

The Gospel of Matthew, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: The Magi and the Flight to Egypt

Matthew 2:1-23

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, Matthew 2 is a chapter about the kingship of Jesus and the universal scope of His reign. From the moment of His birth, Jesus is confessed as “king of the Jews,” and Matthew arranges the whole chapter around how people respond to that kingship. The Gentile magi come and worship, foreshadowing the day when the gospel will go to all nations and people from every background will bow before Christ. Herod and Jerusalem are troubled, foreshadowing the opposition Jesus will face all the way to the cross. Running through it all is Matthew’s drumbeat of fulfilled prophecy, which presses the truth that Scripture is reliable, that God keeps His word, and that every detail of Jesus’ life unfolds under the sovereign hand of God. Get your class to see that this is not a quaint nativity scene but a declaration of war between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world, a war the King has already won.

At the same time, this chapter is aimed squarely at the heart. Matthew sets before your students two ways of relating to Jesus and forces a choice. Will they be like the magi, who counted the cost, traveled the distance, and fell on their faces in worship? Or will they be like Herod, who knew exactly where the King was and would not go, because surrender would cost him his throne? Most of us are tempted toward a third option Matthew will not allow, the option of the chief priests, who knew the right verse and stayed home. The lesson aims to expose the difference between knowing about Christ and seeking Him, between the appearance of worship and the real thing.

So teach for both. Help your students marvel at a King so great that strangers crossed a desert to worship Him and so threatening that a tyrant tried to murder Him. Then let that wonder become personal, calling each student to examine which throne in their own heart they are still defending, and to come, like the magi, and lay their treasures down.

Question 1

Student Question:

The magi arrive asking for “he who has been born king of the Jews” and then “fell down and worshiped him” (2:2, 11), while Herod is “troubled” and the city with him (2:3). What is Matthew teaching us about who Jesus is by setting these two responses side by side at the very start of his Gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open by helping students feel the audacity of the magi's question. These are Gentile travelers walking into the capital of Judea and announcing the birth of a King that the locals do not even seem to know about. The very first thing anyone does with Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, apart from Joseph and Mary, is worship Him, and it is foreigners who do it. That is a deliberate signal from Matthew about the worldwide reach of this King.

Set the two responses in sharp contrast. The magi are filled with joy and fall down in worship (2:10–11). Herod is filled with fear, and Matthew adds that “all Jerusalem” was troubled with him (2:3). The arrival of the true King is good news to those willing to bow and terrifying news to those who want to keep their own crown. There is no third, neutral category. Jesus does not allow it.

Draw out what this teaches about the identity of Jesus. The word translated worship is the same word used for the worship due to God alone, and Matthew uses it without apology for this child. From the cradle, Jesus is presented as worthy of the worship that belongs to God. This is the deity and lordship of Christ shining out at the very start of the Gospel.

Help your class see that the responses people give to Jesus reveal their hearts more than His worth. Herod's fear did not make Jesus less of a King; it only exposed Herod. The same is true today. How a person responds to the lordship of Christ tells you everything about what they are protecting.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The deity and lordship of Christ, shown in that He receives worship as a child (2:11; compare John 20:28)
- The kingship of Jesus declared from His birth: “king of the Jews” (2:2)
- The worldwide scope of the gospel foreshadowed in Gentiles coming to worship (Isaiah 60:1–3; Matthew 28:19)
- That there is no neutral response to Jesus: people either worship Him or resist Him
- How our response to Christ reveals the true condition of our hearts

Discussion Prompts

- What does it stir in you that the first people to worship Jesus in Matthew were outsiders, not insiders?
- Why do you think the arrival of the true King troubled Herod rather than gladdened him?
- If our response to Jesus exposes our hearts, what does your honest response reveal right now?

Question 2

Student Question:

The magi were Gentile outsiders who traveled a great distance and gave costly gifts to seek Christ. Where in your own walk have you let convenience replace true seeking, and what would it look like to pursue Jesus with that kind of determination this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, so the aim is honest reflection rather than information. Begin by recovering the sheer cost of what the magi did. We have romanticized them into figures on a Christmas card, but the journey from the East was hundreds of miles across dangerous terrain, undertaken at real expense, with no guarantee of what they would find. They gave up comfort, time, and treasure to seek a King.

