

THE VISIT

CORE PASSAGE: MATTHEW 2:1-12

CONTEXT

Mary and Joseph experienced much in the years surrounding Jesus's birth. An angel gave each of them a message concerning God's Son being conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-38; Matt. 1:18-25). A Roman census sent them traveling to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born and visited by shepherds. And at the temple in Jerusalem, they were amazed at Simeon's and Anna's reactions to their infant Son (Luke 2:25-38). Some time later, still in Bethlehem, they received yet more visitors—this time wise men from a pagan land looking for the promised King.

KEY CONCEPT

Jesus is the true King and worthy to be worshiped.

As you examine Matthew 2:1-12:

- Consider that knowing Jesus is King can cause us to worship or cause us disturbance.
- Recognize that true worship must be directed toward the One worthy of worship.



TIMELINE

The Angel Foretells the Birth of Jesus, the Son of God (Luke 1:26-56)

Mary and Joseph Take Baby Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:21-39)

Young Jesus Remains in His Father's House (Luke 2:40-52)

Jesus Is Born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-20)

SESSION STUDY: Wise Men from the East Search for the Promised King (Matthew 2:1-12)



Daily Readings

- Day 1:** Matthew 2:1-6
- Day 2:** Matthew 2:7-12
- Day 3:** Matthew 2:13-15
- Day 4:** Matthew 2:16-18
- Day 5:** Matthew 2:19-23
- Day 6:** Psalm 47



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

Notes



SCAN ME

Bonus Content

Scan this QR code to learn more about Jerusalem and King Herod at the time of the wise men's arrival.

JESUS CAME FROM HUMBLE MEANS TO BE OUR HUMBLE KING (MATTHEW 2:1-6).

Circle the wise men's reactions to the birth of Jesus.
Underline the reaction of King Herod and the people of Jerusalem.

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, **2** saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him." **3** When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. **4** So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born. **5** "In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "because this is what was written by the prophet: **6** And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

In much the same way the shepherds immediately went to find baby Jesus after the angel's message, the wise men went looking for the newborn King when they saw a sign in the heavens. The wise men, well-versed in astronomy, saw an unusual star and determined that it heralded the birth of the "king of the Jews" (v. 2). So they packed up a caravan with gifts and traveled thousands of miles to worship this new King.

LEADER NOTE: "From the east" is a general term to describe the wise men's homeland (v. 1). Many scholars hold the opinion that these men came from Babylon or Persia because of Daniel's role among the kings and wise men of Babylon and Persia (see Dan. 2:48; 5:29; 6:3,26-28), but we cannot be certain of this.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

CHRIST AS KING: God has always been King over His creation, whether in heaven or on earth. Yet some of His creatures in both realms have rebelled against Him, leaving destruction in their wake. To restore His broken world, God promised a King who would deliver His people and restore all of creation. The promise of a coming King finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ and looks forward to its perfection when Jesus returns for His bride, the church.

King Herod, on the other hand, had quite a different response. As soon as Herod heard of another king who might threaten his throne, he became disturbed immediately. While Luke's Gospel highlighted people who were excited to see the Messiah, Matthew's Gospel highlighted Herod and Jerusalem's negative reaction to the news of the rightful King's birth.

How might people today be disturbed by the news of Jesus and His gospel?

Herod wanted to figure out where this new King had been born so he could eliminate his competition, but he was unsure where to start his search. The religious leaders and scribes, on the other hand, were not. The birthplace of the Messiah had been foretold by the prophet Micah in Micah 5:2. The Jewish leaders could pinpoint the exact location Herod needed because of the powerful prophecy God had already put in His Word.

Herod, in his selfish pride, sought to protect his throne, but Micah's prophecy concerning Bethlehem pointed to the nature of Jesus as a humble King. The Gospel of Luke showed the lowly shepherds visiting the King of kings as He slept in a manger. Matthew recorded that the little town of Bethlehem was great only in the sense that it would be the birthplace of the "ruler" who would "stand and shepherd [His people] in the strength of the LORD" (Mic. 5:2,4).

