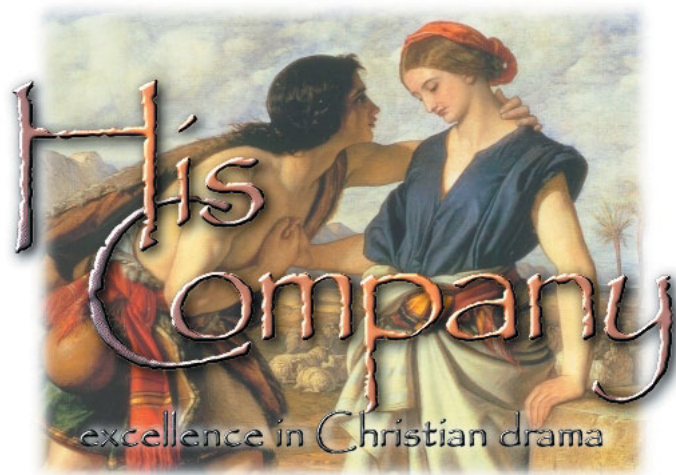


# **THE LIGHT**

## **A (TRANSITIONAL) CHRISTMAS SKETCH FOR THE WISE MEN**

by  
David S. Lampel



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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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### Using this Sketch

This sketch is intended to be used as a transitional piece in a larger production. By that we mean that it isn't meant to stand alone, as a separate play, but to be used to help "flesh out" the wise men characters in a larger play or Christmas musical. For example, if the church is doing a musical drama that includes only a song for the wise men, or only a scene in which the wise men bring their gifts to the stable, this sketch could be inserted earlier in the production to add greater depth to their characters.

### 10 Regarding the Magi

It is universally accepted that the magi (*may-jeye*) of our traditional Christmas story came later in the life of Jesus than the night of His birth. Matthew writes,

15 After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. After coming into the *house* they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:9-11 nasbu; emphasis added)

20 But we have continued to compress this holy time-frame for the sake of brevity, and to include as many of the pertinent facts as possible in one Christmas production. It is the position of this writer that the Lord takes no offense at this, and it matters little to the overall story whether the Magi worship a newborn in a cave or a slightly older child in a family's home.

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## CHARACTERS

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25 The three "wise" men:

**Marsena** (Mar'-see'-nah) is a skeptic and worrier, always fretting over the unknown.

**Zethar** (Zee'-thar) is a mystic, speaking only in vague riddles or confusing epigrams.

**Haman** (Hay'-mun) is an arrogant, pompous twit.

30 In contrast to his employers, their manservant, **Hatach** (Hay'-tack) is more levelheaded—and more knowledgeable about the purpose of their journey than his superiors might think. He is younger than the others, but still a young man—perhaps in his twenties.

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## PROPERTIES AND SET

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35 The setting for this sketch is around an evening fire. Here are instructions for building a workable, and highly portable, fire ring for the stage:

### 1. Base

The base is an oblong (oval) piece of pegboard (any rigid board will do) approx. 24x36 inches; pegboard was used (by His Company) to make it easier to clip in the lights. A hole was cut for a cord, and a handle was attached to the middle (top surface) for ease of handling by the stage crew.

### 40 2. Lights

Note: Don't install the lights until you have determined the size and placement of the Styrofoam "rocks" around the perimeter.

45 We used a short set of (larger, old-fashioned) Christmas tree lights. The individual sockets were clipped through the holes in the pegboard, then glued to the base in an upright position. Most of the standard bulbs were replaced by special bulbs that flicker, like a flame (should be able to find at a Lamp & Lighting store). In ours we used 10 flickering bulbs supplemented by 3 red standard bulbs (to add more red color). Place the flickering bulbs near the back, hence facing the audience, and any standard supplemental bulbs near the front, hence hidden from the audience.

50 You may connect the lights in the way appropriate for your production. In ours, we connected the fire ring to the light board, so that the lighting tech could raise/lower the set, but, in addition, we installed an on/off toggle in the center of the ring. The scene's blocking could include a character entering first to "stir" the fire with a stick, then hit the toggle switch with the end of her stick to "bring the coals to life."

