

CHRISTMAS SHOPPING WITH THE MAGI

by Jacqueline Hurley



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Christmas Shopping with the Magi

A children's Christmas program

by Jacqueline Hurley

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

CHILDREN'S CHOIR:

All Sunday school children except the three Wise Men.

MELCHIOR, BALTHASAR, GASPAR:

Patterned after the tradition of the three Wise Men who came from Persia and were likely disciples of Zoroastrianism. These men wear robes and headdresses commonly associated with the three.

SERVANT:

A boy or girl in simple tunic or servant attire.

CROWN VENDOR:

A boy or girl, wears a robe, carries a crown.

ROBE VENDOR:

A boy or girl, wears a robe, carries a robe.

SCEPTOR VENDOR:

A boy or girl, wears a robe, carries a scepter.

EPHOD VENDOR:

A boy or girl, wears a robe, carries a chest plate or cape worn backwards and ornately decorated with twelve large jewels in gold, purple, scarlet, and blue, as worn by priests at the time of Christ's birth.

BROOCH VENDOR:

A boy or a girl, wears a robe, carries two large jeweled brooches.

PURSE VENDOR:

A boy or girl, wears a robe, carries several fancy purses.

HAT VENDOR:

A boy or girl, wears a robe, carries a tall hat made to look like one worn by priests in the time of Christ.

READER(S):

One or two readers to read "The Visit of the Magi"
from Matthew 2: 1-12.

MARY AND CHILD:

The Mary and child role may be a Sunday school girl holding a doll or a mother from the congregation holding her young child. No lines are spoken. Dress is the simple blue robe often worn by Mary in traditional plays.

ANNOUNCER:

Boy or girl to announce the last song and, if appropriate, host collection for the Sunday school and invite audience to participate in post-play gathering.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Synopsis

The three Magi meet to discuss a surprising astrological observation but discover they need information from a friend and scholar of the Bible to interpret the meaning of a brilliant new star that suddenly appears in the sky. The Wise Men determine to visit the prophesied king announced by this star, but what to take as gifts to an infant who is destined to fulfill such a wonderful but sacrificial prophecy? Local vendors see this dilemma as a perfect sales opportunity to pitch various gift ideas. A wise Servant helps the Magi select the gifts we know they carried to honor the Child. The children's choir may perform during this play. Music suggestions are provided. The three Wise Men sing one verse of "We Three Kings."

Props

The three Wise Men: star charts and scrolls (for use as the men discuss the Star of Bethlehem). Flattened pieces of brown paper bags may have pages of script attached to serve two purposes: they appear to be the charts and prophecies the Wise Men are discussing, and they help the Wise Men remember their numerous lines. The pages of script may be highlighted in various colors to help them even more. The six paper bag parchment scrolls are slightly larger than a sheet of copy paper, torn or burned at the edges to look old, rolled, tied with string, and placed in a basket. They are numbered to help the Magi select one after the other in the right sequence. The Vendors' props include a crown with jewels on it, fancy robe, scepter, ephod, two brooches, several purses (fancy, "evening bag" in appearance), and a priest's hat. The Magi need three appropriate vessels to carry gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Setting

Center Stage

Starry sky backdrop for children's choir who will sing "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." Bright star of Bethlehem appears within the backdrop after the song. In the last scene of the play, the area becomes the backdrop for Mary and child.

Stage Right

Use a tan sheet (double bed size), or dye a sheet tan. Using markers, draw a map of the Middle East on it, including bodies of water such as the Persian Gulf and the Red, Black, Caspian, Aral, and Mediterranean Seas. (These are added in blue marker.) Jerusalem is highlighted. The map may be lit from behind to shadow the three Wise Men as they sing “We Three Kings.”

Stage Left

Magi headquarters. The three Magi engage one another in discussion while standing behind a table that holds their star charts and prophesies. The scene behind reflects the Far East (minaret shapes, etc.) The Vendors approach this area to ply their wares.

Accompanist

While this Christmas play may be performed without music, the script includes suggestions for several songs to be sung during the performance. “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” and “We Three Kings” are the most crucial numbers. The other selections may easily be changed depending on your group’s interest.

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Scene 1:

(Stage Right — twinkling lights appear. The house is dimly lit and the CHILDREN'S CHOIR enters from the rear of the church. Taking their places at Center Stage, they turn to face the house, and sing.)

