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Perusal
NOT FOR PRODUCTION

Three Men and a Star

A play in two acts

Written by James Addis

An ancient prophecy declares that a bright new star in the heavens points to the imminent birth of the long-awaited Messiah. Three Persian scholars set out on an intrepid journey to find the child, believing they are at the dawn of a new age. But their pious quest unwittingly sparks a diplomatic crisis, a crisis of faith and the fury of a demented king.

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Characters

Professor Balthasar	Chancellor of the University of Susa, an expert in Jewish Law, wise man
Caspar	Student of Balthasar, wise man
Melchior	Student of Balthasar, wise man
King Tiridates	King of Persia
Herald to Tiridates	A servant of King Tiridates
Servant Girl	A servant of King Tiridates
Mansoor	A scribe at the court of King Tiridates
Old Hag	
Afareen	Caspar's fiancée—the most beautiful girl in Persia
The Devil	
King Herod	King of Judea
Herald to Herod	A servant of King Herod
Counselor	An advisor to King Herod
Chief Priest	Head of the Sanhedrin
Baby Jesus	The Messiah
Mary	Mother of Jesus
Joseph	Husband of Mary
First Shepherd	
Second Shepherd	
Soldier	An officer in the Persian army
Ensemble	A group of about eight to 12 singers, one of whom is designated a court musician in the court of King Tiridates. The ensemble assumes three roles: courtiers to King Tiridates, courtiers to King Herod and the angels.

THREE MEN AND A STAR was first produced at Our Saviors Baptist Church, Federal Way on December 13, 2013, with the following cast:

In order of appearance ...

Melchior	James Addis
Professor Balthasar	Ted Gentry
Caspar	Jeremy Guddat
King Tiridates	Ryan Kleps
Herald to Tiridates	Enoch Yang
Servant Girl	Jennifer Clausen
Mansoor	James Gentry
Old Hag	Kelly Roach
Afareen	Tama Fulton
The Devil	Michael Duckett
King Herod	Michael Petzoldt
Herald to Herod	Garrett Miller
Counselor	Phillip Reed
Chief Priest	Tim Vincent
Baby Jesus	Elijah Meyer
Mary at Bethlehem	Rachel Officer
Joseph	James Gentry
First Shepherd	Enoch Yang
Second Shepherd	Tyler Kleps
Soldier	Phillip Reed
Mary at Nazareth	Suzanne Isaac

Ensemble Sharon Brumbaugh, Wayne Officer, Shirley Johns, Carol Nanavich, Margaret Gitome, Mary Hardt, Dan Hammes, Cathy Gossage, Dianne Morrison, Rose Nanavich, Barbara Lunde, LeeAnn Hardt, Connie Kelly.

Directed by Patrick Eskew
Settings and costumes by Cathy Officer
Technical direction by Corey Meyer
Lighting by Ted Gentry

Act 1

Act 1, Scene 1

It is early in the evening in Professor Balthasar's study, which is adorned with maps, charts and shelves of scrolls. The room is in semi-darkness and dotted with unlit candles. A jug of wine and cups are arranged on a sideboard. Possibly there is some evidence of primitive scientific equipment and maybe a blackboard on which are chalked geometric drawings and mathematical equations. There is a trunk containing ancient scrolls. There is a desk, overflowing with papers. There is a smaller more intimate table surrounded by cushions to sit on. Although there maybe untidiness, there is a general air of refinement and quality about the furnishings. Balthasar, when he appears, is well dressed in Persian garb and Caspar and Melchior are similarly finely attired. The men wear ornate swords.

MELCHIOR

(He gets up from a seat in the audience and stands at the front of the stage.)

You know, Christmas is a wonderful time of year isn't it? In all the great cities of the world—in New York, London, Paris, Rome ... Federal Way,¹ the high streets will be ablaze with colored lights and decorations. People will feast together and give each other gifts. They will gather in churches, chapels, and magnificent cathedrals to sing the great Christmas carols. And why? Well, to celebrate the birth of Jesus of course—the savior of the world.

(Pause.)

But what about the very first Christmas?

(Lights slowly dim. There is almost total darkness except for a spotlight on Melchior.)

Well, what a different matter that was. Rome was something but Paris was a mere colonial outpost, and as for London, New York, and Federal Way, they appeared on no known maps. Two shabby empires—Rome and Persia—quarreled continuously and for the most part were ruled by tyrants and madmen. Beyond the borders of these corrupt states—complete darkness and barbarity. Life for nearly everybody was—as someone once aptly put it—nasty, brutish and short. On that first Christmas there were no lights, no decorations, no presents, no feasting no music. As far as anyone could tell, there was absolutely nothing to celebrate at all.

(Pause.)

Or was there? In the study of Professor Balthasar, Chancellor of the University of Susa—the highest seat of learning in Persia and maybe the world—there was perhaps just one small pinprick of light ... And I am ashamed to say, I very nearly missed it.

(Melchior exits. Balthasar enters carrying a lighted candle. He is humming contentedly and begins to wander around lighting various other candles. As the candles are lit, the lights begin to come up. Balthasar seats

¹ Federal Way is the city where the play was first performed. The city where the play is due to be performed should be substituted for Federal Way. Unless, of course, the city happens to be New York, London, Paris or Rome. In this case, simply delete "Federal Way."

himself behind the desk and begins to write on one of his papers with a large quill. There is a knock on the door.)

BALTHASAR

Come in!

(Caspar enters with Melchior close behind.)

CASPAR

You called for us Professor?

BALTHASAR

Yes, of course. Come in, come in gentlemen. Take a seat.

(Balthasar motions to the cushions by the small table. Caspar and Melchior sit down. Balthasar busies himself organizing drinks while continuing to talk.)

Well this is cause for a celebration! I have marked your final examinations and I have to say, as expected, you have both done extraordinarily well. Caspar top marks in philosophy, ancient Persian history, mathematics, physical sciences, and astronomy. Jewish studies? Hmmm, well maybe a little more work required.

CASPAR

Well, thank you professor.

BALTHASAR

Melchior. Exemplary in economics, mathematics, languages, eastern religions and the Roman Empire. You are both a credit to the University of Susa.

MELCHIOR

It's been an honor to study under you, professor.

BALTHASAR

Nonsense, the pleasure is entirely mine. A beaker of wine gentlemen?

(He hands them the filled cups of wine.)

A toast to wisdom, truth and the pursuit of knowledge.

CASPAR and MELCHIOR

(They stand and raise their cups.)

The pursuit of knowledge.

(They all drink.)

BALTHASAR

Now to business. I have spoken to the king and as you know he has taken a great interest in your development and wishes to take you immediately into the royal service. Caspar I have recommended you for the finance ministry and Melchior

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Each of you will be second in seniority only to the minister himself.

CASPAR

(Thrilled.)

Well, Mithra be praised. Thank you, professor!

(He turns to Melchior.)

Can you believe it?

MELCHIOR

Things could be worse.

BALTHASAR

That's not all. The king also wishes you to join his inner circle of advisors. You might be interested to know that you will be the youngest men to do so for, oh, say the past 200 years. With, of course, one notable exception.

