

12. The Spicers' Play: The Annunciation and Visitation

DOCTOR:

Lord God, great marvel it is to mean
How man was made without a miss,
And set where he should ever have
been:

Without care, abiding in bliss-
And how he lost that comfort clean,
And was put out from Paradise-
And since, what sorrows sore were seen
Sent unto him, and to all his-
And how they lay a long space
In hell, locked out of light
Until God granted them grace
And help, by his great might.

Then, it is needful now to tell
How prophets all God's counsels
explain,

As the prophet Amos did foretell
While he in this life did remain.

Deus pater deposuit salutem fieri in
medio terre.

He said, "God, the father of Heaven and
Hell,

Ordained on Earth mankind to mend,"
And to atone with Godhead as well.

He said His son that He would send,
To take kind of man's kin

In a maiden full mild.

So were many saved of sin

And the foul fiend beguiled.

And so that the fiend should be misled
And vexed, and to truth give no intent,

God made that maiden to be wed
Before His son to her he sent.

So was the Godhead enclosed and
clad

In wedding-clothes where he went;
And that our bliss should so be bred,
Full many matters may be meant.

Quoniam in semine tuo benedicentur
omnes gentes.

God Himself said this thing

To Abraham, as his bequest:

"Of your seed up shall he spring
In whom all folk be blessed."

To prove these prophets ordained are,
As I say unto old and young,
He moved our mischiefs for to mar,
For thus prayed Isaac for this thing:

"Rorate celi desuper."

"Lord, come down," at your liking,
Make dew to fall from Heaven so
far,

For then the Earth shall spread, and
spring

A seed that us shall save,
That now in bliss are bent;

Of clerks whoso will crave,

Thus in these things is meant:

The dew to God the Holy Ghost

May be compared, in man's mind-

The Earth unto the maiden chaste,

Because she comes of earthly kind.

These wise words were not wrought in
waste

To waft and wend away like wind,

For this same prophet soon, in haste,

Said furthermore, as folks may find:

Propter hoc dabit Dominus ipse vobis
signum.

Lo, he said thus: "God shall give

Hereof a sign to see"

To all that loyally live,

And this their sign shall be:

Ecce virgo concipiet, et pariet filium.

Lo, he says that "a maiden", one

Here on this earth, among us all,

"will clear conceive and bear a son,"

And call him by name Emanuell.

His kingdom that ever is begun

Shall never cease, but endure and
dwell.

On David's seat he shall remain

His dooms to deem, and truth to tell.

Zelus Domini faciet hoc.

He says, "the love of our Lord

All this shall ordain then."
That means peace and accord
To make with earthly man.

More of this maiden he tells me:
This prophet says for our succour
Egredietur virga de Jesse -
"A wand shall be bred of Jesse's bower."
And of this same also says he:
"Upon that wand shall spring a flower,"
Whereon the Holy Ghost shall be
To govern with great power.
That wand means unto us
This maiden, even and morn.
And the flower is Jesus
That of that blessed was born.

The prophet Joel, a gentle Jew,
Sometimes has said the same thing.
He likens Christ even as he knew
Like to the dew in his coming:
Ero quasi ros; et virgo Israell
germinabit sicut lilium.
"The maiden of Israel," all new,
He says, "shall bear one, and forth
bring
As the lily flower, full fair of hue."
This means so to old and young:
That the High Holy Ghost
Came, our mischief to mend,
Into Mary, maiden chaste,
When God his son would send.

This lady is to the lily like;
That is because of her clean life.
For in this world was never such like:
In one to be maiden, mother and wife.
And her son, king on Heaven's peak,
As oft is read, by reason rife,
And her husband, both master and
meek
In charity, to stint all strife-
This passed all worldly wit,
How God ordained them then.
In her, in one are knit
Godhead, maidenhead, and man.

But of this work, great witness
was
With our forefathers, as all folk can tell.

When Jacob blessed his son Judas
Among the two, this tale did tell:
Non auferetur septrum de Juda, donec
veniat qui mittendus est.
He says, "the scepter shall not pass
From Judah, land of Israel,
Before he comes, who ordained was"
To send the devil's force to hell.
Et ipse erit expectatio gencium.
"Him shall all folk abide,"
And stand unto his story.
By these sayings signified
Is Christ, God's son in glory.

For how he was sent, see we
more,
And how God would his place purvey.
He said, "Son, I shall send before
My angel, to prepare your way-"
Ecce mitto angelum meum ante faciem
tuam, qui preparabit viam tuam ante
te.
Of John the Baptist he spoke this, for
On Earth he was ordained always
To warn the folk who then were there
Of Jesus' coming, and thus to say:
Ego quidem baptizo in aqua vos, autem
baptizabimini spiritu sancto.
"After me, shall come to you
A man of might the most.
And he shall baptize you
In high Holy Ghost."

Thus of Christ's coming may we see
How Saint Luke speaks in his gospel:
"From God in heaven is sent," says he,
"An angel named Gabriel
To Nazareth in Galilee,
Where this maiden mild did dwell,
That with Joseph should wedded be;
Her name is Mary." Thus does he tell.
How God his grace conveyed
To man in this manner
And what the angel said,
Take heed, all that will hear.