SONG: "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." (After the song, the CHILDREN move to reserved seats in the front left pews and a large steady light appears within the twinkling lights. Two MAGI — MELCHIOR and BALTHASAR — appear to be studying charts and gazing at the stars at Stage Left.)

MELCHIOR: (Pointing to the large star) I tell you, Balthasar, that star has not moved all night. The other stars have made their journeys across the sky and their paths have been what we expect at this time of year, but that star, (Pauses, exasperated) it stays in the same place!

BALTHASAR: (Also exasperated) I've checked all the charts. I find no record. What can it mean? How can we tell the signs and make our predictions if we have no record?

MELCHIOR: There *must* be some mention of this star. We'll just have to keep looking. (Leafs through a pile of flattened parchment.)

BALTHASAR: (Pausing, awestruck) It's so bright! Even now as the sun rises and the other stars begin to fade, it is still visible to the eye.

MELCHIOR: (Turning) And do you see the quality of the light? It is steady. Stars twinkle, but this light is unchanging.

BALTHASAR: (In a slightly chastising voice) Certain lights have appeared in the sky at special times of the year, and those lights are steady. That's how we make our forecasts ... through their appearance.

MELCHIOR: Yes, but they move across the sky with the stars! This light is different ... so bright ... and it doesn't move! The heavens move behind it! (Softly, slower, and in awe) This is something big, Balthasar. Something

1 important ...

2 **BALTHASAR:** Yes, Melchior. Even now, as day arrives, I can
3 see it. *(Turning to the charts)* Let's keep searching. Surely
4 someone has seen this star before. *(GASPAR enters with a*
5 *map in one hand and basket of scrolls in the other.)*

6 **GASPAR:** So, you *are* on the job. I knew you would be. What
7 have you decided? What of this new star?

8 **BALTHASAR and MELCHIOR:** *(Together, pleased at GASPAR's*
9 *arrival)* Gaspar!

10 **MELCHIOR:** We have no explanation! We watched the star
11 the night through while the heavens moved behind it!

12 **BALTHASAR:** And it's so bright! It's still visible in broad
13 daylight. What do you say? What can it mean?

14 **GASPAR:** We too have been watching this star and agree
15 with all you have said. *(Pause)* Over what city do you
16 think this star shines?

17 **MELCHIOR:** City, Gaspar?

18 **GASPAR:** The star is close. It's so bright, so near, and always
19 in the same place. If we traveled to see it until it shone
20 right over our heads, what city? What place? Where
21 would we be?

22 **BALTHASAR:** I have no idea. Do you? Have you brought a
23 map, Gaspar? *(GASPAR unrolls his map.)* Are you
24 suggesting that this star does not move, but *we* can
25 move until it is right over our heads?

26 **GASPAR:** Exactly, Balthasar. *(Teasing)* But where are we to
27 go?

28 **MELCHIOR:** West. The star is to our west.

29 **GASPAR:** Yes, but how far west? How many days' travel?

30 **MELCHIOR:** Quit playing with us, Gaspar! Tell us what you
31 have found!

32 **GASPAR:** *(Smiling broadly)* Our mathematicians think this
33 star shines right over Jerusalem, the sacred city of the
34 Jews. *(GASPAR rolls out a map and points out a route while*
35 *MELCHIOR and BALTHASAR look on.)* If we leave our city
36 and travel twelve days to the west, we will enter the
37 land of Israel. That should put us directly under the
38 star.

1 **BALTHASAR:** Do you and your astrologers know why this
2 star has appeared?

3 **GASPAR:** We couldn't find anything in our records, but when
4 the mathematicians told us the light shone right over
5 the land of the Jews, I called on a friend. I know a
6 Jewish prophet, a very intelligent man schooled in the
7 sacred writings of his people. He knew what this star
8 meant right away! The writings of the Jews are filled
9 with prophecy about it. It is wonderful. A king is to be
10 born, but not just a king. This child will be a high priest.
11 Listen ... (*GASPAR drops his basket, picks up the first scroll,*
12 *unrolls it, and begins to read.*)

13 **GASPAR:** (*In each case, the reference of the biblical passage will not*
14 *be read aloud. It is provided in the script in the event that the*
15 *readers want to check the statements around the passage they*
16 *are reading. Complete references may be written in the program*
17 *for the audience.) From their book of Numbers: “ ‘I see*
18 *him, but not now. I behold him, but not near. A star will*
19 *come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel’ “*
20 *(Numbers 24:17).*

21 **MELCHIOR:** (*Grabbing the second scroll and reading*) From
22 Jeremiah: “ ‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord,
23 ‘when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King
24 who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the
25 land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live
26 in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The
27 Lord Our Righteousness’ “ (*Jeremiah 23:5-6*).

