

sisted Cæsar in Egypt. Palestine and, in fact, the whole Roman world was in much political turmoil at that time. Through many changes in leadership and various uprisings, Herod secured the favor of the Roman rulers and was eventually declared King of Judæa. However, he still needed to conquer his kingdom. With the help of the Romans and through much bloodshed, he eventually conquered all of Palestine and after laying siege to the city, made Jerusalem the place of his throne.

Herod was an Idumæan. These were a group of people in southern Palestine, the descendants of Esau, who had been conquered a century earlier by the Jews and forced to accept Judaism. The true Jews never really accepted them, calling them "half Jews."

Herod, however, did try to appease the Jewish people, who had become alienated by his cruelty and oppression, by rebuilding the Temple. He set about to make it as magnificent as it had been in the time of Solomon. This Herod is not to be confused with the four other Herods mentioned in Scripture who were his sons. When one reads the account in Matthew 2 of Herod's reaction to the visit of the wise men seeking another king, it is easy to see that the order to kill all the children two years and under, in Bethlehem and the surrounding villages, was in keeping with the record of his character.

How many wise men there were, their names, and their homeland are questions that can only be a matter of speculation. All that one can say for sure is that they were Gentiles from somewhere east of Israel (Matthew 2:1). They came because they had seen an unusual star and it had been revealed to them that it was somehow connected to the birth of a special King of the Jews.

Herod sought to kill this Child. The religious people of Jerusalem, although they knew the Scriptures and were stirred (Matthew 2:3), seemingly did nothing. However, those eastern astrologers acted upon the little light given to them and were the first Gentiles to worship the Christ.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES

Gifts to represent the gifts from the wise men can be made from odd-shaped jars, boxes, etc.

For each child, cut two stars from tagboard. Cut slits as indicated. Let the child add glue and glitter to the stars, then put the two pieces of the star together (see Patterns). Hang from ceiling with a piece of yarn or string.

Star Mobile — Make one big star and three or four smaller ones (see Patterns). Put glitter on them or make them of foil. The wise men followed the star to

Jesus, and Jesus is our Star. He will take us to Heaven if we follow Him.

Each teacher can make a big star for his/her class (see Patterns), and the week before send each child one or two smaller ones and ask him/her to bring them back on Sunday. See which class has the most stars on Sunday, and hang an award banner at the entrance to the class.

Make a folder in the shape of a wrapped and tied gift (see Patterns). Cut a heart from red construction paper and place inside. The wise men gave gifts to Jesus. We can give Him our heart.

Bring a road map to class. Talk about a trip, tracing a route from one destination to another. Discuss how the wise men did not have a map to follow, but a star instead.

Let the class dress up some volunteers as wise men. Have some things prepared to make the costumes fancy, such as tinsel or foil stars.

QUESTIONS

- How did the wise men know Jesus had been born?
- What did Herod tell the wise men to do?
- Did the wise men do what Herod told them to do? Explain.
- How do you suppose that the wise men from the East, who would not be Jewish, would have learned about the expected birth of a King of the Jews?
- King Herod told the wise men that he, too, wanted to worship the newborn King. What were his true intentions?
- Where did the wise men find Mary, Joseph, and the Baby? How did they locate the place?
- How do those who are looking for Jesus today find Him?
- What "gifts" can we bring to Jesus?

PRE-SCHOOL SUGGESTIONS

Take your children on a walk around the department, following one child who is carrying a large star on a tall stick. Have them end up at a special location where you have placed a manger and a baby doll.

Teach your children the Christmas version of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." The words are:
"Twinkle, twinkle, little star
Leading wise men from afar
To the place where Jesus lay
On that first glad Christmas day.
Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
Leading wise men from afar."

Show your little ones something representing the gifts



When
they saw the
star,

They

rejoiced

with exceeding

great

joy.
Matt. 2:19