

Belong

GCI CALENDAR

A season to season reminder of who we are and whose we are

THE FOCUS OF OUR WORSHIP

CELEBRATING HIS STORY

WHAT IS WORSHIP?





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OUR GCI CALENDAR



BY GAVIN HENDERSON
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Should Christmas and Easter carry importance to us as Christians? Have they become so full of myths, idolatry and overlays that they are beyond redemption? Would we be better off shunning and avoiding them? What about the others day in the Christian calendar?

I grew up in a family that did not celebrate Christmas or Easter.

From an outsider's perspective, Christmas seemed like a con. Christ was in the name, but Christmas always seemed to be more about presents than about Christ himself. It seemed to be about celebrating commercialisation and the myth of an overweight white man who went around judging children and breaking into houses. Sadly, most of my friends seemed to know more about the lie of Santa than the truth of Jesus.

Easter was a similar story. It seemed to me that most people thought Easter was more about Cadbury creme eggs and a long bank holiday than the death and resurrection of the Son of God. People seemed to value holidays more than 'holy' days.

“THE GCI CALENDAR IS A CALL FOR US TO REFLECT THE LIGHT OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE YEAR”.

“Our” Calendar

This issue of *Belong* is focused on the GCI worship calendar, a calendar that includes both Christmas and Easter. But this is very much “our” calendar in the sense that the celebrations it marks should be a reflection of our beliefs as a Church, as followers of Christ, and not the beliefs of our surrounding culture and the baggage of centuries of myth and speculation.

In Isaiah 29:13 (NIVUK) the LORD says:

These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.

This is one of several scriptures in the Bible that stress that how we worship God is more important than when or where we worship God. There are many in the world who celebrate Christmas, seemingly honouring God with their mouths when they say ‘Christmas’, while knowing nothing of Christ; their hearts are far away from God. As we look to follow the GCI calendar, our aim is very much to worship God from our hearts and not just to offer him lip service.

Celebrating Christmas, Easter and the other days of celebration in the GCI worship calendar has to be first and foremost about celebrating what God has done for us in Jesus. Celebrating with family and friends, giving/receiving presents, eating good food and decorating our houses are secondary things. They are only an acceptable form of worship if they flow from the primary focus of our worship: Jesus Christ.

In our denomination’s history we have experienced the perils of a legalistic approach to days. In introducing the GCI calendar, we are not seeking to repeat past mistakes, or to make idols of days – where the days we worship become more important than whom we worship.

Instead, with the GCI calendar we are seeking to recognise God’s sovereignty over all time. That, in Christ, God has redeemed not just all of humanity, but all the days of our life as well. That no matter how much the darkness may try to overcome, the light of Jesus Christ will always be victorious. As

the body of Christ, as believers, we are called to be ‘children of light’ (Eph. 5:8 NIVUK). The GCI calendar is a call for us to reflect the light of Jesus Christ throughout the whole year.

A few years ago, when my eldest daughter first started school, a teacher asked the class if anyone knew what the ‘real meaning’ of Christmas was. My daughter was the only one who knew that Christmas had a connection to Jesus Christ. The tragedy of this moment though was not that the other children did not associate Christmas with Jesus, but that the other children did not know about Jesus at all. As the world around us becomes more secular, let us rise to the challenge of proclaiming the Gospel.

The GCI calendar, our calendar, is about proclamation. It is about declaring with our lives that every day should be dedicated to the Lord. That by following the seasons of Jesus’ life, the key moments of his birth, baptism, death, resurrection and ascension, we demonstrate our commitment to him and help point others towards him, the one in whom they have salvation.

In the rest of this edition of *Belong* we have articles about how the GCI calendar helps us to focus on Jesus Christ from GCI leaders around the world. Hector Barrero, the GCI minister in Colombia, writes on what the focus of our worship should be. John McLean, director of ACCM seminary in Australia, writes on how our story needs to be understood within the context of God’s story. Finally, Emmanuel Okai, the GCI Regional Director for West Africa writes about what worship really is and how the GCI calendar helps us in our worship. We have also included a two page graphic of the GCI calendar that highlights how the seasons focus on Jesus.

If you have questions or comments about the GCI worship calendar, or ideas on how we can use it to help proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, please share them with the National Ministry Team by emailing us at nmt@gracecom.church (or write to us at the Church Service centre if that is easier).



