Lesson Plans That Work: Lesson Plans for Older Children
2 Christmas
New Testament: Matthew 2:1-12

BACKGROUND
The world – that played Christmas carols all through the penitential season of Advent – has packed away the ornaments, taken down the Christmas trees, and has moved on to after Christmas sales. We gaze in wonder at the gift shimmering before us that we have barely unwrapped, let alone begun to understand. God among us – the Word made flesh. So we make the only response we can: we celebrate! We keep the greens in the church and sing the Christmas carols. We are being nurtured for the work that will be given us to do.

A NOTATION FOR THIS WEEK'S READING
Those in power are often threatened by those who might be even more powerful. So it was with King Herod. The wise often have to go home by a different way. So it was with the three kings. In this passage, Matthew invites us to see that the gift of baby Christ will find little acceptance among those he came to – and the gift given is for those who continue to share it. This passage provides the transition from gazing in wonder at the gift to empowering us to go out into the world and share it with those who have not yet noticed the gift.

THEME
Where is the Child

BEGINNING
Greet your class. Share some light refreshments while talking about the past week. If this is the first time you have been back together since Christmas, make time to hear special memories of this. Look for opportunities to hear how different cultures celebrate – special foods, special music, etc.

OPENING PRAYER
O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, page 214)

THE STORY: MATTHEW 2:1-12
Invite the children to read the story having several children reading the parts for the wise men (could be more than three), the prophet's words, Herod and the narrator.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Imagine you are King Herod, what might you fear about this new baby? How can this baby be a rival or threat?
- Imagine you are the wise men. How did you hear about this baby?
- I wonder why you decided NOT to tell King Herod who you had found?
- If you were one of the wise men, what would you have done?

ACTIVITIES

Map the Journey

If you have a map of Palestine during the time of Jesus, have the children locate Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and land from the east (Persian Gulf area). Trace with your finger the journey of these men. Ask questions like: Why don't you think King Herod wanted to come worship another king? Why do you think the wise men did not go back to King Herod? Why did they bring such odd baby presents? What presents would you bring if you were visiting Baby Jesus?

Acting out the Story

This story cries out to be acted out. There can be a part for everyone, including inanimate objects such as road signs, the star pointing the way, the dream, etc. The children can get into the intrigue of King Herod. ("Go find out where that baby is so I can go worship him too!") And what about the wisdom of the three men who went home by a different way? They may also be intrigued with the bizarre presents the wise men brought. Gold is pretty easy to figure out and comes in handy in any setting. But frankincense and myrrh? Things used for incense and even for embalming or as fragrances for perfumes? You might tell the children to be on the lookout as we go through the year for times to come in Jesus life that these gifts were foretelling.

Illustration

If the children enjoyed drawing the story last week, perhaps they would like to illustrate this story on another large sheet of paper.

GETTING CLOSURE

This is the last Sunday of Christmas, Epiphany starts on January 6. Invite children to reflect on their favorite part of the Christmas season. Was there anything that they noticed this Christmas Season for which they would like to give thanks?

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank you, God, for the gifts we received this Christmas – the things that were wrapped, and also for the things we noticed (include what the children have noticed). Thank you for letting us know that next year we will again have Christmas to celebrate. Amen.

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MATTHEW 2:1-12

The Visit of the Wise Men

Parts: Narrator, King Herod, People

Narrator: In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking,

Wise men: 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.'

Narrator: When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him,

People: 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel." '

Narrator: Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying,

King Herod: 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.'

Narrator: When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

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