MELCHIOR

That wouldn't have been you would it professor?

BALTHASAR

Ah, well now you come to mention it, I suppose it would. Oh, and one other thing. You will also be required—as punishment for adding considerably to the gray hairs on my head—to do some lecturing for the freshmen at this fine institution.

MELCHIOR

Surely, we don't deserve that.

CASPAR

Oh, don't you listen to him! I'll whip them into shape.

(Imagining a classroom setting and adopting a superior tone.)

Now listen to me you unlearned herd of mountain goats. Your next essay will discuss eschatological variations in the minor Jewish prophets. Your assignment is to be handed in first thing tomorrow morning. Students failing to meet the required standard will naturally be flogged and thrown to the lions.

BALTHASAR

(Chuckling.)

Yes, well given your rather shaky grasp of the law and the prophets, perhaps you better leave Jewish studies to me.

(He walks absent-mindedly to the front of the stage to look through an imaginary window, which faces the audience. He looks up at the stars.)

CASPAR

Well, OK. But just wait till I tell my future father-in-law that I'm now a university lecturer and advisor to King Tiridates himself! That should stop him looking down his nose at me as if I'm some sort of simpleton.

BALTHASAR

(Still looking at the sky, becoming rather distracted and vague.)

Hmmm, high position, titles, prestige, honors, and of course the wealth that comes with them. All very nice. But I sometimes wonder if they aren't mere baubles. Worse, a distraction. Leading a man away from his true calling. Making him content with something tawdry and worthless—when a much greater treasure is at hand.

CASPAR

(He gives a confused glance at Melchior, who shrugs his shoulders in bewilderment.)

I beg your pardon, professor.

BALTHASAR

(Not really hearing him. Still looking into the sky, almost in a trance.)

All my life I have been searching after knowledge. Aristotle, Plato, Pythagoras, Zoroaster, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel. Jewish prophets, Greek philosophers, Persian seers. And all the while never quite ... All the while thinking there was something greater, bigger ... deeper ... getting close but never quite ... But it is out there. Whatever it is. If one could only see just a little bit further ...

(Emerging from his reverie.)

Caspar, you're pretty good at astronomy if I remember correctly?

CASPAR

Yes, top of the class most years.

(He flashes a smirk at Melchior.)

MELCHIOR

Oh, please!

BALTHASAR

Come here then. Read the sky for me.

CASPAR

(Slightly surprised but joins Balthasar at the front of the stage and stares out of the window.)

Well, a clear night. Let me see we have ...

(He begins to list the constellations, tracing their outline with his hands.)

Well, low in the east the Chained Princess; a little higher, the Winged Horse; just to the west of the Winged Horse we have the Swan. Further west still we have the Dragon, encircling the Little Bear.

BALTHASAR

Tell me each of the stars you see making up the Dragon.

CASPAR

(He stares intently at the sky.)

Well lowest in the sky we have Kappa Draconis, Thuban, followed by Iota Draconis, Eta Draconis, Nodus, Chi Draconis and ...

(Becoming unsure of himself.)

... at the highest point, Eltanin.

BALTHASAR

Stop there! And higher yet than Eltanin?

CASPAR

Yes, I was wondering about that. Strange. It does burn bright doesn't it? I can't for the life of me think what it is.

BALTHASAR

Melchior, hand him the star chart in the rack will you?

(Melchior passes Caspar the chart.)

CASPAR

(Unfurling the chart and studying it closely.)

Well let me see we have the Dragon encircling the Little Bear. Kappa Draconis, Thuban, Iota Draconis, oh yes, Theta Draconis—I missed that one—Eta Draconis, Nodus, Chi Draconis but nothing marked above Eltanin. Extraordinary! I wonder which nincompoo compiled this pathetic excuse for a chart.

BALTHASAR

I compiled the chart.

MELCHIOR

Whoops.

CASPAR

Oh sorry, professor!

(Trying to stifle a snigger.)

Still, you have to admit you did drop a bit of a clanger there. It's practically winking at you.

BALTHASAR

The chart is correct. At least it was when I compiled it. Melchior, open the trunk. You'll find another chart there. Be careful with it. It's very ancient. Give it to Caspar.

(Melchior opens the trunk, finds the ancient chart and hands it to Caspar who unfurls it. It unleashes clouds of dust in the process.)

CASPAR

My word, this is old.

(He strains to see the ancient marks on the chart.)

Oh yes, here it is right above Eltanin. Well, well, well. How interesting. So who compiled this chart?

BALTHASAR

It was compiled by the prophet Rakhshan, advisor to the great Nebuchadnezzar, more than 500 years ago.

MELCHIOR

Wasn't he the one who suggested Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom would be blown away like a leaf in a passing breeze? At which point he bent over, lifted his tunic and ...

BALTHASAR

Yes, yes, yes. No need to go into that now. The important point to remember is that Prophet Rakhshan, despite the tomfoolery, was a true prophet. All his predictions came true.

CASPAR

Hmmm, and he saw this star—which must have disappeared for quite a while—and now it's come back again. That's quite something.

BALTHASAR

Not quite. You see the great prophet never actually saw the star himself. He simply predicted that it would one day appear. It's a prophetic chart. He said the star's appearance would signify the imminent birth of the King of the Jews. The one Zoroaster called the Victorious Benefactor. The one the Jews call the Messiah.

CASPAR

Really!

BALTHASAR

That's only a small part of it. We are not talking simply of a king here. We are talking about a king of kings. Rakhshan said this king would be like a king to all nations. But more than that. He would be the means of salvation for every man.

CASPAR

I'm not sure I follow.

BALTHASAR

Well, you both believe in God right?

MELCHIOR

(He is skeptical and slightly irritated by the question.)

Hmmmm. Well ... I don't see ...

CASPAR

(Slightly shocked at Melchior.)

Well ... yes. Of course we do.

BALTHASAR

Of course you do. Zoroaster tells us there is one God, the source of all goodness ... the creator of the universe ... And you believe in life after death?

CASPAR

Yes.

BALTHASAR

A day of judgment?

CASPAR

Yes.

BALTHASAR

Heaven?

CASPAR

Yes.

BALTHASAR

Hell?

CASPAR

I think so.

BALTHASAR

And who goes to heaven?

CASPAR

The righteous, of course.

BALTHASAR

Ah, the righteous

(Pause.)

And who exactly are "the righteous"?

CASPAR

Well, that's easy; those who practice good thoughts, good words and good deeds ... like me.

(Balthasar and Melchior laugh.)

BALTHASAR

Quite so. But are you really righteous, Caspar?

CASPAR

I think so.

BALTHASAR

Think so? You're not sure?

CASPAR

Well ... Yes, I am a righteous man.

BALTHASAR

Really? You're really sure about that? Did you never cheat on a test? Fudge your taxes? Toy with a girl's affections?

MELCHIOR

(Innocently.)

Yes, do enlighten us Caspar.

CASPAR

Well, really professor, I ...

BALTHASAR

Ah, don't worry, I'm teasing you. But you get my drift? How do you know your righteousness is really ... righteous enough?

