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The Other Wiseman: A Festival of Lessons and Carols

A Short Drama Based on the Story by Henry Van Dyke

by

Gwen Adams

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The Other Wiseman
A Festival of Lessons and Carols

Based on the story by Henry Van Dyke

by

Gwen Adams

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The Other Wiseman: A Festival of Lessons and Carols

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BACKGROUND

In 2003, I worked as Director of Youth Formation at St. Boniface Catholic Church, Lafayette, IN where Fr. Timothy Alkire had grown up, been assigned in 1991, and served as pastor since 1994. Chapter 10 of my book *By an Unexpected Way: Stories of the New Evangelization* (Augustine Institute Press, 2019) tells his story and the story of the parish which enjoyed his fatherly leadership between 1994 and 2020.

In my first years as Director of Youth Formation, Fr. Alkire supported me in launching a group for young people called the Catholic Actors Guild. We produced a number of shows including *Hickscorner*, Calderon's *Life Is a Dream*, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We performed at the parish, toured other parishes, and performed in the streets of Lafayette. In 2003, I hit a roadblock about choosing a play suitable for the group. For one thing, we were generating more interest than anticipated. *Hickscorner*, for example, had six parts, too many for the group I directed in 2001. By 2003, there were almost thirty students, from students in fourth grade all the way to undergraduates, all interested in doing a play. I needed something special.

But I could not think of anything which seemed quite right. I racked my brain as we finished up our spring 2003 production. We were fast approaching the time when I would need to announce the next play—if we were doing a next play.

I came to the last weeks before I had to make a decision. I remember getting ready for bed one night. The room was papered with a plaid wallpaper which I fancied at the time and on the opposite wall hung two huge black-and-white Victorian-style portraits of Jesus and Mary which had once belonged to a woman from the parish. I looked at those portraits and said to God, “If you want this guild to continue, and you want us to do a play, you *have* to give me an idea!”

And I went to sleep.

In the morning, I had the idea for this adaptation of *The Other Wiseman*. I already knew Van Dyke's beautiful story. I was also familiar with *The Second Shepherd's Play*, Teresa of Avila's poetry, and the Coventry cycle, so Gill's name, the dialogue between Artaban and Gill in Scene 8, and the heart of Scene 5 slipped naturally into place. I love Commedia dell'Arte and that influence is felt here. The robbers came from a hundred favorite stories. I saw how Van Dyke's story could be turned into something like a musical, something like a pantomime, something like lessons and carols, able to contract or expand with cast size, able to incorporate actors of all ages, and to showcase talents of a particular group. It could be an outstanding show whether one had a lavish budget or almost no money at all.

I wrote the adaptation and then produced the play at St. Boniface Church on December 17, 2003 with a cast and crew of thirty-six. I produced it again the following year on December 19 with a cast and crew of forty-three. For both years, music was provided by the Schola Cantorum of St. Boniface, under the directorship of Linda Schafer with the help of organist Scott Kemmer and other musicians. I would like to thank them for their dedication and for their contribution to the parish liturgical life for decades which so greatly shaped the beauty and impact of this play.

I would also like to thank my sisters, Madeline Rappley, who created the robber images, and Anna Wiebold, who painted the night scene of Artaban and Gill which serves as the background image for the cover of the printed version of this play.

The Other Wiseman has one act and nine scenes including the prologue. By casting actors in multiple roles, it is possible to produce the show with a minimum cast of twelve. The cast can also be expanded to incorporate forty or more actors. The play is technically a full-length play with a variable running time, depending on whether the production incorporates all or just some of the musical suggestions. Without music, the play's running time is 45–55 minutes. With music, the running time is 110–120 minutes, depending on the number and length of individual music selections. There is space for an optional intermission after Scene 3. Whether writing a full-length multiple-act play or a shorter “one-act” play, I always provide for an optional intermission, dividing all plays, even “one-act” plays, into two rough halves. As a director, I find the intermission indispensable. As the period where a theater group can most hope to sell refreshments or swag, intermissions can be key for recouping production expenses. Intermissions also accommodate the need for a quick break, especially with youth or family audiences. And personally, I always want an intermission so I can check in with and encourage the cast and crew before going on to the second part of the play and the big finale.

The play can be performed during Advent, the Christmas season, Lent, the Easter season, and Ordinary Time (part of the Catholic liturgical year; most of this time falls between the months of June and November.) The *Stage Guide* includes music suggestions for producing this play either in the Advent/Christmas season or in the seasons of Lent, Easter, or Ordinary Time.

This play offers much scope for creativity. Scenes can be staged amid the audience, and the audience can be enlisted to participate in the singing. Juggling, tumbling, and dance can be incorporated. Recorded music may be used (with permission), but the play also lends itself to live performance by one or more choirs or music ensembles, and indeed offers the opportunity for a musical feast.

Henry Van Dyke wrote *The Other Wiseman* in 1895. His story remains a classic, and has been reprinted, illustrated, animated, and adapted for film. This original adaptation of the public-domain text is faithful while at the same time novel and arresting. This is an excellent play for Christian churches and religious education programs, as well as Christian professional/community theater, touring groups, college/university, high-school, and middle-school drama groups to be played before youth, middle-school, high-school, college/university, family, and general audiences.

SYNOPSIS

Balthazar, Caspar, Melchior, and Artaban are four magi expecting the birth of a great king. They have made a plan. If a new star appears, Artaban will make his way to Babylon to join the others on a journey to find the king. Meanwhile, Artaban sells all he has to purchase a sapphire, ruby, and pearl to give the new king. When the new star appears, Artaban sets out with his young servant Gill. When unforeseen obstacles arise, Artaban fails to catch up with the other magi or to find the king. Artaban continues his search for many years, dreaming strange dreams, meeting a troupe of traveling actors, and having many adventures. When Artaban is an old man, he comes one day to Jerusalem where he learns about a man sentenced to be crucified. Realizing that this man may indeed be the king, Artaban tries desperately to find him. He then receives one last dream, after which the dreams become reality.