Contrast that with how easy we have made seeking Jesus, and how easily ease becomes spiritual drift. Many believers have quietly traded seeking for sampling. We attend when it is convenient, pray when it is comfortable, and give what we will not miss. The magi rebuke that gently but firmly. Real seeking has always cost something.

Help students name the specific place where convenience has replaced pursuit. For one it may be a prayer life that has shrunk to mealtimes and emergencies. For another it may be a Bible that stays closed all week, or worship attendance that bends to every other priority. Press for honesty without shame.

Then turn toward action. Ask each student to name one concrete way they will seek Christ this week at a cost, whether that is rising early to pray, returning to faithful assembling with God's people, or giving sacrificially. The goal is a small, real step in the direction the magi walked.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Seeking God wholeheartedly as the consistent call of Scripture (Jeremiah 29:13; Hebrews 11:6)
- The difference between sampling religion and truly pursuing Christ
- Costly devotion as a mark of genuine faith
- The danger of spiritual drift through comfort and convenience (Hebrews 2:1)

Discussion Prompts

- Where has convenience quietly replaced real seeking in your walk with God?
- What is one thing the magi gave up that challenges what you are unwilling to give?
- What concrete step will you take this week to seek Jesus at some cost?

Question 3

Student Question:

When Herod asks where the Christ is to be born, the chief priests and scribes can immediately quote Micah 5:2 (2:5–6). What does it tell us about the difference between knowing Scripture and actually obeying it, and why is that distinction so dangerous?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Focus on the unsettling detail in verses 4 through 6. When Herod demands to know where the Christ would be born, the chief priests and scribes answer instantly and correctly, quoting Micah 5:2 about Bethlehem. They have the Scriptures memorized. They know the address of the Messiah. And not one of them makes the short, six-mile trip to see if He has come.

This is one of the most sobering pictures in the chapter. The Gentiles who barely knew the Scriptures traveled hundreds of miles to worship; the experts who knew the Scriptures perfectly would not travel six. Knowledge of the Bible, by itself, saves no one and changes no one. It is possible to be an expert in the text and a stranger to the Lord of the text.

Help your students feel the danger personally, because this is the besetting temptation of lifelong church members. Familiarity can breed a deadly numbness. We can answer the questions, fill in the blanks, and quote the verses, while our hearts stay miles from Bethlehem. James warns that we must be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves (James 1:22).

End on the cure, not just the diagnosis. The answer is not less Scripture but Scripture obeyed, the word that travels from the head to the heart to the feet. Encourage your class to ask the Lord to keep their knowledge from ever outrunning their obedience.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The authority and reliability of Scripture, here Micah 5:2 fulfilled precisely (2:5–6)
- The vital difference between knowing the word and obeying it (James 1:22–25)
- The danger of religious knowledge without a seeking, surrendered heart
- The peril of familiarity and spiritual numbness among those nearest the things of God
- Obedience as the proof that the word has truly taken root (Matthew 7:24–27)

Discussion Prompts

- Where might your knowledge of the Bible be outrunning your obedience to it?
- Why is it so easy for lifelong familiarity with Scripture to become numbness?
- What is one truth you already know that you simply need to start obeying?

Question 4

Student Question:

Herod pretended to want to worship Jesus while secretly plotting to destroy Him (2:8, 16). Where are you tempted to put on the appearance of devotion to Christ while protecting some throne in your own heart that you will not surrender to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Herod is a study in counterfeit devotion. He tells the magi, "go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him" (2:8). The words are flawless. The heart behind them is murderous. He has no intention of worshipping; he intends to kill.

This question presses students to examine their own counterfeits. Few of us plot murder, but many of us practice a quieter version of Herod's hypocrisy. We use the language of devotion while guarding some throne we will not surrender. We sing of full surrender on Sunday and keep a locked room in our hearts the rest of the week.

Help students locate the throne. For one it may be money, for another a relationship, a grudge, an ambition, or a secret sin they keep defending. The test is simple: where do you say the right words about Jesus while refusing to actually let Him reign? That is the Herod in us.

