

MAGI ROAD TRIP

by Douglas J. Eboch



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A Play in One Act

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SYNOPSIS: Strong characterizations, sight gags and snarky humor shape this depiction of the three Magi. While the setting is back then, the vernacular and style are very right now. Arrogant Melchior proclaims he's the first to interpret the prophecy about the Christ child. He sets out to find the new King with young but wise Balthazar and book-smart-but-not-street-smart Gaspar. At the palace, Herod is so power-hungry and horrible, it's comical—and his advisor Gamaliel is a spineless wimp from the get-go. Herod insists the trio stop on their return trip and spill the details on the new King. The star shines a spotlight on Mary and Joseph's humble home, where the couple banters over who should change Jesus' swaddling clothes. The three present their gifts to the baby King—then throw Herod off their trail with an alternate route home. Filled with outsized personalities and plot twists. Originally performed as a children's Epiphany pageant.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 female, 5 males, 2 either)

MELCHIOR (MEL) (m).....	A middle-aged Mage who is arrogant, proud, and short-tempered. (32 lines)
BALTHAZAR (m).....	A young Mage who is thoughtful, wise, and good at reading people. (17 lines)
GASPAR (m).....	An old Mage who is highly intelligent but naïve—book smart but not street smart. (16 lines)
HEROD (m).....	King of Judea. Suspicious and power mad. (13 lines)
GAMALIEL (m/f).....	Herod's Advisor. Timid. (9 lines)
MARY (f).....	The mother of Jesus. Clever and no-nonsense. (15 lines)
JOSEPH (m).....	Mary's husband. Overworked. (14 lines)
ANGEL (m/f).....	A heavenly being. (9 lines)

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PRODUCTION NOTES

TIME: The first year of our Lord.

SET: The action takes place at the Magi library in the Middle East, Herod's throne room, and various locations around Bethlehem.

The Library of the Magi—Scene 1. There is a bookshelf Stage Left with a window nearby. If the window proves too complicated to make, its presence may be mimed. There is an end table with a red book on it at Stage Right, and a full bookshelf at Stage Left.

King Herod's Throne Room—Scenes 2 and 6. You will need an elaborate golden throne for Herod. Take a high-backed chair with arm rests and glitz it up with cardboard panels spray-painted metallic gold. Place a potted palm plant on either side if available.

Outside Mary and Joseph's House—Scene 3. This could take place in an aisle, on the steps leading to the stage, or on the floor below the stage.

Mary and Joseph's House—Scenes 4 and 7. Keep it simple. You may want a stone wall backdrop to establish a boundary. A couple low stools and some simple pieces of pottery are all that's needed.

Magi Campsite—Scene 5. Bedrolls are arranged around a fire. Three neutral-colored blankets folded in half may serve as their bedrolls. The fire could be made from logs with red, orange, and yellow tissue paper "flames" arranged in the middle with optional LED tea lights inside for a glow effect, or you could purchase a Halloween cauldron electronic LED fake fire.

Every performance area is different but, as not many churches have curtains, here are some suggestions for simple staging. Scene 1's library may become Joseph and Mary's house on one side of the stage, simply by turning the bookshelf around and removing the red book, and then adding whatever set pieces you wish for the house. Alternately, the library may take place Downstage and then be removed after Scene 1, since that is the only time it is needed. Herod's throne room may remain throughout on the other side of the stage, since it is the setting for two scenes. The camping scene may take place

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Downstage Center (in front of the other scenes). Whatever you decide for the staging, just make sure the scene transitions are made as smoothly and quickly as possible.

COSTUMES: Melchior wears a gold cloak, Balthazar wears a purple one, and Caspar, a green one. Check thrift stores for choir or graduation robes, have them sewn, or purchase them online. Wrap lengths of matching fabric into turbans. Herod may wear a glitzy robe in black or navy. His crown may be made using an online template and gluing on fake jewels. Gamaliel, Mary, and Joseph should wear robes that are quite a bit more humble and simple than the previous four characters' attire. Think neutral colors and fabric headpieces, with perhaps a rope belt. The Angel may wear a white robe at the minimum. Add cardboard wings and/or tinsel halo if desired. All characters may wear sandals.