CHARACTERS, TIME, PLACE, RUNNING TIME

Characters: (17 m; 9 w; 9 m/w; extras; 1–3 infants or children). With doubling/tripling: (12 overall: 6 m; 5 w; 1 infant or child). See the *Stage Guide*, Section 1 for doubling/tripling (available from Bardstreet.com).

In Order of Appearance:

NARRATOR (m/w): Any age, this character relates a story which came during a dark night.

ARTABAN (m): 40–50 years, the Other Wiseman.

ABGARUS (m): 65–80 years, the head of the magi in Ecbatana and ARTABAN's mentor.

TIGRANES (m): 40–50 years, a cynical wiseman.

RHODASPES (m): 30–40 years, a newly married wiseman and guardian of the royal treasury.

VIRGIN MARY (w): 14 years, the mother of JESUS.

ANGEL GABRIEL (m/w): Any age, an angel sent to the VIRGIN MARY.

GILL (m): 11–12 years, the servant who accompanies ARTABAN.

ROBBERS (m/w): Any age.

ROBBER 1 (m/w): 20–30 years, a ROBBER with a soft heart.

ROBBER 2 (m/w): 20–30 years, a conniving and saucy rogue.

ROBBER 3 (m/w): 20–30 years, interested in GILL's coat.

DYSMAS (m): 7–10 years, a ROBBER, he is healed by Jesus as a child and later crucified beside Jesus.

DYSMAS' MOTHER (w): 18–25 years, a ROBBER.

ELIZABETH (w): 60–70 years, cousin of the VIRGIN MARY.

SICK MAN (m): 60–70 years. By helping him, ARTABAN is too late to join the three wisemen.

RUTH (w): 30–40 years, innkeeper's wife, in charge of the Bethlehem inn where JOSEPH and MARY stay.

JEANETTE (w): 10–15 years, RUTH's daughter.

ISABELLA (w): 10–15 years, RUTH's daughter.

SHEPHERDS (m/w): Any age.

ANGEL OF THE LORD (m/w): Any age, an angel who tells the SHEPHERDS about the birth of the CHILD JESUS.

BALTHAZAR (m): 40–50 years, one of the three wisemen who go to seek the king.

CASPAR (m): 40–50 years, one of the three wisemen who go to seek the king.

MELCHIOR (m): 40–50 years, one of the three wisemen who go to seek the king.

CHILD JESUS (m): Infant.

JOSEPH (m): 20–30 years, the foster father of JESUS.

ANGELS (m/w): Any age.

HEROD (m): 65–75 years, King of Judea.

WOMEN OF BETHLEHEM (w): 20–40 years.

RACHEL (w): 30–40 years, a kind mother whom ARTABAN meets in Bethlehem.

ISAAC (m): 1–2 years, RACHEL's son.

ROMAN SOLDIER (m): 25–35 years, he accepts a bribe from ARTABAN to withdraw from Bethlehem.

OTHER ROMAN SOLDIERS (m): 25–35 years.

ROBBER BABY (m): 0–2 years old. He plays the CHILD JESUS during the ROBBER performance of the “Miracle of Dysmas.”

RABBI (m): 60–70 years, he counsels ARTABAN in Alexandria, Egypt.

HUNGRY PERSON (m/w): Any age. ARTABAN helps this person.

SICK PERSON (m/w): Any age. ARTABAN helps this person.

WOMEN OF JERUSALEM (w): 20–40 years.

ESTHER (w): 20–40 years, she explains to ARTABAN what is happening on the Way of the Cross.

JESUS (m): 33 years, as a grown man.

MERCHANT (m/w): 40–50 years, a merchant who tries to sell MIRIAM into slavery to recoup money he loaned to her deceased father.

MIRIAM (w): 10–15 years, a girl about to be sold into slavery.

Time: The Prologue is set in an indeterminate time. Scenes 1–6 are set around 4 BC–0 AD. Scene 7 spans the years between 0 AD and 33 AD. Scene 8 is set around 33 AD.

Place: Nowhere on earth, “the Hall of Dreams” and various locations in the Middle East: A Persian palace, an inn in Babylon, a temple in Babylon, Bethlehem, Egypt, Jerusalem, and places on route.

Running Time: (without music) 45–55 minutes; (with music) 110–120 minutes. An intermission can be held between Scene 3 and 4.

THE PLAY

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ACT I

Prologue: Nowhere on Earth, “The Hall of Dreams” or a Persian Palace

(Lights down. Musical Selection #1 begins. See the Stage Guide, Section 5 for music suggestions here and elsewhere in the play. When the music ends, a spotlight reveals the NARRATOR standing CS with her back to the audience. She turns and begins.)

NARRATOR

The year had been full of sickness and sorrow.
Every day brought trouble. Every night was tormented with pain.
They are long nights; they are very heavy nights.
In one such night, this story came to me.
You know the story of the Three Wisemen.
They came from afar with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
But do you know of the Other Wiseman?
He saw the star in its rising.
But he did not arrive with his brothers in the presence of the Christ Child.
Of the great desire of this fourth pilgrim;
of the long way of his seeking,
and the strange way of his finding the one whom he sought—
I would tell the tale as I have heard it
in the Hall of Dreams,
in the palace of the Heart of Man.

(Lights up. Musical Selection #2 begins. As the music begins, the NARRATOR bows and exits SR.)

