



# CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

JANUARY 30 2021

## following yonder star

**Scripture Story:** Matthew 2.

**Commentary:** *The Desire of Ages*, 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 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 Savior, 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 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 reli-



## Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

### 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.

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gious 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 sim-

ple 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 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.*

## Teaching From . . .

*Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.*

- **Key Text**

*Invite 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 spoke 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.*

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](http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net).