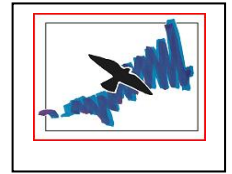


Week beginning: 4th January



THEME: Epiphany 1 – this means ‘showing’ or ‘revealing.’

Matthew 2: 1 – 11 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men [astrologers] from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, ²Where is He Who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east at its rising and have come to worship Him. ³When Herod the king heard this, he was disturbed and troubled, and the whole of Jerusalem with him. ⁴So he called together all the chief priests and learned men (scribes) of the people and anxiously asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They replied to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶And you Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are not in any way least or insignificant among the chief cities of Judah; for from you shall come a Ruler (Leader) Who will govern and shepherd My people Israel.’ ⁷Then Herod sent for the wise men [astrologers] secretly, and accurately to the last point ascertained from them the time of the appearing of the star [that is, how long the star had made itself visible since its rising in the east]. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search for the Child carefully and diligently, and when you have found Him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship Him.’ ⁹When they had listened to the king, they went their way, and behold, the star which had been seen in the east [in its rising went before them until it came and stood over the place where the young Child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were thrilled with ecstatic joy. ¹¹And on going into the house, they saw the Child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then opening their treasure bags, they presented to Him gifts--gold and frankincense and myrrh.

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME:

How far would you be willing to search for something and what are your expectations of other people and their expectations of you? In this reading we hear the wonderful story of the wise men (not sure of their number) who bought 3 special gifts to present to Jesus. We know that they travelled a long way to undertake this task and were willing to keep searching and following the signs God sent. Jesus had been born amongst God’s chosen people and they had missed all of those signs!! The sinister part of the story is that the wise men, searching for a King, dropped in on King Herod expecting the new born King to be in a palace. King Herod’s own scholars advised them as to where the prophets had said the Messiah would be born and Herod sent the wise men on their way but asked them to locate the child and send word back to him. But Herod intended to kill the young child who he saw as a threat to his own throne. Herod was expecting a King who would depose him.


GATHERING / WELCOME (This can be said and signed)


Leader: Jesus is the light of the world

All: Shine in our darkness

WORSHIP SONG - Suggested songs: From Heaven You came helpless babe; I’m going to paint a perfect picture; Make me a channel of Your Peace; Kings came riding from the East; Mary had a baby. (No Pianist for Assembly? No Problem 1)

Way in 1 – Who? What? Why?	Idea 1 - INTRODUCING THE BIBLE STORY
<p>The children will probably have already looked closely at this story as part of the Christmas festivities but it is good to explore some of the messages in this part of the Bible all on their own.</p> <p>Use three large cards with the words Who? What? and Why? Show the children a picture depicting the wise men or using some nativity outfits dress three children up as the three wise men but with out saying who they are.</p> <p>Then test the children with the three questions. Who are they? What did they do? and then the big question.....Why did they do what they did?</p> <div data-bbox="252 1711 584 2033" data-label="Image"> </div>	<p>When Jesus was born it happened very quietly and not announced all over the world in the way people had expected. But never-the-less his birth was marked in a very powerful way for those who were waiting for the signs. This story reminds us that the wise men were keeping watch and were prepared to keep searching for Jesus when they saw the sign of the star. It would have been easy to give up and go back home but they kept going. How many times have we given up and stopped searching for something really special? Today we sometimes expect Jesus to come searching for us and prove himself! But Jesus won’t do that - he will always wait to be invited into our lives and is there waiting for us but still knowing us. Only when we search for him can we start to understand him and learn more about him. Like those wise men who rejoiced when they eventually found Jesus we will have much to celebrate when we find him and we can share with others what this feels like.</p> <p><u>REFLECTION</u> – Ask the children to think about something they have lost that was very special to them. Ask them to reflect on how long they searched for this lost item; did they find what they were looking for and if they did how did they respond?</p> <p><u>PRAYER</u> – Loving Jesus, help us to understand the joy of the wise men when they found you after searching for so long. Help us to learn to keep searching for you and never give up. AMEN</p>

