

## **Journey of the Three Kings To Bethlehem**

Some days after their departure from home, I saw the caravan of Theokeno come up with those of Mensor and Seir at a ruined city. Rows of tall pillars were still standing here and in many places large beautiful statues. A band of wild robbers had taken up their quarters among the ruins. They were clothed in the skins of beasts and armed with spears; they were of a brownish color, short and stout, but very agile. The three caravans left this city together at daybreak and, after journeying half a day, rested in a very fertile district where there was a spring around which were many roomy sheds. This was an ordinary halting place for caravans.



Each of the Kings had in his train, as companions, four nobles of his own race; but he himself was like a patriarch over all. He took care of all, commanded all, dispensed to all. In each caravan were to be found people of different color. Mensor's race was of a pleasing brownish color; Seir's was brown; and Theokeno's of a bright yellow. I saw no shining black, saving the slaves, of whom each king possessed some. The nobles holding staves in their hands, sat upon their dromedaries high among the piled-up packages, which were covered with hangings. These were followed by other animals almost as large as horses, on which servants and slaves rode among the baggage. On their arrival, they unloaded the animals and watered them at the spring. This spring was surrounded by a little mound upon which was a wall with three open entrances. In this enclosed space was a cistern, somewhat lower than the surrounding surface. It had a pump with three pipes furnished with faucets. Over the cistern was a cover usually kept locked. But a man from the ruined city had accompanied the travelers, and he on payment of a tax, unlocked the reservoir. The travelers had leathern vessels, which could be folded perfectly flat. They were divided into four compartments, which when filled afforded drink to four of the camels at once. These people were extremely careful of the water; not a drop was suffered to go to waste. Then the beasts were put up in an enclosed, but uncovered space close to the spring, the stall of each animal being separated from its neighbor's by a partition. There were some troughs before them, into which was poured the feed which had been brought with them. It consisted of corn, the grains of which were as large as acorns. Among the baggage were bird baskets, high and narrow, which hung

on the sides of the animals among the broad packages. In the separate compartments of these baskets, either singly or in pairs, according to their different sizes, were birds like doves or hens. They served for food on the way. In leathern chests, they had loaves, all of the same size, like single plates, closely packed together. Only as many as were needed were taken out at once. They had with them very costly vessels of yellow metal set with precious stones. They were almost exactly of the shape of our sacred vessels, some like chalices, some like little boats and dishes, out of which they drank and upon which they handed around the food. The rims of most of these vessels were set with precious stones.

The three races were somewhat different in costume. Theokeno and his followers, as well as Men-sor, wore high caps embroidered in colors, and white bands wound thickly around their heads. Their short coats reached to the calf of the leg, and were very simple with only a few buttons and ornaments on the breast. They were enveloped in light, wide, and very long mantles which trailed behind. Seir and his followers wore caps with little white pads and round cowls embroidered in colors. They had shorter mantles, which were, however, longer behind than in front. Under their mantles were short tunics buttoning down to the knee and ornamented on the breast with laces, spangles, and innumerable glittering buttons, button on button. On one side of the breast was a little sparkling shield like a star. All had bare feet bound with laces to which soles were fastened. The nobles wore short swords or large knives in their girdles, and they had many bags and boxes hanging about them. Among the kings and their relatives were men about fifty, forty, thirty, and twenty years old. Some wore their beard long, others short. The servants and camel drivers were much more simply clothed; indeed, some had only a strip of stuff or an old garment around them.

When the beasts had been fed, watered, and stalled, and the attendants themselves had drunk, a fire was made in the middle of the enclosure in which they had encamped. The wood used for that purpose consisted of sticks about two and a half feet long which the poor people of the surrounding country had brought hither in well-arranged bundles, as if prepared expressly for travelers. The Kings constructed a three-cornered log pile and laid the sticks around the top, leaving an opening on one side to admit air. The pile was very skillfully put together. But I cannot say for certain how they lit the fire. I saw one of them put one piece of wood into another, as if into a box, swing it round and round a little while, and then draw it forth burning. And so they kindled a fire, and then I saw them killing some birds and roasting them.

The Three Kings and the ancients acted, each one in his own family, like the father of the house, cutting up the food and helping it around. The carved birds and little loaves were laid on small dishes, or plates, which stood upon little feet, and passed around; and in the same way, the cups were filled and handed to each one to drink. The lowest among the servants, of whom some were Moors, reclined on the bare earth. They appeared to be slaves. The simplicity, the kindness, the good nature of the Kings and nobles, were unspeakably touching. They gave to the people who gathered around them something of all that they had; they even held out to them the golden vessels and let them drink like children.

Mensor, the brownish, was a Chaldean. His city, whose name sounded to me something like Acajaja, was surrounded by a river, and appeared to be built on an island. Mensor spent most of his time in the fields with his herds. After the death of Christ, he was baptized by St. Thomas, and named Leander. Seir, the brown, on that very Christmas night stood prepared at Mensor's for the expedition. He and his race were the only ones so brown, but they had red lips. The other people in the neighborhood were white. Seir had the baptism of desire. He was not living at the time of Jesus' journey to the country of the Kings. Theokeno was from Media, a country more to the north. It lay like a strip of land further toward the interior and between two seas. Theokeno dwelt in his own city; its name I have forgotten. It consisted of tents erected on stone foundations. He was the wealthiest of the three. He might, I think, have taken a more direct route to Bethlehem, but in order to join the others he made a circuitous one. I think that he had even to pass near Babylon in order to come up with them. He also was baptized by St. Thomas and named Leo. The names Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar were given to the kings, because they so well suited them, for Caspar means "He is won by love"; Melchior, "He is so coaxing, so insinuating, he uses so much address, he approaches one so gently"; Balthasar, "With his whole will, he accomplishes the will of God."

