

JASMINE'S STAR

By Kathy Applebee

CHARACTERS: see production notes for details

COSTUMES: & PROPS: see production notes at end

SETTING: Middle East, 1 A.D.

RUN TIME: One hour

Scene 1 – before the curtain

Meshach and Jasmine enter from opposite sides and meet down center

JASMINE: (*excited*) Hey, Meshach. We're here.

MESHACH: (*stunned*) Is that you, Jasmine?

JASMINE: Yes, it's me silly. Who else would it be?

MESHACH: You're so.... Grown up.

JASMINE: You haven't seen me since I was eleven. Not only have I grown up, I can read and write in three languages, handle a mount and I learned to swim.

MESHACH: Girls don't swim.

JASMINE: Girls don't have any fun. Grandfather's eyes have gotten weaker so he pretty much had to teach me to read and write, but the swimming and riding were all my ideas.

MESHACH: Oh oh. Your ideas used to get us in quite a bit of trouble.

JASMINE: Only when we got caught. I hardly ever get caught doing (*changing her voice to adult male*) those hare brained schemes (*changes voice back to normal*) anymore. Besides, I have made a decision about my life. Girls typically have boring lives, cooking, cleaning, changing diapers; the same thing day after day so I've decided I'm going to be different. I'm going to go on adventures.

MESHACH: Shouldn't you be wearing a veil?

JASMINE: Aren't you listening to anything I'm saying?

MESHACH: Girls of marriageable age all wear veils.

JASMINE: (*laughing*) I see that hasn't changed – you being so proper.

MESHACH: (*stumbling around what he wants to say*) Well, you should be now that you're.. a ... lady. Women are supposed to be veiled when they are among outsiders.

JASMINE: You are hardly an outsider. We practically grew up together. We learned to read and write, do sums and geometry and chart the stars side by side. Why you had to move to Shushan I'll never know.

MESHACH: Father was appointed governor.

JASMINE: Yeah, I guess that's a good reason. Anyway – isn't all this talk of the promised king being born exciting? I've been helping my grandfather go through the scrolls Daniel left. (*sadly*) He can't see to read anymore so I'm his eyes. (*getting an edge of excitement in her voice*) We think this could be the star. What do you think?

MESHACH: I don't know. First of all, the Jews are subject to the Romans so it doesn't seem logical for their greatest king to be born now.

JASMINE: He's supposed to free his people, isn't he?

MESHACH: I don't think they mean literally free his people. Anyway, they aren't technically slaves, they're just conquered. Secondly, there is already a king – Herod is his name. My father says he is not expecting a child. Probably a good thing to because he's had one or two sons executed. Father says he's jealous for his throne.

JASMINE: You are still pessimistic, I see. I think this may be it. Grandfather says the timing is right – the exact number of years that Daniel prophesied have passed. It is time for the Messiah to be born.

MESHACH: That is true. (*JASMINE interrupts*)

JASMINE: Look, we have a problem. I want to go along but grandfather won't let me. I almost didn't get to come this far but I convinced him he should leave me here with your mother and sisters. I am determined to go. If this is the king we have been waiting for, for 100's of years, I want to be there to see it myself. Besides, grandfather needs my eyes.

MESHACH: (*shocked*) It's too dangerous. My father almost decided not to take me and I'm male. He's afraid our caravan will get attacked because we carry such expensive gifts for the king. I'm supposed to be helping come up with a plan to avoid trouble.

JASMINE: Who is afraid of a few desert raider? We have skilled guards and I can handle a mount as well as any of them.

MESHACH: But you're a girl, er woman,,, oh you know what I mean. Girls don't go on trips like these. Women stay home and take care of their husbands and children. Men go on dangerous adventures.

JASMINE: I have no husband or children. Nor do I ever intend to have them. I'm going to be a scholar and traveler. Now about this trip -I'm going. I'll just need you to help me with my plan.

MESHACH: Plan? You mean another one of your hare-brained schemes, don't you. Last time I helped with one of your plans I almost got... (*JASMINE interrupts*)

JASMINE: Don't be silly. This time we won't get caught. It's a fabulous plan. Suki, who takes care of the camels, is just my size. Grandfather plans to take him along to tend the camels. And he's always got his face covered up because of that scar he has. I plan to switch places with him. No one will know. I just need you to find some excuse and get him to trade clothes with you.

MESHACH: That's crazy. No one is going to believe you're Suki.

JASMINE: They will. At least long enough for me to come along. But you also need to send him on a fool's errand the day we leave so he's not around.

MESHACH: You don't know the first thing about taking care of camels. Besides, it's hard work and the trip will be grueling. Father says the journey to Judea could take five or six months.

JASMINE: If I can learn the Greek alphabet, how hard can taking care of camels be? If you're so concerned about the camels, you can help me. Shhhh. Here comes Suki now.

SUKI: *(entering and bowing)* The others have arrived. Your grandfather wishes you to come assist him with reading.

JASMINE: *(dismissively)* Tell him I will be right there.

SUKI: *(uncomfortable about insisting)* I am to escort you.

JASMINE: I'll be right behind you. *(motioning to MESHACH)* We have something private to discuss. It will just take a sec. Walk slow and I'll catch you before you're half way there. *(SUKI seems uncomfortable and unsure)*

MESHACH: I'll make sure she comes. I'll walk with her. Go on ahead. *(SUKI nods "ok" and exits)*

JASMINE: You're good. I knew I could count on you to help me.

MESHACH: I am NOT going to help you. If your grandfather has forbidden it, then you must do as he says.

JASMINE: *(hands on hips)* Meshach, my grandfather is an old man. This trip could be the death of him. He needs me. I know he's just trying to protect me by leaving me here but I want to be there in case... you know.

MESHACH: *(conflicted and undecided)* I don't know...

JASMINE: But I do. So it's settled. *(lights down)*

Scene 2 – Interior of Melchoir's

At rise: Magi and Azariah are examining scrolls, maps and star charts while discussing their findings.

BALTHASAR: According to the prophet Jeremiah, *(reads)*

The days are coming," declares the LORD,
 "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch,
 a King who will reign wisely
 and do what is just and right in the land.

In his days Judah will be saved
 and Israel will live in safety.
 This is the name by which he will be called:
 The LORD Our Righteousness.

We know Herod is not that king. He does not rule wisely. He assassinates any and all who threaten his throne.

MELCHOIR: It could be just a comet we all observed.

BALTHASAR: Or even a planet, undiscovered until now. (*Jasmine, Suki and MESHACH enter*)

JASPER: But I think it is a star. And not just any star. It could be THE star. Jasmine, find the passage we talked about. (*JASMINE TAKES THE SCROLL JASPER hands her and begins looking for the passage*)

MELCHOIR: If this is the time, then the Romans have to be the clay feet. The Romans don't seem like clay to me. (*JASMINE nods that she has the passage*)

JASPER: Read it aloud for us, Jasmine.

