CHRISTMAS LESSON 5

The Wise Men worship Jesus

MATTHEW 2:1–18

CENTRAL TRUTH

The Magi understood that Jesus is the Messiah.

KEY VERSE

"And going into the house they saw the Child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh" (Matt 2:11).

Supporting Truths

1. Jesus is the Messiah.
2. Because Jesus is the Messiah, He is to be worshiped.
3. As the Messiah, Jesus is God, man, ruler, and suffering sacrifice.
4. Jesus is the Messiah of all people, weak or powerful, Jew or Gentile.
5. Because Jesus is the Messiah, He was protected by God until the right time.

Objectives

1. List three ways this story proves that Jesus is the Messiah.
2. Compare the three different responses to the birth of Jesus.
3. Explain how Micah's prophecy and the three gifts teach us about the King.
4. Point out that the Magi were foreigners and rich, educated, powerful people.
5. Notice that neither the people nor the places in this story were impressive.

Lesson Summary

When Jesus was born, Magi from the east saw a star announcing His birth and came to worship Him and give Him gifts. But Herod did not share their excitement. Because he loved to be king, he hated the Messiah and in his anger slaughtered all the infants in and around Bethlehem. However, God protected the Messiah by warning Joseph to flee to Egypt with the Child and His mother Mary.

Spotlight on the Gospel

The right response to Jesus is to bow before Him in worship and great joy, just like the Magi. The wrong response is to be like Herod, who wanted to be in charge so much that he hated Jesus, or to be like the religious leaders, who didn't seem to care at all about Jesus. If we want to be saved from our sins, we cannot resist or ignore Jesus.

TWO WEEKS AGO

God sends John the Baptist
Luke 1:5–25, 57–67, 76–7

LAST WEEK

God announces the Messiah's birth
Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 1:26–38

THIS WEEK

The Wise Men worship Jesus
Matthew 2:1–18

A SAVIOR IS BORN

Lesson Commentary

The Magi understood that Jesus is the Messiah.

Matthew wrote especially to Jews to show Jesus was the Messiah that they had been expecting. He especially emphasized the kingly role of the Messiah. So he began with a genealogy to show that Jesus was in the royal line of David as prophesied (Matt 1:1–17; 2 Sam 7:8–16). Then Matthew showed that Jesus' miraculous virgin birth fulfilled Isaiah's 700 year old prophecy (1:18–25). Now, in chapter 2, Matthew continues to prove that Jesus is the King through the worship and gifts of the Magi, the fulfillment of seemingly contradictory prophecies, and Herod's failed attempt to murder baby Jesus.

The Magi saw a star and came to Jerusalem (2:1–8)

The Magi who came to honor Jesus were from the east. They are often called ***wise men*** because they were highly educated in all kinds of knowledge, especially in astrology (studying the stars to predict the future). Because of their learning, they were the chief advisors to the kings of Babylon and later of Persia (cf. Jer 39:3). Daniel became the leader of the Magi (Dan 2:48), and since Nebuchadnezzar and Darius both honored Daniel's God (Dan 4:37; 6:25–27), it is likely that the Magi also learned about the true God and anointed Prince whom Daniel foretold (Dan 9:25) from him and from the other Jews who stayed in Babylon.

The Magi continued to exercise religious and political power even after Alexander the Great defeated the Persian Empire around 330 BC. When the Parthian Empire arose around 247 BC as a sort of new Persia, the Magi were close advisors to the kings and strongly influenced who would be king. So their arrival emphasized that the new Child was to be a special king, someone worth making a long journey to honor.

The Magi came because they saw a star, specifically, "His star" (Matt 2:2). Balaam had prophesied that a star and a scepter would rise from Jacob (Num 24:17). Since the star was able to move directly over a specific house (Matt 2:9), it may have been the shining glory of God rather than an actual star, like the pillar of fire leading the Israelites through the wilderness (Ex 13:21), or like Jesus Himself as the bright morning star in His glory (Rev 22:16). To pagans, unusual movement of stars (meteors or planets) were often seen as signs of great things about to happen. The sign of the star confirms that Jesus was born to be King, both of the Jews and of the whole world.

The Magi came to Herod at Jerusalem, the place they would have expected the King of the Jews to be born. But Herod was troubled because he was afraid that someone might replace him as king. He even killed his own sons when he thought they were plotting against him. Herod's troubled reaction shows that he took serious the claim that this Child was born to be King.

