ARE KINGS STILL BORN IN BETHLEHEM?

A One Act Play

By

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Cast of Characters:

Speaking Roles:

Elizabeth A woman in her 20’s

Jedidiah- A man in his 40’s, father of Elizabeth.

Miriam - A woman in her 40’s, mother of Elizabeth.

Mary - A pregnant woman in her teens or 20’s.

Joseph - A man in his 20’s, husband of Mary.

Simon - Local tax-collector, 30’s to 40’s.

Balthasar- High ranking government official, over the age of 50.

Two hotel room guests- One 40’s, the other older.

Non-speaking roles

Two bodyguards 20’s

3-5 hotel guests Various ages

Setting: The front desk at BETHLEHEM BED AND BREAKFAST, a neat but humble establishment. There should be a desk and chair with some ledgers and writing material scattered on top. Above the desk is a portrait of King Herod, with his name on it. Around the room there should be an assortment of chairs arranged around one or several coffee tables. There should be at least one sign with the name of the establishment printed on it.

Time: Evening

Scene 1

**Song 1/ Intro: Jesus Saves**

*Elizabeth enters the stage and begins ambling towards the desk even as he speaks.*

**Elizabeth**: Elizabeth, that’s my name. It means God is my oath. It’s a thing with us Jews, putting God in every name. Jehoshaphat, Joseph, Joel, I’m sure you get the picture by now. God in every baby name, God on the hem of every garment, God in our conversations as we walk along the road, as we sit at home talking and laughing, in every pinch of salt and every glass of water. It’s fitting that this isn’t my story, then. It’s God’s. But if you think about it, isn’t every story a story about God? I don’t know, I’m not even sure I know what that means. I’m sure this one is, though. It’s a story about God coming and turning the world upside down.

*Elizabeth finally gets to the desk and begins to write down on a ledger. Noises from offstage as the other family members begin to come onto stage.*

**Miriam**: Liz, did you do the inventory like I asked?

**Elizabeth**: *(Confused)* Inventory?

**Miriam**: Yes, well, inventory isn’t the right word. Remember I asked you to reconcile the books with the different sets of bookings?

**Elizabeth**: Yes, inventory definitely isn’t the right word.

**Miriam**: Did you do it? And give me three sets of towels.

**Elizabeth**: *(Reaching under the desk for the towels, as asked.)* No, mum. I honestly forgot.

**Miriam**: You need to do it now, Liz. And I mean right now. The first caravan will be arriving any minute, and if we have no idea who is booked where, we’ll have a lot of very angry guests on our hands.

**Elizabeth**: Alright, I’ll get to it right away.

**Miriam**: Ok, thank you. *(Starts walking away, but notices that she gave her only two sets of towels).* I said three sets of towels. I don’t know what field your mind keeps wandering off to, but you need to build a fence for it. Look at me when I’m talking to you, Liz. Things are very serious for our family right now. You know that. One wrong move and we could lose everything.

**Elizabeth**: Yes, mama.

*Miriam exits. Elizabeth takes out a pile of books, opens them all in front of him and starts poring through them.*

**Elizabeth**: Why can’t we just record all our bookings in one place? It would save everyone so much time.

*Simon enters the stage.*

**Simon**: You really look like you need someone to come and brighten up your day.

**Elizabeth**: *(Frightened)* O, Simon, hello. Let…let me just call my father. Father! Simon the Tax-collector is here to see you.

*Simon walks around the room, looking admiringly at the furniture, whistling in appreciation every so often, etc.*

**Simon**: Business has been quite good the last few months, eh? (Picking up some seat covers)O, these are quite nice. I’ve been looking for seat covers like these for quite some time. Are they made with Bethlehem wool?

**Elizabeth**: Yes, they are.

**Simon**: *(Picks up the tablecloth)* But I’m sure this one isn’t?

**Elizabeth**: No, that one is as well.

**Simon**: Really? But how? They’re so soft, and Bethlehem wool is so tough and brittle.

**Elizabeth**: It came from Sam’s Scapegoat Emporium, and afterwards he applied a special treatment to it to make it softer.

