**GROWING TOGETHER:** FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Session 4 of 4

# Wise men

### MEETING AIM

To tell the story of the wise men who travelled to honour the new king.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 2:1-12

### BACKGROUND

This session plan is intended for use either in-person or online, depending on how you’re meeting. Adapt the activities to fit your particular situation.

As Jesus is born in Bethlehem, a star appears in the east and, believing it to be of utmost significance, some wise men follow it to find Jesus.

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### STARTING OUT – 5 mins

As you begin the session, invite the children to sit together in a circle and pass round a simple object. When a child has the object, they can share their response to the question. Sometimes it’s helpful to have a sand timer so that you have time for each person to share if they want to. If a child doesn’t want to say anything, they can just pass on the object. Ask the children to talk about which superstar celebrities they follow.

### INTRO ACTIVITY – 10 mins

Going on from talking about superstars, ask the children what kind of ideas and behaviours you get to if you follow these particular people. It won’t all be bad! For instance, if you follow some pop stars you might get into drinking and bad behaviour, but if you follow a fitness star you might get into health and wellbeing.

### BIBLE STORY – 10 mins

**You will need:** simple props and costumes; three wrapped gifts containing objects to represent gold, frankincense and myrrh

Ask who can recap the story so far. Who knows what happens next? Tell the next part of the story:

The story now shifts a bit further east where some people who knew about the stars saw something rather unexpected. We often have three wise men in our Christmas story because they bring three presents, but the Bible doesn’t say there were three or, for that fact, that they were men. *Choose some children to be star experts and dress them in the costumes.*

People paid much more attention to the stars to tell them things 2,000 years ago. These star experts saw a new star rising and felt that it meant that a new king had been born. They decided to follow the star and pay honour to the new king.

When they came to Jerusalem, they did the sensible thing and went to the royal palace where the king was. Who was this king? A man called Herod – a nasty piece of work. *Have someone be Herod and put a crown on their head.* The star experts asked King Herod about the new king. Herod was a bit rattled – he was the king and no one else was going to take that from him. Herod knew that there were messages in the scriptures about a new king coming and so he asked the religious teachers where it was supposed to happen. They told him: Bethlehem. Herod sent the star experts to Bethlehem and told them to come back when they’d found the baby king. He said that he wanted to worship him too…(I don’t think that was really his plan!) *Have your star experts and Herod act out the conversation.*

In our nativity stories, we always make the wise men get to Jesus when he is still a tiny baby, but they probably didn’t get there until a bit later. Joseph and Mary had found a house to live in (the census must have been over) and Jesus could have been several months old – anything up to two years old. The star experts were thrilled to find Jesus and they gave him presents – not usual things but things with symbolic meanings.

*Choose a volunteer to open each of your three wrapped presents as you talk about the symbolism.* First, gold, to show that Jesus was a king. Second, frankincense, which was something used by priests. A priest was someone who connected people to God so that was what Jesus would do. Third, myrrh, a very strange gift for a baby as it was an ointment used on dead people. It showed that Jesus’ death would be important and special in some way.

After they had given their presents, the star experts went home without going back to Herod because they had been warned in a dream that he was a very dangerous man. And he was!

### CHATTING TOGETHER – 5 mins

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

* Why do you think people took notice of the stars in this way in history?
* Why do you think the ‘wise men’ bothered to follow the star?
* Why was Herod so upset?
* How do you think Mary felt about each of the three gifts that were given to Jesus?
* Why did the wise men believe their dream was a warning?
* Should we pay attention to our dreams?

### CREATIVE TIME – 10 mins

**You will need:** small boxes and stones from session two; permanent markers; hay; gold card; scissors; glue sticks

You’re going to continue to make your stone nativity scene. Put a little hay into the box and then as you decorate the stones, you can place them in. Today, use the markers to decorate stones to look like wise men with their gifts. In addition, cut out a gold star shape and stick it on the outside or lid of your box. As you work, chat with the children about the story and what God might be saying to them.

If you didn’t do session two or three, you’ll need to create stones for Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the shepherds and angels to add to your nativity scene.

If you can’t get stones, you could form some flat pebbles out of air-drying clay a few weeks in advance so that they are dry enough to be drawn on. Or you could make salt-dough pebbles and bake them in the oven ahead of time.

### PRAYER – 5 mins

**You will need:** a Christmas tree decorated with stars

Remind the group that a star can point you towards something – like the superstars we talked about at the beginning and the star in the story. Ask them what they would like to be pointed towards and what sort of things might do that for them. As the think about this, they can come and collect a star from the tree. Pray and thank God for each person, asking that they would find things that point them towards Jesus.

**JENNY CHEUNG**

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