



WHAT GIFT WILL I BRING

Matthew 2:1-12

Big Ideas: *Christmas, wise men, gifts, giving*

I. Gathering (Attendance, First-Timers, Announcements)

II. Engaging the Brain

A. Set Up

1. On a table in the front of the room, have some burning incense, an open container of perfume, and a few items made of gold (rings, old coins, jewelry, and so forth).
2. Once the group has gathered, ask the following process question: ***If these items were your only hint about our topic for today, what would you guess it might be?***

B. Picture Check-in Question

1. Find at least five paintings of the visit of the wise men from the Internet, and print them out for today's session.
2. Move the group into a circle, and spread out these pictures on the floor in the center of the group.
3. Invite each person in the group to check-in by picking the character in one of the pictures on the floor that best represents what is going on in the speaker's life right now.
4. If the picture check-in feels a little too cumbersome, you can move the check-in question to the end of "Engaging the Brain" and try this check-in question:
 - *Who are the "wise men" today?*
 - *If you were in the manger today, would you turn off your cell phone?*

C. Gift Race

1. Bring six old magazines to the group today.
2. Form two teams.
3. Move each of the teams into a single-file line.

Note to the Leader

- Choose the activities that will work for your specific group and time frame.
- We recommend changing your teaching method at least three times each lesson.
- If you have any questions about *Spice Rack*, contact us at youthministrypartners.com.

4. Place three magazines for each team on chairs at the opposite end of the room.
5. Explain how the game will work.
 - a. For each round, a different kind of gift will be named.
 - b. Once the gift is named, the person in the front of each line will run to the magazines, pick them up, sit in the chair, and scour the magazines to find a picture of a gift that fits in the category for that round.
 - c. Once an appropriate picture is found, that person rips the picture out of the magazine and gives it to the umpire for the game (that would be you).
 - d. The team with the most points wins.
6. Invite the group to ask questions to clarify the instructions.
7. Play the game using these topics
 - a. something green
 - b. something that smells good
 - c. something that can improve a person's image
 - d. something very large
 - e. something for a man
 - f. something very small
 - g. something for a woman
 - h. something very expensive
 - i. something soft
 - j. something inexpensive but meaningful
 - k. the "most meaningful gift"

D. Manipulating the Nativity

1. If you can dig up a few Nativity sets (the kind displayed on tables in homes) bring them to the session today.
2. Form as many teams as you have Nativity sets.
3. Give each team all the pieces of the nativity set.
4. Give the groups two minutes to arrange the pieces of their nativity sets to show the way that best reflects how "the world" views Jesus.
5. After two minutes, have each team give the rest of the group a visual "tour" of their nativity scene's "world view about Jesus."
6. Process Questions

- **Which of the characters would be the most likely center of attention for people in our world?**
- **What new insights did these pictures give you into the way many people see Jesus?**
- **Where did you see yourselves in the placement of these characters?**

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III. Igniting the Heart

A. The Debate: You Are the Editor

1. Form two teams.
2. Ask the teams to imagine that they have been invited to be a part of a team of friends called together by Matthew before he sent out the final version of his Gospel.
3. Explain that Matthew, the Gospel writer, has come to these teams with a problem: His Gospel is too long. He needs to cut something. He'd like to remove anything that is not essential.
4. He asks your team specifically to decide whether the story of the wise men should be included in his Gospel.
5. Assign one team the job of arguing to keep the wise men story and another team the job of arguing that the wise men story should be cut.
6. Invite the teams to ask questions to clarify the instructions.
7. Read Matthew 2:1-2 to the group, and give the teams three minutes to come up with their arguments.
8. After three minutes, have each of the teams pick two spokespersons to get up and make their team's arguments.
9. Process Questions
 - **If a decision had to be made based on these arguments alone, would the wise men have made it into the Bible?**
 - **Which of the eyewitnesses would you guess would be the most likely to have passed the story along (since it is unlikely that the Gospel writer was actually present)?**
 - **From whom do you think the writer of the Gospel of Matthew heard this story?**
 - **What more practical gifts might have been more helpful to Mary, Joseph, and the baby?**
 - **Why do you think the shepherds got a message from the angels but the wise men had to "figure it out" for themselves?**
 - **Why would God choose to include a story about people who were in no way connected to the religion of Jesus' family?**
 - **If the Nativity story took place today, what kind of people would the "wise men" be?**
 - **The wise men call in "consultants" to help them determine where Jesus might be. What consultants do you call in when you are looking for God?**
 - **What do you think Mary and Joseph did with the three gifts as Jesus grew up?**

B. Guided Meditation With the Wise Men

1. Have the group members close their eyes.
2. Explain that you want them to take an imaginary journey with the wise men. Depending on your group, you may need to warn the group that this process might feel a little different than what they might have experienced before.

