

CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
FEBRUARY 01 2025

following yonder star

Scripture Story: Matthew 2.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 6.
Key Text: Matthew 2:2.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

We don't know exactly who the Wise Men were. There is no doubt that the Wise Men were wealthy, educated noblemen. We don't know if there were three of them, but we know there were three gifts. And we don't know their names, place of origin, or ages.

We do know it wasn't really a star the Wise Men were following. Ellen White writes: "That star was a distant company of shining angels" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 60). So angels guided them from their home directly to the birthplace of the Son of God.

The Magi (pronounced may-ji) were not extras in a Christmas play. They studied the Hebrew Scriptures and found the words of Balaam: "A Star shall come out of Jacob" (Numbers 24:17). They probably also knew and understood the time prophecy of Daniel (Daniel 9:25, 26), and came to realize that the Messiah's coming was near.

They arrived in Jerusalem expecting to find excitement concerning the birth of the promised King. Instead, they found general ignorance of the event, and their words stirred passions within the Roman and Jewish leaders that would lead to the murder of untold numbers of innocent children with the purpose of destroying Jesus.

In this lesson the Wise Men also serve as models for those who seek Jesus in the time of His second advent.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand how the Wise Men were led to Jesus according to divine plan after they earnestly searched the Scriptures. *(Know)*
- Sense the determination and excitement to search the Scriptures to learn more about the Savior. *(Feel)*
- Seek Jesus as did those Wise Men of old by daily studying His Word and following His lead. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Holy Scriptures, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 1: "The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Discuss with your students how they would welcome Jesus if they learned of His soon return in the near future? What gifts would they offer Him? How would they study the Scriptures? How would this reality take preeminence in their lives? Conclude the activity by challenging them to ponder these questions frequently and live each day in a state of constant readiness in expectation of Jesus' return anytime soon.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

The Wise Men were important, cultured, educated, and wealthy, and they sought truth. After studying scriptures and following a new light in the sky to a humble dwelling, they gave their gifts to the baby they found there.

"Beneath the lowly guise of Jesus, they recognized the presence of Divinity. They gave their hearts to Him as their Saviour, and then poured out their gifts,—'gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.' . . .

"The magi had been among the first to welcome the Redeemer. Their gift was the first that was laid at His feet. And through that gift, what privilege of ministry was theirs! The offering from the heart that loves, God delights to honor, giving it highest efficiency in service for Him. If we have given our hearts to Jesus, we also shall bring our gifts to Him. Our gold and silver, our most precious earthly possessions, our highest mental and spiritual endowments, will be freely devoted to Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us" (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 63-65).

It is a wise person that recognizes the gift God has given and gives back to Him hearts filled with love, gratitude, and a life of loving service.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus are the main characters in the ultimate story of unselfish love. Today, however, we'll focus on the men who followed a star made of angels that led them to those central characters of the story of Jesus' birth. The Wise Men were devout seekers of truth, willing to leave their homeland to take a difficult journey that would be remembered through the ages. They brought gifts with them, gifts that spoke honor and respect for the recipient. They were not searching for a king to satisfy their curiosity. They came to present themselves to Him as a gift.

We will ask the question Are we wise young men and women today? What are we looking for and why? What or who do we love the most? What are we willing to give?

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

The Wise Men possibly came from Syria (north of Judah but still called "the East") or farther northeast, perhaps as far away as the region of the Euphrates River. They may have traveled 400 miles (640 kilometers) or more. Since they were following a "star" of angels moving in the night sky, they traveled at night. This would have made the trip at least three weeks long, and likely longer.

The men arrived unexpectedly in Jerusalem. While their appearance may have garnered attention, their question for King Herod was what created a ripple effect in the community. They asked, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2).

- Why did King Herod not know about the prophecies concerning the Messiah or the place where He was to be born?
- Why was Herod disturbed about the idea of a king being born a few miles from his palace?
- The Wise Men did not perceive any kind of threat as they visited with King Herod. Why do you think that is?
- What does the Bible record (Matthew 2:11) indicate regarding where Jesus was when the

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

User-Provided Content

You may find some written or audiovisual material truly inspiring and in harmony with the biblical account. You may use such material as supplementary resources that would illustrate the themes and teachings of this Sabbath School lesson. Music, and other content can creatively illustrate a concept or provide a springboard for discussion.

Wise Men arrived? This would indicate He was out of the manger setting.