PROPS: You will need a blanket-wrapped doll for baby Jesus. The Magi need three boxes to serve as their gifts. The easiest solution might be hinged wooden boxes, because Joseph opens them as part of the action. It's fine if they are varied in size or appearance. There's no need to fill the boxes with anything, as Joseph says aloud what is supposed to be inside.

LIGHTING: First off—do not worry if you do not have access to lighting effects. They are fun enhancements to your performance, but the success of the performance is not dependent on the lighting. With that being said, there are effects that may be utilized relatively inexpensively. Utilizing outdoor spots, such as for illuminating a tree at holiday times, is one option. Spotlight the Angel whenever he/she appears. Colorful lighting effects denote a dream sequence.

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SCENE 1

AT START: *The library of the MAGI. There is a bookshelf Stage Left with a window nearby, and a table with a red book on it at Stage Right. GASPAR is puttering around. He pauses to look out the window. MELCHIOR enters and struts to Center Stage. He addresses the audience.*

MELCHIOR: Ah, welcome, good people! Tonight you will have the pleasure of hearing the story of Melchior, wisest of the Magi, and how I saved humanity. That's right—I am Melchior himself.

MELCHIOR bows deeply. He should act pleased if the audience applauds loudly. If they do not, he should bow again more flamboyantly, encouraging the audience to clap with hand gestures.

GASPAR: Mel, come look at this.

MELCHIOR: Not now, Gaspar. I'm entertaining these people with stories of my life. *(To audience.)* I was born to a noble family. My brilliance was clear at a young age. I mastered the alphabet while my older brother spent his afternoons eating mud.

While MELCHIOR talks, BALTHAZAR enters and joins GASPAR at the window.

BALTHAZAR: What are you looking at, Gaspar?

GASPAR: A new star.

MELCHIOR: Would you two keep it down, please? You're ruining my monologue.

BALTHAZAR: But Mel, Gaspar has spotted a new star in the west. This is a sign of great import.

MELCHIOR rushes to the window.

MELCHIOR: A new star! Do you know what this means?

GASPAR: There is a Jewish prophecy about a star. I have a book on the matter somewhere. It has a red cover. Help me find it.

GASPAR and BALTHAZAR rummage through the bookshelf stage left. MELCHIOR spots the red book on the table at Stage Right. He sneaks over and flips through the book, unnoticed by the others. When he's found the passage he's looking for, he puts the book back down and returns to Center Stage.

MELCHIOR: I know the prophecy you speak of. A star will herald the birth of a new King of the Jews—a Savior who will rule the world.

GASPAR: That's right. You have an amazing memory.

MELCHIOR: I know. It's a blessing.

BALTHAZAR: Look, Gaspar, there's your book on the table. I'm surprised Mel didn't see it.

MELCHIOR: I was too busy remembering the prophecy.

GASPAR picks up the book and flips through it.

GASPAR: I would dearly love to see this new king.

BALTHAZAR: Why don't we go pay tribute to him?

MELCHIOR: Excellent idea. I will lead a caravan.

BALTHAZAR: *(Sarcastic.)* OK, great leader. Where is this caravan going, exactly?

MELCHIOR stalls while he sneaks a peek over GASPAR's shoulder at the book.

MELCHIOR: Let me think... what would be the best route...

GASPAR: The book doesn't give a location, but I bet King Herod would know where his successor is to be born.

MELCHIOR: ...the best route to King Herod's palace? Because of course I was planning on making that our first stop.

SCENE 2

AT START: *HEROD'S throne room. HEROD sits on an elaborate golden throne. GAMALIEL enters.*

GAMALIEL: Announcing Melchior, Gaspar, and Balthazar, three Magi from the East.

MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR, and GASPAR enter and bow to HEROD.

HEROD: Arise. I have heard many tales of the wisdom of the Magi. Very impressive.

MELCHIOR: And we have heard many tales of the power of Herod. Also very impressive. And, might I add, your throne is beautiful.

