

Scene 5: The wise men's palace

Bible

Based on Matthew 2:1–12

The scene is set as the wise men prepare to leave their homeland to go and find Jesus. The actual story is not told, but is based on the imagined thoughts of the men as they pack their bags.

Aim

To help the children to understand that God wanted all kinds of people to seek Jesus, and to explain that the wise men brought unexpected presents for the baby.

Setting the scene

The wise men came from the east, (this may have been Persia or Babylon). There is no biblical evidence that there were only three people; this is often assumed because three presents are mentioned. There is no mention of their being kings in the Bible, but they were obviously from a noble background as the Greek text talks about royal astrologers. They were welcomed into Herod's court, which was an obvious place to go as they believed that they were looking for the birth of a new king. Their presents had great meaning for Jesus. This part of the story shows that God sent Jesus not only for Jewish outsiders who lived in poverty, but also for those with power and status outside the Jewish faith.

Characters

Leader and some children dressed as wise men

Scenery

The gazebo is draped with dark cloth and rich fabrics to give the impression of an eastern tent-like palace. Think the Casbah meets Arabian nights! Indian saris are ideal and are readily available (see the internet for suppliers). Sparkly fabrics that can catch the light can be obtained cheaply from discount fabric shops. Net curtaining, drapes and remnants can all be used to good effect.

A flimsy curtain at the door can give an air of entering into a different world.

Lighting

Clip on spots positioned to catch the light of the fabric. Red bulbs can create a warm atmosphere. Christmas lights can give an exotic effect.

Props

A low table covered in an exotic cloth and containing: a gold box to represent the gift of gold, a glass perfume jar containing a small amount of perfume mixed with olive oil to represent the gift of frankincense, a small cloth, a screw-top jar containing some hand cream to represent the gift of myrrh (NB: frankincense and myrrh can be obtained from aromatherapy outlets, but be aware of allergies if these oils are used), some pot pourri to create exotic smells (a plug-in cinnamon spice air freshener will add to the atmosphere), a basket of exotic fruits, some eastern-looking jars, dried grasses, baskets and so on, and some boxes of costume jewellery. A coatstand holding cloaks, hats and drapes, an old-fashioned bag to pack presents in, small toys and clothes suitable for a baby. Any props which create a feeling of opulence and mystery can be used. The hats can be very flamboyant. Old hats from charity shops can be

dressed up with chiffon scarves, old jewellery, feathers and so on. Velvet curtains make excellent cloaks.

The Journey

The children are led from a dusty humble stable scene through another dark tunnel into the exotic world of the wise men's eastern palace. The contrast should be dramatic and give them a real 'wow' factor. There are baskets of toys, children's clothes and presents suitable for a baby on the floor. There is a coatstand with hats and cloaks. The leader asks the children where they think they might be. They are invited to sit, knowing that they are in the palace of the wise men. The men are astrologers who have been studying books and watching the stars. They have noticed a new star indicating that an important king has been born. They are preparing to go and find the new baby. The leader (or teacher) chooses a few of the children (boys and girls) to dress as the wise men in cloaks and hats. (It is often useful for a leader to dress up too, thus encouraging the children). Once the children are ready, the leader asks the group what kind of things the children would take if they were to visit a new baby. The children are encouraged to find presents such as toys, rattles and clothes and help to pack them in a bag. The leader then indicates the other gifts on the table. They discuss the fact that these are strange gifts for a new baby. The leader tells the children that gold, the most precious of metals is fit for a king. Frankincense is a sweet-smelling incense which was used when people worshipped God, reminding us that Jesus is God's Son. Myrrh is a fragrant spice used as a soothing ointment. (Traditionally this is thought to represent Jesus' death on the cross.) The gifts are given to the three wise men to complete the scene and the children are told that the men set out to see Jesus. The leader then asks the group if they think that is the end of the story. They are told that they are going 'back to the future' and travelling forward in time to the present day. Costumes are removed and the children move on, singing *Where are you going, wise men?* The helpers stay to tidy the scene for the next group.

Once again there is no set script for this room because it is interactive, so the leader needs to be aware of the aims of the scene and happy to encourage the children to participate. There should be enough toys and gifts so that each child will be able to join in if they want to. A sample script is included here, although depending on the reaction of the children it could be different every time.

Sample script: The wise men's palace

Leader: Where do you think we are? Who do you think lives here?

(Allow time for the children to answer and to look round at the surroundings.)

We don't know that there were three wise men—there could have been more—it's just that three presents are mentioned in the Bible story. We don't think that the wise men were necessarily kings, but they were important men who studied the stars. One day they saw a new star which they hadn't noticed before. Their books told them that it meant that a special baby king had been born so they decided to follow the star and go and find the baby.

Now if they were important men they probably wore fine clothes. Who would like to dress up as a wise man?

(Select two or three children (boys and girls) and help them to put the cloaks and hats on.)

Now if you were going to visit a new baby, what would you take?

(Allow the children to make suggestions then ask them to look for toys and gifts to put in a bag for the baby.)

These are all lovely presents to take for a new baby, but the Bible tells us the wise men took some other gifts, too. Can anyone remember what they were?

(Allow time for suggestions.)

The first gift was gold.

(Pick up the 'gold' from the table and give it to one of the wise men to hold.)

Gold was a present to show that the new baby was a very important child probably a king.

The second gift was frankincense.

(Pick up the frankincense from the table.)

Frankincense is a precious perfume which was used in the temple or holy place. It has a lovely smell and helps people to worship God. This shows us that the wise men thought Jesus was special and could be worshipped.

(Sprinkle a little of the perfumed oil on to a cloth and pass it round to allow the children to smell it. Give the container to the second wise man. Pick up the myrrh.)

Myrrh is an ointment used to soothe people when they are sore or hurting. It helps to heal wounds. In hot countries it is sometimes used when people die. It seems a strange present for a baby, doesn't it?

(Ask the children to imagine the feel of the soothing properties of the myrrh on their skin. Give the myrrh to the third wise man.)

Once the wise men had their gifts ready they set out to find Jesus. They travelled a long way over the desert following the star until they found him. And this is where our story ends... or does it? Do you remember that the storyteller told us that he would meet us again at the end? I wonder if where he is...