

# THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

A Play-Cycle on the Life  
of Our Lord and Saviour  
Jesus Christ

*Written for broadcasting by*  
DOROTHY L. SAYERS



CLASSICAL ACADEMIC PRESS



*The Man Born to Be King*

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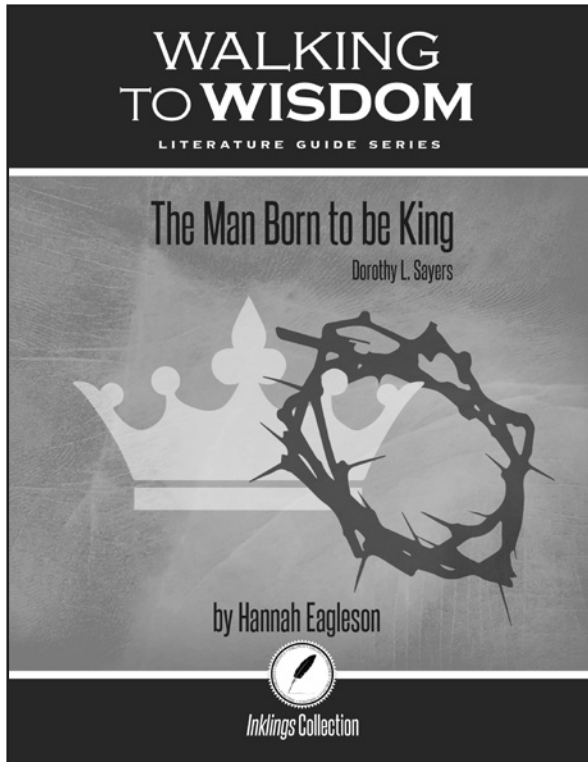
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these plays are for  
VAL GIELGUD  
who has made them  
his  
already

# THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

## *Literature Guide*



Classical Academic Press is pleased to bring Dorothy Sayers's masterpiece *The Man Born to Be King* back into print. We have also created a remarkable guide to help readers travel through the book with the assistance of an expert mentor. Readers will study with Dr. Hannah Eagleson as she helps them to read closely, trace themes, and engage with this superb book. Visit [ClassicalAcademicPress.com](http://ClassicalAcademicPress.com) to download sample chapters of *The Man Born to Be King Literature Guide*, which is part of the Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection.

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## THE MAKERS

The Architect stood forth and said:

“I am the master of the art:  
I have a thought within my head,  
I have a dream within my heart.

“Come now, good craftsman, ply your trade  
With tool and stone obediently;  
Behold the plan that I have made –  
I am the master; serve you me.”

The Craftsman answered: “Sir, I will,  
Yet look to it that this your draft  
Be of a sort to serve my skill –  
You are not master of the craft.

“It is by me the towers grow tall,  
I lay the course, I shape and hew;  
You make a little inky scrawl,  
And that is all that you can do.

“Account me, then, the master man,  
Laying my rigid rule upon  
The plan, and that which serves the plan –  
The uncomplaining, helpless stone.”

The Stone made answer: “Masters mine,  
Know this: that I can bless or damn  
The thing that both of you design  
By being but the thing I am;

“For I am granite and not gold,  
For I am marble and not clay,  
You may not hammer me nor mould –  
I am the master of the way.

“Yet once that mastery bestowed  
Then I will suffer patiently  
The cleaving steel, the crushing load,  
That make a calvary of me;

“And you may carve me with your hand  
To arch and buttress, roof and wall,  
Until the dream rise up and stand –  
Serve but the stone, the stone serves all.

“Let each do well what each knows best,  
Nothing refuse and nothing shirk,  
Since none is master of the rest,  
But all are servants of the work –

“The work no master may subject  
Save He to whom the whole is known,  
Being Himself the Architect,  
The Craftsman and the Corner-stone.

“Then, when the greatest and the least  
Have finished all their labouring  
And sit together at the feast,  
You shall behold a wonder thing:

“The Maker of the men that make  
Will stoop between the cherubim,  
The towel and the basin take,  
And serve the servants who serve Him.”

The Architect and Craftsman both  
Agreed, the Stone had spoken well;  
Bound them to service by an oath  
And each to his own labour fell.



## INTRODUCTION

*Historical reality . . . is above all a concrete and not an abstract reality; and no concrete reality other than the historical does or can exist. . . . Everything genuinely historical has both a particular and a concrete character. Carlyle, the most concrete and particular of the historians, says that John Lackland came upon this earth on such and such a day. This indeed is the very substance of history – BERDYAEV.*

*Very God of very God . . . incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary.  
. . . He suffered under Pontius Pilate.*

There is a dialectic in Christian sacred art which impels it to stress, from time to time, now the eternal, and now the temporal elements in the Divine drama. The crucifix displays in one period the everlasting Son reigning from the tree; in another, the human Jesus disfigured with blood and grief. For various reasons, some of which will appear in this introduction, "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us" that our Life of Christ should depict, primarily, not so much the eternal sacrifice, as the "one oblation of Himself once offered"; that is, it should be handled, not liturgically or symbolically, but realistically and historically: "this is a thing that actually happened".

This decision presented the playwright with a set of conditions literally unique, and of extraordinary technical interest.

There were, to begin with, no modern precedents to offer a guide as to treatment, or to prepare the minds of critics and audience for what they were to hear. Few out of the millions in this country could be supposed to have visited Oberammergau; and the mediaeval mysteries were too remote in period and atmosphere to serve as a model, even allowing them to be familiar to one listener in ten thousand. The law forbidding<sup>1</sup> the representation on the stage of any Person of the Holy Trinity had helped to foster the notion that all such representations were intrinsically wicked, and had encouraged a tendency, already sufficiently widespread, towards that Docetic and totally heretical Christology

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1. Reasonably enough, in view of the very inelastic powers in Great Britain at the Lord Chamberlain's disposal. He has no authority to licence a *particular production*; a licence, once granted, is *generally* valid, and the play can thenceforward be presented by any persons, under any conditions, without safeguards of any kind as to the style and quality of the performance. It is thus delivered over, lock, stock, and barrel, to the tender mercies of commercialism, unless the author (if alive) is sufficiently public-spirited to interpose a veto. This state of things could be remedied by permitting the grant, in certain cases, of a limited licence, covering one production only, the play to come up for re-licence on each subsequent occasion when it is sought to produce it. As it is, many plays which would be wholly without offence in the reverent and decent hands of Messrs. A \_\_\_\_\_ or Mr. B \_\_\_\_\_ have to be withheld from the public for fear of what they might only too easily become under the sensational management of Mr. X \_\_\_\_\_, or Messrs. Y \_\_\_\_\_ & Z \_\_\_\_\_, Ltd

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which denies the full Humanity of Our Lord. The thing was therefore a quite new experiment, undertaken in the face of a good deal of prejudice, and in the absence of any adequate standards of comparison.

The material also was unique. All drama is religious in origin, and Greek tragedy in particular dealt with divine stories whose details were perfectly familiar to every person in the audience. A performance of the Oresteia was not only an entertainment but an act of communal worship, recognised as such. So far, there was a parallel (though, here again, one could not count upon the recognition, by an English audience, of this age-old, intimate connection between the theatre and the heavenly places). But the Greek tragic poet, though he was expected to follow the outlines of the accepted legends, was not riveted to the text of a sacred book, nor to the exposition of a rigid theology.

Something must be said on both these points. The knowledge which the British public has of the New Testament is extensive, but in many respects peculiar. The books are, on the whole, far better known as a collection of disjointed texts and moral aphorisms wrenched from their contexts than as a coherent history made up of coherent episodes. Most people are aware that Jesus was born at Bethlehem, and that after a short ministry of teaching and healing He was judicially murdered at Jerusalem, only to rise from the dead on the third day. But for all except the diminishing company of the instructed, the intervening period is left in the jumbled chronology of the Synoptists – a string of parables, a bunch of miracles, a discourse, a set of “sayings”, a flash of apocalyptic thunder – here a little and there a little. And although many scattered fragments of teaching are commonly remembered and quoted (to the exclusion of as many more, less palatable to the taste of the times), they are remembered chiefly as detached pronouncements unrelated to the circumstances that called them forth. A multitude of people will recall that “the devil is the father of lies” for one who could state on what occasion the words were spoken and to whom, or make a précis of the argument developed in the long, pugnacious, and provocative piece of dialectic in which they occur.

Moreover, the words of the books, in or out of their context, are by great numbers of British Christians held to be sacrosanct in such a sense that they must not be expanded, interpreted, or added to, even in order to set the scene, supply obvious gaps in the narrative, or elucidate the sense. And this sacrosanctity is attributed, not to the Greek of the original and only authentic documents, but to every syllable of a translation made three hundred years ago (and that not always with perfect accuracy) in an idiom so old-fashioned that, even as English, it is often obscure to us or positively misleading. The editor of a newspaper expressed this point of view very naively when he said: “In quoting the Bible we must take the Authorised Version, and not the interpretations of scholars, however wise.” That is to say, we are to pay attention, not to the ascertainable meaning of what the Evangelist wrote, but only to the words (however inexact or unintelligible) used by King James’s translators – who, incidentally, were themselves mere “scholars, however wise”. (Presumably, those of our fellow-Christians who happen not to



speak English are debarred from quoting the Bible at all, since this gentleman – who is typical – will allow authority neither to the Greek nor to the Vulgate, but only to “the sacred English original”).<sup>2</sup> Of this singular piece of idolatry I will say only that it imposes difficulties upon the English playwright from which the Greek tragic poets were free. Nor are things made any easier by the existence, side by side with the instructed and the bibliolaters, of a large and mostly youthful public to whom the whole story of Jesus is *terra incognita* – children who do not know the meaning of Christmas, men and women to whom the name of Christ is only a swear-word – besides a considerable body of agnostics and semi-Christians who accept some incidents of the story and firmly disbelieve the rest, or who propose to follow the teaching of Jesus while rejecting the authority on which He founded it.

This brings us to the theology, which is a very different matter. From the purely dramatic point of view the theology is enormously advantageous, because it locks the whole structure into a massive intellectual coherence. It is scarcely possible to build up anything lop-sided, trivial, or unsound on that steely and gigantic framework. Always provided, of course, that two conditions are observed. It must be a *complete* theology; never was there a truer word than that “except a man believe rightly he cannot” – at any rate, his artistic structure cannot possibly – “be saved”. A loose and sentimental theology begets loose and sentimental art-forms; an illogical theology lands one in illogical situations; an ill-balanced theology issues in false emphasis and absurdity. Conversely; there is no more searching test of a theology than to submit it to dramatic handling; nothing so glaringly exposes inconsistencies in a character, a story, or a philosophy as to put it upon the stage and allow it to speak for itself. Any theology that will stand the rigorous pulling and hauling of the dramatist is pretty tough in its texture. Having subjected Catholic theology to this treatment, I am bound to bear witness that it is very tough indeed. As I once made a character say in another context: “Right in art is right in practice”; and I can only affirm that at no point have I yet found artistic truth and theological truth at variance.

The second condition appears at first sight to contradict the first, though in fact it does not. It is this: that in writing a play on this particular subject, the dramatist must begin by ridding himself of all edificatory and theological intentions. He must set out, not to instruct but to show forth; not to point a moral but to tell a story; not to produce a Divinity Lesson with illustrations in dialogue but to write a good piece of theatre. It was assumed by many pious persons who approved the project that my object in writing *The Man Born to Be King* was “to do good” – and indeed the same assumption was also made by impious persons who feared lest it might “do good” in the Christian sense, as well as by pious but disapproving persons who thought it could only do harm. But that was in fact not my object at all, though it was quite properly the object of those who

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2. The dispute in this case arose from the fact that the editor in question, misunderstanding a common Jacobean idiom, had placed upon a saying of Our Lord an interpretation which involved a violent wresting of the English text, and could not legitimately be derived from the Greek at all.



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commissioned the plays in the first place. My object was *to tell that story* to the best of my ability, within the medium at my disposal – in short to make as good a work of art as I could. For a work of art that is not good and true *in art* is not good or true in any other respect, and is useless for any purpose whatsoever – even for edification – because it is a lie, and the devil is the father of all such. As drama, these plays stand or fall. The idea that religious plays are not to be judged by the proper standard of drama derives from a narrow and lop-sided theology which will not allow that all truth – including the artist's truth – is in Christ, but persists in excluding the Lord of Truth from His own dominions.

What this actually means is that the theology – the dogma – must be taken by the writer as part of the material with which he works, and not as an exterior end towards which his work is directed. Dogma is the grammar and vocabulary of his art. If he regards it as something extrinsic to his subject, he will produce at best something analogous to those harmless but inartistic mnemonics which inculcate grammatical rules: –

Abstract nouns in *io* call  
*Feminina* one and all;  
Masculine will only be  
Things that you may touch or see. . . .

At worst, he will fabricate the cheap and pretentious, like those verses which, purporting to illustrate the musical richness of the English vocabulary, issue only in a jingling and artificial syllabic pattern – Poe's *The Bells*, for example. The music of English can indeed be abundantly illustrated from English poetry, but only from those poems which are created *by that means* and not *to that end*. Indeed, the effort to make language indulge in this kind of exhibitionism defeats its own object; and the same is true of any work of art which sets up a part of its own material as a thesis external to itself. Accordingly, it is the business of the dramatist not to subordinate the drama to the theology, but to approach the job of truth-telling from his own end, and trust the theology to emerge undistorted from the dramatic presentation of the story. This it can scarcely help doing, if the playwright is faithful to his material, since the history and the theology of Christ are one thing: His life is theology in action, and the drama of His life is dogma shown as dramatic action.