JASMINE: I see him, but not now;
 I behold him, but not near.
 A star will come out of Jacob;
 a scepter will rise out of Israel.

JASPER: His coming will be preceded by a star.

MELCHOIR: We have to be sure. We have been entrusted with a legacy.

JASPER: Yes, we have been. Since the time of my ancestor Daniel, we magi who descended from Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have been waiting for the fulfillment of this prophesy to our forefathers. We stayed behind, when others returned to the land of Judah so they we could keep track of the signs, the scrolls and look for the star.

MELCHOIR: And for generations we have watched the night sky for the signs of the Messiah's arrival.

BALTHASAR: We have passed the information and the responsibility from father to son all these years.

JASPER: I have been watching the longest of all three of us. I say this is the sign, the star.

BALTHASAR: (*starting to consider the possibility*) I must admit, the timing is right when Daniel prophesied it would be.

MELCHOIR: Let us not be hasty. I propose we study this star for three nights, and review all the prophesies for three days. If in three days time, two of the three of us are convinced, I will agree to go and take the gifts that our families have saved and added to all these centuries.

JASPER: Sensible. What do you think, Balthasar? Can you agree to this proposal?

BALTHASAR: The Romans are taking a census in Israel. It will be a time of political unrest, short tempers, crowds and danger.

MELCHOIR: Already bandits and thieves are taking advantage of those traveling to their home cities to be counted.

JASPER: But if this is the moment we have waited for, for centuries, then we must act.

BALTHASAR: Three days and nights of study. If two of us three agree it is time, then we go.

MELCHOIR: Agreed. *(All three men clasp hands. JASMINE and MESHACH exchange glances)*

Scene 3- in front of curtain

JASMINE: Why did Balthasar and your father oppose my grandfather's idea?

MESHACH: My father is afraid that perhaps your grandfather's judgment is clouded by his age.

JASMINE: (*defensively*) What do you mean? That's he's getting senile? Just because he's losing his sight doesn't mean he's losing his mind.

MESHACH: It's not that. My father feels that your grandfather may be reading more than there is into the signs because he wants so badly for the King to be born in his lifetime. (*unsure of how to broach such a delicate topic*) He is quite old. Much longer and he absolutely would not be able to make the trip. I mean, he might ... you know... with the journey being so long and dangerous...

JASMINE: He might die. There. I said it for you. (*letting down her guard*) I have considered that too. In fact, he keeps talking about getting me settled into a home before it is too late.

MESHACH: He just wants what is best for you.

JASMINE: Marrying some old geezer as old as my grandfather won't help matters. They might die off first.

MESHACH: (*reasoning with her*) He isn't going to marry you to some ancient.... (*asking*) is he?

JASMINE: (*almost outraged*) I've seen the letters of proposal. I have to read them to grandfather, remember? I know who is asking for a match.

MESHACH: (*with pity and shock*) And they are that old?

JASMINE: (*less outraged*) Well, one of them was forty something I think. But he has kids my age. I don't want to marry some widower even if he is one of the richest merchants in Persia. But even the ones that aren't old in age have old minds – stuck in tradition. I want more than tradition in life. I want adventure.

MESHACH: But this adventure, it's just not a good idea. Think of your grandfather. The last thing he needs is to worry about you.

JASMINE: He won't be worried if he doesn't know I'm along. Listen, it is bad enough Shadrach's line died out and there are only our three families left. My father was an only child and I am the last one of my family's line. When he died I became the only one to carry on the work.

MESHACH: (*trying to convince her*) Until you marry and have children. It is your duty to stay safe and have children who can carry on the work..

JASMINE: (*stubborn*) No, it is my duty to go to take care of my grandfather and should that fail, then to be witness of the promised king's arrival as the last surviving member of the household of Daniel the prophet.

MESHACH: There's no talking you out of this crazy plan, is there?

JASMINE: (*smiling and satisfied she has finally worn him down*) None whatsoever.

MESHACH: I can't believe I am going to help you. If I get in trouble...

JASMINE: You won't. I'll take all the blame. I won't mention your assistance. (*over dramatically*) even if they beat me. My lips are sealed.

MESHACH: I'll give Suki his "disguise" and send him to the marketplace. But that is all I can do to help you.

JASMINE: I will do the rest. (*hugs him spontaneously*) Thanks. You won't regret this. (*she exits*)

MESHACH: I already do.

Scene 4 – Herod’s palace

At rise: HEROD on throne surrounded by courtiers.

CHIEF COURTIER: Your highness, a decree sent by Caesar Augustus.

HEROD: Read it to us.

CHIEF COURTIER: (*reading*) I, Caesar Augustus, decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. Everyone is to go to his own town to register. Please provide whatever assistance is needed by my Roman officials. (*looking up*) It is signed and sealed by the emperor.

HEROD: (*irritated*) A census is the first step towards more taxes. I already brought Augustus 700 talents of silver. Now I can look forward to more taxes. As if we don’t have enough troubles already. (*Getting up to pace*) The Jews don’t accept me. My own family conspires against me. And now a census.

CHIEF COURTIER: My Lord, you have taken care of your problems, have you not, with the deaths of the traitors?

HEROD: I have dealt with some of the traitors. My wife, Mariamme and her miserable, ambitious sons are dead.

CHIEF COURTIER: As well as her grandfather and her brother, the High Priest.

HEROD: And I will execute more if I have to. I have earned this throne a thousand times over and no one, no one will take it from me. No one. (*Settling back down on his throne*) Give the Romans whatever assistance they need to get this census over with.

Scene 5 – before the curtain

MESHACH and JASMINE approach each other from opposite sides. They are careful and cautious, quiet and stealthy. MESHACH thrusts first one, then another bundle into JASMINE’S hands.

MESHACH: Here are Suki’s clothes. But put them in a saddle bag for later and wear these now.

JASMINE: (*unwrapping the second bundle*) These are beggar clothes?!

MESHACH: It’s part of the plan. We’re traveling as lepers who are making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

JASMINE: Why?

MESHACH: Who’s going to come near a beggar?

JASMINE: That is brilliant. No one will rob us, or even come close for fear of catching leprosy.

MESHACH: (*proudly*) I came up with the plan. And since lepers cover their mouths, sometimes their whole face, you'll be able to hide your identity even more easily.

JASMINE: (*genuinely impressed*) I'm impressed with your plan.

MESHACH: (*modesty*) I kind of got the idea from you going in disguise. I thought if you can, we all could.

JASMINE: You're too modest. I'll change and start loading the camels.

Months later

Scene 6a

At rise: Before curtain. MESHACH is pacing, agitated. Jasmine is seated, combing out her hair.

MESHACH: (*miserable*) I can't believe you gave yourself away. For three months we had everyone fooled. Three months! My father will probably kill me for being involved. How could we keep this a secret for three months and then just like that.... (*pause*) He's going to kill me.