**Simon**: O, yeah. The famous secret family treatment, guaranteed to turn the hardest wool soft in five minutes or less.

**Elizabeth**: Yeah, that one.

**Simon**: So this tablecloth is almost a collector’s item, isn’t it? Sam died, what, five years ago, and his son isn’t nearly as good at it as he was.

**Elizabeth**: Yes, I suppose you could say that.

**Simon**: Great *(He puts it in his bag)*

**Elizabeth**: What are you doing? That’s ours!

**Simon**: This will look perfect with that table I bought last week. Thanks, Liz, I always know I can count on you to find me something worth my while.

*Elizabeth walks up to him and tries to grab the table cloth.*

**Simon**: I really don’t think you want to start this, kid. Not with me.

*Jedidiah walks in.*

**Jedidiah**: Elizabeth!

**Elizabeth**: Father, he was just about to steal our\_

**Jedidiah**: Be silent and come here.

*Elizabeth walks over to where his father is standing, looking both angry and ashamed.*

**Simon**: Me steal from you? The kid has really hurt my feelings there, Jedidiah. Hasn’t your father ever told you how far back you and I go? That I held you as a baby? That I’ve known your family longer than you’ve been alive? After so many years of friendship, after all we’ve been through together, I never thought I’d hear you use a word like ‘steal’ to describe me.

**Jedidiah**: I’m sorry, Simon.

**Simon**: You should be sorry, seeing as you’re the one responsible for training her to use those kinds of words when talking about me. In fact, it isn’t even the kid’s fault. You’re her father, you should have trained her better. To think that she would learn to call me a thief in your house is sickening, Jedidiah. It really is. Especially since that word could better be used to describe yourself. Tell me, young lady, do you know how late your daddy is with his taxes. (No response) Well, of course you don’t know, otherwise you wouldn’t have dared call me a thief, so I’ll tell you. Three months. Three months! Wars have been fought in three months, empires have been built in three months. Some kings even reign less than three months. That’s right, girl. Your daddy has been stealing from Rome.

**Jedidiah**: I’m sorry, Simon. After the census is over I promise I’ll have enough to pay you.

**Simon**: See how your daddy disrespects me, Elizabeth. He doesn’t even let me finish talking, he just interrupts with the same excuses that I’ve been hearing every week for the last three months. With a daddy like that, no wonder you keep calling people ‘thief’. Now, where was I? O yeah, so I come over here, feeling all-merciful, willing to accept anything, even these worthless table cloths and seat covers, *(he starts collecting the seat covers one by one)* just so that Rome doesn’t have to come and sell you as a slave or something like that. And then guess what happens? You call me a thief, that’s what happens. Now, wanna guess how that made me feel. (Silence) Answer the question!

**Elizabeth**: Angry.

**Simon**: That’s right, very, very angry. Almost angry enough to stop turning a blind eye to your daddy’s been up to. *(To Jedidiah)* How long until Rome gets her taxes, Jedidiah?

**Jedidiah**: Two weeks.

**Simon**: You have one week, Simon. Or else I might just have to sell off your brat to pay the fine for late payment.

*Simon leaves.*

**Elizabeth**: Father, I…

**Jedidiah**: Get back to work, Liz.

**Elizabeth**: No, father, wait. Why do you let him speak to you like that? Why don’t you do something about it?

**Jedidiah**: Something like what, Liz? He is Rome’s tax collector, he represents Rome. Anything I do to him I have done to Rome. If I fight him, that means I am fighting Rome. And I am not strong enough to fight Rome.

**Elizabeth**: But he stole our table cloths and seat covers.

**Jedidiah**: Yes, he did, Liz. But in the process he gave us the time we desperately needed to get up to date with our taxes.

