

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE



COFFEEHOUSE FIVE CHURCH
CHRISTMAS STORY TIME
THE WISE MEN SEEK JESUS
MATTHEW 12:1-12
12/11/2016

MAIN POINT

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, calls His followers to join in His ministry of peace-making by worshipping Him and proclaiming His message of peace.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Do you consider yourself a worrier? What causes you the most worry in your daily life? What are your go-to methods for alleviating fear and worry?

When you think of having peace, what do you envision?

Fear is both the product of our fallen human nature and the culture in which we live. We innately gravitate toward worry and the feeling that we need to be in control of our lives. As we will see in today's discussion, fear can lead us to take drastic measures to maintain our sense of control. However, the opposite of fear is peace. God's desire is for His children to be people who rest in the peace given to us through Jesus, His Son. Only when they do can they truly become messengers of peace.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 2:1-2.

What is surprising to you about the wise men's involvement in God's plan for Jesus' birth? What do you think motivated the wise men to journey so far from home to investigate another religion's Messiah?

Who were these wise men? The Greek term ("magoi") referred to individuals who held positions of authority for centuries in the ancient Near East. They were not kings, but they counseled kings as important members of the royal courts. The wise men were Gentile dignitaries who traveled hundreds of miles to worship and honor the One born King of the Jews. If the wise men had studied ancient religious texts from the region, they might have been familiar with various Old Testament prophecies about Jesus.

What do the wise men reveal about Jesus in their question to King Herod (v. 2)?

Their query was a loaded one. First, it assumed the child's birth had already taken place. Second, it implied they were seeking the true heir to the throne of God's chosen people. Finally, the object of their search was no mere infant, but a child of royalty who they intended to "worship" (v. 2).

Read Numbers 24:17. Based on this prophecy, what might the wise men have thought about Jesus' mission and purpose?

Read Isaiah 9:6-7, another Old Testament prophecy about Jesus, the Messiah. What titles are given for the Messiah in verse 6? What do these four titles signify?

What do you think of when you hear the word peace? Why do you think the title of "Prince of Peace" was given for the promised Messiah?

Isaiah's prophecy in 9:1-7 was a beacon of hope penetrating deep darkness. A child's birth would usher in the sudden change from warfare and darkness to peace and light. Among the titles of the future messianic King, He would be called Prince of Peace. The Hebrew term translated peace means much more than absence of hostilities. It means "completeness," "soundness," "welfare." The coming Ruler would provide spiritual wholeness for His people.

What evidence do you see in our world that people are searching for peace? How has Jesus been the "Prince of Peace" in your life recently?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 2:3-8,16.

Herod the Great was granted the title "king of the Jews" by the Roman senate; he ruled in Jerusalem from 40–4 B.C. He was a ruthless ruler who did not hesitate to murder even members of his immediate family when he felt his rule was threatened. Herod saw the wise men's request as a direct threat to his empire, so he hastily gathered the chief priests and scribes to tell him where the Messiah would be born.

Why did Herod run to the chief priests and scribes for answers? When you face challenging situations, do you seek counsel from people who will speak truth or people who will confirm what you want to hear? Explain.

The more we love controlling our own lives, the harder it is when we lose control. What is a natural first reaction when your personal "empire" feels threatened?

In verse 8, we read that Herod deceptively played along with the wise men's plan to worship the Messiah. But God had other plans. As Scripture indicates, the wise men were warned in a dream not to return to Herod (v. 12). Once Herod found out he'd been disobeyed, he "flew into a rage" (v. 16). Verse 16 describes Herod's shocking but not uncharacteristic reaction to the wise men's disobedience.

What does Herod's response say about his view of the Messiah? How did Jesus meet or contradict those expectations?

HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 2:9-12.

What do the wise men teach us about worshiping Jesus?

The wise men showed up to worship the new King, and they came bearing gifts. What gifts do you bring to God in worship?

Verse 10 indicates that the wise men were so full of joy, they were compelled to give. Their gifts weren't just trinkets, but extravagant and costly goods from their homelands. Beyond being impressive, the gifts also hinted at Jesus' identity. Gold was traditionally a gift for a king, frankincense was a gift for deity, and myrrh was a spice often given to a person who faced death.

How have you experienced the peace that comes with loving God and living your life as an act of worship?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What did Jesus do to make peace a reality for our lives? Does someone in your life need to know this truth today?