28 **BALTHASAR:** (*Grabbing the third scroll*) From the book of
29 Psalms: “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right
30 hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your
31 feet. The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from
32 Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies. You are
33 a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek’ “ (*Psalms*
34 *110:1-2, 4*).

35 **GASPAR:** You see? Not just a king but a priest!

36 **MELCHIOR:** (*Grabbing the fourth scroll*) Isaiah: “The Spirit of
37 the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has
38 anointed me ... “ (*Isaiah 61: 1*). (*Stopping and looking at*

- 1 **GASPAR)** He is a prophet too?
- 2 **GASPAR:** Yes, a king, a priest, and a prophet! *(Taking the fifth*
3 *scroll)* From Isaiah: “The virgin will be with child and
4 will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel”
5 *(Isaiah 7:14). (Looking toward the star and then announcing*
6 *with great conviction)* It is no wonder the star shines so
7 brightly. *(Pauses and then sadly takes the last scroll.)* But
8 other writings say his own people will not receive him.
9 In fact, he will be killed because of their sin. *(Opening the*
10 *sixth scroll)* “He was despised, and we esteemed him not.
11 He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed
12 for our iniquities” *(Isaiah 53:3–5).*
- 13 **BALTHASAR:** Well, we cannot make the same mistake! We
14 must receive him! We must prepare to go and worship
15 this newborn king!
- 16 **MELCHIOR:** Gifts! We need gifts to honor this child. Shall we
17 take gifts for a king?
- 18 **GASPAR:** Or a priest? *(Slight pause)* A prophet?
- 19 **BALTHASAR:** *(Taking the last scroll out of GASPAR’s hands,*
20 *opening it, and saying to himself, but loudly enough so*
21 *audience can “hear his thoughts,” shaking his head)* Gifts for
22 one who will be sacrificed? Gifts for his burial?
23 *(GASPAR and MELCHIOR look to BALTHASAR and the*
24 *scroll)*
- 25 **MELCHIOR:** *(With sudden understanding)* We will take all three
26 gifts. *(Pointing finger to emphasize each item)* One for the
27 mighty king, one for the honored prophet, and one for his
28 great sacrifice — it must be the most precious gift of all.
- 29 **GASPAR:** *(Claps his hands and a SERVANT appears.)* Servant,
30 call our artisans and craftsmen. We must have gifts for
31 a king!
- 32 **SERVANT:** *(Frantic, hands on side of head)* Hmmmm, gifts for a
33 king, gifts for a king. *(Pauses, lifts head in an “aha” moment,*
34 *pointer finger up.)* In the center of town, I know a man
35 who might have something suitable! *(SERVANT exits in a*
36 *rush down the center aisle, out of the sanctuary, before*
37 *doubling back to the Stage Right area where the CHILDREN’S*
38 *CHOIR is sitting. They rise, move to Center Stage, and sing.)*

SONG: "Simple Gifts" by Elder Joseph Bracket.

Refrain: 'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,
 'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
 And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
 'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

'Tis the gift to be loved and that love to return,
 'Tis the gift to be taught and a richer gift to learn,
 And when we expect of others what we try to live each
 day,
 Then we'll all live together and we'll all learn to say,

(Refrain)

'Tis the gift to have friends and a true friend to be,
 'Tis the gift to think of others, not to only think of "me,"
 And when we hear what others really think and really
 feel,
 Then we'll all live together with a love that is real.

(Refrain)

'Tis the gift to be loving, 'tis the best gift of all,
 Like a quiet rain, it blesses where it falls,
 And with it we will truly believe
 'Tis better to give than it is to receive.

*(CHILDREN return to seats when finished. SERVANT leads
 CROWN VENDOR to the table of three WISE MEN.)*

CROWN VENDOR: *(Displays crown.)* Let me suggest a crown.