**Elizabeth**: It’s wrong!

**Jedidiah**: Yes, Liz, it is. But that’s just the way things are, and there’s nothing we can do about it. When the Messiah comes things will be better, but for now that’s just the way they are.

**Elizabeth**: How long are we going to keep saying that father? When Messiah comes, everything will be ok. We can’t just sit back, relax and wait for everything to be alright. We have to be proactive.

**Jedidiah**: Don’t forget the Word of the Lord, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay”

**Elizabeth**: I’m just tired of getting IOU’s from God that are never repaid.

**Jedidiah**: Listen to me now, Liz This is very important. However angry or disappointed you feel, you can’t allow yourself to speak about Adonai like that. He is El Shaddai, the Lord God Almighty, the Great I am! It seems you have forgotten who you speak of so let me remind you.

**Song 2: He is Yahweh- Vineyard. (A song speaking about who God is).**

**Jedidiah**: So you see Liz, He is God and one day, He will deliver us.

**Elizabeth**: (*not fully convinced but just deciding to agree to have some peace)* Yes, father.

**Jedidiah**: Now, did you finish with the bookings?

**Elizabeth**: Yes, father, I’m more or less finished.

**Jedidiah**: Are you sure? Because if we don’t have that mess sorted out by the time everyone arrives, we’ll be lost.

**Elizabeth**: Yes, father.

*Jedidiah leaves, and for a few moments Elizabeth continues working on the books, before turning to the audience and speaking.*

**Elizabeth**: In the days of my grandfather, our land was ruled by a harsh foreign power, kind of like it is now. My people were oppressed, and they cried out to God. Out of this trouble and turmoil, there came a man who started a rebellion and fought to free them from the rule of their oppressors. Many people said he was a great prophet of God, or even the Messiah himself. But I don’t think he was either. I think he’s just a man who got fed up at how broken everything was, and decided to take matters into his own hands. That’s the problem we have. We don’t stand up for ourselves, or take matters into our own hands. We just sit around and wait desperately for some miraculous intervention from God. But what if that intervention isn’t coming? What if we are all we’ve got?

I know my father would say God will deliver us. But if God is really all that, shouldn’t he be able to stop what is happening to us? Shouldn’t he be able to turn us from the scum of the earth to something better?

**Song 3: O come, O come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel (Rejoice)**

*Elizabeth continues with his work in silence for a few moments. Then, all at once almost, a large crowd bursts in through the doors, carrying a lot of baggage. The whole crowd descends on the front desk where they start loudly demanding the keys to their rooms. Elizabeth hands out keys, smiles warmly and says, “Enjoy your stay at Bethlehem Bed and Breakfast,” all the while referring to the book showing the bookings. After a few moments, most of them have gone off, and Elizabeth is once again alone on stage. Jedidiah and Miriam come on stage.*

**Miriam**: That was the crowd from the caravan. Did they all manage to get rooms?

**Elizabeth**: Yes, mother. There were even one or two rooms left.

**Miriam**: Are you sure? When I counted the bookings yesterday, I thought I saw that we were overbooked by one or two?

**Elizabeth**: Yes, but I made a single list out of the three that we had, and that was what it told me.

**Miriam**: Are you sure, though, Liz? Because if there are any mistakes, they will be very costly for us.

Jedidiah: Of course she’s sure, Miriam. She understands that the booking process in an inn is sacred. But all the same you can never be too careful. So just go through the bookings again, and make sure everything is right.

Elizabeth: Yes, father.

*After everyone else has left the stage, a heavily pregnant woman and her husband come onto the stage. The woman is clearly near term, and the husband is extremely worried.*

Joseph: Hello, do you have any rooms for two left?

Elizabeth: Just give me one moment, sir, and I’ll check for you. (While still searching through the book) You don’t sound like you’re from around here. I guess you’ve also come for the census.

Joseph: Yes, we have. My wife and I are from Galilee, a tiny town you’ve probably never heard of.

Elizabeth: Galilee, eh? I’ve never been there. What do you guys have?