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THE FOCUS OF OUR WORSHIP



BY HECTOR BARRERO
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“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” Col 3:16-17.

The apostle Paul wrote to believers in Colossae to respond to the many heresies the church members were exposed to at that time. Paul does not describe in detail what those heresies were because he is focused on telling the church how to protect themselves from so many false teachings: by maintaining the centrality of Jesus in all of their Scripture reading, praise, and teaching.

Notice some highlights of Colossians:

- Christ is our sure hope in heaven. (Colossians 1:5)
- Through Christ, we’ve been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into his kingdom of light. (Colossians 1:13)
- In Christ we are forgiven and redeemed. (Colossians 1:14)
- Christ is the Creator of everything that exists. He is the perfect image of the Father. In Christ, everything was reconciled to the Father. (Colossians 1:15)
- Christ is before all things, and holds everything together. (Colossians 1:17)
- Christ is all and is in all. (Colossians 3:11)

The church is united in Christ because he is our Saviour and the church is his body. The church is to focus on the above truths and not on any other thing or idea. The best way to protect us from heresies is to keep Jesus at the centre of our teachings and practices.

This is the foundation of our personal and congregational worship and the GCI Worship Calendar. Christ is the centre of the centre –

nothing changes that. We can't make him the centre because he already is. We can, however, continually make sure our worship and our worship calendar is centred on nothing but Jesus. Every worship day is centred on Jesus – his birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and return. We can also focus ourselves on him – thus acknowledging that he is the true centre of our individual and corporate lives.

We come together at our worship services to talk about all that Jesus is, all he did, and all he is doing for us. Children's Bible lessons, youth Bible lessons, the sermon, everything that happens at church is centred in him.

“THE CHURCH IS UNITED IN CHRIST BECAUSE HE IS OUR SAVIOUR AND THE CHURCH IS HIS BODY”

As disciples in whom Jesus dwells, it is our desire to be living testimonies of him. It is our desire that all we have studied and learned about Jesus is shown in the way we speak, teach, and treat people around us. By edifying and loving each other, we are applying the teachings of Jesus – practicing them. Further, we seek to live our lives outside the church in a way that reflects the message of Christ. We are, after all, Christ's ambassadors.

Sounds like quite a challenge. But here's the good news: Jesus helps us with his Spirit in us. Our personal testimony shares that any good others see is the result of knowing him personally, of being in a close relationship with him.

So let's get practical. How do we see Jesus as the centre of our personal lives?

- Spend time with him. Walk with him, allow him to do his works in us. The more we study Jesus and understand his teaching, the more we know how to live as he did. And as we understand more about who he is, our response is to worship him and praise him

- Make sure our worship music – the lyrics especially – exalt Jesus. Many worship songs are about us and who we are, and not about Jesus and joining in his worship of the Father. There are times to sing about our relationship with him, but the bulk of our worship should be to him.

