

The Epiphany Season (Incarnation)

The Epiphany Season follows the wake of Christmastide wherein Jesus, the Messiah is made known to the whole world and recognized by those who believe as symbolized by the Magi/Wise Men from afar. They were led to Jesus as they discerned his coming from signs in the sky – the Star of Bethlehem.

As the very epiphany of God, Jesus embodies God's will and purpose. By reflecting on the life and work of Jesus, Christians are led to discover God's will and purpose for each of their lives and for the whole world.

Epiphany Sunday

Lectionary Title 6: **A Light to the Nations***Old Testament: Isaiah 46:9* (NRSV, 1989)

⁹remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me,

New Testament: Matthew 2:1-11 (NRSV, 1989)

The Visit of the Wise Men

¹In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ⁶"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" ⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

*General Concept: God's offer of salvation includes all peoples.**Key Concepts in the Different Age Levels in Sunday School*N/K/YE: **Jesus is the light.**ME/OE: **Jesus, as the light, leads us to do what is right.**Y: **Jesus, as the light, helps us to make right choices.**A: **Jesus, as the light, offers salvation to all.***Exegesis of the Biblical References*

The prophetic pronouncement was told in the time when the prominent people of Judah were in Babylon as exiles and captives. This pronouncement is part of the prophecy that signals the coming end of their Babylonian captivity. The verse is a strong affirmation of a God who is more powerful than the gods being worshipped by their captors like the gods Nebo and Bel (46:1). It asserts that the God worshipped by the people of Judah continues to be at work in their history. God however is not using the people of Judah as his instrument but other forces or means such as the rising Persian Empire at the time.

This event was interpreted by the prophet as God's initial means to liberate the people of Judah. It may be noted that in the beginning the theology or understanding of the people of Judah about God was that of an exclusive God and that Judah is God's favored people and God only works through Judah. This time, the prophet announces a radical shift in

theology, that even other peoples and other races can be used by God as His instrument in the liberation of God's people. God's plan of redemption for Israel is to be effected even through pagan peoples and non-believers. This is truly a new shift in the idea of God and this is now to be considered as the new identity of God. This God is a God of all the peoples. His protective, guiding and caring presence may be experienced by peoples who are willing to subject themselves to God's gracious leading in their lives and in their history.

The narrative from Matthew 2 presents the visitation of the wise men from the distant east to the child Jesus. The east generally refers to the area of Mesopotamia which was the location of the old empires of Assyria and Babylonia. These are places known for the practice of ancient wisdom practices such as astrology which involves the reading of heavenly signs such as the movement of the stars. It is not really certain how many have actually visited but the gifts were specified into three gifts; gold, myrrh and frankincense.

For Matthew, the visitation of these wise men is very important and necessary as the story that leads to the fulfillment of the prophetic oracle on the birth of baby who will be called Immanuel (God is with us) as seen in the account of Isaiah (7:14). This narrative also points to the fulfillment of the different prophecies of Jeremiah (31:15-17), Micah (5:2) and majority in the Isaiah prophecies concerning the child who will come as the bearer of hope and new life for God's people.

The wise men from the east represented those other nations and other peoples who have come to worship and bowed themselves before the child Jesus. It is very awkward to ask a governing ruler, in this case, Herod, to ask about a Christ or a Savior. Herod was an appointed ruler of Judea by the Roman Empire. He was not really the anticipated Messiah or Christ who was supposed to be born in Bethlehem.

The gifts which were offered by the wise men also meant not just their submission but also the summary of the ministry of Christ and the gospel which will also open the doors for other non-Jews to become a part of a community of believers in Jesus Christ. Gold represents the material wealth which is surrendered towards the mission of Christ. Frankincense represents the task of the Church to be called towards a life of righteousness which produces its own kind of enhancing aroma for others to enjoy (not to be equated as self-righteousness) in terms of serving God and the people with utmost sincerity and faithfulness. Myrrh represents the reality of suffering in the ministry which Jesus has to tread and which the Church will also have to face in her own mission and ministry.

The visitation of the wise men to the child Jesus is a call for the Church to be inclusive, open and faithful but strong and courageous in facing the challenges the Church will face along the way of its mission and ministry.

