

## Life-Sharing Lesson 1 The Light Brings Peace Luke 2:8-20

### Commentary

**2:8** And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.<sup>NIV</sup> From the dirty manger, Luke moved to *the fields nearby*, outside the village. It was *night*. *Shepherds* were there, *keeping watch over their flocks*. Among the occupations, shepherding had a lowly place. They were outcasts, not allowed in the city and not trusted by the general public, for often they were thieves. Luke gave this story about the shepherds for reason. Jesus would come, not to the proud and powerful, but to the outcasts, the humble, those considered "last" on the social lists. To these men God brought the first news of his Son's arrival.

Shepherds also have other implications in this story of the Messiah's birth. King David, from whom this new king is descended, had been a shepherd most of his life. God had called him from that occupation to become a "shepherd" over the nation of Israel ([2 Samuel 7:8](#)). Scripture often uses shepherds to symbolize all who care for God's people, including God himself ([Psalm 23:1](#); [Isaiah 40:11](#); [Jeremiah 23:1-4](#); [Ezekiel 34:23](#); [Hebrews 13:20](#); [1 Peter 2:25](#); [5:2](#)).

**2:9-10** And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people."<sup>NKJV</sup> As these shepherds were living in the fields under the sky, suddenly a bright light broke through the darkness. *An angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them*. They recognized that this was a supernatural being because of the dazzling light, "the glory of the Lord" that was shining all around them. "Glory" refers to the majesty and splendor accompanying God's presence (see also [Exodus 16:7](#); [24:17](#); [Psalm 63:2](#); [Isaiah 40:5](#)).

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### LIFE APPLICATION

#### JUST AS YOU ARE

The greatest event in history had just occurred! The Messiah had been born! For ages the Jews had waited for this, and when it finally happened, the announcement came to humble shepherds. The good news about Jesus is that he comes to all types of people, including the plain, the ordinary, and the outcasts of society. He comes to anyone with a heart humble enough to accept him. Whoever you are, whatever you do, you can have Jesus in your life. Don't think that you need extraordinary qualifications—Jesus accepts

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you as you are.

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The stunning display of God's glory and the appearance of the angel naturally terrified these shepherds. This may have been Gabriel, who had also appeared to Zechariah ([1:19](#)) and to Mary ([1:26](#)). Both Zechariah and Mary were encouraged when Gabriel said, "Do not be afraid" ([1:13](#); [1:30](#)); the angel here also encouraged the shepherds, *Do not be afraid*. He had come with *good tidings of great joy for all people*. "Good tidings" or "good news" became another way of describing the gospel message itself; Luke used this phrase as the name for the gospel throughout the book of Acts (for a sampling of verses, see [Acts 5:42](#); [8:12](#); [10:36](#); [14:15](#)). At the very hour of Jesus' birth, the good news was already being spread supernaturally by an angel. This good news would bring *great joy*, for it comprised everything for which the Jews had been hoping and waiting—the Savior had come. The "all people" to whom this news came was first the people of Israel (the Greek word used here, *laos*, referred to Israelites, not to people in general). While the "good tidings" would one day bring great joy to people of every land across the globe, it came first of all to God's covenant people.

The hinge of history is on the door of a Bethlehem stable.

*Ralph W. Sockman*

Some of the Jews were waiting for a savior to deliver them from Roman rule; others hoped that the Christ (Messiah) would deliver them from physical ailments. But Jesus, while healing their illnesses and establishing a spiritual kingdom, delivered them from sin. His work is more far-reaching than anyone could imagine. Christ paid the price for sin and opened the way to peace with God. He offers us more than temporary political or physical changes—he offers us new hearts that will last for eternity.

**[2:11](#)** "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."<sup>NKJV</sup> The angel explained the substance of the "good news" that he brought: *There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*. A child had just been born. The site of his birth was the "city of David," Bethlehem (see commentary on [2:4](#)).

The child is the *Savior*. The word "Savior" is used to refer to Jesus only two times in the Gospels: here as the angels proclaimed his birth, and in [John 4:42](#) by the Samaritans who came to believe in Jesus as "the Savior of the world." In the Old Testament, the same word (sometimes translated "deliverer" in some versions) is used for certain individuals, as well as for God ([Judges 3:9, 15](#); [1 Samuel 10:19](#); [2 Samuel 22:2-3](#); [2 Kings 13:5](#); [Isaiah 19:20](#)). For the Greeks and Romans, the word "savior" could be applied to their gods as well as to great military or political leaders. Julius

Caesar was called a "savior." The basic meaning of the word was readily understood by Jews as well as Gentiles.