JASMINE: (*matter-of-factly, unperturbed*) I don't think he'll kill you. You are his only son. (*trying to be funny*) He'll probably just beat you within an inch of your life. (*MESHACH stops long enough to glare at her*) I'm kidding. We're more than half way there so they can't possibly send us back. It has taken us three months to get this far. It won't be a big deal.

MESHACH: Every time I let you talk me into some harebrained scheme, I get in trouble. You – you never get more than a reprimand. But me... He's going to kill me... (*AZARIAH enters*)

AZARIAH: (*Stiff and formal*) They will see you now. (*JASMINE rises and they begin to go*) (*Lightening up*) Meshach, how could you be so dumb? She has been getting you in trouble since we were five. Haven't you grown up at least? (*JASMINE glares at him, hands on hips*) I thought would have known better than get involved in something like this. I thought you had become a scholar and had a keen intellect. (*JASMINE glares at him again and flounces off., AZARIAH watches then turns back to MESHACH. Suddenly he understands and smiles*) You're in love with her. That's why you do all these crazy things. (*MESHACH starts to deny it, gives up and turns and exits*) You must really want your heart broken. She will never settle down. (*AZARIAH exits shaking his head*)

Scene 6b

(Curtain opens. Desert oasis. JASPER is seated center stage. BALTHASAR and MELCHOIR are seated on either side of him.)

JASPER: I apologize. How could I have been duped so? And for three months.

MELCHOIR: Do not castigate yourself. Your eyes are failing. But mine are fine. (*upset with himself*) Too think my own son went along with this. (*to BALTHASAR*) At least yours wasn't involved.

BALTHASAR: I'm not so sure. But if he wasn't, how could he have been so oblivious for three months. Either way – he is in trouble.

JASPER: And my granddaughter Jasmine has caused this trouble.

MELCHOIR: Just when I thought my son was growing into manhood!

BALTHASAR: That's exactly the problem. He's becoming a man and has noticed that Jasmine has become a woman. And not just any woman. A very beautiful woman.

JASPER: Her mother was striking.

BALTHASAR: Even Solomon, the wisest of all kings, blessed by the Almighty with wisdom beyond any known to mortal man, this Solomon was led astray by women.

JASPER: True, his foreign wives led him astray.

BALTHASAR: And even Samson, the man blessed by God with unnatural strength, Samson was undone by a woman.

MELCHOIR: Delilah, yes. Delilah was his undoing.

JASPER: (*cutting him off with a smallest amount of edge in his voice*) I'm not so sure I want my granddaughter compared to Delilah. She is a good girl. Misguided perhaps at times. This is my fault for not providing her with a proper home when he parents died.

MELCHOIR: Don't chastise yourself. You have done a wonderful job being both mother and father to an orphan.

BALTHASAR: Even Mordecai could not have done a better job

MELCHOIR: Jasmine is a remarkable young woman. She is pleasing in form, has a quick mind, and if you don't mind me saying so, has done the work of two men keeping the camels.

JASPER: (*sighing*) Nevertheless, this deception is serious.

BALTHASAR: Serious.

MELCHOIR: A serious distraction of the highest magnitude for my Meshach.

JASPER: And I am not getting any younger. What will happen to Jasmine when I die?

BALTHASAR: She should be married off as quickly as possible. Having a husband and children will settle her down.

JASPER: Yes, and break her heart. She yearns for adventure.

MELCHOIR: I think I have a solution. But the young ones are coming. Let us talk more later after we have spoken to them.

AZARIAH sits by BALTHASAR. JASMINE and MESHACH stand before the elders. They are humble and contrite.

JASPER: Jasmine, would it be within my power, I would send you back in chains. But we travel light and no one can be spared to escort you. *(heavy sigh)* I should have sent you to live with a family with a mother when your parents died. It is my fault you have grown up so unruly and headstrong. I am disappointed.

JASMINE: *(sincerely)* I am sorry, grandfather. It was never my intention to hurt you. I just wanted to make sure you were alright. You are all I have in this world.

JASPER: I know. But this hare-brained scheme of yours must be punished.

MELCHOIR: Meshach, there is no excuse for your lapse of judgment. You were brought up in a good family. Your mother will die of embarrassment when she hears. For your part in this escapade, there will be a time of reckoning, but first we must finish what we set out to do: follow the star and find the king. Then I shall deal with you.

BALTHASAR: Azariah, I find it most difficult to believe you had absolutely no knowledge of any of this. Therefore, when the journey is over, you too will be suitably punished. *(AZARIAH is caught completely off guard and moves his mouth to defend himself but nothing comes out. He looks bewildered, then scowls at JASMINE and MESHACH)*

MELCHOIR: Meshach, for the remainder of this trip, I will seriously be considering whether or not you will continue in your studies. If you cannot guide your own conduct, how can you conduct affairs of state. See to it there are no more of these hare brained schemes. Do you understand?

MESHACH: Yes, sir.

BALTHASAR: Let nothing else sidetrack us from this mission of most epic importance.

AZARIAH: Yes, father.

JASPER: We old ones need our rest. This desert is not getting any easier to traverse. Jasmine, you will have to remain disguised as a boy. Water the camels then get your rest. *(As everyone gets out bedrolls and prepares to bed down, MESHACH catches JASMINE'S eye and signals she is to behave and not get in anymore trouble. JASMINE holds her palms out flat indicating she is innocent of any trouble and nods "OK". Lights down)*

Scene 7 before the curtain

The Magi entourage is stopped and looking ahead.

AZARIAH: Traffic has certainly picked up around Jerusalem.

BALSHAZAR: The Romans are definitely making their presence known. Azariah, it is time for you to lead the next segment of this journey. You and two of the servants are to change into your regular robes and venture into the city ahead of us. Go to the palace. Deliver a message to King Herod's palace that three Magi from the east, governors of the Persians, will be arriving soon and humbly ask for an audience with his highness. Present him with the gift.

AZARIAH: What if he will not see us? Then what should I do?

BALTHASAR: We must see him, therefore failure is not an option. Understood?

AZARIAH: Yes, father. *(Exits with two servants)*

JASPER: Jasmine, you must stay close to me the entire time, disguised as a servant lad

JASMINE: Yes, grandfather.

JASPER: Do not speak for any reason.

JASMINE: I will a mute, unable to speak. *(Lights down)*

Curtain opens

At rise: HEROD on throne surrounded by courtiers. Courtier blows trumpet. Magi, followed by JASMINE, MESHACH and AZARIAH enter and bow before King Herod.

HEROD: Welcome to Jerusalem. I am honored to have three distinguished Persian governor's grace my palace. What brings you all the way from Persia to Judea?

BALTHASAR: We come to worship the Messiah.

JASPER: We are scholars of Jewish history as well as Viziers to our king. Each of us trace our ancestry back to one of the children of Israel taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. I am descended from Daniel, the prophet.

