

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

WISE MEN SEEK JESUS

International Sunday School Lesson
For December 28, 1952.

Memory Selection: "Ye shall seek me, and find me; when ye shall search for me with all your heart."—Jeremiah 29: 13.

Lesson Text: Matthew 2: 1-12.

Continuing Matthew's account of the birth and early childhood of Jesus, we have the story of the visit of the three Wise Men, who were the first Gentiles to visit Jesus. Their search for and their worship of the Christ, therefore, may have been prophetic of the time the Gentile world would accept Christ as Lord and Saviour.

As pointed out several times in our present study, the purpose and aim of Matthew's Gospel was largely to convince the Jews that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic hope and prophecy. Therefore, all through his Gospel, Matthew links Jesus with the earlier prophecies.

Jesus was born in the year B. C. 5—four years and one week before A. D. 1—an error made by Dionysius in the calculation of time caused the beginning of the Christian era to be counted wrong. Pompey had captured Jerusalem in 63 B. C. and Palestine was under the Romans at the time of the birth of Jesus. Augustus Caesar was the Emperor of Rome. The gospel references to the time is "in the days of Herod the king," referring to Herod the Great.

Matthew tells us that, "Behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." Tradition numbers these "wise men," probably astrologers and philosophers of their day, as being three, some adding that they were from India, Persia and Arabia, respectively.

Having seen a strange star in the sky, they were led to seek the new Saviour. The star was of such unusual splendor that they believed it foretold the birth of royalty. Then, in their oriental minds, there flashed a thought: The Jewish exiles in Babylon had said that a King would be born among them who would once more restore the glory of Israel. And this particular star was in the direction of Jerusalem, the homeland of the Jews.

In 1604, the great astronomer Kepler saw the planets Jupiter and Saturn in conjunction and, shortly afterward, a bright star burst forth in the constellation of the Serpent. Calculations show that just before the birth of Jesus, these same two planets were in conjunction.

After traveling for miles across the desert, the Wise Men arrived in Jerusalem. They must have been surprised to find the city quiet—unexcited by the event proclaimed by the star. After making inquiry around the city, they explained their presence. Word of their visit and their search for a new "king" reached Herod, who, when he "had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." So he called all the leaders of the Jews—the chief priests and scribes—to him and asked what they knew of this Christ, who should be born.

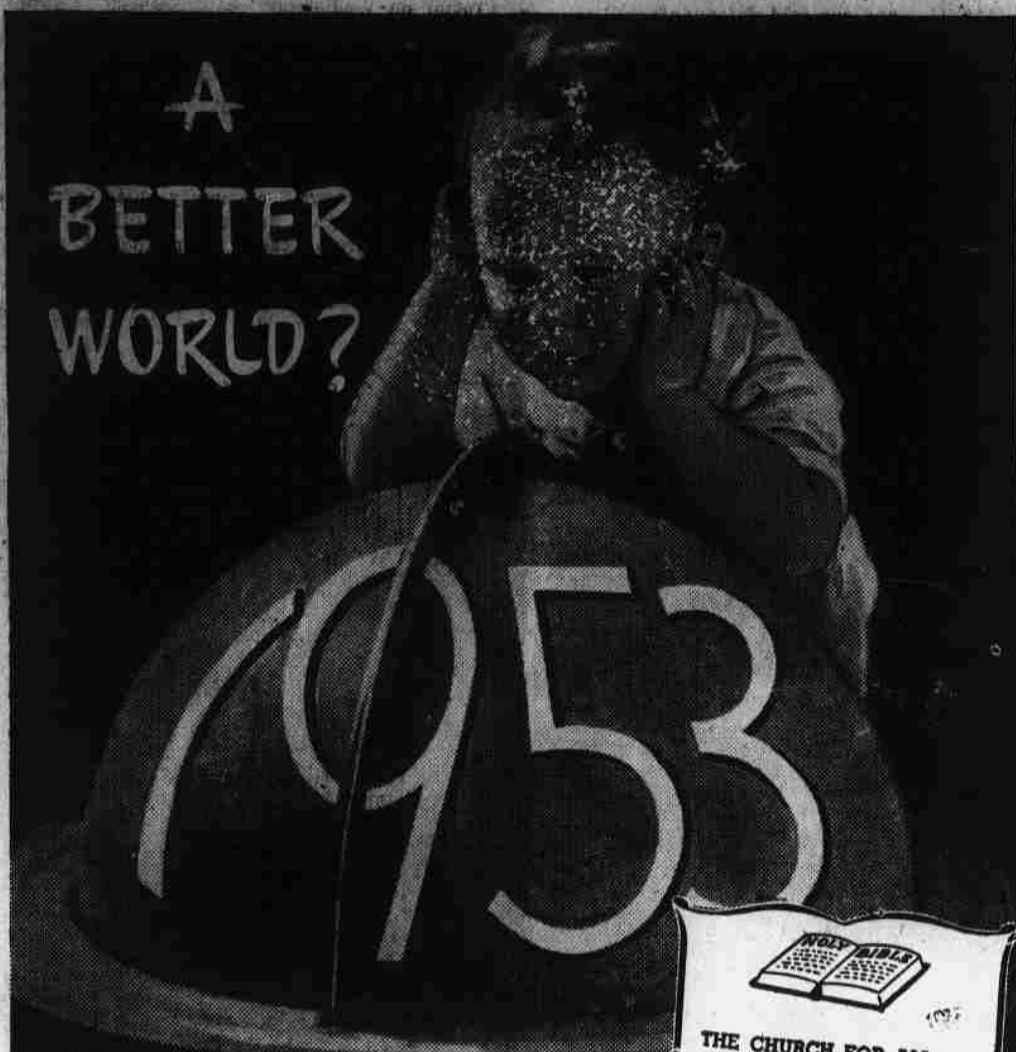
They told him that the prophecies had declared that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea, and then they quoted the prophecy of Micah (Mic. 5: 2). They knew the text, but they did not recognize the fulfillment of it.