This crown is made of pure gold, and diamonds are
 placed all about the front. Imagine how wonderful a
 king will look in this crown. *(He tries it on the SERVANT
 who "models" it in a humorous manner. The three WISE MEN
 make eye contact, and say things like, "No," "Not what I had in
 mind," etc., and shake their heads. SERVANT removes the
 crown and leads the CROWN VENDOR Off-stage. The
 SERVANT returns with the ROBE VENDOR.)*

ROBE VENDOR: A robe, your majesties. Every king needs a

1 robe. Our best weavers have made this fine garment.
 2 Expensive dyes have been used to make its beautiful
 3 color, and the fur on the collar is of the softest wool.
 4 *(The ROBE VENDOR places the robe on the shoulders of the*
 5 *SERVANT, who waltzes around with it. The three WISE MEN*
 6 *make eye contact, discuss, and say no to this idea. The*
 7 *SERVANT removes the robe and escorts the ROBE VENDOR*
 8 *Off-stage. The SERVANT returns with the SCEPTER*
 9 *VENDOR.)*

10 **SCEPTER VENDOR:** *(Holds out scepter.)* A scepter, dear Magi.
 11 If a king wants everyone's attention, he can bang it on
 12 the floor. *(SCEPTER VENDOR bangs the scepter. WISE*
 13 *MEN shake their heads. The SERVANT hurries the SCEPTER*
 14 *VENDOR Off-stage.)*

15 **SERVANT:** *(Returning quickly)* May I suggest a simple gift of
 16 gold? Then the king may have it made into whatever he
 17 likes. A crown ... a ring ... you get the idea. *(The MAGI*
 18 *make eye contact and nod in agreement. The SERVANT leaves*
 19 *and returns with a box of gold.)*

20 **BALTHASAR:** Now we need a gift for a priest. Make haste,
 21 servant! We must leave soon. *(The SERVANT hurries Off-*
 22 *stage and brings in EPHOD VENDOR.)*

23 **EPHOD VENDOR:** What your priest needs is an ephod. This
 24 is a special jeweled cape worn over his robe, and it is
 25 embroidered in gold, purple, scarlet, and blue. *(The*
 26 *EPHOD VENDOR places it on the SERVANT as BROOCH*
 27 *VENDOR rushes in.)*

28 **BROOCH VENDOR:** *(Rushing forward, interrupting)* A brooch ...
 29 you can't have an ephod without a brooch! How will you
 30 keep that ephod from slipping off the priest's shoulder?
 31 *(BROOCH VENDOR pulls the SERVANT around and begins*
 32 *pinning brooches on the SERVANT as the EPHOD VENDOR*
 33 *agrees vigorously.)* I can give you a great deal on these
 34 two!

35 **PURSE VENDOR:** *(Rushing in and interrupting)* High priests
 36 need purses — gold purses, jeweled purses! You see, this
 37 purse can be attached to the front of their chests like
 38 this ...

HAT VENDOR: (*Rushing in holding a hat in front of him*) **The hat makes the priest ...** (*The HAT VENDOR places the hat on the SERVANT, who turns several times, tilting his head in a “charming” manner, modeling all the attire.*)

MELCHIOR: (*Clapping his hands loudly*) **Be gone, all of you.** (*To the other WISE MEN*) **I hate the Christmas rush, don’t you?** (*VENDORS snatch their wares and exit.*)

SERVANT: **What about incense? One who is a priest will want to want to burn incense as he worships his God in the temple.** (*The MAGI make eye contact and nod in agreement. The SERVANT hurries to a predetermined spot and picks up the container that carries the incense. He waves “handfuls” of the incense toward their noses, and they express positive thoughts about this gift.*)

GASPAR: **So, servant, what about a gift for one who will be sacrificed for the sins of others? This priest and king, though powerful and full of wisdom, will be despised and put to death. What gift for that?**

SERVANT: **Ah, myrrh. Those who love him will want the most precious of oils to care for his body in death.**

BALTHASAR: **You are right. Thank you, servant.** (*The SERVANT gets the myrrh and hands the container to the MAGI.*) **We have our gifts! Let’s begin our journey.** (*With the three gifts in hand, the WISE MEN move behind the map. They face the star of Bethlehem in single file formation. A stagehand turns on a spotlight that casts their shadows on the map of the Middle East, and the three WISE MEN sing.*)

SONG: “We Three Kings.”

READER(S): (*The READER reads “The Visit of the Magi.”*) **From Matthew 2, verses 1-12: “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘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.’**

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and



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