

The Story of the Magi

Christmas is a time for stories—all kinds of stories. They range all the way from the silly and fun, frivolous stories about magical snow men with enchanted hats, about strange green creatures who try to undo the holiday, all the way to the very serious stories we share with one another as we write Christmas letters and tell stories about our lives. Then of course there's the story of Christmas itself that changes our lives, changes the world. Christmas is a time when we tell these stories, stories we know to be silly and fun and stories that are so true we stake our lives on them.

The story I have to tell you is not the frivolous sort, but it may not be the true and serious sort either. The story I have for you falls somewhere in between. The fact is this story is so old it's hard to tell how much of it is true. But it is a Christmas story. At least, I believe it's a Christmas story. Even that's hard to identify. The names are what connect this story to Christmas. So whether it's true or not whether it's really a Christmas story or not, I'll leave that to you. Let me tell you the tale as it has come to me.

This is a story that was written thousands of years ago—centuries, generations before the first Christmas. In a far off part of the world, there was a king. And he was a horrible king. He oppressed the people. He was wicked. He was violent. And he was determined that he would hold on to his power, no matter what happened.

And so this evil king started to work with a group of priests. And he charged them with using their understanding of the mysteries of the universe to protect his throne. He charged them with predicting threats to the nation, with interpreting signs and dreams. And they did their best to protect their king to guard their nation.

But eventually they failed.

When the invaders came—the king knowing that his time was at an end—he executed as many of the priests as he could before the invaders stormed the castle. Now, he was unsuccessful in eliminating all the priests, and those who remained were taken as spoils of war. They were taken as slaves by the invaders. And so these priests, these strange sorcerers, were oppressed by yet another king, and this time it was a king who had taken them in battle. And they were used as slaves, as servants.

They were once again instructed to use their understanding of the world around them there, mystical abilities, to serve the throne. And they did everything they could to serve their king. And for a short time, it wasn't so bad. They had peace, but not freedom. And as the generations passed, one ruler gave way to another. And eventually they found themselves again under an oppressive and evil king.

And these sorcerers longed for the day when they would be set free—when they could enjoy both peace and freedom. They looked to the heavens and they prayed for someone who would set them free. And then, they saw an opportunity. The king was killed. And the only people who knew were the sorcerers.

The assassin fled, running for his life. The sorcerers were the only witnesses to the crime. And they realized that no one knew the king had been killed. So, they gathered together and devised a plan. They took the crown and the royal robes. And they put them on one of their own. They hid him from the

public, carefully guarding who could come and see the audience with the impostor. Only people who had never seen the king close up before were allowed to visit. They perpetuated the lie that the king was still on the throne and that all was well in the kingdom.

And for a short time, their deceit proved fruitful. They had both peace and the illusion of freedom. The deception worked and under the reign of the sorcerer who had stolen the throne the people enjoyed peace and prosperity. But eventually the king's friends, his lieutenants, his soldiers his bodyguards, started to question why they had been kept away from the king. They started to wonder what was happening. They noticed that their warlike monarch was gone. And they could tell something was wrong.

Seven of them gathered together and they devised a plan to identify what had happened. They suspected that the king was gone and that an impostor was in his place. And as soon as they verified their fears they put a plan into action to eliminate the impostor. They stormed the palace.

The peaceful sorcerers did the best they could to defend themselves but they were not warriors; they were scholars. And they retreated into the darkness and into the shadows trying to escape the assassins. But it was no use.

One of them, more angry than the rest, leapt at the impostor and wrestled him to the ground. And he shouted to his compatriots, "I'm here. I have him. Come and destroy the impostor."

His colleague shouted back, "We're afraid if we try to kill him we will miss and kill you in his stead."

The war-like assassin shouted out, "My hatred for these slaves is so great I am willing to give my life. Stab at my voice and kill us both."

The assassins did exactly that. Somehow, they missed their colleague, their coconspirator, and slew the peaceful king, the impostor. They lit the torches bringing light back to the palace and they evacuated into the streets carrying torches and weapons. And they went house to house and home to home, hunting down and killing anyone who was of the same race as the impostors.

The oppressed people, these slaves were slaughtered in the streets. They were only saved by nightfall when they returned again to the darkness and the shadows. Those who survived continued on as slaves, forced to use their knowledge, their wisdom in service of a throne that had tried to eradicate them. And they prayed for peace.

Freedom had become a myth—a story, they couldn't tell if it was true or false, buried so deeply in the past they couldn't remember it. These oppressed people longed for someone who would set them free—who would lead them out of the darkness. One day they looked to the sky and they cried to the heavens for help. That's when it changed. They saw a star—a tiny light piercing the darkness. And these sorcerers these scholars, these, "Magi" followed the star to find the one who would bring peace.

But they didn't find another wicked king.

That's where they looked first. They went to the palace of Herod. And it was the wrong place. The one who would set them free was not a warrior. He was not a king. He was not a conqueror. He was not a tyrant.

He was an infant.

He was truly a prince of peace. They worshiped him. They gave him gifts. And then they received the gift they had longed for for centuries. They were set free. And they vanished from the pages of history in peace and freedom.

I have no idea how much of this story is true. All I can tell you is that it's very old. The same magi Herodotus just tells us about as the slaves to the Persians and the Medes and the Assyrians the same Magi appear again, that same word, bringing their gifts to the Christ child.

Christmas is a time for stories. Some of them we know to be true. Some of them we know to be silly. This one, well decide for yourself.