MELCHOIR: I m a descendant of Meshach, known by the Jewish name of Mishael.

BALTHASAR: And I trace my lineage back to Abednego, known also as Azariah.

HEROD: And where is the one who represents the house of Shadrach?

MELCHOIR: Unfortunately, Shadrach's line died out some 100 years ago.

JASPER: We have traveled here in search of the fulfillment of prophesy. Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?

BALTHASAR: We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.

HEROD: (*suspicious, a bit angry*) King? What king? I am the only king of the Jews. (*COURTIER whispers in HEROD's ear*) (*confused*) The king of prophesy? (*more whispering*) (*pleasantly but fake*) I understand. The king of the prophesy. Let me consult with the chief priests and teachers of the law. I will send for you when I have the information you seek. (*Magi and entourage bow and exit*)

HEROD: (*angry and forceful*) You find out where this rival king has been born. I will not have anyone challenging me for the throne. I want to know yesterday where this threat is.

CHIEF COURTIER: At once, your highness. (*Lights out*)

Scene 8 before curtain

JASMINE and MESHACH are sitting, gazing up at the stars.

MESHACH: (*pointing*) It hasn't moved.

JASMINE: It is almost as if the star is waiting for us to follow it.

MESHACH: Yeah. Kind of like when the children of Israel followed the pillar of fire by night.

JASMINE: Our God leads in mysterious ways. I wonder why?

MESHACH: We all wonder. But his mind to ours is like our mind to that of a grasshopper. (*Beat*)

JASMINE: Herod didn't take the news well.

MESHACH: As father and the others suspected.

JASMINE: Do you think he'll call us back? Give us any information?

MESHACH: I would guess that he will. He'll want to know what we know if he thinks there is a rival king out there. He already doesn't trust the Jews. And they don't trust him.

JASMINE: Why?

MESHACH: Several reasons. One, he's an Arab.

JASMINE: How did he get to be king?

MESHACH: Politics. His father was on a first name basis with Julius Caesar. He was appointed king and married a Jewish princess named Mariamme, hoping that would gain him acceptance.

JASMINE: But it didn't?

MESHACH: No. The Jews don't like him, even though he is rebuilding the temple. They don't trust him. I don't blame them. He killed Queen Mariamme as well as her two sons, grandfather and her brother.

JASMINE: Killed them? Why?

MESHACH: Father says he's easily threatened into doing rash things.

JASMINE: What a barbarian. *(beat)* That's just it. Women are just pawns in the games men play. I never want to be a pawn, pushed around, treated like I am of no consequence. At least I don't have much family to kill off.

MESHACH: I don't think you have anything to worry about, Jasmine. The man who tried to push you around would get pushed back.

JASMINE: *(sighing)* Yeah, But what kind of life would that be, locked in a power struggle until you died? It is best just to avoid marriage. *(Lights out)*

scene 9

At rise: HEROD on throne surrounded by courtiers. PRIEST carrying a scroll, enters and bows before King Herod.

HEROD: *(sternly)* Where will the Christ be born? Is there a prophesy of this?

PRIEST: Yes, your majesty. Shall I read it to you? *(HEROD waves permission to read)*

In Bethlehem in Judea, for this is what the prophet has written:

But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.

HEROD: *(paranoid and growing angry at the thought of a rival)* When was he born? How long ago?

PRIEST: We know not, oh king.

HEROD: *(to courtier)* Call back those Magi, but have them come secretly. I will not have the masses thinking there is some Messiah out there. They'd do foolish things and get Rome angry.

CHIEF COURTIER: Yes, your highness. *(exits)*

PRIEST: Your highness?

HEROD: *(crossly)* What is it?

PRIEST: A few months back something unusual took place. In light of this development I think you should know.

HEROD: (*sitting up and leaning toward the priest with interest and furrowed brow*) Go on.

PRIEST: One of the oldest priests, a Zechariah, had a vision in the temple that left him mute. He apparently had been visited by an angel that prophesied he'd have a son in his old age. When his time of service was up, he returned home.

HEROD: Go on?

PRIEST: His wife, Elizabeth was well advanced in years and was barren. But about five months later we heard she was going to have a child.

HEROD: Was she as old as Sarah when she had Isaac?

PRIEST: I don't think she was 90, but they were both very old. In due time she had a son and when they tried to name him for his father, Elizabeth insisted his name was to be John. Signing to us, Zechariah agreed he was to be named John, rather than Zechariah. At that very instance, the man's tongue was loosed and he praised God.

CHIEF COURTIER: I remember the incident. The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things.

PRIEST: Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?"

CHIEF COURTIER: His father declared he should be a Nazarene and would go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

PRIEST: At the time, most of us dismissed this as an old man's fancy. But now?

HEROD: Superstition. Ignorant people see signs everywhere. (*sternly*) But I should have been informed.

PRIEST: But that is not all. The old man prophesied. I may not have it word for word but it went something like this: (*reciting*) Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come and has redeemed his people.

He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David

(*Pause as he switches back to conversational tone*) Then he raised the child high into the air and said:
(*Reciting*)

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him.

HEROD: (*Irate*) And you are telling me this now?! I should have been told immediately if there was any talk of someone preparing the way for another king. What is that prophesy – the one for which Jews set an extra plate for Elijah on the Passover? Do you have a copy of that?

PRIEST: I will fetch the scroll at once. (*Exits*)

HEROD: (*Ranting and pacing, shaking his finger at courtiers*) Conspiracies to my left and right. As if having the Romans marching all over my land was not enough, now I have a revolt in the works. I will put an end to....

CHIEF COURTIER: (*entering and clearing his throat*)Your highness, the Magi from the east.

HEROD: (*stops short, composes himself then returns to his throne He speaks with a calm authoritative voice.*) Show them in. (*COURTIER waves them in. The Magi, followed by JASMINE, MESHACH and AZARIAH enter and bow before King Herod. PRIEST reenters carrying a second scroll*)

HEROD: (*with fake cordiality and pleasantness*) Welcome once again. I hope we can help each other. Exactly when did this star appear?

JASPER: Although we cannot be exactly sure when it appeared, all three of us sited it for the first time about four and one half months ago.

MELCHOIR: We study the sky every night. We believe we noticed it immediately since it is of unusual brightness and since it appears to move.

BALTHASAR: I thought perhaps it was a comet or another planet at first. But we are convinced that this is the star spoken of in the holy scriptures in the book of Numbers. Shall we read it to you?

HEROD nods and BALTHASAR indicates AZARIAH should read.

AZARIAH: I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near.
A star will come out of Jacob;
a scepter will rise out of Israel.

HEROD: Yes. This must be the star. My scholars say the child will be born in Bethlehem. (*nods to priest*)

PRIEST 1: From the prophet Micah,

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.

He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.

HEROD: Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.

JASPER: As you wish.

