

# What Unites Us in Worship at Bethlehem

John Piper

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As a supplement to the two messages I am preaching on worship (September 28 and October 4 and 5), here is a list of "marks" that define us in worship at Bethlehem. I wrote these ten years ago and have only changed them slightly. The reason they are the same, even though we have changed in many ways, is that they deal with deeper issues than style and form. I pray that we will always define ourselves with deeper issues than style and form. "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him" (John 4:23). - Pastor John

1. God-Centeredness. We put a high priority on the vertical focus of our Sunday morning service. The ultimate aim is to experience God in such a way that he is glorified in our affections.
2. Expecting the powerful presence of God. We do not just direct ourselves toward him. We earnestly seek his drawing near according to the promise of James 4:8. We believe that in worship God draws near to us in power, and makes himself known and felt for our good and for the salvation of unbelievers in the midst.
3. Bible-based and Bible-saturated. The content of our singing and praying and welcoming and preaching and poetry should always conform to the truth of Scripture. But more than that, the content of God's Word should be woven through all we do in worship and will be the ground of all our appeal to authority.
4. Head and heart. The elements of our worship service should aim at kindling and carrying deep, strong, real emotions toward God, especially joy, but should not manipulate people's emotions by failing to appeal to clear thinking about spiritual things based on shareable evidences outside ourselves.
5. Earnestness and intensity. We will try to avoid being trite, flippant, superficial, or frivolous, but instead will aim to set an example of reverence and passion and wonder and broken-hearted joy.
6. Authentic communication. We utterly renounce all sham, deceit, hypocrisy, pretense, affectation, and posturing. We do not pursue the atmosphere of artistic or oratorical performance, but the atmosphere of a radically personal encounter with God and truth.

7. The manifestation of God and the common good. We expect and hope and pray (according to 1 Cor. 12:7) that our focus on the manifesting of God is good for people and that a spirit of love for each other is not incompatible with, but necessary to, authentic worship.

8. Undistracting excellence. We will try to sing and play and pray and preach in such a way that people's attention will not be diverted from the substance by shoddy ministry nor by excessive finesse, elegance, or refinement. Natural, undistracting excellence will let the truth and beauty of God shine through. We will invest in equipment good enough to be undistracting in transmitting heartfelt truth.

9. The mingling of historic and contemporary music. No church or service can be all things to all people. But we do not value stylistic narrowness. We believe there are affections owing to God that different tunes and different texts and different genres may awaken better than others. We will strive to be who we are without exalting our own tastes as the standard of excellence or power. We will see God's guidance in each worship setting to be both indigenous and stretching.

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