

WEEK 5: CONCERNING THE MAGI

HIGH SCHOOL

GOALS

Who are the Magi?
Why did they travel to find Jesus?
How did they find Jesus?

LESSON

Materials Needed: Icons, Bible, Gift boxes of Gold, Frankincense & Myrrh

Extended Learning Opportunity for Teachers:

“The Star and the Wise Men” - Dr. Jeannie Constantinou

<https://orthodoxbiblestudy.info/the-star-and-the-wise-men/>

The Gospel of Matthew: Torah for the Church by Fr. Lawrence Farley, pgs 30-42

The Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Matthew by Blessed Theophylact, pgs 23-31

Homily VI on Matthew by St. John Chrysostom

DELIVERY METHODS FOR THIS LESSON

I have provided icons for this lesson in order for the children to make a comparison between the written gospels and the visual gospels. They can read the stories of the Nativity of Christ (Luke 2:1-20) and the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12) and see the stories unfold before them in the icons.

I have also provided the map we have printed in our classrooms for the children to visually see where Bethlehem is located in relation to Jerusalem.

CONCERNING THE MAGI

Matthew says little about the events that took place at Jesus' birth. Most of what we know about the Nativity of Christ is from the Gospel of Luke. However, Matthew is the only one who tells us about the Magi (often translated from the Greek, *magoi*, as the "Wise Men") in his gospel. Let's look deeper to understand why he felt it was important to include this story in his gospel:

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

Saint Matthew directs his gospel to the Jews, but he makes a point to show that the Gentiles were always included as well - from before Jesus' birth (His genealogy includes Gentile women), to His birth (the magi), to His ministry (the centurion), and unto His death (the thief on the cross).

Matthew is demonstrating throughout his gospel that God reaches out to everyone, on their level of understanding, and provides an opportunity for them to draw near to Him, just as He did for the magi. The magi were a Persian priestly caste. They paid close attention to the stars and had gained a reputation for their knowledge of astrology, which is the study and interpretation of the influence of the stars and planets on our lives. St. John Chrysostom explains, " 'And wherefore,' one may say, 'did He attract them by such a vision?' Why, how should He have done? Sent prophets? But the magi would not have submitted to prophets. Uttered a voice from above? Nay, they would not have attended. Sent an angel? But even him they would have hurried by. And so for this cause dismissing all those means, God calls them by the things that are familiar, in exceeding condescension; and He shows a large and extraordinary star, so as to astonish them, both at the greatness and beauty of its appearance, and the manner of its course." (Homily VI)

The magi go directly to King Herod seeking the new Jewish king, but - *he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him*. St. Theophlyact explains, Herod was troubled because he was a

foreigner and feared for his kingdom; for he knew that he was unworthy of it. But why were the Jews troubled? They ought instead to have rejoiced that they would have a king to whom the kings of Persia paid homage. But evil is indeed a senseless thing.”

What stood out about this star that had these magi preparing for a long journey west to Jerusalem? Matthew shares very little about the details of this star in his gospel and while there is scientific speculation about the cause of this star leading the magi to Jesus, both St. John Chrysostom and St. Theophylact explain the star was divine and not a celestial object.

At that time, the planets in the solar system were viewed as “wandering stars” because their movement was not fixed in relation to the other stars. At the approximate time of Jesus’s birth, there was a “Great Conjunction” meaning that Jupiter was very close in the night sky to Saturn. This would be possible to see without a telescope and look like a bright star in the sky. Many have speculated that this is what led the magi to Jerusalem seeking the newborn Jewish king. We need to understand that the Great Conjunction would only last for a short time though and it would take the magi months to travel from the East to Jerusalem.