Scene 1: A Persian Palace

(From various entrances, ARTABAN, ABGARUS, TIGRANES, RHODASPES, and extra WISEMEN enter and process grandly to the stage. Much fanfare. ARTABAN stands CS with ABGARUS at his right hand, SR, and RHODASPES at his left hand, SL. RHODASPES is intimidated by TIGRANES. TIGRANES stands DSL. Music fades.)

ARTABAN

Brother magi, welcome! Abgarus, my father . . .

ABGARUS

Artaban, we are eager to hear your news.

TIGRANES

I, frankly, have some reservations. Abgarus and Rhodaspes already know my thoughts. Your message spoke of light and truth?

ARTABAN

Tigranes, we disagree about the task of the magi. I still say: if the waiting be endless, it is no wisdom to look and wait.

TIGRANES

Our wisdom is this: to know that the darkness is equal to the light. Their conflict shall never end. We may keep *others* looking . . . but that, Artaban, is the secret of power.

RHODASPES

(hesitating, as if he wants to tack on the words “Uh, right?” to the end of his sentence.)

We will see the brightness of a great light?

ABGARUS

(quoting)

“The Victorious One shall arise. Around him shall shine a mighty brightness. He shall make life everlasting and immortal. And the dead shall rise again.”

TIGRANES

This prophecy is obscure . . . we may never understand it.

ARTABAN

(quoting)

“There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a scepter shall arise out of Israel.”

TIGRANES

Judah was a captive by the waters of Babylon, and the sons of Jacob were slaves to our kings. Where are they now? Scattered like lost sheep. From them neither star nor scepter shall arise.

ARTABAN

The great king Cyrus honored the prophet Daniel. Recall his words—

TIGRANES

Abgarus, you are head magus: tell him! None of the magi regard these prophecies as authentic.

ARTABAN

Tigranes, I am not alone. In Babylon, there are magi who also agree that—

TIGRANES

Babylon has no credible magi. Might I ask the names of your colleagues?

ARTABAN

You respect Melchior. There is also Balthazar and Caspar.

(*TIGRANES gestures in disgust.*)

RHODASPES

Balthazar has a good reputation?

(TIGRANES makes a gesture of annoyance at RHODASPES.)

ABGARUS

I agree with Rhodaspes. In many points, we differ with Babylon, but not in fundamentals. Artaban, continue.

ARTABAN

According to Daniel: “From the going forth of the commandment to restore Jerusalem, unto the Anointed One, the king, the time shall be seven and three-score and two weeks.” We have calculated the time. The birth of that king falls in this year.

TIGRANES

Those are mystical numbers! Who can interpret them?

ABGARUS

Artaban, have you consulted the sky?

ARTABAN

(gesturing as if to say, “We have!”)

There is a conjunction of the two greatest planets! In the sign of the Hebrews! We also saw a new star. It shone for one night and then vanished.

(There is an uncomfortable stir during ARTABAN’s following speech when he says the magi will wait for “us” and begins to use the word “we.”)

ARTABAN (cont.)

Our brothers are watching in Babylon, and I am watching here. If the star shines again, our brothers will gather provisions. They will wait for us twelve days. Then we can start for Jerusalem. Together we will seek the promised one, the king of Israel.

RHODASPES

This trip will be expensive! Jerusalem is hundreds of miles away!

TIGRANES

It is more than a thousand! This journey will take you into the Roman Empire.

RHODASPES

(dismayed)

My wife would never—

ABGARUS

Take time to reflect. You may find more light.

ARTABAN

I have already sold all I have to make this journey. See the gifts I have bought for the king! A fine sapphire, a finer ruby, and greatest of all, this pearl.

(ARTABAN draws out the jewels and holds them up. A little hesitantly, ABGARUS comes over and looks. He is more worried about ARTABAN selling all his has. TIGRANES is irritated and does not look. RHODASPES, with a nervous glance at TIGRANES, can't help himself and has to come over and gawk at the jewels.)

ARTABAN (cont.)

Come with me.

(A beat.)

TIGRANES

No king shall arise from Israel and no end shall ever come to the war between light and darkness.

(TIGRANES exits SL. A few extra WISEMEN exit with him.)

RHODASPES

Artaban, you wouldn't suggest I abandon my duties? The royal treasury needs me . . . But you . . .?

(RHODASPES exits SL with any remaining WISEMEN.)

ABGARUS

My son, I am too old. But my heart will accompany your pilgrimage day and night. I have a young servant, intelligent and loyal. His name is Gill. He will go with you to aid your quest.

ARTABAN

I would have your blessing.

ABGARUS

(blessing ARTABAN)

May your fervor last. Fidelity for a short time is easy. For years . . . that is harder.

(ABGARUS exits SL. ARTABAN looks slowly about him and then at his jewels. He walks DS and searches the skies. ARTABAN sits down to think, and nods off to sleep. Lights go down slowly. Musical Selection #3 begins and continues during ARTABAN's dream.)

Artaban's First Dream: The Annunciation

(All is acted in complete silence. A spotlight reveals the raised platform US where the VIRGIN MARY is sleeping. The ANGEL GABRIEL enters SR. The ANGEL GABRIEL carries a sword in his right hand and a lily in his left. He wakes the VIRGIN MARY. Then the ANGEL GABRIEL bows low and presents the lily. The ANGEL GABRIEL and the VIRGIN MARY pantomime a conversation, timing the action of the scene according to the music. Below are the words that make up the content of their silent conversation. Actors need not memorize or pantomime the dialogue verbatim.)

ANGEL GABRIEL

Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

(The VIRGIN MARY registers awe.)

ANGEL GABRIEL (cont.)

Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the most High; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father; and he shall reign in the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there shall be no end.

VIRGIN MARY

How shall this be done, because I know not man?

ANGEL GABRIEL

The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore, also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren: Because no word shall be impossible with God.

(The VIRGIN MARY bows her head and then looks up. The ANGEL GABRIEL trembles.)

