



Bible Study

MATTHEW 2:1-15



Canadian Lutheran
World Relief

CLWR BIBLE STUDIES

CLWR's Bible Studies have been designed to help congregations delve deeper into the challenges leading to injustices around the world, to explore related Bible stories, to discuss how these connect and how God calls us to act together.

These studies are meant to be adapted for your congregation's needs and are free to use. Each study includes discussion questions for children to adults, as well as suggestions to connect this discussion to action.

As CLWR continues to grow our resource collection, we would love to hear suggestions and insight from you. Please feel free to contact Heidi Van Schaik, our Church Relations Manager at heidi@clwr.org with ideas and feedback.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- The gospel of Matthew is the first gospel in the canon and is the one that most heavily relies on the Hebrew Scriptures.
- Matthew is reliant on Mark being written first, as well as using other sources such as “Q” and “M” and therefore the authorship of this gospel is not definitive.
- The text indicates a familiarity with the first Jewish Revolt (66–70 CE) and must then have been written after that time, but it is equally familiar with the story from the early period, so it is believed to have been written likely in the final decade of the first century, most likely in the 80’s CE.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

- The original readers/hearers of Matthew's gospel are predominantly Jewish (more specifically Jewish leadership) and the author uses familiar texts from the Hebrew Scriptures to point to the messiahship of Jesus.

SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

- King Herod (Herod the Great who ruled from 37 – 4 BCE) is the king of Judea under emperor Augustus (who ruled from 31 BCE – 14 CE).
- Herod is aggressive in eliminating potential rivals but being partly Jewish himself, he was even more savage toward any rival that was Jewish.
- Herod was anointed king of Israel in Bethlehem (David's hometown – see 1 Sam. 16:1-13).
- The wisemen are believed to be gentiles from a class of Parthian (Persian) priests, particularly known for their gifts in astrology.
- When the wisemen question Herod, they are not asking for the king of Israel, but rather for the king of the Jews.
- Herod is agitated that there is someone else claiming kingship, not only as king of Israel but also a Jewish King.
- Herod immediately begins scheming to dispose of Jesus the moment he hears of his birth.
- An angel appears to Mary and Joseph to warn them of the danger and they take Jesus and flee to Egypt.
- We often forget that Jesus and his family, in this moment, become refugees.
- Scholars believe Jesus was in Egypt between 1-4 years.
- While Egypt was outside the dominion of King Herod, both Egypt and Judea continued to be part of the Roman Empire.

Matthew 2:1- 8

The Magi Visit the Messiah

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.”

Matthew 2:9- 15

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.

The Escape to Egypt

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”

Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

STUDY

Read Matthew 2:1 – 15

Verse 3 says: “When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him”

Why would Herod be frightened?

- He feels threatened

Why might all of Jerusalem be frightened?

- Herod is angry - that is dangerous for the population
- Herod is volatile when upset

Why might Herod call in all of the chief priests and scribes?

- They know the Hebrew scriptures better than he
- They will be able to interpret this news to him – to tell him if there is actually any validity to the claim a new king had been born

Why might the magi have brought gifts of gold, myrrh and frankincense?

- Gold to denote kingship, wealth
- Frankincense and myrrh are costly resins derived from trees and shrubs used in many religious rituals, including burial.
- Frankincense = holiness
- Myrrh = death

Why might it mean that the magi “paid him homage”?

- As gentiles they would have no reason to worship a Jewish born child
- They understood that this baby wasn’t simply a Jewish born child, but that this child was of God, that the star, the journey they made, and the child they found were from God

What do you think the Magi did when they left for home? Do you think they kept all they heard and saw to themselves, or did they share their experiences?

STUDY (CONTINUED)

Why was Joseph told to flee to Egypt?

- Herod was about to kill all babies born in the last 2 years to prevent the rising of a new king
- For more information look up the Feast of the Holy Innocents

What do you think Mary, Joseph and Jesus' experience was like in Egypt?

