

Christmas Eve: Holy Trinity Church: December 24, 2016

Children's Mass: *Artaban, the Fourth Wise Man*

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Boys and girls, we all know the story of the three wise men of the East who came to Bethlehem to worship the baby Jesus. Well, this is the story of the other wise man, the fourth wise man. Like the three wise men we know so well this fourth wise man was a Persian, an astronomer, a doctor, and a theologian. He studied about God.

His name is Artaban. He has done well in life and he lives in a palace where one day he calls several of his friends together to tell them that he has studied the skies and a new celestial phenomenon has occurred. From the movement of the stars and their alignment the time has come just as the scriptures predicted for a savior to be born who will save all God's children. A star will

shine brightly in the East announcing His coming and leading all who believe to the place of the King's birth. Artaban's friends are not impressed, even when he tells them that Casper, Melchior, and Balthazar all agree with him and are willing to give up everything they own to follow the star until they find the Christ Child. He tells them that he, too, has sold everything to make this trip with the exception of three very precious gems, one sapphire, one ruby, and one pearl. He and his three friends will meet and travel by caravan to go see the savior. Artaban then asks his friends gathered in his palace, if they would like to go too. They tell him he is a fool and a dreamer to do this and all of them leave shaking their heads. Only his father supports him and says, "My son, it is better to follow even the shadow of the best, than to be content with the worst; go in peace and seek your king."

Artaban has only 10 days to meet his friends Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar at the appointed place to join them and the caravan. He rides his fastest horse and feels confident that he can make the rendezvous in plenty of time, but something terrible happens. After traveling across mountain ranges, deserts, fertile fields, and desolate passes he is within hours of joining the caravan when he spots a man lying in the road. The man has been beaten badly by robbers and lies by the side of the road dying. The man needs help or he will die. Artaban is a doctor but if he stops to help he will miss the rendezvous

with Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar and the caravan. But, if he leaves the man he will die. He stays with the beaten man. He treats him. He cares for his wounds and feeds him. When the man is better and regains consciousness, he is told of Artaban's journey to find the Christ child. The man tells him that he should go to humble little Bethlehem, not the great and holy temple city of Jerusalem for the birth of the Christ child saying: "May God bring you safely to your king, because you have had pity on a man in need."

Because Artaban missed the other three wise men, he realizes that he will have to spend his first gem to hire a caravan to take him to Bethlehem. But he learns through a kind woman that he is too late there also. King Herod's soldiers are coming to kill all the baby boys and that Mary, Joseph, and the baby have escaped from Bethlehem and have gone to Egypt where they will be safe. Just then Herod's soldiers break down the woman's door and begin to reach for her baby boy. Artaban reaches into his pocket and bribes Herod's soldiers with his second gem, the ruby. The soldier's greedy hands reach out to grab it and the baby is spared.

Now Artaban's second gift for the baby Jesus is gone. Artaban hangs his head in great pain and disappointment. His plan to give his gifts to the Christ-Child is slipping through his fingers. With the ruby gone, only the pearl remains.

But the young mother whose child Artaban saved says gently, “Because you saved the life of my little one, may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lifts up his face upon you and give you peace.”

From that time on Artaban searches for the Christ-Child. He follows rumors, some true and some false. As the years begin to go by one very wise and learned rabbi tells him “the king you seek will not be found in a palace or among the rich. You must look for him among the poor, the outcast, the sick, the suffering, the dying and the very sad. That is where you will find the Messiah, the Son of God.”

And so Artaban continues the search mile after mile year after year. Along the way he feeds the hungry and cares for the poor. He heals the sick and comforts the dying. Thirty-three years pass, his hair is now white, his eyes are weary and he arrives back in Jerusalem an old man. It is very crowded because it is the season of Passover. And then he hears terrible talk from the crowd that they are going just outside the city walls to a hill called Calvary to see the crucifixion of two robbers and the man called Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, and the savior of all people. Artaban is horrified. He has spent his life searching for him and now the Christ-Child is condemned to

death. He must do something and quickly. He pulls out of his pocket the pearl, his very last gem stone and he thinks maybe, just maybe, I can ransom my last gift, my pearl of great value, for the life of Jesus.

Araban takes off running in the direction of the crowd but he sees another group of soldiers dragging a young girl down the street. She is frantically screaming out for someone to help her. She is being sold into slavery because her father has not paid his bills. She grabs Artaban's arm and begs him to help her. Slowly, Artaban reaches down and pulls the pearl of great value from his pocket and buys her freedom. At that very moment the sky turns dark and the earth begins to tremble. There are earthquakes everywhere. A very heavy slate tile is shaken loose from a roof top hitting Artaban on the head. He falls to the ground. He is bleeding, breathless and pale. The young girl he just saved from slavery leans over him and hears a small, still voice speaking. Old Artaban's lips begin to move as if he is in a conversation and then the girl hears Artaban say, "Not so my Lord, for when did I see you hungry and feed you, when did I see you thirsty and give you a drink, when did I take you in as a stranger, when did I clothe you when you had nothing to wear, when did I heal you when you were sick and hurt, when did I free you from jail?" "I have searched for you for 33 years and I have never seen your face?" This time the voice the young girl heard was much louder: "Truly I say

unto you, Artaban whenever you did this for the least important as these, my brothers and sisters, you did it for me.” A calm radiance of wonder and joy lit up Artaban’s face and his pale and lifeless face shone like the sun. He took one last breath and his journey on this earth was over. All of Artaban’s treasures had been accepted by the Christ child. The fourth wise man now at last had found his king.

So, boys and girls the secret of Artaban’s story is to keep Christmas in your hearts all year long and do good for all the people you meet. You might ask, well where are all these people who need me? Why not start your search in your home with your own family by being respectful to mommy and daddy. Be patient and kind to your brothers and sister. Why not look in your classroom and throughout your school and search out the sad kid, the kid who is always picked upon, bullied and laughed at? That person could use a good friend like you. You could change that kid’s life. Why not search your neighborhood for the old man or woman who is all alone who would simply enjoy a warm hello, a smile or a wave from you as you pass by? Listen to that quiet little voice inside of you. It is in your heart that you will hear Jesus speaking to you. My dearest boys and girls, Christmas is all about Jesus being born in your hearts. The Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Jesus the Christ is a kingdom of the heart. You know, there are many people everywhere, all

over the world, who need to see the face of Jesus in your face. There are many people everywhere, all over the world, who need to hear the voice of Jesus in your voice. There are many people everywhere, all over the world, who need to feel the love of Jesus found in your heart. You know boys and girls, Jesus lives within all of you right now. So, listen to your hearts and you will find and hear that tiny little voice of the baby Jesus calling you. Just imagine that. Wouldn't you love for people to find Jesus every day of the year because of you? So, how do we do that? Jesus wants to see all of you live Christmas every day by being good and kind and caring and loving to all those you meet because when you do this, you do it to Jesus. If you do that you will be beautiful in God's eyes just like Artaban! Amen.