



## CHRISTMAS

# 04

session 4

## SEEK & FIND



## EXPLORE scripture MATTHEW 2:1-12

## MATTHEW 2:1-3

**1** After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, **2** saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising

and have come to worship him.” **3** When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

## MATTHEW 2:4-8

**4** So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born. **5** “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet: **6** And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out

of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” **7** Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.”

## MATTHEW 2:9-12

**9** After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was — the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. **11** Entering the house, they saw the child with

Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.



## EXPLORE options

### 1. Hidden Treasure

Before your group meets this week, draw a simple treasure map for your students to follow. This could include written directions for how to get to a hidden treasure in the room where you meet (i.e., “Take two large steps toward the entrance, then turn left and take three small steps, then turn around and take five regular steps”) or a dotted line for them to follow with vague outlines of landmarks such as chairs, windows, desks, and other features in your room. You could also do this outdoors or in another room if you’d like. Draw a large “X” on the map and hide some sort of small “treasure” at that spot for them to discover. Ask for a few volunteers at the start of your meeting and have them follow the map to find the treasure. Today we are going to read about the wise men and how they followed a mysterious star to find the greatest treasure the world has ever known: Jesus. When we seek after Jesus, He can always be found.

### 2. I Hope I Find

Hang a large piece of paper in your meeting room, or prepare a dry-erase board. At the top, write: “Things I’d Like to Find.” Ask your students to raise their hands and tell you something they’d really like to find one day. Some examples could include a \$20 bill lying on the sidewalk, buried treasure, a rare item in their favorite video game, a restaurant that serves their favorite food, or a stranger who looks just like them. Ask students what it would take for them to find that thing. In today’s session we will read about how some wise men went on a long journey to find the newborn King Jesus and to worship Him. No matter how long the journey, they were committed. When we seek after Jesus, He can always be found.



### LET’S talk

**Have you ever looked everywhere for something?**

**How hard were you willing to look for it? Were you tempted to give up?**



### THIS WEEK’S focus

We have all found ourselves looking for something—searching high and low and finding lost items in places we’d expect and in places we don’t. Maybe you retrace your steps or immediately go ask your mom where it is. More times than not, we don’t bother looking; we just get frustrated and give up. Today we will see how the wise men sought out Jesus from far away because they had heard that the new king of the Jews had been born. Even with little understanding and little direction, they demonstrated that when we seek after Jesus, He can always be found.



# CONVERSATION questions

## READ MATTHEW 2:1-3.

**1** After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, **2** saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his

star at its rising and have come to worship him.”

**3** When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

### **.01** How did the response of the wise men to the birth of Jesus compare to Herod’s response?

### **.02** Why was King Herod disturbed at the news of Jesus’ birth?

After Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph in the little corner of Judea called Bethlehem, word began to spread. A group of wise men from the east arrived, probably up to two years after Jesus was actually born. The wise men were mystics of some kind, and wealthy, based on the gifts they came bearing. They came all the way from the east because they saw a star. Perhaps motivated by some form of astrology or mysticism, they made their way to Judea. Whatever their reasoning, they thought the birth of this new king was important enough to make a long journey and honor Him. They went to great lengths to seek and find Jesus.



#### **HISTORY | Who were the wise men?**

Every nativity set comes complete with three kings or wise men. Yet, much of how we depict them is speculation. The Gospel of Matthew is the only one with an account of their arrival, and Matthew’s text does not indicate they were kings of any kind. The name “wise men” could encompass many kinds of magicians, mystics, astrologers, dream interpreters, etc. We assume they had a connection to astrology based on the fact that they followed a star. We don’t even know if there were three of them! That is only based on the fact that they brought three gifts. They came “from the east,” that is, east of Judea. That could have been Arabia, Babylon, or Persia. Many scholars think Babylon is most likely since they would have had a greater tie to the Jews when they were exiled there.

### **.03** Why would the wise men go to all the trouble of finding Jesus if they were not even Israelites?

King Herod did not have quite the same reaction upon hearing the news of Jesus' birth. Nothing worried Herod quite like the arrival of another king. Herod was a firm, even cruel ruler at times. He was appointed to rule over the Jews (under Rome's authority), and the idea that someone—even a child—was threatening his authority upset him greatly. When he became disturbed by the notion, apparently it led to many in Jerusalem also being concerned. The religious leaders and corrupt politicians would have also felt threatened by the idea of a new king.

The very different reactions to the news of Jesus' birth are a reminder that not everyone responds to Him in the same way. To those who were waiting in great anticipation of the Messiah to rescue them, it was the greatest news of all. But for those like Herod, who saw a new king as a threat, it was not good news. Even on this side of the cross and the resurrection, not everyone has a heart eager to seek and find the salvation that Jesus offers us. For some, the idea of surrendering their lives to someone else feels like a threat to their identity or way of life.

### **.04** Are there any areas of your life in which you like to maintain control? How do you keep God at arm's length at these times?

