

Sunday School Lesson December 20,2020

Good morning, I hope you are well and feel blessed.

Lesson for December 20, 2020, "A Regal Response to Holy Light"

Background Scripture from Matthew 2:7-15

In today's Scripture passage Herod, known as "Herod the Great," was a descendant of Antipater, an Edomite who converted to Judaism in the 2nd century BC. He was an exceptionally cruel king, ordering the murder of one of his wives, mother-in-law, brother in-law, uncle, and at least three sons. The Jews did not like him because of his friendliness with the Romans. He brought enough stability to Galilee and Judea that he gained some independence from Rome for the Jewish people. He is also remembered as a great builder. His biggest achievement was renovating the second temple in Jerusalem, which was not completed until 68 years after his death.

The words "wise men," translated Magi (singular: magus), refer to a group of men who may have studied the stars. Because the Bible says they came from the East, many scholars believe they were Babylonian astrologers. The wise men first come to Jerusalem because of a star, a special manifestation from God to indicate a Jewish king's birth. They then came to Bethlehem following the star again and find Jesus. Tradition says there were three of them, but Scripture never gives a number. The idea that there were three of them come from the number of gifts they offered to the Christ Child (verse 11).

Matthew chapter 2 opens with wise men coming from the East in search of the newborn King of the Jews. Scripture says that they were all from the East, that probably means they would have been from Persia, modern-day Iran. The wise men were astrologers and saw some sort of unusual star that indicated to them that a new king of the Jews was born. They traveled to Jerusalem, the capital, where they expected to see this baby. They almost certainly arrived in a great caravan with many servants. Hearing that a new Jewish king has been born, Herod instantly knows this must be the Messiah. The jealous and power hungry king asks his scholars where the Messiah was predicted to be born.

After Herod's scholars told him where the Messiah was to be born, he has a private meeting with the wise men. He tells them to bring him back the news of the Messiah's whereabouts after they find Him. Herod says this is so

he can worship Him, too. Even though Herod is king of the Jews, he does not rejoice at his promised Messiah's birth. He sees Jesus, instead, as a rival, one who could take control away from him. Then we see the wise men, foreigners without much biblical understanding, and yet these were the ones who set aside everything else in their lives to truly know Him.

After leaving Herod, the wise men continued their search. As they traveled, the star reappeared and guided them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. By the supernatural light of that star, the wise men found the Perfect Light, Jesus.

Mary and Joseph were married and living in a house in Nazareth (Luke 2:39). When the wise men arrived, they immediately knelt and worshiped the holy Child. The wise men worshiped Christ before He performed any miracles, preached any sermons, or healed any sick. Their worship was based solely on who He was, not what He did. They honored Him with special gifts worthy of His divine station (verse 11).

We should all do as the wise men: find Jesus, accept Him as Lord and Savior, and worship Him. The Magi did not listen to what King Herod told them to do. A higher authority spoke to them through a dream and told them not to return to Herod. God warned them and they obeyed His warning, returning home a different way. Think about a time when you had to disregard an authority figure to follow God's guidance instead.

After the wise men departed, God also warned Joseph about Herod's plan. In a dream, Joseph learned that Herod was searching for the child with the intent of killing Him. Joseph was instructed to pack up and move his family to Egypt. When Herod found out that the wise men were aware of his scheme and had left the country by another route, he was furious (verse 16). He ordered his soldiers to go to Bethlehem and kill every male two years old and under. Joseph follows the angel's directions and moved to Egypt, returning home only when Herod was dead.

From the text section, Jesus, the international one. The angel guided Joseph to take his family to Egypt because of the violence of Herod's response to the idea that another king had been born. Violence impacts refugees, and this story gives us a foretaste of Jesus' concern for marginalized and vulnerable refugees.

The Magi came to Jesus and worshiped their way, by bowing to the ground and giving gifts. We have to ask ourselves, are we welcoming to other cultures' worship traditions in your church? Jesus' family left their ancestral land and lived in another country. How would we continue to worship God and be a witness of the Gospel in a foreign country? Should we work with

the local immigrant population or invite immigrants to worship with us in our local worship service?

Jesus is the "reason for all seasons." And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11)

As we begin this week of Christmas here are some comments, I hope apply to each of us as we celebrate Christmas and reflect on our memories. May God bless each one. Merry Christmas.

I wish you a sleigh full of Christmas cheer, for the holidays and the whole coming year. And as you go about through the busy, Christmas season, take time to appreciate the true blessings of Christmas: the moments with family, the companionship of friends, the fellowship with all, and most of all the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Christmas spirit is all about helping others. Wouldn't it be great if we had more of that all year round? Showing our love and support for others as Jesus has done for us.

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week's lesson December 27, 2020, "Called To Prepare the Way"

Background Scripture Matthew 3.

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, International Sunday School Lesson and Commentary, Christian Columnist, Dr. Wayne Williams, Sunday School Lesson from Dr. Craig Rikard, a South Georgia Pastor and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.