Move gently toward repentance. The good news is that, unlike Herod, we are not too proud to bow. The same King who exposed Herod stands ready to receive every throne we are willing to lay down. Invite your students to name one and surrender it now.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of hypocrisy: the appearance of worship without the reality (Matthew 15:8)
- The lordship of Christ requiring the surrender of every rival throne (Luke 6:46)
- Self-deception as a spiritual danger, and the need for honest self-examination (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- Repentance as the path from counterfeit devotion to genuine surrender

Discussion Prompts

- What throne in your heart are you tempted to defend while still using the language of devotion?
- How can you tell the difference in yourself between real worship and merely religious words?
- What is one area you can surrender to Christ's lordship this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Three times in this chapter Matthew says events happened “to fulfill” what God had spoken through the prophets (2:15, 17, 23; see also 2:5–6). What is Matthew teaching about the reliability of God’s word and the way prophecy points to Jesus?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Take time with Matthew’s repeated formula of fulfillment. He tells us the birthplace fulfills Micah 5:2 (2:5–6), the flight to Egypt fulfills Hosea 11:1 (2:15), the weeping of Bethlehem fulfills Jeremiah 31:15 (2:17–18), and the move to Nazareth fulfills what was spoken by the prophets (2:23). Matthew is hammering a single point: Jesus is the One the whole Old Testament was pointing toward.

Explain how Matthew reads these texts, because it strengthens confidence in Scripture. Hosea 11:1 originally spoke of God calling Israel out of Egypt at the Exodus. Matthew shows that Jesus is the true Israel, recapitulating and fulfilling His people’s story, succeeding where the nation failed. This is not careless proof-texting; it is Spirit-guided insight into how all of Scripture converges on Christ.

Draw out the doctrinal weight. If God so precisely arranged the details of His Son’s birth, flight, and homecoming to match what He had promised centuries before, then His word can be trusted utterly. The same God who kept these promises has kept every promise, and will keep the ones still outstanding. This is the bedrock of a confident faith.

Tie it to the New Testament authority your students live under. The God who spoke through the prophets has now spoken finally in His Son (Hebrews 1:1–2), and that word is complete and sufficient (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Fulfilled prophecy is not merely a historical curiosity; it is proof that we are standing on solid ground.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reliability and authority of Scripture, demonstrated through precise fulfilled prophecy
- Jesus as the goal toward which all the Old Testament points (Luke 24:27, 44)
- Jesus as the true Israel, fulfilling His people’s story (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15)
- God’s faithfulness to His word as the ground of the believer’s confidence
- God’s final and complete revelation in His Son and the completed New Testament (Hebrews 1:1–2; 2 Timothy 3:16–17)

Discussion Prompts

- How does seeing prophecy fulfilled so precisely strengthen your trust in the whole Bible?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus is the One the entire Old Testament was pointing to?
- Which promise of God do you most need to trust because He has proven faithful before?

Question 6

Student Question:

God repeatedly guided and protected this family through dreams and warnings (2:12, 13, 19, 22), often in the middle of the night and in frightening circumstances. Where do you most need to trust God's protection and guidance right now, even when you cannot see the whole road ahead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice how active and tender God's protection is in this chapter. He warns the magi in a dream not to return to Herod (2:12). He warns Joseph to flee to Egypt (2:13). He tells Joseph when it is safe to return (2:19–20) and steers him to Nazareth when danger remains (2:22). God is not distant from this family in their fear; He is guiding them step by step, often at night, often with only enough light for the next move.

This is the truth your students most need for their own anxious seasons. God's guidance rarely comes as a map of the whole journey. It comes as a word for the next step, enough to obey by, not enough to remove all uncertainty. Joseph never saw the whole plan. He simply obeyed the next instruction and trusted God with the rest.

Press the question toward their real circumstances. Where are they facing a frightening road they cannot see the end of, a diagnosis, a decision, a family crisis, a future that feels dark? The God who protected His Son through Herod's rage is the same God who holds them now. He has not promised the absence of danger, but He has promised His presence in it.