<p>Way in 2 What am I?</p> <p>Choose four children to help you and pin a picture of four different animals on the back of each child. Be careful which animals you choose.</p> <p>Ask the children to turn around so that the school can see the pictures but emphasise that they must not give any clues as to what the picture is.</p> <p>Each child then takes it in turns to ask a question of the rest of the children which can only be answered 'yes' or 'no'. They need to identify the name of the animal on their back. The children may have played this game before but they need to ask searching questions to find out the identity of the animal pinned on their back. Support and encourage the children to make sure it keeps moving – you may want to offer some prompt questions such as; Does it have four legs? Is it a mammal? Can it run fast? Am I a pet?</p> 	<p>Idea 2 - INTRODUCING THE BIBLE STORY</p> <p>In our Bible story we hear about the wise men who kept searching and asking questions to find the answer to something very important. They were searching for someone very important, Jesus. Like our volunteers they didn't give up even when it seemed to be really difficult and people didn't seem to be helping them!</p> <p>REFLECTION – Over 2000 years ago wise men went searching and didn't give up. Lots of people missed seeing Jesus and the same is true to today....but it is not too late and we can search for him and find him today. But when we find him we have a responsibility to show others what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Lots of people will make fun of those who follow Jesus but we need to be strong.</p> <p>RESPONSE – There will be lots of questions that we want to ask about Jesus – find some time to write some of this questions down and then set aside some 'circle time' to explore some of the children's questions.</p> <p>PRAYER- Father God, there are so many questions that we want to ask about you. Help us not to be afraid to ask those questions so that we can learn more about you every day. Help us to hear your message of love and share that message with everyone we meet. AMEN</p>
--	---

<p>Way in 3 – Why was Jesus born?</p> <p>Ask the children what is surrounding them and pressing against their skin; what is inside them and gives them life. The answer is 'air'. Explain to the children that although we can't see air we know it is there and we can see the effect it has. Carefully light a candle and then blow it out to show what moving air can do. Show the children some photographs of storm scenes to illustrate the power of moving air but remind the children that we cannot see air but we know it is there because of what it does.</p> <p>Tell the children the following story:</p> <p>One day God was looking over the world he had created and he saw many things that pleased him but many that made him very sad. He looked down and saw a brother and sister playing happily together, sharing their toys. He saw a young woman helping a neighbour by buying food for him and preparing a meal. He saw a doctor helping a sick man, making him feel better. He saw all these things but, because God cannot be seen by us on earth, no-one saw him watching them. However, as God looked around, he saw things that made him sad. He saw two boys fighting another boy, they were hurting him and calling him names. He saw a woman stealing from her neighbour and men in power plotting wars with neighbouring countries. These people had forgotten all the ancient stories about God and had forgotten how he wanted them to live. When God had made the world he gave humans the chance to choose what they do – to choose between doing good things and doing bad things. All of the bad things God saw made him very sad – so sad that he tried to think of a way that he could help people understand how he wanted to behave. He wanted people to care for each other and the world he had given them and learn to love each other. So God decided that the best way to do this would be to come to earth as a human, so that people could actually see him. He could then share some of their hopes and dreams, their despairs and anxieties. God knew that if he could live amongst humans he could show them how to live and they could see him if only for a short time.</p> <p>Because God could not be seen some people had forgotten he was there and had stopped believing in him. God decided that this was a good plan so he came to earth to live as a human and be an example to us all.</p>	<p>Idea 3 - INTRODUCING THE BIBLE STORY TO THE CHILDREN.....</p> <p>Ask the children if they know what God was called when he came to earth to live amongst men, women and children. He was called Jesus – God became a man, to live on earth so that people could see him and learn to love him. He didn't live on earth for very long but in that short time he reminded everyone that he loved them so much that he was prepared to die for them. His message was very simple and it was to love God and love one another.</p> <p>REFLECTION – ask the children to close their eyes and imagine a world where everyone makes the right choices and we all learn to love each other instead of fighting, being jealous, being greedy and selfish. Ask the children to think of someone who they admire because of their 'goodness'.</p> <p>RESPONSE – Ask the children to focus on those people who they admire for being 'good' people and silently say thank you to God for that person.</p> <p>PRAYER – Lord Jesus, you give us the ability to make choices in our lives and sometimes we know we make good choices and sometimes we make bad choices. You are always willing to forgive us when we make mistakes and are truly sorry. We thank you for coming to earth as a baby and living as a human amongst us. AMEN.</p> 
---	--