- Why were the Magi warned in a dream not to go back to Herod?
- What was the changed circumstance that made it safe for Joseph to take Jesus and Mary to Israel?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Luke 2:1-20.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

Herod had given religious authority to the Pharisees, a group who were something like a religious political party but with no real political power. To make the people of Judah happy, Herod had rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem into a magnificent building. He did not believe in or care about the religion or the God of the Jews, except as it served his desire to stay in power.

Although it is unknown precisely what area the Wise Men came from, areas considered to be east of Israel at that time included Persia and Media (both now within modern-day Iran) and Assyria and Babylonia (both now in modern-day Iraq).

The Wise Men undertook their remarkable journey because they believed in the prophecy they had studied in the Old Testament. They believed that the baby prophesied to be born was the true king of Israel. It didn't matter to them that the "star" led them to a simple house in the little village of Bethlehem. No doubts entered their minds that this was truly the fulfillment of what they had studied so carefully.

When they entered the house where Joseph and Mary and Jesus were staying, they bowed down on their knees and worshipped Him. Then they presented Jesus with costly gifts of frankincense, myrrh, and gold. Little did the Wise Men know that their gifts would have significant symbolic meaning in relation to Jesus' ministry. Frankincense was constantly burned in the sanctuary, representing the prayers of the faithful, and prefiguring Christ's intercessory ministry as our great High Priest. Myrrh was another precious gift that was used

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Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* The Desire of Ages. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quotes in Further Insight *convey the point of the story in this lesson.*

for embalming. It symbolically pointed to Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection for the salvation of humanity. Gold was associated with the wealth of royalty. The gift of gold prefigures Jesus' victory over the dominion of Satan and His eternal reign over the whole universe as King of kings and Lord of lords. The Wise Men recognized that true glory and power did not reside with Herod in the palace at Jerusalem, or in the emperor's seat at Rome, but with the Son of God, the eternal Creator God, who chose to enter our world as a helpless baby to share God's infinite love for the human family.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Have students form groups of three or four and discuss together the following questions:
What does the story reveal about the Jewish priests and the teachers of the law concerning their familiarity with the Scriptures? What was different about how the Wise Men searched the Scriptures and how the Jewish leaders read the Word of God? What made the difference in recognizing the time of the Messiah's coming? What does the story reveal about the different outcomes from the reading of the Holy Scriptures? Does it make a difference in your life that you study the Bible? How? Why is it important to pray for wisdom and for the guidance of the Holy Spirit before reading the Bible? Discuss and debrief.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

We'd all like to believe we'd have been there to welcome the Christ child with gifts fit for a King.

The Wise Men did several things that make them memorable for us. They studied the Scriptures so carefully that they knew exactly what was going to happen. They accepted the prophecy not just as something interesting but as their destiny. As the prophecy became clear to them, the Wise Men committed their time and wealth to a journey to find the expected King. When they met God, they worshipped Him. And in addition to the material gifts they brought, they gave Him the greatest gift they could, which was themselves. We are called to be wise men and women today, to follow their example by earnestly searching the Scriptures and seeking to know Jesus as our personal Savior.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*),* chapter 6.

*A special adaptation, *Humble Hero*, has been created by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Matthew 2.
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keytext

"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

(Matthew 2:2)

flashlight

"The wise men had seen a mysterious light in the heavens upon that night when the glory of God flooded the hills of Bethlehem. As the light faded, a luminous star appeared, and lingered in the sky. It was not a fixed star nor a planet, and the phenomenon excited the keenest interest. That star was a distant company of shining angels, but of this the wise men were ignorant" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 60).

what do you think?

Imagine the Wise Men. **These learned men had studied the** night sky and the prophetic writings of old. They arrived expecting to find Jesus easily. To their amazement, they found none who knew about His birth.

The visitors looked about but saw no sign of Him. "Do you know where we may find Him?" they asked.

How would you have responded?

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How would you respond to someone who doesn't know anything about Jesus but is asking you to share what you know about Him? Write down your answer and always be prepared to share who Jesus is to you:

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did you know?

The Wise Men were earnest seekers after the truth who studied the Holy Scriptures. Their faithfulness was richly rewarded. When they found the promised Messiah, they presented gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Those items were the most valuable of that day, all gifts literally fit for a king yet also holding symbolic value. Gold, an always highly valuable commodity throughout history, was an appropriate gift for a king. Frankincense was used in making incense, a gift appropriate for a priest. Myrrh was an embalming agent. These gifts symbolize that Jesus was King, Priest, and Savior who would die to save us from sin and its consequences.



