



Small Group Study Guide for January 3, 2021

Our Savior Lutheran Church and School

Theme: On Epiphany Sunday, we remember the wise men who visited the child Jesus and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They were led by a star to Jerusalem, but then hit a dead end. They had to look to the Scriptures to find the final course to Jesus in Bethlehem. In the same way, we can only get so far in our quest for God, and rely on the Holy Scriptures to show us specifically where and how to find Jesus our Savior, namely, in the Gospel delivered in Word and Sacrament.

Getting Started: (sharing with each other)

1. Did you see the “Christmas Star” in December? If not, share with others one of the coolest things in the sky that you have seen.

2. How long do you keep your Christmas decorations up?

In the Word: Read Matthew 2:1-12

3. The word used to describe the wise men is “Magi” – astronomers whose practices went back to ancient Babylon as they studied the stars and tried to connect them to events on earth. Does Matthew record anywhere in this passage that they were ‘kings’? And is the number of wise men given anywhere in this passage?

4. When the wise men visited King Herod, Herod consulted the religious leaders and teachers of the Law to find out the place where the Messiah was to be born. This passage is cited in verse 6. Which Old Testament passage is it? Check your footnotes to find the reference, and then highlight or star that passage in your Bible.

5. King Herod the Great reigned in Judea from 37 – 4 B.C. This means that the birth of Jesus is off by just a few years. (This was calculated by Dionysius Exiguus around 500 A.D. He actually got very close with the records available to him!) Herod was known for being ruthless and cruel towards any who opposed him. He also oversaw incredible building projects, such as the vast Temple in Jerusalem. Read **Matthew 2:13-23** to learn the rest of the story of King Herod’s attempt to destroy the newborn Messiah. What key details about Jesus’ life are given in these verses?

Putting it all Together (what do we believe or do as disciples?)

6. The wise men may be considered some of the earliest 'scientists' as they studied the stars, using highly complex mathematical equations. They mapped most of the constellations and planets visible to the naked eye and could predict their movements. Yet for all their learning and study, they were only able to get so far in their quest for the newborn king. How does modern day science 'only get us so far'? What are the limitations of modern science that limits people from truly knowing and understanding God?

7. The wise men are also considered the first gentiles (non-Jews) who come to recognize the newborn Messiah. It is ironic that King Herod and the scribes missed the Messiah, but the pagan astronomers didn't! This theme will continue through Matthew's Gospel until the great commission in Matthew 28:19-20, where Jesus says to "go and make disciples of all nations..." What are some ways that our church is making disciples of 'all nations' so that Gentiles can come and worship Jesus?

8. The wise men were only able to go so far with their knowledge and understanding of the star. In the end, they needed to consult the Scriptures to find out where the Messiah was to be born. This is the difference between 'general revelation' and 'specific revelation.' General revelation is what we can know about God from nature, our own intellect, or experience. Specific revelation shows us what we can only know about God from the Scriptures. Brainstorm together a few things that we can know about God from general revelation, and what we can only know from specific revelation.

General Revelation –

Special Revelation –

9. Pastor Wangelin is challenging us to read our Bibles this year, and to collectively count as a congregation how many books of the Bible we can read in 2021. Talk about ways that you currently read the Bible, or how you can increase your Bible reading in the coming year.

Prayer: Thank the Lord for the direction and truths we have revealed in His holy Word – the Bible – especially the truth of the Savior we have in Jesus Christ. Ask God to help us seek the Scriptures for our direction and guiding in life, and for all nations to come and worship our King Jesus.

Next Week: We continue through the season of Epiphany with the Baptism of our Lord, remembering both Jesus' baptism and ours!