

THE **crossing** **small groups**

It's The Most Wonderful Time of the Year, Or Is It?

Matthew 2:1-23

Sermon Discussion Participant Guide

Purpose of Discussion: To find comfort in our own hardships in the real Christmas story.

Sermon Reminder: Keith, from Matthew 2, corrects our culture's sentimental Christmas that dismisses the harder parts of life with the more biblical Christmas that takes place within the harsh and dark realities of living in this world.

Discussion:

1. How have we sentimentalized Christmas making the story less messy and real-world than it actually was?
2. What do you find hard about the Christmas season?

Read Matthew 2:1-12

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

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ "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 shepherd my people Israel."

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ 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, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

3. What should cue us to the fact that something is wrong with Herod's desire to know where the Messiah was to be born?

Matthew 2:13-15

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

4. How does thinking about Jesus as a refugee change your perception of the Christmas story?
5. Israel had spent 400 years in slavery in Egypt before God delivered them through Moses. How does thinking about Jesus as the better fulfillment of Moses' deliverance change your perception of the Christmas Story?

Matthew 2:16-19

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸ "A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more."

6. How does the fact that Jesus' death triggered a slaughter of somewhere likely of 25-50 young boys change your perception of Christmas?
7. Not only does Matthew reference the Exodus in the Christmas story, but by quoting Jeremiah he also references the Exile when Israel was taken into captivity for 70 years by the Babylonian Empire. How does thinking of Israel as still in exile under an oppressive ruler (Rome and Herod at this time) change our understanding of what Jesus came to do?

Matthew 2:19-23

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Note: Keith said that there is no passage saying that the Messiah would come from Nazareth or be a Nazarene. Matthew is making a play on words because Nazareth sounds a lot like the word for "branch" or "shoot" in Hebrew. This would reference a prophecy from Isaiah that Jesus would be the new growth from the stump of the tree that had been cut down (which is a reference to the line of David being removed from being kings over Israel).

Isaiah 11:1

¹ A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

8. How would thinking of Jesus as the foretold king who would come feel to a people tempted to give up on hope?
9. How does THIS CHRISTMAS STORY instead of the sentimental version change the way we think about our own hardships?

Sharing and Prayer:

Christmas can be a time people who don't believe are open to the Christian message. Have everyone think of someone they know who doesn't yet believe and pray for them and pray for an opportunity to be a light or to have a substantial conversation with them about Christianity.