

Dear friends this story is fiction. However, it is, I believe, consistent with the birth stories in Matthew and Luke, especially Matthew 2:1-12. You may read the biblical text in Note 2 at the end of the story.

The Magi's Tale¹

"Good morning Kasper."

"And a good morning to you Melchior. And to you Balthazar. Is everything ready?"²

"I believe so Kasper," replied Balthazar. "If our calculations are accurate the royal star should be rising in a few moments."

"And that would mean that the writings that say that a new king could be born today are correct."

"Look the star is rising right on schedule," cried Melchior. "Look how bright it is!"³

"Is it in the true east as we hoped Balthazar?" I inquired.

"It sure is; right in the constellation of Aries."

"Just as we projected, the new king will be the "King of the Jews," replied Balthazar.

"I also predicted that the star would disappear for one hundred days and then reappear showing the path to the new king. Let's watch and see what happens today."

"This is wonderful," exclaimed Melchior. "It is almost midday and the star is still so bright that the sun has not blotted it out. Kasper will the star fade away?"

"No Melchior. Remember that as the noon gets closer to the star, the star becomes brighter and then it will disappear as it moves behind the moon. Look, there it goes! How it will stay behind the moon until the mid part of summer. Then it will reappear and if it is still in the constellation of Aries we will follow it and pay homage to the new king."

¹ The Wise Men or Magi from the East

From the Greek: Magoi meaning astronomers/astrologers not kings. From the Greek: anatolon meaning in the rising or the East. Translations: NIV: Magi from the East. RSV, KJV: Wise Men from the East. NEB: astrologers from the East. The nation to the east of the Roman Empire and Jerusalem would be Parthia. The city of origin could possibly be Ctesiphon (near old Babylon) directly east across the Arabian Desert from Jerusalem.

² The concept of "three" Magi was based on the three gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh which dates from the 5th century C.E. The names Kasper, Balthazar and Melchior were not assigned until the 8th century C.E.

³ There has been much speculation about the nature of the star mentioned in Matthew 2: 2-11. In a note at the end of the tale I have presented some of the theories. In my tale I have adopted Molnar's thesis because it makes the most sense to me.

“Has the time ever gone by quickly!” exclaimed Balthazar. “Could it be that four passages of the moon have come and gone since the Royal Star first appeared and then was gone! Tonight it will reappear in Aries and tomorrow we will be off to find the king.”

“Look, by the moon the star!” cried Melchior. “Is it in Aries?”

“It sure is,” I replied. “How it’s time to follow the star and go to Jerusalem.”

In the next few days we put together the supplies we would need for the journey. This included food, water, tents, donkey’s as pack animals, horses and camels to ride and porters to take care of our needs. Finally, we were ready.⁴

“Are you sure that we have chosen the best route to Jerusalem,” inquired Melchior for the umpteenth time.

“Melchior you know that we have but I will outline it again,” I replied. “We travel north and west to Resafa. Then south-east to Tadmor and via the Highway of Kings south through Jericho and west to Jerusalem. This is the route used for centuries by king’s armies and merchants alike. It is a safe and fairly fast route.”⁵

“Balthazar,” I said. “We have been traveling for many days. Because we were carrying very valuable gifts I was worried about thieves. I wonder why everything has gone so smoothly. We have had no attacks from bands of thieves on the road and we had no trouble in that rough mercantile city of Resafa.”

“Perhaps it is the look of our porters,” replied Balthazar. “Most of them have had military experience and the swords they carry are most imposing. However, I wonder if the gods are not smiling down on our mission and protecting us from harm.”

“You might be right,” I said. “You may be right. Even the tax collectors along the road have waved us through with little tax and no search of our goods.”⁶

“Well we should be through Jericho and up the hill to Jerusalem tomorrow,” said Melchior. “We can camp at Bethany tomorrow night and send an emissary to Herod’s Court for an audience the next day. By that time all of Jerusalem will know that we are here.”