[Then he [the angel] sings "Ave Maria"]

ANGEL:
Hail Mary, full of grace and bliss!

Our Lord God is with thee,
And has chosen thee for his.
Of all women blessed must thou be.

MARY:
What manner of greeting is this,
That secretly comes to me?
For in my heart a care it is,
The sign that I here see.

[Then the angel sings "Ne timeas,
Maria"]

ANGEL:
No, dread you not, mild Mary,
Anything that may befall.
For you have found, most sovereignly
With God, a grace surpassing all.
In the chastity of your body
Conceive and bear a child you shall;
This message I bring you. Now see:
His name Jesus shall you call.

Much of might then shall he be:
He shall be God, and called God's son.
The seat of David, his father free,
Shall God give him to sit upon.
As King, forever reign shall he,
In Jacob's house for all time to stay;
Of his kingdom and dignity
Shall no man earthly know or say.

MARY:
Now, God's angel meek and mild,
How should it be, I you pray,
That I should now conceive a child
Of any man, by night or day?
I know no man who has defiled
My maidenhood, the truth to say;
Without the will for workings wild
In chastity I have been always.

ANGEL:
The Holy Ghost shall in you alight,
And highest virtue you shall hold.
From holy birth of you, so bright,
The son of God he shall be called.
Look, Elizabeth, your cousin, might
Conceive no child, because too
old:

This is the sixth month now, full right,
For her, that barren had been told.

MARY:
Now, angel, blessed messenger,
Of God's will I hold myself well paid;
I love my Lord with heart full clear,
For all the grace he has for me laid.
As God's own handmaid, behold me
here,
To do his will all ready made;
Be it done to me, in joyous cheer-
Through all your words, as you have
said.

Now God, that all our hope is in
Through the might of the Holy Ghost,
Save you, madam, from guilt of sin-
Direct you past all works of waste.
Elizabeth, my own cousin,
It seemed to me I wanted most
To speak with you of all my kin,
And therefore come I thus in haste.

ELIZABETH:
Ah, welcome, mild Mary,
Mine own cousin so dear;
A joyful woman too am I,
Now that I see you here.
Blessed are you alone, I see,
Of every woman most revered,
And the fruit of your body
Blessed is, both far and near.

This is a joyful tidings,
That I may now here see
The mother of my lord the king
In this way come to me.
As soon as the voice of your greeting
Came to my ears, and unto me,
The child inside my womb so young
Made great mirth unto thee.

MARY:
Now Lord, blessed are you for aye,
For all the grace you have me lent;
Lord, I love you, God indeed;
The messenger to me you have sent.
I thank you now, by night and day,
And pray with good intent

You take me to your pay;
For you my will is meant.

ELIZABETH:

Blessed are you, most worthy maid,
To God, through chastity.
You trusted, and yourself held paid
At his will for to be.
All that for you is said
From my lord so free.
Such grace for you is laid,
As is fulfilled indeed.

MARY:

To his grace myself I will take
With perfect chastity,
Who made me thus to go
Among his maidens free.
My soul shall loving make
Unto that lord I see.
My sprit makes joy also
In God, who sets me free.

[Then she sings "Magnificat"]

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13. The Pewterers' and Founders' Play: Joseph's Trouble about Mary

JOSEPH:

Of great mourning may I complain,
And walk full wearily by this way.
For now I know, I better had been
At ease and rest by reason aye.
For I am of great eld,
Weak and all unwell,
As all men see it may.
I may not bustle or build
Either in woods or field;
For shame, what shall I say?

That now, thus-wise in mine old days
Have wed a young wench for my wife--
I cannot cross two passageways!
Now Lord, how long shall I lead this
life?
My bones are as heavy as lead,
And may not stand in stead,
As you may see full right.
Now, Lord, guide my poor head,
Or soon drive me to dead.
You may best stop this strife.

Full bitterly may I bemoan
The way I in the temple went.
It was for me a bad bargain;
For pity may I ever repent.
For there came the command
That single men should stand,
Assembled by assent.
And each one a dry wand
On high held in his hand--
And I knew not what it meant!

Among all others, the one bore I;
It flourished fair, and flowers spread;
And they told me, for this, that I
With a wife should soon be wed!
The bargain I made there,
I now regret full sore;
I am discomforted.
It casts me now in care,
For I might evermore
The single life have led!
Her works have made my cheeks all
wet.

I am beguiled! How, I know not.
My young wife is with child full great!
That gives me now, sorrow unsought.
That reproof has almost slain me--
For if any man arraign me
As to how this thing was wrought--
To lie, if I should pain me,
The law stands hard again' me.
To death I must be brought!

Yet vile it seems, on the other side,
My wife with any man to defame.
Whichever of the two I bide
Holds no escape without great shame.
The child, I know, is not mine.
That reproof gives me pain,
And makes me flee from home.
I stake my life herein:
She is a clean virgin
For my part, without blame.

But...well I know through prophecy
A maiden clean should bear a child...
But it is not her, certainly!
Therefore I know I am beguiled.
And why would not some young man
take her?
For sure I think I must forsake her.
Into some woods wild,
Thus I think to steal away.
God shield that wild beasts should slay
That bird, so meek and mild.