Joseph: Fish, Samaritans, not much else. It’s not exactly the bustling heartland of the nation, if you get my meaning. We do have some pretty good carpenters, though.

Elizabeth: Good carpenters, eh? I’ll be sure to tell my father about it. He’s been needing a good chair and table for a while.

Joseph: And what is Bethlehem known for?

Elizabeth: Lots of shepherds, even more sheep. King David inspired a lot of kids. (She hands him the key that she’s just found.) 122 is still empty. Enjoy your stay at Bethlehem Bed and Breakfast.

*They leave. Elizabeth is left alone on stage.*

Elizabeth: I don’t think there’s any way I could have known who they were. They were just a young couple, like countless others that I’d seen before: a woman just about to give birth, and a husband worried that it might just happen right here in the corridor. The census had been hard on a lot of people, and there wasn’t much room left in the entire town of Bethlehem for all those people that were coming in. I wish I could have, though. We would have talked about a lot more than just fish and Samaritans, that I can tell you (*Pauses to ponder*)... I wonder if they themselves saw the full picture. Did they know? Did they fully understand? I wish I had…

**Song 4: Mary did you know**

*In come two of the guests of the hotel, visibly angry, one of them dragging their suitcase with them as they go.*

**Guest 1**: Excuse me, I would like to make a complaint. I found this, this person in my room. I don’t know who they are, but I insist that they vacate it immediately.

**Guest 2:** And that’s what I’ve been trying to tell you: it’s my room. I’ve been in it since last week. Honestly, I had no idea that you were booked into it.

**Guest 1**: No, no, this is unacceptable, this is a disgrace, it’s a travesty, it’s an abomination, it’s a violation of my God-given human rights! (To Elizabeth) Young lady, who do I speak to about this?

**Elizabeth**: Yes, urm… how can I help you?

**Guest 1**: Are you deaf? Or are you just trying to make me even angrier? Look, I booked a room with you people several weeks ago, but today when I arrived I found someone else already staying in it. And he says he’s booked for two more weeks, right up until after the census! Tell me young woman, what was the point of having us book our rooms? You might as well have given us a few spears and shields and had us fight to the death for them!

**Elizabeth**: I-i-if you’ll just calm down, sir, I’m sure we’ll be able to find another solution to this. Maybe we can put you in another room?

**Guest 1:** Yes, and who will I find in that one? Perhaps King Herod, or maybe Emperor Tiberias himself!? Besides, I like this room, every time I come to Bethlehem it’s the room I stay in, and it’s the room I want to stay in today. So, unless you’re going to help me in that way, I’ll just take my bags and leave. I think I’ll go stay in the town square. At least I’m sure I won’t find anyone booked in there!

*Jedidiah comes in.*

**Jedidiah**: What seems to be the problem, Isaiah?

Guest 1: Jedidiah, I am truly surprised today. I usually get much better service when I visit Bethlehem Bed and Breakfast. Perhaps it’s the pressure of the census, or maybe it’s just a gradual decline in quality that I’d never noticed before. Anyway, I bid you good day. I don’t think I will be staying here this time, or any time soon for that matter.

*Guest 1 leaves with his bags. Jedidiah turns his attention to the other guest.*

Jedidiah: I’m sorry for that, sir. Is there any way I can help.

Guest 2: No, not really. I’m just going to my room to lie down awhile, till my head stops ringing from all that shouting. Have a nice day

*Guest 2 exits going back to his room, leaving Jedidiah and Elizabeth alone on the stage.*

Elizabeth: Father, I…I’m sorry. I have no idea what happened.

Jedidiah: How many times did I ask you to make sure no room was double booked?

Elizabeth: But I did check, over and over again. I just missed this one. I…I made a mistake. I’m sorry, Father.

Jedidiah: No, I’m the one who made the mistake, Liz. I thought you understood the seriousness of the situation we’re in. But you don’t. Liz, we haven’t paid our taxes. Do you know what that means? It means that at any moment Rome could come and take away everything we have.

