Wise Men and a Star



Scripture Reference: Matthew 2:1-23

Suggested Theme: Jesus is our savior. Give Him honour and respect.

Memory Verse: “God did this so that all people will respect the Son the same way they respect the Father. He who does not respect the Son does not respect the Father. The Father is the One who sent the Son.” John 5:23, ICB

Story Overview:

Wise men from the East knew something significant had occurred because of a special star they saw. They made a long journey bringing precious, valuable gifts to this special baby. Wanting to harm Jesus, King Herod tried to use the wise men to lead him to the baby, but the wise men left no trail. Instead, Joseph and Mary took Jesus to safety in Egypt.

Background Study:

The wise men were probably Persian members of the order of priests, philosophers, and astrologers called Magi, who had existed east of the Euphrates River since ancient times. As “the Levites of the East,” they performed public religious rites, mediated between God and men, interpreted doctrine, and educated the royal family. They were also very skilful astronomers. A star was in their line of specialty.

We often hear about three wise men. The Bible does not say the number but does mention three gifts specifically. Frankincense is a kind of gum that is burned for its aroma. Myrrh is an expensive perfume.

God revealed Himself through a star and a dream to people who were not His followers. The star they followed was probably no ordinary star, comet, planet, or eclipse. The magi were experts in astronomy and had often studied the night sky. This star was exceptional, and God provided it. It behaved as no other star had and led the wise men to Jesus’ house.

When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, they were very conspicuous. They seemed to think that everyone in the Jewish capital city would know about the newborn king of the Jews, but they found that their enquiries about Jesus upset Herod.

Although Herod the Great had some positive qualities like courage and executive ability, he was excessively jealous and inhumanly cruel. If Herod thought anyone might threaten his throne, he would not hesitate to eliminate them.

Herod was aware, as all Jews were that God had promised a Messiah to save his people. Herod called his priests and religious leaders together to ask them where the long-expected Messiah would be born. They

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quoted Micah 5:2, informing Herod that Bethlehem was the place.

After this meeting, King Herod called another meeting. This time, it was a secret meeting and only with the Magi. He asked questions to try to determine the age of this child king. With the pretence of wanting to worship the child king, he sent the wise men to find the child and then report back to him.

The wise men travelled by night to the very house where Jesus' family lived. Many depictions of the magi's visit show them presenting gifts to a baby Jesus in a stable while the shepherds were visiting. But many months had passed since Jesus' birth. Joseph and Mary now lived with their young son in a house in Bethlehem.

The Bible lists three gifts. These expensive gifts included gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Perhaps the number of gifts has led people to assume there were three magi. The Bible does not actually state how many magi were present.

Several important dreams occur from this point in the story.

- God warned the magi in a dream not to report back to Herod but to bypass Jerusalem on their return home.
- After the Magi leave, an angel comes to Joseph in a dream and instructs him to flee with his family to Egypt to keep them safe.
- In another dream, an angel informs Joseph that Herod has died and it is safe to return to Israel.
- Joseph was afraid of the new king, Herod's son, Archelaus. In one last dream, Joseph is warned to move his family to Nazareth in Galilee. Jesus grew up in Nazareth.

God knew it was unsafe for Jesus in Bethlehem, so he sent him and his parents to Egypt. Not realising Jesus was gone, Herod ordered the killing of all Jewish boys under the age of two in the vicinity of Bethlehem. The magi had not led him to this potential king so that he would eliminate all boys in that age group. He wrongly thought he had solved the problem of another potential king. But God had other plans.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Before class, gather some items that could be given to a baby at birth (nappies, rattle, baby powder, soap, etc.…) Let the children talk about gifts they would give to a baby. "In today's story, we will talk about some gifts that Jesus received. One of the people who gave Jesus gifts was a very wise man. Today we are going to let him tell us about what happened." (Cover your head with a sheet or blanket and wear some "expensive" jewellery or scarves. Lower your voice to a man's voice and tell the story as if you are one of the wise men. Another option is to ask a man of the congregation to dress up and tell the story in first person.)
If you have a visual aid, you might say you have some lovely photos of everything that happened. Show the visual aid as you tell the story.

The Story:

Far to the east of Bethlehem, some men were referred to as "magi". The magi were considered to be very wise. Even though they were wise in many ways, the magi did not worship God.

The magi did, however, study the world and the stars. They had seen the stars many times, but there was something very different about one star they began to see in the sky. There was something so special about this star that the magi knew they must go and see what it was about.

After studying the star, the magi began to follow it. This star was so special that they realised it led them to a king. The king of the Jews. This was exciting! They wanted to worship this new king.

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The star was over the town of Bethlehem, but the magi decided to stop in the city of Jerusalem on the way. Herod was the King of the Jews and lived in a Jerusalem palace. The magi thought that since he was a king, surely Herod would know about the new king.

“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” the wise men asked Herod, “We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” They wanted to give him gifts and praise him like a king deserved.

King Herod seemed puzzled. He called together the chief priests and teachers of the law and asked for their advice. Herod was the king. Had the priests and teachers of the law ever heard about another king?

These advisers knew what the prophets had written about in the Old Testament. They knew that God was sending a Messiah to save his people. The prophets had said that the Messiah, the real King of the Jews, would be born in Bethlehem.

The “real King of the Jews?” This meant that he would be more important when the Messiah came than King Herod. King Herod did not want anyone to be more important than him! He was king, and he liked himself a lot. He knew he had to find out where this new king was. He had to get rid of him.