Of my wending I'll no one warn.
Nevertheless, it is my intent
To ask her who got her that bairn;
I would know that before I went.

All hail! God be herein!

MAID 1:
Welcome, by God's dear might.

JOSEPH:
Where is that young virgin,
Mary, my bird so bright?

For pity, my heart is rife!
Alas, why wrought you so,
Mary, my wedded wife?

MARY:
To my witness, great God I call,
That in his mind wrought never amiss-

JOSEPH:
Whose is the child you are withal?

MARY:
Yours, sir, and the King's of Bliss.

JOSEPH:
Oh yea, and how then?
Nay, wondrous tidings then is this-
Excuse them well, these women can!
But Mary, all that you see
Will know your works are wan.
Your womb shall still betray
You, that you have met with man.

As you would thrive, say whose it is.

MARY:
Sir, it is yours, and God's own will.

JOSEPH:
Nay, I have nought to do with this!
Name it no more to me, be still!
You know as well as I
That fleshly, you and I
Did never such deeds so ill.
Look you did no folly
Before me, privily,
Your fair maidenhead to spill.

But who is the father? Tell me his
name.

MARY:
None but yourself.

JOSEPH:
Let be, for
shame!
I did it never, you foolish dame, by book
and bell!

Blameless, I would bear this blame if
once you tell.
For I wrought never, in word or deed,
A thing to mar thy maidenhead,
To touch me till.
Now, for such care is little need;
As though my own, I would it feed
If all be still.

Therefore, the father tell me, Mary.

MARY:
But God and you, I know of none.

JOSEPH:
Ah, such sayings make me sorry.
With great mourning may I complain.
Therefore, be not so bold;
Such tales should not be told,
But hold you still as stone.
You are young, and I am old;
I could not, even if I would.
Those games for me are gone.

Therefore, tell me in privacy-
Whose is the child within you now?
For certain, none shall know but we.
I fear the law as much as thou.

MARY:
Now great God, of his might,
Who accomplishes all things right,
Meekly to you I bow.
Rue on this weary wight,
That, in his heart, might light
The truth to trust and know.

JOSEPH:
Who had your maidenhead, Mary? Can
you bring it to mind?

MARY:
Forsooth, I am a maiden clean.

JOSEPH:
No, you're speaking now against kind!
Such a thing no man could mean.
A maiden to be with child?
These words from you are wild!
She is not born, I ween!

MARY:
Joseph, you are beguiled.
With sin was I never defiled.
God's word in me is seen.

JOSEPH:
God's word? Oh, Mary, God us help!
But surely that child was never ours
two.
But even if women should need much
help,
Still, they would let no man know of
their woe.

MARY:
Truly it is God's hand,
[The maker of sea and sand.]
From this I shall never go.

JOSEPH:
Ah, Mary, take away your hand.
Further will I understand;
Yet I trust it is not so.

The truth from me you may retain;
The child-bearing you cannot hide.
But sit here till I come again.
I...have an errand here beside.

MARY:
Now great God show you this,
And mend you of your miss
Of me, what so betide.
As he is king of bliss,
Send you some sign of this,
In truth that you might bide.

JOSEPH:
Now, Lord God, that all things may
At your own will both do and dress,
Show me now some ready way
To walk here in this wilderness.
Before I pass this hill,
Do with me what God will,
Either more or less.
Here shall I bide full still
Till I have slept my fill,
My heart so heavy is.

ANGEL:
Awaken, Joseph, and better keep
Your Mary, who is your fellow good.

JOSEPH:
Ah, I am weary, leave, let me sleep.
I have walked and wandered in this
wood.

ANGEL:
Rise up! And sleep no more!
You make her heart full sore,
Who loves you as she should!

JOSEPH:
Whe, now this is hardly fair!
For I am caught both here and there,
And nowhere rest I could....

Say-what are thou?! Tell me this thing!

ANGEL:
I am called Gabriel; from Heaven, God's
angel;
I have taken your Mary into my
keeping.
And I am sent here for this bidding to
tell:
In loyal wedlock, lead you!
Leave her not, I forbid you!
No sin must you mention,
But to her, fast, now speed you,
And of her, nought fear you.
It is God's son of Heaven.

The child that shall be born of her,
It is conceived of the Holy Ghost;
It brings us joy and bliss forever,
And to mankind, of all, the most.
Jesus his name you'll call,
For such will him befall
As you shall see, in haste.
His people save he shall
From evils and trials all
Which now ensnare them fast.

JOSEPH:
Angel, is this truth you say?

ANGEL:

Yea, and for a token right:
Go forth to Mary, your wife always;
Bring her to Bethlehem tonight.
There shall a child born be;
God's son of Heaven is he,
And of all men most in might.

JOSEPH:

Now, Lord God, full well is me
That ever I this sight should see!
I never was so light!

But...since I would have her refused,
And blamed the one who ever was
clear,
I must pray her to hold me excused,
As some men do, with full good cheer.
Say, Mary, wife,...how fare you?