CASPAR

(Pause.)

The honest truth is I don't know.

BALTHASAR

Exactly! None of us really know do we? That's the trouble with our dear old friend Zoroaster isn't it? He's led us right up the theological creek and then thrown away the damned paddle. As a matter of fact, when we do come before Almighty God, I can't help feeling none of us is going to cut the mustard.

MELCHIOR

So, if I understand you correctly professor, we are all going to be fried to a crisp in hell?

BALTHASAR

That's about the sum of it.

CASPAR

Charming!

BALTHASAR

Unless ... unless ... someone or something can get us out of this terrible mess

(Pause.)

You know, there were many astronomers in Rakhshan's day. Not one of them noted this star. Only Rakhshan mentioned it. A star that would indicate the savior of the world was about to be born. Gentlemen, we live in exciting times.

(Looking at the star again.)

I believe this day has arrived.

CASPAR

(His eyes are also transfixed on the star.)

By Mithra, this is extraordinary. You're suggesting we are at a sort of turning point in the history of the world!

BALTHASAR

I think we are.

MELCHIOR

Oh, come on. Haven't men all through the ages somehow believed that the period they live in is more important, more significant, more worthy than any other time. Well, it's a lot of utter nonsense—a pathetic attempt to give their trivial little lives some significance.

CASPAR

Look Melchior! Come and look.

(He seizes Melchior by the arm and propels him to the window.)

Have you ever seen such a thing?

(Melchior glances briefly at the star and then quickly looks down again.)

MELCHIOR

(Weary)

Yes, yes very nice.

CASPAR

I said "LOOK."

(He seizes Melchior by the chin and forces him to look upward.)

MELCHIOR

(He looks intently at the star for several seconds and softens a little.)

Well ... it is quite something.

CASPAR

(He turns to Balthasar.)

But what should we do? If this is a sign, what does it direct us to do?

BALTHASAR

Ah well. That rather brings us to my, err, hidden agenda for our little meeting tonight. To have been given such a sign is indeed a great honor but also a terrible responsibility. Such a portent I suspect is revealed only to a privileged few. We must go and find this king.

CASPAR

Yes! We must. To think we may be the first to welcome the Messiah into this forlorn world. We must leave at once!

MELCHIOR

Aren't you getting married this week?

CASPAR

(He's only just realized)

Oh yes, so I am.

(Pause.)

But Afareen, I'll talk to her. She will understand ... I will make her understand. This is a quest that cannot be set aside. Am I right professor?

BALTHASAR

That is the noble spirit I was hoping for. And you Melchior? Will you forsake the trappings of court for a dangerous journey, leading I know not where to an end I frankly cannot foresee?

MELCHIOR

(He looks at his fellows as if they have gone mad.)

Absolutely ...

(He is about to say 'not' but then hesitates as he glances in turn at the earnest faces of Balthasar and Caspar.)

Well I think this is madness ...

(Resigned.)

But, all right then, I'm in.

CASPAR

(Putting his arm around Melchior, though the latter continues to look miserable.)

Hurrah for Melchior! A fine and noble fellow's true colors are outed—even if he can be a bit a sourpuss most of the time.

BALTHASAR

(Putting his hand on Melchior's shoulder.)

Melchior, I knew you would not disappoint me.

CASPAR

So what happens next?

BALTHASAR

I will write a memorandum to King Tiridates and seek an audience. I will ask that he make us special ambassadors to Jerusalem with authority to seek out the King of the Jews. To bring him gifts from the royal treasury and to assure the newborn king's guardians of our loyalty, and humble obedience, and also that of the King of Persia himself.

MELCHIOR

(Skeptical.)

King Tiridates will agree to such a request?

BALTHASAR

(Pause. He looks up at the star again, lost in thought.)

Yes ... I think he will. Well, gentleman, I have an important letter to compose.

(He begins to show them to the door.)

Caspar, go see Afareen. Tonight! Warn her of our plans. But otherwise let's keep this to ourselves until I have opportunity to see the king.

CASPAR

Yes professor, goodnight. And may the king listen.

(He leaves.)

MELCHIOR

Goodnight professor.

(He leaves.)

Act 1, Scene 2

It is the royal gardens of King Tiridates. There are ornate railings, decorative plants, fine sculptures, and garden benches. The king is seated on one of these. Servants attend to his nails and hair. Another servant gently waves a palm frond to keep him cool. A herald enters.

HERALD for TIRIDATES

Professor Balthasar, your majesty.

(Balthasar enters.)

TIRIDATES

Ah, Balthasar my old stargazer. What ails thee?

BALTHASAR

I'm in good health your majesty.

TIRIDATES

(Not convinced.)

You are? Oh, sorry about this.

(He waves his hand at the servants, indicating that they should leave.)

Be gone with you.

(Servants leave.)

I am feasting with a delegation of governors from Mesopotamia tonight. One has to look one's best you know.

BALTHASAR

I quite understand, your majesty.

TIRIDATES

Don't know why. Great lot of spongers, all of them. Do you know, last time they were here they almost drained the entire royal wine cellars.

BALTHASAR

I am sure their combined capacity could not hope to compete with that of your majesty.

TIRIDATES

(He roars with laughter then wags his finger at Balthasar.)

Just you watch it Balthasar. I'm not above sending eminent professors to the gallows you know.

BALTHASAR

In that case I must depend on your majesty's renowned mercy and legendary generosity of spirit.

TIRIDATES

Yes, I think you will.

(Suddenly serious.)

Now what's this I hear about Rakhshan's star?

BALTHASAR

It's appeared your majesty.

TIRIDATES

Ah, Rakhshan. Wasn't he the one the one who suggested Nebuchadnezar's kingdom would be blown away like a leaf in a passing breeze. At which point, if I remember correctly, he turned around, bent over, lifted his tunic and ...

BALTHASAR

(Cringing.)

Err, yes, yes, your majesty ...

TIRIDATES

And the whole court was assembled at the time?

BALTHASAR

(Trying to move on to other things.)

Yes, your majesty—a footnote in history that unfortunately my students never quite seem to forget. But ...

TIRIDATES

(Trying to suppress a big laugh but not quite succeeding.)

You know, I've often wondered why the great Neb did not have him thrown into the fiery furnace for his impertinence.

BALTHASAR

The prophet Belteshazzar interceded on his behalf.

TIRIDATES

Belteshazzar, eh. Wasn't he the Jew?

BALTHASAR

Yes, as a matter of fact he was. His real name was Daniel.

TIRIDATES

Ah, thought so. Which brings us to the Jews. You consider yourself a bit of an expert on the Jews, don't you professor?

BALTHASAR

I've studied them all my life, your majesty. I think I can say, in all modesty, that I know something about them.

TIRIDATES

Now that's where I beg to differ. When you think of Jews you think of Moses, David, Solomon. The great prophets—Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, your precious Daniel. Do you not?

BALTHASAR

Well yes, those are some of the greats.

TIRIDATES

Thought so. That's the trouble with you academics; too much living in the past. Tell me, when was the last serious Jewish prophet?