VIRGIN MARY

Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word.ⁱ

(As the music ends, the VIRGIN MARY puts a hand to her womb. The ANGEL GABRIEL manifests great joy. He raises the VIRGIN MARY, lays his sword at her feet, and prostrates himself before the child in her womb. The ANGEL GABRIEL then raises his head, and still kneeling, presents the hilt of his sword to the VIRGIN MARY. The VIRGIN MARY knights the ANGEL GABRIEL. The spotlight fades as the music ends. Lights down. Exit all.)

End of Scene 1

Scene 2: On Route to the Temple in Babylon

(Lights up. ARTABAN and GILL are seen CS, walking in great haste. GILL lags and stops suddenly, bending over and showing signs of great fatigue. Striding ahead, ARTABAN stops, realizing that GILL is not following. ARTABAN turns, torn between the need for haste and worry about GILL's fatigue.)

GILL

Master, can we stop now?

(ARTABAN feels for money bag and jewels.)

ARTABAN

We need to keep going a few more hours.

GILL

Can we slow down?

ARTABAN

(gesturing in the negative)

I wanted to reach Babylon yesterday. Besides, Gill, thieves are plentiful out here. I would rather reach a town.

GILL

Wish our horses could have kept going.

(ARTABAN gestures as if to say, "They would have gone lame. Now, come on!")

GILL (cont.)

Abgarus said you were riding the whole way. I thought magi could tell the future!

ARTABAN

If we reach a town, I shall ask again for horses. For now, we walk.

GILL

I can't walk a hundred miles—

ARTABAN

I cannot be late. I would have to get new supplies. It would waste so much time. I need my brothers. I cannot find the king alone.

GILL

Won't the magi wait?

ARTABAN

Gill, they have already waited ten days.

GILL

Master, we'll never get there in time. Even if we walk twice as fast.

(A beat while ARTABAN comes to a decision.)

ARTABAN

I shall send you back to your old master.

(GILL rouses himself suddenly.)

GILL

I can keep going!

ARTABAN

This is too hard for you. Jerusalem is even farther.

GILL

There's nothing back there for me. . . . Abgarus is a good master but . . . don't send me back.

(ARTABAN thinks a while. Finally, he takes out his money bag and counts out some money.)

ARTABAN

Young man, I am planning a difficult journey. I need a sturdy young servant to accompany me. Any recommendations? I can cover room and board and a small stipend.

GILL

I'm not doing anything!

ARTABAN

How are your feet? Can you march long miles?

GILL

(pluckily)

If that's what it takes!

ARTABAN

When can you start?

GILL

Immediately!

ARTABAN

You're hired.

(They shake hands vigorously. ARTABAN gives GILL the money. GILL puts the money in his coat pocket.)

ARTABAN (cont.)

Now, Gill, we can walk till we reach a town. Or take a few hours to sleep and start earlier tomorrow.

GILL

(surprised and hopeful)

Stop now?

(remembering he wants to be responsible)

It's your call. If we need to march . . .

ARTABAN

We can stop.

(ARTABAN starts and looks in the distance. He has seen the ROBBERS.)

GILL

Thieves? Should we hide?

ARTABAN

(gesturing in the negative)

They have already seen us. . . . Strange—I do believe it is a troupe of traveling actors!

(ARTABAN and GILL wait as the ROBBERS enter from all entrances, surrounding ARTABAN and GILL and singing Musical Selection #4. They dance, juggle, tumble, beg money, etc. They manage to separate ARTABAN and GILL and to reel GILL into their dance. GILL is somewhat enchanted by their music and forgets to keep up his guard. ARTABAN attempts to get close and protect GILL but fails. ARTABAN keeps a tight hold of his own possessions. During the dance, a few ROBBERS manage to divest GILL of his coat and make off with it. The ROBBERS exit in all directions, still singing. GILL runs DS to watch after the ROBBERS. ARTABAN takes out his money pouch to check. ARTABAN also takes out his jewels to check on those. GILL suddenly realizes his loss. ARTABAN joins GILL.)

ARTABAN

Those robbers took your coat! And the money?

GILL

(nodding miserably)

They didn't get yours?

ARTABAN

(gesturing in the negative)

More importantly, they did not take my gifts for the king.

GILL

(gazing at the jewels, with perfect self-assurance)

I would have bought an emerald.

(ARTABAN is amused and surprised, as if he thinks, "And how did this child become a judge of precious stones?" ARTABAN pockets the jewels. Then he gives GILL some more money.)

ARTABAN

First, you will need a coat! You go to sleep. I shall keep the first watch.

(ARTABAN lends his own coat or cloak to GILL for the night. GILL lies down CS. ARTABAN walks DS, sits down and nods off to sleep. Lights go down slowly.)

Artaban's Second Dream: The Visitation

(A spotlight illuminates TIGRANES as he enters SR and approaches ARTABAN.)

ARTABAN

Tigranes! You came after all.

TIGRANES

You are having another dream.

ARTABAN

What does it mean?

TIGRANES

Does a dream need to have meaning? Give up this quest!

ARTABAN

Why do you not want to find the king? He is light and truth.

TIGRANES

What is truth?

(TIGRANES exits SR. Musical Selection #5 begins and continues during ARTABAN's dream. The rest is acted in complete silence. A spotlight reveals the raised platform US where ELIZABETH is working. The VIRGIN MARY enters SL. ELIZABETH turns and places a hand on her own womb as her child leaps for joy. ELIZABETH and the VIRGIN MARY embrace. Then they pantomime a conversation, timing the action of the scene according to the music. Below are the words that make up the content of their silent conversation. Actors need not memorize or pantomime the dialogue verbatim.)

ELIZABETH

Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded

in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord.

