



Bible Drama Scripts presents

WISE MEN IN KING HEROD'S COURT

by Patricia Souder

SYNOPSIS: Drama sketch for two actors during Christmas or Epiphany. Features a Court Attendant who approaches King Herod to request an audience for the Wise Men who have arrived at the palace. Herod enumerates endless excuses for refusing to see them until he learns that they followed a star indicating a new King has been born. Paranoid and power-driven, Herod repeatedly threatens the Court Attendant. When Herod inadvertently reveals his evil intentions to eliminate the rival King, the Court Attendant demonstrates growing courage and true wisdom. Irony and subtle humor underscore God's ability to "out-wise the blood-thirsty Herod . . . in his own court."

SETTING: After Jesus' birth when the Wise Men stop at Herod's palace in Jerusalem

CHARACTERS: King Herod: Petulant, ruthless, power-driven Judean king appointed by Rome. Court Attendant: member of the Palace Court who announces visitors.

PERFORMANCE TIME: 8 minutes.

PERFORMANCE NOTES: Portray Herod as a self-centered character who dangles people and demands his own way, always convinced he is right. Give the Court Attendant maximum room to grow from a "scared centipede" into a person of courage and prayer even though his "head is on the line."

TOPICS: Christmas. Epiphany. Power. True wisdom. God's overarching plan.

PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITIES: Worship services. Advent and Christmas programs. Small groups. Men's groups.

BIBLE REFERENCE: Matthew 2

PROPS: Herod wears a royal robe and crown. Sits on throne with scepter, bowl of grapes, and goblet within reach. Attendant wears a tunic and sash appropriate for palace staff. Carries a scroll.

HEROD *enters and sits on throne. Sips from goblet and eats grapes throughout. Dismissive and derisive in tone.*)

ATTENDANT: *(Enters with a scroll. Unrolls scroll and clears his throat. Nods to HEROD. Speaks with courtly formality.)* Your Majesty, I've come to report that you have visitors.

HEROD: Visitors? *(Rolls his eyes and looks bored.)* Can't you see I'm busy?

ATTENDANT: Well, yes, your Royal Highness, I'm sure you're busy. But I thought you would want to know about these visitors.

HEROD: Really? Why? Have they come to bring me pleasure?

ATTENDANT: Probably not, your Majesty. But they've traveled for a very long time and have requested an audience with you.

HEROD: So . . . Have they brought me treasures?

ATTENDANT: Well, not that I know of, your Highness. But they do appear to be important men of impressive means.

HEROD: Oh, don't tell me they've come to do me harm?

ATTENDANT: No, Sir, nothing like that. Indeed, they seem to be quite peaceable. They came on camels . . . Not elephants or war horses.

HEROD: Camels? *(Wrinkles his nose and makes a face.)* Oh, camels! What annoying animals! Bumpy . . . itchy . . . smelly . . . And you never know when they'll snarl or spit at you. You didn't allow them to park their camels anywhere near the palace, did you?

ATTENDANT: Their camels are well taken care of, Sir.

HEROD: Far away, I trust.

ATTENDANT: I . . . I can check that out, Sir. *(Turns to leave.)*

HEROD: Not now, Idiot! Tell me more about these foreign dolts.

ATTENDANT: *(Takes a deep breath and speaks quietly.)* I doubt that they're dolts, Sir. On the contrary, they seem to be quite intelligent.

HEROD: Intelligent? Really? They ride on camels! *(Laughs in derision.)* That makes them dolts for sure! *(Shakes head with disdain; eats more grapes.)*

ATTENDANT: *(Shifts weight uncomfortably while he waits.)*

HEROD: So why have they come to bother me?

ATTENDANT: They said they followed a special star that led them here.

HEROD: A special star that led them here? *(Clears throat, rolls eyes, and shakes head.)* Exactly how does a star lead anyone anywhere?

ATTENDANT: *(Checks scroll briefly.)* The men are Magi, Sir, who study the stars. This star was brilliant, dominant, and preeminent.

HEROD: Brilliant, dominant, and preeminent? Pretty impressive! *(Becomes angry.)* Then why wasn't I aware of this star?

ATTENDANT: Begging your pardon, Sir, perhaps it's because you're always so busy . . . within the dome of your . . . palace here. (*Gestures around the palace and nods.*)

HEROD: If you value your life, Idiot, you'd better think of a better reason than that.

ATTENDANT: Yes . . . yes, Sir. (*Backs up nervously.*)

HEROD: Now don't act like a scared centipede! Step up here and tell me why these strangers have come to bother me. (*Moves forward slightly and takes a deep breath.*)

ATTENDANT: They're Magi, Sir, who are known as very wise men in the East where they live. This was a new star they'd never seen before. It seemed to hold great significance, so they felt compelled to follow it.

HEROD: They're Magi who are thought to be wise? (*Laughs in great derision.*) And they followed a star?

ATTENDANT: Yes, your Majesty. (*Smiles weakly.*)

HEROD: I believe you said that star led them here? (*Laughs again. Then raises his eyebrows and smiles slyly. Gets up and paces around.*) But of course . . . this *is* the center of the universe. And I am Herod the Great, renowned builder and esteemed king. So, what do they want?

ATTENDANT: (*Checks scroll. Then speaks carefully.*) They believe the star indicates the birth of the long-awaited King of the Jews.