The title *Christ the Lord* is found only here in the New Testament, although the understanding of Christ as the Lord appears elsewhere ([Acts 2:36](#); [2 Corinthians 4:5](#); [Philippians 2:11](#)). The word "Christ" is Greek for "Anointed One"; the word "Messiah" comes from the Hebrew term with the same meaning. To be anointed meant to be set apart for some special purpose. Moses anointed Aaron and his sons as the first priests of Israel ([Exodus 28:41](#)); the prophet Samuel anointed both Saul and David as kings of Israel ([1 Samuel 10:1](#); [16:3](#)). The title was applied to that future one whom God would raise up. The Jews were awaiting this special deliverer, one who would be the Anointed One of God, the Messiah, the Christ.

The word "Lord" refers here to deity. That this tiny baby was the "Lord" means that God had arrived in human form. Thus the angel gave no doubt as to the identity of this child. He was the one for whom all Israel had been waiting.

**[2:12](#) "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."**<sup>NKJV</sup> The shepherds did not ask for a *sign* (as had Zechariah, [1:18](#)), but they received one. The angel apparently expected the shepherds to immediately go looking for this child, so he told them what to look for. The baby would be *wrapped in swaddling cloths* and *lying in a manger*.

Not only would this sign help the shepherds find the right baby, it would also attest to the truth of the angel's words to the last detail. While there might be other newborn babies in Bethlehem wrapped in strips of cloth, there would be only one "lying in a manger."

A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling "darkness" on the walls of his cell.

C. S. Lewis

The shepherds were not told to look in a palace or in a wealthy home—indeed, they would not have gotten past the gates if they had. But they could go to the poor stable, receive acceptance from a poor couple, and discover the miracle baby.

**[2:13-14](#) Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all whom God favors."**<sup>NLT</sup> After the angel gave the great news of God's arrival on earth, *suddenly* all heaven broke into praise, for *the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven*. John's vision of heaven recorded in Revelation reveals that there are innumerable angels in heaven: "Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand" ([Revelation 5:11](#) NIV). One of the angels' key roles is to offer continuous praise to God. The arrival of God's Son on earth caused the "armies of heaven" to join

in an anthem of praise to God. Rarely did more than one angel come; at this great event, however, all the angels joined together, praising God. The "armies of heaven" or "heavenly host" refers to a select group of angels that serve God (see [1 Kings 22:19](#); [Daniel 7:10](#)). The story of Jesus' birth resounds with music that has inspired composers for two thousand years. The angels' song is an all-time favorite. Often called the "Gloria" after its first word in the Latin translation, it is the basis of modern choral works, traditional Christmas carols, and ancient liturgical chants. "Glory to God" focuses the praise on the one who set these events in motion, the one who controls all events on earth. He is "in the highest heaven" and is sending *peace on earth to all whom [he] favors*. The peace referred to is the peace that only the Messiah can bring—not peace after war or conflict, but peace between sinful humanity and the holy God. Those whom God favors are those to whom he will graciously reveal his truth. The emphasis is on God—he is to be glorified, and he will bring peace to those whom he chooses. The entire "good news," brought to humanity through the birth of Jesus, came by God's decision and grace alone.

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### LIFE APPLICATION

#### SPREAD THE WORD

What a birth announcement! The shepherds were terrified, but their fear turned to joy as the angels announced the Messiah's birth. First the shepherds ran to see the baby; then they spread the word. Jesus is *your* Messiah, *your* Savior. Praise for God and gratitude for what he has done should motivate you to witness to others. Have you discovered a Lord so wonderful that you can't help sharing your joy with your friends?

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**[2:15-16](#)** When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.<sup>NRSV</sup> After their anthem of praise, the angels went back *into heaven* (see also [24:51](#); [Acts 1:11](#)), and the shepherds wanted to go and *see this thing that has taken place*. Obviously *the Lord* (through his angels) had given them a special message, *so they went with haste* into the village of Bethlehem to find a baby "wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger" ([2:12](#)). They were not disappointed, for they *found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger*, just as the angel had said.

**2:17-18** Then the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished.<sup>NLT</sup> The *shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said*—thus becoming the first witnesses of the gospel message. They told about the child and all that the angels had said about him, and *all who heard . . . were astonished*. Most likely, "everyone" and "all" refer to the people at the inn. Everyone was astonished at the shepherds' story.

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### LIFE APPLICATION

#### TELLING ALL YOU KNOW

These shepherds told everyone who would listen all that they had heard and seen. Often people who try to tell all that they know are politely avoided. It can be boring to listen to someone who never stops to take a breath.

But in the shepherds' case, people listened, because:

| Shepherds were not supposed to know much, and these shepherds had startling information.

| The message was revolutionary, breathtaking, and transformative. It changed listeners' lives.

| The shepherds spoke from the heart, and their words connected to the deepest needs of others.

When you tell about Jesus, start with what you know best: your life experience. Tell the story of God in your life. You don't need to embellish, but don't hold back either. Your words will change many, and God will use you to change the world.