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**3. Rocks**

55 The actual, visible fire ring was constructed from 4 inch-thick Styrofoam. The Styrofoam was cut into irregular chunks, from 3-8 inches wide and 6-8 inches high, in rounded and angular shapes to look like rocks. They were positioned around the perimeter—but not yet attached.

Before gluing the rocks into place, they were painted. We used a beige base color for all chunks, then splattered them with white and darker brown colors. From only a few feet away this made them look very much like granite. Once painted, the rocks were glued into place. Note: Once the rocks have been installed, touch up any exposed wood with the same colors.

60 The resulting fire ring is very believable from the audience's perspective. Even if some seats permit an audience member to see inside the ring, they will generally only see flickering, orange light. By installing a handle inside the ring, at the center of balance, the ring is easily taken on and off stage by a member of the stage crew.

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**SCENE**


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65 *The Time: Late evening.*  
*The Place: On the desert plains between Parthia (Asia, now Iran and Afghanistan) and Judea.*

70 *House lights down.*  
*Stage lights up.*

75 *Our travelers are gathered around the fire, just finishing their evening meal before packing up to continue their journey. They are traveling at night—when it is cooler, and to better follow their beacon: the mysterious star that is leading them west.*

**Marsena**

*(anxiously peering into the sky)*

Where'd it go? Where'd it go? I don't see it anymore!

**Haman**

*(sarcastically)*

80 What, you've never seen clouds before?

**Marsena**

*(with a blank expression)*

Clouds?

85 **Haman**

Clouds. See that puffy shape up there? Looks like, oh, I don't know—looks like a donkey to me.

90

**Marsena***(studying the cloud's shape for himself)*

Donkey? No, I think it looks more like last night's falafel.

**Haman***(snidely)*

95

Before or after we ate it?

**Marsena**

Come to think of it, it could be a—a fish. Yes, a fish. Definitely a fish.

**Zethar***(peering up into the sky; with profound profundity)*

100

The hand of the Mighty One hath tempered our souls' gaze heavenward.

*The other two slowly turn to look incredulously at Zethar. They then look at each other, raise their eyebrows, and shake their heads resignedly.*

105

**Haman***(to both)*

Look, the star's still there. It's been leading us for months.

*(dismissively)*

Just a cloud passing over.

110

**Marsena***(worried)*I don't know. Whoever put the star there can also cover it up. If they cover it up, what can it mean? What can it mean?**Haman***(disdainfully; after a beat)*

115

It means it might rain. Now come on, we've got a long road before us.

*Their servant, Hatach, who has been busy packing the magi's belongings in preparation for departure, reveals that he also has been listening in on their conversation.*

120

**Hatach***(humbly)*

Pardon me, sir, but how do you know that?

125

**Haman***(imperiously)*

I beg your pardon.

**Hatach**

Sir, we've been following the star for months, not knowing where it will lead us.

130

**Marsena***(excitedly)*

He's right, you know. He's right. It could be soon.

**Zethar***(knowingly)*

135

Peril falls from the stars. Treasure lies buried in the heart.

*Everyone turns to look at Zethar, then return to their conversation.*

**Haman***(admittedly)*

140

Our charts spoke with no specificity,

*(with more authority)*

but they set the object of our search somewhere near the Great Sea—due west. My calculations confirm that that is well beyond the next horizon, and possibly the one after that.

145

**Marsena**

What of our rations, Hatach?

**Hatach***(reassuringly)*

150

Several days' worth, master.

**Haman***(to Hatach)*

Bring me the scrolls.

155 *Hatach retrieves several ancient scrolls from a leather pouch and hands them to Haman, while Marsena addresses Zethar.*

**Marsena**

*(urgently)*

160 Zethar, is it near? Or is it far?

**Zethar**

*(pausing to gaze intently at the stars; with a heavy sigh)*

There is no distance greater than the distance to faith.

165 *Marsena turns to look with a blank stare over to Haman (as in, “what’s that supposed to mean?”).*

**Marsena**

*(shaking his head with frustration)*

170 This has become just a wild chase into nowhere. We don’t even know what it is we seek!

**Haman**

*(his head in the scrolls)*

175 Yes we do. It’s all here. The people of this place refer to it as “The Messiah.”

**Marsena**

Messiah?