HEROD: (*Angrily.*) They believe a King of the Jews has just been born? I'M THE KING! And I wasn't born yesterday! Nor was anyone else in the palace.

ATTENDANT: (*Nods nervously.*) Yes, Your Highness, we already told them that.

HEROD: Then why are you bothering me? Why didn't you just send them away?

ATTENDANT: (*Shifts weight, moistens lips, and checks scroll.*) Well, Sir, they say this King's birth was prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures, so they stopped here to learn exactly what the prophets said.

HEROD: (*Strokes his beard thoughtfully.*) Ah—So they need our help. And I believe you said they were wealthy?

ATTENDANT: I said they appear to be important men of means . . .

HEROD: Which means that they can pay for the information they want.

ATTENDANT: (*Takes a deep breath and swallows hard.*) I've never heard of charging for Scripture, Sir.

HEROD: Your head, Idiot! Do you value your head? (*Grabs his scepter and waves it as if cutting off the ATTENDANT's head.*)

ATTENDANT: Yes, Sir.

HEROD: This sounds like the prophecy about the Messiah.

ATTENDANT: Yes, Sir.

HEROD: Stop Yes-Sirring me and go ask the scribes and chief priests if they know anything about this!

ATTENDANT: Yes, S . . . (*Covers mouth in fear.*) I mean, I'm on my way, Your Majesty. (*Turns to go.*)

HEROD: Not so fast! (*Slices the air with his scepter.*)

ATTENDANT: *(Turns around with a terrified look.)*

HEROD: I've had a change of heart. *(Smiles wickedly.)* I've decided to be gracious and grant those wise guy friends of yours an audience after all.

ATTENDANT: Oh, I think that's wise, Your Royal Highness.

HEROD: For your head's sake, I hope that's true . . .

ATTENDANT: *(Smiles weakly.)* Me, too, Your Majesty.

HEROD: Now, show them in by the secret passageway along the back corridor.

ATTENDANT: Yes, S . . . *(Closes eyes and shudders.)*

HEROD: *(Waves scepter at ATTENDANT.)* IDIOT! YOUR HEAD IS ON THE LINE!

ATTENDANT: I'm going to get them, Your Highness. *(Turns to go.)*

HEROD: Not yet, Idiot! I have to have time to think out my questions and my strategy.

ATTENDANT: *(Turns back.)* Of course, Majesty.

HEROD: I have questions about that special star . . . Questions about when they first saw it . . . Questions about why it seems so significant . . . *(Chuckles and flashes an evil smile. Then becomes quite animated and paces around while speaking.)*

ATTENDANT: *(Registers a change of expression from fear for himself to concern about HEROD's intent as HEROD speaks.)*

HEROD: Questions about why they left their countries to follow that star . . . Questions about their future plans . . . Questions about that new King of the Jews who will completely upset the balance of power. And most of all . . . Questions that will help me find that meddling little "King" so I can do away with him before he ever grows up! *(Chuckles with the brilliance of his murderous intents and swings scepter as if beheading gives him great pleasure.)*

ATTENDANT: *(Closes his eyes and shakes his head as he realizes the extent of HEROD's evil intents.)*

HEROD: *(Turns toward the ATTENDANT.)* IDIOT!

ATTENDANT: *(Opens eyes and stares at HEROD.)* Yes, King.

HEROD: You can usher in those "wise" visitors from afar. *(Strokes beard.)* It will be fun to watch them attempt to out-wise the Great Herod in his own court, now, won't it?

ATTENDANT: *(Mumbles quietly.)* Heaven help them.

HEROD: What did you say?

ATTENDANT: I said they'll need help, Your Majesty.

HEROD: Yes, they'll need help, all right. And so will you if you don't fetch them immediately. Remember: *(Points scepter at ATTENDANT.)*

BOTH: (ATTENDANT) MY HEAD IS ON THE LINE. (HEROD) YOUR HEAD IS ON THE LINE.

ATTENDANT: *(Nods feebly.)*

HEROD: *(Laughs uproariously and returns to throne to sip wine and eat grapes.)*

ATTENDANT: *(Raises arms in resignation as he begins to exit. Lifts his face heavenward and prays softly.)* God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob . . . I'd like to keep my head and all . . . But I'm really more concerned about these fine visitors and the little King.

HEROD: IDIOT! What's taking you so long? Remember: *(Points his scepter at the ATTENDANT and laughs derisively.)*

BOTH: (ATTENDANT) MY HEAD IS ON THE LINE. (HEROD) YOUR HEAD IS ON THE LINE.

ATTENDANT: *(Turns to audience.)* My head . . . Their heads . . . The little King's head . . . *(Raises arms in prayer.)* You, Great God, are the only One who is able to keep any of our heads from rolling. But You are the all-wise God. And I'm eager to see You out-wise the blood-thirsty Herod right here in his own court!

HEROD: *(Rises from his throne in fury. Slashes his scepter from side to side as he strides toward ATTENDANT.)* IDIOT! IDIOT! IDIOT! WHAT'S TAKING YOU SO LONG! HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN?

ATTENDANT: No! I haven't forgotten!

BOTH: (ATTENDANT) MY HEAD IS ON THE LINE (HEROD) YOUR HEAD IS ON THE LINE!

ATTENDANT: *(Exits quickly, but triumphantly. Calls from off-stage)* Gentlemen from the East: King Herod has agreed to see you. May God grant you wisdom to truly be Wise Men in King Herod's court!