

Christmas

Seeking the Savior

**Background
Study Verses:**
Matthew 1:18–2:18

Lesson Material:
Matthew 2:1–15

Bible Truth
God promised to send
a Savior, and He sent
His son, Jesus.



It was Christmas Eve. John sat in his easy chair and looked at the bright lights on the tree. He saw the many presents under it for the children. Tomorrow the children would become excited about all their new toys. They would want to tell everyone what they got for Christmas. But John was not excited. He had been thinking all day about what the next year held for him. He wanted more from his life. He was not happy with his job and his boring life. He took his Bible and found the Christmas story to read to the children before they opened their gifts the next morning. He thought about what that story meant. He realized he must become excited every time he read about God's great gift of His son, Jesus Christ. John prayed. He promised God he would tell more people about God's great gift.

What These Verses Tell Us

1. **What Are You Looking For? (2:1-2)** – Wise men from the East came to Jerusalem looking for the newborn King of the Jews.
2. **What Is Your Motive? (2:3-8)** – Herod told the wise men to come back and tell him what they found.
3. **How Will You Respond? (2:9-12)** – The wise men followed the star and found Jesus. They worshiped Him and gave Him gifts.
4. **Who Is This Christmas Child? (2:13-15)** – Joseph was warned in a dream and took Mary and Jesus to Egypt.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Where was Jesus born?
2. How did the wise men know where to go to look for the new king?
3. Why did Herod want to know where to find the new king?
4. Why did the wise men go home a different way and not tell King Herod?
5. Why did Joseph take his family to Egypt?

Today's Lesson

1. What Are You Looking For? (2:1-2)

In chapter 1, Matthew wrote about the family of Jesus. He traced the family line all the way back to Abraham. He explained how there were 14 generations from Abraham to David and 14 generations from David to the time the Jews were taken to Babylon. There were 14 more generations from Babylon to Jesus. Why was that important? This information helps us to understand how Jesus was truly the Messiah.

Then Matthew told about how an angel talked to Joseph and helped him understand how Mary was carrying a baby from the Holy Spirit. This helps us to understand how Jesus was truly the Son of God.

Verse 1. In chapter 2, Matthew wrote about how the wise men came from the East. This helps us to understand how Jesus was

not only the Messiah for the Jews. He is the Savior for all people everywhere. He will save people who seek Him.

The Gospel of Luke gives us more information about how Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Joseph went with Mary to Bethlehem. Why? King Herod told everyone to go to their home town and register for taxes. Bethlehem was a small town about six miles from Jerusalem. King Herod ruled that area for 37 years. Jesus was born in the last year of Herod's reign.

The men from the East are identified as wise men. Another word we see is *Magi*. They were more like astronomers (people who study the stars), than kings. They were probably from a tribe with some experience with early Judaism. They came from the family of Keturah, Abraham's wife after Sarah died. She had six sons who started Arab tribes south and east of Canaan (Gen. 25:1-6).

The wise men were probably familiar with the first five books of the Old Testament. They may have studied Numbers 24:15-19. In these verses, the prophet Balaam told about a Messiah who will come in the future. "I see someone who will come someday, someone who will come, but not soon. A star will come from Jacob; a ruler will rise from Israel" (Num. 24:17).

WE ARE TRULY WISE
WHEN WE SEEK JESUS.

Because of what we read in verse 16, about Herod wanting to kill all the baby boys under 2 years old, we know the wise men came to see Jesus at least a year and possibly 2 years after Jesus was born. By that time, Joseph and Mary probably had a house in Bethlehem. We do not know why Joseph did not return to his home to Nazareth after he registered for the tax. It seems he stayed in Bethlehem.

Verse 2. The wise men followed a star from their home to the land of the Jews. They went to Jerusalem, the capital, to see the king. They were looking for a king, so they went to a king to ask where this new king was born. They did not understand what kind of king Jesus was. They expected this new king to sit on the throne like David.

Many people today look for something important in their life. We are truly wise when we seek Jesus. He is the one who can give us joy and peace in our life. If you are seeking joy and peace, talk with someone who can share with you the wonderful story of Jesus the Savior.

2. What Is Your Motive? (2:3-8)

In these verses, we find Herod also seeking Jesus, but for a different reason. His motive (reason for doing something) was to kill anyone who wanted to become king. He killed some of his sons and wives so they could not take his kingdom away from him.