LEADER NOTE: The book of Micah described the Messiah as a ruler and shepherd over His people. It was not a coincidence that God anointed David—a literal shepherd of sheep—to be king after Saul. After Saul died, the people said of David: "Even while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led us out to battle and brought us back. The LORD also said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will be ruler over Israel'" (2 Sam. 5:2). Though He was heir to David's throne (see 2 Sam. 7; Matt. 1:1-17), Jesus also would identify Himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

Why do you think God sent the Savior into the world as a humble king?

THE RESULT OF KNOWING JESUS IS JOYFUL WORSHIP

(MATTHEW 2:7-12).

Highlight the description of the wise men's worship of Jesus.

7 Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him." **9** After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. **11** Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

At no point in Matthew 2 do we see the wise men worship King Herod. They visited with Herod and traded questions, but that was as far as their interaction went. They deferred to him as the current ruler over Israel, but they never worshiped this king of Judea in any way. Herod was never the destination for the wise men to come and worship; he was just a stop along the way.

The strangers from a faraway land knew they had another King to come and worship. They were not going to give anything to Herod that was due to the one true King. We do not know if they believed that Herod also wanted to worship the new King—which he didn't (vv. 13-20)—but they went on their way to Bethlehem to fulfill their mission.

LEADER NOTE: Herod the Great had a reputation of being a vicious, bloodthirsty tyrant who killed anyone he perceived as a threat, including his wives and sons.¹ He had no intention of worshiping Jesus but instead wanted to kill Him, as we see from his paranoid rage and the massacre he ordered of all the young boys two years old and younger in and around Bethlehem, a number he had derived from the information given to him by the wise men (vv. 16-18).

What things in life compete for our attention, devotion, and worship, distracting us from true worship of Jesus?

Key Concept: Jesus is the true King and worthy to be worshiped.

Once the wise men left Herod in Jerusalem, they again saw the star they had followed from the East. This miraculous star brought the men overwhelming joy because it led them to the King they had sought. The long journey for these wise men was finally ending with a face-to-face encounter with Jesus.

Even though Jesus was just a small child at the time, the wise men worshiped Him as the King the star had heralded. The wise men were not too prestigious to be focused on what mattered most. They had come all the way to Bethlehem so they could worship and give gifts to the King of kings who had been born. They came with priceless and meaningful gifts to worship the only King worthy of their time and attention.

LEADER NOTE: The gifts the wise men brought were not just trinkets or baby toys. These gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—were incredibly valuable gifts that people would bring to celebrate the birth of royalty. Jesus, the Son of God born in humble circumstances, was given the worship and gifts that were appropriate for Him, the King of the Jews.

What are some ways you give Jesus the worship He truly deserves?



CHRIST CONNECTION

The wise men from a foreign country recognized Jesus as the King of the Jews, as creation aligned to reveal His birthplace. And when they found Him, they rightfully worshiped Him.

Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: Before your group arrives, list the following on a board: “king of the hill,” “king of spades,” “king of the jungle,” “homecoming king,” “king cobra,” and “chicken a la king.” As group members arrive, engage them in adding to the list of other “kings” we may mention or see.

TRANSITION: For most people in the United States in the 21st century, the title of king doesn’t mean much to us, and some kings of other countries are merely figureheads, not the ones making decisions for the people. But at the time of Jesus’s birth, a king carried weight, significance, and honor. Good or bad, ruthless or merciful, kings ruled with ultimate authority. Let’s keep a first-century understanding in our minds as we consider today’s passage.

CONTEXT

SUMMARIZE: The incarnation and birth of Christ is surrounded with an air of mystery and grand proclamations. But in our questions about Jesus’s earthly beginnings, we are given certain details about who Jesus is: He is the Son of God; He was born of a woman; He is the Seed promised to defeat the serpent (see Gen. 3:15); He is King of kings and Lord of lords. And from His earliest days on earth, Jesus was worshiped by people near and far.

RECAP

RECALL: In your personal preparation this week, you considered both Jesus’s humility and His worthiness as well as the various reactions to the news of His birth as King. After summarizing highlights of the session ask the group what details of this story impacted them this week. What did this passage cause you to consider about your own understanding of Christ?

TRANSITION: In the midst of the nostalgia and familiarity surrounding the wise men visiting Jesus, our activity today will help us to focus on the Lord’s work behind the scenes so that His Son, the newborn King, would be recognized and worshiped.