## MATTHEW 2:1-3

**2:1.** The summons of the *wise men* to visit Jesus demonstrates God's intention to save Gentiles from their futile religions. As an adult, Jesus cast out demons and broke Satan's grip on beleaguered people. Here we see that even in His infancy, Christ plundered Satan's kingdom and set captives free. *The east* may refer to Babylonia or Persia. *King Herod* was actually a client king ruling under Roman authority. Though he was Idumean and not a Jew, the Roman Senate named him king of Judea in 40 BC. He was an able ruler but brutal and suspicious.

**2:2.** The question posed by the wise men was an unintentional challenge to Herod's reign. Jesus was *born king* in the sense that He was from David's line and thus king by birthright. Herod, however, was neither a full Jew nor a descendant of David and thus was not genuinely qualified to reign as king. *At its rising* indicates that the star mysteriously appeared in the eastern sky to signal the Messiah's birth. The interest of the wise men in astrology probably first directed their attention to the star. In another profound display of grace, God condescended to use the wise men's pagan superstitions to draw them to Jesus.

**2:3.** Herod was *disturbed* by reports of the birth of a legitimate claimant to his throne. The people of *Jerusalem* were equally disturbed because they feared Herod's paranoid and delusional rages. In the past he had killed even his favorite wife and sons in order to protect his rule.



# CONVERSATION questions

## READ MATTHEW 2:4-8.

**4** So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born. **5** “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet: **6** And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who

will shepherd my people Israel.” **7** Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.”

Herod quickly gathered all his best resources to inquire about the Messiah. He wanted verification of whether this child was really the one the Jews had been waiting for, or if this was all just a rumor. The religious leaders got together and informed Herod about a prophecy concerning where the Messiah would be born. It came from the prophet Micah (Mic. 5:2) and it indeed spoke of the coming ruler of Israel being born in Bethlehem. According to the prophecies, the wise men were on the right track.

## **.05** What kind of ruler was Jesus going to be, according to the prophecy?



### THEOLOGY | Why were the Jews waiting on a Messiah? What does that title mean?

From the beginning of God’s covenant with Israel, He had promised to bless the whole world through Israel. They continued to hope that God would fulfill this promise, though they could not see how. Eventually, God raised up a king after His own heart: David, who faithfully ruled Israel and established the temple in Jerusalem. But God promised to bring a new and better king through the line of David, one who would usher in peace and justice for Israel (2 Sam. 7:12-13). The title Messiah (or Christ) means “anointed one.” Jesus is the savior-king of Israel, and all of humanity. But Jesus wasn’t the kind of king or Messiah anyone was expecting. While everyone was looking for a great warrior or political leader, Jesus redefined the kingdom He was ushering in.

**.06** In what ways was Jesus different than other rulers in Israel had been? In what ways is he different than how many people now expect or want Him to be?

Herod sent the wise men to investigate in person. He gave them instructions to search diligently for the child, and when they found the child, to report back to him. Of course, he told the wise men that he, too, wanted to worship this child. Herod and the other religious leaders knew the truth. They knew the prophecies about the one who was to rescue Israel. But instead of seeing the new king's arrival as a sign of hope and salvation, they misunderstood and were threatened by His potential power. Like most of Israel, they were expecting a different kind of Messiah. They were waiting on a political or a military leader, and those were a threat to their own authority.

The same reality remains in our world today. Many who misunderstand the gospel and the person of Jesus want to silence the truth. The gospel message is offensive to some and hope for others. Some respond as Herod and some respond to Him as the wise men did. But the truth of His good news remains the same. Not only was He the hope for a captive Israel, but He is the hope for the whole world.

**MATTHEW 2:4-8**

**2:4.** Herod summoned expert scribes to learn where the Old Testament said *the Messiah* would be born. To this point the star had guided the wise men near to Jesus, but now the witness of the Scriptures was necessary before God caused the star to reappear and pinpoint the exact location. Thus the value of biblical revelation was upheld even as new revelations unfolded.

**2:5-6.** The chief priests and scribes (v. 3) knew Scripture well enough to identify *Bethlehem* as Christ's birthplace (Mic. 5:2; John 7:42), but nevertheless they later opposed His teachings. The priestly opposition to Jesus is foreshadowed here by the fact that they made no effort to go visit Him even as the wise men undertook the last leg of a long journey to do so. Micah 5:2 foretold that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of a king, a ruler who would *shepherd . . . Israel*. Although Micah said that the promised prince would "rule" over Israel, Matthew's translation says that Messiah will "shepherd" Israel. Matthew likely chose this word to reflect Micah's use in 5:4 and thus show that the entirety of Micah 5 applies to Jesus.

**2:7-8.** Herod questioned the wise men about the *exact time* of the star's appearance under the assumption that the star first appeared at the time of the child's birth. On the basis of this date, he ordered the execution of all male children in Bethlehem two years of age and under (v. 16). This implies that the wise men's journey was lengthy and involved great sacrifice. Herod's pretended desire to worship the Messiah highlights his deceitfulness.