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**2:19** But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.<sup>NRSV</sup>

Surely the shepherds told Mary and Joseph what the angels had said in order to explain why they were intruding on the couple with their baby. When they left they spread the story, and those who heard it were "astonished" ([2:18](#)). In contrast, *Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart*. "Treasured" means deep reflection, keeping in mind or safely storing up; "pondering in the heart" refers to mulling over, seeking to understand and interpret. Mary had a lot to think about as she gazed into the face of her tiny child. Gabriel had told her that the little boy would reign forever ([1:31-33](#)); the shepherds reported the angel's words—he is the Savior, Christ the Lord ([2:11](#)). As Mary held this tiny baby, she must have wondered at all that God was doing, and who her son would grow up to become.

**2:20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.**<sup>NRSV</sup> The shepherds had to get back to the fields before their sheep wandered off into the night. So they *returned*, but as they did so, they were *glorifying and praising God*. They knew that they had received a special message and had been privileged to be the first to see the promised child.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Luke.

## Life-Sharing Lesson 1 The Light Brings Peace Luke 2:8-20

1. What does it mean to you to have peace between two parties?

***For two parties to have peace, they are both willing to look out for the best interest of the other person. They truly want the best for the other person.***

2. Do you think that God is angry with the world? Why or why not?

***I think God is angry at the misery sin has caused in the world, but I don't think God is angry with the people in the world. God sent Jesus Christ into the world at Christmas in order to save people from their sin. Anger does not cause us to do good to those who have hurt us. God looked beyond our contribution of sin in the world, to what we could become if we became reengaged with him.***

### **Luke 2:8-20 (NIV)**

<sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

<sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

<sup>12</sup> This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." <sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." <sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

<sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

<sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

3. What do you think makes the presence of an angel a terrifying experience?

***I think angels are very powerful beings. Often times when they show up in the bible, people are afraid of them. This angel to the shepherds came with glory of***

***the Lord shining around him which means the sky was probably lit up. It's hard to look at the glory of the Lord with our naked eyes. The shepherds didn't know if the angel was coming with good news or with judgment. They had never experienced anything like this before. With the reputation they had as shepherds, they probably were not expecting any good news from God.***

4. How do our actions show that at times we believe that God is for some people, but not all people?

***We tend to be selective with the kind of people we want to be friends with. We participate in society's division and prejudice of people. We want to be friends with the popular and wealthy, but not so much with the homeless and dire poor. We will invite some people to our church, but not others as though God could not choose and use them.***

5. Who are the people that we excuse from needing a savior in their lives?

***We sometimes admire and aspire to be like people who have no visible sign of God at work in their lives. Somehow famous people or even successful people seem not to need a Savior because they have made it. Yet when we go behind the scenes of the lives of the rich and famous, we discover they are very much in need of a Savior. They are bound by addictions, problems, loneliness, isolation, guilt, and sin just like everybody else. Nothing the world offers can get us beyond our need for a Savior to be saved from our sins.***

6. Why do you think God sends the angels to shepherds instead of the religious leaders?

***I think God wanted us to know that the Savior was going to be for everybody. Jesus began as God in eternity, yet humbled himself to begin at the bottom of humanity. The Christmas story has the lowly shepherds and the rich magi from the east all coming to yield and worship the same child Savior. The shepherds***



**indicate that God does not wait for us to get our act together, before choosing to reveal Himself to us. God is ready for us, even if we think we are not ready for God.**

7. Who do you think God would be announcing peace to today if Jesus was born in Cleveland, this year?

**I think God would show up at a place like a homeless shelter, a halfway house, or the city mission to announce the news to some of the residents there. Some of them would have had the same kind of background as the shepherds.**

8. What destroys the peace that we have with each other in our homes?

**Selfishness destroys peace. "I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it." We don't usually say it so bluntly. We're more likely to simply have some expectations of how things should go, and when they don't go that way we're hurt or upset. We forget that those were our expectations and not necessarily the expectations of others.**

9. What's the danger of keeping Jesus in the manger during Christmas time? How should we bring him into our homes?

**It's hard to think that we should have to obey a baby. After all, what can a baby do to us. We Should remember that because of this child, its okay for us to not get our way. We should remember that God sent the child not only for us to become right with God, but for us to become right with each other as well.**

10. What's most likely going to rob you of your peace during the Christmas season? How can you give that over to God?

**Getting upset over how much time will go into wrapping gifts that will be unwrapped in a matter of seconds. I can give it over to God by looking at the time put into wrapping as part of the gift that the person was trying to give. I should see it as extravagant love rather than as a waste of energy. When I look at Jesus coming for me, others may have thought of it as a waste of God's time. Yet I'm thankful that God came.**

11. The shepherds were eager to tell others about the birth of Jesus. What extra step are you willing to take to tell the good news about Jesus to others this Christmas? Who could you invite to either the Christmas Sunday or Christmas Eve service?