What difference does God's peace make in your daily life? What difference does God's peace make in the life of our church?

In what area of your life do you most need peace right now? Peace with God? Peace with yourself? Peace with others?

PRAY

Ask God to give you the wisdom to know Jesus and the desire to worship and serve Him more than yourselves. Thank God for the opportunity to worship Him freely because of what Jesus did on your behalf.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 2:1-12

2:1-6. The mention of Jesus' birthplace, Bethlehem of Judea, is significant in this passage especially because of the prophecy it fulfilled (see 2:4-6). Matthew is building his case. Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophetic intentions of the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. All the details apply, including his birthplace.

The King Herod in this passage, one of many Herods, is Herod the Great, mentioned here and in Luke 1:5. His father, Antipater II, was a Jew of Idumaeen descent (Edomite, related through Esau to Jacob) who gained influence under the Roman Empire. He was influential in his son Herod's rise to power, in a succession of positions over Galilee and ultimately Judea, where Herod ruled from 37–4 b.c. (Herod's death in 4 b.c. is one of the main reasons we know Jesus was born somewhat earlier than the traditional a.d. 1; cf. 2:19.) During this time Herod was given the title "king of the Jews" by the Roman senate. This in part explains his fear and aggressive murderous actions when he heard from the Magi that another king of the Jews had been born (2:2). These Magi from the east (2:1) were likely from Babylon and were culturally influential students of the stars, not evil magicians of some sort. Their interest must have been aroused by the unusual star they observed. We do not know their number, but their entourage was probably substantial to make such a lengthy cross-continent trip and to cause such a noticeable stir in Jerusalem (2:3). How they came to connect the birth of the king of the Jews with the strange star is a matter of conjecture. Some scholars believe they may have been responding, in an amazing display of faith, to a scrap of Scripture brought to their people centuries before through Balaam (Num. 24:17), who was a Mesopotamian himself.

The important point here is that God brought the birth of the king to the attention of these Gentiles, who probably journeyed many months (possibly one to two years) from Mesopotamia to Jerusalem. Matthew included this information to alert his Jewish readers to several realities: (1) the event of Jesus' birth had worldwide impact; (2) the Messiah was coming through Israel as a gift from God to all nations of the world, not just to the Jews; and (3) in contrast to the indifference of Jewish chief priests and scribes who should have anticipated the king's birth (2:4), these Gentiles were over-whelmed with joy!

The quote in 2:6 comes from Micah 5:2. Micah prophesied around the time of the Northern Kingdom's fall in 722 b.c. Through this man, the Lord used the lesson of the Northern Kingdom's fall to confront Judah's own covenant disobedience. He warned of Judah's future judgment, but he also gave cause for hope, foretelling his restoration of the remnant. It is in this context of hope that the words quoted by Matthew are written in Micah.

2:7-12. Herod called the Magi into his chambers alone to try to determine when this new king, Jesus, was born. Because both the Magi and Herod seemed to identify the appearance of the star with the birthdate of the Messiah, Jesus must have been at least a year old when the Magi arrived. (This fact changes the traditional image of the Magi visiting the young family in the stable where Jesus was born. Certainly the shepherds found him there, but Joseph would have found his family a home to live in by the time the Magi arrived.) Herod wanted to use the Magi to determine the exact location of this new king. This was a self-serving strategy, not a generous desire to aid the Magi in their quest. Herod had no desire to worship the new king. His goal was to locate him and eliminate this bud of growing messianic hope which he viewed as potential competition. The Magi likely followed this star very much as a sailor follows the stars to get to his destination. The text does, however, give every indication that this star was a supernatural phenomena.

When the Magi found where Jesus and his family were living, they were overjoyed. Their destination was not just a place—but a person—Jesus. Their response was the same response that Matthew wanted for his readers; they worshiped him. The gifts they gave to Jesus—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—were the most common mediums of exchange in that day. The gold and two forms of incense made it possible for the Magi to cross through many different lands on their way to Bethlehem, much like people today use travelers checks when they are traveling. These gifts would come in handy later for Jesus' family as they traveled themselves (2:13-15).

The Magi chose not to go back to Herod as he had instructed. Instead they went a different way. For foreigners to disobey a king in that day was risky. But the Magi, by faith, followed the warning they had received in a dream. They clearly were more awed by God than by Herod.