BALTHASAR

Well, Malachi wrote about 450 years ago.

TIRIDATES

Four hundred and fifty years! And Yahweh has not had a word to say to them since. And what about their most prized relic—the Ark of the Covenant. Remind me, where is it exactly?

BALTHASAR

It appears to have been lost your majesty.

TIRIDATES

Lost! Lost! My dear fellow can you imagine me turning to the curator of the royal museum and saying, "Excuse me curator, wonderful display, but where exactly is the Holy Ark?"

(Assuming the nerdy voice of an incompetent curator.)

Oh, sorry your majesty we appear to have lost it.

(Resuming his normal voice.)

Good heavens man! That was a little careless of them wasn't it?

BALTHASAR

Indeed, regrettable your majesty.

TIRIDATES

Regrettable! Regrettable! Oh, Professor you are a master of understatement. Well never mind the past. What about today. Do you know who rules Judea at the moment?

BALTHASAR

Yes, King Herod.

TIRIDATES

Yes, King Herod. Only he isn't really a king is he? Just another minor Roman stooge. And do you know why the Romans rule Palestine? It wasn't through conquest you know. No, the Jews spent so much time killing one another in their petty sectarian squabbles that they had to invite the Romans in to sort out the mess. Now of course they are moaning like mad because the Romans are taxing the shirts off their backs. The sort of consequence, I might add, that a child of 10 could have foreseen. But apparently something their most learned scribes couldn't quite figure out.

BALTHASAR

Admittedly, things have been rather difficult of late.

TIRIDATES

So you want me to send you as an ambassador to this Herod?

BALTHASAR

Yes, your majesty.

TIRIDATES

And what exactly are you going to tell him?

BALTHASAR

Well in situations like this I think it's best to simply stick to the truth. We shall say we have seen the star of the newborn King of the Jews and have come to worship him.

TIRIDATES

(He laughs.)

O my dear sweet Balthasar. I just wonder how Herod is going to react to that piece of "thrilling" news. Have you ever met Herod?

BALTHASAR

I'm afraid I haven't had that honor.

TIRIDATES

Oh, it's no honor. I've met him. At some Middle East peace conference—the usual complete waste of time. Anyway, Herod had to keep slinking off from the negotiations to consult with his retinue of lackeys. Trying to work out which member of his odious family was trying to poison him next I shouldn't wonder. I've never met a man so consumed with fear.

BALTHASAR

Well if he is so timid surely that makes our quest so much easier. The man will hardly stand in our way when he learns the magnitude of our mission.

TIRIDATES

I said frightened, not timid. There's nothing timid about Herod. Fearful men are the most dangerous of all. Even the Romans cringe at his brutality. Of course, it makes the little weasel useful to them.

BALTHASAR

But with respect your majesty, our business is not with Herod. It is to find the newborn king. The man who will lead his people **out** of this present darkness.

TIRIDATES

Oh, I find your child-like faith rather touching Balthasar. Can you imagine what would happen if I did send you on this wild goose chase? I can hear the whispers in the court now.

(Assuming the voice of a devious courtier.)

Oh Balthasar has gone off on some fool errand following a star you know. The poor man's cracked. Taken Caspar and Melchior with him. Such a pity. They were such promising young men. But one could hardly trust their judgment after this. Mind you, it's not as though there aren't other promising young bucks around. My nephew, for instance. What a fine junior minister he would make ...

(Tiridates reverts to his own voice.)

Blah, blah, blah. Come on professor, you know exactly how these things work.

BALTHASAR

Your majesty, I'm begging you. This is not the time for worrying about petty politics. We are about to witness something far above all that nonsense.

TIRIDATES

That's enough. Now listen to me Balthasar. You put this idea out of your head right now. Do you understand? And put it out of the heads of Caspar and Melchior. I'm not about to send three of the brightest men in the kingdom on a hair-brained mission like this. Perhaps, one day long ago, Yahweh did care about the Jews. Well not any more. He's forgotten them. They're a joke. They are an embarrassment to the civilized world. Forget it. Do you hear me?

BALTHASAR

Yes, your majesty.

TIRIDATES

And no funny business. I know full well you are not as naïve as you make out to be.

BALTHASAR

I hear you, your majesty.

TIRIDATES

Well be on your way. And don't bring this subject up again.

(Balthasar bows and exits. The lights dim.)

Act 1, Scene 3

It is the palace garden in the early hours of the morning. A servant girl awaits instructions in the shadows. Tiridates enters suffering a bad hangover.

TIRIDATES

(He is clutching a damp towel to his head, walking unsteadily and groaning.)

Ah ... Ah ... Ah ... never again. Ah ...

SERVANT GIRL

More wine, your majesty?

TIRIDATES

Are you nuts? Water please!

(The girl brings him a cup of water. Tiridates takes a large swallow.)

Thank you.

(He sits down heavily on a garden bench.)

Remind me never ever, ever, ever, to host a delegation of Mesopotamians.

Another session like that will kill me.

(Pause. He begins to stare at the sky and becomes more relaxed.)

Do you know the stars girl?

SERVANT GIRL

I think I do sir.

TIRIDATES

You do? Tell me the constellations that you see tonight.

SERVANT GIRL

Well sir, I can see the Winged Horse, then there's the Swan, and the Little Bear and the Great Dragon.

TIRIDATES

Hmmm. Quite good for a woman.

SERVANT GIRL

(She speaks through gritted teeth.)

Thank you, my Lord.

TIRIDATES

And at the highest point of the Dragon. What star do you see?

SERVANT GIRL

That would be Eltanin.

TIRIDATES

(He walks to the front of the stage, and looks intently up at the sky.)

That's right. And above Eltanin?

SERVANT GIRL

(She joins Tiridates at the front of the stage. She is puzzled.)

Well, nothing my Lord.

TIRIDATES

What do you mean nothing? What's that star about 12 degrees above Eltanin? It's practically lighting up the whole sky!

SERVANT GIRL

Oh yes. Errm, I'm afraid I don't know my Lord.

TIRIDATES

(He stares intently at her.)

You can't see it can you?

SERVANT GIRL

No, your majesty.

TIRIDATES

Well, well, well. That is strange ... Look, send the word out. I want to see Professor Balthasar immediately.

SERVANT GIRL

Yes sir.

(She exits. Immediately, Balthasar enters from opposite side of the stage with Melchior and Caspar following close behind.)

BALTHASAR

You called your majesty?

TIRIDATES

(He is startled.)

In the name of Mithra, what are you doing creeping about at this time of night?

CASPAR and MELCHIOR

O king, live forever.

(They bow.)

BALTHASAR

It's almost dawn your majesty.

TIRIDATES

Yes, I suppose it is.

(He returns to looking up at the sky, lost in thought.)

Have you ever seen such a glorious star Balthasar?

BALTHASAR

(He joins Tiridates at the front of the stage and looks up at the sky.)

No, I have not.

TIRIDATES

You know a king has many cares, but as I gaze upon it my soul seems strangely to be at peace.

BALTHASAR

I understand, your majesty.