Herod knew that the "King of the Jews" was the ***Messiah***, so he found out where the Messiah was to be born (2:4). There was no dispute: according to Micah's prophecy, He would be born in Bethlehem (2:5–6; Mic 5:2). Bethlehem was the hometown of David (1 Sam 16:1) and was known as the city of David (Luke 2:4), so the Messiah's birth in this town emphasized His right to rule as the Son of David. Micah's prophecy adds that the Messiah would be a Ruler, and the religious leaders added that He would shepherd the people Israel (Matt 2:6). Although a shepherd is one who gently cares for His sheep (Isa 40:11), the same word for shepherd is also used to describe Jesus ruling with a rod of iron (Rev 19:15). The religious leaders knew that the Messiah was to be the supreme King.

THINK ABOUT IT
It was long predicted that the Messiah would be a real man who was born among men, sent to save and rule men.

Unfortunately, neither Herod nor the religious leaders submitted to Jesus as King. Herod tried to trick the Magi in order to kill Jesus (Matt 2:7–8, 16). The religious leaders didn't care enough to do anything. They eventually became His enemies because those who do not submit to Jesus as King eventually turn against Him (12:30).

THINK ABOUT IT
The magi worshiped the Child, not the Child's mother, because only Jesus is worthy of adoration.

The Magi worshiped Jesus (2:9–12)

Only the Magi, foreigners, worshiped the King of the Jews (2:11). They were so eager to worship Jesus that they "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" when they came to Jesus' house (Matt 2:9–10). They proved their devotion with gifts fit for a king. Gold was a sign of royalty (Ps 21:3). ***Frankincense*** was very expensive incense made from tree sap. When burned in the temple, the sweet smelling smoke symbolized prayers rising up to God (Ex 30:7, 34). So frankincense was a sign of the Child's deity. ***Myrrh*** was a valuable perfume also made from tree sap; it was used for many things, including pain relief (Mark 15:23) and burials (John 19:39). Myrrh was a sign that Jesus was a man who would suffer and die. As these powerful Magi bowed and offered gifts, they showed that Jesus was King over all.

Joseph and his family fled to Egypt to escape Herod's massacre (2:13–18)

After an angel warned the Magi to leave without going back to Herod, he also warned Joseph to flee with his family to Egypt (Matt 2:13). Joseph obeyed, leaving for Egypt while it was still night. (2:14–15). Since he was very poor (Luke 2:24), he may have used the gifts of the Magi to help pay for the journey and the stay in Egypt. They stayed in Egypt until Herod died, which probably wasn't more than a few months, since Jesus was born at the very end of Herod's reign.

THINK ABOUT IT
Before the Messiah could even speak He was worshipped by some and rejected by others.

Another prophecy was fulfilled when Herod brutally murdered all the infants in and around Bethlehem (Matt 2:16–18; Jer 31:15). Again, this prophecy was fulfilled as a type, since Jeremiah was speaking of the grief in Israel caused by Babylon's conquest. Rachel weeping at Ramah represented grief over all Israel when the Babylonians gathered the Jews at Ramah to be exiled (Jer 40:1). Herod's massacre fulfilled this as another instance of mothers weeping for their children. However, it also pictured the beginning of Israel's rejection of their Messiah, for which they would suffer greatly (Luke 19:41–44).

Matthew wrote to call the Israelites back to their Messiah, just as Jeremiah's prophecy about weeping also offered hope of return to the Lord (Jer 31:16). God's promise is still secure: the Deliverer will save all Israel by removing Israel's sins (Rom 11:26–27). Although God's promise cannot be broken (Rom 11:29), the Jews of Jesus' time did not get to enjoy the promise, for the promise can only be received by faith (Rom 4:16). In the story of the Magi, those who were close to Jesus rejected their King, while those who were far away came and worshiped. It is easy for us to be close to the knowledge of Jesus at church and in Sunday school and still refuse to bow before Him as King. But that is what we must do, because the story of the Magi reminds us that truly wise men recognize Jesus is the King of kings (Rev 19:16).

