

7th Grade New Testament (Gospels)

Lesson Plan: The Birth of Jesus - Pt. 3 (Magi)

Learning Goals: Students should understand the unique features of Matthew's presentation of the birth of Jesus, including the magi and the Flight to Egypt.

Question: "That's a Wrap" Game

Prayer.

Activity: "That's a Wrap"

Items needed: 3 bags of candy, boxes, wrapping materials (wrapping paper/newspaper, tape, string, ribbon, etc.)

Round One: Divide the class into three teams and give each team a bag of candy, a box, and a set of wrapping materials. Explain that at your signal, they will have three minutes to wrap the candy as tightly as possible, making it difficult to open. They may use any or all of the materials. The gifts should also be attractive (points will be awarded for wrapping aesthetics). After three minutes, have the teams display their gifts.

Round Two: Have each team select a representative to participate. Seat him or her in front of the group. Place one of the gifts in front of each person (make sure it isn't their own team's gift). Explain that at your signal, they should try to unwrap their gift as quickly as possible. Points will be awarded based on who gets their gift unwrapped the quickest. Students can then share their candy with their team.

Ask a few follow up questions:

- When have you anticipated a gift so much that couldn't wait to rip off the wrapping paper and open it?
- Why do we enjoy giving and receiving gifts?
- Why do we open gifts on Christmas?

When we introduced the four gospels, what were some of the distinctive features of Matthew's Gospel? (see 7.1.9 - *"It concerns itself with the fulfillment of the O.T." - we should be on the lookout for those in our passage today*):

- Matt. 2:5-6 (Micah 5:2)
- Matt. 2:15 (Hosea 11:1)
- Matt. 2:17-18 (Jeremiah 27:9)

Read Matthew 2 (Video from The Visual Bible)

Herod

Who was he?

- Name: Herod I or Herod the Great
- Born about 73 BCE
- Ruled from 37-4 BCE
- He was an Idumean (descendant of Esau)
- Rome has placed him as King over Israel.
- Ruthless in his attempt to stay on the throne - murdered his wife, 3 sons, and other relatives when he felt that they threatened him

- Master builder - restored temple in Jerusalem; built many theaters, cities, palaces, and fortresses (including his palace in Jericho)
- Ravaged by disease, he died in his palace in Jericho
- Summary: “Racially Arab, Religiously Jewish, culturally Greek, and politically Roman” (Kenneth Bailey)

He will reveal to us what human nature through sin has become and so what human nature does when confronted with God’s revelation

- Herod seeks to find out when the baby was born and sets out to kill all the babies born in Bethlehem around that time. All those 2 years old and under. (Parallel to Moses)
- Those who begin by hurting the child end by hurting children. Hating revelation leads to hurting people. If people will be ungodly, they will be inhumane. (Frederick Dale Bruner)
- Frames gospel - slaughter of innocent children; slaughter of innocent John the Baptist; slaughter of innocent Messiah

Why was Herod so frightened? Of a baby?

The baby is a threat to his rule as king

What did he have to lose and how did he see this baby as a threat?

Magi

- Who were they?
 - wise men, kings - popular misconceptions
 - term based on Greek word (magos) for magician, sorcerer, or someone who interprets dreams
 - astrologers (seeking to learn from the stars)
- Where were they from?
 - probably Persia
 - associated with the priestly class in Persia
- How many were there?
 - plural (no specified number)
 - Where do we get the number 3? (the number of gifts that the magi brought)
- Emphasis on the universal impact of Jesus’ birth
- Also emphasize the that God goes beyond racial and moral barriers by calling to the son those who are considered most unworthy

Irony of the Birth narrative in Matthew

- The one who is most expected to worship Jesus (who were awaiting his arrival) were threatened by him
- The people least expected to worship Jesus were the ones coming to look for him

What were the gifts brought by the Magi?

- Gold - a symbol of kingship
- Frankincense - used for incense and frequently in worship (a symbol of deity)
- Myrrh - an embalming oil (a symbol of death)

We need gold to value his identity as a king over our lives.

We need frankincense to affirm his identity as the Son of God.

We need myrrh to remind ourselves of his identity as a crucified messiah, to prevent our forgetting the forces within ourselves and our world that threaten this precious life in our midst.

(Alyce McKenzie)

What signs have pointed you toward faith in Christ?

Are you prepared to pay him homage? How?

Flight to Egypt

- The angel appears to Joseph in a dream, telling him to take Mary and the baby to Egypt to flee Herod
- Egypt approximately 90 miles from Bethlehem (fulfillment of Hosea 2:15)
- Death of children - fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:15
- Parallel of Israel's journey out of Egypt; theme of the new exodus (especially important in Matthew's Gospel)

Return to Nazareth - small fishing village between the Mediterranean Sea and Sea of Galilee

Prophecy (general) - Nazareth was despised in Jesus' time, just like Jesus would be.

Lesson Summary /Review:

Students should review and highlight the following vocabulary terms and concepts from this lesson in their notes:

- Herod
- Magi
- What were the three gifts of the magi to the baby Jesus and what was their significance?