

Matthew 2:1-12 "The Way of the Wise"

Read Matthew 2:1-12.

1. The story of the Wise Men is the classic Epiphany text for much of Western Christianity. What were two reasons Matthew began his gospel with this story? Can you think of any others?

The story of the wise men is about God revealing Jesus Christ not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles, and thus showing to Matthew's audience that the good news of Jesus is not just for the Jews but for everyone. It also sets up the question of what the reader's (and our) response is to the revelation of Jesus Christ, by contrasting the wise men's response with King Herod's.

If you want to dig deeper, some other possible reasons that Matthew included this story: to portray Jesus as 'the new Moses', leading his people out of slavery (see Ex 1:22-2:10); or to show Jesus as the fulfilment of the prophecy from Isaiah 60:3, 5-6.

2. There are many questions and details that accompany this fascinating story. What are some questions that often arise? Are there any questions in particular that you would like to know the answer to?

Who were the wise men? Where did they come from? How many of them were there? Why did they choose to follow a sign to worship a king in a different country? How could a star lead them so specifically to a house? When did they get there (with the shepherds or later)? Do the gifts have particular significance?

3. Why was Herod troubled when the wise men asked about the child born King of the Jews? What implications did the baby being the Christ have for him in particular?

Herod assumed that the baby the wise men were looking for was the long-awaited Messiah, who was to be the ruler of the Israelite nation and to free the people from oppression. His arrival would mean that Herod's reign was over, at least as he knew it, and that his identity as the ruler of the Israelite people, always a sensitive topic in his life, would be changed and/or lost. To lose the thing we have based our identity on is a scary thing for anyone.

4. Herod's fear and trouble rested in the perceived 'threat' to his identity. Where in particular does our acceptance of Jesus' identity as king challenge us in our own lives? Each of us is tempted to base our identity on something other than being the precious child of God (some examples: as a 'hard worker', 'good friend', 'mother', 'philanthropist', 'single', etc). Spend some time reflecting on where you might be tempted to lean on your identity apart

from your identity in Christ. How does Christ want to speak into that part of your life? Share as you feel comfortable.

Speaking of identities is a very personal thing, so this question may be difficult for some. Perhaps think of something in your own life that you are comfortable sharing, to lead the way, and allow people the space they need to speak or stay silent.

5. What are some ways that God has revealed himself in your life? Has he ever revealed himself in an unexpected way in your life, or in the life of someone you know? What did that look like? Did you have trouble believing it was God? Why or why not?

Think of examples from your own life, or from others you know. Jesus often appears in dreams to those of non-Western backgrounds, for example – do you know of anyone for whom this is the case? Are there instances where you weren't sure if it was God revealing himself or you were reading too much into it? It could be a good discussion to get into some more ambiguous examples, but try to have at least one clear example if possible.

6. Can you think of a time where God met you where you were, and as a result you were moved to worship him?