

MELCHIOR'S JOURNEY

by Susan A. J. Lyttek

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STORY OF THE PLAY

The Magi were part of an elite class of scholars. While most of them were not actually kings, they were highly respected for their learning. Many students of history even surmise that the prophet Daniel was a Magi who in turn taught Zoroaster – the figure many of the Magi would have considered their religious founder at the time of Christ.

It was the prophet Daniel who most accurately foretold the birth of the Messiah. The Magi would most certainly have a record of Daniel's prophecies. And they would have been searching the heavens for a sign that the prophecies would come to pass.

But nearly five hundred years had passed since Daniel's time. Many of Daniel and Zoroaster's teachings had decayed in the telling and retelling. What if the Magi as a group had decayed and all but abandoned the prophecies? What if the teachers had gotten lax? What if only three young men followed the Star?

Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar were the youngest of the Magi. They were full Magi, but the junior members of the society, given the task of staying up late or rising early whenever the stars needed to be consulted. While the religious leadership in Judea had been reducing every law to minutia, the Magi leadership had been forming committees to analyze and reinterpret every prophecy, prediction and story.

Of all the Wise Men, only Balthazar truly believed the prophecies at the beginning. Melchior respected the elder Wise Men and had difficulty believing that they might all be in error. Caspar believed what he saw, but he was more interested in challenging the leadership and having an adventure.

In this fictional account, the apostle Matthew has gone on one of his early evangelical missions to Babylon. It is about 10 years since Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. The church is new, growing and just beginning to experience dispersion due to persecution. Matthew hopes to reach many in the leadership of neighboring countries with the message of Christ. But when he reaches the observatories of the Magi in Babylon, he is in for a surprise. Melchior, now an elder of the Magi, has known Christ for years. In fact, he has a message for Matthew. Matthew, who thought he would share the good news with an elderly man, finds himself the recipient of a wonderful tale. This might have been the story ...

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(12 m, 4 w)

OLDER MELCHIOR: An elder of the Magi.

MATTHEW: Former tax collector and future author of the gospel.

MELCHIOR: A young Wise Man, forty years earlier. Originally from Persia, he came to study in Babylon. His wife is from Babylon. He longs for the status and security that will come when he becomes an elder.

BALTHAZAR: A young Wise Man, born and raised in Babylon. His father, an influential tradesman, wanted him to follow in his footsteps. He is single.

CASPAR: A young Wise Man, single, originally from Arabia. None of his wealthy, influential family have been Wise Men, but he showed an aptitude for history and star-reading from a very early age. Since he is not from the wise tradition, he is more open to change and sees many of their scriptures and treatises differently.

ASTARA: Melchior's wife.

ABED: Caspar's servant who accompanies the Magi and takes care of the camels.

**HORSE TRADER(S)
TRAVELER/GABRIEL**

INNKEEPER: Woman in Philadelphia who provides shelter and rest to Magi.

CHAMBER MAID

HEROD: Judea's evil king.

SADDUCEE 1: One of Herod's Jewish advisers.

SADDUCEE 2: One of Herod's Jewish advisers.

MARY: Mother of Jesus.

JOSEPH: The carpenter and husband of Mary.

Time: Approximately 40 AD and around the time of the birth of Jesus.

Performance time: 50-60 minutes.

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SET

It is important that the play flow directly from scene to scene without blackouts or extra pauses. To facilitate the smooth forward motion of the play, it is best to keep set pieces to a minimum. A simple theatrical solution is to have the set be composed entirely of platforms and cubes. Cut a hand-wide opening on opposite sides of the cubes and they can be moved easily about the stage, becoming stools, rocks, benches and water holes. Throw an embroidered cloth over them, and they turn into tables. Move them together, add a fancy blanket and pillow, and they become a luxurious sofa. It might be useful to place Older Melchior and Matthew on a raised platform, suggesting a step up toward the window of the observatory. For the opening and concluding scenes, they can use the whole stage, but during the "journey" they remain by the table with the scrolls.

PROPS

Scrolls
Telescopes
Treasure box, gold crown
Dark jar of myrrh
Lanterns or torches
Travel bags
Water skins. and eating bowls
Water dipper
Camel prod
Baby Jesus doll
Bright jar for frankincense
Fancy robes for magi
Bag of grain

SCENE 1
A Time to Remember

(AT RISE: Observatory in Babylon. View of stars, table with chair and scrolls. Early evening. OLDER MELCHIOR faces the view of the stars with his hands raised in supplication.)

OLDER MELCHIOR: Give me wisdom, Lord. Make me teachable to truths of You I have not learned. Give me grace and season my words with Your salt. Thank you, Blessed Savior, for this opportunity. *(HE lowers his hands, but continues to face stars and appears to be praying.)*

(Enter MATTHEW, walking slowly.)

MATTHEW: Sir? Elder Magi? Magi Melchior?

OLDER MELCHIOR: *(HIS back to MATTHEW.)* What a beautiful night! I can see Your handwriting on all the stars!

MATTHEW: *(Hesitantly.)* I appreciate that you are willing to see me.

OLDER MELCHIOR: *(Turning to MATTHEW.)* Yes, yes. Come here, young man. Please tell me your name again. Then say what you have to say.

MATTHEW: *(Respectfully.)* I am Matthew. *(Pauses nervously.)* I want to tell you about the Jewish Messiah. I want to tell you how He was born, ministered to others, died and then rose again. How He told us to go to the uttermost parts of the earth and share His good news. I came here to give you new hope.

OLDER MELCHIOR: *(With a gleam in HIS eye.)* You came to tell me about Jesus? The baby who was born in Bethlehem some forty years ago?

MATTHEW: *(Surprised.)* Why yes. Did you hear my message from someone at the court? Or did another traveler let you know what I have been speaking of?

OLDER MELCHIOR: *(Softly chuckling.)* Neither, my son. And you're more than welcome to tell me His good news. His good news is my good news, you might say. But first ... *(Starts rummaging through a pile of scrolls, finally pulls one out with a flourish.)* Ah! Here it is!

MATTHEW: What is it, Magi Melchior?

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OLDER MELCHIOR: My record. My journal if you will. From that time, about forty years ago. I met Him then. During the year of His birth.

MATTHEW: *(Confused.)* Met who, sir?

OLDER MELCHIOR: Jesus. God. I even met an angel. And my life has never been the same. *(Holding up scroll.)* This is my record of those days. At that time, I was young and impetuous. *(Sizing up MATTHEW.)* I was probably even a bit younger than you are now. I hadn't been married long. I was ambitious. I wanted to be one of the top Wise Men. *(Unrolls scroll.)* This tells the whole story. Parts of which, I'd rather not share. But God has a way of requiring humility from me whenever I get too exalted in my own mind. *(Looking at scroll. Reads HIS notes.)* This was the place it all began. *(Gestures toward stars.)* Looking at those stars. In particular, the messages in the stars. And then the surprise miracle of THE STAR. The glorious, unexpected star that beckoned each of us in different ways.

(Pacing.) It was in this room that we first saw the signs. There were three of us. Our leader, or instigator if you'd rather, was Caspar. And our steadying force was Balthazar. If anything, I was the weakest link.

We were the junior Wise Men. We completed all the training and apprenticeships two years earlier. But as the youngest of the trained, we had to be responsible for all the assignments the older men would rather not endure.

Which is why we were in this room before dawn on that day...

(LIGHTS fade as MATTHEW and OLDER MELCHIOR move SL to watch the action from the past unfold.)

End of Freeview

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