

## The Three kings

Once upon a time there were three kings. They were wealthy, well educated, and understood the stars.

Then one night they found a new star, much brighter than the rest, in the western sky. Being astrologers, they understood that this phenomenon spoke clearly of the birth of a king. Being kings themselves, they knew that they must find this new royal personage, present themselves before him as rich and powerful, and forge an alliance beneficial to both parties. So they packed their saddlebags with gold, readied their camels, and began their journey westward, following the star, with visions of entering a rich, sumptuous palace, fit for their royal status, and that of this new king.

The journey was not easy. The desert days were scorching, the nights bitterly cold, and they were always in danger, as wild dogs prowled the desert at night. To top it off, the camels were fractious and ill tempered, threatening to throw them and bolt. Then there were the sandstorms that blew in from the north, filling their mouths and eyes with fine sand. They could do nothing but stop, and, using their camels as wind and sand breaks, wait for them to pass.

After a month or so, around the campfire, the kings mulled things over. It seemed that, despite all the difficulties, they had managed to avoid disaster. Perhaps this new king actually was *calling* them to him, offering protection on the journey. Perhaps this new king was more than just a king. Perhaps there was something supernatural about him - that he was in touch with a god who kept them safe. Perhaps he was a priest, as well as a king.

So when they encountered the next caravan, they used some of the gold to buy frankincense, a gift fit for a priest.

They continued their journey westward, following the star. After a few weeks, they came to Jerusalem and, being kings, sought out the local ruler to pay him homage, as protocol dictates.

They found King Herod, who was polite, but uninterested. That is, until they stated their business. They were there to find the new king. Herod's demeanour immediately changed, and it did not go unnoticed.

He simpered and fawned, and promised to help in their quest. He called his scholars in, who said that, according to their sacred writings, the child was to be born in Bethlehem. He then begged the kings to call in on their way back after they had found him, so that he, too, could pay homage. The kings received the information with gratitude, but also caution, for they knew enough about political power games to recognise the deep insecurity in Herod which would be played out in violent elimination of any rival. They also knew what this meant for the kingly child. He was in grave danger, now and in the future.

With heavy hearts they used more of their gold to buy a gift of myrrh, the spice used to prepare the dead for burial.

They eventually found the child and his parents in a small, simple house. After watering and tethering their camels, they carefully laid their gifts before the baby, fully aware of their significance. Then setting aside their royal pomp, they tickled the baby's tummy and talked baby talk to him.

Eventually they reluctantly took their leave, and avoiding Jerusalem and Herod, took the longer road home.

Later, around another campfire, they wondered about what they had experienced, both in the journey and its climax.

The journey had been long and arduous, but if they had found the child easily, within a month or so, would they have recognised his priestly significance?

And If the journey had been swift and untroubled, would they have recognised the simple house as the climax of their journey? After all, they were kings looking for a palace. They realised that they had to be broken of their grand vision, otherwise they would never have had the humility to stoop and enter the doorway of such a dwelling.

And if they had not spent time with Herod, would they have understood the sacrificial nature of this king? After all, they had played baby games with this totally innocent child. Could Herod, with all his cruel power games, be able to do that - capture their hearts so completely? The contrast was stark. This made them ponder their own need for power and prestige, and their own journey out of arrogance. Eventually they lapsed into thoughtful silence, each savouring his own experience.

Then the morning, their hearts and saddlebags lighter, they mounted their camels and headed eastwards.

And so it was that these three, who had left home as kings, returned as wise men.

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