3. Walk them through the following guided meditation, reading slowly:

You are walking with a group of wise men who are on a journey. Imagine what the scenery looks like as you walk. How many wise men are with you? What are they talking about? How long have they been traveling? You ask them why they are going to all this effort. Hear the answer they give you.

You have now made it into a town. You turn a corner, and suddenly, you realize you have arrived at your destination. Your traveling companions stop and prepare. Watch what it is they are doing, what they are saying to each other. You walk with them into the place where the baby Jesus is. You look around at the scene. You see Mary and Joseph there. Imagine how they greet you as you come through the door.

Then you see Jesus. But there is something different about how he looks, not what you would expect.

One of your traveling companions clears his voice and speaks. Listen for what he says and how he says it. Each of the wise men steps forward and brings their gifts. Suddenly, it is your turn. You move to the place where Jesus is, you reach in your pocket and pull out your gift. It could have been anything, something physical, a relationship, a person, even you. As you leave your gift, how do you feel? What thoughts are going through your mind as you leave your gift? What do you say to Jesus and his parents as you leave?

As you walk away, with the “wise men,” things are very quiet. All you can hear is the crunch of the ground as you and your friends walk away. What thoughts are going through your mind? What do you say to yourself, “I hope I never forget about . . . ?”

4. Process Questions

- **Did this exercise help give you a better feel for the story, or did it just tend to get in the way for you?**
- **What ideas or insights surfaced as you thought through the story in this way?**
- **Based on what you experienced, do you feel motivated to do anything differently?**

C. The “Sky’s the Limit” Christmas Gift Exchange

1. Bring enough construction paper to have a sheet for each person in the group.
2. Write the name of each person in the group (including adult leaders) on a different sheet of construction paper.
 - a. Option One: Hang the sheets of paper on the wall around the room.
 - b. Option Two: Move the group into a circle and distribute the sheets so that every person in the group has someone else’s sheet.
3. Give every person in the group a crayon or a pencil.
4. Explain that you want to give the group the chance to give a “sky’s the limit” gift to every other person in the group.
5. Ask the group to imagine that for this exercise, they can give any gift in the world to each other...money (or logic) is no object.
6. Explain that each person in the group will write a gift for every other person in the group.

- a. If sheets are hanging on the wall, everyone will write the description of a gift on every sheet on the wall.
 - b. If a different sheet is held by each person in the circle, give the group twenty seconds or less for each gift sheet and, on your cue, have them pass the sheets to the right until everyone has had the chance to “give” a gift to each other person in the group.
7. Process Questions
- **Some people say that we can’t give other people gifts without also giving to God. What do you think of that idea?**
 - **What differences do you see between the gifts brought by the wise men and the kinds of gifts we exchange today?**
 - **If God could ask for any gift from our class, what do you think that might be?**
 - **Proverbs 22:16 says, “Oppressing the poor to get rich and giving to the wealthy lead only to poverty.” What do you think God thinks about the American practice of “giving to the wealthy” at Christmas?**

D. Thinking It Through: What Happens to the Wise Men?

1. If you’ve got a group that likes to chew on less-than-simple questions, you may want to try this almost-off-topic question.
2. Ask this group the following “thinking it through” questions:
 - a. What do you think happens to the wise men?
 - b. Since there is a good chance that at least some of the wise men died before Jesus began his ministry, what do you imagine their faith was like after their experience with Mary, Joseph, and Jesus?
 - c. Did the wise men go to heaven?

IV. Taking It Home

A. Check Out Question

1. Move the group into a circle.
2. Which of the three characters is the closest to your own faith right now?
 - a. The wise men searching for Jesus.
 - b. Herod who is against Jesus.
 - c. The scribes who know the facts but remain passively uninvolved and never take the first step toward finding Jesus.

B. Take Home: Nobody’s Pawn

1. Bring out a cheap chess set, and set it up for the group.
2. Remind the group that Herod wanted the wise men to be his “pawns” but they chose not to work for him.
3. Give every person in the group a pawn to take home with them, as a reminder that we can follow the wise men and choose to be “nobody’s pawns.”
4. Process Question: **In whose game are you a pawn?**

Close the group in prayer, asking that the lives of the group would be gifts to Christ this Christmas.