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THE LOOKOUT

DECEMBER 2022

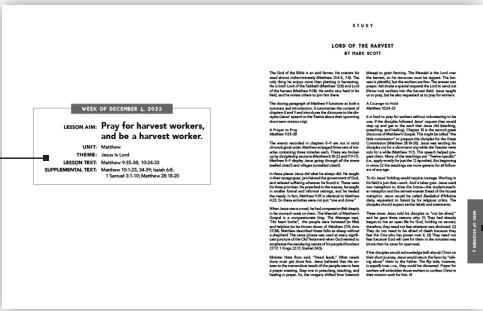
Unit: Matthew

Theme: Jesus Is Lord

Overview: Saying that “Jesus is Lord” can be difficult for someone living in a democratic republic. The paradigm of a democracy runs counter to living in a kingdom. Lordship implies that someone else is in charge. Perhaps the earliest Christian confession was “Jesus is Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:3). The Romans understood that to be a reference to a king. But Matthew’s audience used other titles to indicate the same; examples include “Christ” or “Son of God.” In this unit, students will learn from the disciples that Jesus is Lord of the harvest, they will learn from the miracles that Jesus is Lord of creation, they will learn from a parable that Jesus is Lord of judgment, and they will learn from the Magi that Jesus is Lord of all.

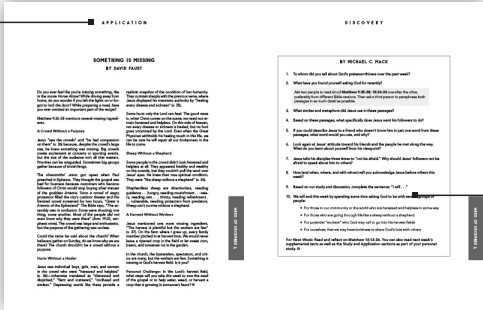
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF DECEMBER 25, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Again this Christmas,
confess Jesus, the Lord
of All, as your Lord.**

UNIT: Matthew

THEME: Jesus Is Lord

LESSON TEXT: Matthew 2:1-12

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Philippians 2:5-11; Revelation 7:9-10;
Isaiah 9:1-7; Ephesians 3:6

STUDY

LORD OF ALL

BY MARK SCOTT

Private investors have launched a multimillion-dollar campaign to reintroduce Jesus to Americans. It is called “He Gets Us.” Maybe the question this Christmas Sunday should be, “Do we get him?” We rejoice that within Jesus’ name is the word *us*. He came for *us*—which should be enough for *us* to embrace him as Lord of our lives.

The babe of Bethlehem (and Messiah of Matthew’s Gospel) is Lord of all—even wise men. Matthew devoted only one verse to the birth of Jesus (1:25) even though he spent many verses tracing Jesus’ human roots (1:1-17) and divine roots (1:18-24). Then, a good length of time *after Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, the Magi from the east came to Jerusalem*. So, very early on in this “Royal Jewish Gospel” we see that Jesus is Lord of all.

Foreign Visitors

Matthew 2:1-2

King Herod is not the hero in the Christmas story, and yet he populates every scene in the narrative of Matthew 2. The godfather of the Herod family was known as Herod the Great. He was an incredible architect and longtime leader, even though he was insanely jealous (as this story will demonstrate). News traveled much slower in those days, so it took time for the wise men and Herod to learn of Christ’s birth. The Magi came *from the east* toward the end of Herod’s reign.

Who were these foreign visitors? Scholars do not agree on their identity. Some think they were astrologers while others say they were astronomers. Some think they were of priestly origin, but Tertullian, the early church father, said they were kings. Where they came from, how they got there, and what they came for may be more important than who exactly they were. They came from the east, essentially retracing Abraham’s steps (Genesis 12). They saw and/or followed a star (prophetically referred to in Numbers 24:17). They were intent on one purpose—to *worship* the real king of the Jews. Think of it—foreigners worshipping a Jewish child.

Disturbed King

Matthew 2:3-8

King Herod lived in more than one spot (Caesarea, Jerusalem, the Herodian, etc.), but when the Magi came to worship Jesus, Herod was in Jerusalem. The presence of the Magi in Jerusalem could have created quite a stir. No wonder Herod and the city were *disturbed* (frightened or even terrified)—maybe for different reasons.

The question about the “king of the Jews” caused Herod to consult the Sanhedrin (composed of both *chief priests and teachers of the law*). It’s ironic the religious leaders knew the answer to Herod’s question. They answered in the words of Micah 5:2. If they had really been longing for their Messiah, one might think they would have walked the six miles to check out this claim. (If they did, we have no record of it.) Perhaps this is an example of faith going to seed. Bethlehem (house of bread), located just six miles south of Jerusalem, was not a large or significant town. Its prominence would result from someone in the line of David being born there who would become the ruler/shepherd of his people.