Elizabeth: Wait, father, I do understand. This was really just one small mistake.

Jedidiah: There was nothing small about the mistake you made, and the fact that you are trying to argue that there was just shows how immature you still are.

Elizabeth: Father, I\_

Jedidiah: Enough! Responsibility is earned, not given, and so far you haven’t shown me that you’re ready for it. And it’s not just today’s error. Your mind is always far away, Liz. You’re never focused on your work. Your mother and I have both noticed it. So I think the best thing we could possibly do is let you take a step back for a while.

*Mary and Joseph enter the stage, carrying their luggage with them. They begin walking across the stage towards the front desk.*

Jedidiah: And it’s not just the quality of your work that troubles me, Liz. The most important thing we have in love is our hope in God, but the questions you’ve been asking me make me think yours is a little wanting right now. We are God’s people. We depend on him for everything: life, breath, strength, protection, everything. If he decided to deny us one of these things that we so desperately depend on him for, we would be doomed. As for the justice that you are crying out for, it will be brought by the Messiah when he comes. Even your name testifies to that fact we are dependent on God for everything. If it was not for Adonai we would not have this place...He puts food on our table and watches over us. He has given me a wonderful family in you and your mother. Often all our eyes see are the things we desire and don’t have and we fail to see the countless blessings that the Almighty has bestowed on us.

**Song 5: Nara (What shall I render to Jehovah)- Tim Godfrey**

*Mary and Joseph arrive at the front desk. Mary is in clear agony, and looks like she might pop any second.*

Joseph: Excuse me.

Jedidiah: Yes?

Joseph: When we were here a few minutes ago, we were given room 122. But when we arrived there we found that it was already taken.

Jedidiah: Yes, kindly bear with us. We had an administrative error regarding some of the bookings. We’re doing our best to solve it, and we’re very sorry for any inconvenience caused. If I may ask, was 122 the room that you booked earlier on?

Joseph: Umm…no. In fact we hadn’t really booked any room earlier on. We just walked in and asked if there were any empty rooms left, and that was the one we were given.

Jedidiah: I see. I’m afraid that there’s just no room left in the entire inn for you and your wife. We’re already full just through the advance bookings.

Joseph: But when I was here earlier, I was given a room. *(Pointing to Elizabeth)* She gave me a room.

Jedidiah: Yes, this is my daughter, Elizabeth. She’s just started working at the front desk, and she made one or two mistakes.

Joseph: Where else can we go? Is there another inn?

Jedidiah: I’m afraid not, sir. Bethlehem Bed and Breakfast is the only inn in town. However, with the large number of people that have come in for the census, you’ll find that the town square should be pretty safe.

Joseph: But, but my wife, can’t you see my wife is ready to give birth. She can’t give birth in the town square.

Jedidiah: The best thing would be for you to stay with some of your relatives, then. I’m sure you must have some in town.

Joseph: We already tried, they don’t have any room left in their homes. Look, I’m sorry to be insisting so much, but I’m desperate. I have to find somewhere warm and private for my wife to give birth.

Jedidiah: *(After a moment’s reflection)* Yes, yes I do understand. There’s simply no more room left anywhere in this inn. Now, maybe you can go to the synagogue and ask them if they have any spare rooms or closets that they can lend you for the evening. I’m sure that they’ll be happy to help if they can.

Elizabeth: What about the stables?

*Everyone looks at Elizabeth, surprised that she’s speaking after such a long silence.*

Jedidiah: Liz, I think it’s best if you stay out of this one.

Joseph: No, it’s ok. *(To Elizabeth)* Just say that again please, I’m not sure I heard what you were saying.

Elizabeth: You could take the stables. It’s warm and private, and not as dirty as you might think.

Jedidiah: It’s a stable, Liz. A baby can’t be born in a stable.

Mary: Joseph…take it please…I feel like the baby’s going to come any minute now.

