

Isa. 60:1–6

Ps. 72:1–7, 10–14

Eph. 3:1–12

Matt. 2:1–12

Discernment and Destinations

Goal for the Session *Youth, with the magi, will explore what it means to seek God's guidance and journey in faith.*

■ 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

Focus on Your Teaching

Decisions, decisions! As young people journey toward adulthood they are faced with decisions that will have lasting effects on their lives. Spend a few moments contemplating the kinds of decisions that young people in your group will be making and how those decisions will shape their life journeys. Remember that these choices often loom larger than life for young people, and they sense the pressure to find the perfect college, job, or field of study. The story of the magi's journey can provide insight into how young people might seek and discern their way through these decisions.

O God who guided the magi, help me guide these young people as they discern your will. Amen

YOU WILL NEED

- newsprint
 - markers
 - Bibles
 - copies of Resource Sheet 1
 - index cards
 - pens
 - pillar candle
 - lighter
- For Responding
- option 2: pillar candle, lighter, copies of Resource Sheet 2, pens
 - option 3: recording of "Hold It Up to the Light" by David Wilcox, music player
- For Music Connection:
- recording of "Home by Another Way" by James Taylor, music player

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, write the following questions on separate sheets of newsprint. Post them around the meeting space:

- ✠ What important decisions do you need to make in the next six years?
- ✠ Where do you go to get help in making decisions?
- ✠ Who are some people you can turn to for help in making decisions?
- ✠ What determines when you seek help in making decisions?
- ✠ What is the biggest decision you will make in the next six months?

As participants arrive, give each one a marker and ask them to write responses to each of the posted questions. When all are finished, review the responses together. Discuss:

- ✠ What are the most pressing decisions that face people your age?
- ✠ How do you find the best way to get direction for some of life's big decisions?

Explain that today's session will explore the journey of the magi and their experience of seeking God's direction.

Pray:

*Holy God, teach us through the sacred story how to better follow you.
Amen.*

If time permits, consider also staging interviews with people playing the roles of King Herod and Mary the mother of Jesus.

EXPLORING

Read together Matthew 2:1. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (The Mysterious Magi) and read together the information in “Who Were These Mysterious Magi?”

Read together Matthew 2:2–12. Then, have two participants role play an interview between one of the magi and a news reporter. Have the news reporter ask the magi the questions found on Resource Sheet 1.

After the interview, discuss:

- ✪ What were the means by which God guided the magi?
- ✪ What does this say about how God guides those who seek God’s help?

On a sheet of newsprint, have the participants list the steps in the magi’s journey. Discuss:

- ✪ In what way was the magi’s journey a journey of faith?
- ✪ What factors threatened the magi’s journey?
- ✪ How did the magi sense God’s guidance along the journey?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

1. **Act It Out** In groups of two or three, have participants create and present a skit that depicts teenagers seeking God’s guidance about how to live their lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. After the presentations, discuss: How can you seek God’s guidance in the coming week?
2. **Personal Reflection** Light a pillar candle and place it in the center of the meeting space. Dim the lights. Explain that the candle, like the star that led the magi, represents God’s guiding light and the presence of Jesus Christ. Give each person a copy of Resource Sheet 2 (Reflection) and a pen. Have participants follow the instructions on the page to write a prayer to God for guidance. After a few minutes, have participants imagine that they are holding that need for guidance in their hands. Have them extend their hands and symbolically hold them up to the guiding light of God’s wisdom and love.
3. **Musical Reflection** Listen together to “Hold It Up to the Light” by David Wilcox. Then explore the following questions together:
 - ✪ What kind of decision do you think the songwriter was facing?
 - ✪ How is holding a decision “up to the light” a way to seek God’s guidance?
 - ✪ What decision can you hold up to the light of God’s guidance in the coming week?

**EASY
PREP**

Consider playing contemplative music while the participants reflect.