When we were settled in Bethany an emissary arrived from Herod inviting us to a meal with his Court the next day.⁷

⁴ Successful wise advisors and learned men would travel in comfort with servants and porters.

⁵ There was a highway directly across the Arabian Dessert from Ctesiphon to Jerusalem but it would not be a first choice unless you were a desert Bedouin trader. The route selected by Kasper was very popular. An alternate route from Damascus to Jerusalem would follow the high country road through Galilee and Samaria.

⁶ In Rome occupied lands and puppet kingdoms tax collectors collected small taxes for each political unit on main roads. These men often added extra taxes that they use to line their own pockets and so were hated by most people.

⁷ The arrival of Magi from another state would be considered important by the King. The protocols required graciousness from both the Magi and the King.

“That is more than I expected Melchior,’ I said.

“I think it’s a good omen,” replied Melchior. “I will tell the servants to ready our gifts for Herod.”⁸

“Good let’s maintain camp here at Bethany and take only horses and a pack donkey with the gifts. WE can return to camp after the dinner and after we meet the child.”

“Look at the crowds,” cried Balthazar as we road into the city. “I didn’t expect anything like this. Herod must be a gracious king.”

At the entrance to Herod’s palace an important looking man greeted us. “I am Cepheus, the first advisor to the King. Please dismount and follow me.”

We were led into the throne room, which was lined with courtiers. We fell on our faces and did not move.⁹

Herod said, “Rise a state your business.

“First Your Majesty we bring gifts for your pleasure. Rugs of the finest quality, rare spices from the distant orient and tribute for your treasury,” I replied.¹⁰

“Thank you I am pleased with your offerings. How, please state your business.”

“Your Majesty we have come from Parthia from the city of Ctesiphon. We are astronomers of great repute in our country. In this year we observed a special rising of the royal star that heralds the birth of a great new king. The star rose in the constellation of Israel. Therefore, we knew that an heir had been born to you and we have come to worship him.”

Herod replied, “I have many sons who could be the heir to my throne but I have no knowledge that any of them was born under such a star. Let’s go to dinner while I consult with the wise men of my kingdom.”

We accompanied the King, his Scribes and Sadducees into the banquet hall. A great feast had been laid out before us. The wise men of his kingdom asked us many questions about the star, our trip and our studies.

“Your Majesty, what a wonderful feast you provide,” I said to Herod as he approached. “It has been a great honour to share our knowledge and ideas with the learned men of your kingdom, but I fear we have upset them in some way.”¹¹

“Don’t you worry about them,” said Herod quietly as he sat down beside where we lay. They are just worried that I will be angry with them for not understanding the meaning of the star.

⁸ It would be appropriate that foreign noblemen to bring gifts to the Herod to show graciousness and supplication to the King. To seek audience without gifts would be very rude.

⁹ At this point the Magi would be totally subject to the King’s pleasure.

¹⁰ Again the tributes were an important part of the protocols and everything could hinge of their acceptance.

¹¹ Herod had no new son heralded by a star and therefore by God.

Prophets have written that a special king, not of my line, will be born in Bethlehem of the line of our great King David. Now Bethlehem is only a short distance south of Jerusalem. When and where does the star appear?"

"In the East just before sunrise," Balthazar replied.

Go then and find the child and then send word to me quietly so that I may also come and worship him."

"We will break camp in the morning, follow the road around the city and set up again at Bethlehem," I suggested. "Within a few days the star should show us the way to his house. We will worship him and then send you word."

"Good! Good!" replied the King.

As I road back to Bethany I mentioned to Balthazar and Melchior, "What a strange reaction King Herod had to our visit and the mention of a new king. I suppose I thought that the new king would be Herod's son and there would be great rejoicing in the city. If the child is not Herod's son, then perhaps we have put the boy in great danger. Let's talk of this further tomorrow."

The next morning, I called, "Kasper is everything ready?"

"Everything is back up and ready for the journey," he replied.