Lesson Outline

The Magi understood that Jesus is the Messiah.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE

1. **The Magi saw a star and came to find Jesus (2:1–8).**
2. **The Magi gave Jesus three presents to worship Him as King (2:9–12).**
3. **Joseph took Jesus and Mary to Egypt to get away from wicked King Herod (2:13–18).**

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE

1. **The Magi saw a star and came to Jerusalem (2:1–8).**
   - Magi from the east saw a star that indicated the birth of the King of the Jews (2:1–2).
   - King Herod was troubled and asked where the Messiah was to be born (2:3–4).
   - The priests quoted Micah, saying the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (2:5–6).
   - King Herod tried to trick the Magi into leading him to the Messiah (2:7–8).
2. **The Magi worshiped Jesus (2:9–12).**
   - The Magi followed the star to a house in Bethlehem with very great joy (2:9–10).
   - The Magi worshiped Jesus (2:11).
   - The Magi gave Him gold, frankincense, and myrrh (2:11).
3. **Joseph and his family fled to Egypt to escape Herod's massacre (2:13–18).**
   - An angel warned Joseph about Herod's plan to kill Jesus (2:13).
   - They fled to Egypt until Herod's death, fulfilling Hosea's prophecy (2:14–15).
   - Herod killed all the infant boys near Bethlehem, fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy (2:16–18).

Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.

Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

1. **Who came to worship Jesus?**
   Magi, wise men from the east, came to worship Jesus because they saw His star.
2. **Where was Jesus born?**
   He was born in Bethlehem, the City of David, fulfilling Micah's prophecy.
3. **What did the Magi give Jesus?**
   They gave Him gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
4. **Did Herod worship Jesus?**
   No, he tried to kill Jesus, but an angel warned Joseph to flee to Egypt.

Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

1. **Who came to worship Jesus?**
   Magi, wise men from the east, came to worship Jesus.
2. **Why did they come to find Him?**
   They saw His star and knew that it meant that the King of the Jews had been born.
3. **How did the people in Jerusalem respond to the Magi?**
   Herod and all the people were troubled. Herod feared the Messiah would take away His kingdom.
4. **How did the religious leaders know where the Messiah would be born?**
   Micah had prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the City of David.
5. **What did the Magi do when they came to the house where Jesus lived?**
   They were very happy, they bowed down to worship Jesus, and they gave Him gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
6. **What did the three gifts show about Jesus?**
   He is a King worthy of gold, God worthy of frankincense, and a man in need of myrrh for His suffering and death.
7. **How did Jesus fulfill Hosea's prophecy about coming out of Egypt?**
   Joseph took Jesus to Egypt to flee from Herod, then after Herod died they came back from Egypt, just like the people of Israel had come out of Egypt long ago.
8. **How was Jeremiah's prophecy fulfilled by Herod's slaughter of the children?**
   Mothers wept for their dead children, and there would also be grief over all of Israel for rejecting their Messiah.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5

INTRODUCE

NATIVITY SCENE
It is always fun for the children to play with nativity figures. Bring in several sets, and let them act out what they will be hearing in the Bible lesson.

FOLLOW THE STAR
Stick some glow-in-the-dark stars securely to the floor so that they do not move. Lay several strands of Christmas lights along the outside of the stars, like a path. Turn the lights off in the classroom. Line up the children, with the first child using a flashlight to guide the others along the trail of stars. Have the children pretend to be wise men following the path of stars. Alternate the leader so that they all have the opportunity to use the flashlight and guide the line of happy wise-men.

ILLUSTRATE

FOLLOWING THE STAR
Cut out a large star from a piece of poster board. Decorate it with bright colors, glitter, or shiny wrapping paper. Securely attach the star to the top of a yardstick. During the lesson when teaching children about the wise men who followed the star, lift up the star high above your head and tell the children to follow its movement with their eyes as you move it across the room.

WISE MEN IN ROBES
Select a number of children to play different parts in today's Bible lesson. Use sheets and robes for the costumes. Give each wise man a gift to leave with the baby Jesus when he visits. Narrate the lesson, and help the children act out the story. You may wish to tell a part of the story several times so that many children can participate.

APPLY

FOLLOWING THE STAR TO THE SAVIOR
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.
Materials: Paper, scissors, glue, and crayons.

Directions: Before class, cut out the pictures, maze, and verse from the craft sheet. During class, have the children color the pictures. Help them glue the magi on the left side of a sheet of paper, Jesus and Mary on the right side, the maze in the middle, and the verse centered at the bottom. Explain why the magi want to follow the star in order to see Jesus as you help the children navigate through the maze. (Be sure to orient the maze correctly for the beginning and end of the maze to be on the sides).

