

# Near and Far

Matthew 2:1-12



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**FOCAL** Matthew 2:1-12<sup>KJV</sup> Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, (2) Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. (3) When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (4) And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. (5) And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, (6) And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. (7) Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. (8) And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. (9) When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. (10) When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. (11) And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. (12) And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their

own country another way.

Where Jesus is, there will always be warring forces. There will always be, at least until Christ destroy him utterly, the forces of the Evil One and the forces of Light; the children of darkness and the Children of God. Later in His ministry our Lord said:

**Matthew 10:32-34** Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. {33} But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. {34} **Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.**

Jesus did not mean by this that the Christian, like the avowed *Muslim*, pick up a sword and kill all of those who refuse to accept Christ as Savior. The Scripture does not allow for the Christian to pick up a sword so as to force others into our faith. Jesus did allow us to defend our faith from the attacks of the ungodly (**Luke 22:36**), but would not have us use a sword to force belief in Christ on anyone (**Matthew 26:51-52; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:49-50; John 18:10-11**). The only Sword the Christian is to use *offensively* is the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God:

**Ephesians 6:17** And take the helmet of salvation, and the **sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:**

**Hebrews 4:12** For the **word of God [is] quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword**, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and [is] a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

In the believer's battle for the Kingdom of God, we must ever remember that we

**Ephesians 6:12<sup>NIV</sup>** For **our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**

If our struggle is *not against flesh and blood*, but against *the fallen forces of Satan*, then we need to look at the two hands seen in this focal text today not as a story about **wise men, Herod, and Jesus**, but as the continuing battle between God and Satan for the souls of men.

### **1. If You Seek To Be Near God, You Will Find Him**

**FOCAL** **Matthew 2:1-2** **Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea** in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from

**the east to Jerusalem, (2) Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.**

As soon as Jesus enters humanity, the struggle between good and evil intensifies. We see the force of God at work in these **wise men**, and the force of Satan at work in **Herod**.

**FOCAL** Matthew 2:1 Now **when Jesus was born** in Bethlehem of Judea **in the days of Herod the king,**

"We know from Matthew that Jesus was born while Herod was king, the Herod sometimes called Herod the Great. Josephus makes it plain that Herod died b.c. 4. He was first Governor of Galilee, but had been king of Judaea since b.c. 40 (by Antony and Octavius). I call him "Herod the Great Pervert" in *Some Minor Characters in the New Testament*. He was great in sin and in cruelty and had won the favor of the Emperor. The story in Josephus is a tragedy. It is not made plain by Matthew how long before the death of Herod Jesus was born. Our traditional date a.d. 1, is certainly wrong as Matthew shows. It seems plain that the birth of Jesus cannot be put later than b.c. 5. The data supplied by Luke probably call for b.c. 6 or 7."<sup>1</sup>

When Jesus was born **Herod the Great** was the *puppet king* over Israel. Because he was good friends with the

Roman Caesar he had risen to power around 40 B.C., and he jealously guarded his throne, knowing that he had no Godly right to be on it. The Throne of Israel belonged to those who descended from Judah:

**Genesis 49:10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.**

Easton's Bible Dictionary says that he was

"... the son of Antipater, an Idumaean, and Cypros, an Arabian of noble descent. In the year B.C. 47 Julius Caesar made Antipater, a "wily Idumaean," Procurator of Judea, who divided his territories between his four sons, Galilee falling to the lot of Herod, who was afterwards appointed tetrarch of Judea by Mark Antony (B.C. 40), and also king of Judea by the Roman senate. He was of a stern and cruel disposition. "He was brutish and a stranger to all humanity."

Herod was a dog of a man, brutish, and evil. As an Arab he was intent on protecting "his throne" from any Jewish takeover.

He was self seeking, dead in sin as any unbeliever is, and a perfect example of the life lived without Christ. A life that seeks happiness outside of Jesus becomes, in time, a life that is *greedy of gain*, chasing pleasure but never finding it. The Bible says:

<sup>1</sup> from Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament*

**Proverbs 1:15-19** My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: {16} For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. {17} Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. {18} And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. {19} So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.

that those who chase the darkness seeking gain will, in time, draw deeper and deeper into the darkness.