For Jesus Christ is unique – unique among gods and men. There have been incarnate gods a-plenty, and slain-and-resurrected gods not a few; but He is the only God who has a date in history. And plenty of founders of religions have had dates, and some of them have been prophets or avatars of the Divine; but only this one of them was personally God. There is no more astonishing collocation of phrases than that which, in the Nicene Creed, sets these two statements flatly side by side: "Very God of very God. . . . He suffered under Pontius Pilate." All over the world, thousands of times a day, Christians recite the name of a rather undistinguished Roman pro-consul – not in execration (Judas and Caiaphas, more guilty, get off with fewer reminders of their iniquities), but merely because that name fixes within a few years the date of the death of God.



In the light of that remarkable piece of chronology we can see an additional reason why the writer of realistic Gospel plays has to eschew the didactic approach to his subject. He has to display the words and actions of actual people engaged in living through a piece of recorded history. He cannot, like the writer of purely liturgical or symbolic religious drama, confine himself to the abstract and universal aspect of the life of Christ. He is brought up face to face with the “scandal of particularity”. *Ecce homo* – not only Man-in-general and God-in-His-thusness, but also God-in-His-thisness, and *this* Man, *this* person, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting, who walked and talked *then* and *there*, surrounded, not by human types, but by *those* individual people. This story of the life and murder and resurrection of God-in-Man is not only the symbol and epitome of the relations of God and man throughout time; it is also a series of events that took place at a particular point *in time*. *And the people of that time had not the faintest idea that it was happening.*

Of all examples of the classical tragic irony in fact or fiction, this is the greatest – the classic of classics. Beside it, the doom of Oedipus is trifling, and the nemesis of the Oresteian blood-bath a mere domestic incident. For the Christian affirmation is that a number of quite commonplace human beings, in an obscure province of the Roman Empire, killed and murdered God Almighty – quite casually, almost as a matter of religious and political routine, and certainly with no notion that they were doing anything out of the way. Their motives, on the whole, were defensible, and in some respects praiseworthy. There was some malice, some weakness, and no doubt some wresting of the law – but no more than we are accustomed to find in the conduct of human affairs. By no jugglings of fate, by no unforeseeable coincidence, by no supernatural machinations, but by that destiny which is character, and by the unimaginative following of their ordinary standards of behaviour, they were led, with a ghastly inevitability, to the commission of the crime of crimes. We, the audience, know what they were doing; the whole point and poignancy of the tragedy is lost unless we realise that they did not. It is in this knowledge by the audience of the appalling truth which is hidden from all the agonists in the drama that the tragic irony consists.

Consequently, it is necessary for the playwright to work with a divided mind. He must be able at will to strip off his knowledge of what is actually taking place, and present, through his characters, the events and people as they appeared to themselves at the time. This would seem obvious and elementary; but its results are in fact the very thing that gives offence to unimaginative piety. We are so much accustomed to viewing the whole story from a post-Resurrection, and indeed from a post-Nicene, point of view, that we are apt, without realising it, to attribute to all the New Testament characters the same kind of detailed theological awareness which we have ourselves. We judge their behaviour as though all of them – disciples, Pharisees, Romans, and men-in-the-street – had known with Whom they were dealing and what the meaning of all the events actually was. But they did not know it. The disciples had only the foggiest inkling of it, and nobody else came anywhere near grasping what it was all about. If the



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Chief Priests and the Roman Governor had been aware that they were engaged in crucifying God – if Herod the Great had ordered his famous massacre with the express intention of doing away with God – then they would have been quite exceptionally and diabolically wicked people. And indeed, we like to think that they were: it gives us a reassuring sensation that “it can’t happen here”. And to this comfortable persuasion we are assisted by the stately and ancient language of the Authorised Version, and by the general air of stained-glass-window decorum with which the tale is usually presented to us.<sup>3</sup> The characters are not men and women: they are all “sacred personages”, standing about in symbolic attitudes, and self-consciously awaiting the fulfilment of prophecies. That is how they were seen, for example, by a certain gentleman from Stoke Newington, who complained that the Centurion who was commended for building a Jewish synagogue had been made by me to “refer to the sacred building in a conversation, in a leivitous (*sic*) and jocular manner”. For him, the Centurion was not a Roman N.C.O., stationed in a foreign province, and looking on the local worship with such amiable indulgence as a British sergeant-major in India might extend to a Hindu cult. He was a sacred Centurion, whose lightest word was sacred, and the little Jewish edifice was sacred *to him*, as though he had no gods of his own. Still odder is the attitude of another correspondent, who objected to Herod’s telling his court, “keep your mouths shut”, on the grounds that such coarse expressions were jarring on the lips of any one “so closely connected with our Lord”.

Sacred personages, living in a far-off land and time, using dignified rhythms of speech, making from time to time restrained gestures symbolic of brutality. They mocked and railed on Him and smote Him, they scourged and crucified Him. Well, they were people very remote from ourselves, and no doubt it was all done in the noblest and most beautiful manner. We should not like to think otherwise.

Unhappily, if we think about it at all, we must think otherwise. God was executed by people painfully like us, in a society very similar to our own – in the over-ripeness of the most splendid and sophisticated Empire the world has ever seen. In a nation famous for its religious genius and under a government renowned for its efficiency, He was executed by a corrupt church, a timid politician, and a fickle proletariat led by professional agitators. His executioners made vulgar jokes about Him, called Him filthy names, taunted Him, smacked Him in the face, flogged Him with the cat, and hanged Him on the common gibbet – a bloody, dusty, sweaty, and sordid business.

If you show people that, they are shocked. So they should be. If that does not shock them, nothing can. If the mere representation of it has an air of irreverence, what is to be said about the deed? It is curious that people who are filled with horrified indignation whenever a cat kills a sparrow can hear that story of the killing of God told Sunday after Sunday and not experience any shock at all.

Technically, the swiftest way to produce the desirable sense of shock is the use in drama of modern speech and a determined historical realism about the

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3. “In which saintly figures are bound to colour one’s view of outward things.” – *Times* Crossword clue to the words STAINED GLASS. *Et ille respondens ait: Tu dicis.*





characters. Herod the Great was no monstrous enemy of God: he was a soldier of fortune and a political genius – a savage but capable autocrat, whose jealousy and ungovernable temper had involved him in a prolonged domestic wretchedness. Matthew the Publican was a contemptible little quisling official, fleecing his own countrymen in the service of the occupying power and enriching himself in the process, until something came to change his heart (though not, presumably, his social status or his pronunciation). Pontius Pilate was a provincial governor, with a very proper desire to carry out Imperial justice, but terrified (as better men than he have been before and since) of questions in the House, commissions of inquiry and what may be generically called “Whitehall”. Caiaphas was the ecclesiastical politician, appointed, like one of Hitler’s bishops, by a heathen government, expressly that he might collaborate with the New Order and see that the Church toed the line drawn by the State; we have seen something of Caiaphas lately. As for the Elders of the Synagogue, they are to be found on every Parish Council – always highly respectable, often quarrelsome, and sometimes in a crucifying mood.

So with all of them. Tear off the disguise of the Jacobean idiom, go back to the homely and vigorous Greek of Mark or John, translate it into its current English counterpart, and there every man may see his own face. *We* played the parts in that tragedy, nineteen and a half centuries since, and perhaps are playing them to-day, in the same good faith and in the same ironic ignorance. But to-day we cannot see the irony, for we the audience are now the actors and do not know the end of the play. But it may assist us to know what we are doing if the original drama is shown to us again, with ourselves in the original parts.

This process is not, of course, the same thing as “doing the Gospel story in a modern setting”. It was at a particular point in history that the Timeless irrupted into time. The technique is to keep the ancient setting, and to give the modern equivalent of the contemporary speech and manners. Thus we may, for example, represent the Sanhedrim as “passing resolutions” and “making entries in the minute-book”, for every official assembly since officialdom began has had some machinery for “agreeing together” and recording the result. We may make a Roman officer address his squad with modern military words of command, since some similar verbal technique must always and everywhere have been used to start and turn and stop bodies of soldiery, or to inspect their kit and parade-order. We may make a military policeman or a tax-collector lard his speech with scraps of American slang; for the local speech must have been full of catch-phrases picked up from the foreign soldiers and merchants who swarmed along the great trade-routes of the Empire; and for these bits and pieces of vulgar Latin, bastard Greek, and Syriac dialects the language of Hollywood is the modern equivalent. Nor was the Roman Imperium at all unlike some types of the New Order advocated for the world to-day. But there are limits. Financial trickery, “big business” methods, and the “rake-off” of the middle-man were as familiar then as now; but it would be a mistake to make 1st-century people talk in terms of the Limited Liability Company and the Stock Exchange. The liberal virtues were known and practised, but not the thing we know as “Liberal Hu-



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manism"; a Roman was only too well acquainted with the dole and divorce and the Married Women's Property Act, but not with "democratic institutions" as we know them, nor did he share our feelings about slavery. The men of a past epoch spoke and thought about certain things as we do: about others, quite differently. But nothing is gained by making them use obsolete forms of speech as though they seemed old-fashioned to themselves. For to themselves they seemed, and were, "modern" – like us, they had all the latest improvements. There is one further complication. The rhythm of speech chosen to represent this ancient modernity has to be such that it can, from time to time, lift itself without too much of a jolt into the language of prophecy. For at that date the snobbery of the banal had not yet imposed itself. You might still speak nobly without being sneered at for a highbrow. Fortunately, the English language, with its wide, flexible, and double-tongued vocabulary, lends itself readily to the juxtaposition of the sublime and the commonplace, and can be stepped up and down between the two along an inclined plane which has one end on the flat pavement –

In the south suburbs at the Elephant  
and the other among

The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces.

The smooth execution of this movement is the technician's job.

When, however, we listen to the language of Shakespeare's time, the movement is to a great extent hidden from our ears, because even the commonest words and most pedestrian phrases of that period have acquired a patina of "nobility" through sheer lapse of time; the back-chat of the tavern has become quaint, the coarse abuse sterilised, the jokes antiquarian, the current slang "poetical"; that which was written in fustian is heard in cloth of gold. And even in its own day, the English of the Authorised Version was a little formal and old-fashioned – partly because it is a translation bearing the impress of a foreign speech-rhythm, and also because of the lingering influence of Wycliffe's Bible – though, if one compares the two versions it is easy to see how the language has been brought up to date: King James's scholars did not cultivate archaism for its own sake. Consequently, the 20th-century writer appears to take a longer step in moving from the common man's idiom to the idiom of prophecy. But this is largely due to the effects of perspective: as the landscape recedes into the distant past, the planes are foreshortened and blurred by an atmospheric haze of antiquity in which distinctions are lost. It is this misty, pleasant, picturesque obscurity which people miss when they complain, in the words of one correspondent, that in the modern presentation "the atmosphere created seems so different from that of the original story . . . where it is all so impressively and wonderfully told". So it is. The question is, are we at this time of day sufficiently wondering and impressed? Above all, are we sufficiently disturbed by this extremely disturbing story? Sometimes the blunt new word will impress us more than the beautiful and old. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man", said Jesus – and then, seeing perhaps that the reaction to this statement was less vigorous than it might have





been, He repeated it, but this time using a strong and rather vulgar word, meaning "to eat noisily, like an animal" – chew? munch? crunch? champ? chump? (But in the end, I was pusillanimous, and left it at "eat", not liking to offend the ears of the faithful with what Christ actually said.)

Thus far, then, concerning the language. I should add that no attempt has been made at a niggling antiquarian accuracy in trifles. The general effect aimed at has been rather that of a Renaissance painting, where figures in their modern habits mingle familiarly with others whose dress and behaviour are sufficiently orientalised to give a flavour of the time and place and conform with the requirements of the story. Thus the incidents of the Wedding at Cana and the tale of the Ten Virgins demand some knowledge of Jewish marriage customs; the Last Supper, of Eastern table-manners and of the Passover ritual; and these have been given with just sufficient accuracy to make the action intelligible. But it is immaterial whether or not Martha and Mary would have had a spit in their kitchen or served sherbet to their guests; and if young listeners suppose that the Wise Bridesmaids filled their lamps with paraffin, or that the vinegar provided for condemned felons was the domestic malted article, what does it matter? the distinction between vegetable and mineral, grapes and barley in no way affects faith or morals. Marching songs have been made to sound like marching songs, not "wrapped in soft Lydian airs" for the benefit of the sticklers for modality; and when it was desired to present the picture of a gentleman mounting a horse in a hurry, he was allowed to cry, "My stirrup, Eleazar!" regardless of the date at which stirrups were introduced into Palestine. The limitations of the microphone have also to be borne in mind. It is doubtless true, as somebody pointed out, that a yoke of oxen would be driven, not with a whip but with a goad; but the lash of a whip can be heard on the air, whereas it is useless to ask the studio-effects-man to stand by making a noise like an ox-goad.

