

# Advent Week 4

*A Gift For All*

# WEEK 4

## *Personal Study*

Matthew 2:1-12 (ESV)

*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 saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:*

*" 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.' "*

*Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.*

Isaiah 42:1-4 (NIV)

*"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.*

*He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.*

*A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.*

*In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope."*

## Focus

Have you ever traveled to a foreign country? How did it feel to be somewhere so unfamiliar? What did you learn about others or yourself in that experience?

### A Gift For All

"The Magi" were people trained in astrology, dream interpretation and other mysteries. TIME described the centuries of efforts to make sense of these traveling Eastern Priests/Wise Men in the December 13, 2004 cover story, "Secrets of the Nativity":

*"Well, from where exactly in the Orient (which means simply "East") were they, anyway? Matthew's word Magi is a vague clue, since it can mean astronomers, wise men or magicians and was applied to people from all over. The gifts they bore—gold, frankincense and myrrh—hint at Arabia, since unrelated Bible stories describe camel trains of similar tribute emanating from Sheba and Midian, both on that peninsula. Their interest in stars suggests Babylon, famous for its astrologers. The happiest guess of all turned out to be the one made in the 4th century by the decorators of the Church of the Nativity in Palestine, whose golden entry mosaic featured the Magi dressed as Persians, also renowned stargazers. When actual Persians came marauding in 614, it was the only place of worship they didn't torch."*

Two things immediately become strikingly clear as this event unfolds in Matthew 2. The first is that these men were Gentiles. They were "outside" of the Nation of Israel and did not share in the lineage of Abraham. Why should they even care that a King of the Jews was coming into the world? The second is how God made sure that He was communicating this birth to a larger audience than just the Israelite people. And He was doing it in a way that was available to those trained in these disciplines. Their orientation was much more in what we might today identify with "science."

Looking to a star is very much in keeping with the religious tradition of this place in time of looking to the heavens, the stars, and the planets for information about the gods' wishes and doings, and some stars or planets were identified with the God above all gods.

This entire scene whispers of God's amazing mercy and plan to reach all the nations with news of a coming salvation. People from every tribe and every language and every nation could look up to the skies to access the Good News.

God has always made a way for everyone to find Him so that all are without excuse. God was declaring to the world through his planets and stars that this King would not just be the King of Israel, but the King over all creation.

In the same way God declared His salvation in the skies, He has placed all of His people as living stars in places of darkness. In our neighborhoods and workplaces, in colleges and lecture halls, in factories and courtrooms. You do not have to travel overseas to proclaim the Glory of God through His plan of salvation. God brings them into our midst physically, through our systems and programs, clubs and shared friendships. And they are only a click away through the magic of cyberspace. God found willing stars and planets to align themselves for His Son. How can we align ourselves to shine this news into the world that we know?

## Reflection

**Read Psalm 19:1-4.** Is it possible that God is speaking of something more concrete here than we realized before. Why do you think the ancients spent so much time studying the movement of stars and planets?

**Read Ephesians 2:11-18.** Jesus came for those close, and for those far away. Who is a person who is "far away" today? Can a "far away" person live or work right next to you?

Why are most Christians hesitant today to share the Gospel with people who live or work near them? Why do most people think it is unkind to do so?

How good would the news have to be for you to want to share it with everyone else in your life? Imagine what that news would be that would break down your barriers for polite social engagement. Why isn't the **only way of salvation** great enough news to do that for you?

## Closing Response

Think of someone in your life at home, at work or at play that is far away from the Gospel. Can you commit one week to praying for them by name to God? What is your next step? If you are uncomfortable talking right now, can you write them a note? Is there a different way you can encourage them in order to draw them closer to the Good News?

If you knew you were going to die this week, what would you want people to know? What would you tell them? And then, whatever that news is, tell them this week. Don't wait anymore.



### Songs for Advent Week 4

- [Joy To The World](#)
- [O Come, All Ye Faithful](#)
- [Go! Tell It On The Mountain](#)
- [The Best Christmas Song I've Ever Heard](#)



*All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page*

# WEEK 4

## *Family Discipleship Time*

**Set aside 30 minutes one night this week to read scriptures together and reflect upon and discuss the material together. If you have Advent Candles, please designate someone to light the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th candles before beginning.**

### ***Scripture Reading***

(Have a family member read out loud and let young children play with a manger scene during the reading and discussion.)