A monster like Hitler or Herod is not created over night. Monsterdom comes when Christ is rejected for self, when Light is rejected for Darkness.

This is the state that Herod the Great was in. He wanted what he wanted when he wanted it - and Satan stood behind him pushing! God was far away from Herod because Herod rejected God for worship of himself. Now our text uses another of the *beholds* of Scripture:

**FOCAL** Matthew 2:1-2 **behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,** (2) **Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to**

worship him.

We've seen some of the hand of Satan - let's look at the wondrous Hand of God. There were **wise men from the east** who came to Jerusalem looking for Jesus. Who were these **wise men**? The word itself, **wise men**, is a Greek word<sup>2</sup> that means *a magician, a sorcerer*. **Strong's Exhaustive Lexicon of the Bible** cross references the **wise men** of Matthew 2 to

**Jeremiah 39:3** And all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, [even] Nergalsharezer, Samgarnebo, Sarsechim, Rabsaris, Nergalsharezer, **Rabmag**, with all the residue of the princes of the king of Babylon. (also **Jeremiah 39:13**)

The Assyrian Magician who was on the staff of the ancient **Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon**.

The **wise men or magi** were considered pagan scientists, advisers to the ancient kings. In short, these people *were not Christians, nor were they believers in the God of Abraham*. These were pagan wise men from a pagan court - Gentiles and not Jews - that God in His infinite power was leading to Jesus.

When you are in distress over lost loved ones in your family, in your neighborhood, or among your friends, it helps immensely to remember what is taught in Matthew

<sup>2</sup> G3097, μάγος, magos, mag'-os, Of foreign origin [H7248]; a *Magian*, that is, Oriental *scientist*; by implication a *magician*: - sorcerer, wise man., (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries)

chapter two. There have been those who have asked, *what about the heathen who have never heard of Jesus? Are they lost forever because they did not believe on the Only Begotten Son of God?* What foolish questions! God answers:

**Isaiah 50:2-3** Wherefore, when I came, [was there] no man? **when I called, [was there] none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?** behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because [there is] no water, and dieth for thirst. {3} I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.

God is God! If He has made faith in Christ a condition for salvation, do you not think that He will make that possible even to those farthest away from civilization? If it is true that:

**Acts 4:12 ... Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.**

Don't you think that God will make a way where the heathen will hear? The pagan scholars of Matthew chapter 2 *prove* that God will give all an opportunity to be saved. This text *proves* that

**2 Peter 3:9** **The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.**

If someone dies and goes to hell, they do so *in spite of God*, not because He has failed to give them an opportunity of salvation. These **wise men** came from the east to Jesus because God led them there.

They started out pagans, following a strange star that they saw. They ended up believers in the God of Abraham, saved by faith in Jesus Christ. How do I know this? Look at the text. These men (and we *do not know how many there were!* *There may have been three, there may have been thirty - the text doesn't tell us*) told Herod:

**FOCAL** Matthew 2:2 ... **Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship<sup>3</sup> him.**

These men - and again, we do not know how many there were - came *to worship Jesus*. These men are not talking

<sup>3</sup> Aorist Active Infinitive of G4352, προσκυνέω, proskuneō, *pros-koo-neh'-o*, From G4314 and probably a derivative of G2965 (meaning to *kiss*, like a dog *licking* his master's hand); to *fawn* or *crouch to*, that is, (literally or figuratively) *prostrate* oneself in homage (*do reverence to, adore*): - worship., (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries)

about paying homage to an earthly king, though they call Jesus **King of the Jews**.

These men come before Herod the Great and yet do not *worship* him. No, they meant to actually *do religious service*, to bow down to Jesus Christ as before the God of Heaven.