MARY:

The better, sir, for you.
Why stand you there? Come near.

JOSEPH:

My back fain would I bow,
And ask forgiveness now.
I hope you will me hear.

MARY:

Forgiveness, sir? Let be, for shame-
Such words should all good women
lack.

JOSEPH:

Yea, Mary, I am to blame
For words that some time past I spoke.
But gather now all our gear,
And such poor weeds as we wear,
And put them in a pack.
To Bethlehem I must it bear,
For little things cause women care;
Help up now, on my back.

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14. The Tile Thatchers' Play: The Nativity

JOSEPH:

Almighty God in Trinity,
I pray, oh Lord, for your great might:
Unto your simple servant see
Here, in this place where we are set
Alone, alas.
Lord, grant us good harbour this night
Within this place.

For we have sought both up and down,
Through diverse streets in this city.
So many people have come to
town
That we can nowhere harboured be,
There is such press.
Indeed, I can no succour see
But to board us with these beasts

And if we here all night abide,
Exposed we shall be, in this shed.
The walls are down on every side;
The roof is rent above our heads.
As I hope for peace too,
Say Mary, daughter, what's your
advice?
What shall we do?

For in great need we now are led,
As you yourself the truth may see.
For here are neither cloth nor bed,
And we are weak, and all weary,
And need to rest.
Now gracious God, for your mercy,
Advise us best.

MARY:

God will advise full well, you'll see;
Therefore, Joseph, be of good
cheer.
For born in this place He will be
Who shall save us from sorrows severe,
Both even and morn.
Sir, you know well, the time is near
He will be born.

JOSEPH:

Then we shall need to stay here still
Here in this same place all this night.

MARY:

Yea sir, in truth,, it is God's will.

JOSEPH:

Then I wish we had some light,
Whatever befall.
It grows full dark within my sight
And cold withal.

I will go get us light to see
And try some fuel with me to bring.

MARY:

May Almighty God you govern and lead
As he is sovereign of every thing
By his might and main;
And lend me grace by his loving
Myself to ordain.

Now in my soul great joy have I;
I am all clad in comfort clear.
Now will be born of my body
Both God and man together here.
Blessed must he be.
Jesus my son that is so dear,
Now born is he.

Hail, my lord God, hail prince of peace;
Hail, my father, and hail, my son;
Hail, sovereign Lord, all sins to cease;
Hail, God and man on earth to run;
Hail, through whose might
All this world was first begun:
Darkness and light.

Son, as I am a simple subject of thine
Permit, sweet son, I pray to you
That I might take thee in these arms of
mine,
In this poor weed to cover you.
Grant me your bliss,
As I am your mother chosen to be
In faithfulness.

JOSEPH:

Ah, Lord God, but the weather is cold!
The frostiest freeze that ever I felt.

I pray, God help those that are old;
Especially those that are unwell
So may I say.
Now good God, be now my help,
As best you may.

Ah, Lord God, what light is this,
That comes shining thus suddenly?
I cannot say, as I have bliss.
When I come home unto Marie
Then shall I ask her.
Ah, now come I, God praised be.

MARY:
You are welcome sir.

JOSEPH:
Say Mary, daughter, what cheer with
thee?

MARY:
Right good, Joseph, as was always.

JOSEPH:
O Mary, what sweet thing is that on
your knee?

MARY:
It is my son, the truth to say,
That is so good.

JOSEPH:
I'm glad I lived to see this day,
To see this food.

I marvel much at this, His light
That shines so brightly in this place.
In truth, it is a wondrous sight.

MARY:
This has he ordained of grace,
My son so young:
A star to be shining out a space
At his birthing.

For Balaam told full long before,
How a star should rise full high
And of a maiden should be born;
A son that shall our saving be
From cares keen.

It is my gracious son indeed,
Whom Balaam had foreseen.

JOSEPH:
Now welcome, flower fairest of hue.
I honour you with main and might.
Hail, my maker; hail, Christ Jesu;
Hail, royal king, root of all right;
Hail, saviour;
Hail, my lord, gleamer of light;
Hail, blessed flower.

MARY:
Now, lord that all this world shall win
To you, my son, this do I say:
Here is no bed to lay you in.
Therefore my dear son, I do pray,
Since it is so,
That here in this crib I might you lay
Between these beasts two.

And I shall wrap you, my own dear
child,
With such poor clothes as we have
here.

JOSEPH:
O Mary, behold these beasts so mild:
They offer praise in their manner,
Like they were men.
In truth, it seems well by their
cheer,
Their lord they ken.

MARY:
Their lord they know, I witness well.
They worship him with might and
main.
The weather is cold, as you can tell
They want to warm him where he's lain
With their warm breath;
And breathe on him as it is plain
To warm him with.

O, now sleeps my son; blessed must he
be
And lies full warm, these beasts
between.

JOSEPH:

O now is fulfilled, indeed I see
What Habbacuk in mind did mean,
And preached by prophecy:
He said our Saviour should be seen
Between the beasts to lie,

And now I see the same in sight.

MARY:

Yea sir, indeed this same is he.