Help them respond not with passivity but with obedient trust. Joseph's trust looked like getting up in the night and moving. Trusting God's guidance means taking the next faithful step He has made clear, and leaving the parts we cannot see in His hands.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's providential care and guidance of His people (Psalm 32:8; Proverbs 3:5–6)
- God's presence in danger as His promise, rather than the absence of danger
- Walking by faith one step at a time, trusting God with what we cannot yet see (2 Corinthians 5:7)
- Obedient trust that acts on what God has made clear

Discussion Prompts

- What frightening road are you facing where you cannot see the end?
- How does God's step-by-step guidance of Joseph encourage you in your own uncertainty?
- What next faithful step do you already know God wants you to take?

Question 7**Student Question:**

The slaughter of the children in Bethlehem (2:16–18) is one of the darkest moments in the Gospels. How do we hold together the reality of such evil with the truth that God was sovereignly working out His saving purpose, and what does this teach us about suffering in a fallen world?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question handles one of the hardest texts in the Gospels, the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem (2:16–18). Do not rush past the horror of it. Matthew does not. He quotes Jeremiah 31:15 and the image of Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted. Real evil happened, and real mothers grieved. The Bible never pretends suffering away.

Help students place the blame where it belongs. The atrocity was the act of Herod's wickedness, not the will of God. God did not author the murder; a tyrant did, out of pride and fear. We live in a fallen world where human sin produces genuine evil, and Scripture is honest about it rather than offering shallow comfort.

Then hold the other truth alongside it. Even in the face of such evil, God's saving purpose was not defeated. The promised King was protected, the Savior who would one day defeat death and wipe away every tear was kept safe. God does not cause evil, but He is never overruled by it; He works even through the darkest valleys toward redemption (Romans 8:28).

Apply this pastorally, because your class likely contains people who carry deep grief. The answer the gospel gives to suffering is finally a Person. The very child who escaped Bethlehem's sword would grow up to face His own cross, entering our suffering to defeat it. We do not always get explanations, but we are given Immanuel, God with us, and the sure hope of a day when grief itself will die.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reality of evil and human sin in a fallen world (Genesis 3; Romans 5:12)
- God's sovereignty that is never overruled by evil, even when He does not cause it (Romans 8:28)
- The honesty of Scripture about suffering and grief (Jeremiah 31:15)
- The hope of final redemption when God will wipe away every tear (Revelation 21:4)
- Christ entering our suffering to defeat it, rather than merely explaining it

Discussion Prompts

- How does it help to know the Bible does not minimize evil or pretend suffering away?
- How do you hold together the reality of evil and the truth that God is still sovereign?
- Where do you need the hope that one day God will wipe away every tear?

Question 8

Student Question:

Joseph again obeys God immediately and at great cost, uprooting his family for Egypt and later for Nazareth (2:14, 21–23). When God’s leading would disrupt your comfort or your plans, how quick are you to obey, and where is He asking you to move now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Return to Joseph, the model of immediate obedience. Twice in this chapter he is roused from sleep with hard instructions, and twice he obeys at once. “He rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt” (2:14). Later he uproots the family again to settle in Nazareth (2:21–23). Each move costs him stability, livelihood, and plans, yet there is no recorded hesitation.

Contrast that with the way most of us treat God’s leading when it threatens our comfort. We negotiate. We delay. We look for a more convenient interpretation. Joseph simply got up and went. His obedience was not only correct; it was prompt, and promptness is itself a form of trust.

Help students name where God is currently asking them to move, whether literally or in some matter of obedience that would disrupt their plans. It may be a hard conversation, a change in priorities, a costly act of service, or stepping into a responsibility they have been avoiding. Ask what delayed obedience is really protecting.

Encourage them that obedience which disrupts our comfort is rarely a detour and almost always the very road God is calling us to walk. Joseph’s inconvenient moves were not interruptions to God’s plan; they were God’s plan. The same is often true for us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Prompt obedience as an expression of trust in God (Psalm 119:60)
- Faith that acts even when obedience is costly or disruptive
- The danger of delayed or negotiated obedience
- God’s leading sometimes calling us out of our comfort and plans

Discussion Prompts

- Where is God asking you to move or change in a way that would disrupt your comfort?
- What is your delayed obedience actually trying to protect?
- What would it look like to respond as quickly as Joseph did this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Herod represents every earthly power that feels threatened by the reign of Christ, raging against a King who simply will not be removed (2:3, 16; compare Psalm 2). What does this passage teach

us about the kingship of Jesus, the futility of opposing Him, and the kind of King He actually came to be?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, so give it the fullest treatment. The whole chapter is a collision between two kings: Herod, the paranoid, propped-up ruler clinging to a fading throne, and Jesus, the newborn King whose reign cannot be stopped. Herod rages, schemes, and finally kills, and for all his power he cannot lay a finger on the One he fears. He dies; the King lives. This is Psalm 2 in miniature, where the kings of the earth set themselves against the Lord and His Anointed, and the One enthroned in heaven simply laughs at their futile rebellion.