 CONVERSATION  
**questions****READ MATTHEW 2:9-12.**

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Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

**.07** What can the wise men teach us about worship?

**.08** What does the wise men's arrival to worship Jesus tell us about God's kingdom?

Believing this newly born king to be in Bethlehem, the wise men went on their way. At that point, they were unaware of Herod's ill intentions toward the child. Indeed, the star was there, guiding them along the way. Bethlehem was only six miles south of Jerusalem, so they made the journey until the star rested over the place where Jesus was. They found the child and immediately fell to their knees in worship.

**BE VULNERABLE**

Consider sharing with your group about a time that you were moved to worship like the wise men did. Whether it was in a worship service, reading scripture, driving in your car, or even in the middle of a mundane moment in your day, what moved you simply to worship? How did God meet you in that moment? How might that time have looked different than just singing a song?

The wise men could not help but worship Jesus. Part of the good news of the Messiah was the promise to usher in a new kingdom that would be, not just for Jews, but for all people who seek and follow Jesus. The wise men were likely some of the first Gentiles to seek out Jesus. What a miracle! The wise men had likely spent much of their lives looking to the sky in search of something. They had to have a sense that something much bigger was holding the universe together. They looked for signs and stars that might point them in the right direction. Who would have thought that a single star would actually point them to the light of the world?

Having worshiped Jesus and presented Him with their gifts, the wise men returned to their home. But they had been warned in a dream not to report back to Herod, so they went a different route on the return journey. The wise men are a picture of what it is to seek and find Jesus. Even without knowing fully what it meant for a newborn child to be the King of the Jews, they set out to discover and worship Him. Those who seek the Savior will indeed be saved.

## MATTHEW 2:9-12

**2:9.** This is the first time the *star* is actually said to move. The text leaves open the question of whether or not it had so moved previously. Regardless of how much the star had traveled, its motion here seems to require a supernatural event. Various attempts to link the star with different astronomical phenomena, especially for purposes of dating (e.g., a comet or a conjunction of planets), prove interesting but are probably irrelevant.

**2:10.** What the wise men recognized as divine guidance filled them, literally, with exceedingly great joy.

**2:11.** In contrast to the stable in which Jesus was born (Luke 2), Jesus' family now lived in a *house*. This shows that the wise men visited Jesus after the visit of the shepherds described by Luke. The wise men worshiped Jesus openly, as did many other people during his lifetime (8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9,17). Jesus' reception of worship reinforces His identity as Immanuel, "God is with us" (1:23). *Gold, frankincense, and myrrh* were costly gifts. The latter two are aromatic resins. Frankincense was used in making incense and perfume (see Ex. 30:34-35). Myrrh was used as an ingredient in anointing oil (30:23-25), as a perfume (Ps. 45:8), and in burial preparations (John 19:39).

**2:12.** The wise men did not recognize Herod's purposes at first but were later *warned in a dream* just as Joseph had been (1:20-21). Like Joseph they obeyed God's words.



# NOW What?

## CENTRAL truth

When we seek after Jesus, He can always be found.

### KEY QUESTION

**.09** The wise men went to great lengths to get to Jesus. What are some ways you can seek Him in your daily life?

**.10** Why is it important that we continue to seek Jesus, even when we don't fully understand how He is working?

**.11** What can we learn from the wise men's journey about following in obedience?

**.12** How is Jesus drawing you to worship? What does worship look like for you outside of just singing?



**THE STUDENT LEADER PACK** is available for purchase on [lifeway.com/explorethebiblestudents](http://lifeway.com/explorethebiblestudents). It includes valuable posters that are referenced throughout the *Leader Guide*, Family Connection guides that equip families to discuss the Bible on the go, a Midweek study of a complementary book of the Bible, a link to training audio to help leaders prepare for each session, and PowerPoint templates with graphics from the quarter study to help prepare slides for teaching.



# DAILY devotions

The Bible is no ordinary book—it is God’s powerful Word and it is given to us for our good (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:13). So we should read the Bible more carefully and thoughtfully than any other book. This is where the 7 Arrows of Bible Reading come in—these 7 questions will train you and your students to get more out of your time in the Bible and experience its life-transforming power. Your students’ *Daily Discipleship Guide* (item 005646504) contains five days of Daily Devotions built on the 7 Arrows. Here is a summary of the texts they will be studying. We encourage you to follow along and use the 7 Arrows questions to guide your own study of God’s Word.

## 7 ARROWS FOR BIBLE reading



What does this passage say?



What does this passage tell us about God?



What did this passage mean to its original audience?



How does this passage change the way I relate to people?



What does this passage tell us about man?



How does this passage prompt me to pray?



What does this passage demand of me?

## LEADER challenge

### MEMORIZE

Matthew 2:2

### CONNECT

Send a group email or group message to your students, encouraging them to complete their daily devotions. You might also consider sharing your own insights from the daily readings as a means of encouraging them.

**DAY 1** MATTHEW 2:1-6

**DAY 2** MATTHEW 2:7-12

**DAY 3** LUKE 2:8-16

**DAY 4** LUKE 11:5-10

**DAY 5** JEREMIAH 29:10-14