JOSEPH:

Honour and worship both day and
night,
Everlasting lord, be done to thee,
Always as worthy;

And Lord, to your service I promise me
With all my heart wholly.

MARY:

You merciful maker most mighty,
My God, my Lord, my son so free,
Your hand-maiden in truth am I;
And to your service I promise me
With all my heart entire.
Your blessing now I beseech,
Now grant all those who are here.

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15. The Chandlers' Play: The Shepherds

SHEPHERD 1:

Brother in haste, take heed and hear
What I will speak and specify:
Since we walk thus far over here,
What moves my mood, now tell will I:
Our forefathers, faithful in fear
Hosea and Isaiah, know I
Proved that a prince without peer
Should descend in a lady, thereby
Mankind thus to purify,
To heal the forlorn.
And in Bethlehem close hereby
Is that same boy to be born.

SHEPHERD 2:

Ere he be born in that burg nearby
Of Bethlehem, brother, I have heard say
A star would shine out and signify
Delightful gleams as bright as day.
This text was shown to my own eye
By men who are witty and learned in
our way.
With blessed blood, he shall us buy.
He should come here by way of a maid
And once I heard my father say:
When he of her was born,
She'd be as clean a maid
As ever she was before.

SHEPHERD 3:

Ah, merciful Maker, much is your
might
That thus your servants may see;
Might we once look upon that light,
Gladder brothers no men might be.
I have heard say, by that same light
The children of Israel shall be made
free,
The force of the fiend will fall in fight,
And all of his power excluded should
be.
Wherefore brother, I counsel that we
Fly fast over these fells
To try to find our sheep
And speak of something else.

SHEPHERD 1:

Hey, Hud!

SHEPHERD 2:

Hey, how?

SHEPHERD 1:

Listen to me.

SHEPHERD 2:

Whoah, man, you go mad out of might!

SHEPHERD 1:

Hey, Coll!

SHEPHERD 3:

What care has
come into thee?

SHEPHERD 1:

Step you forth and stand by me right,
And tell me then,
If ever you saw such a sight.

SHEPHERD 3:

I? Nay, truly, nor never no man.

SHEPHERD 2:

Say fellows what - have you found any
feast?
It fits I should have my part, indeed!

SHEPHERD 1:

Hey, Hud, behold in the east
A wondrous sight then you shall see
Up in the sky.

SHEPHERD 2:

Hey, tell me men, among us three
What makes you stare so steadily?

SHEPHERD 3:

As long as we have herdsman been
And kept these cattle in this rough-
So wondrous a sight was never seen

SHEPHERD 1:

Hey! No, Colle, it comes new enough!
That can we find.
This star with piercing rays so keen
What think you two that it might
mean?

SHEPHERD 3:
Ah, now is come the time foretold,
By ancient fathers from of old,
That in the winter's night so cold,
A maid should bear a flower bold.
Now it's fulfilled.
For now in her these words unfold,
And God is born of maid on mold.

SHEPHERD 2:
Beloved be God, the most in might,
That gives us grace to see this sight.
We praise him now as it is right
And kneel we here this holy night.
Almighty Lord,
We thank you for this star so bright
That through thick darkness sends
such light.

[The angels sing "Gloria in excelsis
Deo"]

SHEPHERD 2:
Well, this is a wondrous note on high
I think I heard the angels' song.
Did you hear heavn'ly lullaby?
What can it mean that thus is sung?
What, shall we try?

SHEPHERD 3:
It means some marvel among us
Full hardly now say I.

SHEPHERD 1:
What it should mean? That know not
ye
For all that you can gape and moon:
I can sing it as well as he
And as a test it shall be soon
Proved, ere we pass
If ye will help, sing on! Let's see
For it was thus:
[And then they sing]

SHEPHERD 2:
Ha ha! This was a merry note!
By the death that I shall die,
I have so cracked my throat,
My lips are nearly dry

SHEPHERD 3:
You boast, my boys.
Now, what it was, to know would I
That made this noble noise.

SHEPHERD 1:
An angel brought us tidings new:
A babe in Bethlehem is born,
Of whom did speak our prophesies
true.
And bade us meet him there this morn.
That mild of mood-
I would give him both hat and horn,
If I could find that noble food.

SHEPHERD 3:
Him to find, we have no doubt,
And I shall tell the reason why:
Yonder star will point him out.

SHEPHERD 2:
Yeah, you say the truth, let's go thereby
Him to honour,
And making mirth with voices high
With song we seek our saviour.

[And then they sing.]

SHEPHERD 1:
Brothers, be all blithe and glad
Here's the burg where we should be

SHEPHERD 2:
In that same place are we now had;
Therefore I will seek and see.
Such chance of weal, herdsman ne'er
had;
Lo, here is the house-and here is he.

SHEPHERD 3:
Yes, indeed, this is the same,
Look, where that lord is laid,
Between two beasts so tame,
Just as the angel said.

SHEPHERD 1:

The angel said that he should save
The world, and all that live therein.
Therefore, if I should something crave,
To worship him I will begin,
Since I am but a simple knave,
Although I come of courteous kin.
Lo, here such baubles as I have,
A simple brooch with a bell of tin
At your bosom to be.
And when you shall wield all,
Good son, forget not me,
If any good befall.

