

# **THE THREE WISE WOMEN**

A Christmas Play In Two Acts

by

Delvyn C. Case, Jr.

# THREE WISE WOMEN

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by **Delvyn C. Case, Jr.**

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## **Characters**

WOMEN (3)

ROMAN SOLDIER, 20's—30's

RABBI #1

RABBI #2

CENTURION, 40's

GUARDS (2) accompanying CENTURION

ANNA, 80's

MARY, 15

ANGEL GABRIEL

ELIZABETH, 50's

## **Time**

Days of Jesus' birth

## **Place**

ACT I, Scene 1: Jerusalem, the Temple

ACT I, Scene 2: Nazareth, the home of Mary

ACT I, Scene 3: Judean hills, the home of Elizabeth

ACT I, Scene 4: Nazareth, a street

ACT II, Scene 1: Jerusalem, the Temple

ACT II, Scene 2: Bethlehem, a stable

ACT II, Scene 3: Jerusalem, the Temple

## **Synopsis**

MARY, ELIZABETH, and ANNA, with wisdom from God, live out the events of Jesus' birth.

## **Costumes**

ROMAN SOLDIER and GUARDS: Roman uniform, long spear, short sword

CENTURION: Roman uniform with red cloak, long sword

ANNA, MARY, and ELIZABETH: plain Bible robes and sandals

WOMEN (3): plain Bible robes

RABBI #1 and RABBI #2: White and blue robes of rabbis, tassels

## **Props**

Temple façade with door way

Long spear, short sword, long sword

Bowl with fruit

Knitting needle and wool

Manger

Three colorful boxes

Hay

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## **ACT I, Scene 1** (Jerusalem, the Temple)

(As the lights come, THREE WOMEN are standing mid stage left. The SOLDIER is standing to the stage right side of the doorway of the temple at center stage. He is looking over the audience. RABBI #1 and #2 enter from the temple. RABBI #1 and #2 cross to center stage arguing about the Romans and the Messiah. The THREE WOMEN listen to RABBI #1 and #2. The CENTURION enters from stage left exit with GUARDS. As the CENTURION crosses toward the SOLDIER, the CENTURION brushes the THREE WOMEN aside. THREE WOMEN cross to stage left stairs and exit off stage left stairs. RABBI #1 and #2 cross to stage right stairs and argue about the CENTURION. As the CENTURION reaches the SOLDIER, the SOLDIER snaps to attention and gives the Roman Salute—fist against chest. The CENTURION returns the salute. The CENTURION inspects the SOLDIER, then waves to the SOLDIER to be at ease. SOLDIER takes at ease position.)

CENTURION: (with authority) Your report, soldier.

SOLDIER: Quiet this morning, sir. Except for the usual crowd here at the Temple arguing about religion and the coming of the Messiah.

CENTURION: (annoyed) Religion. Messiah. The Jews just want to be free from Rome.

SOLDIER: It's something more. According to their beliefs, the Messiah is supposed to turn the people's hearts to God.

CENTURION: (waving off) There's thousands of gods. Which one?

SOLDIER: The Jews say there's only one God.

(CENTURION shakes his head and looks at RABBI #1 and #2. RABBI #1 and #2 exit off stage right stairs.)

CENTURION: (with derision) They want a liberator—(to SOLDIER) their word for Messiah. Watch them closely—all of them. These people in Jerusalem can't be trusted. None of them. Rome wants to know everything

going on. So does Herod.

SOLDIER: He's .....

CENTURION: (waving arm) He's king of the Jews—and Rome's friend. Even if he's a liar and murderer. (ANNA enters from door at end of stage left aisle and crosses slowly toward the stage. CENTURION spots her) Is that her?

SOLDIER: Who, sir?

CENTURION: The old woman, you spoke of.

SOLDIER: Yes. She's always here.

CENTURION: What have you found out about her?

SOLDIER: Her name's Anna. She's the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She's been a widow many years.

CENTURION: Why doesn't she stay at home and.....grow old like other old women? Doesn't she have any gossiping to do?

SOLDIER: She prays all the time in the Temple. Every day. All day and all night.

CENTURION: An exaggeration.

SOLDIER: She's been here regularly since I've been assigned this duty.

CENTURION: Every day?

SOLDIER: Never misses one. (ANNA enters onto the stage.) (nodding toward ANNA) Good morning, Anna.

CENTURION: I don't like her here every day. It's suspicious.

SOLDIER: She's just an old woman.

(ANNA crosses to the door of the Temple.)

CENTURION: (roughly) Good morning.

ANNA: (kindly) (to SOLDIER) Shalom alehem. (to CENTURION) Alehem shalom.