From the linguistic material we may pass to the architectural material. The structure of the Gospel drama is interesting. Up to and including the Crucifixion it has, as I have said, the strict form of classical tragedy, though not of what Aristotle would consider a tragedy of the best type. For it depicts the fall of a good man to undeserved misfortune, and this he reckons only the second worst of the four possible forms. Nor would Aristotle have altogether approved the character of the Protagonist, for "the hero of a tragedy should be a mixed character, neither perfectly good nor perfectly bad." The Hero is, indeed, one of the major difficulties in this particular drama, since perfect goodness is apt to be unsympathetic, and generally speaking permits of little development. But this Hero's goodness was not of the static kind; He was a lively person. He excited people. Wherever He went He brought not peace but a sword, and fire in the earth; that is why they killed Him. He said surprising things, in language ranging from the loftiest poetry to the most lucid narrative and the raciest repartee. (If we did not know all His retorts by heart, if we had not taken the sting out of them by incessant repetition in the accents of the pulpit, and if we had not somehow got it into our heads that brains were rather reprehensible, we should reckon Him among the



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greatest wits of all time. Nobody else, in three brief years, has achieved such an output of epigram.) And if He had no *hamartia* in the literal sense, there was at any rate that clash between His environment and Himself which is the main-spring of drama. He suffered misfortune because He was what He was and could not be otherwise; and since His time tragedy has become the tragedy of will and character, and not of an external and arbitrary destiny.

Thus far, then, a classical tragedy. But in the fifth act there occurs a *peripeteia*, again of the classical kind, brought about by an *anagnorisis*. The Hero is recognised for what He is: and immediately, what was the blackest human tragedy turns into Divine Comedy.

In the light of this fact, the interesting question arises whether such a thing as a Christian tragedy is possible. It has been said on the one hand that it is of the essence of Christianity to take a deeply tragic view of human nature. So indeed it is. Seen from the earthly end, mankind, haunted from the womb to the grave by a *hamartia* that sets him at odds with himself, with society, and with the very nature of things, is a being whose every action is fraught with tragic significance. His native virtues are but "splendid sins", issuing in ineluctable judgment; his divine graces involve him in a disharmony with his fellow-men that can end only in his crucifixion. Either way he is – like Oedipus, like the House of Atreus – doomed to self-destruction. But, viewed from the other end, his worst sins are redeemable by his worst suffering; his evil is not merely purged – it is in the literal sense made good. The iron necessity that binds him is the working of the Divine will – and lo! the gods are friendly.

Short of damnation, it seems, there can be no Christian tragedy. Indeed, if a man is going to write a tragedy of the classic type, he must be careful to keep Christianity out of it. At least, it will not do to introduce a complete Catholic theology; where Christ is, cheerfulness will keep breaking in. Marlowe the atheist did indeed write a Christian tragedy, and by a just instinct chose the only possible subject for unrelieved Christian gloom: *Dr. Faustus* is a tragedy of damnation. But it is not classical. Faustus is not the victim of fate: he has what he chooses; his hell is bought and paid for. Moreover, it is an individual catastrophe; his damnation is not shown in any relation to the Divine Economy; whereas the sin of Judas played its part in the great Comedy of Redemption, and if he damned himself, it was because he did not choose to wait for the last act.

What Christian tragedies are there? No tragedy of Shakespeare possesses a definite Christian theology, or even a well-defined Christian atmosphere (Shakespeare knew better than to introduce this wrecking element). Corneille's *Polyeucte* is a tragedy only in the sense that his hero is finally killed; but he dies in sure and certain hope of everlasting life – there is no tragic frustration. In T.S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion*, the soul is stripped of its last worldly holding, only to find that the curse of sin is lifted, and that the Furies have become the Eumenides. Something of the same transformation occurs, indeed, in the *Orestia*; here, it is connected with Zeus the Saviour, "who established Learning by Suffering to be an abiding law", and whose saving wisdom is



the gift of One by strife  
Lifted to the throne of life.<sup>4</sup>

In the *Prometheus* also, and in the *Supplices* there is the conception of a God who can reconcile because He understands, and can understand because He has in some way shared the suffering due to sin.<sup>5</sup> It seems that wherever there is a suffering God, there is an end of tragic futility, and a transvaluation of all values. To this conclusion many races of men were guided by that Spirit *qui et semper aderat generi humano* – if it could be thus, they felt, all would yet be well. The disciples of Jesus, plunged into cowardice and despondency by the human tragedy of the Crucifixion, needed only to be convinced by the Resurrection that that which had suffered and died was in actual historical fact the true Being of all things, to recover their courage and spirits in a manner quite unparalleled, and to proclaim the Divine Comedy loudly and cheerfully, with the utmost disregard for their own safety. Why and how the suffering of God should have this exhilarating effect upon the human spirit is a question for Atonement theology; that it had this effect on those who believed in it is plain. Under Pontius Pilate, the prophecies of the poets had become furnished with a name, a date, and an address; thenceforward the tragic Muse could survive only by resolutely closing her eyes to this series of events. To those first Apostles, the Resurrection seemed important, not because it held out a promise of “personal survival” – St. Peter’s Pentecostal sermon contains nothing about “pie in the sky when you die”; it was important *because it established the identity of the Slain*: “God hath made that same Jesus whom ye crucified both Lord and Christ”. Earlier than that, the identification had been made in terms still more emphatic and unequivocal: ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ Θεός μου – “my Lord and my God”. All the prophecies were fulfilled. Those who make it a reproach to Christianity that it taught no new morality and invented no new kind of Deity could not be more laughably wide of the mark. What it did was to guarantee that the old morality was actually valid, and the old beliefs literally true. “Ye worship ye know not what, but we know what we worship”, “that which we have seen with our eyes and our hands have handled” – “He suffered under Pontius Pilate”. God died – not in a legend, not in a symbol, not in a distant past nor in a realm unknown, but here, a few weeks ago – *you saw it happen*; the whole great cloudy castle of natural religion and poetic prophecy is brought down to earth and firmly cemented upon that angular and solid cornerstone.

Which brings us to the records themselves.

They were not compiled by modern historians, nor yet (needless to say) with an eye to the convenience of a radio-dramatist some nineteen centuries later. The

4. *Agamemnon*: Gilbert Murray’s translation.

5. One must not, of course, push the parallel too far. It is doubtful whether any heathen soteriology knows of a God who can redeem sin by sharing its suffering without also sharing its guilt. Christianity alone ascribes this supreme value to the suffering of the innocent, though it is, of course, to some extent implicit in all sacrificial religions. Christianity places a new interpretation upon those rites which a deeply rooted instinct had felt to be proper and satisfying – an interpretation which is obscured and distorted by the use of terms such as “substitution” and “propitiation” borrowed from the older religions. But, so far as it goes, the parallel is significant.



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Evangelists, particularly the Synoptists, are concerned to write down what Jesus said and did; not to provide “local colour” (which their readers knew all about) or sketches of contemporary personalities. Nor are they as much interested as we should be in a precise chronology – except, of course, as regards Holy Week. *That* was the important date, and there they are substantially agreed about the outline of events. St. Luke also takes a good deal of pains to fix the birth-date. But between these points, as Archbishop Temple has pointed out,<sup>6</sup> only St. John has any real chronology at all. Frequently the material seems to have been arranged according to subject-matter rather than to the logical or chronological succession of events. Thus St. Matthew takes a number of sayings which in St. Luke are distributed over a dozen different contexts, and arranges them in the one long discourse which we know as the “Sermon on the Mount”. On the other hand we find in St. Luke the three parables of forgiveness (the Lost Piece of Silver, the Lost Sheep, and the Prodigal Son) grouped together, followed – without any more transition than a brief “and he said also to his disciples” – by the parable of the Unjust Steward; after which come a set of detached “sayings” on various subjects, then the parable of Dives and Lazarus, and then another string of sayings without any context at all, leading up to the miracle of the Ten Lepers and a passage of prophecy about the end of the world. St. Luke rather likes to put together little bundles of aphorisms, in the manner of those who compile volumes of “Sayings of Dr. Johnston” or “Epigrams of Oscar Wilde”. St. Mark tends to present us with successions of miracles joined together by some such vague formula as “and straightway”, or “and forthwith”, or “and again”, or “in those days”. St. John is different. He is always anxious to show a logical connection, and very often the chronological order as well.

In presenting this material dramatically, it was necessary always to bear in mind the conditions imposed by the medium. There were to be twelve plays, separated by intervals of four weeks. Some people might be able to listen to all the plays; some would hear only a few here and there. Each play had therefore to fit into its place as a logical unit in the architecture of the series as a whole; every word, line, and episode bearing a proper relation to what had preceded and what was about to follow. Characters and “plot-structure” must be consistent throughout – otherwise, not only the audience but the actors would be confused and disconcerted. But also, each separate instalment had to stand on its own feet as a play-in-itself, with some kind of structural unity and a proper beginning, middle, and end to its action; otherwise, we should have no *plays* at all, but only lengths arbitrarily cut from an interminable Scripture lesson. All this involved the taking of some liberties with the Gospel text – the omission of some incidents, the insertion and expansion of others, the provision of backgrounds and what are technically called “bridges” to link the episodes, and occasional transpositions. For most of these activities there was ample precedent in the Gospels themselves: Matthew and Luke are the great “transposers”; John, the provider of glosses, backgrounds, and bridges.

6. Readings in *St. John's Gospel*: Introduction.



The Nativity story stands, of course, by itself as ready-made dramatic material with a shape of its own; and the five Passion-plays, from the Entry into Jerusalem, also fell conveniently into self-contained episodes, needing only to have the various narratives conflated into a coherent story. The period of the Ministry naturally presented the greatest difficulty, partly because the matter itself was not so clearly arranged, and partly because it is always difficult to make the *middle* of any story self-contained for the reader or listener who comes to it as to a detached item of entertainment.

First, as regards the linking of all the episodes to the main story. This involved two threads of development. Apart from the general theological argument, there was a theme-structure, chosen as being that aspect of the story which was bound to loom large in the minds of both writer and audience at this moment, namely: its bearing upon the nature of earthly and spiritual kingdoms. This question, which supplied the title for the series and dictated the emphasis and line of approach throughout, was just as acute for the men of the first century as it is for us; under the pressure of the Roman Imperium, their minds were exercised as ours are by problems about the derivation of authority, the conflict between centralised and decentralised government, the sanctions behind power-politics, and the place of national independence within a world-civilisation. No force of any kind was needed to bring the story into a form that was sharply topical.

Theme-structure by itself will not, however, make a play. There must also be a plot-structure, and this was provided by bringing out certain implications in the story and centring them about the character of Judas. The unexplained incident of the ass and the pass-word will be found more fully dealt with in the Notes to Play VIII. As it stands in the text, it is unlike anything else in the Gospels, and appears to need something more to account for it than the deliberate, and rather theatrical, "staging" by Jesus of a fulfilment of prophecy. It is very possible that the disciples themselves never knew how the ass came to be there. I have suggested a reason, using for this purpose the character of Baruch the Zealot – the only main character of any importance who is of my own invention. His connection with Judas supplies the main-spring of the plot-machinery.

Judas in the Gospels is an enigma. He is introduced suddenly, at a late moment in the action, "all set" for villainy. We are not told how he came to be a disciple, nor what motives drove him to betray his Master. St. John says he was a thief; he certainly took payment for his treason; Jesus called him "*diabolos*" – the enemy – and "the son of perdition"; when he had done his worst and saw what he had done, he brought back the reward of iniquity and went out and hanged himself. He seems a strange mixture of the sensitive and the insensitive. One thing is certain: he cannot have been the creeping, crawling, patently worthless villain that some simple-minded people would like to make out; that would be to cast too grave a slur upon the brains or the character of Jesus. To choose an obvious crook as one's follower, in ignorance of what he was like, would be the act of a fool; and Jesus of Nazareth was no fool, and indeed St. John expressly says that "He knew what was in" Judas from the beginning. But to choose an obvious



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crook for the express purpose of letting him damn himself would be the act of a devil; for a man, *a fortiori* for a God, who behaved like that, nobody – except perhaps Machiavelli – could feel any kind of respect. But also (and this is far more important for our purpose), either of these sorts of behaviour would be totally irreconcilable with the rest of the character of Jesus as recorded. You might write an anti-Christian tract making Him out to be weak-minded and stupid; you might even write a theological treatise of the pre-destinarian sort making Him out to be beyond morality; but there is no means whatever by which you could combine either of these theories with the rest of His words and deeds *and make a play of them*. The glaring inconsistencies in the character would wreck the show; no honest dramatist could write such a part; no actor could play it; no intelligent audience could accept it. That is what I mean by saying that dramatic handling is a stern test of theology, and that the dramatist must tackle the material from his own end of the job. No; the obviously villainous Judas will not do, either dramatically or theologically – the most damnable of all sins is a subtler thing than any crude ambition or avarice. The worst evil in the world is brought about, not by the open and self-confessed vices, but by the deadly corruption of the proud virtues. Pride, which cast Lucifer the Archangel out of Heaven and Adam out of the Eden of primal innocence, is the head and front of all sin, and the besetting sin of highly virtuous and intelligent people. Jesus, who dealt gently with “publicans and sinners”, was hard as nails about the lofty-minded sins; He was a consistent person, and if He spoke of Judas with almost unexampled sternness, it is likely that the sin of Judas was of a peculiarly over-weening loftiness. What his familiar devil precisely was, we are at liberty to conjecture; I have conjectured that it was an intellectual devil of a very insidious kind, very active in these days and remarkably skilful in disguising itself as an angel of light. The fact that various persons have written angrily to say that the Judas I have depicted seems to them to be a person of the utmost nobility, actuated by extremely worthy motives, confirms my impression that this particular agent of hell is at present doing his master’s work with singular thoroughness and success. His exploits go unrecognized – which is just what the devil likes best.