Joseph: Alright, Mary. The stable will have to do the job. How much for one night in the stable?

Jedidiah: Young man, are you serious? Do you honestly want your wife to give birth in a stable? Why not try the synagogue like I suggested?

Joseph: Because it’s very far away, and I really prefer a stable to a dark street corner in the middle of the night.

Mary: Please…just let us take the stable.

Joseph: How much for one night in the stable?

**Jedidiah**: You can have it for free. But be warned, it’s a lot more dingy and dirty than my daughter’s words must have led you to believe. *(Shouting*) Miriam, I need your help in the stables! *(To Joseph)* That’s my wife. She can help make your Mary comfortable. Let me see if I can get one of the old midwives up this time of night. They won’t be too happy, but we can’t let that stop us, now can we? *(To Elizabeth)* We’ll finish our discussion later. For now, you stay here at the desk. Remember how much of a responsibility this is. Treat it that way. I should be back in a few hours.

*Jedidiah, Mary and Joseph exit. Elizabeth is left by herself on the stage.*

**Elizabeth**: ‘She placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.’ That’s how history is going to remember us. If we’d known it would be that important, maybe we would have given up our own rooms, just so that this precious child could enter the world with a bit more dignity. Or maybe we’d have kicked out one of these rich, self-seeking guests. They would have landed on their feet. They always do. There would have been trouble afterwards, of course, but it would have been worth it. But we didn’t know. So we didn’t give up our rooms or make anyone give up theirs. So we only get one sentence, one short awful sentence that everything inside me wishes I could change: ‘She placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.’

**Song 6: See Him lying on a bed of straw (Congregational)**

Scene 2

*Elizabeth sits down, and starts going through the ledger book again. Lights out.*

*Lights up. Elizabeth still sits at her desk examining the ledgers. In comes Balthasar, dressed in all his finery, and looking around, as if he is seeking someone. He is flanked by two impressive looking bodyguards.*

Balthasar: Hello, is this the inn…what was it called again…Bethlehem Bed and Breakfast?

Elizabeth*: (Without looking up)* Yes, it is. But I’m afraid we’re full right now. If you’re looking for somewhere to stay during the census, I would advise you to try the town square. It should be fine.

Balthasar: O, I’m not here for any census, young lady.

Elizabeth: *(Still looking down)* Wow, I’m surprised that anyone is taking pleasure trips with all that’s going on right now.

Balthasar: Mine is not a pleasure trip, not in the sense that you mean it.

Elizabeth: I don’t suppose you’re here to buy a vintage Bethlehem woollen t-shirt.

Balthasar: Young lady, you are lucky that we are not in my homeland, for there you would be flogged for speaking to me with such impertinence.

Elizabeth: What are you talking\_ *(finally looks up from his ledger)* O, my God, I am so sorry.

*Elizabeth panics. She hurriedly rushes from behind the desk to great the visitor, then after taking his hand to shake it realizes that that might be another piece of ‘impertinence’. She tries kneeling in front of him, but then realizes that bowing might be a better idea, etc.*

Elizabeth: Thank you sir for honouring us so much by…urm, walking into our establishment today. I guarantee you that Bethlehem Bed and Breakfast is the best bed and breakfast in the whole town of Bethlehem. You won’t find better sheep stew anywhere in the whole town of Bethlehem, no sir, you certainly won’t.

Balthasar: I did not come here for sheep stew.

Elizabeth: Don’t worry, sir, we also have a wide assortment of vegetarian dishes prepared for clients just like you.

Balthasar: I am not a tourist, young lady. I have come to see *him*. Tell me where he is!