Matthew 2:1–2 (NLT)

*Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”*

*The journey that had begun so many centuries before had led three Wise Men here. To a little town. To a little house. To a little child. To the King God had promised David all those years before. **THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE***

Matthew 2:9–11 (NLT)

*After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

## Focus

The Bible never says that there were only 3 Wise Men. How many do you think came from the East to meet Jesus? What do you think they thought of a baby?

### **Story Telling (Read the commentary below)**

God made a spectacular show when He announced His son's birth to the shepherds through angelic messengers. But He was also lining up the planets and stars to declare the birth of the Rescuer. God placed a special star in the sky at just the right place for some to see if they knew what to look for. This was a sneaky way to announce a royal birth to those who were looking in the skies for signs from the God who created the heavenly realm.

The Magi were like scientists in their day. They studied our world all the time to see how it worked...to find the One who created it. God gave them the star, a special sign, like a clue that they could find, and to follow it from Persia all the way to Bethlehem.

**Ask:** *Have you ever looked up into the sky at night for clues about God? What do you feel when you see the stars and planets in the sky?*

Throughout the Bible God said He would send a Hero to rescue the Israelites. God came as a baby through Joseph and Mary, who were Israelites. But God wasn't just sending a Son to rescue one nation. He wanted to rescue all of the nations! When God put His clues in the sky He was telling everyone that His Son would be available to the whole world. All they had to do was seek and look for Him. When the Magi found Jesus, they gave His family 3 very expensive gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh. And they bowed and worshipped Him as a King.

**Ask:** *Gold was a gift meant for kings. Frankincense was a gift for priests. (It was used to anoint and heal people.) Myrrh was a useful painkiller and also used to embalm bodies before they were put in caves. Why do you think they gave Jesus these 3 gifts?*

As we continue through Advent we keep seeing that God is generous. He sends the Rescuer, His only Son to earth, and He announces His birth

with an angelic choir. Now we learn that He even put a sign in the skies to announce this Good News to people who were far away. God desires that all people know about him so they can love Him just as much as you do. And God promises that one day in the future people from all tribes, and nations and countries will know and love Him. Even now that is happening across the world.

**Ask:** *Sometimes it is hard to share things because we lose some of what we have. How is sharing the Good News of Jesus different?*

### **Poem to Read**

It wasn't long after some wise men came by.  
They had followed a star that appeared in the sky.  
They knew that a King had been born for the Jews  
So they stopped at the palace of Herod for clues.

"Where is the new King?" They wanted to know.  
Bethlehem was the answer – and so they did go.  
They followed the star 'till it came to the place  
Where they found little Jesus. Oh, the joy on their face!

They offered him gifts – Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh.  
Mary couldn't believe what was happening to her.  
For her little baby was clearly a King  
He was worshiped, adored, and caused angels to sing.

He was Someone so special, in fact, was divine!  
(Author Unknown)



### **Song**

Sing this song together as a family (Karaoke Version)

[O Come All Ye Faithful](#)

### **Prayer**

Discuss what you should pray about, and which family member should pray.



*All resources with this icon can be found by going to the web page*



## ***Family Activities***

**Education:** Do you have a globe or a world map? Can you find one online? Begin by looking at all the countries in the world. What language do they speak in each country? What place would each child would like to visit, and why?

Point out China, North Korea, Iran and Saudi Arabia. These are just some of the places where people are not free to worship or talk about God. What would it be like to live in one of those countries? Do you think people try to talk to God there? How?

**Action:** Do you know of anyone who does a really good job of telling everybody about Jesus, like a missionary, or a pastor or friend? Can you pray for them this week? Write a note of encouragement as a family and thank them for loving Jesus and sharing his Good News.

**Have fun:** God gave the Magi a bright star to follow to Jesus. Have fun creating and following stars in your house.

- Take a small bag and poke holes in the bottom, no more than an inch or two in size. Turn off all the lights and take flashlights and shine the light through the bag onto the ceiling.
- Turn off all the lights and shine a flashlight for the children to follow around the house.
- Ball up a piece of yellow paper to represent a star. Take turns hiding and finding it around the house.