VIRGIN MARY

My soul doth magnify the Lord. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. Because he hath regarded the humility of his handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because he that is mighty, hath done great things to me; and holy is his name. And his mercy is from generation unto generations, to them that fear him. He hath shewed might in his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath received Israel his servant, being mindful of his mercy: As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.ⁱⁱ

(The spotlight fades as the music ends. Lights down. Exit all.)

End of Scene 2

Scene 3: On Route to the Temple in Babylon; Later, the Temple in Babylon

(Lights up. The SICK MAN lies SL. ARTABAN and GILL enter SR, hurrying CS. ARTABAN stops to consult a map or directions.)

GILL

I hope we're in time.

ARTABAN

I am not worried. I have had good dreams these past few nights. We may be early!

GILL

What will you do if we're late?

ARTABAN

Hire steeds and provisions as quickly as I can.

GILL

I'm slowing you down.

(Startled, ARTABAN glances over, smiles, and makes a gesture to set GILL's mind at rest.)

ARTABAN

I also need to rest. Let's not fear things which haven't come to pass.

GILL

(pointing towards the SICK MAN)

Master, what's that? Do you see?

ARTABAN

I think it is a man.

(ARTABAN and GILL approach and see the SICK MAN, robbed, wounded, and lying on the ground. ARTABAN kneels down and takes the SICK MAN's pulse.)

GILL

Is he dead?

ARTABAN

(rising)

This man is not dead, but he needs care immediately.

GILL

We have only till sundown to get to Babylon.

ARTABAN

(turning and pacing a few steps)

O God, you alone are wise. Direct me in the holy path. . . .

(to GILL)

Perhaps my brothers will wait an extra day.

(Musical Selection #6 begins. ARTABAN stands irresolutely, then quickly turns and kneels by the SICK MAN to tend him. Music continues as ARTABAN tends the SICK MAN, then picks him up or helps him stand. They slowly exit SR. They re-enter SR to signify the passage of time and that they have reached Babylon. ARTABAN takes his money bag out, counts some money, and steps offstage SR as if negotiating with the innkeeper. As the music ends, ARTABAN re-enters SR, putting his money bag away and rejoining GILL and the SICK MAN.)

ARTABAN

I spoke to the innkeeper. Do not worry about the cost. You can stay in Babylon until you are well.

SICK MAN

Now may the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob bless you! I can give you nothing in return—

ARTABAN

There is no need. I must go. I have friends waiting for me.

SICK MAN

But who are you? You stayed with me all night and all day. You brought me back again from the depths of the earth.

ARTABAN

I am called Artaban, of the magi. I go to Jerusalem. I seek one who shall be born King of the Jews.

SICK MAN

The Messiah! . . . I can tell you where to look. Not in Jerusalem. Our prophets foretold the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem of Judah. May the Lord guide you, because you had pity on the sick.

(ARTABAN and GILL part from the SICK MAN, who gazes after them before he exits SR. As they hurry SL, GILL speaks.)

GILL

You spent all the money!

ARTABAN

The poor man was sick! Hurry!

(ARTABAN and GILL exit SL at a run. Lights go down briefly and then back up to signify the passage of time. ARTABAN and GILL enter SL. They walk CS as if hurrying to the temple in Babylon. ARTABAN looks about with mounting disappointment.)

ARTABAN

They left.

(GILL spies a letter and snatches it up, bringing it to ARTABAN. GILL cannot read.)

GILL

Look, a letter! Is it from the magi?

(ARTABAN examines the address, opens the letter, and begins to read.)

ARTABAN

“We waited the full time and then past midnight—”

GILL

When was that?

ARTABAN

(turning over the letter)

This is dated yesterday.

(reading)

“We came to the decision that you must have changed your purpose—”

(ARTABAN makes a gesture of dismay.)

GILL

I’m sorry!

ARTABAN

It is not your fault.

GILL

Is there more?

ARTABAN

(reading)

“Per your directions, we have taken the food and the steeds. We left the other supplies and the balance of twenty drachmas at”—

(to GILL)

There’s an address.

(reading)

“If we are mistaken, we would rejoice in your company. We head to Jerusalem. Follow us across the desert.”

GILL

Twenty drachmas? . . . That won’t buy a horse.

ARTABAN

I shall have to sell a jewel . . . the sapphire . . . and get what we need.

GILL

When can we leave?

ARTABAN

I must find a jeweler. Even I do not get a fair price . . .

GILL

Will we go to Jerusalem? Or Bethlehem? Like the old man said?

ARTABAN

(uncertain)

I would like to overtake my brothers. . . . I stopped to show mercy. God the merciful knows whether I shall find the king.

(They appear to make camp. GILL sadly sits down CS and falls asleep. ARTABAN walks DS. He looks up at the sky, kneels down to pray, and nods off to sleep. Lights go down slowly.)

Artaban’s Third Dream: The Nativity

(A spotlight illuminates TIGRANES as he enters SR and approaches ARTABAN.)

TIGRANES

Already you want to sell a jewel?

(mimicking ARTABAN)

“I have sold all I have to buy gifts for the king!”

(ARTABAN is silent.)

TIGRANES (cont.)

You have wasted your money and time on trash. A slave and an old beggar! So much for your fidelity.

ARTABAN

I shall save the best jewels. The ruby! And the pearl!

TIGRANES

You will throw them away by the end. You will have nothing to give your king and nothing to live on. You will have to give up. Unless—

(ARTABAN looks up.)

TIGRANES (cont.)

What will you give me if I deliver him up to you?

(Afraid, ARTABAN begins to pray.)

ARTABAN

O God, you know what is in the darkness. And the light is with you.

(TIGRANES exits SR. Lights down. RUTH enters SR, just enough to be heard distinctly.)