The continuity of the plot-structure was thus secured by linking it all on to the Judas-Baruch political intrigue, and by “planting” Judas at the very outset of the Ministry as a disciple of John the Baptist. Equally important, both for theme and plot, was the Roman element in the story. It was essential that the enormous fact of the Imperium should be present at every moment to the audience as it was to the persons of the time: the persistent pressure, the perpetual menace, the power and prestige of Caesar. Accordingly, another “tie-rod” was run through the series in the person of Proclus, the Roman Centurion. All that was required here was the identification of the Centurion whose servant was healed with the “Believing Centurion” at the Crucifixion – a thing not unreasonable in itself, and making the final expression of belief much more dramatically convincing. Once that had been done, it was easy to introduce the young Proclus among the Roman bodyguard which was, in historical fact, assigned to Herod the Great,





and so tie together the first scene of the tragedy and the last, by bringing Proclus and Balthazar together again at the foot of the Cross as they were at the Epiphany. The Roman connection was further strengthened by “planting” Pilate’s Wife at a comparatively early point in the story, by making her see Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles; and by causing the processions of Pilate and Jesus to meet at the gates of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday; thus leading up to the Jewish-Roman clash at the Trial and providing the machinery for the little scene which ties up the Pilate family with the Resurrection story.

A few other “identifications” supply the “tie-rods” for individual plays and episodes, the most important being that of Mary Magdalen with Mary of Bethany and with the unnamed “Woman who was a Sinner” of Luke VII. This identification is, of course, traditional, and is sanctioned by the authority of St. Augustine of Hippo and Pope Gregory the Great. The two episodes making up Play III, *A Certain Nobleman*, were linked by making the Noble man in question a guest at the Marriage in Cana. Similarly, the Bishop of Ripon’s engaging identification of Mary of Cleophas with the second “disciple” in the Emmaus story locked up that incident with the tale of Calvary. The number of persons who flit, unheralded and unpursued, through the pages of the Gospel is enormous; and every legitimate opportunity was taken of tightening up the dramatic construction and avoiding the unnecessary multiplication of characters.

As regards the parables and the sayings, it was needful to distribute these as evenly as possible over the plays dealing with the Ministry and to provide a suitable context for each. This would not necessarily be always the original context. There is, however, no reason to suppose that each story was told on one occasion only. On the contrary, it seems most likely that they were repeated over and over again – sometimes in identical words, sometimes with variations. (Thus the parables of the Great Supper and the Marriage of the King’s Son have every appearance of being the same story, varied to suit the occasion; the parables of the Talents and the Pounds offer a similar “doublet”, as do the similes of the Improvident Builder and the Improvident King.) We need not imagine that the appearance of the same story in different contexts argues any inaccuracy or contradiction, or that the version of one Evangelist is more authentic than that of another. The teacher who thought of such a story as that of the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son would be foolish indeed to confine it to a single audience. He would repeat it over and over, till his disciples knew it by heart in all its variations.<sup>7</sup> So also with the “sayings”. Indeed, the lapidary form in which these

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7. Compare the methods of another Oriental teacher, the Sadhu Sundar Singh: “The Sadhu’s mind is an overflowing reservoir of anecdote, illustration, epigram, and parable, but he never makes the slightest effort to avoid repetition; in fact he appears to delight in it. ‘We do not,’ he says, ‘refuse to give bread to hungry people because we have already given bread to others.’ Hence we have constantly found the same material occurring in more than one of the written or printed authorities we have used. ‘My mouth,’ he says, ‘has no copyright’; and many sayings that we had noted down from his own lips we afterwards discovered to be already in print. In most cases the versions differ extraordinarily little, but we have always felt free to correct or supplement one version by another at our own discretion.” Streeter and Appasamy: *The Sadhu*.



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teachings have come down to us suggests powerfully that here we have “set pieces” of teaching with which the transmitters of the oral tradition were verbally and intimately familiar.

With the discourses and public disputations, the case is different. Most of these, such as the great passage about the Bread of Heaven, the dispute at the Feast of Tabernacles, and the long discourse and prayer after the Last Supper, we owe to St. John, and their style is so unlike that of the parables and sayings that some people have found it hard to believe that they were spoken by the same person, and that St. John did not invent them out of his own meditations. But the difficulty is more apparent than real. It must be remembered that, of the four Evangelists, St. John’s is the only one that claims to be the direct report of an eye-witness. And to any one accustomed to the imaginative handling of documents, the internal evidence bears out this claim. The Synoptists, on the whole, report the “set pieces”; it is St. John who reports the words and actions of the individual, unrepeated occasion, retrieving them from that storehouse of trained memory which, among people not made forgetful by too much pen and ink, replaces the filed records and the stenographer’s note-book. It is, generally speaking, John who knows the time of year, the time of day, where people sat, and how they got from one place to another. It is John who remembers, not only what Jesus said, but what the other people said to Him, who can reproduce the cut-and-thrust of controversy, and the development of an argument. It is John who faithfully reproduces the emphasis and repetition of a teacher trying to get a new idea across to a rather unintelligent and inattentive audience. It is he again who has caught the characteristic tricks of manner and delivery – the curious outflanking movement of the dialectic, capturing outpost after outpost by apparently irrelevant questions, and then suddenly pouncing upon the main position from the rear, and the *ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν* (“indeed and indeed I tell you”) which ushers in the most important statements.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, when John is the authority for any scene, or when John’s account is at hand to supplement those of the Synoptists, the playwright’s task is easy. Either the dialogue is all there – vivid and personal on both sides – or the part of the interlocutor can be readily reconstructed from the replies given. And it is frequently John who supplies the reason and meaning of actions and speeches that in the Synoptists appear unexplained and disconnected. Thus, after the Feeding of the Five Thousand, there seems to be no very good reason why Jesus should have withdrawn Himself and sent the disciples across the lake by themselves; but John supplies the missing motive, and also the answer to one or two other practical questions, e.g. how the disciples were able to see Jesus coming across the water (it was near Passover, therefore the moon was full), and how some of “the multitudes” turned up next day at Capernaum (they followed as soon as

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8. The same trick of speech, but reduced to a single “amen”, is found in all the Synoptists; John certainly did not invent it, though his version is more picturesque and individual. We also have the rather unexpected appearance in Matt. XI. 27 of a sentence so exactly in John’s style that it might have come direct from one of the Johannine discourses.





the boats had put across from Tiberias to fetch them). It is John who gives us that dramatic moment when Pilate, suddenly deciding not to ratify the sentence of the Sanhedrim without enquiry, disconcerts the priestly party with the formal invitation to state their case (“What accusation bring ye against this man?”), thus leading up to the question, “Art thou the King of the Jews?” which, in the Synoptists, is launched without preliminary and without any explanation of how so fantastic an idea could ever have entered Pilate’s head.<sup>9</sup> It is John who knows that, at the Last Supper, he and Judas were seated so close to Jesus as to permit of whispered conversation and the handing of the sop; John also, and John only, who knows about the interrogation before Annas, thus clearing up the where and how of Peter’s denial, and explaining how it was that the Lord could “turn and look upon Peter” as He was led through the courtyard of the High Priest’s house to His trial before the Sanhedrim.<sup>10</sup>

All through, in fact, the Gospel of St. John reads like the narrative of an eye-witness filling up the gaps in matter already published, correcting occasional errors, and adding material which previous writers either had not remembered or did not know about. Usually, he passes briefly over events that were already adequately dealt with and stories which everybody knew by heart; sometimes he omits them altogether: the Birth-story, for example, the Temptation, the Parables, and the words of the Eucharistic Institution. There is no reason to suppose that a thing is unauthentic because he does not mention it, or, on the other hand, because nobody else mentions it. In modern memoirs written by real people about another real person we should expect just that sort of diversity which we find in the Gospels. If it surprises us there, it is perhaps because we have fallen out of the habit of looking on Jesus and His disciples as *really* real people.

The playwright, in any case, is not concerned, like the textual critic, to establish one version of a story as the older, purer, or sole authoritative version. He does not want to select and reject, but to harmonise. Where two versions are really incompatible (as in St. Mark’s and St. John’s dates for the Cleansing of the Temple)<sup>11</sup> he

9. For a more detailed discussion of this point, see Frank Morison: *Who Moved the Stone?*

10. Mark and Matthew place Peter’s denial during and after the trial before Caiaphas (in the Sanhedrim). Then they both start off again to mention a fresh “consultation,” at the end of which Jesus is condemned, bound, and taken away. That is, they both seem to know that there were in fact two enquiries, though they do not say why. John straightens out this confusion and gets the events into their right order, besides explaining the simultaneous existence in Jerusalem of two “High Priests” – Annas (High Priest “Emeritus,” appointed by the Jews in the ordinary way and deposed by Rome), and Caiaphas (the “collaborating” ecclesiastic set up by Rome in his place). His narrative is perfectly lucid, though it may not seem so at first sight, owing to his confusing habit of communicating vital information in a parenthesis (John XVIII. 44 – cf. the style of John VI. 22-23, XI. 2 and XVIII. 13-14).

11. “St. John is right about it,” says Archbishop Temple (*Readings in St. John’s Gospel*, Vol. I, p. 42). He gives sufficient reasons why St. Mark should have omitted the story of the Raising of Lazarus, and substituted the ‘Temple’ incident as “the occasion for the intervention of the High Priests and the Sadducees” (*ibid.*, p. 175). And he points out, rightly, that though Mark has a consistent scheme, he has no consistent chronology, and that (except for the narratives of the Passion) “we do not have to choose between two incompatible chronologies, for the Johannine chronology is the only one that we have” (*ibid.*, I, xi). I have followed St. John for an additional – for a playwright’s – reason, which is that, somehow or other, the “feel” of the episode is right for the beginning of the Ministry and



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must, of course, choose one or the other. But what he really likes is to take three or four accounts of the same incident, differing in detail, and to dovetail all these details so that the combined narrative presents a more convincing and dramatic picture than any of the accounts taken separately. And in doing this, he is often surprised to find how many apparent contradictions turn out not to be contradictory at all, but merely supplementary. Take, for example, the various accounts of the Resurrection appearances at the Sepulchre. The divergences appear very great on first sight; and much ink and acrimony have been expended on proving that certain of the stories are not “original” or “authentic”, but are accretions grafted upon the firsthand reports by the pious imagination of Christians. Well, it may be so. But the fact remains that *all* of them, without exception, can be made to fall into a place in a single orderly and coherent narrative without the smallest contradiction or difficulty, and without any suppression, invention, or manipulation, beyond a trifling effort to *imagine* the natural behaviour of a bunch of startled people running about in the dawnlight between Jerusalem and the Garden.

For the purpose of these plays, then, I have treated all four Evangelists as equally “witnesses of truth”, combining wherever I could, preserving as much as I might, and, where a choice was necessary, making dramatic propriety the criterion rather than the textual prestige of Codex Aleph or Bezae or the austerity of the hypothetical Q. Nor have I hesitated to conform to a beloved tradition if it added picturesque variety and did no harm: my Magi remain three and remain kings; they keep their fairytale names, and Balthazar is black but comely, as all good children know he should be. The haunted legend of the cry that went over the sea at Christ’s death lent itself readily to the imagery of Pilate’s Wife’s Dream. All the Stations of the Cross are there, except the Third Fall, which would have involved more repetition than the dramatic form could well carry.<sup>12</sup> Apart from a few such traditions, hallowed by Christian piety and custom, the only sources used have been the Canonical Scriptures, together with a few details from Josephus and other historians to build up the general background.

I did not embark on the reading of a great mass of exegetical literature, fearing that a multitude of counsellors might only bring confusion of mind. I must, however, acknowledge my debt to Archbishop Temple’s *Readings in St. John’s Gospel* and Sir Edward Hoskyns’ *The Fourth Gospel*, as also to R. A. Edwards’ *The Upper Room*, from which I have unscrupulously lifted several happy turns of translation. And for the whole handling of the Trial scenes I have to thank Frank Morison’s *Who Moved the Stone?* – an inspired little work which clears up as though by magic everything which may appear puzzling in that curiously legal piece of illegality. Ronald Gurner’s *We Crucify!* was helpful, too, in its imaginative treatment of the whole situation from the point of view of the Sanhedrim. In

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wrong for the end of it. I can only express this in the crudest and most humanistic way by saying that between the Jesus who casts out the money-changers and the Jesus who laments over Jerusalem some kind of development is felt to have taken place: He is recognisably an older man

12. St. Veronica, however, has been deprived of her miracle, which (all other considerations apart) would have struck a note out of key with the rest of the dramatic handling, besides distracting attention from the central action and the central character.



addition, of course, there remain many fragments of interpretation and exegesis left in the memory from desultory reading and half-forgotten sermons, which defy all attempts at identification or acknowledgment.

It seems to me, as it will doubtless seem to many readers, that I set out upon this adventure with a very slender equipment, both natural and acquired.

There comes a galley laden  
 Unto the highest board,  
 She bears a noble burden,  
 The Father's eterne Word.

She saileth on in silence  
 Her freight of value vast,  
 With charity for mainsail,  
 The Holy Ghost for mast –

What are a detective-novelist and a crew of "West-End" actors doing in *that* galley? And what right have they to suppose that they can be trusted to bring such a ship as that to port? Let us be frank about this.