MELCHOIR: Please accept a small token of our gratitude for seeing us. (*MESHACH comes forward with a gift and bowing low, presents it to HEROD. Herod picks it up, obviously delighted*)

HEROD: You are welcome. (*HEROD dismisses them with a wave of his hand. Magi entourage bows once more and exits*)

HEROD: I want them followed. But not so closely they discover they are being followed. I want to know the location of this rival king so I can eliminate the pretender before he causes me any trouble.

CHIEF COURTIER: Yes, your majesty. (*exits*)

HEROD: Now, about that other prophesy...

PRIEST: I have it here. (*Unrolls second scroll*). From Malachi

See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap.

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.

HEROD: Enough! From now on I want to know about anything – anything unusual that goes on in or around the temple. Do you understand?

PRIEST: Absolutely your highness.

HEROD: And find out what you can about the old couple and that baby. Where are they now? They could be the start of a rebellion. (*PRIEST nods, bows and exits, lights down, curtain*)

Scene 10 – before the curtain left

The Magi entourage is packing up.

BALTHASAR: I have a bad feeling about giving that information to Herod.

JASPER: As do I. His words were gracious but his tone was threatening.

MELCHOIR: Herod has executed members of his own family that he feared might usurp his throne.

BALTHASAR: Then let us be on our guard. He may have us followed.

MESHACH: So we go back to our disguises?

BALTHASAR: No, not yet. He knows we are going to Bethlehem. Let us do so openly. Let us make it easy to be followed, at first.

Scene 11 – before curtain right

COURTIER and SPY are lying on ground, looking forward. They give the impression they are spying on someone while wishing to remain out of sight.

CHIEF COURTIER: That's them alright. Kind of hard to miss the red cloaks.

SPY: Do you think their story of a king has any truth to it?

CHIEF COURTIER: It doesn't matter what we think, only what Herod thinks. Keep them in our sights.

ACT 2

Scene 12 – before curtain left, desert overlooking Bethlehem

BALTHASAR is looking through a telescope type instrument. MESHACK is on the ground looking behind them.

BALTHASAR: *(pointing above)* The star has stopped over that house. *(Ad lib overjoyed comments on finally reaching their destination)*

MELCHOIR: Are we still being tracked?

MESHACH: *(rising)* Yes. The same two men continue to stop when we stop and go when we go.

JASPER: Then we cannot go directly to the house. It would endanger them. We will find a secluded place and covertly change back into our beggar outfits and go undetected. I do not trust Herod and I do not wish him to know the location of this promised child.

BALTHASAR: I think it is time to put our second plan into motion.

JASPER: I agree.

MELCHOIR: We will need a diversion. Meshach, you and the servants will continue on. Hire five men to dress as your servants while the three of you don the extra Magi robes and appear to be we Magi. You will rent

rooms, you will attract attention. The next day, you will go in the opposite direction on some fool's errand. To keep those spies following you.

JASPER: That will give us time to find the child and present our gifts.

MESHACH: (*greatly disappointed and upset*) But when will I get to see the child!

MELCHOIR: I am afraid that you will not.

MESHACH: (*stunned*) But I have come all this way... I.

MELCHOIR: (*beginning before MESHACH can protest further*) Your role is crucial. Do you spurn to do this to ensure the safety of this child? (*MESHACH shakes his head "no"*) Besides, this is part of the consequences for your complicity with Jasmine.

JASMINE: Then I too should not be allowed to go. (*MESHACH looks up quickly, not believing she is volunteering to be left out*)

JASPER: (*with uncharacteristic sharpness*) Young lady, you will not venture out of my sight. Do you understand?

JASMINE: (*Cowed for once, humbly*) Yes, grandfather.

MESHACH: (*greatly disappointed but resigned to do his part*) I understand, father. I will do this. I will draw Herod's spies away from the child.

MELCHOIR: Good.

BALSHAZAR: Do not expect us to rejoin you for at least a day, possibly two

MELCHOIR: Then let us all do what we need to do. (*placing his hands on his shoulders*) Do not fail us or the young king. (*MESHACH bows in submission*)

Scene 13 – Zechariah's house

At rise: MARY is rocking the baby Jesus and sitting next to ELIZABETH who is rocking John. JOSEPH is talking to ZECHARIAH. Both are standing, examining a basket. There is a knock on the door. ZECHARIAH answers it and brings in the MAGI ENTOURAGE. They enter and bow to ZECHARIAH.

ZECHARIAH: Shalom. I am the priest Zechariah; this is my wife Elizabeth and our relatives Mary and Joseph. How can I help you?

BALTHASAR: We are scholars of the sky called Magi, from the east.

JASPER: Although we serve in the Persian government, we are Jews and the descendents of Jews.

BALTHASAR: We followed the star and it rested upon this house.

MELCHOIR: We seek the child who is born both king and Messiah. Long have we studied the sky and the scrolls and for generations our ancestors anticipated this day's arrival.

MELCHOIR: We have looked for this promised child's birth since we were old enough to see the stars. Not only us but our forefathers before us.

JASPER: I trace my lineage to Daniel, one of the Hebrew children who served in Nebuchadnezzar's court.

ZECHARIAH: The Daniel that was thrown into the lion's den?

JASPER: Yes, and this is my only heir, my granddaughter Jasmine. (*JASMINE bows*)

BALTHASAR: I trace my lineage back to Abednego. I named my son after him, but with the Hebrew version of the name – Azariah. (*AZARIAH bows*)

MELCHOIR: And I am a descendant of Meshach, known also as Mishael in the Hebrew tongue. I named my son, Meshach, after him. He regrets he could not be here.

ZECHARIAH: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? The three men who were thrown into the fiery furnace because they refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image? (*MAGI nod "yes"*) Your ancestors are heroes of old. But where is Shadrach's offspring?

MELCHOIR: Alas, his line died out many years ago during an earthquake.

JASPER: Since the prophesy of the Messiah King was given to Daniel, we have been charged with watching the skies and collecting the prophesies of the coming of this king. For generations we have watched and waited. Today it seems everything has come to pass. We followed the star to you here. (*beat*) But we see two babies.

ZECHARIAH: This is my son John, chosen by God to be the forerunner of the Christ.

JOSEPH: This is Jesus. The promised child, the hope and reconciliation of Israel.

Entourage falls to their knees before Jesus.

JASPER: (*raising his face to heaven*) We thank and praise you, Oh God for giving us this opportunity to worship your son, the king, God come in the form of mankind.

The Magi entourage ad libs phrases like "we praise you", "Thank you, lord", "Hallelujah", etc. The entourage removes their outer garments to reveal their elegant and regal robes. (AZARIAH, JASMINE, MESHACH assist the elders before removing their own disguises) Joseph places a basket at Mary's feet and Mary places Jesus in the basket.

The Magi's simple head pieces are removed (others can help) to reveal crowns upon JASPER, MELCHOIR, and BALTHASAR. They remove their crowns and lay them before Jesus.