***I am going to use the Breakfast with Santa as an opportunity to speak and hand out cards to people I see with Children passing the church or at the bus stop. I can invite my barber.***

12. Why must a lasting peace begin with our relationship to God rather than to one another?

***Only God can help us to overcome the selfishness within us that ruins our peace with others. Our relationship with God takes away any right we might have to refuse to try to be reconciled or at peace with others. That's why the great commandment is to first love the Lord with all our soul, mind, body and strength. The second commandment to love others flows from the first.***

13. What can you do to be a light and to bring God's peace into New Life at Calvary?

***I can deliberately choose to say thank you to those who are in a position of service each Sunday. If we thanked people for ushering, serving, singing, playing an instrument, serving in the parking lot, leading a committee, working camera's etc. it would make them feel more appreciated.***

14. What price did the shepherds pay to be able to tell others about Jesus? What price is God calling you to pay to share Jesus?

***They risked losing their sheep. They risked being rejected at the door of the inn. They risked people calling them a bunch of liars. God is calling me to trust him more.***

## Life-Sharing Lesson 2 The Light Brings Joy Matthew 2:1-12

### VISITORS ARRIVE FROM EASTERN LANDS / [2:1-12](#) / [12](#)

Only Matthew has a record of the visit of the wise men. These men traveled thousands of miles to see the king of the Jews. When they finally found him, they responded with joy, worship, and gifts. This is so different from the approach people often take today. Some expect God to come looking for us, to explain himself, prove who he is, and give *us* gifts. But the truly wise still seek and worship Jesus today for who he is, not for what they can get.

**[2:1](#)** Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king.<sup>NKJV</sup> Matthew did not record the details of Jesus' birth, as did Luke in the well-known [chapter 2](#) of his Gospel. Instead, after stating that Mary had given birth to a son ([1:25](#)), Matthew moved to the time *after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea*. Most scholars believe that the traditional nonbiblical picture of the wise men arriving at the manger is incorrect based on clues given in this chapter. More likely, the wise men arrived some time after Jesus' birth—Jesus is called a child (paidion, [2:9](#), [11](#)) rather than a baby or infant (brephos, used in [Luke 2:12](#)), and the wise men went to a house ([2:11](#)), not to a stable. The fact that Herod had all the baby boys under two years old killed ([2:16](#)) may mean that a couple of years had passed between Jesus' birth and this visit. If so, apparently Mary and Joseph decided to remain for a time in Bethlehem instead of returning after the census taking ([Luke 2:1-5](#)) to Nazareth. [Matthew 13:55](#) and [Mark 6:3](#) describe Joseph as a tekton, that is, a builder and possibly contractor, not just a carpenter. This may have involved a lot of travel, which would explain his mobile lifestyle.

While we cannot know exactly when this story took place, we do know more details about other elements. The tiny village of *Bethlehem* is located about five miles south of Jerusalem and sits on a high ridge more than two thousand feet above sea level. This little village held great significance for the Jews. Jacob had buried his beloved wife Rachel in Bethlehem ([Genesis 35:19](#)); Ruth had met Boaz in Bethlehem ([Ruth 1:22–2:6](#)); King David had grown up in Bethlehem ([1 Samuel 16:1](#); [17:12](#)). Even more important, the prophet Micah had prophesied that the Messiah would be born there: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" ([Micah 5:2](#) NIV).

To distinguish this Bethlehem from other towns with the same name, Matthew added *of Judea*. The land of Israel was divided into four political districts and several lesser territories. Judea (also called Judah) was to the south, Samaria in the middle, Galilee to the north, and Idumea to the southeast.

Jerusalem was also in Judea and was the seat of government for *Herod the king*. While many Herods are mentioned in the Bible, this was Herod the Great, named king

over all four political districts of Palestine by the Roman Senate. He ruled from 37 to 4 B.C. The history of the Herod family is filled with lies, murder, treachery, and adultery. Although Herod the Great was a ruthless, evil man who murdered many in his own family, he also supervised the renovation of the temple, making it much larger and more beautiful, as well as overseeing other building projects. This made him popular with many Jews. After Herod's death, the districts were divided among three separate rulers. We later read about Herod the Great's son, Herod Antipas, who killed John the Baptist ([Mark 6:26-28](#)) and taunted Jesus ([Luke 23:6-12](#)).

**Behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem.**<sup>NKJV</sup> Not much is known about these *wise men*. Also called Magi, they may have interpreted dreams and had other special knowledge and abilities; they specialized in astronomy. They may have been from the priestly caste in Persia; they were *not* kings. We don't know where they came from; the Bible just says *from the East*. Tradition says they were men of high position from Parthia, near the site of ancient Babylon (the book of Daniel refers to the wise men of Babylon; see [Daniel 2:12, 18; 4:6, 18](#)). The traditional view that there were three wise men comes from the three gifts presented to Jesus ([2:11](#)), but the Bible doesn't say how many wise men came. These men came from the East *to Jerusalem*. If they traveled from Parthia, they had covered thousands of miles in their quest to find a newborn king.