"Then let's be on our way. As we indicated to King Herod we will travel across the northern reaches of the city until we meet the high road and then turn south on the road to Hebron."

"Look everyone I can see Bethlehem," cried Balthazar. "That was a rather short trip. There is still time in the day to go to the town and worship the child. Wow! It's a very small place to be the birth place of a king."

"Let's setup camp and see what remains of the day," I replied. We are not in a great hurry. Tomorrow would work just as well."

"I am very excited about seeing the child," said Melchior. "Let's go today if possible."

"Okay. Okay, you two." We will go as soon as we can be ready.

"Sir! Sirs! Have you come to meet Jesus?" It was a shepherd boy.

"We are busy unpacking," said one of the porters. "Go away boy."

"Wait! Boy did you say Jesus?" I asked.

"Yes Sir. I have seen him!"

"Come here boy. Melchior and Balthazar come sit for a moment. What is your name boy?"

"My name is David son of the great shepherd Simon. You are camped in our fields sir."

At this we laughed and laughed.¹² To Melchior and Balthazar, I asked, “Do you remember what the name Jesus means?”

“Of course we do,” scoffed Balthazar. “It means “Yahweh Deliveries.” A very suitable name for a king wouldn’t you say.”

“David have you seen Jesus?” I asked.

“Of yes sir. It was like magic.”

“David! David! Where are you? Oh there you are. Stop bothering these people. Come away with you. You have flocks to attend to. Forgive him pray my Lords. He is often an impetuous boy.”

“But father they are looking for Jesus.”

“My Lords Jesus is a common name in Judea. There are many named Jesus in Bethlehem. Come David.”¹³

“But father the angels!”

“Don’t listen to the boy. He has a great imagination.”

“Simon, that is your name correct?”

“Yes Lord.”

“Simon you have nothing to fear from us. We are just learned astrologers from far away Parthia. We are not Herod’s men and certainly not his soldiers. We have seen a great star which heralds the birth of a great king. Perhaps the greatest king of all. We only wish to honour and worship him. Please tell us your story about him.”

“Can I father? Please! Please!”

“All right,” said Simon still looking frightened and rather dubious. “Go ahead.”

“It was night. All the sheep were safely in the folds. We were sitting around the fire with Alphaeus and Saul telling stories. Suddenly a beautiful glorious man was standing before us. The others fell on their faces but not me. I was not afraid.”

“Just tell the story,” said his father.

“The angel said “I am Gabriel and I bring you wonderful news. Tonight in Bethlehem a Savior is born, a savior for you David,] and for you Simon and for you Saul and for you Alphaeus and for all people. The child is Christ the Lord. Go to worship him. You will find the baby in a

¹² Poor shepherd would not have any climb to the pastures. It is more likely that if they own even part of the herd they would pay the own a small tribute to graze the sheep. They may also have been peasant workers payed to care for someone else’s sheep.

¹³ The people feared King Herod and would be very worried about the safety of Jesus.

stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laying in a manger.” He raised his arms and said, “listen to the hosts of heaven.”

“Glory to God in the highest and on Earth peace delight toward all people,” sang the host of angels as they filled the sky with light and joyous song.”

“Was there an incredibly bright star in the sky?” cried Balthazar.

“The sky was filled with light but now that you mention it there was one bright star that out shone all the others,” added Simon. “You can even see it in the daylight. Indeed, it seems to stay over Bethlehem all of the time.”

“I new it! I new it!” cried Balthazar.

“Did you find the child?” I asked.

“Yes, yes we did!” cried David.

“Could you take us to the child?”

“Ahhh no,” said Simon. “They were from Nazareth and have already returned home.”

“Simon please. I know that you fear that we would harm the child. But again we just want to worship him.”

“Father?”

“Okay David will take you there. I must stay and tend to sheep. Jesus was born in the stable at the Inn but has since moved to the house of his father Joseph’s family.”

“Come on! Come on! Let’s go. We can walk. I will show you the way.”

“Wait a moment! Wait a moment David. We have to pack the donkey that must go with us.”