Verses 3-4. Matthew does not tell anything more about other people in Jerusalem who were troubled along with King Herod. This may mean the important priests and teachers (scribes). Herod called these Jewish leaders together because the wise men said they were looking for the king of the Jews. These Jewish leaders hated and feared King Herod.

Verses 5-6. They knew nothing about the birth of Jesus, of course, but they did remember a verse from the Old Testament. This verse is Micah 5:2, “You, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are too small to be among the army groups from Judah, from you will come one who will rule Israel for me. He comes from very old times, from days

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVE
FOR WANTING TO KNOW
MORE ABOUT JESUS?

long ago.” Matthew wrote the verse in a different form from the Old Testament verse. The difference is because the Old Testament is translated from Hebrew. Matthew wrote in Aramaic, so Matthew 6 is translated from Aramaic.

Both verses give the same truth. This always helps us to know how God keeps His Word alive. The truth is the same, no matter what translation we read!

Verse 7. After Herod talked with the Jewish leaders, he met with the wise men again. He asked them when they first saw the star. Why did he want to know that? Because he knew that was the day this new king was born. He knew how old the baby was when he talked with the wise men. That helps us understand why King Herod killed all the baby boys under two years old in the area around Bethlehem.

Verse 8. Herod was a murderer and a liar. He lied when he told the wise men he wanted to worship the new king. He wanted to kill the new king and anyone else powerful enough to take his kingdom away from him.

The wise men had a strong motive for visiting the new king. Herod had an evil motive. What is your motive for wanting to

know more about Jesus? Our motive must be to worship Him as our Savior and Lord.

3. How Will You Respond? (2:9-12)

The word *respond* means “to do something because of what we have seen or learned.” In these verses, we see how the wise men responded with joy and with generous gifts to Jesus.

Verse 9. The wise men left Jerusalem, and the star continued to lead them to Jesus. We can learn something from this verse. If the wise men did not stop in Jerusalem to talk with other people about this, the star would have led them to Jesus. We need to be careful we do not go to the wrong people and places to learn about Jesus. We need to go to the Bible. The Bible will lead us to Jesus in the same way the star led the wise men.

Verse 10. The wise men saw the star was still there to lead them. They rejoiced. We, too, can rejoice every time we go to God’s Word and learn something more about Jesus.

When we read more of the Bible, we learn more about Jesus.

GOD SPOKE
AND THE WISE MEN
OBEYED.

Verse 11. The wise men came to the house and found Jesus with His mother and Joseph. Joseph had moved his little family from the stable to a house in Bethlehem. We do not know how old Jesus was. Bible teachers believe he was only a few weeks old. Herod wanted to make sure, so he killed all the baby boys under two years old.

The three gifts show us three things about Jesus. The gold shows He was a king. The frankincense shows He was divine, and the myrrh shows He would suffer. It is also necessary to realize how Joseph could use these things to pay for his trip to Egypt. God always provides for His people!

Verse 12. Herod told the wise men to report back to him, but God was in control. God told the wise men to go a different way. God spoke and the wise men obeyed God rather than the king.

When God speaks to your heart, how will you respond? When you read the Bible and understand what God wants, will you obey? When we meet Jesus, we know we need to obey Him.

4. Who Is This Christmas Child? (2:13-15)

Verses 13-14. Matthew again quoted from the Old Testament (Hosea 11:1) when he wrote about the trip to Egypt. God spoke to Joseph and told him to go with his family to Egypt. God spoke, and Joseph obeyed.

Verse 15. Joseph continued to obey God and stayed in Egypt until he knew King Herod was dead. Then he went back to his home in Nazareth. That town is where Jesus grew up.

In verse 16, Matthew said Herod was very angry. The word Matthew used is a strong word. More than 300 years later a man named Macrobius wrote about this terrible killing. He said Herod killed his own son who was under two years old! The Jews had a saying, "It is better to be Herod's pig than to be his son." Herod killed several of his sons, but as a Jew, he would not touch or kill a pig! Matthew quoted from Jeremiah 31:15-17 about the weeping of the Jews at the time they were taken to Babylon and compared it with the weeping when these babies were killed.

Who is this Christmas child? Through all of Matthew's words, we can see God's hand as He takes care of His son. God guided the wise men. God guided Joseph to take his family to Egypt.

During this week, take time to look into God's Word and let God guide you to understand more about Jesus, our Savior. Then obey God as He leads you to do His work today.