### See Also:

[Chart: Gospel Accounts Found Only in Matthew](#)

**[2:2](#) Saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."**<sup>NKJV</sup> The wise men said they had seen Jesus' star (*His star*). In the Old Testament, through a man named Balaam, God had referred to "a star" coming out of Jacob ([Numbers 24:17](#) NIV). How did these wise men know that the star represented the Messiah, the one who was *born King of the Jews*? (1) They could have been Jews who remained in Babylon after the Exile and knew the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah's coming. (2) They may have been eastern astrologers who studied ancient manuscripts from around the world. Because of the Jewish exile centuries earlier, a large Jewish population still existed there, and they would have

Worship is a meeting between God and His people when the worshiper is brought into personal contact with the one who gives meaning and purpose to life; from this encounter the worshiper receives strength and courage to live with hope in a fallen world.

*Robert Webber*

had copies of the Old Testament. (3) They may have had a special message from God directing them to the Messiah.

Some say this star may have been a conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars in 6 B.C.; others offer many other explanations. However, no explanation accounts for the star moving as described in [2:9](#). We don't know if the miraculous element took the form of the timely conjunction of the planets, or if God, who created the heavens, created a special event to signal the arrival of his Son, just as he had created a pillar of cloud and of fire to lead the nation of Israel to the Promised Land ([Exodus 13:21-22](#)). Based on the significance of the star, these wise men traveled thousands of miles searching for the one who had been born King of the Jews. When they found him, they worshiped him. While their worship was probably meant to be no more than homage to royalty (notice that Jesus did not "become" king of the Jews, he was "born" king of the Jews), the homage paid to this young king was more respect than he received from many of his own people.

Astrology and those who practiced the art were held in contempt by the Bible and by God-fearing Jews ([Isaiah 47:13-15](#); [Jeremiah 10:1-2](#); [Daniel 2:10](#); [4:7](#)). Matthew made a significant point in highlighting the worship of these wise men (who were pagan astrologers, wise in the ways of secular science, diviners, and magicians) in contrast to the Jewish religious leaders who knew the Holy Scriptures and did not need to travel far to find their Messiah. The Jewish leaders directed the wise men to Bethlehem but apparently did not go themselves ([2:4-6](#)). Some scholars say these wise men were each from a different land, representing the entire world bowing before Jesus. These men from faraway lands recognized Jesus as the Messiah when most of God's chosen people in Israel did not. Matthew pictures Jesus as King over the whole world, not just Judea.

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### *LIFE APPLICATION*

#### LOOKING FOR GOD?

How can we learn about God? Some people say, "I find God on a nature hike when the wind whistles through trees and the stars shine brightly." Others say, "Read the Bible and you'll discover God." And yet others, "Only by believing in Jesus can a person ever know God."

Here we learn that all three ways of knowing God are important. The wise men were drawn to worship by a bright heavenly radiance. They came close (Jerusalem) and got specific instruction from people who knew the Old

Testament well. Then, unlike Herod and the priests, they actually finished the journey and saw Jesus, who was then a little child. All three ways of finding God helped the wise men finish their journey.

If you want to find God, see his glory in nature, learn of his promises in the Bible, and discover Jesus by getting to know him personally.

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**2:3** When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.<sup>NKJV</sup> The wise men traveled to Jerusalem, the capital city, expecting to find a young king there. However, Herod the Great did not even know about the birth of someone who was to be king. This obviously *troubled* him for several reasons:

- Herod was not the rightful heir to the throne of David. He was partly Jewish, but descended not from Jacob but from Esau. He was an Idumean Arab, but honestly considered himself Jewish by religion. His people had been forcefully converted a century earlier (126 B.C.), but Herod considered himself a faithful Jew. He reigned by appointment from Rome. Many Jews hated Herod as a usurper, even though Herod attempted to boost his popularity among the Jews by doing much for their country (see Josephus's *Antiquities* 13.258). If this baby really was a rightful heir to the throne, Herod could face trouble from the Jews who might want to make the baby king.
- Herod was ruthless, and because of his many enemies, he was suspicious that someone would try to overthrow him. Many feel he had become mentally unstable by this time in his life.
- Herod didn't want the Jews, a religious people, to unite around a religious figure.
- If these wise men were of Jewish descent and from Parthia (the most powerful region next to Rome), they would have welcomed a Jewish king who could swing the balance of power away from Rome. The land of Israel, far from Rome, would have been easy prey for a nation trying to gain more control.

The wise men's news troubled Herod because he knew that the Jewish people expected the Messiah to come soon ([Luke 3:15](#)). Most Jews expected the Messiah to be a great military and political deliverer, like Alexander the Great.

That *all Jerusalem* was troubled along with King Herod indicates that the leaders and lay people also felt concern over word of a child born in the Jewish royal line, the line of David. What would this mean? Any who knew Herod's ruthlessness may have feared his aroused suspicions. Such fear was well founded considering Herod's actions recorded in [2:16](#).