To make an *adequate* dramatic presentation of the life of God Incarnate would require literally superhuman genius, in playwright and actors alike. We are none of us, I think, under any illusions about our ability to do what the greatest artists who ever lived would admit to be beyond their powers. Nevertheless, when a story is great enough, any honest craftsman may succeed in producing something not altogether unworthy, because the greatness is in the story, and does not need to borrow anything from the craftsman; it is enough that he should faithfully serve the work.

But the craftsman must be honest, and must know what work he is serving. I am a writer and I know my trade; and I say that this story is a very great story indeed, and deserves to be taken seriously. I say further (and here I know what I am saying and mean exactly what I say) that in these days it is seldom taken seriously. It is often taken, and treated, with a gingerly solemnity: but that is what honest writers call frivolous treatment.

Not Herod, not Caiaphas, not Pilate, not Judas ever contrived to fasten upon Jesus Christ the reproach of insipidity; that final indignity was left for pious hands to inflict. To make of His story something that could neither startle, nor shock, nor terrify, nor excite, nor inspire a living soul is to crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame. And if anybody imagines that its conventional presentation has of late been all that it should be, let him stop the next stranger in the street and ask what effect it has had on *him*. Or let him look at the world to which this Gospel has been preached for close on twenty centuries: *Si calvarium, si sepulchrum requiris, circumspice*. Let me tell you, good Christian people, an honest writer would be ashamed to treat a nursery tale as you have treated the greatest drama in history: and this in virtue, not of his faith, but of his calling.



## THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

You have forgotten, perhaps, that it is, first and foremost, a story – a true story, the turning-point of history, “the only thing that has ever really happened”. If so, the humblest in our kind may venture to put you in mind of it – we the playwright and the players – because it is our craft to tell stories, and that is the only craft we know. We have done what we could; may the Master Craftsman amend all.

The text of the plays is given here exactly as it was broadcast, except that I have amended a verbal slip or two, and restored some passages which were omitted for lack of time, together with a few words that were censored for no better reason than that they were not of British origin.

The “Notes” prefixed to each play are those which I wrote at the time and handed in to the producer with the scripts. They are reprinted here – unedited – chiefly as a matter of technical interest to playwrights who have to cope with the peculiar problems of writing dramas for radio.

The Signature-tune used throughout the cycle was taken from Ravel’s *Introduction and Allegro for Harp and Strings* (Record H.M.V. No. C. 1662).

The Hymns in Plays 5 and 9 were set to traditional airs.

The Soldiers’ Song in Play 10 and Mary Magdalen’s Song in Play 11 were composed by Benjamin Britten.

Finally, therefore, *Deo gratias*. And perhaps I may add for all of us the naive ejaculation of the mediaeval scribe who wrote at the conclusion of a some what lengthy and exacting piece of work:

*Finis, finis, finis,  
Ludendo dicit!*

Dorothy L. Sayers.



# 1

## THE FIRST PLAY

# KINGS IN JUDAEA

### CHARACTERS

The EVANGELIST.

HEARD THE GREAT, King of Jewry.

ELPIS, Queen to Herod.

EPHRAIM, a Gentleman of Herod's Bedchamber.

PROCLUS, a Roman Officer in Herod's Bodyguard.

A SLAVE-BOY, Page in Herod's Household.

The COURT PHYSICIAN.

The HIGH PRIEST.

ZORASTES, the Chief Astrologer.

A SECRETARY.

DARIUS, a Captain in Herod's Army.

MATTHIAS, a fanatical Rabbi.

CASPAR, an aged Chaldaean.

MELCHIOR, a Greek Warrior.

BALTHAZAR, a young Ethiopian.

} The Three  
Wise  
Kings.

MARY, Mother of Jesus.

JOSEPH, Husband to Mary.

A SHEPHERD.

SHEPHERD'S WIFE.

ZILLAH, their Daughter, a Child of Nine.

A MESSENGER.

An ANGEL.

LORDS, LADIES, SLAVES, ATTENDANTS, and CROWD.



# NOTES

## THE CHARACTERS

EPHRAIM – He is, I imagine, about 60, and has spent the last forty-five years of his life in the whole-time occupation of trying to keep his head on his shoulders, in a court where yesterday's favourite is apt to be butchered overnight without warning, and where everybody is engaged in plotting against everybody else. He has a peevish, bleating voice like an agitated goat, and a little thin beard, and an expression of permanent anxiety. The experience of a lifetime has failed to teach him that the best way to handle Herod is to stand up to him.

PROCLUS is only 28; but a hard life and a habit of discipline make him seem more mature. He is a Roman, who has taken service in Judaea as a captain of Herod's personal bodyguard. (Later, under Archelaus, he will become part of the Roman military machine, and we shall meet him again.) In his feelings he is Roman through and through, with the contempt of the European for the Oriental, and of the metropolitan for the provincial. He is not in the least afraid of Herod, and therefore gets on with him very well.

THE SLAVE BOY, who is about 13, is the usual pampered nuisance of an Oriental court. He is probably some kind of Greek or Levantine – pretty, pert, and thoroughly spoilt.

THE MAGI – Following tradition (though not the Bible) the Magi are represented as kings, symbolising the three races of mankind, the children of Shem, Ham, and Japhet (Asia, Africa, Europe).

CASPAR (the Asiatic) is an old man, learned, mild, and dignified, and a little withdrawn and aloof. His wisdom is the wisdom of the intellect.

MELCHIOR (the European) is a man in the prime of life. His interest is chiefly in practical matters; if he consults the stars, it is to learn how to guide his actions. His wisdom is the wisdom of the bodily senses.

BALTHAZAR (the African) is a young man. He has the temperament of the mystic, and his interest is in the relationship of man to men and of men to God. His wisdom is the wisdom of the heart.

The parts of the **KINGS** are stylised so as to bring out this three-fold structure, and the acting should be patterned accordingly. The "Kingdom" they come to announce is a kingdom not of this earth, and I have tried to indicate this by giving them a kind of fairytale atmosphere (in their dreams, etc.), to contrast with the very practical and earthly quality of Herod's kingship.

HEROD is the most elaborate character in this little play and it is important that we should get the right idea about him. We must forget the traditional picture of a semi-lunatic monster, "out-heroding Herod" and "raging on the pageant and in the street." This man was not called "Herod the Great" for nothing. He is 70 years old, and already dying of an agonising disease, but he is the wreck of a very great man. Everything he says about himself is true. He *did* keep Judaea

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at peace for thirty years after it had been torn to pieces by religious factions, and he *did* leave it prosperous; he was betrayed by every one he loved, and his nephews *did* try to poison him. He was a brilliant soldier and politician, and, as far as the country was concerned, no more cruel and unenlightened than other Eastern princes of his time. But his private life was one long horror of jealousy, suspicion, and bloodshed. He never got over the death of Mariamne, whom he had loved passionately, and had executed in a frenzy of personal jealousy (unfounded) and of political suspicion (perfectly well founded). Nor could he ever get over the knowledge that the strict Jews despised him for being an Edomite (a descendant of Esau) and not a true Israelite of the House of Jacob. He sat lightly to the Jewish religion, allowing pagan temples in his outlying provinces; though he built the great Temple of Jerusalem and enriched it magnificently. The Roman Eagle which he put up there infuriated the Pharisees, because it suggested that the Jewish religion was subordinate to the Roman State. Stories are told of Herod's personal courage and of his sense of humour. He was crafty, false, and suspicious, and had a vile temper; but he was a genius in his way. Caesar knew that Herod was the one man who could be trusted to keep Judaea in order; and Herod knew that if order was not kept, Judaea would be deprived of her last vestiges of independence. On the death of Herod this did in fact happen, and Judaea was put under the direct control of a Roman governor. Herod was, in fact, very much in the position of an Indian Maharajah, exercising sovereignty within the British Raj – (like many of them, he introduced a good deal of European culture into his province, and sent his grandsons to college in Rome, as they send theirs to Oxford). Thus his being “troubled” by the threat of a Jewish Messiah, and steps he took to suppress the menace were, from the political point of view, perfectly well justified.

ELPIS – She is Herod's eighth wife – a young woman married to an old man – and exercising the functions of a professional soother.

ZORASTES – There was no room to give this poor soothsayer any characteristics beyond a terrified anxiety not to give offence, and a general disposition to hand the baby to someone else.

HIGH PRIEST – He is Herod's puppet and, like the Vicar of Bray, is determined to keep his job whatever happens. (He did not succeed, for Herod sacked him over the affair of the Golden Eagle.) His office gives him a little more dignity than Ephraim or Zorastes, and he says his bit without stammering.

DOCTOR – His concern for his own neck is tempered by the authority that any physician has over his patient. I intend him to be quite honest, and not to have taken any part in poisoning Herod. (He only has two lines – but these are to be spoken firmly.)

SHEPHERD'S WIFE – Presents no difficulty – a nice, kind, bustling, motherly person. Country accent.

ZILLAH – About 9 years old. An ordinary nice child, intelligent and helpful in the house. She takes the Christ-child quite simply and naturally, as just the new baby.





JOSEPH – About 50 – an artisan of a good class; a little sententious and given to quoting the Scriptures – he is the kind of man who reads his Bible regularly. He has a slight provincial accent, but less marked than that of the SHEPHERD’S WIFE.

MARY – She must be played with dignity and sincerity, and with perfect simplicity. Her voice is sweet, but not sugary; and there must be no trace of any kind of affectation. A very slight touch of accent – perhaps a faint shadow of Irish quality – would be of assistance in keeping her in her “station of life”; but if so, Joseph’s accent must be in keeping (and later on, we must not get the anomaly of a Jesus speaking in a different accent from His mother).

ANGEL – A *male* angel, please! – the voice stylised to give dream-effect (avoiding the dismal wail considered appropriate to stage-ghosts in *Richard III*) – a quality vaguely suggestive of woodwind.

#### NOTE: CROWD-EFFECTS AND MATTHIAS’S SPEECH IN SCENE III

I have suggested some things for the crowd to shout, because it is generally better to do this than leave it to the taste and fancy of the actors. But I leave it entirely to the Producer to decide how much of all this to put in, or how much of Matthias’s speech to make audible. The speech is there, partly, of course, to explain why the Eagle gave such offence, but chiefly as an excuse for damping down the crowd-noises so that HEROD’S remarks can be heard.

The crash of stones on a marble floor will be a nuisance, I’m afraid. It is extremely inconsiderate of the 1st century not to have provided glazed windows for the purpose of being broken by missiles; I have done my best by offering Etruscan vases and a brass lamp as sacrificial victims.

#### CHRONOLOGY

It will be seen that I have used the conventional “Twelve Days of Christmas” chronology. Actually, of course, the visit of the Magi, with the subsequent Flight into Egypt and Massacre of the Innocents, cannot have followed so quickly upon the Nativity. But since considerations of time and space did not permit me to include the Presentation among the episodes of this Cycle, the shorter time-scheme made for swifter action and better dramatic compression.

#### NOTE ON ACCENT AND DIALECT

This whole question presented great difficulties. For complete realism, all the Galilean characters, *including Jesus*, ought to speak with a strong local dialect, and the Jerusalem contingent with another, while the Romans would have to be distinguished according to whether they were speaking Latin to one another



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or struggling to express themselves to the local inhabitants in bad Aramaic (or possibly in colloquial Greek).

It was felt that to land ourselves with a Jesus and Disciples consistently speaking broad Scots, Welsh, Irish, Yorkshire, Somerset, or Mummerzet would be trying to the listener, make difficulties in the casting, and possibly arouse a certain resentment among local patriots whose particular form of speech had not been chosen.

We decided that Jesus and His Mother should speak Standard English, but that the "multitudes" should be allowed to "speak rough", though without any attempt at discriminating between the dialects in various parts of Palestine. The question then arose: should the Disciples also speak Standard English (in which case they might, by contrast with the Crowd, sound rather like a Universities' Mission to the East End); or should Jesus have a monopoly of refined speech, at the risk of appearing among His Disciples and the Crowd like a B.B.C. Announcer lecturing to the W.E.A.? The expedient adopted was to "step up" the Disciples a little from the "multitudes", and also to step them up among themselves – John and Judas, for example, speaking Standard English, Peter being kept rougher (in preparation for his recognition as a Galilean peasant by the High Priest's people), and Matthew being given a Cockney twang to distinguish the "townee" petty official from the country fishermen. The Romans also were left with only their "class" distinctions of speech, since the perpetual use of a foreign accent might have proved irritating to the listener and hampering to the actor.



## SCENE I (JERUSALEM)

THE EVANGELIST: The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God . .

Now, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the King, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem. . . .

*(The rattle of dice and the sound of a lute)*

EPHRAIM: Four, six, two. . . . Oh, stop strumming, you idle monkey! . . . Your throw, Captain.

PROCLUS *(throwing dice)*: Five, three, six.

EPHRAIM: You win, Proclus. . . . What was all that noise in the street last night? Right under the palace windows – disgraceful!

PROCLUS: A bunch of fools who'd got hold of some rumour or other.

*(Throws dice)* Aha! Three sixes. Beat that if you can, my Lord Ephraim.

EPHRAIM: You have all the luck. . . . Rumour? What about?

PROCLUS: Oh, nothing. Just an excuse for rioting.

