

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Explore the concept of self-interest and then use that exploration when discussing the next objective....
- Compare shepherds response vs wisemen vs King Herod’s response to the news of Jesus’ birth
- Highlight how God helps the wisemen and Mary and Joseph see the best place(s) to go despite their not knowing the full extent of their circumstances

Materials needed:

1. Movie clip (available on rfour.org) from *Minority Report*
2. Electronics that show the video clip
3. A printout of the handout for the activity for each team or each student (located at end of lesson)
4. Two rooms for the two teams to meet in during the activity

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- One of the things we do every class is ask and answer the opening question at the beginning of class – because it helps us 1. Learn more about each other and 2. Helps “warm us up” for some of the ideas in the upcoming lesson. So we’re going to do that now.
- So here’s the opening question for today’s class. I [the teacher] will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we’ll go around the circle and each of us will answer.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- **Here’s this week’s question:** What is a gift you have received recently?

TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY

- Last class, we started a session on Jesus’ beginnings.
- We started by reading the story of Jesus’ birth.
- In it, we saw how the lowly, outsider shepherds were the first ones invited to celebrate Jesus’ birth.
- Today, we’ll read a continuation of Jesus’ birth story (although Jesus is probably 1 to 2 yrs old in today’s story)
- And, in the story, we will see how important people respond to the news of Jesus’ birth.

- To get started, let's talk a little about self-interest.
- Self-interest is when you make decisions based on what you think is best for yourself.
- Now, I'm not wanting to talk about whether self-interest is good or bad.
- Instead, I want us to be clear that sometimes, what is best for you is also best for others and other times what is best for you is not best for others.
- And, to help us better understand self-interest - which should help us with understanding what's going on in part of today's story – we're going to do the following activity

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- There will be two teams – each team will be located in a different room
- But, before we get into teams, here's what you will do as a team: You will make one decision during each of the five rounds during the activity.
- The decision you must make is this: Does your group choose the color of "blue" or "red"
- Driving your decision will be the following goal: *"To accumulate as many points as possible, preferably by not hindering the other group."*
- Note that *preferably* does not mean "must" but does mean "strongly recommended"
- The twist to the activity is that you get points partly based on what the other group chooses.
- Here is how you get points:
 - If both teams choose "blue," then both teams get 10 points
 - If both teams choose "red," then both teams get 0 points
 - However, if one team chooses red and one team chooses blue, then the team that chose red gets 5 points and the team that chose blue gets -5 points.
 - Image of the scoring:

Choice		Result	
Group A	Group B	Group A	Group B
Blue	Blue	+ 10	+ 10
Blue	Red	- 5	+ 5
Red	Blue	+ 5	- 5
Red	Red	0	0

- After each round, you will be informed of your score for the round and your cumulative score for the activity.
- You will have 2 minutes per round to come to a decision.
- Any questions?

DO ACTIVITY

Note to teachers: *Sometimes the groups will want to send messages to each other. I tend to let them give me one verbal message per round to pass on to the other group. I don't tell them this ahead of time, but if they ask during the activity (and they will), I then tell them what I'm willing to do. You can come up with your own rules, even letting each team send delegates to discuss their team's perspectives. It all depends on how much time you have. The one message per team per round tends to keep "time creep" in check for me.*

ASK

- During the first round, why did you (each team) make the decision that you made? What was your thinking that first round?
- How concerned were you about what the other team might pick?
- After the first round, how concerned were you about what the other team might pick?
- If you trusted the other team, what color was the largest point choice to make every round? (blue)
- Why? (Because it got you the most points)
- Were you ever tempted to pick red?
 - Why? (for yes: because we didn't trust the other team; we wanted to make sure we wouldn't lose our points; for no: because what was best for them was also best for us – pick blue!)

TELL

- So, in our activity, we see how self-interest can help determine two types of decisions:
 - 1. How we can best succeed (by trusting and taking risks) and
 - 2. How can we best protect ourselves (by not trusting and taking less risks)
- Typically, we can't pick both at the same time – we have to favor one over the other
- In today's scripture story, let's see what type of self-interest drives King Herod's decision making after he is informed about Jesus' birth

READ **Matthew 2:1-23** (recommendation: Have class read it aloud; one person per verse)

1In 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." 3When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 6'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.'" 7Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8Then 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."

9When 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. 10When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 11On 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. 12And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

13Now 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.” 14Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, 15and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

16When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. 17Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: 18“A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

19When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 20“Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.” 21Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. 22But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. 23There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazorean.”

