

Epiphany Play – Jerusalem or Bethlehem?

Based on Jeremiah 23:5-8, Zechariah 9:9-10, Isaiah 60:6, Micah 5:1-2, Matthew 2:5-6

An audio recording of the drama is also available.

In this short 7-minute dramatic dialogue, the magi, en route to Jesus' birthplace, quarrel over the likely destination. There's good biblical reason for each argument. Only 14 kilometres apart, Jerusalem and Bethlehem represent significantly different aspirations and messianic expectations. What type of king do we expect Jesus to be?

(Melchior, stage left, is packing up camping gear from their overnight stay. Balthazar, reading a book, is seated next to their campfire, stage centre.)

Balthazar: We still have the gold, Melchior?

Melchior: *(Rummaging through the backpack.)* Oh yes.

Balthazar: And the frankincense?

Melchior: Yes, it's still packed.

Balthazar: And the myrrh?

Melchior: Yeah, it's all here. *(Pause.)* But have we picked up any diapers?

Balthazar: Pardon me?

Melchior: Or any disposable baby wipes?

Balthazar: What?

Melchior: Well, have we picked up any practical gifts?

Balthazar: These are gifts for a king!

Melchior: Well, yeah, yeah, but even baby kings need Pampers!

Balthazar: *(Reading out loud.)* I read nothing about Pampers in their holy scriptures! “Kings” – that’s us – “shall come to the brightness of your dawn ... and they shall bring gold and frankincense.”

Melchior: What an impractical poet! I just think it would be a kind gesture ...

Balthazar: This isn’t a Sunday afternoon baby shower!

Melchior: Well, no, I know.

Balthazar: It’s an international diplomatic visit.

Melchior: Right.

Balthazar: Magi to king.

Melchior: *(Puts down the backpack. Joins Balthazar at the fire.)* I understand.

Balthazar: *(Puts another log on the fire.)* So, given our current position, are we still on track to arrive in 5 days?

Melchior: Um, it’s hard to say, it may take an extra day or two.

Balthazar: Why? Because the camel’s strength is waning? Because there’s more food to find? Or, is it because of last night’s mishap?

Melchior: No, because the exact destination is uncertain.

Balthazar: Uncertain? Why? We are following ...

Melchior: A celestial luminary orb, I know. And although a star is not a precise measurement, we know it’s relative distance from the sun and can calculate our prior position, more or less ...

Balthazar: Melchior, I know, the math got us this far, but ...

Melchior: The math is remarkable, Balthazar.

Balthazar: Perhaps, but so is their literature. *(Pause.)* Their poets. *(Pause.)* Have you not read Zechariah? *(Pause. Again picks up the book.)* "Your king, triumphant and victorious, comes to you, O Jerusalem!"

Melchior: Jerusalem?

Balthazar: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!"

Melchior: Oh, I see you're equating Jerusalem with Zion ...

Balthazar: "I will arouse you, O Zion ... and wield you like a warrior's sword!"

Melchior: You see, that's a rather malicious vision for a young child, don't you think?

Balthazar: He's not only a child, Melchior. He's their king.

Melchior: But you think he'll take that form of power?

Balthazar: Power? You mean a monarch's privilege, and right? Their scriptures point to it. Their poets revel in it.

Melchior: Some do, I suppose.

Balthazar: "The Lord will protect Zion and its sons will devour the enemy by drinking their blood like wine!"

Melchior: Well, it seems amiss, I have to say.

Balthazar: What?

Melchior: Well, what do you make of the rumours that ...

Balthazar: Rumours? You mean the rumours of a forlorn nativity?

Melchior: And the angelic messages of peace.

Balthazar: Huh, it's all hearsay. Unproven. Unreliable. You know that. A cute tale. Something churches might some day take a liking to perhaps, dressing

themselves in bathrobes and reciting ridiculous rhymes, but really nothing more ...

Melchior: Well, our story is no less fantastic.

Balthazar: Yes, count on it, they'll present our gifts at that same manger.

Melchior: You see, what if he's not really into gold and frankincense and such?

Balthazar: He'll grow into these gifts.

Melchior: What if he's not into drinking enemy blood?

Balthazar: Please. I think that's metaphorical. A monarch does not defile his lips.

Melchior: Well, you know, maybe diapers would have been better.

Balthazar: Please.

Melchior: A different type of gift for a different type of king.

Balthazar: No, I'll stand with their poet's expectations. I can't stomach more rumours or cute stories.

Melchior: *(Picking up the book himself.)* "Bethlehem."

Balthazar: What?

Melchior: "Bethlehem of Ephrathah."

Balthazar: Yes, of course, I know Bethlehem. A small, trivial, insignificant, dive of a...

Melchior: "From Bethlehem shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people, Israel." Micah 5, verse 2. It's not like you to omit a significant scriptural reference.

Balthazar: *(Takes the book from Melchior.)* Give me that ... "Shepherd?"

Melchior: A person who herds, tends or guards sheep.

Balthazar: Yes, I know.

Melchior: Doesn't really jive with your militant figure, does it? More of a dove than a hawk. More of a lamb than a lion. More of a hen than a coyote. More of a ...

Balthazar: Yeah, yeah, I get it. But can a ruler arise from outside the seat of power?

Melchior: Well, not normally. But everything, from the astronomical physics to the reported rumours, you know, have not been normal.

Balthazar: But a divine warrior would not hail from a place like, ah, Bethlehem.

Melchior: No, no, but a shepherd would. *(Pause.)* Look, I agree. It's not glorious, or wealthy, or particularly kingly.

Balthazar: A shepherd from a backwater town?

Melchior: Well, it's just 14 kilometers further down the road.

(Pause.)

Balthazar: What are we to believe – when one poet says this, and another says that. *(Pause.)* Mind you, Bethlehem's the town of David, is it not?

Melchior: Oh, yes.

Balthazar: Another surprising shepherd-child who became king.

Melchior: Yeah, exactly. So, what's another 14 kilometres?

Balthazar: An extra day or two. As you said. And, apparently, all the difference. *(Pause.)* Humour me, though. We've come this far. Let's stop in Jerusalem and have Herod point us in the right direction.

Melchior: Oh, sure. But promise me, we'll buy diapers if I'm right!

Arlyn Friesen Epp (Canada), 2022, 2010.

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