We see these wise men carry out their act of worship in:

**FOCAL** Matthew 2:2, 10-11 ... we have seen his star in the east, and **are come to worship him**. ... (10) When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. (11) **And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him**: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

Here is the mark of the Christian, not that someone *says they are a Christian*, but that *the professor worships Christ as God*. Jesus Christ is God, not mere Man. He is very God of very God, and at the same time Perfect Man. These ex-pagans came to **worship** Jesus because that is what Christians do! Christians are *compelled* to worship Christ, they are *drawn* to worship Christ, but they are never *forced* into worshipping Christ. If you must be forced to worship Him and to honor Him, then you have a spiritual problem that is great indeed!

Those who are far away from God, if they seek Him, shall find Him through Christ. God will make a way! God is God, and God will lead the willing to salvation by faith in Jesus. But let's look at the other side of the coin:

## **2. If You Worship At The Altar Of "Self", You Will Be Far From God**

**FOCAL** Matthew 2:3-4 When **Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled**<sup>4</sup>, and all Jerusalem with him. (4) And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

When Herod heard that **Jesus, the King of the Jews** was born the Bible says **he was troubled**, like a pot of boiling water! Herod was upset. He was not upset because the Savior of the world was born and he wanted to go and worship him.

Herod was upset because HE wanted to remain King of the Jews, even though *he was an Arab, unfit, unqualified, and uncalled to sit on the Throne of David!* Herod was close to Jesus *physically*, but because he rejected any way but his way he was far away from Jesus *spiritually*.

Who does God call to salvation? All men, all women, all

4 Aorist Passive Indicative of G5015 , **ταράσσω**, tarassō, *tar-as'-so*, Of uncertain affinity; to *stir* or *agitate* (roil water): - trouble., (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries)

children. Who usually answers that call? Look at the Christmas story. Those who were first to see Christ were **the Shepherds, the lowly servants**, and not kings. It was to the shepherds the angel Gabriel came and said:

Luke 2:10-11 ... **Fear not:** for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. {11} For **unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.**

The *angel of God* would come to the shepherds to announce Christ's birth. The *star of Bethlehem* would come to the wise men to lead them to Jesus. In both cases Light always leads to The Light. What did Herod have at hand? We read:

**FOCAL** Matthew 2:4 ... when **he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.**

When a pagan king wanted to know whether he would win in battle or not, he would gather his pagan priests around him. Sometimes a glimmer of truth would come through even the pagan council! When the pagan Herod wanted to find Jesus to kill Him, who did he call? Fallen priests, unbelieving religious people, Pharisees and Sadducees all. The devil often knows and quotes Scripture, and so it was this day. They told Herod:

**FOCAL** Matthew 2:5-6 ... **In Bethlehem of Judea:** for thus it is written by the prophet, (6) **And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.**

The Pharisees and Sadducees quoted the text of

**Micah 5:2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, [though] thou be little among the thousands of Judah, [yet] out of thee shall he come forth unto me [that is] to be ruler in Israel;** whose goings forth [have been] from of old, from everlasting.

If you'll notice, though, the devil *never quotes Scripture completely*. The devil always quotes *part* of the Word of God, but leaves out anything that will glorify God. The part of the prophecy that *was not* quoted was:

**Micah 5:2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, [though] thou be little among the thousands of Judah, [yet] out of thee shall he come forth unto me [that is] to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth [have been] from of old, from everlasting.**

The One that God spoke of being the **Ruler in Israel**

would be **One Whose Origins was from Eternity or Everlasting**. The Holman Christian Standard reads:

**Micah 5:2<sup>HCSB</sup> Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; One will come from you to be ruler over Israel for Me. His origin is from antiquity, from eternity.**

The One Born in Bethlehem would be none other than Almighty God! **Jamieson-Fausset-Brown** in their Commentary write:

"... Messiah's generation as man coming forth unto God to do His will on earth is from Bethlehem; but as Son of God, His goings forth are from everlasting."

What did the devil leave out when he quoted the Scripture to Herod through his religious "advisers"?