Companion Guide for the Teachers and Other Users

As Israel's messiah, Jesus was called to be savior not only of his nation but also of all the nations. The Christian understanding of salvation is rooted in the old prophetic view that through Israel God will save the other nations as well. At first, Yahweh was thought to be a tribal God whose concern was exclusive to Israel since the other nations had their own gods also to take care of them. It was only later during the Exile that the nation's theological leaders overcame this nationalistic view:

Yahweh is the one and only God whose mercy encompasses the whole world. By declaring that there's no other God but Yahweh, they also affirmed that this one and only God will save both Israel and the nations of the world. At the dawn of the Hebrew faith, they believed that they were the only people of God. At the noonday of their faith the truth shined out more clearly that all the nations were equally children of God.

The idea of an exclusive tribal God, however, continues to be held presently by some Christians. They hold on to the archaic idea that God will only save those who belong to the Christian fold. It is this mistaken and dangerous faith that is behind religious ideologies that justify the plunder and slaughter of other peoples. Perpetrators of this crime don't find guilt in their bloody hands in the belief that their victims either worship other gods or are idol worshippers.

Another version of this fatal theological error is that unless people convert to Christianity they have no share of God's saving grace obtained exclusively through Christ. This is contrary to everything that Jesus stood for in his earthly ministry. This is also a perversion of the truth of the gospel that was delivered by Jesus' disciples to the church. In the Gospels, Jesus pointed to the faith of non-Jewish persons as authentic demonstrations of true faith greater than Israel's.

There are, however, portions in the rest of the New Testament that have survived from the early struggles of the church against tendencies to revert back to Judaism or to swing wide to pagan (read, Greek) religions. In that context, the message to the young converts was that faith in Jesus Christ was *sufficient for salvation* so that there was no need to retain certain Jewish beliefs and practices or to dilute it with worshipping the Greek gods in order to have full security. Remember that today's Christians are but "accidental" readers of the Bible whose theological questions were neither anticipated nor contemplated by the writers. They wrote to address specific situations of the original readers who needed responses peculiar to them. It would be a travesty of the gospel of Jesus Christ when these portions are used to support theological positions that are contrary to the whole ministry of Jesus.

Nursery/Kindergarten/Younger Elementary Levels

I. Objectives

At the end of the session and with the consistent example shown by parents and other significant adults, the children will be able to:

1. tell the story about the wise men from the East who visited the child Jesus;
2. describe the baby Jesus as the light from God; and
3. perform a pantomime about the visit.

II. Concept: Jesus is the light.

Materials: *The Holy Bible* (NRSV, 1989), popsicle sticks, song chart, scotch tape or glue, crayons, pencils, candle pattern

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet the children with handshakes. Allow them to talk to each other saying "kumusta."
2. Opening song: 3rd stanza of the song "Many, Many Years Ago"
3. Opening prayer: "Dear God, bless us again this morning as we study the visit of the wise men to the child Jesus. This is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen."

B. Getting Ready

1. Ask the children to find their way to church by answering the maze.
2. Ask: "Have you gone to a place where you do not know the way?" Say: "When Jesus was born, there were people called as "wise men" who were looking for him. They came from a far place."

C. Learning Time

1. Say: Let us find out from our story how the wise men found Jesus.
2. Present the story.

Visitors from the East

(Based on Matthew 2:1-12)

After Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, there were men from the East, so far away, came to Jerusalem.

They told themselves, "Let us follow this star to find the newborn king."

In Judea, there was a king named Herod. The wise men asked Herod, "Where is the baby born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east and we have come to worship him."

Upon hearing the news, King Herod was very sad. He was afraid of the newborn baby.

He called all the priest and teachers of the law. He asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?"

"In the town of Bethlehem in Judea," they answered.

So king Herod called the visitors from the East to a secret meeting. He found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

Then Herod sent them to go, "Make a careful search of the child. When you find him, let me know so that I may go and worship him, too."

And so they left. On their way, they saw the same star. It led them to the place where the child was.

They went into the house and they saw Jesus with his mother Mary. They knelt down and worshipped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and gave them to Jesus. Then they returned to their country by another road after they were warned by God in a dream not to go back to Herod.

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Ask these questions and refer to the pictures in the story.

