



***Theme: Good, Good News!***  
***“Good News of Great Joy for ALL People”***

**Weekly Memory Verse:** <sup>10</sup> *When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!* –Matthew 2:10

**Family Activity for the Week:** This week, it’s all about spending time with the people who mean the most to you this week. If they’re living under the same roof, spend quality time doing an activity that everyone can participate in. If they live far away, call them, write them, message them. Make time to “go the distance”! The 3 Kings certainly made quite the trip to follow a star and to see a very special little baby. When they saw baby Jesus, they fell to their knees and honored Him, but they also saw a family – mother Mary, and father Joseph, participating in the Good News together!

**Monday, January 4** – Read Matthew 2:1-12. Who were these wise men (Greek *magoi*) who came from the East seeking the newborn “King of the Jews”? They weren’t “kings” (the Christmas carol notwithstanding), and the text never said how many there were. “From the east” probably meant they were Persian, most likely Zoroastrian students of the stars. They followed an unexpected star toward the alluring hope that a new King offered the world a fresh start. They were looking for good, good news, and eventually would find that in a baby.

- ▲ These weren’t the first Persians in the Bible. Over 500 years earlier, Persia defeated Babylon and let exiled Hebrews go back to Jerusalem. The Persian king Cyrus received high prophetic praise (cf. [Isaiah 44:24 - 45:6](#)). The prophet called him God’s “shepherd” and God’s “anointed” (Hebrew *mashiach*), even though God said, “you don’t know me.” Are you at all surprised that God would move a prophet to so praise a foreign king with limited (if any) grasp of “correct theology”?
- ▲ The followers of a foreign religion may have tracked the star for as much as 18-24 months. (After their visit, Herod brutally ordered the death of every boy 2 years old and younger.) Yet when these wealthy foreigners “saw the child with Mary his mother [a poor peasant girl],” they fell to their knees and “honored him.” What does that tell you about the God who invited Zoroastrians through the stars to experience the Good News and valued their worship of the newborn king?

**Prayer:** *Lord of the whole world, you didn’t want only people with the “correct” theology to share heaven’s joy at Jesus’ birth. Thank you for caring enough to reach far beyond human boundaries to share that joy. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 5** – Read Matthew 2:1-12...yes, again! Did something else jump out at you today as you read this text? We learned yesterday that Christ (Greek *christos*) meant “anointed one,” like the Hebrew *mashiach* (“Messiah”). Hebrews knew that meant Jesus was the king; Greeks or Romans were less likely to get that. But the *magoi* (wealthy scholars, but not “kings”) who came to Jerusalem some time “after Jesus was born” asked for “the newborn king” (Greek *basileus*), a title that greatly disturbed the paranoid King Herod. The foreign visitors said, “We... have come to worship him,” and knelt before the infant Jesus as they would to a ruler.

- ▲ Roman historians Suetonius and Tacitus both wrote that in the time Jesus was born, an ancient prophecy led many to believe a world ruler would rise in Judea. Both Romans said that must have meant Emperor Vespasian.

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They missed the true king, but so did the priests and legal experts who recited Micah's prophecy about Bethlehem. Only the eastern wise men didn't. In what ways can you keep your mind and heart open, so as not to miss where God is at work?

- ▲ We've heard this story a lot, so we might miss the surprise. Wealthy men who'd visited King Herod's court "saw the child with Mary his mother [a young peasant girl]. Falling to their knees, they honored him." What do you believe showed these foreign wise men that this was a king worthy of their honor (it clearly wasn't outer "glitz")? What qualities Jesus showed most move you to "fall to your knees" in worship?

*Prayer: King Jesus, after the holiday hoopla, help me find inner stillness and peace. Help me, like the wise men of old, to name you king, and to commit myself anew to serve you. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 6** – Read Acts 10:34–43. The apostle Peter didn't just declare Jesus' Lordship in Jerusalem. When a Roman centurion invited Peter to tell him and his troops about Jesus, Peter told those occupying soldiers Jesus "is Lord of all!" With their military access, they could easily confirm (or refute) any factual claims, and Peter made one provable claim after another: "You know... you know... we are witnesses." Rome's military might against Jesus' outwardly naïve witnesses looked like a terribly uneven contest. It was—but 2,000 years of history show that Jesus, not Caesar, had the greater power to bring Good News to ALL people.

- ▲ One crucial way Rome insisted that citizens in its empire show their loyalty was to say, formally in a temple to the emperor, "Caesar is Lord." Imagine Peter telling these soldiers sent to enforce Caesar's lordship, "This is the message of peace he sent to the Israelites by proclaiming the good news through Jesus Christ: He is Lord of all!" (verse 36) What "lords" has Jesus challenged and dethroned in your life? How does knowing that Jesus is Lord over all bring Good News to you in this New Year?
- ▲ There was surprise in this story—and not among the Romans. We can almost hear the wonder as Peter, who no doubt resented the Roman invaders, said, "I really am learning that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another." Later we read that "the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles" ([Acts 10:45](#)). When has the amazing reach of Jesus' kingdom expanded your mental horizons?

