



Week 4

The Promise for All Peoples: The Journey of the Magi

-Personal Study-

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. '"

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

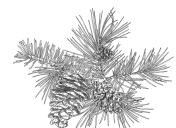
MATTHEW 2:1-12

What is the farthest you have ever traveled from home?

How did it feel to be outside your normal setting?

What made you uncomfortable? What did you find interesting and new?

How did the experience change the way you understand the world?





The Promise for All Peoples

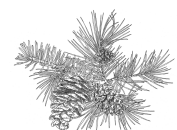
Magi were men trained in astrology, dream interpretation and other mysteries. They studied the sky and knew the stars and their significance. The Magi mentioned in Matthew 2 lived in the East, probably near Persia. We do not know their exact identity and origin. What we do know is that they were not Jews—they were Gentiles. It is possible that these men heard of the promised Savior from Jews residing in their land during the Babylonian captivity. When they saw the star signifying His birth, they left their home for Jerusalem, embarking on a journey to and the newborn King and worship Him.

At least two things are striking about the events that unfold in Matthew 2. The first is that these men were Gentiles. They were not of Israel, not descendants of Abraham. Why should the birth of the Messiah matter to them? The second is that God was the One who announced the birth of His Son to the Gentile world. God appointed a star to herald the news of Jesus' coming. God set that star in the sight of these Magi. God used that star to lead them to His Son so they could worship Him as the rightful King.

This scene in the Advent narrative whispers of an incredible mercy: God reveals His Son and extends salvation to the nations. Men and women from every people, tribe and tongue will taste the honey-like sweetness of Jesus' name upon their lips, confessing Him as Lord and worshipping Him as King. Jesus is worthy. Only He deserves the glory, honor and praise of the nations.

In the same way God set a star in the sky to lead the Magi to Jesus, He places His children in their neighborhoods, workplaces, PTA meetings and lecture halls to do the same. You don't have to go overseas to impact the nations. God brings them to our doorstep—refugees, international students, those in search of greater opportunities and freedom. The nations may very well live next door. Being part of God's global purposes may be as simple as reaching out to people He has placed in your everyday life. Or you may indeed go to the ends of the earth and happily herald the good news to those who have never heard because God is worthy of their worship.

The world is big, and the gospel is not an American idea. The gospel has been proclaimed to us too; the mercy of God extended to the Gentiles means that mercy has been extended to us. The story of the Magi stirs our hearts to look beyond our familiar comforts and remember that it is our joyful duty to bring that gospel to all nations for the glory of God. We want to be a part of what God is doing as He continues to draw men, women and children from all nations to come and worship His Son.





Reflection

Look up Psalm 86:9. What promise do you see in this verse? What reassurance does the story of the Magi give us about the spreading of the gospel? How should the story challenge us as those who are called to tell the good news? What common reasons do Christians give for not spreading the gospel to all nations? Are any of these reasons valid?

How is being compelled by the glory and worth of God more powerful than being motivated by guilt or duty when it comes to reaching the nations?

Look up Ephesians 2:11-17. In this passage, who are “those who were far off”? Are people in foreign countries farther off from the gospel than you were when you first heard it? Explain.

What is the primary means God uses to make disciples of all nations? How can you take an active role in taking the gospel to all nations in the upcoming year? List some specific ideas.

God reveals many things about His nature and character through the birth of His Son. What attributes of God do you see in this part of the Advent narrative?

Response

Think of someone you know who is actively involved in reaching the nations with the gospel. Take time this week to pray for them by name and write them an encouraging email or letter.

In the next few weeks, notice how many people from other nationalities you see in the rhythm of your everyday life. Ask the Lord to give you faith and favor in building relationships and sharing the gospel.

Songs of the Season

Joy to the World

O Come, All Ye Faithful

Go! Tell it on the Mountain

We Three Kings





-Family Discipleship Time-

Set aside ten minutes one night this week to talk about how only God is worthy of all glory. Consider sitting outside as you talk about the journey of the Magi, drawing particular attention to the stars in the night sky above you. The only materials needed are five candles, matches and a Bible.

