

DECEITS OF THE WORLD

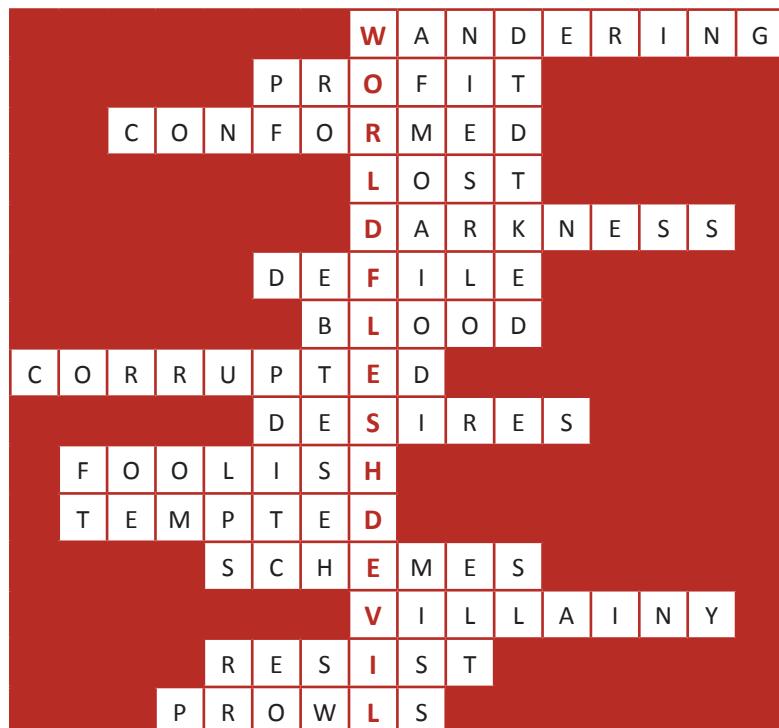
CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Copies of the downloadable “Litany” and “Prayers & Thanksgivings” booklets
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Pencils (for students to fill out the crossword)
- Copy of the leader’s notes - *note fifth page re ice breaker, you may want multiple copies*
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

ICE BREAKER: A WICKED CROSSWORD

As the teens arrive, provide copies of the crossword puzzle (page five of the leader’s notes), and have them see how far they can get in the allotted time. They will need Bibles (or devices with Bible search capability) to look up the references given in the clues. If time allows, take the answers up together, otherwise set the crossword to one side and provide the answer key (to right) at the end of the lesson. Note: The references use the ESV. Other translations will have different words and word orders, but may still be close enough to make good guesses. If you plan to use a different translation it’s suggested that you do a run through of the ice breaker ahead of time and add hints to the activity sheet as needed.

FOR SMALLER GROUPS, YOU MAY EITHER HAVE THE GROUPS WORK COOPERATIVELY ON A SINGLE COPY OF THE PUZZLE, OR WORK COMPETITIVELY AS INDIVIDUALS. FOR LARGER GROUPS, TRY DIVIDING THEM UP INTO TEAMS COMPETING TO ANSWER MORE THAN THE OTHER TEAMS BEFORE TIME’S UP.



THE LITANY: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson by saying together the Litany, leaving off the Grace (which can be said at the close of the lesson).

AT THIS POINT IN THE LESSON, ASK IF THE TEENS SUCCEEDED IN DOING LAST WEEK’S CHALLENGE, HOW IT WENT, AND WHETHER THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO SHARE.

DISCUSSION: INVISIBLE ENEMIES

As an introduction to the lesson ask the teens to discuss the following questions.

DEPENDING ON THE COMFORT LEVEL FOR SHARING IN YOUR GROUP, IT MAY BE EASIER TO HAVE THEM VOLUNTEER ANSWERS WITH ALL RESPONSES WRITTEN TOGETHER ON A BOARD.

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- Have you ever felt like there was an invisible force working against you? What happened? Did you ever figure out where the opposition was coming from?

A few things worth pointing out (if they don't otherwise arise during the discussion):

- *This is a good opportunity to share a story to get things going. Perhaps you offered a suggestion at work and kept hitting a wall, only to discover that a colleague was quietly working to ensure you did not succeed.*
- *We all encounter obstacles in life and they are not necessarily sinister in origin. However, we may also encounter obstacles that are in one way or another connected to these three enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil. If time permits, you might ask the teens whether they felt one or more of these three enemies were involved in the situation they described.*
- *If something of a serious and current nature arises, take a moment to stop and pray for that situation.*

THE LESSON: MATTHEW 2

The first part of the lesson (below) can be read aloud. Then the teens are asked to read the Bible text (either silently to themselves or aloud together), followed by some additional questions for discussion.