So Herod came back to the Magi and tried to trick them. He told them to go and find the newborn king so he could go and worship him and give him honour, too.
But this was a trick. King Herod didn’t really want to worship the new king – he wanted to kill him! He wanted to follow the magi to know where the new king was.

The star began to shine again, so the wise men followed it again. Soon, they found the house in Bethlehem where Joseph, Mary and their little boy, Jesus, stayed.

Mary and Joseph told the wise men all about how Jesus had been born in a stable. They told them about the angels singing to the shepherds when they announced his birth.
The wise men knew immediately that this little boy was truly the new king of the Jews. They bowed in front of him and gave him expensive gifts from their country in the east. The gifts were gold, incense and myrrh. These were the kinds of expensive gifts that people would give to a king. The Magi gave Jesus this special honour.

The magi had a dream and knew that King Herod would try to kill Jesus. The magi did not want to tell King Herod where to find Jesus. They went back home a different way so that King Herod could not follow them.

The magi weren’t the only ones to have a dream. In a dream, an angel appeared to Joseph and said, “Joseph, get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you. If you don’t go, then Herod will search and find your son. Then he will kill him.”

So Joseph got up at that very moment. In the middle of the night, he took his family on a long trip to Egypt. They were safe.

It was a good thing that Joseph did act quickly. When the other Magi did not return to King Herod, he got very angry. King Herod ordered his soldiers to kill every single little Jewish boy under the age of two. He did not know that Jesus was already gone, so he thought he could kill him this way. What a very sad day.

But God kept Jesus safe! Jesus was God’s special gift to the world. The wise men knew that Jesus was special and wanted to give him special honour.

Are you like the wise men? You can give Jesus special honour by obeying him and telling him how much you love him. Have you given Jesus honour today?

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.
Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.

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Click here to download the slideshow, or click here to download the pictures to print.
Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story, while reflection questions encourage them to internalize its meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

Review:

1. Where did the wise men who brought gifts to Jesus come from? (The East)
2. What is another name for wise men from the East? (Magi)
3. Who was the King who wanted to kill young Jesus? (Herod)
4. Why did King Herod want to kill Jesus? (He wanted to be the only King over the Jews)
5. What led the Magi to Jesus? (A star)
6. Name the three gifts the Magi gave Jesus: (gold, incense (or frankincense), and myrrh)
7. Why did the wise men travel to see Jesus? (To worship him)
8. What did King Herod do to try to kill Jesus? (He had all the Hebrew boys under age two killed)
9. How did God protect baby Jesus from King Herod? (He gave Joseph a dream and told him to take Mary and Jesus and live in Egypt until it was safe to return to Israel)
10. What did the magi learn from their journey to see Jesus?

Reflection:

1. Where do you think the Magi lived in the East? How long do you think they had to travel to reach Jerusalem?
2. What do you think the Magi's gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh smelled like?
3. What is something you wonder about in this story?
4. How do you think King Herod felt when he heard that Jesus would be King?
5. God sent Joseph a dream to tell him to move his family to Egypt for their safety. Do you think Joseph was afraid to obey God? Why or why not?
6. If you were Mary and Joseph, how would you feel about moving to Egypt?
7. How do you think the Magi felt when they saw Jesus and worshipped him?
8. What does it mean to honour someone? How do we honour God?
9. How can we honour Jesus? How can we show him we love and respect him in our daily lives?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

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Song Suggestions:

- Sing appropriate Christmas Carols:
  - We Three Kings
  - What Child is This?
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more options.

top

Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Make a trail of stars for the children to follow. Have the children follow the star trail to Herod's palace in Jerusalem. This might be a road sign or a picture of a palace. Tell the first part of the story in this place. Then, have the children follow another trail to Jesus' house and tell the next part of the story. Finally, have the children "sneak" back to the classroom a different way as the Magi did when they returned home.
- Gift wrap a few different boxes in several sizes. Inside each box, you should have one gift. Some gifts should be good and some funny (a lolly, one unmatched sock, a small toy, an empty toilet paper roll, etc.) Children can open the gift if they answer a question correctly (today's review questions would be good). Let the children take turns opening the gifts until all are opened. Finish with one last box that contains a picture of Jesus. Discuss how God gave the best gift.
- Play a simple word game. Bible Wordz Game is an adaptable game where children form words from letter tiles. The words relate to words found in the Bible lesson.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Teach younger children how to draw a star.
- Make any "star" craft. One idea is to have children cut slices of bread with star-shaped cookie cutters. Spread with soft margarine or butter and sprinkle with "hundreds and thousands" or shiny biscuit decorations.
- Write "Jesus is Special" in a star shape. Let the children write words about Jesus on the star: Son of God, born in Bethlehem, birth prophesied, shepherds visited, angels announced, etc.
- Make a scroll. Click here for instructions. Write this verse on it: "*For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. God gave his Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life.*" John 3:16, ICB

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Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

top

Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and worksheets about Simeon and Anna (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page and worksheets about the visit of the wise men (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page and worksheets about Jesus' escape to Egypt (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page of Mary, Jesus and wise men (Christian answers)
- Craft: Version 1: Video instructions for making a star
- Craft: Version 2: video instructions on making a star
- Simple, step-by-step instructions for drawing simple stars (Shihori Obata)

top

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