Draw out what kind of King Jesus is. He does not match Herod's violence with violence. He comes as a child, He is worshiped by foreigners, He will reign not by slaughtering His enemies but by dying for them. His kingdom does not advance the way Herod's does, by fear and force, but by truth, sacrifice, and the gathering of willing worshipers from every nation. This is the kingdom Matthew will unfold all the way to the cross and the empty tomb.

Here is where you can gently but clearly establish a vital truth for your class. The kingdom of Jesus is not, and never was, a worldly political kingdom won by armies and thrones. That was exactly the mistake Herod made and the hope many in Israel clung to. Jesus is reigning now, at the right hand of God, over a kingdom that is His church, established at Pentecost (Daniel 2:44; Acts 2:30–36; Colossians 1:13). We are not waiting for an earthly throne in Jerusalem; the King already reigns.

Then make the application unavoidable. Every Herod since has discovered the same thing: you cannot remove this King. Empires that set themselves against Christ have crumbled, while His kingdom has spread to the ends of the earth. The only real question for each of us is not whether He reigns, but whether we will resist Him like Herod or worship Him like the magi.

Close in wonder rather than mere argument. The King strangers crossed a desert to worship, the King a tyrant could not destroy, the King who reigns now from heaven, is the same King who invites you to come and bow. Opposing Him is futile; worshiping Him is the joy for which we were made.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The kingship and lordship of Jesus, reigning now at the right hand of God (Acts 2:30–36; Colossians 1:13)
- The kingdom of Christ as His church, established at Pentecost, not a future earthly political kingdom (Daniel 2:44; Mark 9:1; Acts 2)
- The futility of all earthly opposition to the reign of Christ (Psalm 2:1–6)
- The nature of Christ's kingdom: advanced by truth and sacrifice, not by force

- The worldwide gathering of worshipers from every nation under Christ the King (Matthew 28:18–19; Revelation 5:9–10)
- The call to bow before Christ's reign rather than resist it

Discussion Prompts

- What does it change for you to know that Jesus reigns as King right now, not only someday?
- How is the kingdom of Jesus different from the kind of power Herod chased?
- In what area of life are you still resisting the King rather than worshiping Him?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter: the seeking magi, the raging king, the protecting hand of God. Name one specific way Jesus, the King worth worshiping, is calling you to seek Him more truly, surrender a throne, or trust His care this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this capstone to gather the whole chapter and turn it toward the heart. Matthew 2 has set before us a seeking people who worshiped, a raging king who resisted, religious experts who stayed home, and a faithful God who protected His King through it all. The aim now is not more information but a single, honest yes.

Encourage specificity, because vague intentions evaporate. A real answer might sound like: "I will seek God with my mornings instead of my leftovers," or "I will surrender the grudge I have been guarding like a throne," or "I will trust God's care in this frightening decision and take the next step He has made clear." Help each person find their own one thing.

Let the question land personally. You might give a moment of silence for each student to write a single sentence before anyone shares. The goal is that no one leaves having merely admired the magi from a distance; each should leave having decided to walk in their direction.

Close in worship, not just resolve. The magi did not merely study the King; they fell down before Him. Lead your class to marvel that this King welcomes our worship, withstands every Herod, and reigns even now, and let obedience flow from that wonder.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The integration of doctrine and daily transformation
- Specific, concrete obedience as the fruit of genuine encounter with Christ the King
- Worship as the proper response to the reign of Jesus
- The lifelong process of being formed into the likeness of Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What is the one truth from Matthew 2 that God most wants to work into your heart?
- What specific step will you take this week, whether to seek, to surrender, or to trust?
- How can this class pray for you as you take that step?