RUTH

Jeanette, go wake your father! Isabella, get the neighbors! The two we put in the stable—everybody needs to see this! And girls! Bring some lights!

(The rest is acted in complete silence. Productions should feel free to cut one or two musical selections to suit the timing of the play, as well as to cut the appearance of the ANGEL OF THE LORD to the SHEPHERDS if working with a smaller cast using doubling/tripling. Musical Selections #7–9 begin and continue during ARTABAN's dream. JEANETTE and ISABELLA enter SR, joining RUTH with candles. RUTH, JEANETTE, and ISABELLA carry candles through the audience, helping audience members to light their own candles, or encouraging them to pretend to light their candles from the “wick” of battery-powered candles.)

When candles are all lit, Musical Selection #8 begins. RUTH, JEANETTE, and ISABELLA exit nearest exit. A spotlight reveals the raised platform US, where a group of SHEPHERDS are keeping watch. The ANGEL OF THE LORD enters SL and appears to the SHEPHERDS to announce the birth of a savior. The SHEPHERDS are filled with fear and joy. The ANGEL OF THE LORD exits SL. The SHEPHERDS appear to consult with one another. The SHEPHERDS exit SR in great joy and haste, making their way behind the audience. The spotlight fades. The ANGEL OF THE LORD and any supporting ANGELS join the SHEPHERDS behind the audience.

A spotlight reveals the raised platform US where BALTHAZAR, CASPAR, and MELCHIOR are traveling from SR to SL. BALTHAZAR, CASPAR, and MELCHIOR exit SL and join SHEPHERDS, the ANGEL OF THE LORD, and other ANGELS behind the audience. The spotlight fades as Musical Selection #8 ends.

Musical Selection #9 begins. A few lights go up to reveal the raised platform US and also DS where ARTABAN is sleeping. RUTH, JEANETTE, ISABELLA, JOSEPH, and the VIRGIN MARY holding the CHILD JESUS enter SR. The CHILD JESUS wears vestments. They proceed to the raised platform.

A few more lights illuminate the center aisle. The SHEPHERDS, ANGELS, and BALTHAZAR, CASPAR, and MELCHIOR begin to process down the center aisle from behind the audience toward the stage and the CHILD JESUS. Their advance is timed according to the music.

First, the SHEPHERDS process. As they come, ARTABAN awakens and sees them. As the SHEPHERDS pass, ARTABAN reaches out to touch and speak to them, but it is like a dream and they do not respond. The SHEPHERDS pass ARTABAN and GILL, proceeding US where they arrange themselves USR near the CHILD JESUS and the central figures already present on the raised platform.

Second, the ANGEL OF THE LORD and ANGELS process. ARTABAN also tries and fails to interact with them. The ANGELS proceed US where they arrange themselves USL near the CHILD JESUS and the central figures already present on the raised platform.

Lastly, BALTHAZAR, CASPAR, and MELCHIOR process. As they approach the platform US, ARTABAN turns and tries to follow them but finds he cannot. He walks DSR and watches like an audience member. Arriving before the VIRGIN MARY and the CHILD JESUS, BALTHAZAR, CASPAR, and MELCHIOR stand side by side, backs to the audience, each facing the CHILD JESUS.

As the last verse begins, BALTHAZAR, CASPAR, and MELCHIOR remove their outer garments. Each is dressed in cassock and surplice like altar servers at a Catholic Mass. BALTHAZAR, CASPAR, and MELCHIOR prostrate themselves as in the Good Friday Liturgy. They rise and present the CHILD JESUS with the gifts of the priesthood. MELCHIOR presents Holy Oils which JOSEPH takes. CASPAR presents a thurible of incense and, after incensing the CHILD JESUS, steps to the side and swings the thurible to and fro as at a Catholic Mass. Last of all, BALTHAZAR gives a golden chalice which the CHILD JESUS holds with the help of the VIRGIN MARY.

During the climax of the last verse, all, including ARTABAN, bow down in adoration as the VIRGIN MARY holds the CHILD JESUS aloft. Still kneeling, all raise their faces and appear to adore the CHILD JESUS. Lights down. The music ends in the darkness. Exit all.)

End of Scene 3

Optional Intermission

Scene 4: On Route to Bethlehem

(Lights up. ARTABAN stands CS, looking at his ruby and pearl. GILL is US, pitching camp and unpacking.)

GILL

When do we get to Bethlehem?

(Glancing up, GILL notices ARTABAN deep in thought. GILL stops what he is doing to come over and see if he can offer some word of comfort.)

GILL

You still have the ruby and the pearl.

(ARTABAN comes out of his reverie and puts the jewels away. He goes to help GILL with the packs.)

ARTABAN
(cheerfully)

We shall reach Bethlehem tomorrow evening. We have twenty miles to go.

GILL

Will we get there in time for the birth of the king?

ARTABAN
(gesturing in the negative)

To see his face will be enough.

GILL

Maybe the other magi will be there.

ARTABAN

They might have heard the same prophecies we did.

GILL

Maybe we'll get there ahead of the magi!

ARTABAN

(amused)

I hope they find their way. Sleep well. This time tomorrow, Gill: Bethlehem!

(GILL lies down CS. ARTABAN walks DS, sits down, and nods off to sleep. Lights go down slowly.)

Artaban's Fourth Dream: The Wisemen Consult King Herod

(A spotlight illuminates TIGRANES as he enters SR and approaches ARTABAN.)

ARTABAN

Tigranes! I am getting used to this. Tell me I will never find the king. Tell me the quest is hopeless.

TIGRANES

Let us speak frankly. It is better to consider the things that are near at hand, and to increase the influence of the magi in our own country, rather than look for one who may be a stranger, and to whom we must resign our power.

ARTABAN

That power had one end: to lead others to the one who is light and truth.