ASK

- Verse 1 and 2, who is asking about Jesus’ birth? (wise men from the east – “east” probably refers to geography found in present day Iraq or Iran)
- What title do the wise men give to Jesus? (king of the Jews)
- How did the wise men learn of Jesus? (“his star at its rising” – sounds like signs in the night sky)
- What do the wise men hope to do? (give gifts / pay homage to Jesus)
- Verse 3 – What is King Herod’s response to the news that a king of the Jews has been born? (he was frightened)
- Any thoughts on why the wise men would want to give gifts but King Herod would be afraid? (we don’t really know about why the wise men do what they do – maybe they are wanting to get on the good side of the new king; but it does seem pretty clear that King Herod is worried about losing his job)
- Verse 6 – what is this messiah supposed to do? (“shepherd my people”)
- Verse 8 – What does King Herod tell the wise men to do? (find the child and then tell him, Herod, where the child was located)
- Verse 9 – How do the wise men find Jesus? (a star is rising and then stops where Jesus was)
- Verse 10 – What is the wise men’s response to finding Jesus? (They are filled with joy)
- Verse 11 – How do the wise men respond to Mary and Jesus? (they kneel and give gifts)
- Verse 13 – Where does God tell Joseph and Mary to go? (Egypt)
- Do they go? (Yes)
- Verse 16 – What does King Herod do after he realizes the wise men aren’t coming back? (kills all the 2 year olds and younger who were in and around Bethlehem)
- Any thoughts / responses about that decision?
- Verse 19-23: What does Joseph do because of a dream from God? (moves his family back to Israel – Galilee to be exact)

TELL

- In today's story, there are three sets of characters making choices where self-interest was a factor.
- King Herod had a self-interested choice to make once he heard about a new king being born.
- He could've heard the news about a new leader being born of his people and he could've thought, "Yes! This is great! I will now have someone who will really help me with my job of leading the people of Israel!"
 - Referring back to the activity, let's consider this a "blue thought"
- Or, he could've thought, "Oh no! Someone is going to take my job away from me! I have to do something to make sure I do not lose my job."
 - Referring back to the activity, let's consider this a "red thought"
- Of those two ways of thinking, which one did King Herod seem to choose? (the red thought, the one where he protects his job)
- By choosing to protect his job, did other people benefit or not benefit? (Did not benefit)
- The wise men also had a choice of self-interest to make.
- When they first saw this sign about a new leader of the Israelites being born, they could've had a (blue) thought of, "A new leader has been born, let's go celebrate and make friends with this new leader."
- Or, they could've had a (red) thought of, "A new leader has been born, let's do something to this leader before s/he makes their country more powerful."
- Which of these two decisions did the wise men pick? (the blue one, the one where they make friends with the new leader)
- Finally, there's the decision that Mary and Joseph make when they agree to move.
- They actually make that choice to move two different times in today's story
- In both cases, moving was not initially beneficial to them.
- It would've been a difficult move, physically, and would've been emotionally difficult, too, especially since they were moving to a different country.
- And, remember, Mary and Joseph didn't know what Herod was planning.
- So, in this case, at least at first, there was no seen or known self-interest to move.
- For them to move, then, based only on a dream that Joseph had had, it is pretty amazing that they actually moved.
- So why did they do it? Why did Mary and Joseph move? Probably because of their previous experiences where God talking to them had worked out for them.
- But even when we have previous experiences with God that worked to our benefit, listening for and then following God's direction is not easy.

TRANSITION TO VIDEO CLIP

- To help us think about how difficult it can be to trust someone who sees more than you can see, let's watch the following movie clip from "Minority Report."
- In the clip, the character played by Tom Cruise is trying to rescue a woman.
- An interesting thing about this woman is that she can see into the future
- To help them with their escape, the woman tells the Tom Cruise character to do certain things that are certainly perplexing.
- Let's see if Tom Cruise's character listens to her or not.

WATCH VIDEO CLIP

ASK

- Did Tom Cruise's character obey the instructions given to him? (yes)
- But did he hesitate in his obedience sometimes? (yes)
- Why do you think he hesitates? (the instructions don't make all that much sense at the time and seem to not even be helping in some cases)
- Do the instructions make sense later on? (yes, especially at the very beginning where she tells him to grab the umbrella)
- When she tells him to hold still and wait, do you think that was easy for him?
- Near the end, though, when she tells Cruise to drop the change, does he hesitate at all? (no)
- Why do you think he stops hesitating by then? (because he's learned to trust that she knows what she's talking about)

TELL

- Today's scripture passage is a distressing passage, I think.
- The response by political leaders to kill lots of their own people (who are children!) is a pretty dark thing – especially when that choice was in response to good news.
- That good news, though, should not be lost in the face of such a distressing decision.
- The good news is that throughout the darkness of this story, God's light and instruction continues to shine, always available to whoever will listen.
 - We see this when the Wisemen follow the light of the star and celebrate Jesus' birth
 - We see this when the Wisemen do not go back to King Herod due to a dream from God
 - We see this when Joseph and Mary listen to God's instructions about moving.
- Just like in the movie clip, then, we see how God provides options even when things looks hopeless and grim, options that are in the self interest of the individuals as well as others.
- And because Joseph, Mary, and the Wisemen listened for and did what they heard from God, the Wisemen had a successful visit, and Mary, Joseph and Jesus received gifts and, more importantly, lived to tell about it.

CLOSING PRAYER