

Playstage

Junior

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FOLLOWING YONDER STAR



A short play about the Christmas Carol
'We Three Kings of Orient Are'

Written by
Andrew Beattie



Following Yonder Star: The Story of 'We Three Kings'

Background to the Play and the Carol

These notes could appear in the programme or could be given by an announcer (in abbreviated form) before the play starts.

We Three Kings was written in 1857 by John Henry Hopkins Jr., the rector of Christ Episcopal Church in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, for a Christmas pageant. Hopkins published the carol in 1863 in his book *Carols, Hymns, and Songs*, and since then it has become one of the most successful of the many carols composed in the United States. The carol centres around the Biblical Magi (the “three wise men”), who visit Jesus as a child after his Nativity and give him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Though the event is recounted in the Gospel of Matthew, there are no further details given in the New Testament with regards to the names of the “wise men”, the number that were present or whether they were even royal. The names of the Magi – MELCHIOR, CASPAR and BALTHAZAR – and their status as kings from the Orient are legendary and based on post-Biblical tradition. *The Play of We Three Kings* recounts their visit to Bethlehem, making use of the words ascribed to the three kings by the writer of the carol.

Following Yonder Star: The Play of We Three Kings

The Cast

INNKEEPER

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

Their CHILD (of either gender)

The Three Kings

MELCHIOR

CASPAR

BALTHAZAR

CHORUS

Running time approximately 15 minutes.

6 individual speaking parts.

The CHORUS is envisioned as having 10 members, though could be expanded or contracted to suit circumstances.

The Setting

Bethlehem, shortly after the birth of Christ

Following Yonder Star: The Play of We Three Kings

We open on a gloomy stage: the desert, at night. The THREE KINGS appear as separate shadows – or silhouettes – in the background. The CHORUS, dotted around the edges of the stage, comment on the action. The CHORUS should be dressed as men and women of the locality and sit in groups, around imaginary fires, sharing food or miming conversations. They stay on stage all the time.

CHORUS 1

What three shadows are those?

CHORUS 2

Black as pitch against the starlit gloom of the desert sky.

CHORUS 3

Are they alone?

CHORUS 4

They are not alone. They are kings, and kings are never alone on the open road.

CHORUS 5

Behind them is their baggage train. Servants and men-at arms. Courtiers and cooks...

CHORUS 6

...and wives and children too.

CHORUS 7

They are weary and nearing the end of their journey.

(Lights on each of the KINGS in turn, as they speak.)

CASPAR

How glorious that end will be, when it comes!

CHORUS 8

The desert wind is cold...

MELCHIOR

...and as dry as dust in a tomb.

BALTHAZAR

And it is fierce. All day it has tugged at our robes. It will not die down. It will not give in.

CASPAR

But nor will we. The desert is our enemy. But we have overcome it. For we have but one purpose. (*Indicates*) And there it is. Yonder star, that we have been following.

(To one side of the stage, high up, has appeared a blinding light.)

MELCHIOR

Star of Wonder!

CASPAR

Star of Light!

KINGS (*in unison*)

Star of Royal Beauty Bright!

CASPAR

At last it is close! At last the prophecies will be fulfilled! My eyes are sore from the desert wind. But now they are filled with a sight more glorious than any of us could imagine!

BALTHAZAR (*to audience*)

Caspar is a believer. It is he who has persuaded me to come on this journey. He wanted my eyes to be opened. And my heart, he said. I said no, at first. I said my great palace opened my heart and filled my eyes with everything I could ever desire. But he was persistent. He wouldn't stop asking. And eventually I said – yes, I like you will be guided by the star that has risen in the western sky.

CASPAR *(to audience)*

I had to drag Balthazar away from what he holds dear. On this great journey he has exchanged luxury for austerity, comfort for discomfort, indulgence for poverty.

(Turning to him) But it will be worth it. Believe this, Balthazar, if you believe anything: it will be worth it.

MELCHIOR *(to audience)*

I am a believer too. At least I think I am. My belief wavers. It does not burn inside me, as it does inside Caspar. Like Balthazar I know what it is to doubt. And so, Caspar asked me to join him and Balthazar on this journey, so that I could understand equally the one's faith and the other's uncertainty.

(As they speak a CHILD appears, unseen by them – crouching in the background, watching each of them in turn, quizzically.)

CHORUS 9

From where have these kings journeyed?

CHORUS 10

From the Orient! From the land over which the sun rises!

BALTHAZAR

Each morning we have travelled with the sun on our backs...

CASPAR

...our shadows stretching out ahead of us, showing us the way.

MELCHIOR

And each evening, as we settle for the night, it has set in front of us in the western sky.

CASPAR

And once again the star has appeared in that sky. Our sacred guide and beacon.

(He looks down. The CHILD, whom has not noticed until now, has become emboldened and is tugging at his robes.)

CHILD

What's your business here, mister?

CASPAR

And what's yours, child?

CHILD

To bring the animals into the stable. See what I have here! *(A switch or whip)* I mean business, see! And don't the goats know it! And the cows!

CASPAR

Bless you, child. You work all day in the dust and the wind. But one day you will be rewarded for it!

CHILD

You know that, do you?

CASPAR

I do.

CHILD

Who told you?

CASPAR

Child, no-one has told me.

CHILD

Then how do you know?