“That’s it! That’s the house,” cried David as we climbed the narrow street.

“It is a rather modest house for a king,” commented Melchior.

“But look,” I said. “The star seems to be just above the horizon directly over the house.”

As we approached a man came out to greet us.

“That’s Joseph, the father of Jesus,” said David.

“Bow low my friends. Joseph must be a king himself if he is the father of the Great King,” I said to Melchior and Balthazar.

“Stop my Lords. I am but a common carpenter.”

“Kind sir!” I said. “We are astrologers from far to the East in Parthia. We have come to worship and honour the king whose star we saw in the sky and is now over your house. Is there a king here?”

Joseph smiled. “I don’t know about a king but our child Jesus is truly a special gift of the Lord God. Would you like to meet him?”

“Oh Yes! Yes! Yes!” we all exclaimed.

“Come into our home then kind sirs.”

“We know that your law forbids you from having us into your home. We would be glad to see him here in the courtyard.”¹⁴

“Nonsense!” cried Joseph. I think that Jesus has and will expand our understanding far beyond the old laws of the Pharisees. Come.”

“Can I come too?”

“Yes David you may come too,” said Joseph.

As I entered the house I saw the child Jesus held in the arms of his mother. They both glowed like Gods.¹⁵ I immediately fell on my face. So did Melchior and Balthazar.

“I am your most humbly servant Kasper. Look favourably on me and also on Melchior and Balthazar. You are a God above all gods and we praise you.”

“Kasper, Melchior, Balthazar, my name is Mary. Please sit with us. We are not gods but common people to whom God has given a wonderful gift.”

“We have also brought gifts for the king,” said Melchior.

“Yes we have gold to honour him, frankincense to worship him as God and myrrh to anoint his body,” added Balthazar.

“But my Lords these gifts are a king’s ransom.”

“Yes my lady. A king’s ransom for the King of Kings,” I replied.

Mary asked me to hold Jesus. As I did I felt alive as I had never felt before. She passed Jesus to Melchior and then to Balthazar. I knew that Melchior was experiencing the same reaction as me. But as Balthazar received Jesus something wonderful happened.

“I am healed,” he exclaimed. My leg that has been crippled since my birth is healed. See, I can walk with no limp.

He cried for joy and we all cried with him.

¹⁴ See Acts 10:28.

¹⁵ There is no reference, in the bible, to the glow of Jesus or Mary. However since Moses came down from Mount Sinai glowing or halo has been associated to nearness to God.

Finally, it was time to go. We said our shaloms and headed back to camp with David leading us all the way.

“David, thank you for helping us to find Jesus,” I said. “You have been a great help. How here is a gold coin for you and your family.”

“Oh Thank you sirs! Thank you!” he said as he ran off to find his father.

I said to the others, “It has been a wonderful day, a miraculous day. But now I am very tired. Let’s rest in our tents for a time and then come together for dinner, some talk of the day and what to do next.”

As we came back together, Balthazar cried, “I had a terrible dream while resting. I dreamed that when told King Herod where to find Jesus he did not come to worship him but instead sent his soldiers to kill the child.”

“I also had this dream,” exclaimed Melchior.

“And so did I,” I told them. “We can not go back to Jerusalem. We must find a different way to return home.”

“I can help you! I can help you!”

“It’s David with his father,” I said. “David why did you come back?”

“My father insisted that we both come back once more to thank you for the wonderful gift.”

“Simon perhaps you can help us again,” I declared. “All three of us dreamed that Herod will seek to kill Jesus and therefore we must not return through Jerusalem to tell him where we found Jesus. But the high road north and the highway east to Jericho pass through the edges of Jerusalem and Herod’s guards are bound to see us. Could there be another way?”

“Lords I am but a poor shepherd and I know not the highways; but I know someone who will be able to help you. He was staying at the Inn when Jesus was born and helped to provide for them. His name is Jonathan the peddler and I believe he is staying at the Inn again tonight. Should David and I fetch him?”