This is what the devil would leave out when he quoted Scripture to Herod through the unsaved priests. By the way, is this any different than what the devil does through Rome today in its garbed "fathers"? No, not at all! Satan will do whatever he can to cloak Christ and Who He is. The reason that the wise men came to **worship Jesus** is because they knew the all of prophecy. They listened to God and were saved, but not so Herod.

Herod is not presented a true picture of the Christ of

prophecy, though I doubt that it would have made much difference. Herod wanted to be king of Israel, and would do anything to remain there. To endanger his eternal soul meant nothing. However, I want you to notice that when Satan works, he always *takes away from God's Word, and takes away from the Living Word of God.*

The Pharisees made the prophecy to be about a coming human king, but God prophesied of the day that He would rule over Israel. The devil misquoted Scripture, and Herod heard what he wanted to hear.

**FOCAL** Matthew 2:7-8 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, **inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.** (8) And he **sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.**

Though Herod had no intention of worshiping Jesus, but wanted these wise men to find Jesus and tell him where Christ was.

Why didn't Herod send a guard with these men, one who would come back and tell him where Jesus lay? This would have been the surest way to catch the Savior so as to kill Him. Was Herod stupid? \_\_\_\_\_

No, he was a pretty smart man who used his intelligence

to rise to the throne of Israel. A stupid man could not have done this. Herod was smart, and had much of the wisdom of this world. So why the blunder? Why not send a guard or a spy with these wise men? *Because God was at work protecting the Messiah.* The Lord said through the prophet Isaiah:

**Isaiah 29:13-14** Wherefore the Lord said,  
**Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: (14) Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.**

God caused Herod's wisdom - great though it was - to perish and his understanding to be hidden. The wily Herod would have sent a spy with the wise men. The Lord confused him and protected the Messiah. God is in control!

May I say this to you all: the devil is no more than a befuddled, created being, who operates in this era under the watchful eye of God. Just as Satan had to ask God for permission to afflict Job, whatever Satan does in God's

Church or among God's people is always governed by the overruling decree of the Father. Herod was troubled, and tried to enlist the aid of the wise men in getting to the Savior's residence. Yet God is always in control, always watching, always overruling that pitiful fallen creature and his henchmen!

It is odd that in this age there are so many Christians who modify their behavior in order to suit the prejudices of the Herods!

The unbeliever, knowing not Christ nor caring for His Person, does not want to worship Jesus. The unbeliever seeks out Christ so as to snuff Him out, to kill Him, to drive Him away. The wise men, touched and led by the Spirit of God, wanted to find Jesus so as to worship Him. Herod, touched and led by the spirit of Satan, wanted to find Jesus so as to remove Jesus from the world he lived in. Jesus says:

**John 3:19-21** ... **light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (20) For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. (21) But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.**

The Light of God was close to Herod, but because Herod loved evil more than he loved God's Light, he did not

come to the Light. He did not follow that star, as the wise men did, to the place where Jesus was. He did, however, want to find Jesus so as to kill Him, thus remaining in his evil without guilt.

### 3. Worship Jesus Where You Find Him: He Is Worthy Of Worship

**FOCAL** Matthew 2:9-10 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. (10) When they saw the star, they rejoiced<sup>5</sup> with exceeding<sup>6</sup> great<sup>7</sup> joy<sup>8</sup>.

When these wise men came into the place where Jesus was, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. In short, they were ecstatic, overjoyed, so happy they

- 5 Aorist Deponent Indicative of G5463, *χαίρω*, chairō, *khah'ee-ro*, A primary verb; to be full of "cheer", that is, calmly happy or well off; impersonal especially as a salutation (on meeting or parting), *be well*: - farewell, be glad, God speed, greeting, hail, joy (-fully), rejoice., (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries)
- 6 G4970, *σφόδρα*, sphodra, *sfod'-rah*, Neuter plural of *σφοδρός* sphodros (*violent*; of uncertain derivation) as adverb; *vehemently*, that is, in a high degree, *much*: - exceeding (-ly), greatly, sore, very., (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries)
- 7 G3173, *μέγας*, megas, *meg'-as*, Including the prolonged forms, feminine *μεγάλη* megalē, plural *μέγαλοι* megaloi, etc.; compare also G3176, G3187], *big* (literally or figuratively, in a very wide application): - (+ fear) exceedingly, great (-est), high, large, loud, mighty, + (be) sore (afraid), strong, X to years., (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries)
- 8 G5479, *χαρά*, chara, *khar-ah'*, From G5463; *cheerfulness*, that is, calm delight: - gladness, X greatly, (X be exceeding) joy (-ful, -fully, -fulness, -ous)., (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries)

were nearly shouting! Jesus is worthy of *exuberant worship*!

