

Isa. 60:1–6
Ps. 72:1–7, 10–14
Eph. 3:1–12
Matt. 2:1–12

Following the Light

Goal for the Session *Children will join the magi in worshiping Jesus Christ, the light of the world.*

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Matthew 2:1–12

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Paul J. Achtemeier

The account of the magi announces at the beginning of Matthew’s story of Jesus that he is the king of the Jews (v. 2), the Christ (v. 4), and the promised ruler of Israel (v. 6). The assembling of the Sanhedrin here anticipates such action on the part of Jesus’ enemies at the time of his passion (26:3, 57; 27:17, 27, 62) and serves with the Great Commission (28:16–20) to bracket the story of Jesus with the acknowledgment of his universal import. Astrologers from a foreign land are the first to acknowledge Jesus as God’s anointed king, and the final command of the risen Jesus is to carry the gospel to all nations, including them via baptism into God’s new chosen people.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” William J. Danaher Jr.

In the Gospel of Matthew discipleship is often likened to a kind of shining, which recalls the light from the star that shined on the Christ child. Jesus tells his disciples, “You are the light of the world. . . . Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (5:14, 16). That disciples are called to shine is important to remember in the season of Epiphany, for now that Christ has ascended and the Spirit has been given, we are the ones through whom this light shines forth.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Stephen Bauman

Everyone who happens to worship on Epiphany has their own idiosyncratic story to tell concerning their pathway to the manger. Some may have no idea who lies there. Others have mistaken ideas about the swaddled child. Nevertheless, all are present due to the prompting of God, who initiates our asking, our seeking, and our finding. The magi’s journey to Bethlehem exposes God’s intention to welcome everyone “into the joy of [God’s] home not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens,” and, remarkably, on earth as well.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Barbara Brown Taylor

Preachers will ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten them, helping them recall the ordinary and extraordinary ways in which the light of Christ has appeared to them in their own lives and the lives of those they love. They might also think of four or five people they would like to ask the same question: by what light do you see God? The church has a word for this. When we tell the stories of our encounters with God—in community, in nature, in relationship, in the chambers of our own hearts—we give testimony to the ongoing revelation of the Word made flesh.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2:1–12

YOU WILL NEED

- white cloth
- white battery-powered candle
- offering plate
- Bible
- Resource Sheet 1
- flashlight
- card stock
- Color Pack 3, 11, 30
- 1" x 8½" white paper strip, paper chain started Dec. 2
- tape
- Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019; CD player

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2 on card stock; clear, self-adhesive plastic; colored pencils; gold glitter; scissors; large rubber bands; duct tape
- option 2: Color Pack 12, paper, pencils or colored pencils, tape
- option 3: small glass jars with lids, water, foil star confetti, small spoon, blue food coloring, hot glue gun
- option 4: Color Pack 30; *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019; CD player

Focus on Your Teaching

For children who are back in school and who no longer see the decorations of Christmas in the stores, Christmas was over days ago. However, in the church the celebration of Christmas ends on Epiphany. It isn't often that Epiphany falls on Sunday, so take advantage of presenting the story of the magi, or wise men. In Responding, the children will have ways to extend their reflection on this story beyond the session. They will also have the opportunity to think about the gifts they can present to Jesus.

God of light and understanding, lead me with your star that I may offer my best to these children. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, cut a circle from card stock the size of the lens of the flashlight. Cut a star opening in the middle of the circle. Tape the circle tightly over the lens. For option 2 in Responding, cut paper to match the size of the gift box on Color Pack 12.

Greet each child. Invite early arrivals to help you set up the worship space with a white cloth, a white battery-powered candle, an offering plate, the paper chain started December 2, and a Bible open to Matthew.

When everything is ready, gather the group around the worship space. Say that the church is now concluding the Twelve Days of Christmas. Today is Epiphany. Epiphany means "to reveal" or "to make known." On Epiphany we celebrate the magi, or wise men, who came to worship Jesus. Light the candle as a reminder of Jesus' presence. Review the "All" response, and then lead the following litany:

Leader: Jesus has come.

All: Rejoice, rejoice!

Leader: Today we light the white candle, a symbol of Jesus.

All: Rejoice, rejoice!

Leader: The waiting is over and we cry out,

All: Rejoice, rejoice!

Leader: We pray for the light of Jesus to show us the way. Amen.

Ask a child to pass the offering plate and then place it next to the candle.

Invite the children to tell how they or their families find their way to a place they haven't been before. Maps and GPS will probably top the list. Ask:

✿ Have you heard about using the stars in the night sky to find your way?

The travelers in Matthew 2 are called wise men, magi, and kings. Children will hear all these terms in this session.