BOY: They're saying in the market-place that Judaea is to have a new king.

PROCLUS: Eh? Now then, my lad, none of that.

EPHRAIM: You've no business to repeat such a thing. It's treason.

BOY: 'Twasn't me. Those strangers who arrived yesterday told the door-keeper that –

PROCLUS: You heard what I said.

BOY *(pertly)*: You needn't shout. I've got ears.

EPHRAIM: So's a donkey. Long ones, with fur on them. They get that way with listening to gossip.

BOY: Well, have it your own way. But all Jerusalem's talking about it. *(He strums again.)*

PROCLUS: That's quite enough. You hop it, my lad, and take that confounded musical-box of yours with you.

EPHRAIM: Stay in the ante-chamber, and when the strangers present themselves, show them in.

BOY: Oh, all right.

EPHRAIM: And if I catch you talking treason again, I'll have you whipped. There's no king here but King Herod. You understand?

BOY: God save King Herod!

PROCLUS: And no emperor but Augustus Caesar. Get that?

BOY: Hail Caesar!

PROCLUS: That's right. Now clear out.

EPHRAIM: And shut the door after you.

*(Exit BOY, slamming door)*



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Jackanapes . . . (*confidentially*) I say, Captain Proclus, I don't like this at all. The King's a very sick man, and when he dies there's going to be trouble about the succession. I'm more or less backing Prince Archelaus. You're a Roman. What do you think? Will the Emperor support his claim?

PROCLUS: No idea. Soldiers have no politics.

EPHRAIM: One must look after one's own interests, you know. I hope to goodness there won't be a civil war.

PROCLUS: Not if Caesar knows it, there won't.

EPHRAIM: Herod's been a strong ruler in his time; but between you and me, he can't last out the year.

PROCLUS: That's bad.

EPHRAIM: These things leak out and cause a lot of unrest. Some firebrand might get up and start a movement for Jewish independence.

PROCLUS: They'd better not try.

EPHRAIM: You know that seven thousand Pharisees have refused to swear allegiance to Caesar, and have got the King's brother on their side – and they say there's a big conspiracy afoot and that (*in a hoarse whisper*) Prince Antipater is heavily implicated.

PROCLUS: Antipater? King Herod's favourite son?

EPHRAIM: S'sh! We're sitting on the edge of a volcano. These rumours are a bad sign. Jerusalem's full of riff-raff come up to register under the new census; the least thing might set a match to the fire. Only last week there was a story going round about angels appearing at Bethlehem, and proclaiming a new Messiah.

PROCLUS: It was only some country bumpkins. Potty, as like as not. Who are these strangers the boy was chattering about? Anybody that matters?

EPHRAIM: Heaven knows. Foreign princelings of some kind, with outlandish names. One of them's a Nubian, I think – at any rate, he's as black as a coal. They say they are astrologers, and have brought the King a complimentary message from the stars.

PROCLUS: Then he may see them: Herod has a weakness for fortunetellers.

EPHRAIM: He says he *will* see them. As a matter of fact, they're about due now. I only wish somebody would tell *my* fortune. But these magicians are so unreliable.

BOY (*off*): This way, my lords. Follow me, my lords. (*He throws open the door and announces shrilly*) King Caspar, King Melchior, and King Balthazar, desiring audience of King Herod.

EPHRAIM: Good day, my lords. Pray be seated. Boy, go and inform His Majesty that these lords have arrived. . . . I trust, sirs, that the King will be able to receive you; but you know that he is an old man, and has been ill for many weeks.

CASPAR: We are very sorry to hear it.

EPHRAIM: You *will* be careful not to say anything that may vex him.

MELCHIOR: He will be glad of our embassy. We are the messengers of great good fortune.



BALTHAZAR: To him and to his son, the heir of Judaea, the great and mighty king that is to be.

PROCLUS: That's very interesting. Which son?

EPHRAIM: Captain Proclus! Please, not so loud. . . . You see, gentlemen, the political situation is a little complicated. If you are fortune-tellers, perhaps you could give me a hint –

CASPAR: We are not fortune-tellers.

VOICES (*off*): Make way for King Herod!

EPHRAIM: Only a hint –

PROCLUS: Be quiet, you fool; he's coming.

EPHRAIM: One must look after one's interests –

VOICE (*at door*): King Herod!

PROCLUS (*in stentorian tones*): King Herod!

(*Enter KING HEROD THE GREAT, with QUEEN ELPIS, the HIGH PRIEST, the COURT PHYSICIAN, the CHIEF ASTROLOGER, LORDS, LADIES, and ATTENDANTS*)

ALL: God Save King Herod!

HEROD (*in a voice ragged with pain and exhaustion*): Set me down carefully. If you shake me, your bones will pay for it.

EPHRAIM: Here, slaves, here. . . . Will it please your Majesty to lie on this couch?

HEROD: In my chair – in my chair of state. Fool and traitor, what would you make of me? I am King Herod still.

EPHRAIM: And for many a long year, please God.

HEROD: You are a hypocrite. You think and hope I am dying. You are in league with my traitor sons, who would snatch at my sceptre before my carcass is cold. Don't deny it. I have seen you, licking the hand of Archelaus, fawning at the heels of Antipater – plotting, plotting – nothing but plots and treachery. (*His voice dies away into a groan*)

EPHRAIM: Alas! Why should your Majesty think so? We are all your most devoted, loving, faithful subjects.

HEROD: So every traitor says. You had best be careful, my lord Ephraim.

EPHRAIM: I am the King's dog. May the plague light on me if ever one disloyal word or thought –

HEROD: Bah!

ELPIS: Oh, sir; when my royal husband is in this mood it is better not to cross him. His sickness makes him impatient – but it will pass.

HEROD: Doctor, give me something to ease this pain. Though I daresay you are in league with my heirs to poison me.

PHYSICIAN: Heaven forbid, Sir.

HEROD: Heaven, or somebody, will know how to deal with you if you play tricks with me. . . . Now then! Who are these foreign princes, and what do they seek at the hand of Herod, King of Jewry?

CASPAR: O King, live for ever! I am Caspar, King of Chaldaea.



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MELCHIOR: I am Melchior, King of Pamphylia.

BALTHAZAR: I am Balthazar, King of Ethiopia.

HEROD (*with the utmost graciousness: it is like a different man speaking*): Royal brothers, you are all most heartily welcome to my Queen and me.

CASPAR: We are Magi, humble searchers after the hidden Wisdom.

ELPIS: My lord and I are the more honoured by your visit. We love the company of good and learned men.

MELCHIOR: To you, King Herod, and to the whole realm of Judaea, we bring glad tidings from the High Lords of Heaven.

BALTHAZAR: Glory and dominion to the uttermost ends of the world, and the promise of an everlasting sceptre.

HEROD: That is good tidings indeed.

MELCHIOR: Therefore, O King, in the name of the most High God, we pray you to grant us our heart's desire.

HEROD: Ask what you will. Our royal bounty and favour are open to you.

CASPAR: Show us, we beg you, the noble child himself.

HEROD: Child? What child?

MELCHIOR: Show us him that is born King of the Jews.

BALTHAZAR: We have seen his star in the east, and have come to pay homage to him.

HEROD (*in a dangerous tone*): Sirs, I do not understand you.

CASPAR: Do not deny us; we have journeyed many miles for this.

MELCHIOR: We know that the boy is born. Nine months long the hosts of heaven were troubled. Fiery Mars glowed like gold in a furnace, and Saturn's leaden cheek grew pale. Jove himself, the imperial star, was smitten and afflicted between the sun and moon in the constellation of the Virgin.

BALTHAZAR: While yet it lay beneath the horizon, we felt the coming of the Star, and marvelled what this might be. And in our books, we read how the truth should be made known in Judaea, and in the House of the Lion, which is the House of Judah.

HEROD: Judah!

EPHRAIM (*in an agitated whisper*): You have touched him nearly. He is an Idumaeen. He is not of Judah's line. I beseech you, my lords –

HEROD: What are you muttering there? Proceed, sirs, proceed.

CASPAR: Then we took horse and rode across the desert. And as we sat by night beside the waters of Araba, we saw the rising of the Star. Between the midnight and the day it stood, burning upon the cusp of the First House, lord of the ascendant.

MELCHIOR: And all the rulers of the firmament were gathered to do it honour.

Never were such conjunctions seen in the horoscope of any earthly potentate.

BALTHAZAR: Then we knew that the hour had come, when he that should establish the kingdom was born a prince in Israel.

HEROD: Have a care, you little lords. Who sent you hither to mock me?

ELPIS: Indeed, sirs, you do not know what you are saying.



HEROD: I think there's treason here. Who sent you?

CASPAR: Herod, Herod –

HEROD: I say, who sent you? Answer me, or I will have your ancient and lying tongue torn out by the roots.

CASPAR: Our commission is from the gods, and from the God of gods.

HEROD: Villains and mountebanks! You shall be racked, impaled, crucified.

ELPIS:	}	Herod, my lord, dear husband, have patience.
EPHRAIM:		I warned you not to vex him.
PHYSICIAN:		Pray, sir, control yourself. You will be ill.

HEROD: Leave me alone, you fools. (*He struggles for breath, and resumes silkily*) Noble kings, learned Magi, I beg you to forgive me. You took me by surprise. You see what I am – an old man stricken with disease. No son has been born to my Queen Elpis and me. Sons I have, but they are all grown men, with sons of their own. Is it a grandson of mine, that shall sit upon my throne and rule an empire?

MELCHIOR: My lord, we do not know. But it is written in the heavens that he that is born shall be both priest and king.

HEROD: Priest and king? *Priest?* Are you sure?

BALTHAZAR: So it is written.

HEROD: This is serious. You do not know the history of this kingdom. For many years it was torn by wars and rebellions, till Augustus Caesar took it under the protection of Rome. Under his imperial mandate, I assumed the crown; for thirty years I have kept the peace, by force and policy. It has not been easy. There have been continual revolts against the Roman order – all made, do you understand, in the name of religion.

HIGH PRIEST: Pardon me, your Majesty. Not with our approval.

HEROD: As the High Priest says, not with the approval of the official priesthood, who know better. Religion has been the pretext for political ambition. It was I, Herod, that broke the power of the Hasmoneans. *They* were the priestly house. *They* claimed to sit upon this throne, and rule as priests and kings. They were traitors to Rome and to me, and I slew them. I slew my own sons for treason. I slew my queen, my first queen Mariamne, whom I loved – my queen and my sons, whom I loved. . . .

CASPAR: Sir, do not distress yourself and us –

HEROD: They were traitors. Their children are traitors to this day. Conspiring against me. Conspiring against Rome. Looking always for the warrior Messiah that shall lead them to victory, and independence. But there is no security in independence. The only safety for this country lies in playing her part within the great new order of Imperial Rome.

MELCHIOR: My lord, it is written in the stars that the man born to be king shall rule in Rome.

(*Murmurs*)

HEROD: In Rome also? What do you say to that, Captain Proclus?



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PROCLUS: Nothing. I am a soldier. It is my business not to say, but to do. If Caesar wants deeds, Caesar will command.

HEROD: Mark that, sirs. You prophesy, Herod reasons, but Caesar will command.

EPHRAIM (*tentatively*): My lord, if your Majesty's dog may presume to speak, may not these learned kings have made some error in their calculations? After all, we have no confirmation. Your Majesty's court magicians have issued no official prophecy in connection with this – er – alleged astral appearance.

HEROD: That is true. (*With instant suspicion*) And why not? Are they in the plot as well? Here, you, Zorastes – what are you doing there? I see you, skulking behind the skirts of the High Priest. Have you nothing to say about this? Hey? Come out, my lord Chief Astrologer, come out and speak the truth. Who has bribed you to hide things from Herod?

ZORASTES: No one, my lord.

HEROD (*with savage mockery*): No one, of course. No one. Stand up, man. Look at him now, white as a sheet, and his knees knocking together. Tell me, you dog, have you seen the star these wise men talk about?

ZORASTES: The star? Oh, yes, yes, my lord. A very bright star indeed. Quite remarkable.

HEROD: And what do you make of it?

ZORASTES: O King, live for ever! The favour of the King's face is brighter than the stars. (*Disconcerted by a snarl from HEROD, he goes on hurriedly*) Doubtless, my lord, a most happy conjunction of fortunate planets of ever-blessed augury for Jerusalem and for the high, mighty, and resplendent house of –

HEROD: I've heard all that before. You have read the Jewish prophecies?

ZORASTES: Yes, magnificence.

HEROD: Where do they say that the Messiah of the Jews will be born?

ZORASTES: Sir, it is said – that is, it appears most probable – the High Priest could tell you better than I.

HEROD: Out with it then, High Priest, where will the Christ be born?

HIGH PRIEST: Presumably, my lord, in Bethlehem of Judaea; for so it is written in the Book of the Prophet Micah; "Thou, Bethlehem, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth that is to be ruler of Israel".

HEROD: Bethlehem, eh? Then, my wise princes, you will not have far to go.

Though I doubt if you will find much when you get there. A very squalid little village. It is not usual for kings to be born in such a collection of mud walls and sheep-cotes. Boy, tell the groom of the stables to prepare horses for these gentlemen and set them on the road to Bethlehem.

BOY: Immediately, magificence.

HEROD: And now, withdraw, all of you. I would speak with these royal astrologers in private. And hark'ee – keep your mouths shut.

ALL: We are the King's slaves. God save your Majesty.

