

Well Fed Family

Lessons for Christmas 3

Wise Men Still Seek Him!

I. Memory Verse:

Isaiah 60:1-3 Arise, Shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

II. Lesson:

Sometimes the Bible tells us exactly when specific events happened. For example Purim, the feast celebrating the bravery of Esther and Uncle Mordecai, happens in the Jewish month of Adar which is somewhere between February and March in our calendar. (Read about the events surrounding Purim in the Old Testament book of Esther. Purim is specifically mentioned in Esther 9:20-32.)

Passover, the feast celebrating God's rescue of the Jews from slavery in Egypt, happens in the month of Nisan which is somewhere between April and May in our calendar. (Read about the events leading up to the Passover in the Old Testament book of Exodus chapters 2-13. Passover is specifically mentioned as a feast day in Leviticus 23:5-8.)

When it comes to Jesus' birthday the Bible just doesn't say! In fact Christmas wasn't celebrated on December 25th until at least 300 years after the crucifixion. Even today this date still isn't accepted worldwide. Some Christians celebrate on January 6th.

The Bible DOES tell us many important things about Jesus. Most of these concern the good news, or Gospel, of the life, crucifixion, and resurrection, and how Jesus died for our sins so that we can join him in Heaven. We can read facts about Jesus' birth in Matthew and Luke. You are probably familiar with many of them. We learned many of these in Lesson One – the Prophets foretell, and Lesson Two – Jesus is Born.

For example can you tell me where Jesus was born? Bethlehem in Judea

Can you tell me who was there when he was born? Mary, Joseph, some animals, and out in the fields there were shepherds and angels.

What about the Wise Men? Were they there when Jesus was born? We will learn more about the Wise Men in this lesson, and then you can answer that question.

Many details about Jesus' birth are found in the Gospel of Luke, but only the Gospel of Matthew tells us about the Wise Men. Let's begin reading together in Matthew chapter 2.

Matthew 2:1-3 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi (wise men) from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the

Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

The Wise Men (also called Magi) had noticed a new star in their night sky far, far away from Bethlehem. This star was unusual, special in some way, and signaled to these men that something important was happening. We know from Lesson One that Old Testament prophets had left predictions, called prophecies, that a new star would announce the birth of the Messiah, or Savior, of the world. The Wise Men understood this when they saw the star and they gathered together very special gifts and followed the new star westward.

The Wise Men traveled a long, long way and when they arrived in Israel they showed up in the wrong town. They went to Jerusalem, the capital city, which is six miles or so north of little Bethlehem. When they got to Jerusalem they started asking a lot of questions that made a lot of people very nervous. They started by asking for a different king besides Herod! How do you think Herod felt when he heard about another king? Verse 3 says he was “disturbed”. The original Greek word here can also mean to agitate, trouble, terrify, give doubt, unsettle or perplex. Those are all very descriptive words that help us realize what Herod was feeling. This might explain what happens next.

Matthew 2:4-6 When he (Herod) had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “For this is what the prophet has written: ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’ “

Herod had been caught unprepared! He already had all the answers he needed, his own advisors knew the Messiah was going to come from Bethlehem and was going to be a ruler of Israel. But none of them had paid attention to the signs, and so Herod had to hurry and find out as much as he could about this new king.

Matthew 2:7-8 Then Herod called the Wise Men (Magi) secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

Do you think Herod was telling the whole truth? Did he really want to worship this child king? More likely Herod was alarmed and worried he was going to lose his job!

Matthew 2:9-12 After they (the Wise Men) had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Quite a lot happened in those four verses, 9 through 12! First of all in verse 9 we read again about the star that guided them and finally stopped to mark the place where Jesus was living. When the Wise Men see the star how do they feel? Find the answer in verse 10. This translation says “overjoyed”. Other translations say “exceeding great joy”. The Greek word for great is mega – a word we use a lot in English when we mean really, really huge! The Wise Men had “mega joy” when their guiding star brought them to Jesus!

Verse 11 tells us where Mary and Jesus were. Was it the same place where Jesus was born? What word is used to describe Jesus – is it baby or child? What is the first thing the Wise Men do when they see Jesus? Why did they worship him? Is this something we should also do for Jesus?

Verse 12 tells us the Wise Men all had the same dream. God was warning them not to go back to Herod. They listened to God's warning and obeyed. They took a different road home so that Herod would not know where to find Jesus and his family.

The Wise Men searched for Jesus. They took a long journey from far, far away. They brought extravagant gifts fit for a king, and when they found Jesus they were filled with joy and they worshiped him! The Wise Men are great examples of what we should also do. We can search for Jesus by reading and memorizing God's word which is the Bible. We will definitely find Jesus when we search because Jesus himself said in Matthew 7:7 "...seek and you will find..." The only gift Jesus wants from us is to love him with all our heart, soul and mind; and to love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:36-40) When we love Jesus this much we will also have mega joy just like the Wise Men!