SHEPHERD 2:

Oh son, that shall save both sea and
sand,
See to me, since I have sought.
I am too poor to cross your hand
As my heart would, and as I ought.
Two cobble-nuts upon a band-
See, little babe, what I have brought.
And when you're lord of all the land,

Do good again, forget me not.
For I have heard declared,
By cunning clerks and clean,
That bounty asks reward,
Now you know what I mean

SHEPHERD 3:

Now look on me, my lord so dear,
Although I shove not forth with these
You are a prince without a peer
I have no present which could please.
But look, a horn spoon I have here,
And it will harbour forty peas.
This will I give you with good cheer;
Such novelty may not displease.
Farewell you sweet swain
God grant us long life so,
We take us home again,
And making mirth we go.

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16: The Masons' and Goldsmiths' Play: Herod and the Magi

HEROD:

The clouds clapped in clearness that
these climates enclose
(Jupiter and Jove, Mars and Mercury
amid),
Rushing over my realm in rows, make
me rejoice,
Blending brutal blasts to blow when I
bid.
Saturn, my subject, that subtly lies hid,
Listens at my liking and lays himself
low.
The roof of the red sky of clouds I do
rid.
Thunderbolts thickly by the thousands
I throw
When I like.
Venus his voice to me owes,
That princes to play on him pick.

The prince of planets, proud in his
light,
Shall brace forth his beams to make
blithe my body.
The moon at my messages musters his
might,
And Kaisars in castles great kindness
give me.
Lords and ladies attend me lovingly,
For I am fairer of face, and fresher on
fold
(The sooth I shall say), times seven and
sixty
Than glorious gules, that gayer is than
gold
In price.
How think ye these tales that I told?
I am worthy, witty, and wise.

1 SOLDIER:

All kings to your crown may clearly
commend
Your law and your lordship as lodestar
on height.
What traitor untrue that will not
attend,

You shall lay him down low, far from
brightness and light.

2 SOLDIER:

What faker, in faith, that does you
offend,
We shall set him some soreness, that
sot, in your sight.

HEROD:

In wealth shall I work you to dwell, ere I
wend,
You warriors worthy, both witty and
wight.

But you know well, cunning knights in
counsel,
That my region so royal is ruled well, at
rest.
I am aware of no one in this world that
does dwell
That forges any felony; with force
they're bound fast.
Arrest ye those ribalds who unruly are
running!
Be they kings or caitiffs, for care make
them cursed,
Yea, and work them to wail for woe, ere
day's waning.
What brat that is brawling, his brain
look you burst,
And ding ye him down!

1 SOLDIER:

Sir, what fool in faith you will feeze,
That sot full soon myself shall him
seize.

2 SOLDIER:

We shall have no doubt to do him dis-
ease,
But with countenances cruel we shall
crack here his crown.

HEROD:

My son that is seemly, how seem to you
these saws?

How comely these knights do converse
in this case.

SON:

Father, if they like not to listen to your
laws,
As traitors untrue you must teach them
their place;
For, father, for unkindness you give
them no cause.

HEROD:

Fairness befall you, my fair son, so
handsome of face.
And, knights, I command, whoever
towards dole draws,
Like chevaliers those churls you shall
chastise and chase;
And dread you no doubt.

SON:

Father, I shall fell them in a fight,
What rank ones that rob you of your
right.

1 SOLDIER:

With dints to death we indict
Him who listens not to your laws, that
lout!

1 KING:

Ah, Lord that lives, everlasting light,
I love thee ever with heart and hand--
Thou, who has made me see this sight
Which my kindred hoped to
understand.
They said, a star with beams so bright
Out of the east should stably stand;
And that it should mark the wondrous
might
Of the one who should be lord in land--
Who people from sin should save.
And surely I shall say,
God, grant me grace to have
Your guidance on the way.

2 KING:

Almighty God, who all has wrought,
I honour thee as is worthy-

Thou, who with brightness has me
brought

Out of my realm, rich Araby.
I shall not cease till I have sought
What stunning thing this shall signify.
God, grant me luck so that I might
Have grace to get good company,
And my comfort increase
With thy star, shining sheen.
For surely, I shall not cease
Till I know what it mean.

3 KING:

Lord God, that all good has begun,
And all may end, both good and ill,
That made for man both moon and sun,
And established yon star to stand stone
still:
Till I the cause may clearly expound,
God guide me with his worthy will--
I think I have some fellows found,
My yearning faithfully to fulfill.
Sirs, God save thee and thee,
And keep you ever from woe.

1 KING:

Amen, so mote it be;
God save you, sir, also.

3 KING:

Sirs, with your will, I would you pray
To tell me some of your intent:
Whither you go forth on this way,
And, from what countries you both
went?

2 KING:

Full gladly, sir, I shall you say.
A sudden sight to us was sent:
A royal star that rose ere day,
Before us, in the firmament.
That made us leave our homes,
The matter for to prove.

3 KING:

Surely, sirs, I saw the same
That makes us thus to move;

For, sirs, I have heard tell, certain,
It means some marvels shall betide.