(CENTURION gives slight nod of acknowledgement and looks at ANNA with suspicion.)

SOLDIER: Anything new today?

(ANNA stops at doorway and looks intently at CENTURION.)

ANNA: He's coming.

(CENTURION looks at SOLDIER and then at ANNA. CENTURION laughs. SOLDIER laughs half-heartedly.)

CENTURION: (with a wry smile) Who's coming.....Anna?

ANNA: The Messiah, God's anointed one.

CENTURION: And what's this anointed one to do, this.....(motioning to SOLDIER) Christ in our language?

ANNA: He's to redeem Israel.

(CENTURION grabs ANNA'S arm.)

CENTURION: (harshly) Rome doesn't like such talk.

(CENTURION shakes ANNA.)

SOLDIER: (concerned) Let her go, sir. Please. She talks like that all the time. Nobody listens to her.

(CENTURION pushes ANNA away.)

CENTURION: Foolish woman. (roughly) (pointing toward Temple doorway) (firmly) Go! (with derision) Pray!

ANNA: (kindly) Shalom.

(ANNA exits into Temple. CENTURION shakes head.)

CENTURION: What else do you know about her?

SOLDIER: She's a prophetess.

CENTURION: She's a woman! (waving off) She's a fool.

SOLDIER: She speaks of events to come.

CENTURION: (mockingly) When is He coming?

SOLDIER: She never says when.

CENTURION: (mockingly) Because she doesn't know when. (pointing to Temple) The Jewish.....(with derision) prophets, men who.....

SOLDIER: There are Jewish women.....

CENTURION: They try to convince the people that prophecies made centuries ago will come true. Like the prophet..... Isa.....

SOLDIER: Isaiah?

CENTURION: He's the one.

SOLDIER: Anna has mentioned his name many times. Isaiah made many prophecies about the coming of the Messiah.

CENTURION: The Messiah hasn't come yet and He never will. There's no such person.

SOLDIER: There's talk on the streets, too. People are saying that there's been no word from God in 400 years. It must be time for God to send.....

(CENTURION puts up hand for SOLDIER to stop.)

CENTURION: (pointing where ANNA exited) How can anyone prove she's a prophet?

SOLDIER: According to their religion, whatever a true prophet says must come true. We must watch if what she says.....

CENTURION: Nothing.....(thinking) Isaiah's said has come true.

Nothing's Anna's said has come true. She's not a prophet. (shaking head) There's no such things as prophets! (waving off where ANNA exited) She's a lonesome old woman. She has nothing else to do except talk.

(CENTURION turns toward stage left and turns back to SOLDIER.) (waving a menacing finger at SOLDIER) Watch her anyway. Something may be going on with all the .....(waving arm) chatter you're hearing. We must watch for anything that might affect the security of Rome.

SOLDIER: (saluting) (coming to attention) Yes. Sir.

(CENTURION looks SOLDIER over.)

CENTURION: (critically) Listen.....(pause) but don't forget who you are. (returning salute) As you were.

(SOLDIER takes at ease position.)

(CENTURION with GUARDS cross to stage left exit and exits stage left.

SOLDIER stands guard at doorway and watches audience.)

(black out)

## **ACT I, Scene 2** (Nazareth, the home of MARY)

(As the lights come up, MARY, barefoot, is at center stage facing stage right. There is a bowl with fruit around it dropped in front of her. GABRIEL is stage right of MARY.)

GABRIEL: “And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

MARY: How can this happen, since I’m a virgin?

GABRIEL: “The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee. (MARY bows head.) Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. (MARY holds lower abdomen.) And, behold, thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age; (MARY looks at GABRIEL.) and this the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible.”

(MARY kneels with hands up in praise.)

MARY: Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word. (MARY crosses hands across chest and looks down. GABRIEL exits stage right. MARY looks up and stands up.) (Mary looking around) Was this a dream? An angel visiting me here? Could I be dreaming when..... standing in my own house? (shakes head) It wasn’t a dream. The words the angel used—they were words I’d never use. And Elizabeth? How would I know about her? I’ve not seen her since she visited here in Nazareth years ago. I must talk to someone. (turning stage right) Joseph? (turning back) Poor Joseph, we’re just engaged. (holding abdomen) And I’m pregnant.....pregnant by God. That’s what the angel said. What if Joseph doesn’t understand? What’ll happen to us.....to me? To his plans.....my plans.....our plans? (shaking head) I can’t tell him yet. (thinking) The angel said Elizabeth has conceived at her age. (shaking head) She’s too old to have

a child. She couldn't..... without a miracle. (MARY bends down and gathers fruit and puts into bowl.) If anyone can explain what's happening, she can. I'll ask my parents if I can visit her. (holding hand to face) What about my parents? When can I ever tell them? (MARY stands up.) Elizabeth can help me—she must. (MARY takes two steps toward stage right and stops.) (tapping chest) The angel called me blessed, highly favored of God. (shaking head) I'm no one special. Why has He done this to me? (looking down at abdomen then forward) I'm to bring God's Son into the world—I'm to be His mother. What great thing He has done—(looking up) Holy is His name.