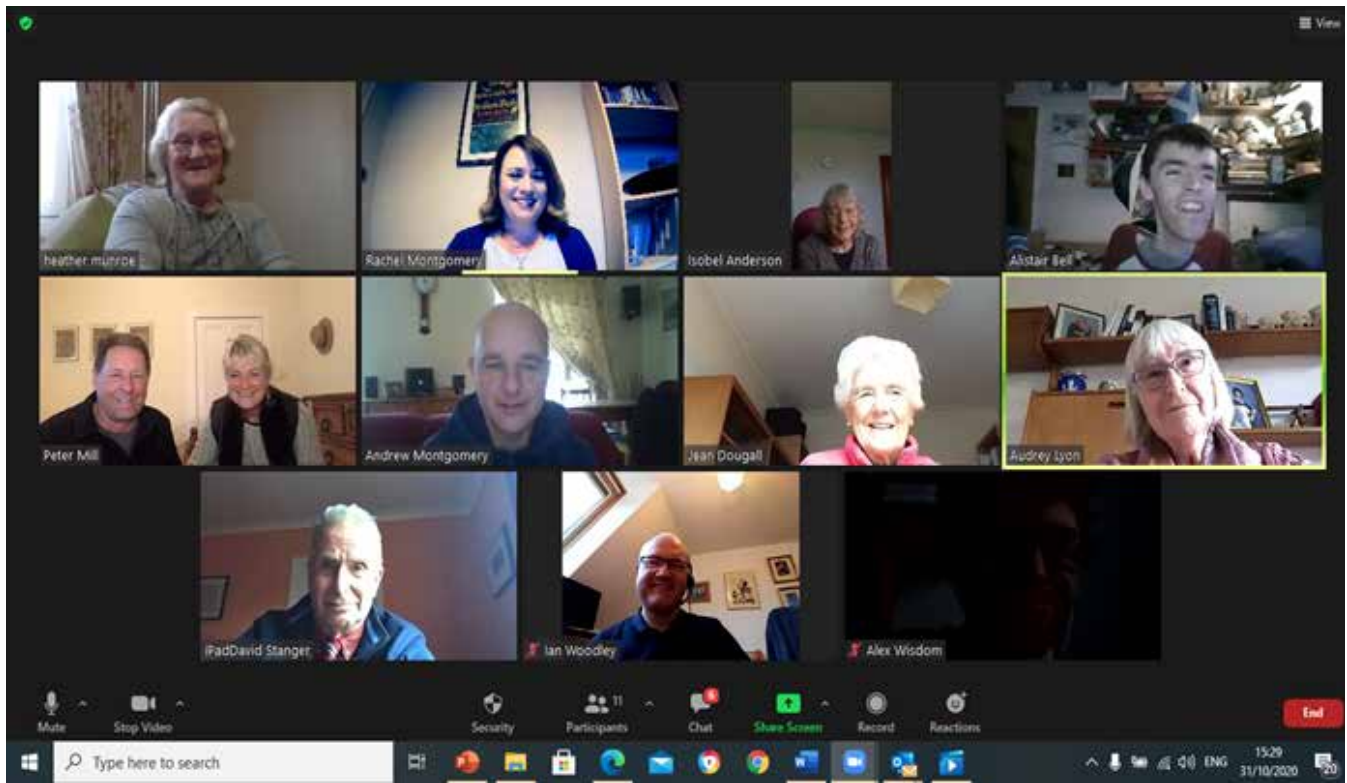
- Celebrate and commemorate days associated with his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. Make these days worshipful and meaningful. Put aside any days that are not focused on Jesus.

Let us close with another verse from Colossians:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (Colossians 3:1)

Whether worship is individual, collective, or in the GCI Worship Calendar, it's all focused on the centrality of Jesus – his birth, life (mission and ministry), death, resurrection, ascension, and return.

Hector Barrero is the GCI ministry leader in Colombia.



EMBRACING CHURCH ON ZOOM?



BY RACHEL MONTGOMERY
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It has come as possibly no surprise that, due to COVID-19, the UK is coming to a grinding halt once more. Depending on what part of the UK and Ireland you are in, you are either in lockdown or going into lockdown. We can feel disheartened by this and wonder whether we ever will get back to normal but is there something else we could be doing?

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33).

In our Edinburgh congregation we asked the question, how do we take heart and overcome the world? Are we really being stopped from worshipping God and fellowshiping or are we stopping ourselves? We know the challenges, we have a large percentage of the congregation who have never used

this kind of technology before, some don't even have devices or internet connections.

We human beings tend to see the problems and challenges first, but we mustn't let that limit our thinking. Instead, let us think of the opportunities that await if we push past these problems. What can we achieve and how will our congregations benefit? At the start of lockdown, we managed to get most people using YouTube for the national services, but we have missed interactions with each other. Singing together, praying together, and building that bond of relationship with each other in Christ.

More than that though, we have had vulnerable people in our congregation who have been shielding throughout the pandemic and are therefore truly isolated. We have had people who were becoming more disconnected and were feeling so down that they avoided phonecalls.

Here's what we did. Each member got a visit whilst following government guidelines and Zoom was loaded onto everyone's devices. Everyone was given support on how to use Zoom. We all helped each other out, had trial runs, and had patience with each other as we practiced and trained each other. Once we got past the pain barrier and the limiting beliefs of what could be achieved, we have managed to get all members on-line and are now having regular services and Communion on-line.

This is not something that has just happened in Edinburgh. Birmingham congregations have been having Zoom services since March and at the end of October they celebrated Black History month in a truly uplifting service. Their journey started with getting people onto a WhatsApp Group. Then, supported by family and neighbours, members got tablets so they could join the weekly services. The interactive time together lifts the spirits for all who attend.