TIRIDATES

Do you know, I asked one of my servant girls—a smart woman—she could identify nearly all the constellations, but she could not see Rakhshan's star.

BALTHASAR

Really? Perhaps her eyesight is weak.

TIRIDATES

No, I know her. The woman could see a pin sticking out of a Persian rug from 100 feet away, but I tell you she could not see the brightest star in the sky. What on earth does that mean?

BALTHASAR

Well.

(Pause.)

The only thing I can think of is that those who can see the star are enormously privileged.

(Pause.)

And at the same time bear a great responsibility.

TIRIDATES

Yes, indeed.

(Pause.)

You really want to find this King of the Jews don't you?

BALTHASAR

With all my heart, your majesty.

TIRIDATES

(He turns to Caspar and Melchior and returns to his jovial self.)

And you, young fellows. Are you are willing to join your nutty professor on this nuttiest of his nutty escapades?

CASPAR and MELCHIOR

Yes, your majesty.

TIRIDATES

Oh dear! I always worried the University of Susa was turning out dunderheads. Now I know it for sure. Very well then, I shall have my scribe write a letter of introduction for you to deliver to King Herod.

BALTHASAR

(He speaks rather hurriedly.)

Ah, well in anticipation of your majesty's most excellent decision. I've already had scribe Mansoor working on the text. Melchior, call scribe Mansoor.

MELCHIOR

(Shouting into the wings.)

Call scribe Mansoor.

(Mansoor enters.)

TIRIDATES

(He is taken aback. Then addressing Balthasar.)

Oh, you have, have you?

(Mansoor bows and hands Tiridates a scroll.)

MANSOOR

A letter to commend the professor and his students to King Herod, your majesty.

(He bows and exits.)

BALTHASAR

All that is required is your signature, your majesty.

TIRIDATES

I see. Well of course if you are to be ambassadors you will also need certificates identifying you as such—authenticated with the king's seal.

BALTHASAR

Such foresight your majesty! In anticipation of your majesty's most excellent decision I have had scribe Mansoor work through the night to prepare the documents. Melchior, call scribe Mansoor.

MELCHIOR

(Shouting into the wings.)

Call scribe Mansoor.

(Mansoor re-enters and bows.)

MANSOOR

Certificates of commission for noblemen Balthasar, Caspar and Melchior, your majesty.

(He hands the certificates to Tiridates, bows and exits.)

TIRIDATES

(Follows Mansoor's exit with his eyes and is momentarily speechless.

Then he speaks through gritted teeth.)

How remarkably prescient of you Balthasar. But of course such a commission would need to be witnessed by the entire court.

BALTHASAR

: Your majesty's forethought is breathtaking, your majesty.

(Pause.)

In anticipation of your majesty's most excellent decision to have the court witness our commission, I have taken the liberty to have them assemble this morning. Caspar, Melchior, call the assembly!

(Caspar and Melchior go to either end of the stage to call the courtiers from the wings. The courtiers are the ensemble.)

CASPAR

(Shouting.)

By command of the king, the court shall assemble.

MELCHIOR

(Shouting.)

By command of the king, the court shall assemble.

(Courtiers begin to assemble on stage, each bowing respectfully toward the king as they enter. As they do so, Tiridates stares in astonishment. Then he takes Balthasar aside.)

TIRIDATES

Just a minute of your precious time professor. Remind me. Who exactly is running this kingdom?

BALTHASAR

Well naturally, as king, you are your majesty.

TIRIDATES

I am? For a moment I was beginning to feel like a puppet on a rather short string.

BALTHASAR

Perhaps the wine, your majesty, creates such peculiar illusions.

TIRIDATES

Illusion my foot!

(Suddenly taking command and speaking to the entire court.)

Well thank you all for gathering at such an early hour. As you may know we have reason to believe a man is soon to arise to be King of the Jews. We believe this man to be no ordinary king. We believe he will also be a priest and a prophet. He will in some sense be a king to all peoples; a man of justice and of peace; a beacon of hope for us all. A savior to Jews ... Persians ... and all peoples everywhere ... We are on the eve of a new era in the history of the world. Professor Balthasar and I have been engaged in extensive discussions throughout the night. Have we not Balthasar?

BALTHASAR

(Startled.)

We have?

(Recovering.)

Oh yes indeed, your majesty.

TIRIDATES

Discussions about how best we should mark this momentous event. And as always to ensure peace and harmonious relations throughout the east. I have decided ...

(Glancing sternly at Balthasar.)

... that Professor Balthasar and two of his most able students—Caspar and Melchior—should be dispatched at once to King Herod. Their mission? To find the newborn king and to offer our service, our dutiful cooperation, our humble obedience, our love, and our devotion. The Kingdom of Persia has been honored by Almighty God to witness the arrival of his chosen one. That is no small matter. And we will honor him!

COURTIERS

Hear, hear your majesty.

(There is a burst of cheers and applause from the courtiers.)

TIRIDATES

And of course our ambassadors shall bring gifts.

(Suddenly at a loss.)

Err, remind me Balthasar. What gifts did we decide were appropriate?

BALTHASAR

Ah yes, gifts. I shall take frankincense—a fitting gift for a priestly king. Such sweet incense will fill the air as he performs his religious duties—mediating between man and God.

CASPAR

And I shall take pure gold—only the finest metal to fill the new king’s treasury.

MELCHIOR

And I shall take myrrh, your majesty.

TIRIDATES

Myrrh? An embalming fluid? That’s a cheery sort of gift.

MELCHIOR

Rakhshan said this king would be a king for all generations. The manner of his death may be just as important as the manner of his life.

TIRIDATES

Yes ... Very well. Courtiers, you have heard their mission. I present to you Professor Balthasar, and his protégés Caspar and Melchior. Three of the bravest, honorable, and wisest men in all of Persia. Ambassadors to myself, King Tiridates, and invested with authority to speak on my behalf, and furthermore, instructed to find the King of Kings.

(Courtiers give rousing claps and cheers. Wise men bow.)

TIRIDATES

Court musician, do you have a song?

MUSICIAN

(The musician can be a member of the ensemble.)

I do sir.

(The court begins to sing enthusiastically.)

MUSICIAN

These three kings of Orient are²

ALL

*Bearing gifts they traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star.*

BALTHASAR

*Frankincense to offer have I
Incense owns a deity nigh
Pray’r and praising, all men raising
Worship him, God most high.*

ALL

O star of wonder, star of night

² We Three Kings of Orient Are. John Henry Hopkins Jr. Public Domain. Adapted.

*Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light.*

CASPAR

*Born a king to all mankind
Gold I bring to crown him again
King forever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign.*

ALL

*O star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light.*

MELCHIOR

(Slowly and mournfully.)

*Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume
Breathes of life of gathering gloom
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.*

BALTHASAR

*Glorious now behold him arise
King and God and sacrifice*

ALL

*Alleluia, Alleluia
Earth to heav'n replies.*

ALL

*O star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light.*

(Toward the end of the song, Mansoor hands Tiridates a quill and possibly a board to rest on. Tiridates hastily scribbles his signature on the various documents and hands them to Balthasar. Balthasar rolls them up and stows them in his garments. Once Balthasar has finished singing his part, the wise men confidently depart from the front of the stage, making their way through the audience, as the courtiers continue to sing. The courtiers stretch out their arms towards the departing wise men, as though willing them onwards.)