When the magi arrived in Jerusalem, they learned through King Herod’s scribes about the prophecy of a Messiah being born in Bethlehem. As they left for Bethlehem, *“the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.”*

The magi first traveled west to Jerusalem in order to find the king and now are traveling south to Bethlehem. *(See map)* This stands out to us. You cannot follow a star from north to south - because stars move in the sky from east to west - let alone follow the star to a specific house. It simply doesn’t work that way. St. John Chrysostom confirms this, “Thus, that this star was not of the common sort, or rather not a star at all, as it seems at least to me, but some invisible power transformed into this appearance, is in the first place evident for its very course. For there is not, there is not any star that moves by this way, but whether it be the sun you mention, or the moon, or all the other stars, we see them going from east to west; but this was wafted from north to south; for so is Palestine situated with respect to Persia.”

St. John Chrysostom reminds us that the star guiding the magi acted much in the same way as the pillar of cloud that led the Jews in the wilderness. As such, this was truly

a miraculous light. As Orthodox Christians, we know that with God, all things are possible - even a star moving from north to south.

The magi brought treasures of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus:

- They brought **gold** to Jesus as you would offer gold to a **king**.
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God warns the magi in a dream not to return to Herod and also warns Joseph in a dream to leave for Egypt, thus fulfilling prophecy - "From Egypt I have called my Son."

Matthew includes the story of the magi in his gospel because:

- he demonstrates that Jesus came for the benefit of everyone - the Jews and Gentiles.
- he shows that the scribes (the scholars and teachers of the people) had first confessed the truth of Christ and then later crucified Him.
- he shows the treasures the magi brought to Jesus recognize His kingship, divinity, and His saving death for all.

JESUS' JUDEAN AND PEREAN MINISTRIES



LEARN MORE ABOUT WHERE JESUS LIVED
AT <http://bit.ly/ZEABmaps>







from orthodoxincense.com



from Basilica of Our Lady in Trastevere, 12th Century



from Daphni Monastery in Athens, late 11th century



from Cappadocia, 12th century



from Ferapontov Monastery in Russia, 1500



From Chora Church in Constantinople, 1315-1320

WEEK 5: CONCERNING THE MAGI

MIDDLE SCHOOL

GOALS

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WEEK 5: CONCERNING THE MAGI

3RD & 4TH GRADE

GOALS

Who are the Magi?
Why did they travel to find Jesus?
How did they find Jesus?

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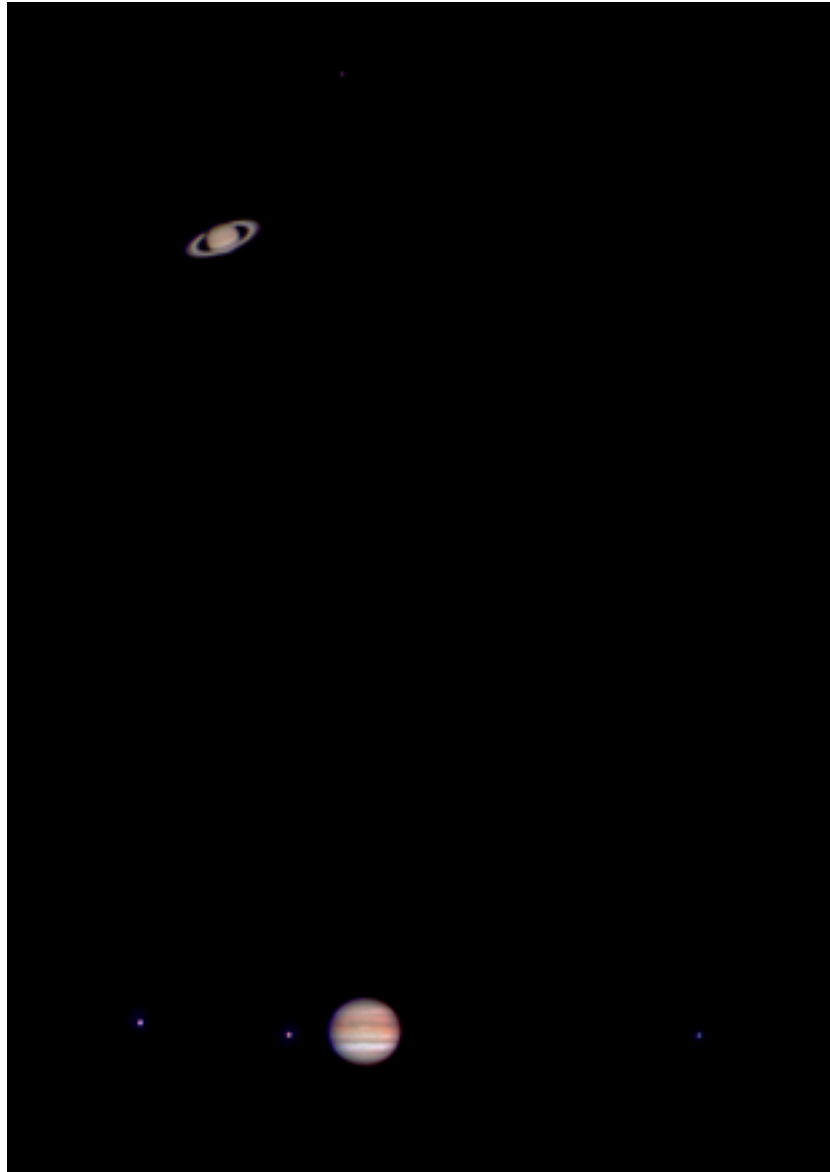
Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