Back in March, when lockdown happened, our Luton congregation continued to meet “virtually” every week by video and phone-in. Attendance has burgeoned and it has opened a special door for people to attend who in the past might not have been able to for various physical reasons.

Luton has also benefitted from joyfully reconnecting with people who attended the congregation in the past. This includes six people in Scandinavia, one in the Czech Republic, as well as others around the UK – all of whom are overjoyed with this unexpected blessing. One person commented: “Zooming with you guys has changed my life” and many have commented about feeling closer together as a congregation than in pre-Covid days.

Now that we have discussed the benefits of having congregations connected in this way on Zoom, and that we do indeed have the tools to worship together, then we encourage you all to help each other achieve this. If you are part of a congregation and have the skillset and time to help people get online, then do make this known to your Pastoral Council. Happy Worshipping!

The advantage of the Zoom is it brings you so much closer to your friends, you can see folks faces and reactions. There can be a real discussion about what has been learnt in the sermon with others contributing ideas.

– David Stanger
Edinburgh

I am enjoying meeting so many new people who have joined our Zoom meetings. Also it is open to any friends or past members. It is very welcoming.

– Gill Goode
Luton

I look forward to church Zoom meeting because it makes such a difference to get a message and to sing hymns and fellowship with others

– Isobel Anderson
Edinburgh

I find the Zoom meetings a great alternative to church services in these times. They capture worship, praise, teaching and fellowship (some elements that the YouTube services lack). I am all for Zoom meetings.

– Jason Cornish
Birmingham

GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL

WORSHIP CALENDAR



GCI WORSHIP CALENDAR



ADVENT

A season of anticipation. Posture of waiting with expectation.



CHRISTMAS

A season of joy and wonder - God is with us! Posture of contemplation and celebration.

CHRISTMAS DAY

DECEMBER 25



EPIPHANY

A season of discipleship. Posture of sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning who he is.

EPIPHANY DAY

JANUARY 6

TRANSFIGURATION DAY

FEBRUARY 14



EASTER PREP

A season to open ourselves wider to more fully appreciate our deep need for Jesus. A posture of preparation to receive the overflowing graces of Good Friday and Easter.

PALM SUNDAY

MARCH 28

MAUNDY THURSDAY

APRIL 1

GOOD FRIDAY

APRIL 2



EASTER

A season of transformation - the inauguration of new creation. Posture of contemplation and celebration.

EASTER SUNDAY

APRIL 4

ASCENSION DAY

MAY 13

PENTECOST SUNDAY

MAY 23



ORDINARY TIME

A season of participation with Jesus in the building of his church. A posture of being sent and joining Jesus in disciple-making..

TRINITY SUNDAY

MAY 30

CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY

NOVEMBER 21





Photo: Keilah Gepte, Pexels.com

CELEBRATING HIS STORY



BY JOHN MCLEAN
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The GCI Worship Calendar is designed to focus our worship and attention directly on Jesus – his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, and the giving of the promised Comforter.

Each one of us has our own personal story. Our stories are, naturally, very important to us. Our birth, growth and adulthood. Our achievements, our challenges and difficulties. And in its own way each story is unique, to be cherished and valued.

And yet...

Each of us knows in the depths of our being that if our brief span of life is all there is – if that's it, "signifying nothing" as Shakespeare put it, then our personal story can be frustratingly futile. Like the grass of the field, we wither and fade. And the dark side of only individual stories can

be the default to loneliness, separation, even the fragmentation of society.

A major step in the right direction is when we see that our story exists only in the context of others – that "my story" makes more sense when we consider "our story." We are relational beings: child, parent, husband, wife, sibling, friend, colleague. Our story helps make sense of and gives meaning to my story.

And yet...

We know there is still something missing. And indeed, there can even be a dark side to "our story": us-versus-them, the stigmatizing of the "other" who is outside our group, tribe, state, country.

Just as well there is the Big Story, the greatest of all stories – which makes sense of all our personal and collective stories. It is no less than "His Story" (history!) – the majestic, cosmic story of God, revealed in his Son, Jesus Christ. Christians call this the gospel, the good news. It's the good news of a God who creates and wants to share his love and fellowship with us. It's the incredibly good news of Jesus' coming to earth, breaking into our physical dimensions of time and space, to be one of us, to redeem us, to invite us into this eternal relationship of love and grace.

