

Lesson Plans that Work
Year C – The Feast of the Epiphany
Intergenerational Gospel Lesson

Scripture: Matthew 2: 1-12

Background

Today we explore the passage telling of the visit of the wise ones to the Christ Child and understand that this amazing baby was coming to the Hebrew people AND to all people. Christmas carols and cards have embossed the bare bones story Matthew provides. So we most likely envision three kings riding camels and dressed in elegant robes with fancy crowns. The wise ones probably represent three different cultures or races. Whoever they were, they were wily enough to avoid getting trapped in the web of a threatened king, brought their intriguing gifts to the child, and went home -- by a different way.

This story closes the season of Christmas, celebrating the incredible gift of the incarnation (God among us) and invites us to explore the Epiphany. What did this story say to the people in Matthew's time and what does it say to us?

During this gathering we will 1) get to know each other better, 2) open with prayer, 3) explore the Bible passage together, 4) have some fun through one or more activities, and finally 5) close with prayer.

We offer more activities than you will probably have time to do, so choose the ones most appropriate for your group.

Gathering: Provide name tags inviting people to write how they prefer to be addressed: Connor, Ms. Jane, Father Joe, etc. then ask everyone to sit in a circle.

<p>Supplies Needed: Name tags, writing tools, a table and chairs arranged in a circle</p>
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Preview: Tell the group we will offer a prayer to our God who is right here in the center with us, we will hear the story from the Bible, and do some things together to help make this story our story. (Tell them one or two of the activities you have selected and what time you expect the session to conclude.)

Opening Prayer: God of Light, we thank you for the story of Jesus' birth and the wise people who sought out their new king. Be with us as we try to see Jesus in our midst and to see the light of Christ in each of us. Amen.

The Story: Matthew 2: 1-12: Invite someone to read the passage, or tell it, like this:

<p>Supplies Needed: A Bible or someone identified to tell the story</p>
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People far from Bethlehem had heard the news: The baby, long ago promised in the Bible, had been born.

Three very wise people just knew it was true. “We must go find the child and bring valuable gifts to the child,” they said to each other.

So the three started out on their trip and saw a very bright star far off. This had to be the sign. So they traveled for days. When they got to Bethlehem, King Herod called the wise ones to come to his palace and told them to bring him the news if they found this child. The wise ones were wise enough to know that the King was jealous of this child and was not to be trusted.

The wise ones continued their journey until the star stopped right over the place where the child was. Mary invited them in; they knelt by the child and presented their gifts. Then they left and went home -- by another road.

Questions:

Who do we think the “wise ones” were? Were they kings? Why do we think they were probably all men? (Women would not have been free to take such a trip.)

What countries do we think they might have come from?

Does anyone know what the gifts were that they brought to the child? (gold, frankincense, myrrh)

Why do we think they brought such odd gifts? (Gold could mean we bring our very best to God, Frankincense: that our worship is pleasing to God and Myrrh: that we can bring all of who we are to God, not just the nice parts.)

Epiphany Journey Game: Have people gather in groups of 8-10. In their groups, they will go around the circle and share what they would bring to Jesus by saying, “My name is _____. I’m going to see Jesus and I’m going to bring_____.” The next person has to say the person’s name, what they are bringing, and then introduce themselves. Keep going around the circle until everyone has shared something they would bring to Jesus.

Supplies Needed: Chairs arranged in a circle
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Christmas Card: Tell the group they are to become a talking Christmas Card.

The group decides who will play the part of the Christ Child, Mary, Joseph, the wise ones -- and if you have sufficient people add an angel, some shepherds – even townspeople, as needed.

Working together the group helps each character describe who they are and what they think about all this. For example, Joseph might say: first it was shepherds and the beautiful sound of angels’ voices. Now these elegant people have come to visit our baby. For sure, this child is the special one Mary told me he would be.

Keep going until the group had added all the speaking parts they think are needed.

