

DAY 1 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

Are you the same person in private that you are in public? Why or why not?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him."

King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

"In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote: 'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.'"

Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. Then he told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!"

Matthew 2:1–8 NLT

Sermon Insights: From far all the way to the feet of Jesus, the Magi made a journey that God has opened to all.

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Sometimes "good news" is troubling to those whose power, control, or comfort is threatened. How are you dealing with surprises in your life?

If it walks like a duck...if Herod had genuinely wanted to worship with the wise men, don't you think he would have gone with them, helped them search carefully, and presented gifts as well? How about you—are YOU living with a clean conscience?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, I understand that a clean conscience is a genuine gift from you. Help me be honest with myself, you, and someone I trust so that I can receive that gift that Jesus came into the world to give.

DAY 2 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

What inspires extravagant generosity in you?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

Matthew 2 continued: After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt." **Matthew 2:9–15 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

The wise men were filled with joy, came close to worship, and gave incredibly valuable gifts—a deep sign of honor and respect in that culture. How about you—does that overwhelming response describe when you found Jesus?

Consider the tremendous risks, supernatural protection, and powerful rewards the wise men experienced because they took seriously the prophecies God had given their people through the Jew Daniel centuries before. How have you seen God faithfully and surprisingly weave his plan over the course of your life?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, you are the God of the ancient past, the present moment, and the distant future. May I have the awareness to trust you even when I cannot fully see the scope of your Master Plan.

DAY 3 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

Do you tend to be a "people pleaser"?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

From the Old Testament prophet Daniel hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth: It was the first year of the reign of Darius the Mede, the son of Ahasuerus, who became king of the Babylonians. During the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, learned from reading the word of the LORD, as revealed to Jeremiah the prophet, that Jerusalem must lie desolate for seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and fasting. I also wore rough burlap and sprinkled myself with ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed:

"O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands. But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations. We have refused to listen to your servants the prophets, who spoke on your authority to our kings and princes and ancestors and to all the people of the land.

"Lord, you are in the right; but as you see, our faces are covered with shame. This is true of all of us, including the people of Judah and Jerusalem and all Israel, scattered near and far, wherever you have driven us because of our disloyalty to you. O LORD, we and our kings, princes, and ancestors are covered with shame because we have sinned against you. But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him. We have not obeyed the LORD our God, for we have not followed the instructions he gave us through his servants the prophets. All Israel has disobeyed your instruction and turned away, refusing to listen to your voice. So now the solemn curses and judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured down on us because of our sin..." **Daniel 9:1–11 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

"Confess" means "to say the same thing." When we confess our sins and the sins of our nation to God, we are "saying the same thing" that God says, acknowledging that he is right and we are wrong, and asking for his mercy. Daniel didn't engage in a self-righteous finger-pointing session but acknowledged he was also a part of the problem. What do you need to confess so that you can put the focus on God?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, thank you for being the God who is merciful and forgiving. Forgive us for our sin, and fill our land with your goodness and faithfulness.

DAY 4 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

What surprises you most about God?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

From the Old Testament prophet Daniel hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth: [Daniel 9 continued:] "All Israel has disobeyed your instruction and turned away, refusing to listen to your voice. So now the solemn curses and judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured down on us because of our sin. You have kept your word and done to us and our rulers exactly as you warned. Never has there been such a disaster as happened in Jerusalem. Every curse written against us in the Law of Moses has come true. Yet we have refused to seek mercy from the LORD our God by turning from our sins and recognizing his truth. Therefore, the LORD has brought upon us the disaster he prepared. The LORD our God was right to do all of these things, for we did not obey him.

"O Lord our God, you brought lasting honor to your name by rescuing your people from Egypt in a great display of power. But we have sinned and are full of wickedness. In view of all your faithful mercies, Lord, please turn your furious anger away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain. All the neighboring nations mock Jerusalem and your people because of our sins and the sins of our ancestors.

"O our God, hear your servant's prayer! Listen as I plead. For your own sake, Lord, smile again on your desolate sanctuary. O my God, lean down and listen to me. Open your eyes and see our despair. See how your city—the city that bears your name—lies in ruins. We make this plea, not because we deserve help, but because of your mercy. O Lord, hear. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, listen and act! For your own sake, do not delay, O my God, for your people and your city bear your name." **Daniel 9:11–19 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Daniel acknowledges that the Lord has both "faithful mercies" and "furious anger." Does it challenge your view of God to realize that God prepares disaster for those who refuse to repent?

Why do you think the God of love "warns" and brings *temporary* "disaster" on disobedient people?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, we echo Daniel's pleading in our own time and land: we make this plea not because we deserve help but because of your mercy. O Lord, hear us...forgive us...listen and act!

DAY 5 – SCRIPTURE, OBSERVATION, APPLICATION, PRAYER ("SOAP")

CONVERSATION STARTER

Do you think you would have followed Jesus if you had been alive when he was on the earth?

SCRIPTURE OBSERVATION (5 MINUTES)

From the Old Testament prophet Daniel hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth: [Daniel 9 continued...] I went on praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people, pleading with the LORD my God for Jerusalem, his holy mountain. As I was praying, Gabriel, whom I had seen in the earlier vision, came swiftly to me at the time of the evening sacrifice. He explained to me, "Daniel, I have come here to give you insight and understanding. The moment you began praying, a command was given. And now I am here to tell you what it was, for you are very precious to God. Listen carefully so that you can understand the meaning of your vision.

"A period of seventy sets of seven has been decreed for your people and your holy city to finish their rebellion, to put an end to their sin, to atone for their guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to confirm the prophetic vision, and to anoint the Most Holy Place. Now listen and understand! Seven sets of seven plus sixty-two sets of seven will pass from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem until a ruler—the Anointed One—comes. Jerusalem will be rebuilt with streets and strong defenses, despite the perilous times.

"After this period of sixty-two sets of seven, the Anointed One will be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing, and a ruler will arise whose armies will destroy the city and the Temple. The end will come with a flood, and war and its miseries are decreed from that time to the very end. The ruler will make a treaty with the people for a period of one set of seven, but after half this time, he will put an end to the sacrifices and offerings. And as a climax to all his terrible deeds, he will set up a sacrilegious object that causes desecration, until the fate decreed for this defiler is finally poured out on him." **Daniel 9:20–27 NLT**

APPLICATION SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

"...the Anointed One will be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing..." When Jesus was executed like a criminal and placed into a borrowed tomb (his family did not even own a burial plot...), he **appeared** to have accomplished nothing. When he rose from the dead three days later, he changed **EVERYTHING**. He conquered death—and gave guilty sinners the opportunity to live forever in Heaven with him. He conquered the **POWER** of sin—and gave guilty sinners the opportunity to live a new life here on earth by being forgiven and filled with the Holy Spirit—God's own powerful presence. What has the "Anointed One" done in your life? What is he still waiting for your permission to accomplish?

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Lord, your power is undeniable. Your majesty is unmistakable. Your kindness is unbelievable. Your heart is beautiful. Thank you for loving even me.