

Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Second Sunday after Christmas
Lesson Plans for Younger Children

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: If these children were in class last Sunday, and you used this curriculum, you may want to tell them that today's story happened just before the story we had last week. If you can darken your classroom even a bit, bring a flashlight (with fresh batteries!) as a prop for telling the story and as a prop for the children's acting out the story. If you have a manger scene you are comfortable bringing to the class with you, set it up in a corner of the classroom. Bring a small box wrapped in gold gift wrap, two small containers of sweet smelling spices (cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, or whatever you have in your cupboard). Although frankincense and myrrh were both used in incense and perfumes, the fragrance was the benefit. Additional props for the play could be a scarf for Mary, a small blanket and a doll to be Jesus, and scarves for the three wise men. If you choose to do the second activity, you will also need paper, crayons, glitter, and glue.

Beginning. Tell the children that the story we have today happened while Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus were still in a manger with a bunch of animals.

Praying: Thank you, God, for sending us the baby Jesus. Help us to seek Jesus as the wise men did. Amen.

The Story: The baby Jesus, his mother Mary, and Joseph, his daddy, were all together in the manger. The animals had made room for this little family, and the baby was getting stronger each day. (Shine the flashlight on the manger, if you brought one.)

Way far away, some wise men were traveling on their camels at night. What is that new bright star (shine the flashlight in a corner of the room opposite the manger) they asked each other. A star that bright and that new must be pointing to something very special, they decided. They packed some treasures and started to follow the star. (Move the flashlight beam closer and closer

to the manger as you tell the rest of the story) They were far, far away, so it took then a long time to get to where the star was pointing.

When the star finally appeared to stand still (hold the flashlight beam over the manger) they got off their camels, tied them to a tree, carried their treasure chests with them and tiptoed into the manger. “May we please look at your baby, Ma’am?” they asked Mary. When they saw the baby, they knelt down beside him, opened their treasure chests, and put their presents beside the baby. They gave the baby gold (place the gold box on the floor in front of you) they gave him frankincense (place one of the containers on the floor beside the box) and myrrh (place the other container there). Then, they got up, got back on their camels, and went back home by a different road.

Activity: Invite the children to make a play about this story. (You will need at least 5, so if you have fewer, some children can play more than one part. Ask who wants to play the part of Mary, who wants to be Joseph and who wants to be each of the three wise men. An additional child can be the star by shining the flashlight. Where in this room shall the manger be? Where shall the wise men begin their journey? What shall we do with the scarves? The presents the wise men bring? Let the children act out the play, doing it over again with different people playing different parts, if they want.

Activity: If time permits, let the children draw pictures of the play to take home with them. Offer crayons and paper. Glitter would be great fun, if you want to use it.

Getting Closure: Invite the children to tell you what their favorite part of the story.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for the wise men who traveled to see Jesus. Help us to see your star and see Jesus. Amen.

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Lesson Plans that Work
Year A – Second Sunday after Christmas
Lesson Plans for Older Children

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

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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 Bibles or copies of the scripture for today. You will also need a whiteboard or large sheet of paper for taking notes. If you have access to a video camera you may want to record their interview to show them and to share with their parents.

Beginning: Tell the children that our scripture for today happened before the scripture we had last Sunday (the family fleeing to Egypt to be safe). Today's story having happened, the story we had last week was pretty inevitable. We can look at today's story as a flashback--how and why last week the Holy family fled to Egypt.

Opening Prayer: Thank you, God, for this story that helps us see that Jesus came for all of us. Be with us and help us to hear your story in a new way. Amen.

The Story: Matthew 2:1-12 Invite one child to read verse 1-6 and another to read 7-12.

Activity: For a different way to get at this story, tell the children we will have a talk show – either TV or radio, their choice. We will need a TV or radio host to interview Herod, the chief priests and the wise men. Before the host does the interviews we will need to figure out something about the characters: (You may want to make notes on a white board or large sheet of paper for the children to use as they prepare.)

- What do we know from this passage about the wise men?
- Where did they come from? (the “east” so they were not Jews.)
- Why did they decide to follow the star? (It was a star they had never seen before and had heard that a new star would be a sign of a new king.)
- What signs do we find in this passage to assure us that they were, indeed, wise? (They brought presents worthy of a king.)
- What is “frankincense,” and what is “myrrh?” (Both are used in incense and in perfume.)

- What did they figure out about King Herod? (That he was up to no good, so did not tell him where the baby was.)
- What do we know about King Herod in this passage?
- Why was King Herod frightened at the question the wise men asked? (If there was a baby king out there, what could happen to his being king?)
- How did he try to trick the wise men into revealing where the baby was? (He told them to come tell him where the baby was so he, too, could go and worship the baby.)
- What can we determine about the scribes and the chief priest? (They were called upon by Herod because they were knowledgeable about Hebrew scriptures and might know about who was the “King of the Jews”)

The Talk Show: Invite the children to decide who will be the host or hosts, who will be King Herod, the chief priests and scribes, and the wise men. If there are additional children, either take turns in the parts, or just add additional perspectives (some more chief priests, an employee or two of the wise men who went along on the journey, even another interviewer.)

When the children are ready, enjoy the show they present. If you have the ability, you may want to record it so they can watch it themselves and share it with their parents.

Getting Closure: Invite the children to wonder with you: What do you think the wise men did when they got back home? Did they kept quiet about their experience, or told others about the baby they saw?

Closing Prayer: Thank you, God, for all the ways your story gets told. 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.

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

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

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A Notation for This Week's Gospel

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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:

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