Elizabeth: Umm … well, I’m sure whoever you’re talking about, they will really enjoy their stay at Bethlehem Bed and Breakfast. Would you like me to show you to a roo… Actually we don’t have any rooms left…

**Balthasar**: No, listen to me very carefully, young lady. I am Balthasar, advisor to Mithridates the Fifth, Emperor of Parthia, the ruler of all the earth east of the Euphrates River, the greatest river in the world. My fellow magi and I have travelled for three months over more than one thousand six hundred kilometers from Ecbatana, our glorious capital, whose towers gleam like polished bronze and where the mightiest army in all the world stands ready to defend it. We have visited the courts of seven kings during our journey, and have just come from the court of Herod the Great, where we were received with great honour. We have come because in our homeland we saw signs and wonders in the skies, the star of The Great King, the King of Kings, the prophesied King of the Jews. That star has guided us across the desert and through many lands. That star has led us all that way from our home to yours. That star tells me that the one who has been born king of the Jews is here.

**Song 7: O Come All ye Faithful (Pentatonix)**

**Elizabeth**: (confused) I’m glad that you have come…but Umm…who have you come to see again?

**Balthasar**: (*Exasperated)* Young lady stop wasting my time. I won’t ask again. Where is the newborn king?

**Elizabeth**: I have no idea who you’re talking about. There’s no king in Bethlehem, all we have is a lot of sheep.

**Balthasar**: The star of the King of Kings led us here for a reason. You cannot lie to me.

**Elizabeth**: But it’s the truth. No real king has been born here since David, and that was hundreds of years ago.

**Balthasar**: Then answer me this, why did the star guide us here?

**Elizabeth**: I don’t know, ask the star.

**Balthasar**: *(In disgust)* Clearly you are a very sorry example of an innkeeper. Don’t worry, I shan’t trouble you any further.

*Balthasar turns to leave.*

**Elizabeth**: No, wait, wait. Just think about it for a second. If a new king had just been born, wouldn’t Herod know about it? He’s the current king after all, so it’s in his best interests to know when the next one is born. And what about the high priest and the Pharisees? Aren’t they God’s representatives here on earth? Why wouldn’t God tell them before something as big as the birth of the King of Kings?

*After a moment, Balthasar gives a subtle sign to his bodyguards, who immediately sheath their swords and retreat back into the shadows. He then sits down on one of the chairs.*

**Balthasar**: I see wisdom in your words, young lady. And yet, don’t your own scriptures say, “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 shepherd my people Israel.”

**Elizabeth**: Sir, all that is fine, but the simple truth is that no king of any sort has been born in this town lately. Trust me, it’s a really small town. If a king had been born, we would all know.

*Off-stage, the sound of a baby crying. One of the men with Balthasar goes off to investigate.*

**Balthasar**: Unless the Most High in his sovereign power decided that this child be born in a manner that none of us expected.

**Elizabeth**: But that’s not all, sir…Look, you’re not from around here, so I can understand how none of the prophecies are really that familiar to you. The Messiah is supposed to be the successor to David and Moses. He’s supposed to be a warrior and a king, and he’s supposed to free us. But we’re not free. We’re slaves of another emperor who’s even farther away than yours. Our land is occupied by an army that kills and rapes and pillages all the time, and we can’t do anything about it. If the Messiah had been born with things the way they are, wouldn’t something have changed?

*The man that had gone out comes back and whispers in Balthasar’s ear.*

**Balthasar:** I’m sorry to have to depart in this manner, young lady, but it appears we’ve found what we’re looking for.

Elizabeth: Wait, what? Are you sure?

Balthasar: We shall continue our conversation at an opportune time.

*Balthasar and his guards exit. Elizabeth is in shock for a moment, but then she goes back to her ledger. A moment later Simon enters, holding in his hand a bunch of flowers.*

Simon: Well, if it isn’t my favourite innkeeper’s daughter.

Elizabeth: Hello, Sir…Let me just call my father.

Simon: No, that will be completely unnecessary, trust me. It’s you I’ve come to see.

Elizabeth: M..me?

Simon: Yes, you. You see, as I was heading home, I thought to myself, “Simon, I think you and Liz got off on the wrong foot last time.” And I was right, of course. So I came to, you know, apologize. Do you accept my apology?

Elizabeth: Y…yes.