III. Terms:

Magi – this word is the plural of the word Magus. These were priests or scholars from ancient Media and Persia, the area of the Middle East stretching from the borders of modern day China and India westward into large parts of Greece and northern Africa. The name magus/magi suggests these were not kings; instead they probably were professors who studied the stars, planets and heavenly bodies.

Herod – was appointed as king of the region of Judea which was, during the time of Christ, part of the great Roman Empire. He ruled there for over 30 years. Herod was actually a practicing Jew because his mother was Jewish. During his rule he built a giant fortress and many cities. He also built many palaces for himself including one called the Herodium located southeast of Bethlehem. Before the Herodium could be built first Herod had thousands of workers build a hill. Then they built a fortress on top of the hill. Then they built the palace on top of that. Herod also commanded the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. In spite of all this the Jews never really accepted him.

IV. Kitchen Connection:

In this lesson we learned the Wise Men had to travel westward to find Jesus. They came from far, far away. This means they came from somewhere in what we today call the Middle East or possibly the Far East. The region called Persia in the Old Testament is one possibility, also China or India could be where they came from. All of these places were well known for their exotic spices. When you have cinnamon toast, gingerbread, vanilla ice cream, or even just black pepper on your scrambled eggs you are enjoying spices that originally came from these eastern countries. Sugar is another special treat that was very rare and expensive in Jesus' time.

Recipe:

Our special recipe for this lesson is a cake that is rich with the flavors from ancient Persia and China. If you like the flavor of Chai tea or coffee you will enjoy this cake! Take time to smell each of the spices individually. It might be fun to visit an Indian or Chinese grocery store if you have one in your area and explore all of the unusual spices and ingredients available.

Spice Cake with Spiced Honey Syrup

This recipe makes 3 loaf cakes. You can give two as gifts and enjoy the third one yourself!

Ingredients:

1 cup (two sticks) of butter, at room temperature

1 cup sugar

2 eggs, at room temperature

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 cups raisins (or any mixture of small sized dried fruits such as currants, dates, apricot pieces, cranberries or cherries)

3 cups organic applesauce with no sugar added

½ teaspoon sea salt

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground ginger

½ teaspoon ground nutmeg

¼ teaspoon cardamom

¼ teaspoon ground cloves

¼ teaspoon ground black pepper

1 Tablespoon baking soda

4 cups unbleached all-purpose flour*

*(to make this gluten-free use 4 cups of King Arthur Measure for Measure or similar gluten free flour blend)

Instructions:

Prepare your pans by greasing three 8 ¼" x 4 ½" x 3" loaf pans with butter. Preheat the oven to 300 degrees.

Using an electric mixer, cream the butter and sugar together until fluffy. Add the eggs and vanilla, and beat until smooth. Stir in the raisins or dried fruit.

In a separate bowl mix together all of the dry ingredients.

Add the dry ingredients a few scoops at a time alternating with the applesauce and mixing gently in between each addition until the dry ingredients and the applesauce are all incorporated.

Divide the batter evenly between the three prepared loaf pans. Bake the cakes in the preheated oven for 1 hour, or until a toothpick inserted in the center of each loaf comes out clean.

While the cakes are baking, prepare the spiced sugar syrup below.

When the cakes are done place the pans on a cooling rack and allow the cakes to sit in the pan for 2-3 minutes. Then carefully remove the cakes from their pans and continue to cool on the rack.

Spiced Honey Syrup

½ cup water

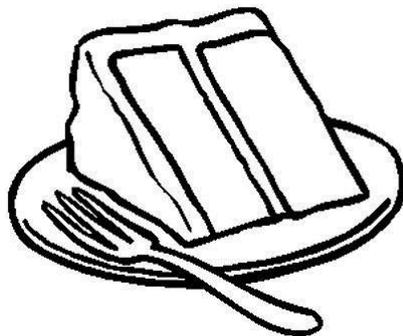
¾ cup honey

3 whole cloves

1 cinnamon stick

Place all of the ingredients in a small saucepan. Bring the water to a boil while stirring. When the water boils and the honey has dissolved completely, remove the pan from the heat and allow to cool. Leave the spices in the sugar syrup until you are ready to use it.

When the cakes have cooled use a toothpick to gently poke holes all over the top of each cake. Drizzle the cooled sugar syrup evenly over the three cakes until it is all absorbed. Slice the cakes and serve. Or you can wrap each cake tightly in waxed paper or plastic wrap and refrigerate or freeze until ready to use.