The magi were known to be a Persian class of priests. The magi paid close attention to the stars and had gained a reputation for their knowledge of them.

These men were closely watching the sky and when they saw this magnificent star - they wanted to pack up and leave immediately to go see what was happening!

The magi went directly to King Herod because they believed the bright star they saw in the sky from their home was telling them that there had been a royal birth of a Jewish king. The magi were correct, but the birth of Jesus was not an earthly kingship. It is an eternal, heavenly one. No one else was looking to the stars in the sky to learn about the birth of the Messiah. We know this because when Herod learned from the magi that they were seeking the King of the Jews - *he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him*. Herod was troubled because he was afraid of losing his throne to someone else! St. John Chrysostom explains to us that God will provide opportunities for us to approach Him in a way that we understand. For the magi, God used the sky to guide them to Jesus.

At the approximate time of Jesus's birth, there was a Great Conjunction, meaning that Jupiter was very close in the night sky to Saturn. Many have speculated that this is what lead the magi to Jerusalem to worship Jesus. However, both St. John Chrysostom and St. Theophylact explain in their writings that the star the magi saw was divine and not a regular star (or planets) that we see in the sky.



From wikipedia - Great Conjunction 2020
(4 hours before it's closest proximity to each other, seen via a telescope)

When the magi arrived in Jerusalem, they learned through King Herod about the prophecy of a Messiah being born in Bethlehem. They then traveled from Jerusalem and went south to Bethlehem. This stands out to us! You cannot follow a star from north to south - because stars move in the sky from east to west - let alone follow the star to a specific house. It simply doesn't work that way.



Great Conjunction in 2020 -
(bright dot just above the trees in the background)
Seen without a telescope and taken with a regular phone camera

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WEEK 5: CONCERNING THE MAGI

1ST & 2ND GRADE

GOALS

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Why did they travel to find Jesus?
How did they find Jesus?

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CLASS ROUTINE

Continue routine - move photo, light candle, venerate icon, prayer before beginning

THE BIRTH OF JESUS & THE MAGI

Read or summarize pages 168 - 173 of the Orthodox Bible Reader to the children.

Ask the children to summarize the story back to you.

They can point to the icon to help remind them of all the parts of the story. If they have trouble remembering parts of the story, you can ask them to point to these parts of the story in the icon.

LORD, HAVE MERCY

Continue learning to sing ‘Lord, have mercy’ in multiple languages



WEEK 5: CONCERNING THE MAGI

PRE-K & KINDERGARTEN

GOALS

Who are the Magi?
Why did they travel to find Jesus?
How did they find Jesus?

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LORD, HAVE MERCY

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