

# Lucius of Bethlehem

By John Teague

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## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

The extreme peril and the boundless love surrounding Jesus' birth is beautifully dramatized here. Lucius, an ex-Roman soldier still vibrant although somewhat crippled, has escorted Mary and Joseph on the long trip to Bethlehem to register for the tax. In return Joseph will build cabinets for the inn that Lucius owns with his wife Swan.

They hide Mary and Joseph in a small cave used as a barn and soon the older couple thinks of Mary as an adopted daughter. But there's danger everywhere. In a tense scene Lucius uses his wit and friendship with local soldiers to enable Joseph to register without Mary's appearance. Tension rises even more as Lucius and Swan help Mary deliver the Christ child. Lucius must further protect the young family as hordes of people try to determine if the Messiah has been born.

Finally, Lucius trades his greatest treasure, a sword given to him by his Tribune, for a fast horse to help the young family move to the safety of Egypt. These richly-detailed characters and emotion-filled scenes will make the Christmas story come alive as never before.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*7 m (with doubling), 3 w, extras as desired*

**LUCIUS:** An older man, a former Roman soldier, now owner of an inn in Bethlehem. Is dressed in a combination of Roman tunic and Jewish robe with an officer's battle sword at his waist. Is not easily frightened. He has a pronounced limp.

**MATTHEW:** A young man, Lucius' hired guard. Dedicated. Armed with a short sword.

**MARY:** The mother of Jesus. Young and somewhat afraid of what lies before her.

**JOSEPH:** Mary's loving husband. A skilled carpenter.

**SWAN:** Lucius' intelligent, loving wife. Is dressed like a Jewish woman but is a Nubian from Egypt.

**REBECCA:** A young woman interested in Matthew.

**CHIEF GUARD:** Helps at the tax collector's table.

**TAX COLLECTOR:** Typical official. Appears overweight and balding.

**FIRST SHEPHERD:** Seeks the Child after hearing the angels.

**SECOND SHEPHERD:** Another.

**BALTHAZAR:** Wise Man from Egypt.

**MELCHOIR:** Another Wise Man.

**CASPAR:** Another Wise Man.

**DARIUS:** Hired guard of the Wise Men.

**EXTRAS:** As Guards, Villagers, and Shepherds.

#### ***Doubling Suggestions:***

*Chief Guard/Balthazar*

*Tax Collector/Melchoir*

*First Shepherd/Caspar*

*Second Shepherd/Darius*

*Lucius of Bethlehem*

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### **PROPS**

Food containers; water jug; several scrolls; quill pen; official seal; purse; coins; two small bundles; jug; stool; cloak; ornate sword; baby; hammer; four swords, shields, helmets and armor; cleaning utensils; towels and blankets.

## **Scene 1: Arrival**

*(AT RISE: Just outside Bethlehem in late afternoon. LUCIUS and MATTHEW enter and then stop to wait for MARY and JOSEPH.)*

LUCIUS: Just a few more minutes and we're home. Ah, smell the air. I tell you, the air is cleaner here than anywhere else in the country.

MATTHEW: Sir, have you noticed the change in Mary?

LUCIUS: Well, she seems to tire more quickly now than when we first left Nazareth.

MATTHEW: It's more than that. When we started out the baby seemed high up. Now it's low and Mary's spirit seems to have dropped with it. She snaps at Joseph and me, and grimaces when your back is turned.

LUCIUS: Huh. Selling the donkey didn't help. I wish she had consented to a litter. She should be home with her mother and sisters fussing over her. Instead she is in the wilderness with three men who know less about childbirth than she does.

MATTHEW: And she was supposed to have delivered by now. I'm told those extra days are very hard on a woman. It's no wonder she has no patience.

LUCIUS: I'm glad now that Swan is barren. Can you imagine my wife at this stage with her temper?

MATTHEW: I've felt her temper many times. It's best she is barren.

*(JOSEPH and MARY join MATTHEW and LUCIUS.)*

LUCIUS: Sit here, little one. We'll rest for a while then you three remain here while I make certain that all is safe at home. I'll be back within an hour.

JOSEPH: One more hour and then we're there, Mary. Bethlehem is just one more hour away.

*(SHE begins to cry and hides her face in her hands. JOSEPH consoles her while LUCIUS and MATTHEW exchange nervous glances.)*

MARY: I'm sorry. I've been trying to hold in that outburst for days. My feet are swollen, my back never stops aching, and I am so tired. Don't mind me. Let's just get there and I'll be better.

LUCIUS: Just a while longer, little one. I'll go ahead to make sure it's safe. Wait just over there and I'll be back.

*(HE heads toward the inn as the THREE exit. LIGHTS fade CS and rise SR. Lucius arrives at the inn and calls for SWAN. Swan is just inside the inn and brightens at his call. She is about to run to him, stops herself then walks outside.)*

LUCIUS: Woman of the house!

SWAN: So, the wandering husband has decided to return. And why did it take so long?

LUCIUS: You are a hard woman. I'll tell you what's going on but first... *(HE embraces HER and takes her aside for a private talk.)* Have any strangers been here looking for me or a young family?

SWAN: Are you in trouble?

LUCIUS: Maybe, I don't know yet. Anyone here that asked for me or a young pregnant girl?

SWAN: Two weeks ago a group of soldiers came with some important-looking Jew. They stayed for a while then left. We heard no more of it. What is going on?

LUCIUS: I met a young couple in Nazareth. The man is a carpenter and his betrothed is with child. Matthew and I escorted them here. Swan, those two are special. Do you know the myth of the Messiah?

SWAN: You can't live in this country more than a month and not know it. Why?

LUCIUS: I believe the girl carries the Messiah in her womb.

SWAN: What? How is that so? Do you really believe this?

## **End of Freeview**

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