Act 1, Scene 4

It is dusk at a resting place on the wise men's journey. There is a grove of trees and a few large rocks.

(Caspar enters carrying a rolled up Persian rug.)

CASPAR

Sand. Sand. Sand. Sand. SAND!

(He unfurls the rug and begins to shake sand out of his clothing. Then he removes his hat, turns it upside down, and a cup full of sand pours out of it onto the ground. He sits down on the rug.)

MELCHIOR

(He enters carrying various bits of baggage, which he dumps on the ground. He removes his hat and lays it on the ground. He is exhausted.)

Such a charming journey!

CASPAR

Where's the Prof.?

MELCHIOR

Coming, I think. He's feeling a bit stiff.

(Balthasar enters slowly and painfully with exaggerated bowlegs, as if still sitting astride a camel.)

BALTHASAR:

Awwwww camels! Stubborn, ill-tempered, uncomfortable, uncooperative, foul mouthed. Can there be a more aggravating creature on the face of the earth. Awwwww.

CASPAR

Careful Professor!

BALTHASAR

I am going to die.

(He falls flat on his face.)

CASPAR

Quick! Get him some water!

(He pulls Balthasar upright. Melchior uncorks his water bottle and puts it to Balthasar's lips.)

BALTHASAR

Well, what a fine lot of misfits we are. Fourteen days traveling across the desert. Searing heat, bitter cold at night and most disturbing of all Rakhshan's star has disappeared. I wish I knew what that meant.

CASPAR

Come on, professor. Perhaps you should quote us some of your beloved Hebrew poetry. That always seems to cheer you up.

BALTHASAR

Meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless
Everything is meaningless
What is twisted cannot be straightened
What is lacking cannot be compensated for
For with much wisdom comes much sorrow
The more knowledge, the more grief
Everything is meaningless, a chasing after wind.

MELCHIOR

(Long pause.)
So, did you find that helpful?

CASPAR

Not the most uplifting of texts.

(Long pause. The wise men stare out at the audience looking glum.)

BALTHASAR

Ah, you can't beat old Solomon. He certainly knows how to warm the soul!

CASPAR

(Looking into the sky.)
I just wish we could see the star again. It always seems to have kept me going.

BALTHASAR

Yes, well maybe a long rest will help. Goodnight gentlemen.
(He lies on his back.)

CASPAR

Good idea.
(He lies on his back.)

MELCHIOR

Indeed.

(He lies on his back next to the others. The men yawn and sigh and maybe begin to softly snore. The lights slowly dim to almost complete darkness. Even the snoring disappears. Long pause.)

OLD HAG

(She enters with a loud ear-piercing screech. A spotlight illuminates her as she trips gaily around the stage)

Yeeeeaaaahhahahahahaha!

(She follows up with a maniacal laugh.)

BALTHASAR

(He sits bolt upright, frightened.)

What do you want, you mad woman? Go away, do you hear?

OLD HAG

Oh charming, charming, what a lovely way to treat a lady!

(Laughs.)

BALTHASAR

Go away, I tell you.

OLD HAG

Awwww, how can you tell me to go away? Why I've heard you telling your students people like me don't even exist! Well what I want to know is, dearie, if I don't exist how can I be told to go away? It don't make sense darling does it?

(Mocking laugh.)

BALTHASAR

You are merely a phantom created by my subconscious. Get out!

OLD HAG

Ohh, well if you say so dearie. I can do phantoms

(She rushes at him, making exaggerated ghost-like noises.)

Oooooooh. Oooooh. Ohhhhhh.

(Balthasar, while still on the ground, struggles to get away from her with each lunge. The old hag laughs again, and then withdraws a little.)

OLD HAG

So what's happened to the star eh? Gone, gone, gone! Tiridates was right wasn't he? You're on a wild goose chase. Still, the silly old fool let you go didn't he? Now you are all going to die in the desert I shouldn't wonder. Oh how very sad.

BALTHASAR

Rakhshan was never wrong. I don't need to listen to this.

OLD HAG

(Assuming a sly and serious tone)

Oh, so he was never wrong was he? Thought this newborn king was a cause for celebration? A time of joy? A time of blessing? I don't think so.

BALTHASAR

Get out of here!

OLD HAG

Shush. I hear a voice. What does it say? What does it say?

(She puts her head to one side and cups her ear as if to hear a voice from the sky. Her voice gets even creepier.)

A voice is heard in Ramah
Mourning and great weeping
Rachel weeping for her children
And refusing to be comforted.

(Pause.)

But why, why, why won't she be comforted?

(She lifts herself on tiptoes straining to hear from the sky.)

Because her children are no more!

(Mocking laughter. Then triumphantly shouts in Balthasar's face.)

Her children are no more!

(She shrieks with laughter.)

Her children are no more!

(She begins to skip and dance around Balthasar and the sleeping men while making her exit. She turns her words into a chant.)

No more, no more, no more. Her children are no more.

No more, no more, no more. Her children are no more.

No more, no more, no more. Her children are no more.

No more, no more, no more. Her children are no more.

(She exits.)

BALTHASAR

(He is shaking from the encounter and takes some time to recover.)

O Lord, have mercy.

(Balthasar lies down again to sleep. Almost total darkness descends again. Afareen enters from opposite side of stage. She is beautiful and seductive. As with the old hag, a spotlight follows her, leaving most of the stage in darkness.)

AFAREEN

(Softly.)

Oh, Caspar ...

CASPAR:

(Immediately he sits bolt upright. Lights come up a little.)

Darling!

(She approaches gracefully; drawing tantalizingly close to Caspar but daintily skips out of reach when he reaches out for her.)

AFAREEN

O Caspar, why have you left me at home, all alone? A girl gets sooooo lonely.

CASPAR

But Afareen, I told you. We need to follow the star and find the Messiah.

AFAREEN

Hmmmmm.

(She begins to circle Caspar flirtatiously, running her hands through her hair.)

Caspar, do you love me?

CASPAR

Love you? Of course I love you. Darling, I would die for you.

(Pause.)

I say, Afareen, you look beautiful tonight.

AFAREEN

Do I? But you seem so much more interested in chasing your silly star than being with me.

CASPAR

Look Afareen, not long now. The day after tomorrow we will be in Jerusalem. We will find the king. Perform our duties. Then it's straight home to you, I promise. We will get married. I am going to be advisor to King Tiridates himself. Every noble in the land will come to the wedding.

AFAREEN

Hmmmm. Oh, really Caspar, I don't think I can wait that long. I just feel so alone, and my father says you're a fool. You'll never come back. And do you know? There are so many handsome men who have called since you've been gone.

CASPAR

Handsome men! Who? Whose been calling?

AFAREEN

Well, your brother has been so attentive. He can be soooo charming you know.

CASPAR

Little Farid! I'll kill him!