(MARY crosses hurriedly stage right and exits stage right exit.)

(black out)

## **ACT I, Scene 3** (Judean hills, the home of ELIZABETH)

(As the lights come up, ELIZABETH is sitting on a bench at center stage. She is pregnant, near delivery. She is knitting and humming. She is happy.)

MARY: (offstage) (calling) Elizabeth! Elizabeth!

(ELIZABETH reacts to calling by looking stage right and then holding her abdomen. She stands up as the knitting falls to the floor. MARY enters from stage right.)

ELIZABETH: Mary.

MARY: Dear cousin.

(MARY crosses to ELIZABETH. They hug and hold hands.)

ELIZABETH: Why is it the mother of my Lord should come to me?

MARY: How did you know?

(ELIZABETH puts MARY'S hands on her abdomen.)

ELIZABETH: As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb leaped for joy as welcoming him. I too realized that the Lord is with us.

(ELIZABETH releases MARY'S hands.)

MARY: I was visited by an angel named Gabriel, the messenger angel of God. He told me..... You don't look shocked.

ELIZABETH: My husband Zechariah was visited by the same angel. He

announced that we'd have a child even though I was beyond child-bearing age. My son will be the herald for the Messiah——(pointing toward MARY'S abdomen) the son in your womb.

MARY: (dreamily) It's been the dream of every Jewish woman since Eve to be the mother of the Messiah. (touching her chest) Yet He has chosen me, a poor maiden. Is it true, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: Yes, Mary. God is working through you for his people.

MARY: I have not known a man. The Angel said the child is God's Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. (ELIZABETH nods and motions to bench. They sit down with MARY stage right.) What shall I do?

ELIZABETH: You must tell Joseph.

MARY: I'm afraid of what he'll do.

ELIZABETH: (thinking) If he doesn't believe what you say, you could be stoned to death for adultery. The law is clear.

MARY: (earnestly) Would that fulfill God's plan?

ELIZABETH: (thinking) Joseph could ask for a divorce. It'd be a scandal 'cause people would talk. You'd live in disgrace. But you'd live. (MARY looks upset.) (trying to encourage) You could be sent away quietly.....to another village.....far away. Joseph is an honorable and righteous man. This might be.....

MARY: I love Joseph. Joseph loves me. I want Joseph to be my husband.

ELIZABETH: (shaking head) We need another miracle.

MARY: (hopefully) Can we expect that?

ELIZABETH: At times in our people's history, miracles——sometimes several together-- have occurred so our people would understand that God was doing special, something new and wonderful.

MARY: Like in the days of Moses and the days of Elijah.

ELIZABETH: (nodding) Now with God's son's coming into the world.....  
(MARY reaches toward ELIZABETH and touches and holds her arm.)

MARY: (with earnestness) He is Immanuel: God with us.

(ELIZABETH touches and holds MARY'S arm.)

ELIZABETH: It is as Isaiah prophesized. Other prophets have also told of the Messiah's coming.

(MARY takes hand away from ELIZABETH'S arm and touches her own abdomen.)

MARY: He's here. I know it.

ELIZABETH: (pointing to MARY'S abdomen) This is a day like those of Moses and Elijah. This is a day of miracles.

MARY: But now?

ELIZABETH: You should go home.

MARY: I have many questions to ask you. (ELIZABETH is uncomfortable. She holds abdomen and shifts weight. MARY looks concerned.

ELIZABETH motions for MARY to continue.) The prophecies say the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. (ELIZABETH shifts weight and acts uncomfortable.) I've never been to Bethlehem! I don't have any reason to go to there.

ELIZABETH: God will get you to Bethlehem if it's His will. (ELIZABETH holds abdomen in discomfort. She tries to smile. MARY is anxious.) I don't have long to go.

(MARY stands up and picks up knitting. She hands it to ELIZABETH.)

MARY: Let me stay. I can help. I have more questions

(ELIZABETH tries to stand. MARY helps her.)

ELIZABETH: Yes. Stay. (ELIZABETH holds abdomen.) I'll answer what I can. (ELIZABETH takes knitting.) How have you been treated at home?