What About You?

This lesson is about the birth of Jesus and what it meant to the wise men.

What does Christmas mean to you? Is it just another holiday? Is it just a time for families to get together and share gifts? Or is it a time when you remember how God sent His only son to become your Savior?

Applying the Lesson

Think of some of your friends, or people you work with, or people who live near you. Are any of them still seeking a Savior? Think about people that live in other parts of the world who do not know Jesus. Use this Christmas time to remind them who Jesus is and why He came.

Mark the things that you can do this year to help them to know Jesus:

_____ Invite them to church.

_____ Write your personal testimony in the Christmas cards you send.

_____ "Adopt" a needy family in Jesus' name and give them special Christmas gifts.

_____ Give money to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering to support missionaries in other countries.

A verse to remember: "When the wise men saw the star, they were filled with joy" (Matthew 2:10).

Christmas

Seeking the Savior

Background Study Outline

- 1. Joseph's Account
(Matt. 1:18-25)**
- 2. Wise Men's Quest
(2:1-12)**
- 3. Family's Escape
(2:13-15)**
- 4. Herod's Rage
(2:16-18)**

Lesson Material

- 1. What Are You Looking For? (Matt. 2:1-2)**
- 2. What Is Your Motive?
(2:3-8)**
- 3. How Will You Respond? (2:9-12)**
- 4. Who Is This Christmas Child? (2:13-15)**

Bible Truth

God promised to send a Savior and He sent His son, Jesus.

The Bible in Context (Matt. 2:1)

Several kings named Herod are identified in the New Testament. In Matthew 2:1, it is Herod the Great. He ruled Palestine at the time of Jesus' birth. He was one of the cruelest dictators in all of history. The Jews despised him, though he rebuilt their temple in Jerusalem in 19 B.C. He was bloodthirsty and mean to the people he governed. He was succeeded by Herod Antipas, also called Herod the Tetrarch, who ruled over Galilee and Perea for about 30 years. He is the one who killed John the Baptist (Matt. 14:1-11; Luke 3:1,19-20). The third Herod is Agrippa, before whom Peter appeared (Acts 12:1-23).

Explore . . . Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh (Matt. 2:11)

Orientals and other cultures never visit someone of importance without a gift. That custom has continued from Old Testament times until today. They offered Jesus incense as their God, gold as their king, and myrrh used in preparation for burial and representing the humanity of Jesus. Another explanation is how they offered him things they valued and products of their own country. The gold shows God's plan to provide for Joseph and his family while they were in Egypt.

STEP ONE – OVERVIEW

- The title and theme of today's lesson is "Seeking a Savior." We take a break from the prophecy of Hosea to focus on the birth of Jesus.
- This is the evangelistic lesson for this quarter. Ask two or three pupils to be ready to give their testimony about their salvation experience at the end of the lesson. Encourage any lost pupils to read page 4 in their quarterly and to talk with you or another leader today.
- **Make the lesson come alive!** Use a map to locate Persia, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Egypt. Review the discussion of the Magi from the pupil material. Note how God used these men from Persia to bring the gold Joseph needed to take care of his family in Egypt! For the first several years in the life of the Messiah, he was supported by "foreigners" and did not live in Israel.
- Ask someone to be prepared to sign the verses from the hymn, "We Three Kings."

STEP TWO – WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR? (MATTHEW 2:1-2)

- Ask someone ahead of time to discuss King Herod from "The Bible in Context," above, and other resources from the church library.
- Note that the wise men may have had some knowledge of Israelites and may have been familiar with Numbers 24:15-19. Ask someone to sign these verses.

STEP THREE – WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVE? (2:3-8)

- Contrast the motives of Herod and the wise men. The king wanted to kill anyone who might challenge his role. The wise men only wanted to worship the Messiah.

STEP FOUR – HOW WILL YOU RESPOND? (2:9-12)

- Ask someone to sign verse 10. It is a good memory verse.
- Ask someone ahead of time to review the discussion of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh from "Explore..." above and other resources.
- Call attention to the Lottie Moon Christmas offering.

STEP FIVE - WHO IS THIS CHRISTMAS CHILD? (2:13-15)

- Note this is Joseph's second dream. The first is reported in Matthew 1:18-25.

STEP SIX - CONCLUSION

- Close with prayer that class members will always seek to know more about their Savior and witness to others who are seeking Jesus.