**Hatach**

*(reverently)*

180 The Anointed One.

*Marsena and Haman look with surprise at their manservant, who sheepishly explains.*

**Hatach**

*(haltingly)*

185 My people are from this place. So many years ago—hundreds, really—when Ezra resettled Jerusalem,

*(ashamed)*

190 my people were afraid, and remained in Babylon. In so many ways we  
 forfeited our heritage, but parts of it have been handed down, father to  
 son.

**Haman**

*(betraying interest in this surprising revelation, but continuing;  
 referring to the scrolls)*

195 This text appears to be the most pertinent to our quest—I translate it to  
 our tongue:

*(reading haltingly as he translates)*

200 “Then they will look to the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the  
 gloom of anguish; and they will be driven away into darkness. But there  
 will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He  
 treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but  
 later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side  
 of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.”

*(with scholarly excitement)*

205 And then this:

*(returning to the text)*

210 “The people who walk in darkness  
 Will see a great light;  
 Those who live in a dark land,  
 The light will shine on them.”<sup>1</sup>

*(declaratively; with ceremony)*

Without question this prophecy describes the very light we have been  
 following.

**Marsena**

215 *(muttering)*

Impressive. Impressive.

**Hatach**

But sir, the Messiah is to be a person—not a star.

---

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 8:22-9:2 nasbu

220

**Haman***(amused; mockingly)*

So then this land of yours has people who glow in the dark, eh. It's common here for people to shine like lamps?

*(pressing)*

Is this so?

225

**Hatach***(struggling to remember his place and control his temper)*

Your scholarship is beyond me, master. I am just a servant in your employ.

230

**Zethar***(gleefully to Haman)*

“The eye that mocks a father  
And scorns a mother,  
The ravens of the valley will pick it out,  
And the young eagles will eat it.”<sup>2</sup>

235

**Haman***(exasperated; wearily)*

Shut up, Zethar.

240

*Zethar does not reply in kind—neither does he back down—but silently expresses delight in teasing his colleague, grinning like a schoolboy who has just gotten back at a bully by placing a frog in his milk.*

**Marsena**

Haman, if the boy can help us, let him speak.

245

**Hatach***(respectfully)*

Master Haman, my people have suffered under exile and foreign rule for centuries. They've lived for so long in the darkness of oppression, ignorance, and sin.

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<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 30:17 nasbu



250 **Haman**

Sin?

**Hatach**

Israel's condition is no accident. Look further in that scroll and you'll find our rebellion against God.

255 **Haman**

The Romans may want to take credit for some of that "condition."

**Hatach**

God's hand moves many different people in many different ways.

**Zethar**

260 *(isn't anyone interested in what I have to say?)*

No one knows who moves the pebble up the hill.

**Marsena**

*(ignoring Zethar; impatiently)*

So what of the star? Is it the purpose of our journey—or only the guide?

265 **Haman**

When it stops, we will know.

**Hatach**

Master Marsena, my father taught me that the "light" that my people await is not illumination, but salvation. That is what the Messiah brings.

270 **Haman**

*(unpleasantly)*

And from what will this Messiah save them?

**Hatach**

*(with a noncommittal shrug—but clearly, as this is the punch line)*

275 From what they are now.

*There is a pause while what Hatach has just said resonates. Then everyone (especially Hatach, the servant) collects their belongings to continue their journey.*

280

**Marsena**

*(after a pause)*

I don't think any of us will know the object of our quest until we see it  
with our own eyes.

285

**Haman**

I think I've heard too many wild ideas tonight.

*(beat; referring to the star)*

The light that guides us will either reveal its true self—or reveal what still  
lies hidden. In either case, it is worth the journey.

290

**Zethar**

*(grandly)*

The journey of a thousand nights begins with one step.

*Marsena and Haman turn to look at Zethar, then say in unison...*

295

**Marsena**

*(with Haman; wearily)*

Shut up, Zethar.

**Haman**

*(with Marsena; wearily)*

300

Shut up, Zethar.

*All exit together.*

*Lights slow-fade to black.*

305

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