

Eastern visitors

Matthew 2:1-18 – Leaders version

For a one hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

What does the passage say and mean?

Read Matthew 2:1-12.

1. Where have the travellers come from, what were they following and what does this tell us about them?

They have come from 'the east'. This means that they are Gentiles, i.e. are not Jewish. They are likely to have come from Babylon (Iraq) or Arabia. The first people to visit Jesus were shepherds, local men who were social outcasts, showing us that Jesus welcomes everyone, including those whom society ignores. Now we see visitors who are rich, influential and foreign – Jesus has come for all people, not just for the Jews. It's interesting to note that the only visitors we are told about are those we least expect to be told about!!

They were following a star – they are astrologers who knew the Jewish Scriptures and saw fulfilment of prophecy revealed by the star (probably a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter).

2. What title do the travellers give to the child Jesus and why have they come to see him?

They call him 'the king of the Jews' and they have come to worship him.

3. Why do you think King Herod and all Jerusalem were disturbed to hear this?

King Herod was the king! He didn't want to hear that a new king had been born, or that people were going to worship a new king – this would have raised hatred and fear in Herod.

4. Herod asks the Jewish religious men where the Messiah (the Christ) was to be born (v3-6). What do the Scriptures say in answer to this (see 2 Samuel 5:2 and Micah 5:2) and what do you notice in Matthew 2:1?

Look up the OT references so the group can see that the prophets really did say these things.

2 Samuel 5:2 – ‘...And the LORD said to (David), ‘You shall shepherd my people Israel, and you shall become their ruler.’

Micah 5:2 – ‘But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel...’

Matt 2:1 – Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, the town of David (1 Samuel 16:1).

5. Read Matthew 2:7-11. Why do you think king Herod wants to know where the child is?

Let the group brainstorm. The passage says ‘so that I too may go and worship him’...

6. Read v11. Do you notice anything unexpected about where they find Jesus and Mary?

We are no longer at the birthplace of Jesus, but in a house. Much time, up to 2 years, has elapsed since the nativity.

7. What happens when they meet the child Jesus? Why is this surprising and what does it tell us about their understanding of who the child is?

On one hand, it isn't surprising that they worship him, because that was their stated aim, v2. But this is a child born to a peasant woman living in a village, not to a queen in a palace. This child is not the recognised heir to any throne, he is just a child as far as everyone else is concerned (except Mary, Joseph and a few shepherds!) These travellers recognise that the child is a king, despite all evidence to the contrary.

8. What gifts do the travellers give to the child and why do you think these gifts are important?

Gold – a gift worthy of a king. A handy gift for a poor family who will shortly be on the run, asylum seeking in Egypt... = Who Jesus is.

Frankincense – the incense used in the Temple, signifying the priestly role of this child who would reconcile man to God. = Why Jesus came.

Myrrh – a spice used in burial. A prophecy of the death of the child. = What it cost him.

NB 3 gifts has given rise to the idea of 3 men. But there is no mention of the number of travellers in the Bible and no evidence that they were kings...

9. The travellers are warned to go home by a different route in Matthew 2:12, avoiding Herod. Read v13-18. Why does Herod do this? What does this tell us about the ways that people can respond to Jesus?

Herod kills all the boys in Bethlehem who are the right sort of age for the ‘king of the Jews’, <2yrs old, but Jesus’ parents have already escaped to Egypt with him. Try not to get caught up in a discussion about infanticide, rather focus on the 2 ways we can respond to Jesus – love him or hate him (ultimately, indifference and rejection are the same as hate).

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What is your response to Jesus? Who do you most resemble?

- Herod – who fears Jesus and seeks to destroy him
- The religious people – who know all about him but do not even go to see him (Bethlehem is just down the road from Jerusalem!) or respond to him
- The travellers – who worship him

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.



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2. What title do the travellers give to the child Jesus and why have they come to see him?
3. Why do you think King Herod and all Jerusalem were disturbed to hear this?
4. Herod asks the Jewish religious men where the Messiah (Christ) was to be born (v3-6). What do the Scriptures say in answer to this (see 2 Samuel 5:2 and Micah 5:2) and what do you notice in Matthew 2:1?
5. Read Matthew 2:7-11. Why do you think king Herod wants to know where the child is?
6. Read v11. Do you notice anything unexpected about where they find Jesus and Mary?

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