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Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

BOXES: Direct your group to page 40 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find “Linking the Prophecies.” Recreate the boxes and verses on a board in your room so you can record the group’s findings as they interact with the Scripture text.

Linking the Prophecies

Read Matthew 2:1-12. Compare the passages to the prophecies listed below.

<div style="background-color: #4a7c59; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">THE WISE MEN</div> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">Matthew 2:1-2,11</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 30px;">Isaiah 60:1-6</p>	<div style="background-color: #4a7c59; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">THE STAR</div> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">Matthew 2:2,7,9-10</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 30px;">Numbers 24:15-19</p>
<div style="background-color: #4a7c59; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">BETHLEHEM</div> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">Matthew 2:1-8</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 30px;">Micah 5:1-6</p>	<div style="background-color: #4a7c59; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">RULER/SHEPHERD</div> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">Matthew 2:1-8</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 30px;">Ezekiel 34:15-24</p>

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 2:1-12 aloud.

ENGAGE: Form four smaller groups and assign each group one of the prophecies concerning Jesus. Encourage the groups to read both Scripture passages and to compare the prophecy and its potential fulfillment. *(Apart from an explicit reference in the New Testament, we should be cautious about certainty when connecting prophecies and potential fulfillments, yet we can consider the validity of such connections.)*

FOCUS: Call for a volunteer from the first group to read Isaiah 60:1-6. Ask: “What did you notice about Isaiah’s prophecy about foreigners from far off bringing gifts and proclaiming praise to the Lord?” Follow this pattern with the other groups and discuss the prophecies regarding the star, Bethlehem, and the Shepherd over the people of Israel. Write down the group’s findings on the board, and encourage them to record them in their PSGs.

ENGAGE: As a group, consider how these men from far away understood the significance of Jesus's birth even as the religious leaders in Jerusalem, who were well-versed in such prophecies, had missed it. Ask: "How is it that the wise men reacted to Jesus with worship, and yet, the people who should have known better, disregarded His birth? (*Recall the following question from LG p. 46; PSG p. 39*) What things in life compete for our attention, devotion, and worship, distracting us from true worship of Jesus?"

DEBRIEF

How can we, like the wise men, reveal to others that we follow Jesus with our time, money, focus, and hearts?

SUMMARIZE

Jesus came as a humble baby, practically undetected by the world. But God's plan for His Son included at least one moment of royal recognition, and it came in the form of wise men from the east. By their diligent searching, meaningful gifts, and humble bowing, they revealed that they truly understood who He is—the King of the Jews. May we too be bearers of this truth to the world as we proclaim and worship Jesus as King of our lives.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 41). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Head** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Some people read the prophecies that God made of the Messiah in the Old Testament and assume that they have no sort of relevance for us in the church today. Yet fulfilled messianic prophecies reveal that God is who He says He is. The power of His Word throughout the course of history shows how faithful and powerful the Lord is.

How can recognizing the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the life of Jesus bolster your faith?



HEART: Responses to the rule and reign of Jesus can be wide ranging. Some people feel threatened by what submitting to Jesus would cost them. Others see Jesus for who He is and want to give everything they have to worship Him.

What do you need to confess or release to worship Jesus with all you have?



HANDS: Worship flows from the recognition of who God is and what He has done for us—namely, the Father sent His Son into the world to save sinners. For those who have repented of sin and believed in Jesus, we should desire to worship God with our words, our gifts, our time, and our talents.

Key Concept: Jesus is the true King and worthy to be worshiped.

What is something you will give God today as an act of worship for the gift of His Son, our King?

Notes

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Write the word "King" on your mirror in a dry erase marker or on a sticky note in a prominent place. As you see it this week, take time to reflect on Jesus and to consider your own life: How are you regarding Jesus as King?
- As you pray this week, consider how you posture yourself before the King of creation: Are you approaching Him hurriedly, unfocused, flippantly? Or are you regarding Him as worthy of your time, energy and praise?
- Using a topical Bible or Bible app, do a word search for every time Jesus is identified as King in the Bible, and consider how this impacted His life and death.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 41 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES



PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 47:5-9 with your group. Praise the Lord for being the King of the whole earth (vv. 6-7) and for sending His Son, Jesus, as King over all the nations (vv. 8-9).

References

1. David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, eds. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2013), 33–34.