



## Weekly Law & Gospel Bible Study



The law & Gospel method of Bible study is the Church's traditional way to study the Bible, which was popularized by Martin Luther. Law & Gospel Bible study makes a distinction between God's two main Biblical themes: law & Gospel. God's law theme identifies our sin, by revealing what God wants us to do that we don't do. God's Gospel theme identifies our need for Jesus the Savior, and reveals how God's love offers us salvation through Christ.

### **STEP ONE** PRAY FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT TO REVEAL GOD'S VOICE THROUGH THE TEXT:

***"Father, let your law and Gospel voice renew our love, faith, and hope."***

### **STEP TWO** READ THE TEXT REPEATEDLY UNTIL YOU CAN TELL IT IN YOUR OWN WORDS:

**Matthew 2:1-12** (See the reverse side of the worksheet for the printed Gospel text)

### **STEP THREE** REVIEW A STUDY BIBLE TO DETERMINE THE TEXT'S THEOLOGICAL MEANING:

We celebrate Epiphany on January 6 (or the nearest Sunday). Epiphany, Easter, and Pentecost were the great holy days for the early church. It was not until five hundred later that Christians began to celebrate Christmas. The word *epiphany* means an appearance or manifestation, particularly of a divine being—or an illuminating discovery, especially one that comes unexpectedly. Epiphany marks the first manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles. It signals that God loves Gentiles as well as Jews—that God's plan of salvation includes Gentiles too. Epiphany challenges us to reconsider all the people whom we see as outside the boundaries of God's love. Instead of shepherds, Matthew gives us Magi from the East. Instead of a stable, Matthew takes us to Herod's palace. Instead of a manger, Matthew shows us gifts fit for a king (gold), a priest (incense), and the death of a Savior (myrrh). Instead of angels, Matthew tells us of dreams. The wise men's visit probably took place long after the shepherds had departed. Presumably the wise men visited during the latter part of Mary and Joseph's visit to Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

Matthew includes a number of dark elements in his story: Joseph resolves to put Mary away quietly (1:19). (*Exodus 1:16,22*); Herod kills babies in an attempt to do away with the newborn king (2:16-18). (*Exodus 2:1-10*); Joseph and his family flee to Egypt to escape the murderous king (2:13-15). (*Exodus 2:15*); Joseph and family return to Nazareth rather than Bethlehem (2:19-23). (*Exodus 4:19*); For Matthew, these are important parallels between the stories of Moses and Jesus.

**"Wise men (*magoi*) from the East came to Jerusalem"** (v. 1c). These *magoi* come to Jerusalem, because the capital city is the logical place to look for a king. *Magoi*, "originally the title of a Persian priestly caste who played an important role in advising the king, was applied more widely to learned men and priests who specialized in astrology and the interpretation of dreams, and in some cases magical arts." They were probably members of a priestly caste in ancient Persia, possibly followers of Zoroaster. We call them kings, but Matthew calls them *magoi*, which we transliterate "Magi." We think of these *magoi* as astrologers because they are observing stars (v. 2). However, from the perspective of the Jewish people, *magoi* look to the stars for answers that legitimately come only from God (Acts 8:9-24 and 13:6-11). From the perspective of the Jewish people, *magoi* work magic using demonic powers. They are far from the Jewish community, which makes these *magoi* especially useful for Matthew's purposes as he shows how the Messiah brings salvation even to Gentiles (non-Jews)—even to Gentiles who might be magicians or sorcerers. Matthew's Gospel is very Jewish, but he introduces these Gentile worshipers at the beginning, preparing us for Jesus' last words to his disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (28:19 — the Greek word translated "nations" is *ethne*, which also means "Gentiles"). We are struck by the contrast between these Gentiles, who follow the star to Jesus, and the chief priests and scribes, who know the scriptures but who do nothing to seek out the Messiah, whom they have determined to be only five miles away in Bethlehem (v. 5). God's people ignore the Messiah, while pagans eagerly seek him out. Without this newborn king, the astrologers and King Herod (and we too) remain in sinful separation from God, living in the miseries of our own devising, believing that worldly wisdom can somehow offer us a relationship to God. For the most part, we misunderstand faith and trust in God as something of our own making, instead of a gift from God. The power of God's Spirit transcends the Church. The Spirit of God is at work in the world, especially in the lives of our family and friends, even those outside of the Church. This frees us to invite our unchurched loved ones to deepen their relationship with God where they are at, instead of thinking that we have to bring them to God -- who only resides in the church.



**Matthew 2:1-12** In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>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." <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup>and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup>'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.'" <sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>Then 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." <sup>9</sup>When 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. <sup>10</sup>When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup>On 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. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

**STEP FOUR COMPLETE A LAW & GOSPEL BIBLE STUDY TO *Restore Hope in the Savior***

**Law Question:** *How does this text reveal our sin (self-centeredness) and how we do not live as God desires?*

Answer.....  
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**Gospel Question:** *How does this text reveal God’s gift of Jesus as the Savior who freely offers us salvation?*

Answer.....  
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Please send your “answers” to Pastor Bob: [Schmalzle@yahoo.com](mailto:Schmalzle@yahoo.com) which he likes to incorporate into the sermon.

**STEP FIVE PRAYERFULLY MEDITATE UPON GOD’S GOSPEL VOICE: *Restoring Our Hope***

**A. Quietening Our Inner Sanctuary:** *We quiet our hearts (souls) by focusing on our breathing. Breathe in slowly to the count of five (J-E-S-U-S)...hold your breath to a count of six (C-H-R-I-S-T)...exhale to a count of seven (T-H-E-L-O-R-D). Repeat this pattern of breathing until you are relaxed.*

**B. Dwelling within Our Inner Sanctuary:** *We meet the Lord Jesus in the sanctuary of our hearts (souls), which is a place created within our mind’s eye for us to be with the Lord. Using our favorite sights, sounds, smells and feelings, we visualize our inner sanctuary as a place of peace where the Lord Jesus meets us.*

**C. Listening to God’s Voice in Scripture Speak to Us through Jesus:** *As Jesus meets us in our inner sanctuary, he lovingly shares God’s Gospel message of hope from the Scripture text we have just studied. Listening to God’s Gospel voice restores our trust and hope that Jesus’ death and resurrection freely offers us eternal Salvation. When Jesus speaks to us, our souls are nourished and refreshed.*

**STEP SIX SHARE THIS LAW & GOSPEL BIBLE STUDY WITH A FRIEND:**

*Forward this via email, give a printed copy, or post on social media*