

LESSON 3

December 20, 2020

Unit I: The Beginning of a Call

International Honor for the King of the World

Devotional Reading: Exodus 1:8-22

Background Scripture: Matthew 2:7-15

Print Passage: Matthew 2:7-15

Key Verse—When they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11, KJV)

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On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Explain how the wise men point to the global nature of Jesus' mission.
- Grieve for those who suffer innocently due to the world's brokenness and sin.
- Join with peoples of every ethnicity and culture to worship Jesus, the King of all nations.

Key Terms

Behold (verse 13 [KJV only])—Greek: *idou* (id-oo'): look; see; lo.

Magi (verse 7)—Greek: **magos (mag'-os)**: a Magian; an (Oriental) astrologer; by implication a magician; "wise men" (KJV).

Rejoiced (verse 10)—Greek: **chairó (khah'-ee-ro)**: to have rejoiced; was glad; "were overjoyed" (NIV). Search (verse 8)—Greek: **zetéo (dzay-teh'-o)**: to seek, examine closely.

Star (verse 7)—Greek: **astér (as-tare')**: a star.

Worship (verse 8)—Greek: **proskuneó (pros-koo-neh'-o)**: to express profound reverence.

INTRODUCTION

Most of us are in the countdown to Christmas. In fact, many churches are preparing for Christmas plays and concerts. You may notice, at your home, in the church, and throughout your city, the radiance of lights hung high. Some are simple; others are more elaborate. Yet, all are designed to get our attention. There are differing responses to the lights. The attention received is not always favorable. Many tend to shrug off the lights and ignore their brilliance. Some fuss that it is too much or too bright, stating that it does not take all of that to share the Christmas spirit. A few are simply oblivious. Yet, there are others who become all the more curious and eager to search out the lights all over the city. Many Americans have fond holiday memories from childhood—they can recall touring neighborhoods or various areas of the city looking at the colorful or elaborate light displays. It is a popular tradition that many still enjoy with their own children and grandchildren. Today, there are many places that feature drive-through light displays, which allow persons to admire a series of unique light displays from the comfort of their automobiles. Many of today's light displays appear elaborate and complicated. The lights reflect someone's considerable time and effort to bring a bit of Christmas joy and wonder to those who

will see them. Many come with an option to tune in to a local radio station or broadcast timed to the blinking of the lights. The wonders of technology are amazing! More than two thousand years ago, God created His own display in the sky. He later displayed the same radiance in the hearts of humanity by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Today, that light still shines brightly as an inward and outward display of God's presence. Can you sense God's calling you to acknowledge that light and let it shine through you to draw others to His majestic work in the world?

THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

The wise men (interpreted in the Greek as "Magi") were experts in sacred writings, ancient wisdom, and astrology. It is quite likely that the Magi became familiar with the idea of a coming Jewish Messiah because the Jews had been exiled centuries before in Persia and Babylon. As the Jews were dispersed, they carried their traditions, prophecies, and hopes with them with a sincere expectation that God would not only redeem and restore them, but He would make things better for them with an everlasting reign of peace. Herod the Great was appointed by Rome to govern the Jews from about 37 BC to 4 BC. History shows him to be a ruthless ruler who resorted to murder and political assassination to retain political power. Herod's reckless quest for power, greed, and selfishness contributed to his widespread dislike and mistrust among the Jewish population of his day. History records that Herod was greatly motivated by self-interest, even in decisions that appeared to benefit others. The setting for today's lesson aligns with events following Jesus' birth (see Matthew 2:1). Luke is the only other writer to make any reference to the days of Mary's pregnancy and the birth of Jesus (see Luke 2:5-7). Both Matthew and Luke record that other visitors, previously unknown to Mary and Joseph, were divinely directed to visit Jesus. These narratives affirm that the Good News of Jesus' birth was not just for Jews, but for the entire world. While believers in ancient times may have struggled to understand the meaning of Jesus' birth, Christians in this generation can be certain that He is a Savior for people throughout the earth, in every generation. As we respond to Jesus, the Light of the world, let us boldly acknowledge His royal reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to not only our community, but in all the world.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Searching for the Light (Matthew 2:7-9)

KJV

7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

NIV

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

This week's lesson text opens with the wise men from the east's arriving in Jerusalem (see Matthew 2:1). The technical term is Magi, which represents a specific type of scholar of the royal courts of the Eastern kingdoms of Persia and others east of Judea. Magi is also the root word of the English word magician. The wise men arrived and inquired about the star they saw from the east and the place where the "King of the Jews was born" (see verse 2). It is important to note that they were seeking a child that had already been born, not necessarily a newborn. Herod received word of the men's search in Jerusalem and summoned them to meet with him. In their private meeting (verse 7), Herod discovered the exact time when the Magi first saw the star. Through his questioning, Herod was able to determine an approximate age of the child whom the wise men were searching to find. Herod previously enlisted the help of priests and scribes in Jerusalem on the matter and was able to learn where the child should be born (see verses 3-6). Herod informed the wise men that the child should have been in the City of David, Bethlehem, and sent them there. Herod also instructed the men to notify him when they had found the child so that he could come and worship also (verse 8). Herod was being deceptive, but the wise men, not knowing him, had no reason to question the sincerity of his motives. By the hand of God, the wise men and their caravan continued their journey—led by the same star that guided them to Jerusalem—and arrived in Bethlehem at the very place where Jesus was (verse 9). The sign that led the wise men to Jesus reassures us that His light will guide the path of all who seek Jesus sincerely, no matter who they are.

What Do You Think? Share a time when you felt specifically led by God to a certain destination and/or answer. How did you react?

Seeing the Light (Matthew 2:10-12)

KJV

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

NIV

10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Verse 9 (in the previous section) tells us that the star stopped over the house where Jesus was located. Upon noticing that the star stood still, the wise men were extremely excited (verse 10).

This excitement should not be missed. The wise men had yet to see Jesus. They had not even stepped into the house. We can even assume that they are still on their camels or some other given mode of transportation. The anticipation of meeting the King excited them. Like the wise men, we should seek Jesus with an expectation of “exceeding great joy.” The repetition of “exceeding” and “great” are intentionally used to highlight the magnitude of the excitement felt and expressed by the wise men as they prepared to enter the presence of the Savior of the world. As the men entered the house, they found Jesus with His mother, Mary, and fell immediately to their faces and worshipped Him (verse 11a). They proceeded to give gifts to Jesus, specifically “gold, frankincense and myrrh” (verse 11b, NIV). Each gift represented a character trait Jesus would display as King, God, and Savior. Many Bible scholars have suggested that although three gifts were presented, there were far more than three travellers. We have no further details of the Magi’s journey, other than the fact that they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, but to return home another way (verse 12). The light shone and appeared to them first in their homeland, then again as they drew closer to Jesus, and a third time in a dream. It is imperative for those who seek the Savior to follow the light of the Lord, when and wherever it leads them.

What Do You Think? Does God still guide us today? Share with the class a time when God’s Word offered guidance or direction for you.

Scripture about the Light (Matthew 2:13-15)

KJV

13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

15 And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

NIV

13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt,

15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

After the Magi departed for their homeland, God sent an angel to speak to Joseph in a dream. The angel directed Joseph on exactly what to do to ensure Jesus’ safety. He was to take the young child and His mother, Mary, from their home to Egypt and stay there until they received assurance that it was safe to return home (verse 13). The angel, in the same voice and verse, tells Joseph that Herod was seeking to destroy Jesus. God’s redirection of the wise men’s route home (see verse 12) allowed extra time for Joseph to get his family together. God knew the danger that boiled in the heart of Herod the Great, just as He knows the boiling anger of our enemies. Joseph did what we should do when God reveals dangers and gives us direction: he moved quickly. Joseph gathered his family at night and led them from their home toward Egypt, as directed by God’s angel (verse

14). Joseph's obedience preserved Jesus' life. Herod was so angered that the Magi did not return with specific information that he authorized the mass killings of young male children throughout the region, two years and younger (see verse 16, which is not in today's lesson). Joseph kept his family safe in Egypt until Herod died, confirming the word of the prophet Hosea (see 11:1) that God has called His Son out of Egypt (verse 15).

What Do You Think? What word have you received from God either by the Holy Spirit's affirmation in your heart or the preacher's proclamation as confirmed by the Bible? What was your response?

A CLOSING THOUGHT

God has called each of us to do marvelous works for His glory. The great takeaway from this week's lesson is that God will guide and protect us on our journeys when we submit to Him. This guidance does not eliminate the presence of trouble but does help us remain confident that God will guide us through it.

YOUR LIFE

As you meditate on God's plan and path for your life, seek confirmation from God's Word, and not from popular opinions, trends, or social media. Be sure to take time to make notes of your experiences and discoveries.

YOUR WORLD!

During this week as you celebrate the birth of Jesus, take time out to share the moving revelation and sustaining power of God in your life.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, help us to shine in this world. Help us to become vessels of Your light, drawing the lost to You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

CONCLUSION (PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON)

While reading the Background Scripture, consider this thought: "What are you doing to prepare yourself for God's purpose and plan for your life?"

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 21-27, 2020)

Monday, December 21: "A Voice Cries, 'Comfort My People'" (Isaiah 40:1-5)

Tuesday, December 22: "John the Baptist Is the Greatest" (Matthew 11:2-15)

Wednesday, December 23: "The Baptist's Testimony of Faith" (John 1:19-34)

Thursday, December 24: "Jesus, The Father's Beloved Son" (Matthew 17:1-8)

Friday, December 25: "In John, Elijah Has Come" (Matthew 17:9-13; Malachi 4:4-5)

Saturday, December 26: "John Baptizes Jesus In the Jordan" (Matthew 3:13-17)

Sunday, December 27: "John Prepares the Way for Jesus" (Matthew 3:1-12)