“Simon we would be most grateful for his help,” I replied.

When Simon and David returned with Jonathan, we explained our problem and the danger that we had brought to Jesus.

“Jonathan,” I asked. “I have heard of a back road that goes from Bethlehem to the east through Herodium northeast passed Qumran to Jericho. We could then cross the Jordan River to the Great Highway where we could get lost among the caravans heading north.”

“My Lords there is indeed such a road but Herod has many workmen and soldiers building a fortress at Herodium and I think that you would be spotted.”

“There must be a way,” said Melchior.

“There is but it is much longer,” replied Jonathan. But if you are willing to take the route I will go with you until you know the way. This is my territory. The people know me and trust me. I will take you to safety.”

“But why would you do this?” I said.

“Because you love my Lord and he loves you.”

“Tell us about the route then,” said Balthazar.

“As you know the way east is blocked by the salt sea and the cliffs above it. So first we must go south to Hebron and then Beersheba. From there we will take the highway east through the mountains of Idumea to the great valley of Araban and then over the hills of Nabatea to the great highway of kings. Herod has concentrated his armies and workers to the west and north of the sea and along the Jordan valley so we should not encounter anyone getting to this southern intersection with the highway. However, as you move north the danger will increase. I would recommend that when you reach the Aroer River Valley you turn east and follow the desert road home. It is a hard way but I think much safer for you and your people. Herod is unlikely to follow you into the desert and with God’s speed I know that you will make it.”¹⁶

“Jonathan, your advice is good and your help greatly appreciated,” I said. “I think that we should pack up tonight and be on the road by first light. Agreed?”

“Agreed,” said Melchior.

“Agreed,” said Balthazar.

“Agreed,” said Jonathan.

Early the next morning David and Simon went to say a final goodbye to the Magi. They were gone without a trace.

¹⁶ The route outlined by Jonathan is a very different route than any of the proposed routes suggested in footnote #5. All usual routes would pass close to Jerusalem or areas inhabited by Herod’s soldiers. The route across the desert here proposed is south of the route that meets the king’s highway near Jericho.

Note 1: The Star

Over the centuries there has been much speculation but the star that heralded Jesus birth. Some people (especially evangelical Christians) believe that a totally new star just appeared and then in time disappeared Others consider the story of the star as “pious fiction.” Since, at least, the time of Kepler astronomers have endeavoured to explain the star scientifically. Below are several of the more astronomically based theories that have been proposed. All require a willingness to move the date of the birth of Jesus by a few years.

A Conjunction of Planets. Conjunctions of planets were well known to astronomers of the time. Johannes Kepler, in 1614, proposed that the star could be the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the year 7 BCE.

A Comet. Comets were not considered a good omen. A comet was recorded in 5 BCE by Chinese astronomers. They described it a hanging in one place for seventy days.

A Supernova. An idea suggested by modern astronomers. A good candidate but as yet impossible to date and difficult to interpret in ancient records. A possible supernova was recorded in China and Korea in 5 BCE.

Double Occultation. An occultation is considered a conjunction of Jupiter and the Moon. Jupiter (the Roman royal star) was a morning star morning (in the rising) during the year 6 BCE. Michael Molnar observed that such a double occultation occurred on March 27 and April 17 of that year. He also observed the star was then hidden to the eye until August. He also proposed the he occultation and reappearance occurred in the astrological sign for Judea (Aries) and that the star followed the path of Aries through December 19. It this time appeared stationary or to hang over one place. Therefore, signs that would attract astronomers/astrologists to a search. There was confirmation of a royal star by the Roman astronomer Firmicus Maternus who also believed that the April 17 appearance of the Morning Star heralded a royal birth. In the Magi’s Tale I have adopted Molnar’s theory.

Note 2: The Biblical Text of the Magi’s Tale

Matthew Chapter 2 verses 1 to 12.

2In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:
⁶ “And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.” ’

7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' 9 When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 11 On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.