TIGRANES

What will become of the magi if this great one arrives?

ARTABAN

Our work would be fulfilled.

TIGRANES

On that day we become unnecessary, obsolete. It would be better this king had died in his youth; better he had never been born.

ARTABAN

Tigranes, where do you think we shall be in a thousand years? In a hundred? My bet? One more outpost of the Roman Empire. Let us seek the true king. Power is nothing.

TIGRANES

“True king!” . . . If we let him go on, everyone will believe in him. We would lose our place. Artaban, you know nothing. I’m not thinking only of myself. It is better for you that one man die, not that we all should perish.

(TIGRANES exits SR. Lights down. The rest is acted in complete silence. Musical Selection #10 begins and continues during ARTABAN’s dream. A spotlight reveals the raised platform US where HEROD is sitting in court. BALTHAZAR, CASPAR, and MELCHIOR enter SL and appear to talk about their quest and their gifts. As the last verse begins, BALTHAZAR, CASPAR, and MELCHIOR exit SL. HEROD rises and begins to pace about and brood. The spotlight fades as the music ends. Lights down. HEROD exits SR.)

End of Scene 4

Scene 5: Bethlehem

(Musical Selection #11 begins. A spotlight reveals ARTABAN and GILL as they awaken, rise, light their lanterns, and begin to journey around the performance space, amid the audience. GILL exits briefly SR. As the last verse begins, the stage lights go up slowly.

WOMEN OF BETHLEHEM enter from various entrances with their babies and mill about the stage. RACHEL works or cleans near her doorstep USL. ISAAC plays on the ground near RACHEL. ARTABAN arrives DS. ARTABAN kneels and kisses the ground and turns to face the audience as the music ends. As the music ends, GILL reenters from SR and joins ARTABAN. RACHEL covertly watches ARTABAN and GILL while eavesdropping on their conversation.)

GILL

Master, I found a place for the horses, but . . . unless you want to sleep on the floor of a hostel. . . . The Romans are conducting a census—

ARTABAN

Did you learn anything?

GILL

(gesturing in the negative)

Not about the magi. People are hiding property. Some have gone into hiding. They think the Romans are going to force a new tax here. Or conscript the men as galley-slaves.

ARTABAN

That explains that. I have seen only women and some old men. And strangers.

GILL

Did the magi come here?

ARTABAN

(gesturing in the affirmative)

My brothers camped outside of town.

GILL

(excited)

You saw them!

ARTABAN

(gesturing in the negative)

Where is the change?

(GILL hands ARTABAN the change from stabling the horses. ARTABAN counts the money and adds it to his own.)

ARTABAN (cont.)

That leaves about three hundred days wages. No fortune, but it will get you home and leave me enough to go on.

GILL

(perturbed)

Aren't you going home?

ARTABAN

I have no plans.

End of excerpt

Finish reading this script.

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CHARACTERS AND CASTING

Characters: (15 m; 9 w; 9 m/w; extras; 1–3 infants or children).

Alphabetical List

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| ABGARUS (m) | RUTH (w) |
| ANGEL GABRIEL (m/w) | SHEPHERDS (m/w) |
| ANGEL OF THE LORD (m/w) | SICK MAN (m) |
| ANGELS (m/w) | SICK PERSON (m/w) |
| ARTABAN (m) | TIGRANES (m) |
| BALTHAZAR (m) | VIRGIN MARY (w) |
| CASPAR (m) | WISEMEN (m) |
| CHILD JESUS (m) | WOMEN OF BETHLEHEM (w) |
| DYSMAS (m) | WOMEN OF JERUSALEM (w) |
| DYSMAS' MOTHER (w) | |
| ELIZABETH (w) | |
| ESTHER (w) | |
| GILL (m) | |
| HEROD (m) | |
| HUNGRY PERSON (m/w) | |
| ISAAC (m) | |
| ISABELLA (w) | |
| JEANETTE (w) | |
| JESUS (m) | |
| JOSEPH (m) | |
| MELCHIOR (m) | |
| MERCHANT (m/w) | |
| MIRIAM (w) | |
| NARRATOR (m/w) | |
| OTHER ROMAN SOLDIERS (m) | |
| RABBI (m) | |
| RACHEL (w) | |
| RHODASPES (m) | |
| ROBBERS (m/w) | |
| ROBBER 1 (m/w) | |
| ROBBER 2 (m/w) | |
| ROBBER 3 (m/w) | |
| ROBBER BABY (m) | |
| ROMAN SOLDIER (m) | |

In Order of Appearance

NARRATOR (m/w)
ARTABAN (m)
ABGARUS (m)
TIGRANES (m)
RHODASPES (m)
WISEMEN (m)
VIRGIN MARY (w)
ANGEL GABRIEL (m/w)
GILL (m)
ROBBERS (m/w)
ROBBER 1 (m/w)
ROBBER 2 (m/w)
ROBBER 3 (m/w)
DYSMAS' MOTHER (w)
DYSMAS (m)
ELIZABETH (w)
SICK MAN (m)
RUTH (w)
JEANETTE (w)
ISABELLA (w)
SHEPHERDS (m/w)
ANGEL OF THE LORD (m/w)
ANGELS (m/w)
BALTHAZAR (m)
CASPAR (m)
MELCHIOR (m)
CHILD JESUS (m)
JOSEPH (m)
HEROD (m)
WOMEN OF BETHLEHEM (w)
RACHEL (w)
ISAAC (m)
ROMAN SOLDIER (m)
OTHER ROMAN SOLDIERS (m)
ROBBER BABY (m)
RABBI (m)
HUNGRY PERSON (m/w)
SICK PERSON (m/w)

WOMEN OF JERUSALEM (w)
ESTHER (w)
JESUS (m)
MERCHANT (m/w)
MIRIAM (w)