Following the Star to the Savior
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2

TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

The Wise Men worship Jesus • Matthew 2:1–18

AGES 6–8

INTRODUCE

SMELLING CENTER
In small plastic containers, place scented items or cotton balls soaked with scented liquids. Let children take turns smelling and identifying the smells. Let them vote on which smells they like best. Some suggestions include: perfume or cologne, vanilla, peppermint, spices, chocolate, a sliced orange, bubble bath, soap, and leather. In today's Bible lesson, some wise men travel from far away to bring the King of the Jews gifts of sweet-smelling oils and incense. Jesus was the King of the Jews.

CHRISTMAS CHAIN OF CHRIST'S NAMES, WEEK FIVE
Add to the chain from previous weeks the title "King of the Jews."

ILLUSTRATE

GIFT ROLLS
Cover a cardboard tube (or toilet-paper roll) with wrapping paper. Next, gather one end of the paper and tie it together with a ribbon. Fill the tube with candy, and then gather the other end of the wrapping paper and tie it with a ribbon. During the lesson, explain that some rich wise men traveled a long distance to bring gifts to the promised King of Israel. They brought their gifts to Jesus. Give each child a gift roll to bring home.

VISIT FROM WISE MEN
Dress up as a wise man (bathrobe, gift, etc.) and tell the children about your journey and why you came so far to worship Jesus. Allow the children to ask questions about your trip, dress, and job as a wise man.

APPLY

JOURNEY TO THE SAVIOR
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.
Materials: Blue construction paper, scissors, glue, crayons, white string, and hole punch.

Directions: Cut out the magi, camels, star, and Bethlehem silhouette from the craft sheet. Color the magi and camels. Fold the bottom portion of the magi and camels along the dark line. Place glue on the bottom of these pieces and place the pictures on the lower half of a folded sheet of blue construction paper. On the upper half, glue the city and the star. Finally, punch holes in all four corners of the paper and tie string through them.

Journey to the Savior
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2

AGES 9–11

INTRODUCE

THE MOVEMENT OF STARS

Tell the children that some modern theorists believe that the special star at the time of Jesus' birth was a natural event, such as a supernova or conjunction of planets. However, tell them that a better theory that aligns with the biblical story is that the star was a supernatural reality similar to the Shekinah glory that guided the Israelites in the days of Moses (refer to Exodus 13:20–22). Emphasize that our Creator could easily make a new star and sovereignly control it to move as a guiding light for the wise men. Furthermore, He could cause the star to remain in that position without moving (cf. Josh 10:1–15). It is very possible that the special star seen by the magi moved in the same direction and speed of the earth's rotation so that it appeared to stand still over Jesus' birthplace.

GIFTS THAT TEACH, PART ONE

Bring in gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Allow the children to look at these items. Explain that in today's lesson we will learn how each gift represented something special about Jesus.

ILLUSTRATE

A LONG JOURNEY

Obtain a map that shows the Parthia Empire and Jerusalem/Bethlehem during the 1st century BC. Use this map to show the children the distance the Magi may have traveled to worship Jesus. If the Magi were from Parthia, then they would have traveled around 725 miles following the star from Parthia to Bethlehem to worship Jesus. For comparison, this is about the same distance it is from New York City to Atlanta, Georgia (750 miles) or San Francisco, California to Seattle, Washington (800 miles).

GIFTS THAT TEACH, PART TWO

Use the gold, frankincense, and myrrh during your lesson to show the children which gifts the wise men gave to Jesus. Explain the significance of each gift: (1) The gold was a sign of royalty, signifying that Jesus is king; (2) The frankincense was very expensive incense and signified Jesus' deity; (3) The myrrh was a valuable perfume used for burials and signified that Jesus was a man who would suffer and die.

APPLY

SCENES FROM THE JOURNEY

Divide the class into 4 groups. Each group will reenact one of the 4 scenes from today's lesson: (1) Journey from the East (Matt 2:1), (2) Jerusalem (2:2–8), (3) Bethlehem (2:9–12), and (4) Egypt (2:13–15). Bring in props for the children to use during their scene. Reenact the scenes in order of the story to help children review and remember the lesson. Award a prize to the group that does the best job reenacting their portion of the story.