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## LIFE APPLICATION

### THE GREAT TROUBLEMAKER

When Jesus was born into our world, people immediately began to react. His presence did not soothe and comfort people; instead, it startled and disturbed them. In some, he awakened spiritual longings; in others, fear and insecurity. If it is true that God entered our world when Jesus was born, we dare not sit idly by ignoring and rationalizing our inaction. We must acknowledge Jesus as the rightful King of our lives. He did not stay in the manger.

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**2:4** When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.<sup>NIV</sup> Herod needed some advice from the experts. So he *called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law*. While Herod did not call a formal meeting of the Sanhedrin, he probably called together a group of leaders living in Jerusalem who could tell him what he wanted to know. The "chief priests" were probably mostly Sadducees, while the "teachers of the law" (sometimes called "scribes") were mostly Pharisees. These two groups did not get along because of vast differences in their beliefs about the law. The Sadducees believed only the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) to be God's Word; the Pharisees and teachers of the law were the professional interpreters of the law, the legal specialists of Jesus' day. They interpreted the law but were especially concerned about the "halakah" or "rules" for life that came to be as binding as God's written law in the Torah. Among these men Herod hoped to find someone who could explain *where the Christ was to be born*. Herod apparently understood that the King of the Jews sought by the wise men was also "the Christ," that is, the Jews' promised Messiah. However, the Jews expected their Messiah to be a political leader, accounting for Herod's interest and concern.

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## LIFE APPLICATION

### SO CLOSE; SO FAR



Herod asked the religious leaders and teachers to tell him what the Scriptures said about the location of the Messiah's birth. These religious leaders and teachers had knowledge of the Scriptures, but they lacked the desire to understand and believe. With so many churches nearby, so many Christian books and Bibles available, so many radio and television programs, so many Christian videos and films—how can anyone not believe? But it happens. Several Bibles on your bedroom shelf and perfect Sunday school attendance do not a Christian make! Like the chief priests and teachers of the law, a person can miss the opportunity to believe in Jesus completely while studying the facts of the Bible meticulously.

Becoming a Christian means giving your life to Jesus Christ in faith. In a simple prayer, give up trying so hard to be so good. Admit to God your need, and accept in faith his promise to save you.

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**[2:5-6](#) "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 be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"**<sup>NIV</sup> The answer to Herod's question was simple, for *the prophet* Micah had given the exact location of the Messiah's birth seven centuries earlier in [Micah 5:2](#). Matthew often quoted Old Testament prophets to show how perfectly Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about the Messiah. The religious leaders quoted from [Micah 5:2](#) and [2 Samuel 5:2](#). As the grandson of an Idumean Jew, Herod may have known about messianic prophecies, but he was not trained in knowing anything specific. The Jewish religious leaders understood that the Messiah would be born *in Bethlehem in Judea*. In fact, the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem was well-known to all Jews ([John 7:41-42](#)). Ironically, when Jesus was born, these same religious leaders became his greatest enemies. When the Messiah for whom they had been waiting finally came, they wouldn't recognize him.

**[2:7](#) Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.**<sup>NRSV</sup> Herod had a problem on his hands, and already his troubled mind was making a plan. He called the wise men back to him in order to answer their question ([2:2](#)) and send them along to Bethlehem. However, Herod also needed some information from them. He needed to know the age of this "king." Herod deduced that if he knew *the exact time when the star had appeared*, he would know the child's age. We infer from this that the star had appeared a couple of years earlier, for when Herod went on his murderous rampage, he ordered the killing of all boys two years old and under ([2:16](#)), although he may have added to the age to make sure the child would be destroyed.

**2:8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."<sup>NIV</sup> Discovering that this future king was not in Jerusalem, King Herod sent the wise men down the road to the little village of *Bethlehem* to *make a careful search for the child*. Not knowing the age of the child, nor exactly where he would be found, might make for a difficult and lengthy search. Herod certainly wondered how they would know this child even if they found him. But Herod would not let rumor of a future king go unchecked. So he sent the wise men on their way, instructing them to return to Jerusalem after they found the child. Herod's reason? *So that I too may go and worship him*, he explained. This deceitful ruse fooled the wise men, and they agreed to return and *report to* Herod the whereabouts of the child. The wise men had no reason to expect that Herod would do anything other than pay homage to a king, and Herod had no reason to think that the wise men would not return with the information he needed. But Herod did not want to worship Christ—he was lying. Herod planned to kill Jesus.

**2:9** After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.<sup>NIV</sup> Having been told that the child was to be born in Bethlehem, the wise men left Jerusalem, heading south. *As they went on their way*, suddenly they saw once again *the star they had seen in the east*. The wise men had followed this star thousands of miles, traveling west toward Jerusalem.

At this point, the star reappeared as they traveled south toward Bethlehem, moving *ahead of them*. Then, the star *stopped over the place where the child was*. Obviously this was no ordinary star (see comments on [2:2](#)). Matthew does not tell us what the star looked like, how it moved, or how the wise men found the child from the movement and stopping of the star. But Matthew made his point that God had purposely sent this star to guide these men to his Son.