CLOSING

Distribute index cards and pens. Have each participant write a two- or three-sentence prayer asking for God's guidance in life. When all are finished, light the candle and ask for volunteers to pray their prayers aloud. Close by saying, "Amen, Lord. May it be so."

Send the participants with this blessing:

Go from this place following the light of God's love in Jesus' name. Amen.

Extinguish the candle.

■ ENHANCEMENT

MUSIC CONNECTION

Listen together to "Home by Another Way" by James Taylor. Then explore the following questions together:

- ✧ How is James Taylor's interpretation of the magi's journey consistent with Matthew 2:1-12?
- ✧ What are instances where it is necessary to "go home by another way"?

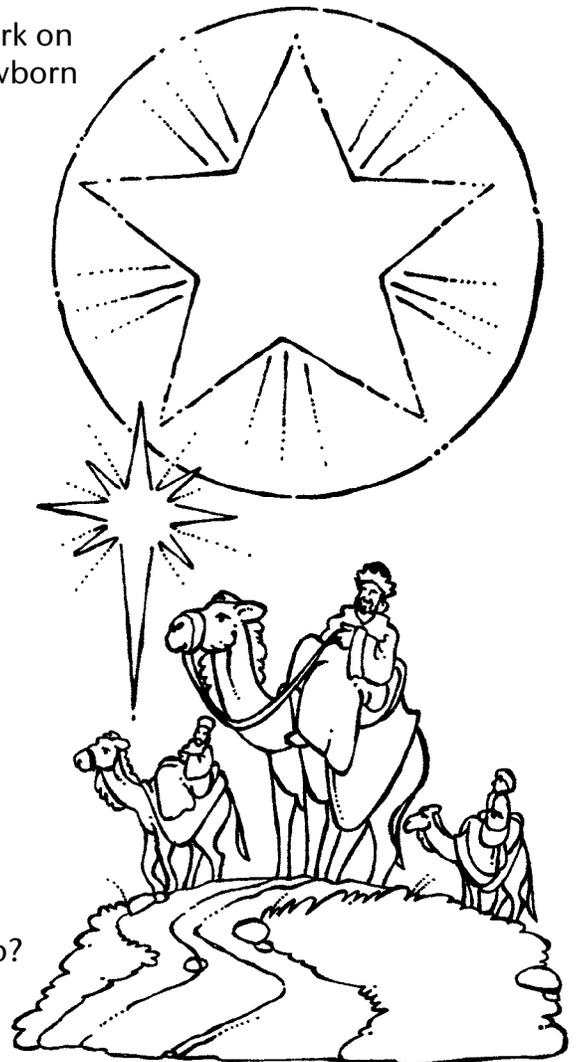
The Mysterious Magi

Who Were These Mysterious Magi?

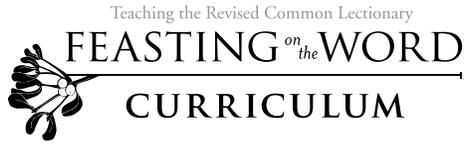
- The story about the wise men can only be found in the Gospel of Matthew.
- Some versions of the Bible refer to these travelers as “wise men”; other versions refer to them as “magi.”
- The word *magi* is from the Greek root meaning “magic.”
- Since they are guided by a star, Matthew’s Gospel portrays these men as astrologers.
- The phrase “from the East” in Luke 2:1 could mean somewhere like Mesopotamia or Arabia, but could also mean somewhere else altogether.
- Though many assume that there were three magi, the writer of Matthew never specifies how many there actually were.

Magi Interview Questions

- What motivated you to embark on the journey to honor the newborn King of the Jews?
- What was your impression of King Herod when you met with him?
- What advice did you get from the Jewish scribes and scholars?
- What were the king’s instructions to you?
- When you finally found the baby, what was that like?
- Why did you change your travel plans on the return trip?



January 6, 2019
Discernment and
Destinations



Youth
Resource Sheet 2

Reflection

Name a situation for which you need guidance.

Write a short prayer that asks God for guidance.