INTO THE STORY

"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 have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.'

"When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. . . .

". . . And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.'

"When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. . . . And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

"Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. . . .

"Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:

" 'A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.'

"Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 'Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead.' Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

"But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'"

(Matthew 2)

OUT OF THE STORY

Why was Herod disturbed at news of the birth of Jesus?

Why do you think the Wise Men were led first to Jerusalem before being led to Bethlehem?

Warned by God in a dream, the Magi headed home after finding Jesus. What does God's intervention through the warning given to the Magi tell you about His care and guidance? What encouragement can you gain from this story about God's fatherly care for each one of His children?

Have you ever had a dream you thought was a divine communication to you? If so, explain.

punch lines

"Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?' " **(Genesis 3:9).**

"So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, 'Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously' " **(Luke 2:48).**

"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" **(Luke 15:8-10).**

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" **(Psalm 23:6).**

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?" **(Luke 15:4).**

further insight

"While they [the Wise Men] had the star before them as an outward sign, they had also the inward evidence of the Holy Spirit, which was impressing their hearts, and inspiring them with hope."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 60

"The offering from the heart that loves, God delights to honor, giving it highest efficiency in service for Him."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 65

Sabbath

Read Matthew 2:3.

Herod and all of Jerusalem became alarmed at the words of the Magi. Had they truly accepted the fact that Jesus had come as prophesied, that would mean their lives would be affected, their plans impacted. So, too, our lives and plans are affected by His coming, then and soon to come. God takes a special interest in sharing His love with us through the Holy Scriptures. "In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation" (The Holy Scriptures, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 1).

How does your study of the Word of God help you understand the prophecies and prepare for His soon return?

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Sunday

As you read the account of the birth of Jesus, much happens in a very short time that directly and strikingly fulfills prophecies that had been given long before.

First advent prophecies fulfilled:

- Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
- Born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).
- Slaughter of the innocent children of Bethlehem (Jeremiah 31:15).
- Coming from Egypt (Hosea 11:1).
- Messiah to come from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10).

We're counseled by Ellen White that "the end will come more quickly than men expect" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 630). With spiritual eyesight, and an eye toward those who failed to realize His first advent, we'll see the signs of His coming. We'll be the wise men and wise women seeking His second advent. Will you be among the wise? How have you sought Him today?

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Monday

Read John 17:17 and 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

The Wise Men were looking for Jesus, led by their study, the Holy Spirit, and an angelic beacon specially provided to show them the way. Convinced they were on the right path, they incredulously realized they were virtually alone in their awareness that the fullness of time had come. What lessons can be learned today from that scenario?

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The Wise Men looked to the east and saw the sign of His coming. So, too, will those alive in the last days look to the east and see the sign of His second coming. Ellen White states in *The Great Controversy*: "Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man's hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Saviour and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. The people of God know this to be the sign of the Son of man" (p. 640).

Tuesday

Read 2 Peter 1:20, 21.

The *Flashlight* quote in which Ellen White reveals that the star that the Magi saw was actually a band of angels presents a wonderful opportunity for Seventh-day Adventists. This opens up a natural opportunity to talk about the role of a modern-day prophet. Many people seem especially attuned to spiritual discussion at Christmas and can readily see the plausibility of angels being involved, given their involvement with the shepherds when they proclaimed His birth. Have you ever interjected the knowledge you have into such conversation? How do you seek Jesus today? Do you find Him in the words of the Bible, in the embrace of a loved one, in the smile of a parent, in the expectant eyes of a child, and in the beauty of a glorious sunset?

Wednesday

Read John 5:39 and Ezekiel 34:11-14.

The Holy Scriptures reveal to us God's character of love.

Today's reading reminds us that not only do we seek God, but He also seeks us. Is there a connection between the idea of people searching for Jesus and the knowledge that He is even more interested in seeking us? One day we will seek Him no more, for we shall behold Him face to face.

Thursday

Read Isaiah 55:6-9 and Hebrews 4:12.

Do you actively seek Jesus yourself? Where do you look for Him? Are you in places where you'd expect to find Him? List several ways in which you believe Jesus can be found.

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Friday

Read Psalm 139:1-3.

In the game hide-and-seek, children often place themselves where the seeker can't help finding them! How are you positioning yourself so that God can find you? What changes can you make in your life so that you can be found by God more easily?

this week's reading*

The Desire of Ages (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 6.

**Humble Hero* is a special adaptation of *The Desire of Ages*, created by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companionbooks#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.