JASPER: Lord God, enthroned on the heavens above, I thank you for blessing us with the opportunity to worship both you and this child. (*Entourage stands*)

BALTHASAR: Our forefathers rose to high positions in the governments of the Babylonians, Medes and Persians. In every generation, part of their wealth that God had blessed them with was set aside to be presented to the king. Please accept these humble gifts. Azariah.

AZARIAH: I present to you Myrrh as an anointing oil. For this child shall be a healer of wounds both physical and spiritual and an anointed priest, after the order of Melchizadek.

JASPER: I present to you gold as one would offer a king. This child is destined to become king of kings and lord of lords. And he shall reign forever and ever in an eternal kingdom. (*He hands bags to Jasmine who presents them*)

MELCHOIR: I present to you frankincense, an aromatic incense presented before God. For this child is God come in the flesh, the son of God who has come to save all mankind.

MAGI entourage joins together to sing a song of praise. See production notes for suggestions

JOSEPH: We thank you. (*Mary picks up Jesus and holds him*)

MELCHOIR: We rejoice with you for we have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

BALTHASAR: We would speak further with the two of you. (*indicating Joseph and Zechariah*) Come outside where we can see the stars. (*All but the women exit*)

ELIZABETH: You have had a long journey. Would you like some refreshment?

JASMINE: No, thank you.

MARY: How long did you travel?

JASMINE: A bit more than five months.

ELIZABETH: (*to Mary*) Can you imagine?

MARY: Yes, I can. A few days, when you are about to give birth seems like nine months. (*They laugh together*)

ELIZABETH: I am surprised to find a young lady traveling such a long distance in dangerous times.

MARY: Are you betrothed to one of the young men? That's why I had to travel.

JASMINE: No, I'm not betrothed. I just wanted to come. And to take care of my grandfather. (*Small outburst*) Why shouldn't girls have adventures too? Who wants to be some plain old wife and mother? (*covers mouth in embarrassment over what she had said to "plain old wives and mothers"*) Forgive me. I was rude.

ELIZABETH: We are not offended. I am thrilled to finally, after years and years of trying, to be a mother.

JASMINE: (*pointing to JOHN*) This is your baby? Your first baby?

ELIZABETH: (*with obvious pride and contentment*) Yes. Jasmine, I was barren until a few months ago. It was a terrible burden to bear. I longed to have a child for years. Someday you too may understand the deep desire to have and care for a child of your own.

MARY: I can think of no greater adventure than being a mother. The trip here was certainly not easy. Imagine being ready to deliver a baby while riding a donkey for 15 miles a day. But for the sake of this child, I would have gone any distance.

JASMINE: I guess traveling while pregnant would be difficult.

MARY: Not only that – we got here and the inn was full.

ELIZABETH: They had no idea we were staying here in this house in Bethlehem or they could have come here.

MARY: So we had to stay in a cave that had been converted into a stable. That's where Joseph delivered the baby. We wrapped Jesus in swaddling clothes and laid him in the cattle's feeding trough for a cradle.

JASMINE: Sounds like you made the best of a bad situation.

ELIZABETH: You don't know the half of it.

MARY: When the angel first brought me the news I was troubled. I was betrothed to a good man, yet God had called me to carry his own child, God come in the flesh. I wondered what Joseph would think. What he would do.

ELIZABETH: Do you know what the penalty for adultery is in Israel?

JASMINE: A fine?

MARY: Death by stoning. Joseph could have brought me before the elders and insisted I be put to death.

JASMINE: How did you talk him out of it?

MARY: I didn't. God did. Despite the gossip, the snide remarks, the humiliation, Joseph stood by me. (*MARY starts tearing up. Elizabeth reaches and arm around her to side hug and support her*) I have been doubly blessed.

ELIZABETH: As I have. Never did Zechariah rebuke me for being barren. Instead he comforted me as together we faced this great disappointment. Looking back, we both see why God did not answer our prayers for a child sooner. This child (*indicating John*) is destined for an enormous task. Many people know what a miracle his birth was and eagerly await his purpose in the kingdom of God..

MARY: I wondered but I was not afraid. The angel Gabriel said I would be with child and give birth to a son named Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end. It was God's word. It would come true which meant I would live to deliver the child.

JASMINE: Perhaps being the mother of a king would be OK.

MARY: It is not about being the mother of a king. It is about being the servant of the Lord, willing to do whatever task he asks of you. No matter how great or how small. You are descended from Daniel. Do you believe that?

JASMINE: Not entirely. But I certainly will reflect on it.

ELIZABETH: It is just a matter of keeping an open mind and using open eyes. I never imagined I'd be a mother at my age. But I am and not just of an ordinary child. My son John will be the forerunner of the (*pointing to Jesus*) Messiah. I can think of no more noble or exciting task than to nurture, teach and care for my son who will play such an important role in the salvation of the world. It is not about me. It is all about Him.

JASMINE: I never thought about motherhood like that.

MARY: Be humble. Open yourself to be the servant of God most high and whatever He wants for you. No matter how educated you are: God is wiser. Let Him guide you. Be his servant first and all the rest will come to you.

ELIZABETH: I wish I had known my mother.

MARY: What happened?

JASMINE: My parents died just after I was born during an earthquake.

ELIZABETH: Yet you survived?

JASMINE: I had been left with my grandparents. I am the only one now.

ELIZABETH: Perhaps the Lord God Almighty has preserved your life for a special purpose?

MARY: (*placing her hands on JASMINE*) May he be mindful of the humble state of his servant Jasmine. May the mighty one do great things for you as he has for me.

JASMINE: Do you think you could start at the beginning and tell me everything about how all this came about? (*Mary and Elizabeth nod "yes"*)

MARY: Would you like to hold him while we talk? (*Offering Jesus to her*)

JASMINE: I would be honored. (*Carefully and reverently taking and cuddling the baby*)

As the lights slowly dim we see them settling to talk.

Scene 14 – before the curtain, stage right.

The three teens are sitting, talking.

MESHACH: (*eagerly*) So, what is HE like? Tell me everything.

AZARIAH: *(trying to put difficult to describe things into words)* He is just a little baby. But you can tell, There is something... different about him.

JASMINE: And different about his mother and aunt. His mother Mary isn't much older than I am.

AZARIAH: Mary's husband is a carpenter from Nazareth. They seem like an ordinary couple. But pretty poor. Joseph told us they couldn't afford to sacrifice a lamb at Jesus' circumcision. They had to offer two birds. I think the gifts we brought will help them out quite a bit.

JASMINE They had to travel all the way from Nazareth to Bethlehem with her about to have a baby. *(AZARIAH appears to hear someone calling him and exits)* I can't imagine how difficult that trip was. But that wasn't the worst of it. Every inn was filled to capacity because of the census. They had to hole up in a cave.