From Mensor's city, Seir dwelt at the distance of a three days' journey, each day counting twelve hours; and Theokeno further on, at a distance of five such days. Mensor and Seir were together when they saw in the stars the vision of the birth of Jesus, and both set out on the following day with their respective caravans. Theokeno, also, had the same vision in his own home, and he hurried to join the other two. Their journey to Bethlehem was about seven hundred and some odd hours. In the odd number, six occurs. It was a journey of about sixty days, each day twelve hours long; but they accomplished it in thirty-three days, on account of the great speed of their camels, and because they often travelled day and night.

The star that guided them was like a ball from whose lower surface light streamed as from an open mouth. It always appeared to me as if guided by an apparition that held it by a thread of light. By day I saw walking before the caravan a figure more brilliant than the light of the sun. When I reflect upon the length of the journey, the rapidity with which they made it appears to me astonishing. But those beasts have so light and even a step that their march looks to me as orderly and as swift, their movements as uniform, as the flight of birds of passage. The homes of the Three Kings formed a triangle with one another. Mensor and Seir dwelt nearest to each other; Theokeno was the most distant.

When the caravan had rested till evening, the people that had followed helped to load the beasts again, and then carried off home all that the travelers left behind them. When the caravan set out, the star was visible, shining with a reddish light, like the moon in windy weather. Its train of light was pale and long. The Kings and their followers went part of the way on foot beside their animals, praying with heads uncovered. The road here was such as to prevent their travelling quickly; but when it became level, they mounted and pushed on at a swift rate. Sometimes they slackened their pace and all sang together, the sound of their voices on the night air producing a most touching effect. When I gazed upon them riding forward in such order, their hearts filled with joy and devotion, I could not help thinking: "Ah, if our processions could only pattern after this!" Once I saw them passing the night in a field near a spring. A man from one of the huts in the neighborhood unlocked it for them. They watered their beasts and, without unpacking, refreshed themselves by a short rest.

Again I saw the caravan upon a high plateau. On their right extended a mountain chain, and it seemed to me that they were drawing near to a point in the road where it again made a descent to a thickly settled district whose houses lay among trees and fountains. The inhabitants of this place wove covers out of threads stretched from tree to tree, and adored images of oxen.

They bountifully supplied food to the crowd that followed the caravan, but the dishes out of which they ate were used no more. I was surprised at that.

The next day I saw the Kings near a city whose name sounded like Causur, and which was built of tents on stone foundations. They stopped to rest with the king to whom the city belonged, and whose tent palace lay at a little distance. The Three Kings had since their meeting travelled fifty-three or sixty-three hours. They told the king of Causur all that they had seen in the stars. He was very greatly astonished. He looked through a tube at the star that was guiding them, and in it he saw a little Child with a Cross.

He begged them, in consequence, to inform him on their return of all that

they discovered, that he might erect altars and offer sacrifice to the Child. On the Kings' departure from Causur, they were joined by a considerable train of nobles, who were going to travel the same way. Later they rested at a spring and made a fire, but they did not unload their camels. When again on their way, I heard them softly and sweetly singing together short strophes, such as: "Over the mountains we shall go. And before the new King kneel!" One of them began and the others took up and sang with him the strophes, which they in turn composed and intoned. In the center of the star was plainly visible a little Child with a Cross.

Mary had a vision of the Kings' approach when they were resting a day in Causur, and she told it to Joseph and Elizabeth.

At last I saw the Kings arrive at the first Jewish city, a small, straggling place where many of the houses were surrounded by high hedges. They were here in a straight line from Bethlehem, notwithstanding which they proceeded along toward the right as the streets ran in that direction. As they entered this place, they sang more sweetly than ever and were full of joy, for the star was here shining upon them with unusual brilliancy, although the moonlight was so bright that one could see shadows distinctly. The inhabitants of the city, however, either did not see the star, or they took no special notice of it. They were exceedingly obliging. When some of the cavalcade dismounted, they assisted them greatly in watering their camels. It reminded me of Abraham's time, for then people were all so good and ready to assist one another. Many of them, bearing branches in their hands, led the caravan through the city and even went a part of the way with them. The star was not constantly shining before them; sometimes it was quite dull. It appeared to shine out more clearly wherever good people lived; and when the travelers beheld it more brilliant than usual, their hearts were filled with emotion thinking that there, perhaps, they would find the Messiah. The Kings were not without apprehension lest their large caravan would create notice and comment.

The next day they went without halting around a dark, foggy city and, at a short distance from it, crossed a river which empties into the Dead Sea. That evening, I saw them enter a city whose name sounded like Manathea, or Madian. Their caravan was now perhaps two hundred strong, so great was the crowd their generosity drew after them. A street ran through this last place, the inhabitants of which consisted partly of Jews, partly of heathens. The caravan was led into the space between the city and its surrounding wall, and there the Kings pitched their tents. I saw here, as in the former city, how anxious they became when they discovered that no one knew anything of

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**the newborn King, and I heard them telling how long the star had been  
looked for among them.**