The private meeting between Herod and the Magi must have raised some suspicions in the minds of the Magi. How much they believed Herod’s stated intent to worship this king of the Jews is hard to say. Herod wanted a *report* (message—one of the words for preaching in the New Testament) so, he said, he could *worship* (bow down and show homage to) this king.

Worshipped Child

Matthew 2:9-12

The Magi left the private meeting with Herod. Upon leaving, they saw the star they had seen earlier from when they were in the east. The text says the star arose and *went ahead of them*. This may indicate that the Magi saw the star in the heavens while they were far off (in the east), but the star technically moved only six miles in leading them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. There is probably no way to know this for sure, just as it’s unknowable whether God used a special natural phenomenon like a nova or just put a miraculous star in the heavens.

The Magi came to the *house* (not stable or inn). By the time they arrived, Jesus was no longer an infant. He was a toddler (child), and Mary and Joseph had found a more permanent residence. The Magi saw Mary and *bowed down and worshipped* Jesus. This worship was expressed in the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh—strange gifts for a toddler, perhaps, but expensive and maybe even practical for the upcoming flight to Egypt.

God guided the Magi first by a star and finally by a dream (there are several of these in Matthew 1–2). They went home while the holy family left to escape Herod’s butchers. Jesus is the real king of the Jews, the ruler/shepherd of Israel, and the child Messiah. ■

APPLICATION

WHAT THE MYSTERIOUS MAGI CAN TEACH US ABOUT FAITH

BY DAVID FAUST

We call them Magi, but they weren't magicians. We picture them riding camels, but the Bible doesn't specify their mode of transportation. We don't know how many Magi made the trip "from the east" (perhaps today's Iraq or Iran), although it's traditional to assume there were three of them because they brought three gifts. Scripture doesn't mention their names, nor does it say they came to the manger; they arrived later when the child Jesus was residing in a house, not a stable.

We don't know about these mysterious characters, but the Magi illustrate what it means to live by faith.

They Followed the Light to a New and Unfamiliar Place

What kind of star led the Magi "until it stopped over the place where the child was" (Matthew 2:9)? Since God created stars in the first place, it was no problem for him to provide a special heavenly light. The Magi called it "his star" (Matthew 2:2)—the Messiah's star. Numbers 24:17 predicted, "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel." Jesus called himself "the bright Morning Star" (Revelation 22:16).

The Magi followed the light God provided, even when it led to unfamiliar places and encounters with dangerous people like King Herod. In a world darkened by sin and confusion, the written Word is a lamp for our feet. The living Word said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12) and he called us to be bright spots as well (Matthew 5:14). Instead of complaining about the darkness, are we willing to follow the light we have?

They Gave More Significant Gifts Than They Realized

Generosity is a natural response to God's leading. The Magi came to worship, and worship includes giving. They "opened their treasures and presented him with gifts" (Matthew 2:11).

Are we willing to open our treasures to God? What kind of present can we give the omnipresent God? Talk about someone who's hard to buy for! What can we give the Lord who already owns everything? The Magi did the best they could, offering gifts appropriate for the Messiah. Gold—a gift fit for a king. Frankincense—an aromatic resin used for medicinal purposes, which priests used in the tabernacle (Exodus 30:34-38). Myrrh—a spice used for burial, including the burial of Jesus himself (John 19:39).

God does more with our offerings than we realize. He "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20).

They Played a Role in a Divine Drama More Profound Than They Comprehended

These mysterious Magi probably didn't realize they would go down in history and be forever associated with the Messiah's arrival. God warned them to avoid King Herod, so "they returned to their country by another route" (Matthew 2:12), disappearing from the biblical record as abruptly as they first appeared.

But their story lives on. The Magi remind us to seek the Lord . . . follow the light . . . worship Christ . . . give our treasures. . . and reject the counsel of this world's Herods. We all have our own parts to play in God's redemptive story, if we are wise enough to follow.

Personal Challenge: How will you open your treasures to honor the Lord during this Christmas season? As an act of worship, make a faith-stretching year-end gift to a neighbor in need or a ministry or mission that is advancing the gospel of Christ. ■

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DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. Over the past week, with whom did you share Jesus' identity as King, Judge, Shepherd, and Savior?
2. What kinds of things in general disturb you?
 - What things make you overjoyed?

Ask two people to read aloud **Matthew 2:1-12** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to paraphrase the passage in as much detail as possible.

3. What titles (roles) for Jesus are mentioned in the passage?
4. What was the Magi's purpose for their travel?
5. What can you discern as King Herod's purpose for finding out where the child was located? (*Hint: The Magi were searching for "the one who has been born king of the Jews."*)
6. What contrasts do you see between the Magi and King Herod? (*See especially verses 3 and 10.*)
7. What do you learn about Jesus in this passage?
8. What do you learn about yourself?
9. How can the Magi be examples to you for how to radically pursue Jesus?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Ezra 1:1-11** as we begin a new study: "It's a New Start." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■