

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Second Sunday after Christmas
Gospel Lesson for Adults

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

The Incarnation: the Word made flesh. The Word, with God from the very beginning and hovering over the creation process with God, is now an infant lying on a bed of straw surrounded by curious animals. The awe and wonder of this incredible breakthrough can become awash in sentimentality and cuteness. Each year we tiptoe up to this amazing gift: God, in human flesh, coming to live among us. Each year we choose our response.

A Notation for This Week's Gospel

A star so bright it commanded the attention of wise men from far away and from a very different faith tradition. Tenaciously, these wise ones followed a star to a very different land and humbly knelt before the infant. Who did they believe this infant was? Who do we say he is?

Theme: A Star Led the Way

Before Class: You will need copies of the Bible or copies of the scripture for today.

Beginning: Tell the group that the passage we have today occurs directly before the passage we had last week. You may wish to tell them that this account of the visit of the Magi occurs in none of the other Gospels.

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for all those who told the story so we have it with us now. Be with us as we hear your story anew. Amen.

The Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12 Invite one person to read verses 1-6 and another to read 7-12.

Questions:

- I wonder what stood out for you in the passage today?
- King Herod has been king since the year 38 BC. What do we know about him from this passage? (He is terrified of the rumors that a baby king has been born.)
- What scheme does he come up with to find out where this baby is? (He attempts to conspire with the wise men. (verse 8b)
- What did he do when he realized he had been “tricked” by the wise men? (verse 16)
- What do we know of the “wise men” from this passage? (They were not Jews, probably pagans, and lived far away, understood much about stars and realized that the one they had seen in their country was different enough to merit following.)
- Why did they have to ask King Herod where the baby was? (They believed the star would lead them to a King; Jerusalem was where they presumed a King would be born.)
- What did they do when they found the place where the star had “stopped?” (They realized they had found the spot and the baby, so they entered the manger, carrying with them the luxurious gifts they had brought.)

- What would we say is the significance of their having “knelt down and paid him homage?” (This was not an event solely for the Jewish people. The baby had come for even pagans from afar.)
- What would we say is the significance of the gifts? (Not your average baby shower gifts, they were the kind of gifts one would give to a king.)
- What did the wise men do after their visit to the infant king? (They honored what they received in a dream: Herod was dangerous; they went back home by “another road.”)
- Why do we think this story was important enough to Matthew to include - when none of the other Gospels include this story? (Possibilities: Matthew was writing primarily to Jewish communities and gentiles who were hearing the story of Jesus and wanting to be a part of their community. Matthew may have been trying to help these people - who were clearly in transition - to see a new thing.)
- How might this story help us in our transitions? How might it give us courage to risk the new, while not abandoning the known ways?

Getting Closure: Invite the group to sit in silence for a moment or two. As they sit, with eyes closed if that is comfortable for them, offer these words for reflection:

A star rises in the east . . .
 Wise people begin a journey. . .
 The star stops; they stop . . .
 They knelt and paid him homage. . .
 They left for their country . . . by another road.

If you have time, you can invite them to offer their reflections or what they will take away with them from your conversations today.

Closing Prayer: For stars and those with courage to follow them, we thank you, God. Help us to follow your star, and guide us to see Christ in our midst. Amen.

Matthew 2:1-12

The Visit of the Wise Men

2 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ “And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.” ’

7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Printed by the Office for Formation and Vocation Ministries of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

© 2013 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.