Frankincense and Myrrh Game: As the group sits in a circle give one container to one person and say to them: “This is Frankincense.”
They are to reply: “This is frankincense?”
You answer: “Yes it is frankincense” and they turn to the next person and say: “This is frankincense,” that person replies with the same question.

Supplies Needed:

Two small boxes, each wrapped in slightly different gift wrap.
Chairs arranged in a circle.

Continue around the circle until each person has had a chance to pass the frankincense.

To make the game more complex, start a second box going in the opposite direction with the statement: “This is Myrrh.” Then start a third that can be passed in any direction with this statement: “This is Gold.”

Old Story – New Setting: Ask the group to brainstorm with you how this story would be told – if it were happening this year, in our town.

Supplies Needed:

Chairs in a circle

If Mary and Joseph were local people, what might be their nationality of origin? Would their ancestors have been here for a long time – or if they are immigrants where would they have come from? If they could not find a motel in our town, where might they be staying? Where would the wise ones have come from and what gifts might they bring? Who might the people be who have the “part” of the shepherds (the unaccepted ones)? How might all this be covered by the press; how would the local TV anchors handle the story? How do we think we might respond to the story if we were hearing it for the first time?

Three Wise Ones Panorama – a Contemporary Setting:
Spread the length of butcher paper (or lengths of other plain paper) on a table with the art supplies.

Supplies Needed:

a length of freezer paper and
crayons or felt markers

Invite the group to work together to portray the story according to the way the group brainstormed it in the preceding activity. Show the place where the child is found with his mother and his father, the wise ones and how they got there, the gifts they brought, etc. When the work of art is complete, decide together where to hang it so all can see it.

New Words, Old Tune: Using the Tune for “We Three Kings” (Hymnal 1982 # 128) compose new words to the tune. Here is an example. Let the group come up with its own words:

Supplies Needed:

Copies of the Hymnal, paper, and
pencils

“We’re the ones who looked for a star
Really hard, cause we had no car
Hungry, sleepy
Sometimes weepy
Here now, at last, we are.”

Hymn Sing: One last time, we can sing Christmas carols people like to sing.

Supplies Needed:
Copies of the Hymnal

The King's Cake: The tradition is to provide a cake with one hidden treasure – and the person who finds it is king for the day.

If you choose to do this activity, hide only one piece of fruit in the cake (poking it up from the bottom, or sticking it in from the top and re-smoothing the frosting.)

Supplies Needed:
A home-baked or purchased cake and fruit (a piece of apple or an orange segment. Option: several pieces of fruit)

Another option is to put enough pieces in the cake so everyone gets a piece. As each person finds the piece of fruit, they can tell one thing they are grateful for.

Epiphany: In Our Own Words: First, write in big letters where all can see some of the fancy words we use to describe this season:

(Epiphany, Manifestation to the Gentiles, Showing Forth, etc.). Tell the group that all these words are fancy words for: “Wow!” or “I get it!”

Supplies Needed:
Large piece of paper and markers; or a chalkboard or white board; someone to take notes

Depending on the size of your group, either work all together, or break into small groups to brainstorm how we would describe this season to someone who asked us about it – and knew nothing of our faith.

Some clues: Who was this baby that was born on Christmas and what is so special about him? And if this baby did not come for just a few specific people, who did he come for? What was it about the people who first spread this message that made people want to come join them? Who are some people we know who cause us to want to be like they are? What do we do that makes others want to be like us?

Gather the group together, share what you have noticed. What else might we do as individuals? (Example: think up encouraging things to say to people, or things we could do as a community, such as collect food for a food shelter, or have a Penny Jar available each Sunday to collect small change to buy something from Episcopal Relief and Development's Gifts for Life Catalog <http://www.er-d.org/GiftsForLife/> or some other worthwhile charity.) If the group comes up with something they want to continue to do, make sure it gets publicized so others in your community can participate.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for loving each of us and for helping us to share the good news we have received. Amen.

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