Lesson Plans That Work: Lesson Plans for Younger 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 as usual. Spend time together talking. You may wish to serve simple refreshments.

THE STORY: MATTHEW 2:1-12
You can read the story from a Children's Bible, or simply tell it, using the following as a guide.

We have another story about Mary and Joseph and their little baby boy. They live in a place the animals are sharing with them. Lots of shepherds have come to see the baby. Far away, wise men had also heard about this baby so they traveled a long way on the backs of their camels to see this special baby and bring presents to him.

They stopped at the big fancy house of King Herod. "Hey, King Herod," they asked. "Do YOU know where we can find this special baby king?" Herod did not know where the baby was and he was jealous that there was someone else who was

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special. So the three kings kept on riding until they saw a huge star in the sky. Ah-ha! Now they knew where the baby could be found, so they rode to the manger. They visited Jesus and gave the baby the gifts they had brought for him. They then traveled a different way home so they would not have to tell Herod where they had found the baby.

ACTIVITIES

Acting out the Story

Invite the children to act out this story, with children playing more than one part if necessary. Have the children tell you the story by deciding which people are necessary. Do we need the wise men who came on camels? Who did they come to see? Where did they stop first?

Illustrate the Story

The children could draw the story. A length of butcher paper could allow several children to be working on separate parts of the story (three men on camels in the distance, Herod and his fancy house, the manger with the family and all the animals, then the wise men giving their gifts at the manger).

GETTING CLOSURE

The wise men have gone home, Mary and Joseph are ready to take a trip. The Christmas Story is about over -- for this year. We are taking the tree down at our house and putting the lights and ornaments away -- until next year. We will spend the rest of our year hearing stories Jesus told us when he grew up. Next year we will celebrate again with trees, and stockings, and tasty foods. But we still have today to sing one more Christmas song. Which one shall we sing? "Away in a Manger" or "Silent Night?"

CLOSING PRAYER

Close by singing the song you have chosen.

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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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