



## GROUP GUIDE: WEEK 1

### CONVERSATION STARTER

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If you were king for a day, what rule would you enact and why?

### RESPONSES TO KING JESUS

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At the start of Matthew's Gospel, we witness how two very different parties respond to the good news of Jesus' birth. First are the magi—a group of kingly advisors who specialize in astrology. These priestly advisors looked for signs in the stars to try and determine the will of the gods.

These magi see the signs in the heavens they've been waiting for, and they eagerly seek out the new King of the Jews. They want to worship him. King Herod, on the other hand, hears about Jesus and wants him dead. In fact, Herod is willing to slaughter innocent lives to accomplish his twisted end.

Because the magi didn't have a good reputation at this time in history, scholar Tim Mackie points out that, "It's possible that Matthew includes this story to provide a contrast with Israel's current rulers—while Herod and the current establishment in Jerusalem does not recognize Jesus as Israel's messianic King, even the mysterious magi of the nations can discern the arrival of God's Messiah, and they eagerly come!"

**How do you respond to the kingship of Jesus? Do you see him as the object of your worship and affection or as competition for the throne of your life?**

The magi are the first to recognize Jesus as the rightful king, and they bring him gifts that honor that status.

- **Gold**—symbolizes royalty
- **Frankincense**—was often used in worship; symbolizes divinity

- **Myrrh**—was used in embalming, symbolizes death and burial

These gifts reveal exactly who the magi believe Jesus to be—the royal king, human and yet divine, worthy of worship, and perhaps not the conquering king many would expect, but rather the one who would give his life for the whole world.

What do you have to offer Jesus?

It turns out, what we give Jesus actually says a lot about who we think Jesus is—not what we *hope* or *claim* to want to give Jesus, but what we *actually* give him. How much of your time, affection, and attention goes to King Jesus? Do you seek out intentional time to be with him? Or does Jesus get the crumbs of your day, if anything at all?

Spend a few moments discussing these ideas with your group. How does this story add color to what you think about Jesus?

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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1. What are you most looking forward to when it comes to studying Matthew's Gospel?
2. What stuck out to you about the reading from this week? Was there a verse or idea that was particularly meaningful or challenging for you?
3. The responses we see to Jesus' birth are rejection, indifference, and worship. How do you see these three responses persist today?
4. Read together the story of Jesus calling his first disciples in Matthew 4:18-22. What do these fishermen give up to follow Jesus? What kinds of things do you think Jesus calls us to give up today to follow him?

## WEEKLY PRACTICE

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This week, spend a few moments in prayer each day, allowing the words of Saint Ignatius of Loyola to be your guide. This prayer was Ignatius' self-dedication to Jesus. As we begin a new year, let us use his words as a time of rededicating ourselves to our king.

Pray this simple prayer through at least twice, slowly taking in each statement. Then allow some time for quiet reflection, inviting God to speak to you whatever God wants to share.

*Lord Jesus Christ, take all my freedom, my memory, my understanding, and my will.*

*All that I have and cherish you have given me.*

*I surrender it all to be guided by your will.*

*Your grace and your love are wealth enough for me.*

*Give me these, Lord Jesus, and I ask for nothing more. Amen.*