From all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil... Good Lord, deliver us.

Ever since the fall of humanity in Genesis 3, God's people have lived in hostile territory. If you've been a believer for any length of time, you've probably discovered that the Christian life is not easy. There are many forces at work in our world seeking to thwart God's purposes, and yet the outcome is already determined.

God's great plan of salvation is centred in the person and work of Jesus, sent to our world to be born, to live, to die, to rise again: to defeat sin and death. The prophets of the Old Testament foretold his coming. Those who studied these things knew the moment was at hand. We hear the story every year at Christmas: the explosion of angels singing, the happy bewilderment of the shepherds, the joy of simple men and women who'd been longing to see this day. And yet not everyone welcomed this moment with joy. The "spiritual forces of evil" were also tuned in to what was going on, and they were waging a war against God, his people, and his plan.

Those who lead a life of faith – then and now – do so in a Genesis 3 world: with the world, the flesh, and the devil conspiring to do what harm they can. And yet in spite of this, we have hope because we've read the last chapter of the book and we know who wins!

Refer to Matthew 2:1-21.

(THE TEXT IS PROVIDED ON THE BACK OF THE HANDOUTS AND IN THESE LEADERS' NOTES SO THAT EVERYONE CAN MARK IT UP AND MAKE NOTES ON IT IF DESIRED. ALTERNATIVELY, YOU CAN READ OUT OF A BIBLE).

Read through the text. Then ask the teens to respond to what they've just read. Here are some questions to help guide the discussion.

- What evidence do we find in this passage of hostility to God's plan?
(If your teens aren't getting beyond Herod, ask them to chart out all the people who knew that a special birth was happening, along with what they did about it).
- What evidence do we find in this passage of God's plan prevailing?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *Herod is the obvious indication that there is hostility to God's plan; a hostility that is deranged in its intensity. He uses deceit (v8) and a massacre of innocent infants in order to try to destroy Jesus (v16). But notice that the news of the Messiah's birth did not bring joy to all Jerusalem. Instead the passage tells us that they are "troubled" – with Herod (v3). They would rather cling to the status quo with a ruler of immense cruelty and immorality. This is a*

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crowd of bystanders; quietly hoping God's plans will be thwarted! The priests fall into the same category. They aid Herod in his search, and yet they demonstrate no interest seeking out Jesus for themselves (v4-5)!

- *This passage is filled with divine intervention. The wise men were Gentiles – outside of the covenant – and it was through pagan arts that they came to discover Jesus (v2). This is not an endorsement of those methods, but evidence of God's grace and his ability to use surprising means to bring people to himself. Already, God's saving plan is taking effect! On three occasions in this passage, God uses dreams to warn people of danger. The wise men are alerted not to return to Herod, and Joseph is alerted to the need to remove his family to Egypt (v12,13), then to return in safety (v19). God's plan of salvation will not be thwarted by Herod's bloodlust. Instead, prophecies will be fulfilled because of movements necessitated by Herod's actions (v15).*
- *Note: The slaughter of the innocent babies of Bethlehem is a disturbing narrative. It's important to emphasize that this, like many other horrors and tragedies that occur in our world, are the direct consequence of sin, rather than an act of God. The collect for the feast of Holy Innocents says God "madest infants to glorify thee by their deaths", but this does not imply that God is the author of evil actions. As Romans 8:28 reminds us, God is able to work in all things to bring about good. ("And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose".)*

DURING EACH LESSON, IF THE TEENS RAISE THEOLOGICAL OR BIBLICAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU DON'T FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT ANSWERING, SAY SO, BUT LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU'LL FIND THE ANSWER AND RESPOND AT THE NEXT MEETING.

PREVIEW: AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Take a brief moment to look at the at-home challenge together.

THE WEEKLY "AT-HOME CHALLENGE" IS TYPICALLY A SIMPLE ASSIGNMENT TO SPEND SOME QUIET TIME IN PRIVATE PRAYER. ENCOURAGE THE TEENS TO GET NOTEBOOKS THAT CAN BE USED AS PRAYER JOURNALS. ASSURE THEM THAT THEY WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO SHOW THEIR JOURNAL OR THEIR PRIVATE PRAYERS TO ANYONE.

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE "FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES", WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.))

Psalm 119:11 says, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you". The At-Home Challenge during this unit is to commit a short passage of scripture to memory each week. If the suggested passage is too long, try picking out one verse or phrase that speaks to you particularly and commit it to memory. You will be amazed at how the words of scripture, stored in the heart, will return to you in the moments when you most need them.

EPHESIANS 6:10-13: ¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect.