These men had traveled for some time looking for the Savior. Now they were come to Him, and they came to worship Him as all true Christians do.

What type of worship is Jesus worthy of? \_\_\_\_\_

When Christians worship Christ, God is in the worship service enabling the act.

**FOCAL** Matthew 2:11 And when they were come into the house....

Notice first that the act of worship begins *outside the house* where God was, and was then *brought into the house*. If you are not worshiping Jesus outside of this house of God, then you probably will not worship Him inside of this house of God. This was no manger where Jesus lay at this time, but the text says that it is **the house**. This was a place where Jesus was going to be for a while.

These wise men began to worship the Savior *before* they came into the house, *while* they came into the house, and now *in the house* where Jesus was.

Jesus said:

**John 4:24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.**

God knows your heart, knows your lifestyle, and looks on the inward man and not the outward person. When God looked for a king for Israel He rejected, one by one, every son of Jesse. God rejected the strong, the handsome, the pretty, the wise. The Lord told the prophet Samuel:

**1 Samuel 16:7 "... Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.**

God looks at the heart. If you are going to worship God, begin to worship Him without the house, and bring your worship *into* the house where Jesus is.

**FOCAL Matthew 2:11 ... they saw the young child** with Mary his mother ..

The wise men came to worship Jesus, so their eyes were on Jesus. They weren't looking at one another, nor Mary,

nor Joseph, nor even an angel from God had he been there. These men were looking at Jesus.

If you had a priceless jewel that you lost, or were a miner looking for a diamond, your eyes would not be focused on the things around you. Your attention would be focused on that thing which you sought, especially so if you looked for this over a period of time. These wise men were like King David who said:

**Psalms 42:1-3 .. As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. (2) My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? (3) My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?**

These men thirsted for Christ. Like the deer, they panted for His presence, and their thirst was allayed. They wanted to see the Savior so they did not dwell on other things. They were so thirsty for Christ that they risked much by going to Herod, putting their head in that old lion's mouth.

They saw Jesus, and

**FOCAL Matthew 2:11 ... fell down, and worshiped him..**

Mary was not the subject of worship, nor did they

congratulate Joseph on the birth of his new Son. This was what they came for, to worship the Master. Look at how they worshiped Jesus. They **fell down**. The wise men were guilty of *surrendered worship*. There was no niceties here, no genuflection, no good manners. These men saw the King of all creation, the Maker of Heaven and Earth in human form, and they **fell down** to worship Him. There is no human pride in worship. How few worship today, Beloved, how few fall down before God! The unclean spirits **fall down** before Jesus:

**Mark 3:11** And **unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him**, and cried, **Thou art the Son of God.**

Simon Peter **fell down** before Jesus:

**Luke 5:8** **When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees**, saying, **Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.**

Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, **fell down** at Jesus' feet:

**Luke 8:41** And, behold, there came **a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought him that he would come into his house:**

and even the cursed, Samaritan leper **fell down** at

Christ's feet:

**Luke 17:16** And **fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks:** and he was a Samaritan.

Should not we be like these wise men? If the wise men fell down at Christ's feet to worship Him, what should my response be to Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When we worship Christ, God enters the worship service and blesses it beyond measure. We can see God's hand even in the worship of these wise men. Let us worship Christ in the Church, but let us worship Him at home, at work, in the stores, and at school. Let us worship Him, for He is worthy of worship. I pray that God touches your hearts to grow closer to Him!