HEROD: It took hundreds of slaves to mine the gold and a dozen craftsmen to carve it. It should have taken ten, but I executed two whose work was sub-par.

MELCHIOR: *(Whispering to GASPAR and BALTHAZAR.)* I like this guy.

HEROD: What have you come to ask of me?

MELCHIOR: O great Herod, I am called to use my immense wisdom to read the heavens and interpret prophecy. I have seen the signs, and I would like to know: where is the one who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." *(Matthew 2:2)*

HEROD: You're saying a child has been born who will become King of the Jews?

GASPAR: Yes, the prophesied Messiah who will one day rule over all the world.

HEROD: So you've come to worship a child who will overthrow all governments? Such as the government here in Judea?

GASPAR: Oh, yes. He is destined to be the greatest king the world has ever known.

BALTHAZAR: *(Growing worried at HEROD's tone.)* But right now he's just a tiny little baby. I'm sure any conquering will be far into the future. Long after you've—you know, passed away.

HEROD: I see. Gamaliel, where is the Messiah to be born?

GAMALIEL: In Bethlehem in Judea. For this is what the prophet has written: “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” (*Matthew 2:6*)

HEROD: (*To the MAGI.*) Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him. (*Matthew 2:8*)

BALTHAZAR: Thank you, Your Majesty.

The three MAGI exit.

GAMALIEL: Wow, that's very noble of you, Your Majesty. It is a sign of your great honor that you would worship the man who will one day replace you.

HEROD: Fool, I'm not going to worship him. I'm going to kill him.

GAMALIEL: Ah, yes. That does sound more like you.

SCENE 3

AT START: Outside MARY and JOSEPH's house. MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR, and GASPAR enter.

GASPAR: Look—the star has stopped!

BALTHAZAR: That must be the house.

MELCHIOR: This can't be the house. It's so... humble. The house of a workman or maybe a craftsman, but not the house of a king.

BALTHAZAR: Yet Gaspar is correct. The star has stopped above this house.

MELCHIOR: Gaspar, you better not be wrong about this prophecy.

BALTHAZAR: But Mel, I thought you were the one whose immense wisdom studied the heavens and interpreted the signs. Would you not know if we had misinterpreted the prophecy?

MELCHIOR: Sarcasm is the tool of the dimwitted, Balthazar. Let's see what's inside.

SCENE 4

AT START: *Inside MARY and JOSEPH's house. JOSEPH is relaxing. There is a door Stage Right. MARY enters from Stage Left.*

MARY: Joseph, it's your turn to change Jesus' swaddling clothes.

JOSEPH: I did it this morning.

MARY: And then you went to work, and I've done it three times since then.

JOSEPH: I had a long day, Mary.

MARY: And now you should go spend some quality time with Jesus—by changing his swaddling.

There is a knocking at the door.

JOSEPH: Oh, someone's at the door. I'll get it.

JOSEPH opens the door. MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR, and GASPAR enter.

MELCHIOR: Greetings! I am Melchior, a wise Mage from the East. These are my associates, Balthazar and Gaspar.

JOSEPH: Magi? Oh, gosh—come in. I'm Joseph. Sorry for the mess. We weren't expecting visitors. Mary! Look—Magi from the East.

MARY: You're here to see Jesus, I suppose.

BALTHAZAR: Hello, Mary. You have a lovely home. Is Jesus the child who was born to be King of the Jews?

MARY: I see you've been talking to the angels.

MELCHIOR: Angels? No. We have come because I saw a new star in the west. With my incomparable understanding of the heavens, I recognized it as a sign of the birth of a new king. I led our caravan across a vast distance through great danger to see this future ruler... if indeed that is what the child is. I have not yet made up my mind.

MARY: Well, you sound like you're quite important.

MELCHIOR: As you say.

MARY: The star heralding *your* birth must have been bright indeed.

GASPAR: There was no star at Mel's birth.

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MARY: Is that so? Hmmmm. I'm no Mage, but doesn't that mean he's not quite as important as the Messiah?