MARY: Some women have asked why the wedding was so soon.

ELIZABETH: It's how gossip starts.

MARY: No one suspects anything else. No one knows I'm pregnant.

ELIZABETH: It'll be harder when you return to Nazareth. There'll be questions, hard questions as you start showing.

MARY: (with determination) I'll be ready. (ELIZABETH smiles at MARY.) (with concern) I hope so.

ELIZABETH: (taking MARY'S hands) (with enthusiasm) This is an extraordinary day. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

(MARY smiles)

(black out)

## **ACT I, Scene 4** (Nazareth, a street)

(As the lights come up, RABBI #1 and #2 are standing at center stage talking together. They smooth their robes. They are pompous. MARY and THREE WOMEN enter from stage left stairs and cross half way to RABBI #1 and #2. They stop and talk happily about MARY'S pregnancy. MARY is carrying a bowl with fruit. MARY is obviously pregnant. RABBI #1 motions for THREE WOMEN to leave. THREE WOMEN exit off stage left stairs. RABBI #1 and #2 look at MARY with disdain.)

RABBI #1: (with an edge) Shalom, Mary.

(MARY crosses to downstage of RABBI #1 and #2.)

RABBI #2: Welcome home.

(RABBIS cross in front of MARY and block her.)

RABBI #1: How was your cousin Elizabeth?

(MARY stops)

MARY: (smiling) She's well. She's.....(concerned) How'd you know I was visiting her?

RABBI #1: We know. We always know.

RABBI #2: (pointing to MARY'S abdomen) How's the baby?

MARY: (cheerfully) The baby's fine. Everything's.....

RABBI #1: (sternly) (counting on fingers) If I count from your wedding-- (motioning at RABBI #2 and to himself) we officiated it--.....

(RABBI #2 nods to RABBI #1.)

RABBI #1: You're showing too much.

RABBI #2: The wedding was hastily arranged. The bride price was paid by Joseph's father only nine months before.

RABBI #1: The betrothal was too short.

RABBI #2: It should be a year.

MARY: Joseph decided.....

(RABBI #1 holds up hand for MARY to stop talking.)

RABBI #1: (mockingly) He decided? We've heard Joseph had a dream. An Angel in the dream told him to marry you. Joseph needed convincing? Why, Mary?

(RABBIS #1 and #2 laugh.)

MARY: Joseph loves me.

(RABBI #1 and #2 stop laughing.)

RABBI #2: (with an edge) Why did the angel appear to you?

RABBI #1: (with annoyance) Why didn't the Angel appear to.....(tapping chest) us? (pointing to RABBI #2 and then himself) We're the rabbis. We're the religious leaders.

RABBI #2: There's talk of adultery.

MARY: I can assure you.....

RABBI #2: The women in town are whispering about.....

(MARY holds up hands to answer.)

RABBI #1: (holding hands up) The synagogue council wants you examined by the elders.....

(RABBI #1 turns to RABBI #2 who nods in agreement.)

RABBI #1: When you return.

MARY: Return?

RABBI #2: From Bethlehem.

MARY: Bethlehem? I can't.....

RABBI #1: (harshly) Aren't you in the family of David?

MARY: Both Joseph and myself.

RABBI #1: Then both of you must go to Bethlehem for the census. All over twelve years of age.....

MARY: Why?

(RABBI #1 looks over at RABBI #2 to explain.)

RABBI #2: Caesar Augustus is convinced he's not receiving the proper amount of taxes from the provinces. The Senate won't levy the taxes without an accurate census. Everyone must return to the hometown of his family to be registered and counted in the census.

MARY: When will this be?

RABBI #2: At the winter solstice, in December by the Roman calendar.

MARY: (holding abdomen) The midwives feel I shouldn't travel far from home, even now. By then it would be.....

RABBI #1: (harshly) If you're only as pregnant as you should be, you'll have no difficulty with the trip. Even the crippled and the lame must go. (pointing a finger at MARY) No exceptions!

RABBI #2: One cripple in Nazareth is going on a litter.

(RABBI #1 looks at RABBI#2 and nods. MARY looks away.)

MARY: I'm going to Bethlehem.

RABBI #1: What, Mary? Yes, you're going to Bethlehem. By Caesar's decree.

(MARY shakes her head.)

RABBI #1: (harshly) You'll be examined when you return. As soon as you return. Then we'll know what's going on.

MARY: But sirs!.....

RABBI #1: When you return. The day you return.

(RABBI #1 and #2 cross to stage left exit and exit stage left. MARY looks bewildered.)

(black out)

## **End of ACT I**

**Please order the script to read the rest.**