Apparently, Herod took the Wise Men's report more seriously than did the chief priests. Herod wanted to know just when the star had appeared, so that he might calculate just when the birth had taken place. Jesus is thought to have been around two years old at this time—not the tiny baby in the manger as usually depicted. With every pretense of sincerity, Herod asked the Wise Men to report back to him after they had found the Child, so that he, too, might go to Bethlehem to worship him.

Again, the Wise Men set out on their quest and this time they were successful. Following the star, they came to the house where Mary and the young child lived. When they saw the child they fell down and worshipped him, and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And, being warned of God in a vision that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

It is interesting to think that our lesson title for this week has a double meaning. It suggests that the Wise Men from the East came to Bethlehem, seeking the Christ. It also suggests that men—who are wise—will seek Jesus.

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A
BETTER
WORLD?

There's plenty of room for improvement in this old world of ours.

Of course, it is just about perfect from a structural standpoint. It spins through space with such mathematical precision that man can count days and months and years—and even print them on calendars without fear of error.

But where life and people are concerned . . . even a child can see that things are pretty badly muddled. What of 1953? Will it bring a better world? Will there be more happiness and less sorrow . . . more love and less hatred . . . more good, less evil?

Our world will always be what we are. Only as the lives of men change, can the life of the world improve.

The Church is dedicated to building better lives. By religious education, by worship, by preaching the highest moral and spiritual standards, the Church can make a better you and a better us. There is no other way to a better world. The Church is the salvation of mankind.

THE CHURCH FOR ALL . . . ALL FOR THE CHURCH

The Church is the greatest factor on earth for the building of character and good citizenship. It is a storehouse of spiritual values. Without a strong Church, neither democracy nor civilization can survive. There are four sound reasons why every person should attend services regularly and support the Church. They are: (1) For his own sake. (2) For his children's sake. (3) For the sake of his community and nation. (4) For the sake of the Church itself, which needs his moral and material support. Plan to go to church regularly and read your Bible daily.

Day	Book	Chapter	Verses
Sunday	Psalms	90	1-17
Monday	Psalms	103	1-18
Tuesday	Matthew	13	44-52
Wednesday	Luke	5	33-39
Thursday	John	3	1-8
Friday	John	13	31-35
Saturday	Psalms	98	1-8

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Wishing you joy and happiness not only on Christmas but every day of the coming year.

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May the Christmas Season bring you much happiness

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