BOY (*with a malicious consciousness that he can be infuriating with perfect impunity*): We are Caesar's slaves. Hail Caesar!





ALL (*dutifully*): Hail Caesar!

HEROD: Shut the doors.

(*Doors shut*)

(*Rapidly and smoothly*) Gentlemen, you see how I am placed. Men call me tyrant and autocrat, but I am not my own master. The grip of Rome is on Judaea, and I cannot openly countenance revolt. But if it please Heaven to raise up a leader in Israel, then I am ready, heart and soul, to strike a blow for Jewish independence. May I trust you?

CASPAR: It is no part of our commission to betray the counsels of kings.

HEROD: It is well. Now, tell me: when exactly did this royal star appear?

BALTHAZAR: Twelve days ago we beheld its light in the east.

HEROD: Twelve days. (*musingly*) In the House of the Lion – the Lion of Judah – the House of David. It may be so. Bethlehem is called the City of David – did you know that? And the Scriptures speak of Bethlehem. Priest and king. Have you calculated his horoscope? What sort of man will this be that is born to be King of the Jews?

MELCHIOR: Prouder than Caesar, more humble than his slave; his kingdom shall stretch from the sun's setting to the sun's rising, higher than the heavens, deeper than the grave, and narrow as the human heart.

CASPAR: He shall offer sacrifice in Jerusalem, and have his temples in Rome and in Byzantium, and he himself shall be both sacrifice and priest.

HEROD: You speak mysteries. Tell me this; will he be a warrior king?

BALTHAZAR: The greatest of warriors; yet he shall be called the Prince of Peace. He will be victor and victim in all his wars, and will make his triumph in defeat. And when wars are over, he will rule his people in love.

HEROD: You cannot rule men by love. When you find your king, tell him so. Only three things will govern a people – fear and greed and the promise of security. Do I not know it? Have I not loved? I have been a stern ruler – dreaded and hated, – yet my country is prosperous and her borders at peace. But wherever I loved, I found treachery – wife, children, brother – all of them, all of them. Love is a traitor; it has betrayed me; it betrays all kings; it will betray your Christ. Give him that message from Herod, King of Jewry.

CASPAR: Sir, when we have found the Christ –

HEROD: True; I had forgotten. When you find him, return and let me know. We must work quickly and cunningly. The patriotic party only need a leader, and a name – some name that will unite instead of divide them. They will not support *me*, because I am not of Jacob's house; but if I myself go and swear allegiance to this royal child, then they will all fall into line behind me. But first we must make certain of the boy. May I rely on you to bring me news at once?

CASPAR: These intrigues are no affair of ours. Yet to whatever end a man is born, to that end he shall come at last, no matter how dark and devious the way. We are all the instruments of destiny, and Herod himself but a tool in the hand of God.



## THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

HEROD: If it be my privilege to restore the kingdom to Israel, then blessed is the House of Herod. . . . You will do me this favour, and guide me to the young king's feet?

MELCHIOR: The high gods permitting, we will certainly do so.

HEROD: I thank you from my heart. For your visit, your good news, and the great opportunity shown me, Herod is grateful. . . . Forgive me; I find it difficult to move. Do me the favour to strike upon that gong.

*(Gong struck)*

Remember, no word of this to my people, if you value your young king's safety.

BALTHAZAR: We will be silent.

*(Enter BOY)*

BOY: Your Majesty desires?

HEROD: The Princes are leaving immediately for Bethlehem. See them to their horses. And send me my secretary. Farewell, sirs. Heaven speed your quest. I hope you may not find it a wild-goose chase.

CASPAR:

MELCHIOR:

BALTHAZAR:

} Farewell. May Herod's name be written in the book of life.

*(Doors shut)*

HEROD: Fools! May their own prophecies choke them! But there is danger – very grave danger. No matter. Old as he is, Herod will ride out this storm too. Let me think. To seize the child – that's the first step. To kill him straight away – that's the simplest. But if only we can implicate all the rebels – tempt them to show their hand – then strike, and clear out the whole hornet's nest at once – Yes! that is the way. That is Herod's way. . . . But we must see that no garbled accounts reach Rome. We must write –

SECRETARY: Your Majesty needs a secretary?

HEROD: Yes. Take your pen. I will dictate: "To the Divine Emperor, Caesar Augustus, from Herod, King of Jewry, greeting. . . ."

## SCENE II (BETHLEHEM)

### SEQUENCE 1 (A SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE)

THE EVANGELIST: When the wise men had heard King Herod, they departed; and lo! the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

SHEPHERD'S WIFE: Zillah, Zillah! Have you laid the table?

ZILLAH: Yes, Mother.



WIFE: Then run and tell Father Joseph supper's ready. You'll find him out at the back. And have a look up the road to see if your Dad's coming.

ZILLAH: Yes, Mother. (*She runs out, calling*) Father Joseph, Father Joseph!

WIFE: Now, Mother Mary, let me take the Baby and lay him in the cradle while you have your bit of supper. Come along, lovey, aren't you a beautiful boy, then? There! Now you go off to sleep like a good boy. But he's always wonderful good, ain't he? Never cries hardly at all. Happiest baby as ever I see.

MARY: He is happy in your kind home. But when he was born, he wept.

WIFE: Ah! they all do that, and can you blame them, poor little things, seeing what a cruel hard world it is they come into? Never mind. We all has our ups and downs. Here's your good man. Come along, Father Joseph. Here's a nice dish of broiled meat for you. I'm sure you need it, working so late, too. I wonder you could see what you were doing.

JOSEPH: It's a grand night. That great white star do shine well – nigh as bright as the moon – right over the house, seemingly. I've mended the fence.

WIFE: Isn't it a real bit of luck for us, you being such a fine carpenter? And so kind, doing all these jobs about the place.

JOSEPH: Well, that's the least I can do, when you've been so generous and shared your home with us.

WIFE: Well, that was the least *we* could do. We couldn't leave you in that old stable over in the inn. We'd never a-slept easy in our beds, knowing there was a mother and baby without no proper roof to their heads – especially after what Dad told us about seein' them there angels, and the little boy bein' the blessed Messiah and all. . . . There, Mother Mary, you take and eat that. It'll do you good. . . . D'you think it's really true? About him bein' the promised Saviour as is to bring back the Kingdom to Israel?

MARY: I know it is true.

WIFE: How proud you must feel. Don't it seem strange, now, when you look at him and think about it?

MARY: Sometimes – very strange. I feel as though I were holding the whole world in my arms – the sky and the sea and the green earth, and all the seraphim. And then, again, everything becomes quite simple and familiar, and I know that he is just my own dear son. If he grew up to be wiser than Moses, holier than Aaron, or more splendid than Solomon, that would still be true. He will always be my baby, my sweet Jesus, whom I love – nothing can ever change that.

WIFE: No more it can't; and the queen on her throne can't say no different. When all's said and done, children are a great blessing. What's gone with Zillah, I wonder? I hope she ain't run off too far. There might be wolves about. Hark!

ZILLAH (*running in from outside*): Oh, Mother! Mother!

WIFE: What's up now?

JOSEPH: Hallo, my lass! What's the matter?

ZILLAH: They're coming here! They're coming here! Dad's bringing them!



## THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

WIFE: Who're coming, for goodness' sake?

ZILLAH: Kings – three great kings! riding horseback. They're coming to see the Baby.

WIFE: Kings? Don't talk so soft! Kings, indeed!

ZILLAH: But they *are*. They've got crowns on their heads and rings on their fingers, and servants carrying torches. And they asked Dad, is this where the Baby is? And he said, Yes, and I was to run ahead and say they were coming.

JOSEPH: She's quite right. I can see them from the window. Just turning the corner by the palm-trees.

WIFE: Bless me! and supper not cleared away and everything upside down. Here, Mother, let me take your plate. That's better. Zillah, look in the dresser drawer and find a clean bib for Baby Jesus.

ZILLAH: Here you are, Mum. . . . One of the kings is a very old gentleman with a long beard and a beautiful scarlet cloak, and the second's all in glittering armour – ooh! and the third's a black man with big gold rings in his ears and the jewels in his turban twinkling like the stars – and his horse is as white as milk, with silver bells on the bridle.

WIFE: Fancy! and all to do honour to our Baby.

JOSEPH: Take heart, Mary. It's all coming true as the Prophet said: The nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

MARY: Give me my son into my arms.

WIFE: To be sure. He'll set on your knee so brave as a king on his golden throne. Look at him now, the precious lamb. . . .Mercy me, here they are.

CASPAR (*at door*): Is this the house?

SHEPHERD (*at door*): Ay, sirs, this is the house. Pray go in, and ye'll find the Child Jesus wi' his mother.

WIFE: Come in, my lords, come in. Please mind your heads. I fear 'tis but a poor, lowly place.

CASPAR: No place is too lowly to kneel in. There is more holiness here than in King Herod's Temple.

MELCHIOR: More beauty here than in King Herod's palace.

BALTHAZAR: More charity here than in King Herod's heart.

CASPAR: O lady clear as the sun, fair as the moon, the nations of the earth salute your son, the Man born to be King. Hail, Jesus, King of the Jews!

MELCHIOR: Hail, Jesus, King of the World!

BALTHAZAR: Hail, Jesus, King of Heaven!

CASPAR:

MELCHIOR:

BALTHAZAR:

} All hail!

MARY: God bless you, wise old man; and you, tall warrior; and you, dark traveller from desert lands. You come in a strange way, and with a strange message. But that God sent you I am sure, for you and His angels speak with one voice. "King of the Jews" – why, yes; they told me my son should be the Messiah of



Israel. “King of the World” – that is a very great title; yet when he was born, they proclaimed tidings of joy to all nations. “King of Heaven” – I don’t quite understand that; and yet indeed they said that he should be called the Son of God. You are great and learned men, and I am a very simple woman. What can I say to you, till the time comes when my son can answer for himself?

CASPAR: Alas! the more we know, the less we understand life. Doubts make us afraid to act, and much learning dries the heart. And the riddle that torments the world is this: Shall Wisdom and Love live together at last, when the promised Kingdom comes?

MELCHIOR: We are rulers, and we see that what men need most is good government, with freedom and order. But order puts fetters on freedom, and freedom rebels against order, so that love and power are always at war together. And the riddle that torments the world is this: Shall Power and Love dwell together at last, when the promised Kingdom comes?

BALTHAZAR: I speak for a sorrowful people – for the ignorant and the poor. We rise up to labour and lie down to sleep, and night is only a pause between one burden and another. Fear is our daily companion – the fear of want, the fear of war, the fear of cruel death, and of still more cruel life. But all this we could bear if we knew that we did not suffer in vain; that God was beside us in the struggle, sharing the miseries of His own world. For the riddle that torments the world is this: Shall Sorrow and Love be reconciled at last, when the promised Kingdom comes?

MARY: These are very difficult questions – but with me, you see, it is like this.

When the Angel’s message came to me, the Lord put a song into my heart. I suddenly saw that wealth and cleverness were nothing to God – no one is too unimportant to be His friend. That was the thought that came to me, because of the thing that happened to *me*. I am quite humbly born, yet the Power of God came upon me; very foolish and unlearned, yet the Word of God was spoken to me; and I was in deep distress, when my Baby was born and filled my life with love. So I know very well that Wisdom and Power and Sorrow *can* live together with Love; and for me, the Child in my arms is the answer to all the riddles.

CASPAR: You have spoken a wise word, Mary. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is Jesus your son. Caspar, King of Chaldaea, salutes the King of the Jews with a gift of frankincense.

MELCHIOR: O Mary, you have spoken a word of power. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is Jesus your son. Melchior, King of Pamphylia, salutes the King of the World with a gift of gold.

BALTHAZAR: You have spoken a loving word, Mary, Mother of God. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is Jesus your son. Balthazar, King of Ethiopia, salutes the King of Heaven with a gift of myrrh and spices.

ZILLAH: Oh, look at the great gold crown! Look at the censer all shining with rubies and diamonds, and the blue smoke curling up. How sweet it smells – and the myrrh and aloes, the sweet cloves and the cinnamon. Isn’t it lovely? And



## THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

all for our little Jesus! Let's see which of his presents he likes best. Come, Baby, smile at the pretty crown.

WIFE: Oh, what a solemn, old-fashioned look he gives it.

ZILLAH: He's laughing at the censer –

WIFE: He likes the tinkling of the silver chains.

JOSEPH: He has stretched out his little hand and grasped the bundle of myrrh.

WIFE: Well, there now! You never can tell what they'll take a fancy to.

MARY: Do they not embalm the dead with myrrh? See, now, you sorrowful king, my son has taken your sorrows for his own.

JOSEPH: Myrrh is for love also; as Solomon writes in his Song: A bundle of myrrh is my beloved unto me.

MARY: My lords, we are very grateful to you for all your gifts. And as for the words you have said, be sure that I shall keep all these things and ponder them in my heart.

## SEQUENCE 2 (THE TENT OF THE THREE KINGS)

CASPAR: Well, royal brothers! The Star has led us by unexpected ways.

MELCHIOR: The treasures we chose for a king's palace serve now as play – things for a baby. And what became of all our fine compliments and prophetic speeches?

BALTHAZAR: I think we forgot our wisdom, and could only ask questions like school-boys.

CASPAR: All man's learning is ignorance and all man's treasures are toys. But you, Balthazar, you found a strange new word to speak, "Hail, King of Heaven", and again, "Mary, Mother of God". What put it into your heart to say that?