Some children may know about navigation by stars. Explain that travelers in the Bible story used a star to find their way.

EXPLORING

Have a child retrieve the Bible from the worship space, keeping it open. Read the name of the book. Explain that the Gospel of Matthew is the first book in the New Testament. The Bible story the children will hear is found only in Matthew. Show Color Pack 3. Ask:

- ✪ If you were traveling through country like this, how do you think you would know where you were going?

After they have offered some ideas, darken the learning area as much as possible. Give one child Color Pack 3, and give another child Color Pack 11. Ask an older child to shine the flashlight through the star template to a far side of the room. Play “We Three Kings” (track 19 on *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019) softly. After a moment, begin the story on Resource Sheet 1 (Led by a Star). When the story begins, the child can slowly move the star light across the upper part of the wall or the ceiling.

After the story, invite the children to wonder about it with these words:

- ✪ I wonder why these men from so far away wanted to see the baby who was born to be king of the Jews. What do you think?
- ✪ I wonder how they knew the star was a sign that a new king of the Jews was born. What do you think?
- ✪ I wonder how King Herod felt when he realized the magi were not coming back to him. What do you think?
- ✪ I wonder what Mary thought when the magi gave Jesus those gifts. What do you think?

Conclude Exploring with this wondering sentence:

- ✪ I wonder how we can follow the star to find Jesus today. What do you think?

RESPONDING

Offer at least two options so children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest older children who can work on their own.

- 1. Star for the Car** Children can make reminders of the journey of the magi to find Jesus for the family car. Many children will know about GPS units that aid travelers today. The star for the car will aid travelers as they seek to follow Jesus. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Star for the Car). Read the poem together. If some children will not be able to read it, have two or three children read each line for the others to echo. Then follow the directions on the resource sheet to make the stars.
- 2. Gifts for Jesus** Christians today cannot give gifts to Jesus as the magi did, but we can give to people in need, which is what Jesus teaches us to do. If the children are participating in a mission or outreach project during the Twelve Days of Christmas, celebrate their accomplishments on this day. Show the children Color Pack 12. Read the Bible verse on it. Talk together about what they can give to Jesus. Give the children

Some children will notice that four magi, or wise men, are on Color Pack 12. Explain that the Bible doesn't say how many there were. People assume there were three because of the three gifts.

EASY
PREP

paper cut to the size of the box on Color Pack 12 and pencils or colored pencils. Have them draw something they would like to give Jesus. Tape their gifts anywhere on Color Pack 12.

We Three Kings

Chorus:

O star of wonder, star of
night,
Star with royal beauty bright;
Westward leading, still
proceeding,
Guide us to the perfect light!

We three kings of Orient are,
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and
mountain,
Following yonder star.
(Chorus)

Born a King on Bethlehem's
plain,
Gold I bring to crown Him
again,
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign.
(Chorus)

Frankincense to offer have I:
Incense owns a Deity nigh;
Prayer and praising, voices
raising,
Worshiping God Most High.
(Chorus)

Myrrh is mine; its bitter
perfume
Breathes a life of gathering
gloom;
Sorrowing, sighing,
bleeding, dying
Sealed in the stone-cold
tomb.
(Chorus)

Repeat first verse

- 3. Star Globe** The story of the visit of the magi can be pondered for many days. The star globe will encourage the children to continue to reflect on it. Give each child a small glass jar with a lid. Have the children complete these simple steps as you demonstrate them: Place a small spoonful of foil star confetti in the jar. Fill the jar with water. Add two drops of blue food coloring. A leader adds a line of hot glue around the top edge of each jar and twists the lid tight. *Do not let children handle the glue gun or touch the hot glue.* Keep the jars right side up.

As the glue dries, ask children to tell their favorite parts of the story of the magi. When the glue is dry, the children can shake their jars and watch the stars sparkle and float.

- 4. Gift of Worship** An important element of worship, and one that children especially enjoy, is singing praises to God. On Epiphany Sunday it is likely that one hymn in worship will be “We Three Kings” (Color Pack 30; track 19 on *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019). Teach the children the chorus to this classic carol. Listen to it first. Then read the words together or read one line at a time for them to repeat. Listen to the song and sing along with the chorus. Read the stanzas and have the children identify the gifts in the last three stanzas. Knowing the chorus will help the children participate in this part of the worship service.

CLOSING

Gather the group around the worship space. Light the candle. Add a white paper link to the church year paper chain. The color for Epiphany is white.

Play the song “We Three Kings” (Color Pack 30; track 19 on *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019). Encourage the children to sing or hum along.

Pray aloud:

*God, thank you for the gift of Jesus. Help us to follow his star today.
Amen.*

Invite the children to respond: *Thank you, Jesus.*

Say good-bye to each child with this blessing: “(Name), shine brightly this week as you seek to follow Jesus.”