AFAREEN

(Appearing not to hear.)

Oh, those soft brown eyes and those strong manly arms. Hmmmmmm.

CASPAR

Now listen to me Afareen. I love you, you love me. We're getting married and that's that. I can't believe your talking like this.

(Afareen begins to slowly drift away.)

Afareen! Afareen! Come back. Come back, I haven't finished ...

AFAREEN

(Drifting away, her voice is ever dreamier.)

Caspar you sound so faint. I can hardly hear you... You seem so far away, far away, far away, far, far, away... Hmmmmmm.

(She exits but continues to be heard offstage, though ever more faintly.)

... far away ... far away ...

CASPAR

(Yelling and desperate.)

Afareen! Come back! Come back, I tell you.

(He rubs his eyes and squints after her. He notes the other wise men sleeping, and then emits a long sigh.)

Aggh, what a nightmare!

(He looks wistfully into the sky and hugs himself.)

Oh Afareen, you are what I need right now. Oh, I want you close.

(He buries his head in his arms. Then slowly lies down again to sleep.)

(There is a long pause then Melchior begins to stir. He is clearly uncomfortable. He raises himself on one elbow.)

DEVIL

(Offstage.)

Ah, I see you have come to your senses.

(The devil enters. He is in modern dress, wearing a sharp suit, shirt, tie, and expensive shoes. He looks like a man who wears too much cologne.)

MELCHIOR

Who are you exactly?

DEVIL

Who am I...**exactly?** Well that's rather difficult to say. People call me many things ... the Devil ... Lucifer ... Beelzebub ... the Prince of Darkness. Personally I prefer ...

(He becomes rather grand.)

... The Voice of Reason.

MELCHIOR

And what does the Voice of Reason have to say?

DEVIL

I'm afraid the Voice of Reason has to tell you, that you, dear Melchior, are in the process of making a complete ass of yourself. Tell me, where is the star you have been following?

MELCHIOR

We have not seen it for the last 12 nights.

DEVIL

Indeed? Strange sort of sign wouldn't you say? One that disappears once its supposed message becomes all the more critical. But then the Voice of Reason would tell you that the star has no message whatsoever. Stars come and stars go. Just like the sun. It rises in the east, sets in the west, and then rises in the east again. Or the wind: It blows to the south; it blows to the north; it blows to the south.

(He begins to prance around miming the actions to his words, almost in a trance. Periodically he advances on Melchior, unnerving him. Meanwhile, Melchior gets to his feet and attempts to keep his distance.)

Stars come and stars go. Just like the sun. It rises in the east, sets in the west, and then rises in the east again. Or the wind: It blows to the south; it blows to the north; it blows to the south again. What does it all mean Melchior?

MELCHIOR

Nothing. It's just a silly cosmic dance.

DEVIL

Of course it is. It means **nothing**. What does your star mean Melchior? Nothing. Nothing at all! And here you are in the middle of the desert. You're in bandit country, loaded with precious gifts, chasing a meaningless star. Oh, you really are a disappointment to some of my colleagues. We had you marked down as a modern man—ready to cast aside a silly superstitious past and usher in a glorious new era; one who would be part of a generation guided by reason and reason alone. Really Melchior! You are an educated man; a graduate of the University of Susa. I can hardly believe you give any credence to fairy stories. Your former fellow students must be laughing themselves silly by now. Indeed, I know for a fact they are.

MELCHIOR

Well, I have had my doubts.

DEVIL

Is that all? A few doubts? Doubts are no good unless they are acted on Melchior. Believe in your doubts. Listen to the Voice of Reason. Set yourself apart from the common herd—those who believe any ridiculous story they are told. Tell that loony professor of yours that your little party must return to Susa at once! Show some intellectual courage, man!

MELCHIOR

I'll think about it.

DEVIL

Well, I certainly hope you do more than think about it. You have a great mind Melchior. It would be such a pity to waste it.

(Melchior watches, clearly troubled, as the Devil exits. His eyes remain transfixed on the Devil's exit point until Melchior speaks again. There is a long pause. The lights come up a little but it's not yet daybreak. Balthasar sits up and rubs his eyes. He glances upward and suddenly becomes transfixed. Caspar begins to awake with yawns and stretches.)

CASPAR

(He turns to Balthasar who continues to stare into the sky.)
Professor, I don't quite know how to break this, but I'm really beginning to wonder if we are doing the right thing.

MELCHIOR

(He snaps out of his reverie.)
Wonder? I'm wondering what came over me. This whole expedition is nuts!

CASPAR

Yes, well funnily enough I'm beginning to think so myself. I mean, I'm supposed to be getting married to the most beautiful girl in Persia. What on earth am I doing stuck out here in the desert?

MELCHIOR

Never mind that. We are educated men for goodness sake. If we suddenly took off whenever a strange looking object appeared in the sky we would be chasing our tails for the rest of our lives.

(He notices Balthasar appears not to be listening but rather is still gazing intently into the sky.)

Professor! Professor! It's time to go home.

BALTHASAR

(Speaking calmly, and still looking upward.)
Tell me, gentlemen. You had visitors last night?

CASPAR

Well, I had a very vivid dream about Afareen but what's that got to do with anything.

MELCHIOR

I had a dream about someone calling himself the Voice of Reason.
(He arranges his costume and puts his hat back on.)
Weirdest dressed man I have ever seen.

BALTHASAR

Yes, thought so. That's the trouble with life isn't it? It's not as though there are no signs. Just the opposite: there are too many of them. It's always hard to tell which voice to listen to. And what makes things even more confusing is that the lying voices speak so much that is true.

MELCHIOR

I don't think this is getting us anywhere. I insist we return to Susa at once.
(He makes moves to depart.)

CASPAR

I agree.
(He makes moves to depart.)

BALTHASAR

Look up, gentlemen.

(They both look up and catch a glimpse of the star again. Balthasar slowly rises to his feet.)

CASPAR

(Pause.)
Rakhshan's star. It's returned.

BALTHASAR

Now listen to me. Don't take your eyes away my friends. Don't glance away for even a moment. Do you understand? Not a moment.
(They all stare transfixed for several seconds.)
Now think very, very carefully. Choose you this day whom you will serve?

CASPAR

(Pause. He is almost in tears.)
Forgive me professor. I am coming with you to Jerusalem.

MELCHIOR

(Pause.)
So am I.

BALTHASAR

(He begins to smile, then starts to sing. He begins softly but grows more confident as the song progresses. Caspar and Melchior soon join in until they are all singing heartily. As they sing, they begin to pack their belongings. They exit the stage while still singing.)

BALTHASAR

*He who would valiant be 'gainst all disaster,³
Let him in constancy ...*

ALL

*...follow the Master.
There's no discouragement shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.*

ALL

*Who so beset him round with dismal stories
Do but themselves confound - his strength the more is.
No foes shall stay his might; though he with giants fight,
He will make good his right to be a pilgrim.*

ALL

*Since, Lord, Thou dost defend, us with Thy Spirit,
We know we at the end, shall life inherit.
Then fancies flee away! I'll fear not what men say,
I'll labor night and day to be a pilgrim*

End of Act 1

Perusal
Only FOR
NOT FOR
PRODUCTION

³ He Who Would Valiant Be. John Bunyan/Percy Dearmer. Public Domain.