Further knowledge I would gain;
That makes me on this road to ride.

1 KING:
Sir, your fellowship to attain
We would be glad. Now side by side,
God grant us, ere we come again,
Encouragement this wintertide.
Sir, here is Jerusalem
To search before we go.
Beyond is Bethlehem;
There shall we seek also.

3 KING:
Sirs, you must well understand
(For wisdom now we all do need),
Sir Herod is king of this land,
And makes the laws, his land to lead.

1 KING:
Sir, since he now is near at hand,
Unto his help we must take heed.
If in his blessing we may stand,
Then we may without fear proceed.

2 KING:
To have leave of the lord
Is reasonable, indeed.

3 KING:
To that let us accord,
And go, with all good speed.

MESSENGER:
My lord, Sir Herod, king with crown!

HEROD:
Peace, dastard, in the devil's despite!

MESSENGER:
My lord, some news has come to town!

HEROD:
What? Vile villain, would you fight?
Go, beat this boy, and ding him down!

2 SOLDIER:
Lord, messengers no man should spite;
It may be for your own renown.

HEROD:
That would I hear. Tell on, then, quite.

MESSENGER:
My lord, I saw this morn
Three kings, speaking together
Of a babe that is born;
And they agreed to come hither.

HEROD:
Three kings, indeed?

MESSENGER:
Sir, so I say,
For I myself saw them come here.

1 COUNSELLOR:
My lord, do question him, I pray!

HEROD:
Say, fellow, are they far or near?

MESSENGER:
My lord, they will be here today;
I know it well, and never fear.

HEROD:
Let me be dressed in rich array,
And every man make merry cheer,
That no sign should be seen
But of friendship and goodwill,
'Till we know what they mean:
Whether good or ill.

1 KING:
The lord that lends everlasting light
Which has us led out of our land,
Keep thee, sir king and comely knight,
And all thy folk that here do stand.

HEROD:
Mahound, my god, the most in might,
That has my health all in his hand,
May he save you, sirs seemly in sight.
Now, give us news to understand.

2 KING:
Some shall we say to you, sire:
A star stood us before
That made us soon enquire

Of one that is new-born.

HEROD:

New-born? That burden I think bad;
And surely, unwise men you were
To leap over land to look for a lad.
Say, when did you lose him? Not long
before?
All wise men will think you mad;
Therefore, mention this no more.

3 KING:

Yes, surely, such heartening have we
had,
We will not cease 'till we come there.

HEROD:

This would be a wondrous thing.
Say, what babe might this be?

1 KING:

Indeed, he shall be king
Of Jews and of Jewry.

HEROD:

King? In the Devil's name, dogs, you
lie!
New well I see you rant and rave.
By any shimmering of the sky
How should you know either king or
knave?

SON:

Nay, he is king, and none but he;
That you shall know if that you crave.
And he is judge of all Jewry,
To speak or spoil, to slay or save.

HEROD:

Such tricks may greatly grieve:
To witness that which never was.

2 KING:

Now, lord, we ask but leave
By your power to pass-

HEROD:

Where to go, in the Devil's name?
To look for a lad, here, in my lands?
False villains! Unless you get you home

You shall be beaten and bound in
bands!

2 COUNSELLOR:

My lord, to defeat this foul defame
Let all this wrath run off now; and
With sober mind ask them their aim.
Thus shall you clearly understand
Their mind and their meaning;
And take good heed thereto.

HEROD:

I thank thee for this thing;
So, surely, shall I do.

Now, kings, to catch all care away,
Since you are come from kith and kin:
Against our law, now, nothing say
On pain of losing life and limb.
And so that you the truth will say,
I grant you leave to pass herein.
And if your words please me, I may
Myself go with you. Now, begin.

1 KING:

Sir king, we all accord
And say a babe is born
That shall be king and lord,
And heal those that are torn.

2 KING:

Sir, you need wonder at no thing
Of this same matter that gives us news;
For Balaam said a star should spring
From Jacob's kin; that is, the Jews.

3 KING:

Isaiah says a maiden young
Should bear a babe, among the
Hebrews,
Who of all countries shall be king,
And govern all that on Earth grows;
Emmanuel is his name,
That is, "God's son of Heaven,"
And indeed this is the same
That we here to you mention.

1 KING:

Sir, the proven prophet Hosée
Did prophecy in town and tower.

A maiden of Israel indeed, said he,
Shall bear one like to the lily flower.
He means, a child conceived shall be
Without the seed of man's succour,
And his mother, a maiden free,
And he, both son and saviour.

2 KING:
What the fathers said before,
No man has the power to curse.

HEROD:
Alas, I am no more;
This waxes worse and worse.

1 COUNSELLOR:
My lord, be ye nothing distressed;
This fix to an end shall well be brought.
Bid them go forth, and kindly request
The truth of this that they have sought,
To tell it to you-thus you shall test
Whether their tales be true or not.
Then, you shall quickly them arrest,
And make all waste that they have wrought.

HEROD:
Now surely, this is well said.
This eases all my pain.
Sir kings, I hold me paid
Of all your purpose plain.
Go forth, your mission to fulfill,
For Bethlehem is here at hand.
And ask now keenly of good and ill
Of him that should be lord in land.
And, come again then me untill,
And tell me truly how it does stand.
To honour him would be my will;
Thus you must surely understand.