- a. Who are the characters of the story?
(Men from the East, King Herod, Jesus, Mary, and baby Jesus)
 - b. Can you tell what the men from east did when they heard about Jesus?
(They traveled from a far place to look for baby Jesus.)
 - c. How did the men from the east find Jesus?
(The followed the star.)
 - d. What did they bring with them for Jesus?
(Their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh)
 - e. How did king Herod feel when he knew that Jesus is born? Why?
(He became sad. He was afraid of the newborn child.)
 - f. How did the men from east return to their country?
(God warned them through a dream to take another road.)
2. Present a real lighted candle. Ask: "What is the use of this candle?" (We use it when are in a dark place. We use it in the altar.) Say: "In our story, the star gave the light that led the wise men to find Jesus. In our life, who do you think gives us light to help us?" (Draw from the pupils the answer: Jesus)

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: "Why do you think Jesus is the light of the world?"

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Teach the memory verse: "On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage" (Matthew 2:11a)
2. Present the finger play at <http://childrensministry.com/articles/finger-play-jesus-is-the-light/> and let the children do finger play as they watch it.
3. **For N/K:** Tell the children to do the activity in the activity sheet.
For YE: Prepare the needed materials for the activity. Give each of the children a candle on a dish. Tell them to decorate it to make it colorful. On a separate sheet of paper, ask them to write: **Jesus is the light of the world.** Have them attach it to the dish.
4. Ask the children how they feel about their activity.

G. Closing Worship

1. Ask the children to recite the memory verse.
2. Reflective action: The star led me to Jesus. I will offer my _____ (talent) to Him.
3. Offering
4. Closing song: "Jesus Loves Me" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 249)
5. Prayer: "Dear God, thank You for sending Jesus into our world to become our Light. This is our prayer. Amen.

Middle and Older Elementary Levels

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. retell the story of the visit to the child Jesus of the wise men;
2. describe the light that led the wise men in finding the child Jesus; and
3. proclaim that the light of Christ leads us to do what is right.

II. Concept: Jesus, as the light, leads us to do what is right.

Materials: *The Holy Bible* (NRSV, 1989), song chart, crayons, pencils, candle

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time: Greet the children. Let them talk to each other about how they celebrated New Year.
2. Opening prayer: Dear God, bless us again this morning as we continue to study and learn your message for us today. Be with us now and forever. Amen!
3. Opening song: "Jesus Loves Me" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 249)

B. Getting Ready

1. Prepare the class to do the guided play "Picture Frame".
 - a. Divide the class into 3 or 4 groups depending on the number of pupils.
 - b. Each group will make a picture portrait of the given situations (Christmas celebration in the church nowadays; the nativity scene; Christmas party in school; and the visit of the three wise men to Jesus).
 - c. When the group members are ready, the teacher will say, "Lights, camera action!"
 - d. Each group will present their picture portrait one after the other. As they freeze, the other groups will guess what they are presenting.
2. After all the presentations, ask each group to share how they felt while doing the game.

C. Learning Time

1. Use the scene that shows the visit of the wise men to prepare the class for the story. Assign 2 sets of children who will play the role of the narrator, King Herod, priest and teachers, and the wise men.
2. Let the class read the dialog silently first. Then let the two groups of pupils read the dialog one after the other.

Visitors from the East

(Based on Matthew 2:1-12)

Narrator: After Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, there were men from the East, who came to Jerusalem to look for baby Jesus. They asked King Herod, the king during that time. The king found out from them the exact time the star had appeared to lead them to Jesus.

Wise Men: Where is the baby born to be king of the Jews? We saw His star when it came up in the east and we have come to worship him.

Narrator: When King Herod heard the news about the birth of Jesus, he was very upset. He was very troubled. So, he called together all the priest and teachers of the law and asked them.

King Herod: Where will the Messiah be born?

Priests & teachers: In the town of Bethlehem in Judea.

Narrator: King Herod called the visitors from the East for a secret meeting. Then, he sent them to go with the instructions.

King Herod: Go and make a careful search of the child. And when you find Him, let me know, so that I, too, may go and worship him.

Narrator: And the wise men left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the east. When they saw the star, they were very happy. Oh! what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. Immediately, they went inside the house with joy and saw Jesus with his mother Mary. They knelt down and worshipped Jesus.

Wise Men: Glory to God in the Highest! To the King of the Jews, accept our gifts in your honor.

Narrator: The wise men brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and presented to Jesus. Then, they returned to their country by another road, since God warned them in a dream not to go back to King Herod.

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Ask these questions.