BALTHAZAR laughs while MELCHIOR fumes.

BALTHAZAR: You may not be a Mage, but I think you are quite wise, Mary. We would be honored if we might see the child.

MARY: I'll go get him.

MARY exits.

MELCHIOR: So Joseph, what do you do for a living?

JOSEPH: I'm a carpenter.

MELCHIOR: Does it not seem odd to you that a future king would be born to a carpenter?

JOSEPH: Very odd. I said the very same thing to the angel.

GASPAR: Are you from the line of Abraham and Isaac?

JOSEPH: Yes.

GASPAR: The Jewish Scripture does say the Messiah will come from that lineage.

MELCHIOR: Of course, I knew that. I just find it all very odd.

MARY returns with the baby Jesus. MELCHIOR steps forward to look at him.

MELCHIOR: *(With wonder.)* He's very... small.

GASPAR: He looks the proper size for a baby to me.

BALTHAZAR: Perhaps the humble origin of this King is meant to be a sign for us. A sign that greatness need not come from wealth nor power.

MELCHIOR: Truly, I look upon this child and feel peace in my heart. I am honored to present my gift to Jesus.

MELCHIOR places a box in front of Jesus. BALTHAZAR and GASPAR add their own gifts.

BALTHAZAR: Well, we have disturbed this family enough for one evening. Thank you for your hospitality.

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Ad-lib goodbyes. MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR, and GASPAR exit.

MARY: I wonder if we're going to keep getting strange visitors like that our entire lives.

JOSEPH: At least they came bearing gifts. (*JOSEPH opens the boxes.*) Mary! They brought gold... and frankincense... and myrrh! We're rich!

MARY: Well, that was very generous of them. What shall we do with this wealth?

JOSEPH: Maybe we could hire somebody to change Jesus' swaddling for us.

MARY: Maybe we should think a little more before making any decisions.

SCENE 5

AT START: MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR, and GASPAR have made camp. They are sitting on their bedrolls around a fire.

GASPAR: What a momentous thing we witnessed today.

BALTHAZAR: Does anyone else feel transformed? I feel transformed.

GASPAR: If the prophecies are true, the years ahead will transform the whole world.

MELCHIOR: Herod will be so pleased when we tell him of the Messiah. Perhaps he'll give us rewards. Do you think he'd grant us lands to rule?

BALTHAZAR: I will be happy to return to our own land. I have much to ponder.

GASPAR: It's getting late, and we have a long journey tomorrow. We should get some sleep.

The three MAGI lie down and close their eyes. After a few moments, colorful lights swirl. ANGEL, glowing in a spotlight, enters.

ANGEL: Melchior... Melchior...

MELCHIOR sits up. He gasps when he sees the ANGEL.

MELCHIOR: Is this a dream? Who are you?

ANGEL: I am an angel of the Lord, come to warn you.

MELCHIOR: An angel? Like the ones Mary talked about?

ANGEL: You must not return to Herod. You can't tell him where Jesus is.

MELCHIOR: But he said he wished to worship the Messiah.

ANGEL: In truth, he wishes to kill Jesus.

MELCHIOR: Kill Jesus? But Jesus is so tiny and innocent. He gives me hope. Surely a great king like Herod could not hate someone like that.

ANGEL: Herod is jealous of the child. He's afraid of losing power.

MELCHIOR: Hmmmm, I didn't think of that. All right, angel, I will do as you say. I will lead the caravan home by another route.

ANGEL: Good. Now sleep, Melchior.

The ANGEL waves a hand and MELCHIOR lies back in his bedroll.

Blackout.

SCENE 6

AT START: *HEROD'S throne room. HEROD sits on the throne.*

HEROD: Gamaliel! Come here!

GAMALIEL enters.

GAMALIEL: Yes, Your Majesty?

HEROD: Have those Magi returned from Bethlehem?

GAMALIEL: No, Your Majesty.

HEROD: It should not have taken them so long. I suspect they have betrayed me.

GAMALIEL: Who would dare betray you? Your reputation for vengeance is fearsome.



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