Led by a Star based on Matthew 2:1-12

Not long after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, magi, also called wise men or kings, discovered a new, bright star in the sky. These men watched the night skies carefully for signs like this. They were far away from Bethlehem, but this star looked very special. So their servants packed the camels and got everything ready for a long trip. They had to take everything they needed, and they didn't know how long they would be gone. What a job that must have been!

They traveled by land, always following the star. They trekked through the desert (*child holds up Color Pack 3 for everyone to see*), always following the star. This means that they must have rested during the day and traveled at night. Day after day passed. We have no record of how many days, probably years, but finally they came to Jerusalem.

Now these magi had never been to Jerusalem. I don't know if they had ever heard of this city. They began asking anyone they saw, "Where is the child who has been born to be the king of the Jews?" For that is what they thought the appearance of the star was about, that a new king of the Jews was born. When people looked puzzled, even afraid, the magi said, "We have been following this bright star and know that this new king is nearby."

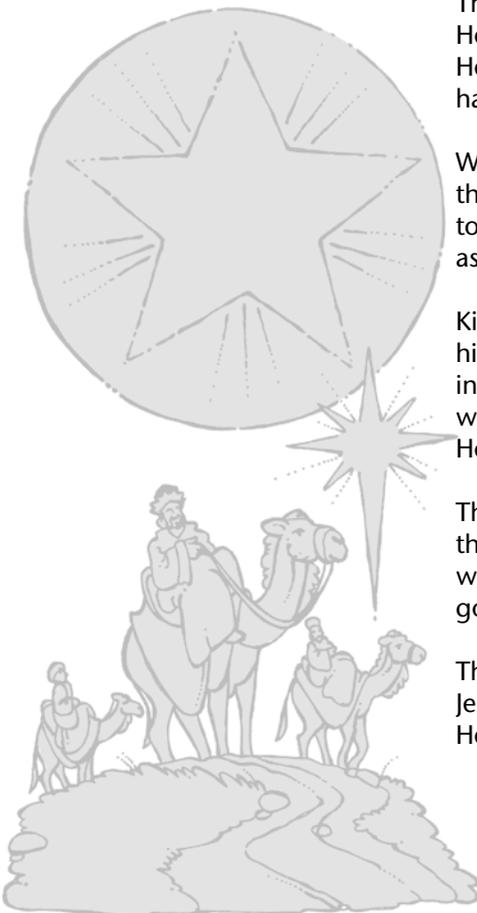
The people they asked didn't want to answer them because they knew that King Herod, who was king of everybody, did not want to hear about a new king. King Herod would be afraid that this new king would take his place. Terrible things could happen if King Herod were afraid.

Word of these travelers got to the advisers of King Herod. It was the custom to greet the ruler of a city or country if you were a stranger there. So when the magi came to the palace and stood before the king, not knowing that he would be afraid, they asked, "Where might we find the child who has been born to be king of the Jews?"

King Herod was clever. He didn't let the magi know that he was afraid. He consulted his advisers and then told the magi, "My advisers tell me that this child is to be born in Bethlehem, not far from here. When you find this baby, come back and tell me where he is so I can worship this new king, too." King Herod was lying, of course. He wanted to keep this baby from becoming king in his place.

The magi and all their camels and servants started off for Bethlehem. The star led the way. In Bethlehem the magi found Mary and her son, Jesus, in a house. They went in and kneeled down before Jesus, just a little boy. They gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (*Have child show Color Pack 11.*)

The star had led the magi to Jesus. Now it was time to go home. Before they left Jerusalem, they had a dream in which they were warned not to return to King Herod. So the magi went home a different way.



Star for the Car



For each star, you will need:

- copy of this resource sheet made on card stock
- 2 squares (each 4½" x 4½") of clear, self-adhesive plastic with peel-off backing
- colored pencils
- gold glitter
- scissors
- large rubber band
- duct tape

Directions:

- Color the star with colored pencils.
- Cut out the circle, following the dotted line.
- Take the backing paper off one square of self-adhesive plastic. Place it on a table, sticky side up.
- Sprinkle a small amount of gold glitter onto the sticky side of the self-adhesive plastic.
- Place the cutout circle facedown on the glitter and sticky self-adhesive plastic.
- Take the backing paper off the other square of self-adhesive plastic. Place it on the back of the star, trying to line up the edges with the first square. Smooth out any big bubbles with your fingers.
- Trim the plastic to the edge of the circle.
- Attach a large rubber band to the back of the star with duct tape. The rubber band will fit over a car visor so that the star becomes an Epiphany reminder to everyone in the vehicle.