



CHRISTMAS

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

BEST GIFTS EVER

THE MOST NEEDED GIFT EVER
KEY SCRIPTURE | Matthew 2:1–12

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2024
CEDAR VALLEY

DISCUSSION GUIDE

For many people, Christmas is their favorite time of year. The beautiful lights, the presents, the time with family, everything that comes with the season fills their hearts with joy! But others may feel lonely, exhausted, or empty during this season. No matter how we feel about the season, it's important to remember that Christmas is a time for us to slow down and reflect on the best gift we've ever received. This is a gift that keeps on giving! The gift is the man Jesus, God Himself. The only way any of us can be right with God is for God himself to save us from our sin. We need a savior! And the gift of Jesus, our savior, is available for everyone! The gift that keeps on giving is the Savior who's still living.

QUESTIONS

Icebreaker: What is the most meaningful gift you have ever received?

1. Read Matthew 2:1–12. What does the birthplace of Jesus tell us about Him according to this passage?
2. Read Isaiah 9:6–7 and the prophecy in Matthew 5:6 again (quoted from Micah 5:2, 4). What titles and descriptions are given about the Messiah in these passages? What does this reveal about what the Messiah is like?
3. Matthew is the only gospel writer who includes this story of the magi—who are Gentile astrologers who gave council to high-ranking political leaders. (Many believe Daniel 5:11–12 demonstrates how the Magi were influenced by the Jews because of King Nebuchadnezzar). Why do you think Matthew includes this story?
4. Compare and contrast the magi's response to Jesus versus Herod's response to Him. What do you think produced their reaction? (See Digging Deeper)
5. What do you think is the significant about the three gifts the magi brought to Jesus? Why gold, frankincense and myrrh? (See Digging Deeper)
6. Read John 1:1, 14. The "Word" John is talking about is Jesus. What does this passage tell us about the identity of Jesus? Why is this significant for our salvation? (See Notes)
7. Pastor Neal said this salvation is available to all. Have you received the gift of Jesus? How is God calling you to give good gifts and to receive God's best gift again this season?

NOTES | Question #6:

If there were to be a savior, the savior would have to be BOTH God and man

- The true savior has to be HUMAN because the justice of God requires that the same HUMAN nature which has sinned should pay for sin.
- But the true savior also has to be GOD because someone infected with sin can't pay for the sins of other sinners
- So, we need our sin removed but we're not capable of doing it ourselves.

DIGGING DEEPER | Question 4

"The *wise men* are, more correctly, 'magi', originally the name of a Persian priestly caste, but later used widely for magicians and astrologers (cf. Acts 13:6), a numerous class in most countries in Western Asia at the time. Astrology had been developed into a sophisticated science especially in Babylonia, and there is evidence for its influence also in Palestine. From what part of *the East* these Magi came can only be guessed; their gifts (v. 11) are most likely of Arabian origin, but would be available to and used by the Magi of Babylonia, and this is perhaps their most likely place of origin. Their reference to 'the king of the Jews', and their need to enquire about the birthplace of the Messiah, imply that they were Gentiles, though with a limited knowledge of Judaism (which was well established in Babylonia)."

"The verb *worship* (*proskyneō*) need mean no more than to pay homage to a human dignitary, but Matthew frequently uses it in contexts where Jesus' more-than-human status is recognized."

—R. T. France. *Matthew*, pages 81-82

"What is worth noting is that the Jewish worldview held magi not only as non-Jewish (therefore Gentiles) but also as sorcerers. Jewish practice at that time was that sorcerers could be stoned to death if caught in the company of Israelites (Exodus 22:18; Deuteronomy 13:10)...the journey of the Magi to see Jesus was a life-threatening pilgrimage in every way..."

This was the climax of their careers. For years (perhaps decades), these astrological geniuses had dedicated their lives to charting the stars. These were scientists who saw no need to separate astrology from theology... the Magi's seeing the star soaring in the east would be a cause for weeping and dancing... everything they'd spent their life anticipating was arriving."

—AJ Sherrill, *Rediscovering Christmas*, pages 117-119.

Question 5

Read Psalm 72:15, Isaiah 60:6, and 1 Kings 10:2. These are gifts fit for a king.

"What did the Magi bring? We know they brought frankincense. But what exactly is *frankincense*? It's incense from the resin of trees located in the land of Arabia. Frankincense was used in worship ceremonies (Exodus 30:4-8; Leviticus 24:7).

We also know they brought gold. But why was gold offered? They believed the child at the end of the star was a king; gold befits the honor of a royal king!

They also brought a gift of *myrrh*. Myrrh was used for medicinal qualities but also for burial purposes. Could it be that Matthew was foreshadowing the extent God would go to become a gift for us? The frankincense tells us that Jesus is worthy of worship. The myrrh tells us that this king was born to die."

—AJ Sherrill, *Rediscovering Christmas*, pages 1126-127.