

# The King and I

Two perspectives on Christmas night:  
King Herod and a shepherd near Bethlehem

By David Radcliff

*[Scripture readings prior to performance: Luke 2:8-15; Matthew 2:1-8]*

Shepherd: It's a bit nippy out here tonight...and only my dog Spot to keep me warm...

Herod: Slave! The fire is burning low—see to it!

S: 88, 89, 90, 91, 92...yoo-hoo, sheeeep! How am I supposed to count you when you're moving around like that—and if some of you would dress a little differently, it would make my job a lot easier—but noooo, everyone's in their white wool outfit again tonight...

H: (counting out coins) 88, 89, 90...some things you can never have too much of...money—servants—and security...

S: That's why Spot and I are here, in case you didn't guess—to keep you safe. One of you wanders off, a wolf wanders by...and let's just say it would be baaaaaadddd....

H: There were some wanderers in Jerusalem tonight. Men from the East—wise men, they are called. Said they had been following a star for many miles. Said they had news of the “birth of a king.” I listened with great interest...

S: Listen to me! Talking to a bunch of sheep. This has got to be the loneliest job in the world—watching a flock of sheep on a hillside outside the town of Bethlehem—or, as me and the boys call it, Boringhem. The only action is when the Romans come through—then we hide and see if we can ding a couple of 'em with our slingshots. Slingshots versus mounted cavalry—not much of a match—especially if they catch us...

H: Of course he'd be no match for me—some little folk hero, peasant conspirator. I know these Jewish dreams—I am one myself—a Jew, that is. All they have are dreams—nothing more—and they never will—so long as I've got Rome on my side.

S: But it's just a matter of time. And we've got plenty of time on our hands. After all, we've been waiting for nearly a thousand years for things to be right again—like they were under King David. (strikes pose of warrior) Bring on the Philistines, bring on the Babylonians and Persians, bring on King Herod—the traitor! With Yahweh on our side, no one can stand in our way! Right, Spot?!

H: Actually, I wouldn't mind seeing a little insurrection. It would give me another excuse to bring in the troops and reduce the population a bit—not too much; don't want to hurt the tax base—but enough to teach them a lesson.

S: But Spot, I gotta tell you—sometimes I wonder if we'll ever get what we want by fighting for it. We've been fighting since we were a people—and look what it's gotten us. Prisoners in our own land; our people poor, our children hungry; all of us living in fear of what they may do to us next. Even the religious leaders—some of them talk about a kingdom of this world—restoring our power and glory through strength of arm. The rest of them don't speak of this world at all, but tell

us to be patient until we enter the afterlife. What if neither course satisfies—violence or acquiescence. Would that there were another way...!

H: Sometimes I tire of it—this state of war—the constant presence of fear—never really trusting anyone. And even I have some feeling for what it does to those poor souls, the ones we have to control—I guess you could say “my” people. They are always poor, always anxious for their next meal, never really sure what tomorrow may bring. But alas, I live with it...I suppose it’s the price one must pay for...this—this palace, these fine clothes, food when I want it, fire when I need it, the feeling of being superior to “those” people. Ahhh, the high price of prosperity...

S: I don’t want much, really. Food for my family, a roof over our heads, opportunities for my children—a feeling that life is fair—and that I have the same chance as anyone else for a decent future. I have spoken with God about these things—my wish for a new direction for our people, for a good life for my children, for an end to the constant cycles of violence and revenge that can only lead to greater destruction...for sheep that come in different colors...

H: So I had a conversation with these wise men from the East. I told them that I also anticipated the birth of this “king,” and asked if they would come to me with news of his birth, should they find him. I would like to welcome him in my own special way into this world...

S: So, good sheep—I see you have not suddenly changed your colors—so I can only assume that God is not listening to me when I pray. If you know something different than this, will you please tell me...?

H: Oh, but I’m sure theirs is another wild goose chase—magi from the Orient who took a wrong turn in Mesopotamia and look now in vain for their “child king.” Too bad—and a waste of some VERY fine gifts, I might add....

S: (stunned) Sheep...is that *you* talking...I...didn’t think so...what do you mean “fear not?!” A child king? A stable? Swaddling cloths? Here in Boring—er, Bethlehem??

H: If there were a birth like this, I’m sure my people would let me know—nothing happens in this kingdom that Herod doesn’t soon find out about...

S: Sheep—don’t move—I’ll be back—Spot’s in charge—there’s something I just have to see for myself...

H: (yawns) I may as well turn in...looks like everything is under control...

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