V. Science connection:

Here's a trick question....how many wise men were there?

We know Wise Men brought gifts. The Bible calls their gifts "treasures" because these gifts were extremely expensive and valuable. The gifts also give us more clues about where the men might have come from. The Bible mentions three gifts specifically, so it has become custom to say that there were just three Wise Men, although we don't know for certain. What do we know about their gifts?

Gold was a gift that was definitely fit for a king! You have probably seen gold jewelry, but gold is also used as money. This gift was one of the ways God provided for Mary and Joseph so they could take care of the boy Jesus.

Frankincense is extracted from the sap of the boswellia tree. The trees are slashed much like maple trees are slashed to extract their sap for syrup. The boswellia tree sap is allowed to dry out and become like hard pellets. The dried sap, called resin, can then be used in making incense, perfume, medicine, or distilled to make essential oil. Our word frankincense is from the Old French *franc* meaning high quality and *encens* meaning incense. The trees are native to the Arabian Peninsula and northeast Africa.

Myrrh is extracted from the sap of the Commiphora bush. The resin is used in making perfume, incense, medicine and distilled to make essential oil. Myrrh resin can be powdered and mixed with wine to drink. You can find myrrh in toothpaste and mouthwash among other places. The bushes grow in tropical areas of Africa, Indian Ocean islands, the Arabian Peninsula, India and Vietnam.

Both frankincense and myrrh were used as part of the Holy Incense burned in the Temple. They were both also used for many other things. Mary and Joseph would have known exactly how to use frankincense and myrrh to treat wounds, cure poisoning and heal the skin. These gifts were also symbolic because frankincense symbolized prayer and myrrh symbolized death, both important parts of Jesus' life and ministry.

We can use frankincense and myrrh essential oils to make a healing salve that's good for all ages. Use it for sunburns, chapped skin, or anyplace that needs soothing. Store in a cool place.

Myrrh and Frankincense Healing Salve

Ingredients

½ cup olive oil

¼ cup coconut oil

¼ cup shea butter

2 Tablespoons grated beeswax or beeswax pellets

20 drops frankincense essential oil

20 drops myrrh essential oil

Small glass, metal or BPA-free plastic containers to hold the salve

Directions

Place the olive oil, coconut oil, shea butter and beeswax in a double boiler or heavy bottom saucepan. Gently melt the oils together, but don't get them any hotter than needed to melt. Remove the pan from the heat and allow the melted oils to cool to about 100 degrees or less. When cooled stir in the frankincense and myrrh essential oils. Mix very well, then pour the mixture into the storage containers and cap tightly. You can put it in the refrigerator to solidify.

VI. Music Connection:

Amahl and the Night Visitors is a one act opera by Gian Carlo Menotti. It was written in English and first performed on Christmas Eve in 1951 in New York City at NBC studio where it was broadcast live. It is the first opera ever composed for television.

It tells of the night the traveling Three Wise Men (Kings in this story) stop for shelter at the home of a poor, crippled shepherd boy who lives alone with his mother. If you have never seen an opera this is a great first one to try! The story is warm and compassionate, and the music is a favorite in our family. You can find the original black and white television broadcast with an interview with the composer Gian Carlo Menotti here <https://binged.it/2EHjFkY> You can also watch it on Prime.

A book of the libretti or words to the opera can be found here <https://amzn.to/2EEQbnU>

VII. Art Connection:

A triptych (pronounced trip-tick) is a painting made up of three parts. Often the center painting is the largest and hinged together so that the two sides can fold over to cover the center when closed. The outside, called a frontispiece, is also decorated while the triptych is closed. These hinged-together paintings became popular in the medieval era where they were used as altar pieces for churches. Back in a time when very few people knew how to read the triptychs helped to tell important Bible stories in pictures to inspire and educate the congregation. Sometimes triptychs were carved out of wood. Artists have used triptychs for centuries, and still use it today. You can find modern triptychs using photographs or even video in addition to the more traditional paintings and carvings.

Hieronymus Bosch painted a triptych titled *The Adoration of the Magi*. This painting was Gian Carlo Menotti's inspiration for *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. The painting is in the Museo del Prado of Madrid, Spain. You can see it here <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-adoration-of-the-magi/666788cc-c522-421b-83f0-5ad84b9377f7>

Some other very famous triptychs are Hugo Van Der Goes' The Portinari Triptych which now in the Uffizi (<http://www.travelingintuscany.com/engels/firenze/uffizi/album/hugovandergoesportinaritriptych.htm>), and Stefan Lochner's Three Kings Altarpiece still on display in the Cologne Cathedral, Cologne, Germany (https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g187371-d192291-i98799343-Cologne_Cathedral-Cologne_North_Rhine_Westphalia.html)