BALTHAZAR: Do not ask me; I spoke like a man in a dream. For I looked at the Child. And all about him lay the shadow of death, and all within him was the light of life; and I knew that I stood in the presence of the Mortal-Immortal, which is the last secret of the universe.

CASPAR: You are the wisest of us three, Balthazar. But come – let us sleep, to be ready for our journey tomorrow. Bid our musicians play softly in the outer tent.

MELCHIOR: Music there! Let the flute and the harp sound sweetly together.

*(Music. It fades and swells again. Then the VOICE of the ANGEL speaks through the music)*

ANGEL: Caspar! Melchior! Balthazar!

CASPAR *(in his sleep)*: Who calls?

ANGEL: The warning of a dream, in a horror of great darkness.

MELCHIOR *(in his sleep)*: What is it? Oh, what is it?

ANGEL: A sword in the path on the road to Jerusalem.

BALTHAZAR *(in his sleep)*: How can I come to you? Where shall I find you?

ANGEL: By the tall tree on the hill.



## KINGS IN JUDAEA

*(Music fades)*

BALTHAZAR: Call again! I am coming. . . .

*(Music ceases)*

*(waking)* O me, it is gone! . . . Caspar!

CASPAR: Is that you, Melchior?

MELCHIOR: I thought it was you cried out.

BALTHAZAR: I had a dream.

CASPAR: And so had I.

MELCHIOR: And I.

CASPAR: I dreamed I was going by night to Jerusalem, but the wind blew out my lantern. So I reached up to heaven and plucked down the Star to serve for a candle. And behold! a great darkness. And I fell – down – down – and woke to the sound of a voice calling my name.

MELCHIOR: I too was going up to Jerusalem, when suddenly the earth gaped open before me. So I drew my sword, and crossed the chasm, walking on the narrow blade. But when I was over, I found the point of the sword plunged in the heart of Mary, and in my ears was the desolate cry of a child.

BALTHAZAR: I also was going up to Jerusalem, by a deep valley between mountain forests. And I heard the voice of Mary calling: “Come back, come back! My child is lost in the hills.” And I searched long among the thorns, for I knew that I never could reach the city until I had found the Christ.

CASPAR: Brothers, I cannot think that these are idle dreams.

MELCHIOR: I believe that if we return to Jerusalem we shall find a sword in the path.

CASPAR: We have looked into the heart of Herod, and seen only a horror of great darkness.

MELCHIOR: To be plain with you, I deeply distrust his intentions.

BALTHAZAR: Do as you will, my brothers. But I will not return to Jerusalem.

CASPAR: Then we are all agreed. Ho, there, strike the tents. Make ready our horses. . . . We will return to our own country another way.

## SCENE III (JERUSALEM)

THE EVANGELIST: Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth. . . .

PROCLUS: Your move, my Lord Ephraim.

EPHRAIM: I beg your pardon, Captain. There! . . . For Heaven’s sake, boy, stop strumming. How often am I to tell you? It’s not seemly, with the King at the point of death in the very next room.

BOY: It won’t hurt him. He’s too far gone to hear.

EPHRAIM: I don’t care. It gets on my nerves.



## THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

PROCLUS: I huff you, my lord.

EPHRAIM: Tut, tut, tut. How did I come to overlook that?

PROCLUS: Your mind's not on the game tonight.

EPHRAIM: I was listening. . . . *Will you stop making that noise? . . .*

*(BOY stops strumming with a final defiant twang)*

Hark! Don't you hear shouts in the distance?

*(Noise of CROWD running outside)*

BOY: I think something's happening up near the Temple. Everybody's running that way.

EPHRAIM: Oh, dear! Oh, dear! We live in troubled times. Captain Proclus, if there's going to be a disturbance –

PROCLUS: Somebody at the door. Yes? Who are you and what do you want?

MESSENGER: A letter, to be delivered into the hand of King Herod.

PROCLUS: He's ill. You can't see him. Better leave it with me.

MESSENGER: My orders were: into the King's own hand. But they're saying in the street King Herod's dead.

EPHRAIM *(nervously)*: They've no right to say any such thing. The King is not dead. Certainly not. He's not very well, that's all. You'd better sit down and wait.

*(Uproar in the street)*

GOD of Abraham, what's that?

BOY *(excitedly)*: Oh, I say! it's a riot or something . . . there's a big crowd up by the Temple . . . they've got torches . . . they're coming this way . . . the street's simply swarming. . . .

*(Hubbub increases)*

PROCLUS: What are they shouting?

BOY: I can't hear. . . . Now the High Priest has come out of his house. . . . He took one look and went in again, double quick. . . . Here they come I can see them now. . . .

EPHRAIM: You'll be out of the window in a moment.

BOY: They're carrying something . . . they're holding it up . . . something big and shining . . . Oh! oh! oh! . . . they've torn down the Eagle!

PROCLUS: They've done *what*?

BOY: The Eagle! the gold Eagle from over the Temple gate . . . they've pulled it down!

PROCLUS: Pulled down the Roman Eagle? . . . Get out . . . let me look. . . .

EPHRAIM *(whimpering)*: That disastrous Eagle . . . it ought never to have been put there . . . it offends pious people. . . . All these fierce young men. . . .

CROWD *(surging nearer)*: Down with the Eagles! . . . Jewry for the Jews! The King's dead – long live Archelaus! Long live Antipater! . . . Up the true Religion! . . .

Down with tyranny! . . . Down with Rome. . . . Fire the palace, etc.

SLAVES *(rushing in)*: Help! help! the city's in arms.

PROCLUS: Slaves! What are you doing here? Have you left the King alone!





## KINGS IN JUDAEA

SLAVE: The King's unconscious. . . . I think he's dead. . . .

EPHRAIM: Oh, heavens, we shall all be murdered!

CROWD (*under the window. Cries of*): Freedom! . . . Independence! . . . A free Jewry! . . .

Down with the graven images. . . . Tear down the false gods. . . . Blasphemy. . . .  
Sacrilige. . . . Down with Caesar! . . . Throw off the yoke of the Empire! . . . Jewry  
for ever. . . . A Messiah! a Messiah! . . . Stones, stones, stones! . . . etc. (*Mingled with  
counter-cries of*): Hail Caesar! . . . Down with the rebels! . . . Down with the Priests!  
. . . Treason. . . . Stone the traitors! . . . etc.

(*Noise of fighting*)

EPHRAIM: O, Captain Proclus – can't you do something?

PROCLUS: Hey, there, you Jewish dogs –

(*Several sharp crashes. Cries from the SLAVES*)

EPHRAIM: Come away! They're throwing stones!

(*Another crash, followed by a sound of breaking crockery*)

Ow! the Etruscan vases!

(*And another*)

There goes the lamp! Ow!

PROCLUS: In the name of the King –

CROWD: The King's dead!

(*Cheers and laughter*)

PROCLUS: In the name of the Emperor –

CROWD (*rather less confidently*): Down with the Emperor!

VOICE: Run back to Rome, little soldier!

(*Laughter*)

VOICE (*off*): Peace, there. Hear me speak!

CROWD: Matthias! Hear Matthias! Silence for the Rabbi Matthias! Shove him up on  
the rostrum.

MATTHIAS: People of Israel! Servants of the true religion! ("*Hear, hear!*") You see  
this idolatrous image (*Groans*), this odious symbol of a pagan power (*Hiss-*  
*es*) impiously set up over the sacred doors of the Temple ("*Shame! Jewry for  
the Jews!*"), in defiance of the law which forbids graven images. Are you not  
ashamed to have let it stand there so long? . . . Are you Jews? . . . are you believ-  
ers? . . . are you men? . . . What are you afraid of? . . .

(*Mumbling from the CROWD; the noise quiets down a little,  
so that we can hear, loudly and suddenly in the room itself, the voice of HEROD*)

HEROD: Stand back from the window!

EPHRAIM: The King! (*in an awed whisper*) Alive and walking! . . . Oh, sir! you will  
not show yourself . . . they'll attack you. . . .

(*CROWD noises continue*)



## THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

HEROD: Silence, fool! Fetch candles! . . . Proclus!

PROCLUS: Sir?

HEROD: Run to the fortress. Turn out the guard.

*(PROCLUS clatters out)*

Here, boy!

BOY: Yes, sir!

HEROD: Candles, you slaves, candles! Hold them up to my face!

MATTHIAS: Take courage, Israel! We will endure this oppression no longer! *(Cheers)*  
Lift up your hearts. *(Cheers)* The tyrant Herod is dead!

*(Tremendous cheers and cries as before)*

HEROD *(in a fearful voice, dominating the uproar)*: How now, rebels! Do you know me?  
Do you know Herod?

*(Deathly silence, in which you could hear a pin drop)*

*(Icily, and with alarming irony)* I see you do. I am obliged to you for the funeral oration. To be sure, it is a little premature, but Herod will not forget. *(With a sudden roar)* Stop where you are, fellow! *(quietly)* If anybody tries to leave while I am speaking, I will have him broken on the wheel. I observe that somebody has been carried away by his enthusiasm for the Imperial emblem. That Eagle is not intended for private use as a garden ornament. However, Caesar shall be informed of your devotion. No doubt he will be delighted. Next time you wish to hold these public demonstrations of loyalty, will you kindly do so at a more convenient hour; you have disturbed my rest and roused all these worthy citizens from their beds.

*(Sound of quick marching)*

There, you see! the Guard is coming to see what all the noise is about.

*(CROWD utters murmurs of alarm: "Look out! The soldiers! Run! run!" etc.)*

I think you had better be getting home.

*(Confused shuffling)*

Hey, there! Is that Captain Darius?

CAPTAIN: Yes, sir.

HEROD: Get hold of those four men with the Eagle – and that fellow in green – and the gentleman with the hammer – and the two rabbis who are trying to sneak down off the rostrum. Then go to the High Priest's house and put him under arrest. Let the other imbeciles go.

CAPTAIN: Very good, sir.

HEROD: And report back to me with Proclus.

CAPTAIN: Very good, sir. . . . Go on, lads, you've got your orders. Move along there.  
Off with you!

*(CROWD is moved off, with scuffling and noise dying away)*



HEROD: Very pretty indeed. The High Priest will answer for this behaviour.

GIVE me a chair. And some wine.

EPHRAIM (*bleating*): Yes, magnificence. At once, magnificence. Oh, my lord, we were so afraid – we thought you were – that is, we thought – are you sure you are not hurt –

HEROD: Stop gibbering, man. Here, slaves, pick up the lamp and sweep up all this mess. Who's that fellow in the corner?

EPHRAIM: That? Oh, he came with a letter. Yes. So he did. (*Giggling feebly*) I'd forgotten all about him.

HEROD: A letter, from whom?

MESSENGER: From the noble King of Chaldaea; for your Majesty's own hand.

HEROD: From Caspar of Chaldaea? Give it to me.

EPHRAIM: Shall I read it to your Majesty?

HEROD: No!

(*Pause, while he opens and reads the letter*)

Ten thousand plagues smite them! Leprosy seize their flesh! Listen to this piece of insolence:

(*reading*)

"We have seen; we have heard; we have worshipped. But we may not return as we had promised, for the command of the Most High stands in our way. Farewell."

Is that a way for one king to write to another?

EPHRAIM (*warmly*): Abominable. I don't know what it means. But it's abominable.

HEROD (*grimly*): It means trouble. Worse trouble. Insurrection. Civil war.

(*EPHRAIM utters a protesting squeak*)

But I will defeat them yet. I *will* have order in Judaea. I'll spread a net that their Messiah shall not slip through. Proclus!

PROCLUS: Here, sir, with Captain Darius, to report everything quiet, sir.

HEROD: Good. Here's another order. Take a band of my Thracians. Go to Bethlehem. Search out every male child in the cradle –

PROCLUS: Children, sir?

HEROD: From twelve days old – No. I don't trust them. No. Take *all* the male children from two years old and under and put the lot to death. All of them. The whole brood of adders. Do you hear? Let none escape. Kill them all.

PROCLUS: Sir, I am a soldier, not a butcher.

HEROD: You will obey orders.

PROCLUS: I won't, and that's flat. I am a Roman, and Romans do not kill children. Send one of your own barbarians.

HEROD: Insolent. You are a soldier in my pay.

PROCLUS: Excuse me, sir. I am in your service, but I am still a Roman born. You have the right to dismiss me. But if you imprison or execute me, I think there will be trouble.



## THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

HEROD: Proclus, you are a fool, but an honest fool. Captain Darius!

CAPTAIN: Sir.

HEROD: You heard the order.

CAPTAIN: Yes, sir.

HEROD: Carry it out, immediately.

CAPTAIN: Very good, sir.

*(The CAPTAIN stamps out)*

PROCLUS: Am I to go back to Rome, if you please?

HEROD: No, you mean well. But which is worse? To kill a score or so of peasant children or to plunge a whole kingdom into war? The Jews cry out for a Messiah. Shall I tell you Messiah's name? Fire and sword. Fire and sword. I will not have it. This country shall have peace. While Herod lives, there shall be but one king in Jewry.

VOICE *(without)*: Squad, 'shun! . . . right turn! . . . quick march!

*(The troops march out)*

HEROD: I am sick. Carry me in.

PROCLUS: So that is the end of the new Messiah.

THE EVANGELIST: But the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

And when he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod.

