

# GROWTH + GROUPS

NAVIGATE LIFE TOGETHER

Maranatha Chapel Sermon Based Study Guide  
SB 12.13.2020

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM – MATTHEW 2:1-12



## Receiving the Message and Relating to the Study

What insights, principles, or observations stood out to you from this week's message? Discuss with your group.

Today we will look at the biblical account of the wise men that came from the East and followed the star of David to see the newborn Jesus. The term Magi refers to the ancient group of spiritual men who were philosophers, interpreters of dreams and astronomers. They may have been Jewish remnants from the days of the prophet Daniel, or maybe even from Persia (Iran). In Acts 2 the first 3 people groups were Parthians, Medes and Elamites and all are from ancient Persia! This is where the fastest part of the Church growth is happening in the world today! Num. 24:17 states, **"I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel..."** God put a Sign in the sky to declare that the world was about to change. At this season we are once again thinking about the birth of a child born 2,000 years ago and His star is about to appear! The child born in a humble stable and placed in a makeshift cradle would forever change the world! This child was destined to be a King, but there was no Rejoicing in the nearby Palace. Those in Power respond to a threat by trying to destroy it! His birth was more than a threat to a political system for empires of this world have risen and fallen time and again. This Birth would shake more than a local Palace, it would change the way man thought about himself and the God who created him. In the end it brought down the foundation that every empire is built upon – a foundation of disillusioned people who think they can be like God. Let's get into our study...

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

1. What struck you most or spoke to you from Pastor Ray's message this last weekend?
2. What is your least favorite Christmas gift you've ever received? By contrast, what is the best gift you ever received?
3. Why do your reactions to gifts, whether good or bad, matter?

## Digging Deeper in God's Word: Life Lessons

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 2:1-2

1. What is surprising to you about the wise men's involvement in God's plan for Jesus' birth? What do you think motivated the wise men to journey so far from home to investigate another religion's Messiah?

**Who were these wise men?** The Greek term ("magoi") referred to individuals who held positions of authority for centuries in the ancient Near East. They were not kings, but they counseled kings as important members of the royal courts. The wise men were Gentile dignitaries who traveled hundreds of miles to worship and honor the One born King of the Jews. If the wise men had studied ancient religious texts from the region, they might have been familiar with various Old Testament prophecies about Jesus.

2. What do the wise men reveal about Jesus in their question to King Herod (v. 2)?

Their query was a loaded one. First, it assumed the child's birth had already taken place. Second, it implied they were seeking the true heir to the throne of God's chosen people. Finally, the object of their search was no mere

## *Prepare! in 2020*

**infant, but a child of royalty who they intended to “worship” (v. 2).**

1. Read Numbers 24:17. Based on this prophecy, what might the wise men have thought about Jesus’ mission and purpose?
2. Read Isaiah 9:6-7, another Old Testament prophecy about Jesus, the Messiah. What titles are given for the Messiah in verse 6? What do these four titles signify?
3. What do you think of when you hear the word peace? Why do you think the title of “Prince of Peace” was given for the promised Messiah?

**Isaiah’s prophecy in 9:1-7 was a beacon of hope penetrating deep darkness. A child’s birth would usher in the sudden change from warfare and darkness to peace and light. Among the titles of the future messianic King, He would be called Prince of Peace. The Hebrew term translated peace means much more than absence of hostilities. It means “completeness,” “soundness,” “welfare.” The coming Ruler would provide spiritual wholeness for His people.**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 2:3-8,16.**

**Herod the Great was granted the title “king of the Jews” by the Roman senate; he ruled in Jerusalem from 40–4 B.C. He was a ruthless ruler who did not hesitate to murder even members of his immediate family when he felt his rule was threatened. Herod saw the wise men’s request as a direct threat to his empire, so he hastily gathered the chief priests and scribes to tell him where the Messiah would be born.**

1. Why did Herod run to the chief priests and scribes for answers? When you face challenging situations, do you seek counsel from people who will speak truth or people who will confirm what you want to hear? Explain.
2. The more we love controlling our own lives, the harder it is when we lose control. What is a natural first reaction when your personal “empire” feels threatened?

**In verse 8, we read that Herod deceptively played along with the wise men’s plan to worship the Messiah. But God had other plans. As Scripture indicates, the wise men were warned in a dream not to return to Herod (v. 12). Once Herod found out he’d been disobeyed, he “flew into a rage” (v. 16). Verse 16 describes Herod’s shocking but not uncharacteristic reaction to the wise men’s disobedience.**

3. What does Herod’s response say about his view of the Messiah? How did Jesus meet or contradict those expectations?

**HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 2:9-12.**

1. What do the wise men teach us about worshiping Jesus?
2. The wise men showed up to worship the new King, and they came bearing gifts. What gifts do you bring to God in worship?

Verse 10 indicates that the wise men were so full of joy, they were compelled to give. Their gifts weren’t just trinkets, but extravagant and costly goods from their homelands. Beyond being impressive, the gifts also hinted at Jesus’ identity. Gold was traditionally a gift for a king, frankincense was a gift for deity, and myrrh was a spice often given to a person who faced death.

4. How have you experienced the peace that comes with loving God and living your life as an act of worship?

**Applying God's Word**

What did you learn from this study and how does this personally speak to you? Discuss with your group.

**THE BETHLEHEM STAR**- Headline in the Seattle Times. For the first time in nearly 800 years, a rare Christmas star will light up the sky at the start of this month's winter solstice. It is a planetary alignment that last happened in the year 1226. The 2 largest planets in the Solar System, Jupiter and Saturn will do something next month not seen since the Middle Ages – they will look like a double planet – Extra Bright. It will happen after sunset Dec. 21, 2020 the start of the winter solstice. Could God be giving us a Sign this year, a reminder to Look Up for His Kingdom cometh quickly?

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

1. What did Jesus do to make peace a reality for our lives? Does someone in your life need to know this truth today?
2. What difference does God's peace make in your daily life? What difference does God's peace make in the life of our church?
3. In what area of your life do you most need peace right now? Peace with God? Peace with yourself? Peace with others?

PRAYER - Ask God to give you the wisdom to know Jesus deeper and the desire to worship and serve Him more than yourselves. Thank God for the opportunity to worship Him freely because of what Jesus did on your behalf.

Note: Pastor Ray reminded us that we must prepare for Jan 2021! Start adding to your food pantry by getting a little extra every time you go out. Remember the shortages we had the last time people bought out the stores. We can also be prepared to help our neighbors. Consider following our "CONOPS" 3 Hr, 3 day and 3 week plan as seen here- <https://www.maranathachapel.org/growthgroups>

*"I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult." (Num. 24:17)*