Lighting of the Advent Candle

Have one member of the family light the candles from the first three weeks and a fourth candle.

Scripture Reading

Have one person read the following passages out loud.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

MATTHEW 2:1-2

The journey that had begun so many centuries before had led three wise men here. To a little town. To a little house. To a little child. To the king God had promised David all those years before.

THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE

And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him.

Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

MATTHEW 2:11-12





Reflection

Have an adult read the commentary below.

The first people God told about Jesus' birth were the shepherds. He used a spectacular mass of angels to shout from the skies that Jesus had come. But the angels were not alone in proclaiming the good news that night, and the shepherds were not the only people to learn of the Rescuer's coming. That same night, God placed a special star in the sky, a bright body of light that announced the birth of the King. Some men in a faraway country saw this star. These men were called Magi. They were educated men who studied the skies and nature. Most scholars believe these men came from Persia, or modern-day Iran. There was something very special about these men.

Throughout the Bible, God promised to send a Rescuer to save the Israelites from their sins. But these Magi were not Israelites. They were Gentiles. That means they were not from Abraham's family and likely did not know and worship God. But that night, God did something that no one expected.

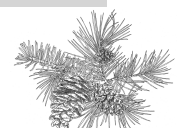
By placing that star in the sky, God showed unbelievable mercy toward all people. In showing the Magi that Jesus, the King of heaven, had been born, God was extending salvation to people of all nations.

When the Magi saw the special star that God had placed in the sky, they left their home country to find Jesus. Their journey took a long time. They did not arrive in Bethlehem the night Jesus was born. In fact, it may have taken them up to two years to reach the place where Jesus was.

The Bible tells us that when the Magi found the place where Jesus was living with Mary and Joseph, they entered the house, bowed down and worshiped this small child who had come to save sinners. They then gave Jesus precious, costly gifts.

Ask: Why do you think the Magi were willing to leave their homes and families and travel for such a long time to find Jesus? What did they know and believe about Him? Why do you think they brought baby Jesus such special, expensive gifts?

Throughout the Advent story, we see that God is generous. He sent a company of angels to shout the good news of Jesus' birth to the shepherds, and He put a special star in the sky to guide men from a faraway country to Jesus. He desires that all people know, love, trust and obey Him. And God promises that one day men, women and children from every tribe, tongue and nation will worship Jesus. God will rescue people from all over the world, and we will worship Him as He deserves.





God shows us many things about what He's like through the birth of Jesus. How do you see that God is worthy—that only He deserves all glory—in this part of the Advent narrative? What other attributes of God do you see?

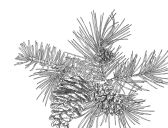
Prayer

Have one family member say a prayer to praise God and ask Him to show people of all nations the good news that Jesus came to save sinners.

Song

As a family, sing or listen to “O Come All Ye Faithful.” As you do, read carefully through the lyrics and explain any words that might be unfamiliar to your kids. Ask them what they learn about Jesus from this song.

*O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold Him born the King of angels;
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.
Sing choirs of angels, sing in exultation
Sing all ye citizens of heaven above;
Glory to God in the highest:
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.
Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning; Jesus, to thee be glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.*





Family Activity

Spend time this week looking at a map of the world. Play a game where you name a country and your kids try to find it. Talk together about what it would be like to live in a different culture with a different language and customs. Point out places in the world where people aren't free to openly worship Jesus or talk about Him.

Look together at the list of unreached people groups on the IMB website (<https://www.imb.org/people-and-places/>). Pick one group and pray for them.

Additional Activities

Continue making your nativity set. This week, create the Magi pieces and add them to the set.

Create luminaries for your front yard, sidewalk or porch to remind your family of the star God put in the sky to tell the Magi of Jesus' birth. Take paper lunch bags and draw or punch out a star on each bag. Fill the bottom of the bags with sand to keep them from blowing away. Place a battery-operated candle inside.