Male Roles

ABGARUS (m)
ARTABAN (m)
BALTHAZAR (m)
CASPAR (m)
DYSMAS (m)
GILL (m)
HEROD (m)
JESUS (m)
JOSEPH (m)
MELCHIOR (m)
RABBI (m)
RHODASPES (m)
ROMAN SOLDIER (m)
SICK MAN (m)
TIGRANES (m)

Male Extras

OTHER ROMAN SOLDIERS (m)
WISEMEN (m)

Roles Which Can Be Played by Men or Women

ANGEL GABRIEL (m/w)
ANGEL OF THE LORD (m/w)
HUNGRY PERSON (m/w)
MERCHANT (m/w)
NARRATOR (m/w)
ROBBER 1 (m/w)
ROBBER 2 (m/w)
ROBBER 3 (m/w)
SICK PERSON (m/w)

Extras Which Can Be Played by Men or Women

ANGELS (m/w)
ROBBERS (m/w)
SHEPHERDS (m/w)

Roles for Infants or Children up to 2 Years Old

CHILD JESUS (m)
ISAAC (m)
ROBBER BABY (m)

Female Roles

DYSMAS' MOTHER (w)
ELIZABETH (w)
ESTHER (w)
ISABELLA (w)
JEANETTE (w)
MIRIAM (w)
RACHEL (w)
RUTH (w)
VIRGIN MARY (w)

Female Extras

WOMEN OF BETHLEHEM (w)
WOMEN OF JERUSALEM (w)

Roles with Lines

ABGARUS (m)
ARTABAN (m)
DYSMAS (m)
ESTHER (w)
GILL (m)
JEANETTE (w)
MERCHANT (m/w)
MIRIAM (w)
NARRATOR (m/w)
RABBI (m)
RACHEL (w)
RHODASPES (m)
ROBBER 1 (m/w)
ROBBER 2 (m/w)
ROBBER 3 (m/w)
RUTH (w)
SICK MAN (m)
TIGRANES (m)

Roles without Lines

ANGEL GABRIEL (m/w)
ANGEL OF THE LORD (m/w)
ANGELS (m/w)
BALTHAZAR (m)
CASPAR (m)
CHILD JESUS (m)
DYSMAS' MOTHER (w)
ELIZABETH (w)
HEROD (m)
HUNGRY PERSON (m/w)
ISAAC (m)
ISABELLA (w)
JESUS (m)
JOSEPH (m)
MELCHIOR (m)
OTHER ROMAN SOLDIERS (m)
ROBBERS (m/w)
ROBBER BABY (m/w)
ROMAN SOLDIER (m)
SHEPHERDS (m/w)
SICK PERSON (m/w)
VIRGIN MARY (w)
WISEMEN (m)
WOMEN OF BETHLEHEM (w)
WOMEN OF JERUSALEM (w)

Depending on costuming and the ability to change roles quickly, doubling/tripling can be arranged as follows.

With Doubling/Tripling: Minimum (6 m; 5 w; 1 infant or child)

ARTABAN (m)

ABGARUS, SICK MAN, JOSEPH, HEROD, OTHER ROMAN SOLDIER, RABBI (m)

TIGRANES, CASPAR, ROMAN SOLDIER (m)

RHODASPES, DYSMAS, BALTHAZAR, OTHER ROMAN SOLDIER (Scene 5 only) (m)

WISEMAN, ROBBER 3, MELCHIOR, OTHER ROMAN SOLDIER (Scene 5 only), JESUS
GILL, SHEPHERD (m)

NARRATOR, ELIZABETH, RUTH, WOMAN OF BETHLEHEM, WOMAN OF JERUSALEM
(w)

ANGEL GABRIEL, DYSMAS' MOTHER, ANGEL OF THE LORD, WOMAN OF
BETHLEHEM, WOMAN OF JERUSALEM, MERCHANT (w)

VIRGIN MARY, RACHEL (w)

ROBBER 1, JEANETTE, HUNGRY PERSON, WOMEN OF JERUSALEM, MIRIAM (w)

ROBBER 2, ISABELLA, SICK PERSON, ESTHER (w)

CHILD JESUS, ROBBER BABY, ISAAC (m)

Easier Doubling/Tripling: (7 m; 7 w; extras; 1 infant or child)

ARTABAN (m)

GILL (m)

ABGARUS, SICK MAN, JOSEPH, HEROD (m)

TIGRANES, ROMAN SOLDIER, MERCHANT (m)

RHODASPES, DYSMAS, BALTHAZAR (m)

WISEMAN, ROBBER 3, CASPAR, JESUS (m)

WISEMAN, MELCHIOR, RABBI, OTHER ROMAN SOLDIER (m)

NARRATOR, ROBBER, MIRIAM (w) (the NARRATOR could also play ROBBER 1, 2, or
DYSMAS' mother)

VIRGIN MARY (w)

ANGEL GABRIEL, DYSMAS' MOTHER, ANGEL OF THE LORD, WOMAN OF
BETHLEHEM, WOMAN OF JERUSALEM (w)

ELIZABETH, SHEPHERD, WOMAN OF BETHLEHEM, ESTHER (w)

RUTH, RACHEL, WOMAN OF JERUSALEM (w)

ROBBER 1, JEANETTE, HUNGRY PERSON, WOMAN OF JERUSALEM, MIRIAM (w)

ROBBER 2, ISABELLA, SICK PERSON, WOMAN OF JERUSALEM (w)

ANGELS (m/w)

OTHER ROMAN SOLDIERS (m)

ROBBERS (m/w)

SHEPHERDS (m/w)

WOMEN OF BETHLEHEM (w)

WOMEN OF JERUSALEM (w)

CHILD JESUS, ROBBER BABY, ISAAC (m)