2 KING:
Surely, sir, we shall you say
The truth of that same child,
In all the haste we may.

2 COUNSELLOR:
Farewell! You are beguiled.

HEROD:
Now surely this is a clever plot.

Now shall they truly take their way
And tell me of that trivial tot,
And all their counsel they shall say.
If it be true, then I shall not
Hold off for gold; I shall them slay.
But let us go and play somewhat
Elsewhere, until return they may.
I think that shall avail;
Yet none must know. For these
Three kings we must not fail
To murder as we please.

[Then Herod exits, and the three kings
enter again to make their offerings.]

1 KING:
Ah, sirs, for sorrow what shall I say?
Where is our sign? I see it not.

2 KING:
No more do I. Now dare I say
That in our going some wrong is
wrought.

3 KING:
Unto that prince I advise we pray
Who to us sent his sign unsought,
To let us know a certain way
That we may find him as we ought.

1 KING:
Ah, sirs! I see it stand
Above where he is born!
Lo! Here is the house at hand;
We have not failed this morn.

HANDMAID:
Whom seek you, sirs, on journeys wild,
With talking and traveling to and fro?
Here dwells a woman with her child;
Her husband also, and no more.

2 KING:
We seek a ruler and a child;
His certain sign has told us so.
And his mother, a maiden mild;
Here we hope to find the two.

HANDMAID:
Come near, good sirs, and see;

Your way to its end is brought.
Behold, sirs; hear and see
The same that you have sought.

1 KING:
Loved be that lord by night and day
Who has us guided courteously
To travel many a difficult way,
And come to this pure company.

2 KING:
Let us make now no more delay,
But bring us forth our treasury
And ordained gifts of good array,
To worship him; this is worthy.

3 KING:
He is worthy to wield
All worship, wealth, and win.
Brother, we do yield
To you; you shall begin.

1 KING:
Hail, the fairest on earth, shield of
mankind;
From the fiend and his forces faithfully
us defend.
Hail, the best that shall be born, to
unbind
All the people that down to Hell's pains
did descend.
Hail; mark us as your men and keep us
in mind
As your might is on earth, our misease
to amend.
Hail, pure one, that comes to us of a
king's kind
To be king of this land, as we do
comprehend.
And since it shall be in this wise,
Yourself I have sought soon, I say you,
With gold that is greatest of price;
Please accept now this present, I pray
you.

2 KING:
Hail, food that your folk fully may feed;
Hail, flower fairest, that never shall
fade;

Hail, son that is sent of that very same
seed
That shall save us from the sin that our
fathers had.
Hail, mild one, for you marked us for
favour indeed;
Of a maiden unblemished your mother
you made;
Into her, through the grace of your
Godhead,
Like a gleam in a glass you did glide
and were glad.
And since you shall sit and shall deem,
To Hell or to Heaven to give us,
Incense does your honour beseem.
My son, see to your subjects and save
us.

3 KING:
Hail, babe that is best for our bales to
beat;
Beaten and bound shall you be for our
debt.
Hail, faithul friend; we fall to your feet;
Your Father's folk from the fiend may
you get.
Hail, man that is made, your own men
to meet,
As you and your mother with joy are
thus met.
Hail, duke that drives death under his
feet;
When your deeds are done, die you
must yet.
And since your body buried shall be,
This myrrh I will give to your graving.
This gift is not of great degree,
Yet receive it, and see to our saving.

MARY:
Sir kings, you travel not in vain.
As you have sought, here you may find;
For I conceived my son certain
Without the sin of man in mind,
And bore him here without any pain
Where pain is the part of all
womankind.
God's angel in his greeting plain
Said he should comfort all humankind;
Therefore, have no doubt at all

Here for to have your boon;
I shall witness fill well
To all that is said and done.

1 KING:
For solaces certain now may we sing;
All is performed for which we prayed.
But, good babe, give us thy blessing,
For a good fortune before you is laid.

2 KING:
Let us return to Herod the king;
To hear of this he shall be repaid,
And shall come himself and make
offering
Unto this child, for so he said.

3 KING:
I suggest we rest somewhat
For to maintain our might,
And then do as we ought
Unto the king and knight.

ANGEL:
Now, courteous kings, to me be attent,
And turn away quickly, yourselves to
defend.
From God himself thus am I sent
To warn you as your faithful friend.

Herod the king in malice has meant
To destroy you all; your lives he will
end.

And so, to avoid that man malevolent,
By other ways God shall you send
Even to your own country.
And if you ask him a boon,
Your protector shall he be
For this that you have done.

1 KING:
Ah, Lord, I love you fervently.
Sirs, God has kindly warned us three;
His angel here now heard have I,
And how he said.

2 KING:
Sir, so did we.
He said Herod is our enemy,
And readies himself our killer to be,
With feigned falsehood. Therefore I
Suggest that from his force we flee.

3 KING:
Sirs, fast I suggest we go
Each to his own country;
May the source of wisdom show
Us the way, and with you be.