God comes to men in the spheres with which they are most familiar; to Zacharias in the Temple, to the shepherds in the fields, to the wise men by a portent in the heavens. He knows just where to find us. Be sure to follow your star, whatever it be; only remember that it must ultimately receive the corroboration of Scripture.

*F. B. Meyer*

**2:10** When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.<sup>NRSV</sup> The star's movement had been constant and visible to these men who studied the sky and watched the stars. They had followed this star across thousands of miles. They had not found the child in the palace in Jerusalem as they had expected. So they

had wearily continued on their way, only to once again follow the moving star. No wonder that *when they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy*. Their journey was completed; they had found the one for whom they were searching.

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## LIFE APPLICATION

### FINDING CHRIST

The wise men were overjoyed at finding the child. If you think becoming a Christian means putting on a long face and behaving like a person in a straitjacket, think again. Finding Christ brings real joy—deeper than winning at sports, more enduring than the first test drive in that new car—this joy fills the soul and makes you glad. This joy comes from knowing all is well, you're OK, God loves you, the future will be secure.

Have you been on a journey to find yourself, to find love, satisfaction, or some sense of what this life is all about? There's joy at the end of that journey when you find Christ.

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**[2:11](#) And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.**<sup>NKJV</sup>

Jesus was probably one or two years old (a *young Child*) when the wise men found him. By this time, Mary and Joseph were married, living in a *house* and intending to stay in Bethlehem for a while. The wise men gave expensive gifts because these were worthy presents for a future king. The wise men were simply bringing customary expensive gifts for a superior, but scholars have seen in the gifts symbols of Christ's identity and what he would accomplish. *Gold* was a gift for a king ([Psalm 72:15](#)). *Frankincense* (also simply called "incense"), a glittering, odorous gum obtained from the bark of certain trees, was a gift for deity ([Isaiah 60:6](#)). *Myrrh*, a valued spice and perfume ([Psalm 45:8](#)), also came from trees and was used in embalming; thus, it was a gift for a person who was going to die ([Mark 15:23](#); [John 19:39](#)). These gifts certainly would have provided the financial resources for Joseph and Mary's trip to Egypt and back ([2:13-23](#)).

These wise men, astrologers from the east, *fell down and worshiped* the young king of the Jews, indicating a further fulfillment of prophecy. [Psalm 72:10-19](#) speaks of a coming king before whom all will bow and whom all nations will serve.

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## LIFE APPLICATION

### HE ALONE IS WORTHY

The wise men brought gifts and worshiped Jesus for who he was. This is the essence of true worship—honoring Christ for who he is and being willing to give him what is valuable to you. We see in their lives a pattern for worship:

| *They entered.* They had prepared for their journey, studied, and sought out Jesus.

| *They bowed.* They humbled themselves in the presence of their superior. They acknowledged his authority.

| *They gave.* They gave expensive and sacrificial gifts out of respect and honor for the child king.

| *They worshiped.* They recognized God's guidance in bringing them and attested to Jesus' royalty. They exalted Jesus as the rightful king.

| *They obeyed.* Their worship was not empty. They followed the guidance they received from God.

Worship God because he is the perfect, just, and almighty Creator of the universe, worthy of the best you have to give.

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**2:12** And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.<sup>NIV</sup> After finding Jesus and worshiping him, the wise men were warned by God *in a dream* not to return through Jerusalem and take their news *back to Herod* as they had intended. God gave guidance to Joseph at four separate times in dreams (see [1:20](#); [2:13](#), [19](#), [22](#)). The first three times, the angel of the Lord is specifically mentioned as appearing and delivering God's message to Joseph. The angel is not mentioned as appearing to the wise men, but somehow God guided the wise men in a dream. The wise men "wisely" followed the guidance given them; after worshiping the child, they *returned to their country by another route*. Going back through Jerusalem would make it impossible to avoid Herod; so they apparently went out of Bethlehem in another direction, perhaps continuing south and going around the southern end of the Dead Sea before heading back north and east. It took courage to refuse the king's command; it also took courage to follow guidance that added many miles to their already lengthy journey.

In this story, God reveals his care for his Son as the hostile world already was attempting to take the young child's life. Matthew has divine intervention as a major theme. He shows how God superintends Jesus' life in order to accomplish the divine plan.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Matthew.

## Life-Sharing Lesson 2 The Light Brings Joy Matthew 2:1-12

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word joy?

***I think of a miniature explosion building up on the inside that results in a tremendous smile on a person's face.***

2. What about Christmas brings you the most joy?

***I'm torn between the excitement produced by the Sunday Christmas service and the time spent talking with family members I have not seen for a while.***

### **Matthew 2:1-12 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

<sup>4</sup> When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

<sup>6</sup> "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 be the shepherd of my people Israel."

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

<sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." <sup>9</sup> After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

<sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> 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 and of incense and of myrrh.

<sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

3. What does the presence of the Maji tell us about God and God's purposes?

**God is concerned about all people all over the world. God does not just speak to the people we expect God to speak to, for example the Jews, but God's plans embrace all of humanity. We can't limit whom God will reveal Himself to.**

4. Why do the Magi make such a difficult journey to Jerusalem instead of to Bethlehem?

**They probably thought the King would be born and living in the capital city. Jerusalem was the seat of political and economic power in the region. Bethlehem was a little hick town of probably less than a 1,000 people. Also if they wanted to know what was happening, the people in Jerusalem would be the ones to ask.**

5. Do you think something is wrong when we do not associate joy with worship?

**Yes. There should be something pouring out of us in praise to God that should bring delight to our face. Usually when you are offering a gift to someone, there is a smile in the presentation. We are offering our allegiance and service to God. We should do it in a positive manner.**

6. What joy is to be found in worshipping God?

**There is the joy of being thankful for what God has done for us. There is the joy of being invited to partner with God in His plans for the world. There is the joy of being refilled by the Spirit of God. There is the joy of sensing God is answering our prayers. There is the joy of being lifted above and beyond our circumstance.**

7. Why could Herod not find joy in Jesus?

**Herod could not find joy in Jesus, because He perceived Jesus to be a threat to his throne and to His way of life. Herod wanted to be the number one guy in Jerusalem. He had no intention of allowing anyone to change his life. He had worked too hard to get what he had in life to allow another king to take it away**

**from him. He wanted things to stay just like they were with him being the one in charge.**

8. Why do you think all Jerusalem was disturbed by the news from the Magi?

**First they probably could not believe that a king could be born in their midst and they not know anything about it. Why on earth would God give this message to pagans from thousands of miles away, and not tell them, God's chosen people, that a king was being born. Second, they were probably afraid of what Herod might do. Herod had killed many members of his family because he thought they were trying to ascend to the throne. Who knows how many people he'd be willing to kill to find this alleged king of the Jews. Herod considered himself King Of The Jews, because he had built this elaborate temple for the Jews to worship in.**

9. Herod had a false reason for wanting to find Jesus? What are the false reasons we have today for wanting to find Jesus?

**We want to find Jesus to impress others with our spirituality. We may want to attract someone in the church, so we pretend we too want to know Jesus, but all we want is the person in the church. We want to find Jesus because someone has told us He wants to make us rich with no problems of any kind in our lives. We may want to find Jesus to seek power in a church position.**

10. Why do you think the Magi were able to see the star, but others did not?

**The Magi were looking for a Messiah to be born. They were expecting God to do something. When they saw something out of the ordinary, they pursued it to try and find the meaning behind it. Whereas others saw the star and dismissed it as a curiosity, they saw the star and studied it enough to believe that God was involved and doing something new. They believed that God was still involved in the lives of others.**

11. Why do we sometimes miss seeing what God is doing in our church at New Life At Calvary?

***We miss what God is doing because we don't believe God is doing anything or we don't expect God to do anything. Many of us act as though God could not speak to us through a song, a scripture reading or a sermon. We see church as a place to socialize instead of a place to make a real connection with God. We don't see our service as an aroma offering to God, but as something to complain about. We let what others are not doing, lead us to getting so upset, that we miss out on what God wants to do for us. We really believe that God would not possibly speak to others without speaking to us first. We are not that far different from the Jews in Jerusalem who were disturbed to hear a king had been born and they did not know anything about it.***

12. What do you think this light or star looked like that it would stop over the place that Jesus was located?

***I think at some point the star had to descend from the sky to a much lower position over the roof of the house. I imagine it looking like the lights of an airplane that is coming in for a landing. I think it must have gotten smaller as it got closer to the house, otherwise everyone would have been at the scene. God was not trying to draw everyone's attention to the house, because God knew that Herod was going to try to kill the child.***

13. What do you think it means when it says the Magi were overjoyed? Describe what you think the scene looked like for them at this point?

***I can see them giving each other high fives. I can see them all saying yes pulling down their hands together. All their hard work had not been in vain. They were***



***right in their interpretations of the star. When others had probably told them they were foolish to make the journey, they felt vindicated in that they had made the right decision to leave their own country.***

14. Why do you think they gave of their treasures to Jesus?

***The whole purpose of the trip was to worship the newborn king. Worship was not worship unless it involved some kind of sacrifice. They gave Jesus the best they had to offer. They had no way of knowing that their gifts would probably help take care of Jesus, Mary and Joseph for the couple of years they were living in Africa. God wants to use our treasures to further the growth of the kingdom of God and to help us grow in our knowledge of God.***

15. Why are we reluctant to give Jesus our treasures today?

***We have a greater love for the things and comforts of this world than we do in seeing God pleased with our giving. We tell ourselves that God will be glad to accept anything we throw God's way, after all God understands we have other "needs" to take care of.***

16. How will you bring joy to worship in the next few Sundays?

***I'm going to make a sacrifice to help with the deficit. Like the Magi, I want to add a treasure to my worship of the king.***