1. What did the wise men from the East do when they heard about Jesus?
(They traveled from afar and looked for baby Jesus.)
2. How did they find Jesus?
(They followed the star that rose from the East.)
3. How did King Herod feel when he learned that Jesus is born?
(He became upset.)
4. How did King Herod instruct the wise men?
(He told them about Bethlehem in Judea where the baby was born.)
5. How did the wise men identify the exact place where Jesus and his family stayed?
(The star led them to the place.)
6. What are the gifts of the wise men to Jesus?
(Gold, myrrh, and frankincense)
7. Why did the wise men not return to king Herod? (God warned them through a dream not to tell King Herod where the baby was.)
8. How did the wise men return to their country? (By another road)

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Say: "The light of the star enabled the wise men to see the place and do the right thing." Ask: "How does Jesus serve as our light today? (When we walk in darkness,

Jesus lights our way to do what is right.)

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Teach the memory verse: "... ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was." (Matthew 2:9)
2. **For ME:** Tell the children to sit around and form a big circle. At the center, light a big candle. Ask: "What is the use of a lighted candle?" List all the answers of the children: gives us light when it our place is dark, keeps the house bright, lights the way. Say: The prophets of long ago said that a baby will be born to give us light. Ask: Who do you think that baby is?" (Jesus) Do you agree that Jesus is the light? (Yes) Let the children complete the paragraph.

Like this lighted candle, _____ (Jesus) is the light of the world.
_____ (He) is our light when we are in _____ (darkness). He leads us to do what is _____ (right). He bring _____ (light) to other people to help them do what is good and right.

For OE: Tell the class to complete the chart of good deeds in the activity sheet.

G. Closing Worship

1. Memory verse: "Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11b).
2. Reflective action: Tell the class to recite the following poem:
I Can Do Yes!
I can do, yes, I can do what is right
Helping others, I can do, Yes, that's right
I can give, I can share to people everywhere
I can do, yes, I can do what is right.
3. Offering
4. Closing song: "Jesus Loves Me" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 249)
5. Closing prayer: Dear God, thank you for our Lord Jesus, who is our light. Thank you also for the wise men who did what is right and made Jesus as their light. Guide us to follow your light. Help us to make Jesus as our light all the time, so that we can do what is good and right. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Youth Level

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. retell the story of the visit to the child Jesus of the wise men using two-column notes;
2. declare that the light of Jesus helps people make the right choices;
3. identify ways they can make the choice to bring Jesus' light to the nations or peoples of the earth; and
4. express through creative work how the light of Jesus provides guidance in making the right choices.

II. Concept: Jesus, as the light, helps us to make right choices.

Materials: *The Holy Bible* (NRSV, 1989), hymnal, activity sheets

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer:
3. Opening song: "As with Gladness Those of Old" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 142)

B. Getting Ready

1. Introduce the word epiphany.
 - a. When capitalized, it refers to a celebration of a church festival commemorating the coming of the Magi (wise men from the East) to visit the newborn baby Jesus. This represents the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles.
 - b. When it is not capitalized, it means an appearance of a divine being.
2. Let the class share their thoughts on the manifestation of Christ.

C. Learning Time

1. Tell the class to read Isaiah 46:9 and Matthew 2:1-12.
2. Ask them to complete the two-column notes based on the NT verses. Tell them to read on the left column the main idea and to the right column, to write the details about the main idea.

Main Ideas

Details

1. The appearance of the star rising on the East
2. The search for the newborn king
3. The gifts of the wise men
4. The departure of the wise men

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Discuss the biblical texts. Ask these questions.

1. Who are the characters of the story?
(Men from the East, King Herod, Jesus, Mary)
2. Use other references to research on the following:
 - a. What do these wise men do? (They study the stars.)
 - b. Why are the wise men also called the Magi? (The Greek word for wise men is magus. The plural form of magus is magi.)
 - c. Do you agree with your research work or not?
3. What did the men of the East see? (The star of Jesus)
4. Why did the wise men follow the star? (To worship the promised king)
5. What was the reaction of King Herod upon hearing from the wise men?
(He became upset and afraid.)

6. What gifts did the wise men bring? (Gold, frankincense and myrrh)
7. How did they return to their country and why? (By another road since God warned them through a dream)
8. Think and reason out.
 - a. How did the star help the wise men find Jesus?
 - b. Why is Jesus referred to as the light of the world?
 - c. With Jesus as the light, how do you think this can help us make wise decisions?

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Say: "The light from the star led the wise men to make the right decision in finding Jesus. The men from the East were not Israelites but they came to worship Jesus nonetheless. Jesus is the messiah of all nations/peoples. All are welcome to worship Him and through Him all nations/peoples will experience a full life." Ask: "How can the light of Jesus help us make right decisions in life?"