In Jesus, we see the human face of God. In Jesus, we see the love of God made manifest. Through Jesus, we have faith and hope, and we are included in God's love. That's worth celebrating! And so the GCI Worship Calendar is designed to focus our worship and attention directly on Jesus – his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, and the giving of the promised Comforter.

This story is told in the four Gospels and the eternal consequences are examined there and throughout all of the New Testament. In the Old Testament, we see evidence of God's saving work, of his faithfulness, and the preparation for Jesus' coming, the spelling out of the need of mankind for a Saviour. We see evidence that only by grace can salvation be accomplished.

In Jesus, we see the fulfillment of all that was promised. We see the reality of the divine come to live among us. The shadows are consumed by the reality of who Jesus is and all that he does. He gives meaning to all our stories and, by so doing, gives hope for all humanity for all time.

“THROUGH JESUS, WE HAVE FAITH AND HOPE, AND WE ARE INCLUDED IN GOD'S LOVE. THAT'S WORTH CELEBRATING!”

As much as they were dismayed by his crucifixion, the early disciples were even more stunned by the resurrection and ascension of their friend and teacher. They recognized that something unique had happened. Not just another event in the history of events, but THE event that changes and transforms all the other events. This event was so earth-shattering, it heralded a new creation, a new way of seeing the world, a new way of thinking, a new way or worshipping, celebrating and living.

Something new had been ushered into the world. It was so exciting, so mind-expanding, so joyful and amazing, that it needed to be celebrated. This was a deep well that could never be exhausted. It was the story – his story – that could never be surpassed.



Photo: beerphotographer, istockphoto.com

It was a story that had personal, community and indeed cosmic dimensions. Jesus was the new and now inevitable focus of worship. And so the GCI Worship Calendar each year keeps us focused on the story of Jesus, our Saviour. The foundation is his remarkable resurrection. All four Gospels make the point of telling us the women went to the tomb on Sunday morning and discovered it empty. And so the story founded on the reality of his resurrection: “He is risen.” It's not just about a good moral teacher. It's about God among us, changing the story completely.

The gospel story tells us about Jesus' birth – a vulnerable baby – yet born to save the world; he is good news for all mankind. That's worth celebrating! The GCI Worship Christian calendar walks us through major events and major moments of teaching in Jesus' life and ministry. It takes us in preparation for his crucifixion, his redeeming death, and subsequent resurrection and ascension. And then on to his promise, and delivery, of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, and the creation of the church. All these elements, and more, focus on Jesus and give us hope. No wonder church is meant to be a beacon of hope in the world as we point people to Jesus.

Each year the calendar takes us to these realities at the centre of our worship. We learn best by



Photo: Cottonbro, Pexels.com

doing. Actually forming our worship around these compass points, all of which keep our focus on Jesus, orients our lives, our stories, to the greatest story ever, the gospel story. In our worship, time and eternity intersect in Jesus. He is life, truth, love and belonging.

One writer recently lamented that the West is losing its identity because it has lost sight of any overarching narrative that makes sense of all the competing narratives that demand our attention. Theologian Tom Wright has lamented the tendency to lose sight of the Big Story, and be kidnapped by competing secondary stories, of the Christian church.

We make sense of all our stories as we tell and retell the magnificent life-changing story of Jesus. Celebrating the GCI Worship Calendar is an important and joyful way for us to keep directly focused on Jesus – the centre of the centre.

John McLean, is a director of ACCM seminary in Australia.

The clock analogy

There are often three arms / hands on an ordinary clock – the second, minute and hour hands. The first time a child sees the clock, her attention will most often be arrested by the fascination of the rapid movement of the second hand. She probably won't notice the slow movement of the minute hand; and certainly won't perceive the much slower crawling of the short hour hand. However, the movement of the second hand is meaningless if its movement is not in relationship with the other two. Can you imagine a clock with only the second hand jogging around the face? It might be useful for measuring a few things, but not for telling the time of day.

Similarly, our story has meaning only within the bigger divine story. Our life's cycle of birth, marriage, work, achievements, failures, retirement, old age and death have meaning only if they are synchronized within the clock of God's plans and purposes. When we rush around in our little corners of the earth within the limitless universe oblivious of the grand agenda of the Creator God, in whom we live, move and have our being, then our 70 to 120 years become like vapour. As humans, and more importantly as Christians, we need to understand that our story becomes meaningful only in the context of the bigger story that God is working out through Jesus Christ, whom we recognize as Lord and Master. The GCI Worship Calendar helps us stay within that context.