- Missing family and friends
- Limited support system
- Fearful for life (Herod is still wanting Jesus dead)

Why did God send the Holy Family to Egypt?

- To fulfill prophesy

Read Hosea 11:1

When Herod died, God sent another angel to Joseph to call him 'home.'

Where did the Holy Family end up?

Read Matthew 2:19-23

Why do you think it was important that Jesus be called a "Nazorean"?

Read Judges 13:5 and Isaiah 11:12

Do you know of people in your community that would understand fleeing their home for a safer place? Have you ever spoken to them about their experiences? Why or why not?

Did you know:

- According to Amnesty International, 108.4 million people have been forcibly displaced due to conflict, persecution or natural disasters and there are 35.3 million refugees globally.¹
- Canada has welcomed 1 088 015 refugees since 1980.²
- 52% of all refugees originate from only 3 countries: Syria (6.5 million), Afghanistan (6.1 million), and Ukraine (5.9 million).³
- Data on some 4.4 million stateless people residing in 97 countries was reported at mid-2023. The true global figure is estimated to be significantly higher.⁴

1. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/#:~:text=A%20refugee%20is%20a%20person,rights%20violations%20and%20persecution%20there>. Jan 2/24

2. <https://www.unhcr.ca/in-canada/refugees-in-canada/> Jan 2/24

3. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/> Jan 2/24

4. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/> Jan 2/24

WONDERINGS

Consider your local community; how are refugees welcomed into your community?

Consider Canada; how do we respond, as a country, to those who flee violence and disaster?

Consider the world; what factors might contribute to people needing to flee their homes, friends and/or families for a place of safety?

ACTION BRAINSTORM

How can you/your parish support local refugee families?

How can you/your parish offer refugee resettlement or support nationally?

How can you/your parish offer refugee resettlement or support globally?

ACTION SUGGESTIONS

Read and learn more. Subscribe to the UNHCR newsletter and join a global community that cares for the protection and well-being of refugees, internally displaced and stateless people. You can do that here: www.unhcr.org/sign-and-stay-informed.

Offer a worship service that focuses on praying for peace, conflict resolution, the displaced and those who are stateless. Consider the languages that are used in the service. Take an offering to donate towards local refugee resettlement or through CLWR's Refugee Resettlement program: clwr.org/rr.

Host an event with a guest speaker who will offer their experience of being a refugee. Any funds raised at the event could be donated towards local refugee resettlement or through CLWR's Refugee Resettlement program: clwr.org/rr.

Host an event to support local refugee families.

Consider acknowledging January 31 as Holocaust Remembrance Day. Many of our Jewish brothers and sisters have lived experience and understanding about living as refugees.

Connect with CLWR to learn how to develop a settlement plan to sponsor a refugee: clwr.org/refugee-resettlement/settlement-plans.

Host a fundraiser to support CLWR's Refugee Resettlement program, including refugee sponsorship or shelter for refugees (Gifts from the Heart - \$50).

Children may have school friends that are from refugee families. They may know a lot about world crisis that lead to displaced peoples, and they may know nothing.

You may find there are some refugee families in your community. Have conversations with people with lived experience before engaging this topic on a Sunday morning, as this could be triggering and be prepared to follow up with them afterward.

Ask children what they know about refugees. Be prepared to handle misconceptions and misinformation tactfully.

What causes people to become refugees?

What do you think would be the hardest thing about having to choose what to take and what to leave behind for someone who had to run to safety?

What do you think you would want to take with you?

Did you know that right after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph had to take him to Egypt because they were in danger?

Jesus was a refugee as a baby and for the first few years of his life and understands what it's like to be scared, and in an unusual place.

We can pray and ask Jesus to be with all those people who are refugees to comfort them and to take care of them.

PRAYER

Jesus,

You know what it's like
to have to leave your home for a safer place,
no refugee is a stranger to You,
and no one is far from Your loving care.
Watch over children and families
as they travel to refugee camps
or move somewhere else in their country
or even to another country to be safe.
Shelter their hearts and their bodies.

Amen.