MESHACH: *(greatly disappointed)* I can't believe I came all this way and didn't get to see him.

JASMINE: *(genuine)* I wish you could have. I can't describe how it has started to change me. Meshach, I am so sorry. It is all my fault. I shouldn't have been so selfish. I should have thought about how my actions could affect you.

MESHACH: Don't blame yourself.

JASMINE: But you have always stood by me, every time I came up with some harebrained scheme. I never realized before what a treasure it is to have someone stand by me, no matter what.

MESHACH: *(Looks at her, wondering where that comment came from, then lightens the moment with humor)* It was pretty boring those years we were apart.

JASMINE: *(looking at him)* Yeah, I missed you a lot.

MESHACH: I missed you too. I'm afraid that once we get home, they'll never let us see each other again because of all of this.

JASMINE: *(softly)* That will be terrible! *(AZARIAH enters in a hurry, interrupting what is about to become a tender moment between them)*

AZARIAH: *(Intense and rushed)* We are leaving immediately. Get your things packed.

JASMINE and MESHACH ad lib "What's wrong?" "What's going on" "Slow down, tell us about it."

AZARIAH: All three of our Magi had the exact same dream at the exact same time. We have been warned to NOT return to Herod but to return home by another route. We must leave immediately so the child remains safe. *(JASMINE and MESHACH jump up and begin gathering things together)*

JASMINE: *(stops)* Shouldn't someone warn Mary and Joseph?

AZARIAH: I don't know. All I know is we have to leave now. Don't do anything foolish, Jasmine. *(exits)*

JASMINE: Somebody should warn them. *(grabbing MESHACH's arm)* You should go and then catch up with us later. Warn them. Then you'd get to see the child.

MESHACH: I could, couldn't I? *(takes a deep breath)* No. I can't think of what I want at a time like this. I have to think of the child first. I'm going to ask my father what he thinks.

JASMINE: He might say "No".

MESHACH: I know. But it is the right thing to do.

JASMINE: It is. Hurry. *(lights out, lights up stage left on MELCHOIR who is packing, putting on disguise. Jasmine exits and dons disguise)*

MESHACH: Father!

MELCHOIR: Get packed. We leave immediately.

MESHACH: Azariah told us. But father, shouldn't someone warn Mary and Joseph?

MELCHOIR: Oh! *(pondering)* Yes, but it could be dangerous. If we are being followed, we could lead Herod's people right to them. On the other hand, maybe we are here to warn them. *(Jasmine starts her cross to stage left)* Let me ask the others. *(exits)*

JASMINE: *(entering stage left light)* What did he say?

MESHACH: He went to ask the others.

JASMINE: Get your disguise on so you can leave immediately if they say to go. *(JASMINE helps him as he disguises himself. MELCHOIR rushes in)*

MELCHOIR: Yes, they should be warned. *(chastising himself)* I shouldn't have sent Azariah on ahead. *(They shakes heads "no" and JASPER enters, moving quickly, yet stiffly, like this is difficult for a man of his years)*

MESHACH: I can go with Jasmine to guide me. If anyone stops us, we can pretend to be husband and wife, here for the census.

JASPER: *(to JASMINE)* Can you find the house again?

JASMINE: Absolutely. *(JASPER nods "OK")*

MELCHOIR: Then go with all speed. Meet us on the path that leads out of Bethlehem to the south. *(JASMINE and MESHACH nod "ok" and exit. Lights out)*

Scene 15 – interior of Zechariah's house

At rise: Zechariah and Elizabeth are packing up. Knock on the door. ZECHARIAH crosses to open the door and admit JASMINE and MESHACH.

JASMINE: There is trouble. This is Meshach, Melchoir's son.

MESHACH: We came to warn you. Our Magi have been warned in a dream. We have been told not to return to Herod but to return home another way.

ZECHARIAH: We know there is trouble brewing. Joseph also had a dream.

JASMINE: Where are they?

ELIZABETH: They are gone.

JASMINE: Are you going too?

ZECHARIAH: Not with them. But we are leaving.

ELIZABETH: We did not wait all these years for a son only to wait for trouble to find us.

ZECHARIAH: If your grandfather could come 1200 miles at his age, then we too can put whatever distance we need between our John and danger.

The following two lines are "private" between JASMINE and ELIZABETH

JASMINE: God has called you to an adventure.

ELIZABETH: So it would seem.

JASMINE: I will pray for all six of you.

ELIZABETH: Thank you.

MESHACH: We must go. *(Pulls JASMINE with him toward the door)* May the God of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego watch over you and preserve your lives and the lives of the children as he did our forefathers.

ZECHARIAH: Go with God.

Scene 16- before the curtain

JASMINE and MESHACH sneak across stage. Optional: have extras milling about, one group crossing stage right to left and the other left to right.

Scene 17

At rise: HEROD on throne surrounded by courtiers, priest.

HEROD: *(Angry)* What do you mean, they are gone?

CHIEF COURTIER: Sire, we followed them to their lodging. They did not leave until the next day, and then they went to some field to speak to a bunch of shepherds and buy a lamb. The next day they took the lamb back and looked though the entire flock again but did not choose one.

HEROD: *(Yelling)* And you didn't think that was some kind of distraction?

CHIEF COURTIER: No, I thought they were looking for the perfect sacrifice or something before they presented it to this king... child.

HEROD: So where did they go from there?

CHIEF COURTIER: I don't know. After a few days I knocked on the door to their lodging. But it was a family from across the Jordan here for the census. Someone had paid them two month's wages to stay inside the home for a week or so and pretend to be the Magi. They had their robes and everything.

HEROD: And then you finally caught on that they had outwitted you.

CHIEF COURTIER: *(trying to keep out of trouble with excuses)* Your majesty, I am sorry. Bethlehem is so crowded with the census, not even people who have lived there all their lives can keep track of who's who.

HEROD: This situation requires drastic measures. This child is a threat to my throne. If no one can tell me which child it is, then I shall slay them all. I want every child under the age of one slain. *(There is a moment of stunned silence as the courtiers think about the wholesale slaughter of innocents Herod is ordering)*

PRIEST: Sire, reconsider, please. Many innocent lives will be needlessly snuffed out.

CHIEF COURTIER: Think of how the people will take this news. It could endanger your popularity.

HEROD: *(almost irrationally irate)* I have no popularity. I have power. And I'm not afraid to use it. *(frighteningly calm)* You want me to reconsider? I'll reconsider. Make it every baby two years of age and under. That way I'll get that priest's child as well. *(No one moves. Pause. Herod points to COURTIER)* You heard me. Relay the orders to the soldiers. I want my wishes carried out before the sun rises tomorrow. Move!

Scene 18- before curtain

Darkness. Soldiers chasing fleeing mothers carrying children. Shouts, screams, shrieks and weeping.

Scene 19 – desert oasis

AZARIAH: They've seen us and are making their way here.