O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles: Mercifully grant, that we, who know thee now by faith, may be led onward through this earthly life, until we see the vision of thy heavenly glory; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ, who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth, one God, world without end. Amen. (THE COLLECT FOR THE EPIPHANY, P. 117)

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CLOSING PRAYERS

Close with any prayers that might be appropriate in the context of the discussion of the day.

AT THE END OF EACH LESSON, IF YOU FIND THAT YOU STILL HAVE LOTS OF TIME REMAINING, YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE SOME TIME TO EXPLORE THE “PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS” SECTION IN THE BCP (PAGES 39-62, OR YOU CAN USE THE DOWNLOADABLE BOOKLET). AS YOUR GROUP MEMBERS COME ACROSS PRAYERS THAT THEY FIND RELEVANT, PAUSE AND PRAY THEM TOGETHER. IF YOU’RE PRESSED FOR TIME, YOU MIGHT CLOSE WITH THE THEMED PRAYER FROM THE AT-HOME CHALLENGE.

Then finish with the “Grace”, printed at the end of the Litany booklet.

MATTHEW 2: TWO KINGDOMS COLLIDE

¹Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ²saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

⁷Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” ⁹After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

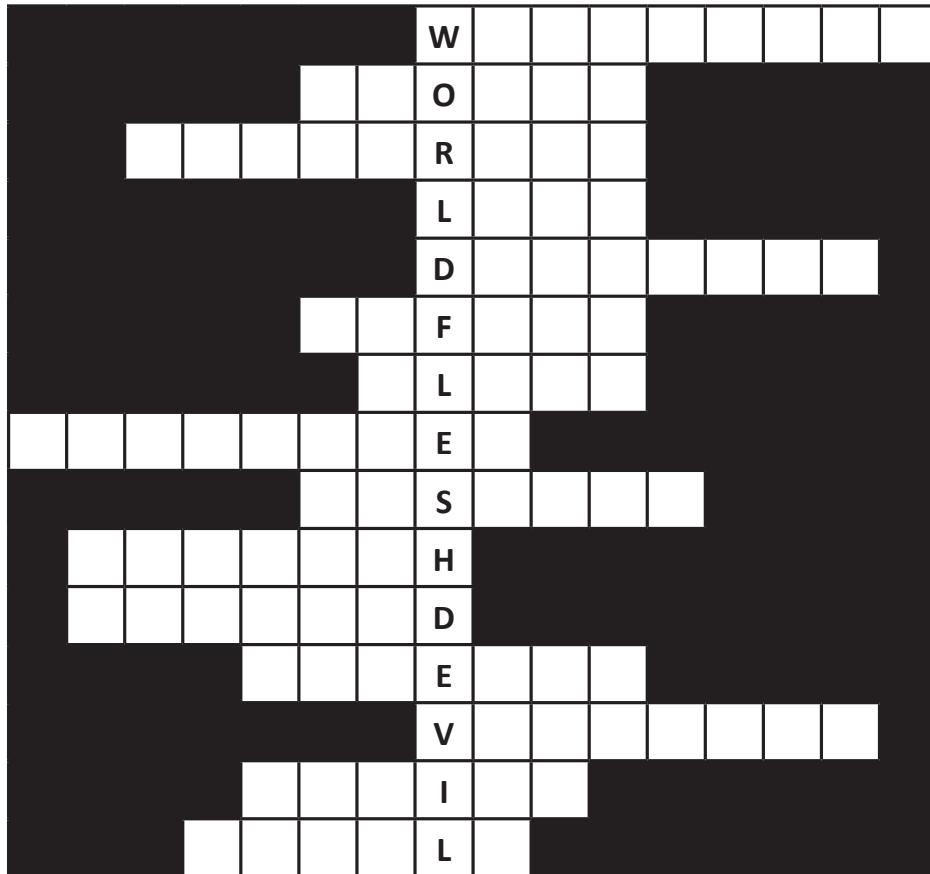
¹³Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

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

¹⁹But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” ²¹And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

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ICE BREAKER: A WICKED CROSSWORD



CLUES

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|--------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| W. Hebrews 11:38; 8th word | F. Jude 1:8; 12th word | D. Matthew 4:1; 14th word |
| O. Luke 9:25; 5th word | L. Hebrews 9:13; 4th word | E. Ephesians 6:11; 17th word |
| R. Romans 12:2; 4th word | E. Genesis 6:12; 15th word | V. Acts 13:10; 18th word |
| L. Revelation 18:14; 20th word | S. 1 John 2:16; 9th word | I. James 4:7; 6th word |
| D. John 12:46; 19th word | H. Galatians 3:3; 4th word | L. 1 Peter 5:8; 10th word |