*Prayer: Jesus, you are Lord of all. That takes in all the world's big problems that sometimes trouble me—and it also takes in all my internal struggles. Be Lord of all, inside me as well as outside. Amen.*

**Thursday, January 7** – Read Acts 17:16–34. On his second missionary journey, the apostle Paul spent time in Athens, the "other religions" capital of his world. Athens was, in its day, what we might call a university town, with lots of novelty-loving philosophers. Given a chance to speak to a gathering on Mars Hill, Paul declared his own faith winningly while giving a model for dealing respectfully and lovingly with people of different faith traditions.

- ▲ Luke, maybe with a wry smile, wrote that the Athenians and their foreign guests "used to spend their time doing nothing but talking about or listening to the newest thing." Paul's message about Jesus, especially his resurrection, seemed very novel in Athens. Could it be that in increasingly un-Christian parts of our culture and world, the "novelty" of the good news might get more of a hearing from some people than its antiquity?
- ▲ Some people would expect the apostle Paul (and Christians after him) to denounce the Athenians as pagan libertines and idolaters, going straight to hell. But Paul's actual sermon had a respectful, inclusive tone. (In verse 28, he quoted a Cretan philosopher named Epimenides and the Stoic poet Aratus.) Was quoting pagan writers "selling out" his faith? How can openness to faiths and cultures other than your own allow you to create conversation rather than condemnation?

*Prayer: King Jesus, when Paul preached in Athens, he quoted Greek poets and Cretan philosophers. Help me to know the culture around me well enough that I can use it to communicate, and be respectful, without letting that culture subvert my faith. Amen.*

**Friday, January 8** – Read Matthew 9:35–38 and Luke 19:1–10. Jesus was "a man on a mission." He did many admirable, valuable things during his ministry on earth. He healed the sick, broke down barriers of prejudice and

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exclusion, taught people how to live better lives, and challenged religious hypocrisy. Yet all that grew from his one central mission. First and foremost, Jesus said, he came to bring Good News to those who felt lost, wounded and trampled upon.

- ▲ Jesus yearned for God to “send out workers into his harvest field.” To what extent do you think “troubled and helpless... sheep without a shepherd” expresses the spiritual state of your neighbors, co-workers, even some people you know in church? Are you willing to become one of the workers Jesus wished for? What abilities and resources has God given you that you can use to help reach troubled, helpless people with the good news of Jesus?
- ▲ Jesus said he “came to seek and save the lost.” Scholar William Barclay wrote, “In the New Testament ‘lost’ does not mean damned or doomed. It just means in the wrong place.... A man is lost when he has wandered away from God; and he is found when once again he takes his rightful place as an obedient child in the... family of his Father.”\* In what ways has God “found” you, and given you your rightful place in God’s family? When have you been able to help God find someone else?

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for coming “to seek and save the lost,” including me. Guide me to the ways I can join you in doing that great, world-changing work. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 9** – Read Ephesians 3:1-12 and 4:1-6. These passages named central truths all Christians hold in common and formed the framework for the Good News offered by Jesus life, death and resurrection. These are the foundation for God’s new community—a community united, despite its members’ many differences, by their loyalty to the same God. Yet before, during and since the Reformation, Christians have disagreed (and often divided) for many reasons—from circumcision in New Testament times to the “right” form of baptism or communion in Reformation Europe to slavery in American history and ordaining women among Methodists in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, we still see differences among Christian believers and sometimes that causes the “Good News” to be drowned out or lost altogether.

- ▲ Methodism’s founder John Wesley often echoed Ephesians 4. In the introduction to his *Notes on the New Testament*, he wrote, “Would to God that all the party names, and unscriptural phrases and forms, which have divided the Christian world, were forgot: and that we might all agree to sit down together, as humble, loving disciples, at the feet of our common Master, to hear his word, to imbibe his Spirit, and to transcribe his life in our own!” In his sermon titled “Catholic Spirit”, he asked, ““Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?... Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences.” If more Christians through the ages had followed Ephesians 4:1-6, as well as Wesley’s counsel, do you believe the church would be stronger and more respected, or weaker? For what reasons?

*Prayer: Loving Jesus, guide your people all over the earth. Guide me. As the world looks at your followers, help us to so conduct ourselves that words like “peace,” “unity,” “humility” and “love” will be the main descriptors that come to minds and the Good News can be experienced and not just preached. Amen.*