Simon: That’s my girl. And as a token of my, you know, sorrow or whatever, I brought you this.

*He holds out the flowers. Elizabeth hesitates for a second before taking them.*

Elizabeth: Th…thank you.

Simon: You haven’t even smelt them, yet.

*Elizabeth tentatively smells them.*

Elizabeth: They smell lovely.

Simon: I know. I made I sure I let the florist know I would come and, you know, confiscate his shop if he gave me anything but the best. Now you need to put them in some water. We don’t want them to wilt now, do we?

*Elizabeth takes them and puts them in the vase on the table.*

Elizabeth: Let me just call my father.

Simon: One question first, Elizabeth. Where’s the baby?

Elizabeth: What?

Simon: Come on, Elizabeth, work with me here. We’re trying to get off on a new footing, aren’t we? Mutual trust and respect and all that. When I ask you a question, you give me an honest answer, right. So, I’ll ask again, where’s the baby.

Elizabeth: There’s no baby.

Simon: I’m trying to help you, Elizabeth. Article seven of the Hotel and Restaurants Law bans you from keeping an infant in a facility that isn’t specially designed to receive them. Now, I think I’ve been around here a few times, and I don’t remember ever seeing special facilities for infants. Do you? Seen any changing rooms around here lately? (*Elizabeth doesn’t respond.)* So, I’ll ask one more time, where’s the baby?

Elizabeth: I…I already told you, there’s no baby.

*At that precise moment, the baby starts crying. Elizabeth’s face falls.*

Simon: Well, that sounds a lot like a baby to me.

Elizabeth: I don’t know what you’re talking about.

Simon: It’s a real shame, Liz. After I confiscate this place from your dad, I was really thinking we could work out a little arrangment. Whoever that baby is, I hope he’s worth it.

*Simon starts walking in the direction of the sound. Elizabeth grabs his hand to try and restrain him. There’s a brief scuffle, during which Balthasar and his bodyguards quietly enter the stage. Simon slaps her hard and she falls to the ground.*

Balthasar: Unhand her, you vermin!

Simon: And you are?

Balthasar: Someone who will not stand idly by while you flout the law. Get out of here, you filth, and never return.

Simon: Well, aren’t you the smooth talker. I guess I should let you know, pal, that interfering with a Roman official in the exercise of their duties is a crime punishable by death!

Balthasar: What duty could you possibly be doing here?

Simon: Well, *sir*, it just so happens that this family owes room enough in taxes to make your head spin. I’m here to collect.

Elizabeth: No, you said you would give us three weeks!

Simon: I said that!? But that would be breaking the law, dearie. And I never break the law.

Balthasar: How much?

Simon: What?

Balthasar: How much do they owe?

Simon: Around a month’s worth.

*Balthasar takes a gold coin out of his cloak and holds it out to Simon.*

Balthasar: This should cover the whole amount. Now get out of here, and never come back.

*Simon is, for the first time, dumbstruck. He takes the coin and walks out slowly, checking on his way out to make sure that it’s real gold.*

Balthasar: Are you alright, young lady.

Elizabeth: Yes, I mean no. Why…why would you do that?

Balthasar: That was nothing. I will not run out of gold for paying off little swindlers like him. But even if I did, it would be worth it. I would have given up everything that I own to be able to see what I have seen today.

Elizabeth: I don’t understand.

Balthasar: I have visited your stables, and seen who lies there. My search is at an end. I have found the reason I was born.

**Elizabeth**: Stable… you mean… the man with the pregnant lady with a baby… but…(*Confused trying to piece things together)*

*Balthasar turns and starts heading back to the stables.*

**Elizabeth**: Sir, why are you here?

**Balthasar**: Because God is.

*Balthasar walks off stage, leaving Elizabeth alone.*

Elizabeth: (to herelf)… The King? The Messiah? Here? Can it be? Father! Father!(*She runs off stage in search of her father*)…

**Song 8: O Holy Night**

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