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

1. Discuss the memory verse: "When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was." (Matthew 2:9)

2. Present the following prayer:

Prayer of a Reluctant Leader

Joe Seremane

Lifelines/Christian Aid (adapted)

<http://www.appleseeds.org/reluctnt.htm>

You asked for my hands that you might use them for your purpose,
I gave them for a moment, then withdrew them for the work was hard.

You asked for my mouth to speak out against injustice.

I gave you a whisper that I might not be accused.

You asked for my life that you might work through me.

I gave a small part that I might not get too involved.

Lord, forgive my calculated efforts to serve you

only when it is convenient for me to do so,

only in those places where it is safe to do so,

and only in those who make it easy to do so.

Lord, forgive me, renew me, heal me, nurture me,

empower me, send me out as an instrument of your peace

that I might take seriously the meaning of servant-leadership.

Amen.

3. Provide a regular sized shoe box. Select some students who will decorate it and call it the Epiphany Box. Encourage the class to write what they think about the epiphany of Jesus and write how they can respond to his manifestation by stating what they can do to proclaim Jesus Christ. Provide each student the format in the activity sheet.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "As with Gladness Those of Old" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 142)
3. Closing prayer: Request three students to read their prayers.

Adult Level

I. Objectives

At the end of the session, the learners are expected to:

1. talk about the gifts brought to the child Jesus by the wise men;
2. infer from these gifts the earthly life that Jesus will lead;
3. explain the significance of Jesus as the light;
4. proclaim that Jesus, as the light of all nations, offers salvation to all; and
4. share one's experiences about the effect of the Light in one's life.

II. Concept: Jesus, as the light, offers salvation to all.

Materials: *The Holy Bible* (NRSV, 1989), hymnal, activity sheet

III. Learning Experiences

A. Opening Worship

1. Welcome time
2. Opening prayer
3. Opening song: "As with Gladness Those of Old" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 142)

B. Getting Ready

Let the class compare the meaning of advent and epiphany.

1. Advent is the coming of the Messiah.
2. Epiphany is the appearance or manifestation of the promised Messiah. This season symbolizes the giving of the promised gift of God to his people when Jesus came to live with us a human being.
3. The seasons of Advent and Epiphany also represent the gift of salvation to the Gentile world as manifested by the inclusive Jesus Christ.

C. Learning Time

1. Let the class discuss the highlights of Matthew 2:1-11.
 - a. The star rose on the East and this has been observed by the wise men or the Magi. They decided to follow the star to find the newly born infant Jesus.
 - b. The three wise men were led to the exact place where Jesus lived with his parents. They were overjoyed upon seeing the baby Jesus and they worshipped him.
 - c. They gifted Jesus with three gifts, namely: **gold** that symbolized His **royalty**; **frankincense**, His **divinity**; and **myrrh**, His **sufferings**.
 - d. To protect the infant King, the wise men were warned in a dream to go by another road so as not to return to King Herod, who was out to kill the child, a threat to his kingship and that of his heirs.
 - e. Biblical scholars consider this story as foreshadow of the greatest commission commanded by Jesus Christ to "go to all nations and make them my disciples."

D. Deepening Activity/Sharing Time

Discuss the texts and ask these questions.

1. Jesus is sent to gift of salvation to all peoples and nations. What is the role of the church in being able to proclaim the God News of salvation in the different walks of life?

2. The wise men gave gifts to the infant King. Why do you think these gifts are signs of providence for the family especially when they left Israel to hide in Egypt? How does God gift us with providence when we need it? What talents can we offer to show our gratitude for blessings received?
3. The wise men worshipped Jesus and as warned in a dream, went another way. The wise men were enlightened to do the right thing to protect Jesus. How do we know when we are advised to do what is right? How can we confront temptations of fame, wealth or popularity through illegal means and take another path to do what is right? Do you agree that this is easier said than done? Why or why not?

E. Discovering the Biblical Truth

Ask: *Why is repentance a continuing process of searching for the truth and living in righteousness?*

F. Applying the Biblical Truth

Tell the class to comment on the following statements:

1. The search for the child Jesus is seeking God.
2. The Magi made a wise decision. In our life, we choose to follow God and that is true wisdom.

G. Closing Worship

1. Offering
2. Closing song: "As with Gladness Those of Old" (Hymnal of a Faith Journey # 142)
3. Closing prayer: