

Sought

FOCUS ATTENTION

BEGIN: As the group arrives, explain that during the holidays people may have experienced the need for information on a gift they received or maybe information on assembling a gift they purchased for a child. Many turn to the Internet, looking for how to help. Occasionally the information needed is immediately received. And yet, often people experience the opposite. A search for information can take people on a journey that includes visits to many sites. Maybe the information is eventually found or maybe it isn't ever discovered. Sometimes we have to go back to the beginning and ask, what was the motivating factor for delving into this search? Allow the group to speculate on the driving factors behind the search.

DISCUSS: *What causes people to search for Jesus? To what lengths might a person go to find Him?* (p. 37)

TRANSITION: *We are taking a break from our study in Ezekiel to focus attention on Jesus' birth. The wise men traveling from the east following a star adds significant truths to the coming of the Messiah.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Use information from Understand the Context: Matthew 1:1–2:12 (p. 37) to set the stage for the session. Read the bulleted points below that summarize the text. Use these statements to introduce each segment of Matthew 2:1-12.

- Some people are seeking God and His salvation, while some are not (2:1-3).
- Some people misunderstand the truth of the gospel while others want to silence it (2:4-8).
- Jesus can be found by people wanting to worship Him (2:9-12).

TRANSITION: Highlight the first summary statement. (Some people are seeking God and His salvation, while some are not.)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 2:1-3, instructing the group to identify those in the verses who were seeking God and those who were not.

- **(2:2)** The wise men sought the King of the Jews, but they were not looking for Herod, who claimed the title. They testified, *we saw his star at its rising*, a sign they had interpreted as indicating a king's birth. Further, this new king was more than an earthly king, because the wise men had *come to worship him*.

- **(2:3)** Toward the end of his reign, Herod became extremely paranoid and even killed several members of his own family whom he suspected of conspiring against him. The wise men's statement thus naturally brought him concern because he perceived their news as a threat.

TEAMS: Create two teams: a Herod and a wisemen team. Provide **Pack Item 11** (*Handout: Identifying the Wise Men*) to the wisemen team and a Bible dictionary to the Herod team. Direct the groups to look for the following: background, profession, personality, spiritual needs. Allow time for research, and then invite each group to respond based on their assignment. Highlight the significant elements that contrast the differences between King Herod and the wise men.

HIGHLIGHT: Emphasize this week's memory verse (Matt. 2:2), listed on **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark*).

DISCUSS: Lead the group in a discussion of the reason Jesus was such a threat to Herod and those in Jerusalem. ***Why might people today view Jesus as a threat?*** (p. 39)

TRANSITION: Call attention to the second summary statement. (Some people misunderstand the truth of the gospel while others want to silence it.)

READ: Read **Matthew 2:4-8**, instructing the group to identify two different types of kings.

- **(2:6)** Old Testament prophets often described bad leaders as worthless shepherds (Jer. 10:21; 23:2). In contrast, God said His Messiah would *shepherd* His *people Israel* and care for them as a good shepherd cared for his sheep (Isa. 40:11; John 10:14).

- **(2:8)** King Herod failed to understand the truth of the gospel. Jesus did not come to take over Herod's kingdom, though Jesus did come that Herod might understand the truth of God's salvation.

DIFFERENTIATE: *The wise men said they were seeking the King of the Jews; Herod told the chief priests and scribes that he was looking for the Messiah.* Direct the group to scan the information in the Day 2 Daily Exploration (p. 41) and differentiate the use of those two terms as they relate to the motivation of Herod and the wise men to find Jesus.

EXPLAIN: Point out the immediate response of the chief priests and scribes pointing to Micah 5:2; the Scripture not only gave the location of Jesus' birthplace but also spoke to His identity. Summarize 2 Samuel 5:2 and Ezekiel 34 to explain God's use of shepherds in describing the identity of Jesus. Ask: ***What does Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy reveal about Him?*** (p. 39)

DISCUSS: ***With this knowledge of Jesus, Herod sent the wise men to find Him. How might a person use information found in the Bible to silence or discredit Jesus? How might knowing about Jesus get in the way of seeking Him?***

TRANSITION: Call attention to the third summary statement. (Jesus can be found by people wanting to worship Him.)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Matthew 2:9-12**, asking the group to identify the response of the wise men upon locating Jesus.

- **(2:11)** The wise men's coming confirmed to Mary and Joseph their son was truly God's Son. Their response to seeing Jesus also may have surprised those who saw them. Their worship of Jesus points to Jesus' deity. The Law of Moses prohibited the worship of anyone or anything but God. In fact, when Satan tempted Jesus to worship him, Jesus replied that God alone deserved worship (Luke 4:8; Deut. 6:13). At the same time, Jesus accepted worship from His followers (Matt. 14:33; 28:17). Only God's Son could properly accept such adoration. Joseph and Mary must have marveled at seeing the wise men bow before their child.
- **(2:12)** The wise men were *warned in a dream not to go back to Herod*. Dreams play an important role elsewhere in Matthew 1–2. The Lord's angel told Joseph in a dream of Mary's conception (1:20). God warned Joseph by a dream to flee to Egypt to avoid Herod's death decree for Bethlehem's male children (2:13). When Herod died, God again came to Joseph in a dream, advising him he could return safely to Israel (2:19–20). Finally, a dream warned Joseph not to settle in Judea, so he settled in Galilee to the north (2:22).

ASK: *How would you describe the joy expressed as the wise men encountered Jesus? To what might you compare their experience?* (p. 39)

HIGHLIGHT: Throughout the Old Testament, God offered signs of the coming Messiah. The giving of gifts by the wise men fulfills words found in Psalm 72:10–11 and Isaiah 60:6. Read those passages to emphasize the detail of God's plan of

providing the Savior for all people and guidance to God's followers in the act of giving as a part of worship.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Review the bulleted statements under Apply the Text (p. 40). Encourage the group to modify or add to the statements.

SHARE: Highlight the third question set under Apply the Text (p. 40): ***Review the ways you celebrate Christmas. What could you adjust to make your celebrations more worshipful of Jesus?*** Encourage the group to be specific in their responses and challenge them to hold each other accountable in the days ahead.

PRAY: Conclude the group time with prayer, thanking God for providing salvation through Jesus and allowing believers to participate in sharing the good news to those seeking Him.

AFTER THE SESSION

Reinforce the session by following up with group members who need to be encouraged in their spiritual journeys. Especially focus on those who may need to commit to following Jesus. Offer to pray with them, reminding them of God's provision and love. Ask if there are opportunities for you or others to provide additional encouragement.