Three Men and a Star

Suggestions on sets, costumes and props

Act 1

Scene 1: Balthasar's study, evening

- Persian color palate, rich patterns and fabrics
- Low painted table as a desk
- Floor cushions and tassled pillows to sit on ... maybe a tufted ottoman
- Persian style rug
- Baskets, plumes/peacock feathers to define space
- Rack with many scrolls near desk
- Ancient looking trunk with star maps and charts
- Candles in candle holders. Alternatively, Persian or Morrocan-style lanterns
- Small carved table for tea or wine service

Hand props:

- Candle in candle holder
- Scroll and quill
- Cups plus jug or teapot for sharing a celebratory beverage
- Hand-held spy glass
- One large, ancient-looking star chart

Scene 2: Garden of King Tiridates, daytime

- Curtain opens to lush palace garden setting, bright lighting, birds chirping, music in the distance
- Suggest a garden with a backdrop or lighting gobo (Perhaps use a Taj Mahal gobo with reflecting pond)
- A stone patio bench or wicker chair as "throne"
- Large potted palms and/or flowering vines
- Platforms painted as stone can be used to vary the floor scape for the actors and define the space
- Shaped arches or lattice screens could also be used as garden walls in lieu of backdrop or gobo

Hand props:

- Comb or brush for tending the king's hair
- Palm frond for fanning him
- Nail file/buffer for his manicure
- Wooden basin and towel for washing his feet before sandals are put on
- Tray or bowl with grapes for feeding him

Scene 3: Tiridates' garden, just before dawn

- As for Scene 2 with dim, blue-toned lighting and cricket sounds
- The king's throne or chair is absent

Hand props:

- Tray with cup for the king's water
- Water jug or pitcher
- Letter to King Herod
- Three scrolls of commission
- Quill pen
- Gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh in distinctive containers
- Any court dancers could have silken scarves or shawls, flowers or baskets of fruit in their hands to suggest a festive scene

Scene 4: Desert oasis, nightfall

- The set should suggest an oasis or grove of trees in the desert, dimly lit
- The silhouette of a camel could be in the background
- A mound of "sand" can be created on a floor dolly with burlap draped over boxes or batting and dotted with silk grasses
- Palm tree trunks can be made from burlap wrapped carpet roll tubes
- Three large papier mache rocks of different sizes. These can be used for sitting and standing and scene definition. Create these over stools or boxes, strong enough to support an actor's weight.

Hand props:

- Small Persian-style rug with "sand"
- Bedrolls
- Bundles or baskets as luggage
- Gold, frankincense and myrrh props
- Water bag for travel (bota style)
- Makeup compact with powder puff for Afareen to preen

Act 2**Scene 1: Interior Herod's palace, late in the day**

- This scene opens after intermission so the staging set up plan should consider all of the set changes required for the balance of the production
- This is a palace with a raised platform for the throne and formality in the adornments.
Formality can be suggested with symmetry (of lampstands or large plants etc) on either side of the throne. Consider a backdrop of a high stone wall, with a banner or decorative drape, or columns set to one side of where the throne is placed
- The most important element is that the throne be raised to suggest importance

- Colors should contrast with the Persian king's environment. Perhaps earth tones and gold versus the jewel tones of Persia.
- It is important that the two kingdoms, the two groups of people and the two palaces look and feel different

Hand props:

- Trumpet for the herald (optional)
- Letter to King Herod
- Three scrolls of commission

Scene 2: Interior Herod's palace, early the next day

- The king's throne is present, a small table is set with a beverage service (teapot and cups or jug and wine goblets)
- A small tufted stool or ottoman and a simple low chair are offered for the chief priest and king to sit near the table for their meeting

Hand props:

- Tea or wine service

Scene 3: Stable in Bethlehem, late evening

- The elements of the stable can be minimal. A simple stool for Mary and a manger for baby Jesus—filled with raffia and muslin for swaddling cloths and hay
- A stable wall backdrop can be used with some simple barn set dressing. Alternatively, a lighting gobo of a creche, thrown against deep-blue lighting.
- The stone platforms from the garden scene can be used in this scene to elevate the angel choir for better framing and scaping of the visual elements

Hand props:

- Shepherds crooks (as part of their costume identity)
- Baby Jesus (real or a doll)
- Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh props

Scene 4: Stable in Bethlehem, early in the morning

- The holy family is not the focus of this scene; it is the waking of the wise men from the dream warning them to flee Herod. The manger and Mary's stool may be taken off stage; the wise men's bed rolls and luggage should be with them on stage

Hand props:

- Bed rolls
- Luggage of wise men
- Persian rug, water bag (from earlier oasis scene)

Scene 5: Herod's inner voice, darkness

- This scene takes place in Herod's mind and can be done with a front or top spot light in front of the closed proscenium curtain, or off to the side of a darkened stage

Scene 6: Tiridate's garden, daytime

- The earlier garden setting without the king's chair present
- No sound of birds or music ... bright, happy lighting at first but fading as the truth is revealed

Hand props:

- Sword for the soldier (as part of his costume identity)
- Sword for Balthasar

Scene 7: Melchior's speech, darkness

- This scene takes place between Melchior and the audience. It has no setting and can be staged in front of the closed proscenium curtain or off to the side of a darkened stage with only a front spotlight

Hand props:

- A lighted candle in a candle holder

Scene 8: The porch of Mary's kitchen, midday

- This scene is simple and intimate, with the focus on the dialogue ... a dark, nondescript background with strong top and front lighting set the characters apart from any setting
- A wooden work table, with striped cloth, and a basket of firewood suggest an outdoor food preparation area that Melchior happens upon as Mary works

Hand props:

- Straw broom for sweeping
- Cup and water jug
- Cloth for dusting
- A wooden bowl and spoon or fruit

Costumes

- Two kingdoms, Persia and that of King Herod are represented by the same chorus of supporting actors so they need to appear very different from one another in color, clothing, detail and demeanor
- The choir of angels could be clothed in white or in choir robes
- The three dream characters need special focus: the hag, Afareen and the devil. The devil may be clothed in modern attire.
- The shepherds, Joseph and Mary are typically clothed
- A royal herald, a Persian soldier and the chief priest should be recognizable for their station (for example the chief priest wears a chest piece and tall hat with shawl)
- The two kings should be very opulent but very different from one another as represented by their different personalities
- The three wise men, as the focus of the show, should be colorful and distinctive
- All characters should have head coverings
- Persians should have jewelry and decorated shoes, (veils and pillbox hats are a suggestion)
- The Jews should have sandals or be barefoot and have little or no ornamentation. Though they should have fine-quality cloth and draping for the royal court
- Tunics and haram-style pants are easy to sew and often available at thrift stores in the ethnic clothing sections for a reasonable price. These can be embellished with period details, sashes and head dresses for either gender.

Period
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PRODUCTION