

January 9, 2013

Epiphany

Matthew 2:1-18

LESSON FOCUS

Say with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord." Believe in your heart that God praised him from the dead. Then you will be saved. Romans 10:9 (NirV)

The first story after Jesus' birth opens with Magi who have traveled a long distance to offer homage to a new king born in Judea. They enter Jerusalem with a large enough caravan to attract the city's attention (2:3); they must have assumed that they would find the newborn king in Herod's palace in Jerusalem.

Magi were astrologers from the royal court of the king of Persia. Part of their job description was to make the king of Persia look good, but here they come to promote another king. Kings would often send congratulations to new rulers in other realms, but the king of Persia called himself "king of kings," that is, the highest of kings. We might not expect the Magi to worship Jesus, especially if they found him not in the royal palace but in a cave.

More unexpectedly, these Magi are astrologers, which is why they noticed the star to begin with. Although the Bible forbade divination (Deut 18:9-13), which includes astrology (Is 47:13; see also Deut 4:19), for one special event in history God, who rules the heavens, chose to reveal himself where the pagans were looking.

Yet even supernatural guidance like the star can take the astrologers only so far; for more specific direction they must ask the leaders in Jerusalem where the king is to be born (2:2). That is, their celestial revelation was only partial; they must finally submit to God's revelation in the Scriptures, preserved by the Jewish people.

Another central character in this narrative is Herod (2:3, 7-8). That Herod is dismayed by the Magi's announcement is not surprising (2:3); in this period most Greeks, Romans and even Jews respected astrological predictions. But as many incidents during Herod's reign illustrate, he was more paranoid than most other rulers. For Herod, little room existed for two kings in his realm.

Not knowing himself where the king would be born, Herod gathers the religious experts, the chief priests and scribes (2:4), most of whom in this period were loyal to his agendas. These experts immediately identify the place where the Messiah will be born on the basis of Micah 5:2. But while the religious leaders know where the Messiah will be born, they do not join the Magi in their quest. These are the religious leaders, but they fail to act on all their Bible knowledge. Jesus is just a baby, and they take him for granted.

After the Magi have left Jerusalem, they come and worship Jesus (2:9-11). A road led south to Bethlehem, which was about six miles from Jerusalem, so the rest of the Magi's journey probably did not take very long.

The Magi's innocence compared to Herod's murderous shrewdness again reminds Matthew's readers not to prejudge the appropriate recipients of the gospel (compare 13:3-23). Jesus is for all who will receive him, and God may provide Jesus' servants with allies in unexpected places if we have the wisdom to recognize them.

WELCOME ACTIVITY

Star Find

Hide stars of different sizes around your room. Allow time for children to find the stars.

Say: The stars are all different, just like people. We come in different shapes and sizes and colors too. Jesus loves each one of us.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Make a masking tape star shape on the floor for children to sit inside of.

Say: How many of us are inside the star? We all are! When Jesus was born, God put a star in the sky. The star led people from far away to Jesus so that they could be inside God's family – just like we are! That's because God loves all people. He wants everyone to know Jesus and to be saved.

BIBLE STORY

Epiphany

Matthew 2:1-18

Open your Bible so children can see you "reading" God's Word. Show them your Bible and the words to they know what you're saying is coming from God's Word. Use Tell the Story idea below.

An Idea

Bring gold, frankincense, and myrrh if you have them. If not, bring brightly decorated boxes to show your students. Talk about the Wise Men's gifts.

Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem, in the region of Judea. A man named Herod was king over this region of Judea. After Jesus' birth in a stable in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary moved into a house there in Bethlehem.

It was during this time that Wise Men came from the east. These Wise Men studied the stars. While they were still in their own country, God sent a star to announce the birth of His Son and they saw it. They knew that the star announced something big! When they arrived in Jerusalem they asked about a newborn king, "Where is the child who has been born to be king of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2 NIV) They wise men had come all this way to worship Jesus.

But when King Herod heard about a newborn king, he was very upset. Herod called together all the teachers of the law and the priests. He asked them where God's promised Son would be born. They all knew exactly where He was to be born. God had promised that His Son would come out of Bethlehem. That is where the newborn king would be born.

As the Wise Men left King Herod, they saw the star that had led them to Jerusalem. They were so excited to see the star again. It led them to Bethlehem. They didn't find a palace. What they found as the star stopped, was a normal house. The Wise Men went into the house. Young Jesus was there with His mother, Mary. The Wise Men bowed down and worshipped Jesus. Then they brought out their gifts.

They gave Jesus gold, frankincense, and myrrh. As the Wise Men left, God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod. They obeyed and they went home another way.

After the Wise Men's visit, Joseph had a dream. The angel of the Lord warned Joseph, "Get up! Go to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you to come back. King Herod is going to search for the child. He wants to kill Him."

So Joseph got up and they left during the night. They went to Egypt. They stayed there until King Herod died. God kept His promise - "I chose to bring my Son out of Egypt." (Hosea 11:1)

GOD'S WORD IN MY HEART

Read this passage from your Bible. Ask students to locate it in a Bible too. Help them learn this verse.

Say with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord." Believe in your heart that God praised him from the dead. Then you will be saved. Romans 10:9 (NirV)

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Frost star shaped cookies. Decorate them with royal colors. Students may eat their star cookies! (Approximately 2 cookies per student)

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GAME

Flashlights

Make sure all flashlights are working before you begin! (They will be provided for each child to take home).

- Turn off half of the lights in your room. Over each flashlight place a piece of paper with a star cut out. Make **star patterns on the ceiling**.
- Play **Follow the Light** (follow the leader). Children follow leader's light around the room. Change leaders often!

SING

Praise Song

to the tune of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat."

*Lift, lift, lift your hands,
Lift your hands in praise.
Singing, dancing, praising Jesus,
Do it every day!*

*Fold, fold, fold your hands,
Fold your hands in prayer.
This is how we talk to God,
And tell him that we care.*

*Clap, clap, clap your hands,
Clap your hands for joy.
Jesus is alive and he,
Loves every girl and boy!*

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Wise Men Travel

Look! Look! Look! *Point up*
The wise men was a bright star
Shining in the sky.
That is good news!

Clop! Clop! Clop! *Pat legs*
The wise men rode their camels
For many, many days.
They followed the star to Bethlehem.
That is good news!

Twinkle! Twinkle! Twinkle! *Open and shut hands*
The star led the wise men to Jesus.
That is good news!

Kneel, kneel, kneel. *Kneel*
The wise men knelt down
And gave Jesus special gifts.
That is good news!

Praise! Praise! Praise! *Clap hands*
The wise men praised God for Jesus
That is good news!

Twinkle, Twinkle, Shining Star

To the tune of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Twinkle, twinkle shining star,
Guiding wise men from afar.
To a home so far away,
Where little Jesus played all day.
Twinkle, twinkle shining star,
Guiding wise men from afar.

CLOSING ACTIVITY

Gather children around you.

Our flashlights say: Jesus is the Light and the Way. Just like the star guided the Wise Men to where Jesus was, Jesus is our Light and Way, we need to follow Him all the time! Our flashlights will help us remember that!

Pray: Dear God, thank you for keeping your promises! Thank you for guiding the Wise Men to find Jesus in Bethlehem. Help me remember to follow You too. Help me remember that You are with me always. Thank you for loving me! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.