

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

CHRISTMAS STAR

EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY'S THEME

Introducing the Gospel

Epiphany (Matthew 2: 1-12)

Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus sets out the major themes of his Gospel. In Matthew's account, Jesus' birth was recognised and welcomed by the wise men from the East (representing the Gentile world), but rejected by King Herod (representing God's chosen people, and acting on information provided by the chief priests and scribes). The journey of the wise men from the East is a rich tradition which contains many important images. One of these images is the Christmas star. According to this image, the wise men from the East seem to have been astrologers who were led to the infant Jesus by following the star. The star stopped over the place where the child Jesus was living.

The image to stimulate reflection on Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus is *Christmas star*.

Core extract from the Gospel (Matthew 2: 1-2; for reflection throughout the week)

In the time of King Herod,
after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea,
wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking,
'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.'
When King Herod heard this, he was frightened,
and all Jerusalem with him.

Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)

Lord Jesus Christ,
you led the wise men by your star,
and welcomed them into your home.
Let your star shine over our heads
and lead us to welcome you into our lives;
for you are our God.
Amen.

READING NEXT SUNDAY'S GOSPEL

Matthew 2: 1-12

The Visit of the Wise Men

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, '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.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

“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.” ’

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then 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.' 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. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On 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. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

ENGAGING WITH THE THEME

Dwelling with the text (Matthew 2: 1-12)

Begin to explore Matthew's account of the journey of the wise men from the East by employing the SIFT approach of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking. You may find that one of these approaches comes easier to you than the others. But it is worth trying all four.

- What details in the passage catch your attention (Sensing)?
- What big ideas in the passage spark in your mind (Intuition)?
- What most touches your heart in the passage (Feeling)?
- What most stretches your mind and makes you think in the passage (Thinking)?

Thinking and talking

Identify topics within the passage that can get you thinking and talking. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- Why do you think the wise men made this journey?
- Who do you think the wise men were?
- What is the importance of the star?
- Why was Herod so frightened?
- What does this narrative say for us today?

Using your Bible

Explore the roots of Matthew's narrative in the Old Testament.

- Numbers 24: 17
- Isaiah 60: 3
- Ezekiel 24: 23
- Micah 5: 2

Explore the image of stars in the Old Testament.

- Job 38: 7
- Psalm 8: 3
- Psalm 19: 1
- Psalm 136: 9
- Psalm 147: 4

EPIPHANY (YEAR A) Sunday 4 January 2026

Exploring online

Widen your exploration of Matthew's account of the journey of the wise men from the East by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

- Who were the wise men from the East
- What was the star of Bethlehem
- Poems on the star of Bethlehem

Drawing on experience

The image to stimulate reflection on Matthew's account of the journey of the wise men from the East is *Christmas star*. Draw on your experience of stars. For example:

- Have you experienced memorable Christmas stars?
- What has been your experience of a star-filled sky at night?
- In what ways do stars catch your imagination?

What have you learned about the Christmas star?

Creating and making

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by Matthew's account of the journey of the wise men from the East or by the image of the Christmas star.

- Make small Christmas stars to share at the service.
- Create a mural of the visit of the wise men led by the star.
- Make a collage of images of stars in the night sky.
- Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of the visit of the wise men or on the image of the Christmas star.



**Liverpool
Cathedral**

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

Each week we are inviting people in their homes to look forward to those Sunday services that follow the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel readings. We employ the SIFT approach (Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking) to encourage reflection on the Sunday Gospel. We are suggesting a variety of ways in which people of all ages, and households working together, may engage with the Gospel reading and celebrate that engagement with shared activities.

These materials have been developed by the Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral working in collaboration with the staff team here at the Cathedral, and with sponsorship and support from the St Mary's Centre in Wales.



The scripture quotations contained in these materials are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Anglicised Edition, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and is used with permission. All rights reserved.

Copyright © Leslie J. Francis, 2025
Canon Theologian Liverpool Cathedral
with sponsorship and support from
St Mary's Centre, Wales