finally get it! Because of the Word, the spiritually lame and the narrow-minded pick up their mats and walk! Because of the Word, you walk the walk of Jesus. Down Jesus’ path instead of down your own path. Down the path of freedom, justice, and hope.

My friends, Jesus was active, not passive, in worship. He didn’t come to be entertained. Jesus came to serve God... and he came to serve the people around him. Jesus used the talents he had to serve God and humankind. You also do not come here to be entertained. None of us have the abilities Jesus had. But God has given you and me talents that we CAN use in worship.

Every time Tom helps me with the bulletin, he worships like Jesus worships. Every time Frank and Linda help me make coffee, they worship like Jesus worships. Every time Ray plays the piano, and our guest vocalists sing, they worship like Jesus worships. Every time you sing out loud – you worship like Jesus. Every time Mary pours the juice for communion, she worships like Jesus worships. Every time one of you serves communion or takes up the offering –you

worship like Jesus. Every time Frank, Linda, Ruth, Katy, or Bob, teach Bible School, they worship like Jesus. Every time you see someone in church who is suffering a tragedy or has lost someone they love, and you spend time praying with them and comforting them – you worship like Jesus. Every time you see someone sitting alone in worship and you go over to them and give them your name and welcome them to church – you worship like Jesus. Every time you go to a team or committee meeting, you declare God worthy. Because you use your talents to serve God ... and to serve those around you. You declare the worthiness of God and other people.

Our church is not a building, it is an assembly of people, you and me, worshipping God. Jesus promises that "... where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:20). You come to church not to be entertained, but because this is where you see Jesus. Jesus promises to be here waiting for you. You gather to worship on the Lord's Day not out of obligation, but because it is your honor to be with and in Jesus. The word "Christ" is not Jesus' last name. "Christ" is the Greek translation for the English word "anointed." In the letter we read from Paul to the Corinthians today, he says each local church is the local body of Christ. He says, "You are the body." You gather to be the very body of Christ. You gather to be the anointed of God.

But being anointed not only signifies worth. It also signifies task. You gather to put on the clothes and ministry of Jesus. Jesus declares that you are worthy. And God's Spirit anoints you with worth-giving power. But Jesus also declares as

worthy the poor, the captives, the sick, the oppressed, and even the spiritually blind and the spiritually lame.

You respond to God's Word with thanksgiving and declaration of trust in God's promises. But you also respond to God's Word by sharing your material and spiritual gifts. Gifts that are used by God to relieve the suffering of the poor, the captives, the sick and the oppressed. And finally, you respond to God's Word by using it to make disciples in all the world. God sends you out into the world with the Word.

### **Conclusion**

In worship, you gather around the Word to sing and pray. You gather to find and to be the body of Christ. In worship, you listen to the Word proclaimed in rhythm, song, and prose. After hearing the Word, you receive the Spirit. In worship you declare God as worthy with prayer, song, and by saying the Apostle's Creed. But you also declare as worthy the poor, the prisoners, the sick, and the oppressed. For you are truly the anointed of God. And "with deeds of love and mercy, the heavenly kingdom comes."

Glory be to God. Hallelujah and Amen. Now let us "give thanks!"