The GCI Annual Worship Calendar keeps us focused on God's story by focusing on Jesus—his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, his identity, and his church as well as his promised second coming.

– Emmanuel Okai



VIRTUAL CELEBRATION



BY NANCY SILCOX
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Our Autumn Celebrations had to be cancelled this year due to the coronavirus pandemic. Instead, we had a wonderful Virtual Celebration on the 3-11 October 2020. There was no charge for this Celebration or any of its events or activities and it was open to everyone.

Each morning there was a Prayer Meeting over Zoom between 9:45-10:15am.

This was followed by a live-streamed Sermon on YouTube like we have been enjoying each Saturday and Sunday since the lockdown in March.

Each afternoon there were events available from Fellowship Zoom Rooms, Adventure Club Zoom, Seminars with guest presenters and even a Life Club Zoomed to us. The evenings held a Zoom Quiz Night, Praise & Worship Evening on Zoom, a SEP Zoom Presentation, a Day by Day Zoom Presentation, Bible Study, Zoom Talent Show and more Fellowship Zoom Rooms!

This Virtual Celebration Week was a wonderful way of bringing together friends in a new way. We may not be able to gather physically, but we give God thanks for the technology that is available to us in this present crisis. Several hundred people benefitted and were renewed, inspired, and re-energized to share the Gospel in even more ways than before.





Photo: Samuel Martins, Unsplash.com

WHAT IS WORSHIP?



BY EMMANUEL OKAI
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Like many who grew up in rural sub-Saharan Africa before the 1960s, I experienced various practices in African Traditional Religion similar to the performances of Baal's priests during Elijah's time.¹ I was raised in my maternal grandfather's village, where shrines, deities, sacred groves, taboos, and festivals in honour of lesser gods and ancestors were the order of the day.

As a child I observed the fervour and spectacle that accompanied the worship of created things – a worship regime based on fear, which often created mistrust even among close family members. The system of worship never promised nor could deliver anything beyond our earthly existence. Death was an enemy that held the community captive – enslaved

with fear, without hope beyond the present world (Hebrews 2:15).

With maturity and experience, I came to see that worship is derived from the idea of worthiness, or something of immense worth or value. Worship is directed towards objects or beings worthy of our total devotion, respect, love, allegiance and service. Worship is “respect and reverence paid to a divine being or supernatural power.”²

As I read through the Scriptures, I came to see that Isaiah highlights knowledge of the true Creator God and good deeds as paramount in true worship.³ When Elijah confronted and ultimately defeated the Baal worshippers in that rare religious contest, he told Israel to make a choice between two forms of worship⁴ (1 Kings 18:21). False worship is based on wrong knowledge of who really is worthy of our devotion and allegiance. At an early age I came to the realization that God is the only one who is worthy of worship because he created and sustains all things – seen and unseen (Colossians 1:16).

It is not difficult to classify what I experienced in my childhood days as forms of false worship. However, it is more difficult to identify and categorize false

worship practices that occur among those who do not bow to idols, especially those who mention the name of God or Christ as part of their proclamation of faith. Yet, Jesus declared: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21 NRSV). Foundational to true worship is knowledge of who God is and what his will is, and how to be in relationship with him and others. Anything we do that does not honour the Father’s will is not true worship. Jesus is the one who set the basis for true worship when he declared, “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24 NRSV).

**“TRUE WORSHIP BEGINS
WHEN WE STRIVE TO LOVE
GOD ABOVE EVERYTHING
ELSE, ALLOWING HIS WILL TO
PREVAIL IN OUR LIVES AS WE
SERVE HIM ALONE.”**

Worship results from focusing on the life, death, resurrection, ascension and return of Jesus. The shepherds and wise men from the East were given detailed direction to the location of the Messiah (Luke 2:10-20) by angels, and they worshipped because he had been divinely revealed. Jesus emphasized the need to know the true God who is Creator of all that there is – seen and unseen.⁵ In doing so, he is speaking of God as Father, Son and Spirit – in essence speaking of himself. Here are several examples of Jesus being worshipped:

- A leper kneels before Jesus in worship (Matthew 8:2)
- A ruler kneels before Jesus after Jesus healed his son (Matthew 9:18)
- The disciples worshipped him after he walked on water (Matthew 14:33)
- A Canaanite woman worships him as she asks for help (Matthew 15:25)
- A man tormented by evil spirits came and bowed before Jesus (Mark 5:6)
- A man healed of blindness by Jesus worships him (John 9:38)
- Thomas worshipped Jesus by saying, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28)

He was worshipped after his resurrection and his ascension, and he is still worshipped today. Jesus is the object of our worship – all we have, all we do, all we hope for revolves around him. This is why we produced the GCI Worship Calendar. Our only focus is Jesus. We don’t focus on Israelite days, we focus on Jesus – his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, his identity, and his church. As Christians, nothing else is worthy of worship.

Worship that is true involves offering ourselves, totally and unconditionally to God.⁶ We know that everything we have comes from him. We know our identity is in him. We know our future is in his hands. He is the only one we worship – asking him to guide our ambitions and goals to be in line with his will. True worship begins when we strive to love God above everything else, allowing his will to prevail in our lives as we serve him alone.⁷ True worship is focusing on God – giving glory and praise only to him.

Actions that depict worship

- Since true worship involves our total person, many actions that we perform constitute worship. When they proceed out of a good heart, our thoughts and desires for God are forms of worship.
 - We build our worship calendar and our special worship services around Jesus, our Immanuel – his birth (Christmas), his life (Epiphany), his love for the world (Palm Sunday), his passion (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday) his resurrection (Easter Sunday), his ascension (Ascension Sunday), his Body – the church (Pentecost), his identity (Trinity Sunday), his return (Christ the King Sunday).
 - Love those whom God loves – Jesus said when we love others, we are loving him. When we honour and respect those whom God has created and calls his children, we are worshipping God.
 - When Thomas was convinced that Jesus is Lord, he exclaimed, “my Lord and my God!”⁸ Our confession of faith, prayers, singing and our declaration of God’s majesty in praises are actions of worship.
 - Worship involves our emotion. In exclaiming, “Rabboni,” Mary Magdalene was

expressing a sigh of relief, and an emotional attachment, devotion and love to Jesus.⁹ When people cry, laugh, shout or dance exuberantly (like David) in response to God's grace, such emotion constitutes worship.¹⁰

- Worship includes our thanksgiving – the healed leper and blind man returned to give thanks to Jesus; Mary washed and anointed the feet of Jesus¹¹, the disciples offered materials things to enable the work of God to progress. Offerings in terms of money, time, ideas and energy in the service of God are forms of worship.



Photo: Charday Penn, istockphoto.com

No such thing as perfect worship

In his article, “Perfect Worship,” Joseph Tkach points out how inadequate we are in expressing our worship in the right way. Thankfully, as the apostle Paul told us in Romans 8, the Spirit intercedes on our behalf – not only in how and what to pray, but also in how to worship. Our best example for worship is Jesus, who spent his life worshipping the Father. Everything he did was according to the will of his Father. Tkach concludes, “The last word on worship is that we must look to Jesus as the one who is doing it right for us, and he invites us to join in what he is doing.”¹²

Our knowledge of the true God, our offering ourselves as living sacrifices, our determination to love our neighbour and our various actions meant to show our devotion and reverence for God must be mediated and perfected through Jesus, our Lord and High Priest, who sits in the heavenly realm offering the most acceptable worship on our behalf.

Emmanuel Okai, GCI's Regional's Director for West Africa

References:

¹ 1 Kings 18:26–28.

² Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary

³ Isaiah 1:2-3, 10-18: When we wash ourselves and cease from evil and do good, our sacrifices to God become acceptable.

⁴ Elijah said “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him, but if Baal, then follow him”. Elijah was saying there is a true God and a false god; and Israel must make up their minds whom they would follow.

⁵ John 17:2 – 3

⁶ Romans 12:1 – “And so dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.” (NLT)

⁷ Luke 14:25 – 27 – Jesus demanded total commitment from any who claims to follow him; Matthew 22:36–38.

⁸ John 20:24 – 29

⁹ John 20:16

¹⁰ 2 Samuel 6:12 – 14, 21 – 22

¹¹ Luke 12:3, 7

¹² Tkach, Joseph, “Perfect Worship,” 40 Days of Discipleship, A self-paced doctrinal educational plan, Volume 1, Grace Communion International, 2016, p. 124.



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