JASPER: Thank the Lord for his protection. It is a wonder this journey hasn't been the death of me.

MELCHOIR: We aren't home yet. *(MESHACH and JASMINE arrive. Hugs and greetings)*

BELTHASAR: Did you warn them?

MESHACH: It was unnecessary. Joseph had also been warned in a dream. They left immediately.

JASMINE: Elizabeth and Zechariah are going too, but somewhere else.

MESHACH: We didn't ask about their destinations. I thought it best if we didn't know.

JASPER: That was wise.

MECHOIR: That was better thinking that I've seen in some time.

BALTHASAR: They have enough gold to go to the ends of the earth twice, if need be.

JASPER: And enough to live on, no matter where they go..

BALTHASAR: While we are stopped, there is still the matter of consequences for the three of you. The three of us have had time to think and confer. We have decided upon suitable penalties.

AZARIAH: *(trying in vain to defend himself)* But I've told you. I had no idea. I wasn't part of this.

BALTHASAR: I believe you son. But you should have noticed. You need to be aware of what is going on around you. So, you shall be on guard duty the entire journey home. That should hone your skills of observation.

AZARIAH: Every night? When will I sleep?

BALTHASAR: *(voice lightening up)* As a young man I learned to sleep while riding a camel. I'm sure you'll be able to do the same. *(AZARIAH glares at JASMINE and MESHACH)*

JASPER: Jasmine, I should never have indulged you after your parents died. I cannot change the past but I can see to your future. I would see you safely settled in a home. Therefore you will be married as soon as we arrive home. *(JASMINE abruptly sits and gathers herself into a fetal position, her face bowed and hidden)*

MELCHOIR: *(lecturing)* Meshach, this is not the first time you have been involved in some harebrained scheme but it is the first time you are old enough to be fully accountable for your actions. *(less severe)* You have suffered an enormous consequence in traveling all this way, but not seeing the Christ child.

However, additional responsibility may be just the thing you need. Jasper, on the other hand, is ready to relinquish some of his. From this day hence, you are responsible for any and all of Jasmine's actions since you will be marrying her as soon as we return to Persia.

MESHACH is stunned. MESHACH sinks to the ground slowly. He looks around to see if they are joking, He looks at Jasmine but her face is hidden. He sits, stunned and silent

BALTHASAR: *(almost jovially)* Besides, we can't have Daniel's line dying out.

JASPER: Now, we are tired and are going to sleep. Meshach, she is officially your problem as of now. Good night. *(JASPER exits)*

BALTHASAR: Azariah, I believe you have guard duty. *(All but Azariah, Jasmine and Meshach exit to retire).*

AZARIAH: Well, I guess congratulations are in order. *(Smiling big and clapping MESHACH on the shoulder)*
Compared to you, I think I got off pretty easy. *(Exits)*

There are a few moments of uncomfortable silence.

MESHACH: I don't know what to say. I know the last thing you ever wanted was to be a wife and mother. I feel like an executioner.

JASMINE: *(picking her head up to look at him)* Are you sure you don't feel like a trapped rabbit? Or a condemned criminal?

MESHACH: *(some confusion)* I'm not sure how I feel. How I should feel. *(beat)* I would feel a whole lot better about it if I knew how you felt.

JASMINE: I told you I've been thinking about some things Mary and Elizabeth said to me. The short story is: I've decided being a wife and mother could quite possibly be an adventure.

MESHACH: *(not believing his ears)* You what?

JASMINE: I don't quite have it all sorted out. But to hear Mary and Elizabeth talk about being mothers and then thinking about the part they play in what's going on....It could be alright. *(a couple of beats of silence)*

MESHACH: That's good, at least. *(afraid to know the answer but he has to ask)* But what about the fact you have to marry me?

JASMINE: *(Smiling)* I couldn't think of anyone I'd rather marry.

MESHACH: Really?

JASMINE: Yeah, and not just because you're fun, clever and cute. *(seriously)* It's because you have always stood by me, no matter what we've gotten ourselves into. Elizabeth said Zechariah stood by her all those years she ached for a child, when other people made fun of her or pitied her. Mary told me how Joseph stood by her when everyone was gossiping about her being with someone else's child. I realized then, how much I respected you for always standing by me. So, yeah, I'm glad they picked you.

(MESHACH smiles, they scoot together and smiling, JASMINE lays her head on his shoulder. They sit in companionable silence for a moment then....)

MESHACH: So you think I'm clever and cute?

JASMINE: Yeah.

MESHACH: Really?

JASMINE: Really.

PRODUCTION NOTES:

A great number of extras, including children, can be incorporated into the show. While this can complicate matters for a director, the benefits may outweigh the difficulties. Every cast member is part of the ministry of sharing the message of Jesus Christ come into the world. Especially for children, the repetition in rehearsal and performance firmly cements the birth of Jesus in their minds. Years after the show closes, the story of Jesus' birth will live on in more realistic detailed memories than mere reading or seeing can provide.

Additional cast can also serve as living set pieces, bystanders, servants, merchants, soldiers, etc, eliminating the need for more elaborate sets. Members of the cast often find inviting the unchurched or unbelieving friends, family and neighbors (and getting them to come) is easier than when they are not actively involved.

Songs are suggested between the acts for a couple of reasons. One, Christmas music is a joy that comes for only a month or so each year. Songs also provide an opportunity for set and costume changes.

CAST:

Meshach – teenage boy, reserved
 Jasmine – teenage girl, outgoing
 Suki – young male approximately the height and size of Jasmine
 Azariah – teens, early 20's. Dignified
 Jasper- the oldest Magi and Jasmine's grandfather
 Melchoir – middle aged Magi and Meshach's father
 Belthasar – middle aged Magi and Azariah's' father
 Mary – mother of Jesus
 Joseph- Mary's husband
 Elizabeth – mother of John
 Zechariah – father of John
 Herod - king
 Chief Courtier
 Priest
 Spy
 Extras as soldiers, courtiers, servants, people on the street

COSTUMES:

Time period costumes with the following notations:

The Magi (Melchoir, Jasper and Belthasar) should have elegant Persian royalty costumes as well as beggar outfits that easily slip over the regal costumes. Azariah, Meshach and Jasmine have regal costumes but not as elaborate as the Magi. Suki has Persian garb. Lines in scene 3 referring to the color of the Magi's garments may need to be adjusted to reflect actual costumes.

Herod dresses as a King in Judea. Costume should contrast with that of the Magi.

SETS:

Interior of Melchoir's home: Table with scrolls, maps, star charts, scientific instruments of the first century.

Herod's palace: Throne, optional rug before throne and potted plants beside it.

Interior Zechariah's house: Two chairs or stools, small table.

Desert Oasis: Baggage, illusion of sand. Optional palm trees or the outline of camels.

PROPS:

basket

LIGHTS:

Ability to light full stage or just left, right, center.