

## Twelfth Day

By Beth Beall

The "Twelve Days of Christmas" refers to the days from December 25th through January 6th. On January 6<sup>th</sup> (the twelfth day), we remember the wise men who followed a star to find the baby Jesus. Let's listen to a story from one of the wise men, and try out some of the traditions associated with "Three Kings Day."



### For

Just for Kids

### Season

Winter

### Needed

Story on page three below, paper and drawing materials, *or* cake mix, a dried bean, homemade crown & scepter (optional), *or* a piece of chalk, *or* paper and pen.

### Activity Plan

1. Prayer helps us to quiet down and listen for God. You may want to begin by saying the following prayer silently or aloud. Or, simply say some words that come from your heart.

*God of light, thank you for sending Jesus to be your light in the world. Help us to follow that light. Amen.*

2. Read the story on page three below. The story is entitled, "Star Light, Star Bright." You might read it on your own, or you might prefer to read it with someone else.
3. After you read the story, think about one or more of the following questions on your own or with a parent or friend:
  - The star that Balthasar saw led him to Jesus. I wonder what that star looked like? If you'd like, draw a picture of how you think it might have looked.
  - Balthasar, Caspar and Melchior gave gifts to the baby king. I wonder what gift you would give to a baby king?
  - An angel appeared to the Balthasar, Caspar and Melchior, warning them not to report back to Herod. I wonder if an angel has ever come to you in a dream?
4. Both of the activities below are traditional activities associated with January 6, "Three Kings Day." Pick one to try at home!

- **Bake a Three Kings cake!** On your own or with the help of a family member, bake a simple cake. *Place a dried bean into the cake batter before you bake it.* Invite your family to eat the cake with you. Whoever finds the bean in their slice of cake is the king or queen for the day! If you want, you could make a paper crown or aluminum foil scepter in advance, and give that to the king or queen.
- **Do a House Blessing.** January 6 is a day when some people take time to ask God to bless their homes. This is because, according to tradition, the three kings entered the home of Mary, Joseph and Jesus on this day. There are two ways you can do the traditional house blessing:
  - ✓ You will need an adult's permission for this first one, and you may also need an adult's help. Take a piece of chalk, and find a place on the outside of your house where you can write something with the chalk. Some people like to write this message above their front door, but anywhere you choose is OK. On the place you select, write **"20+C+M+B+14"**. It may look like a strange math equation to your neighbors! What it really means is this: the numbers are for the year (2014, or whatever year it may be). The letters are for the first names of the three wise men: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. The letters can also refer to a Latin phrase, "Christe, Mansionem Benedicat," which means, "Christ, bless this house."

Then, on your own or with a family member, say this prayer,

*"God of love, Mary and Joseph welcomed the wise men into their home, and the wise men saw Jesus there. Help us to welcome people into our home this year, and to show them the love and light of Jesus. Amen."*

- ✓ A second way you can do this blessing is to write the letters and numbers on a piece of paper rather than on the outside of your house. Use any size paper you'd like, and write upon it **"20+C+M+B+14"**. Find a special place to put the paper in your home. Again, on your own or with a family member, say the prayer in the paragraph above.



## Star Light, Star Bright by Balthasar

I am Balthasar. People call me a king and a wise man, but I like to think of myself as a star gazer. I love stars. At night, when the sky is dark, I watch the stars come into view. The stars dance into shapes, and we give beautiful names to those constellations: Ursa Major, Orion, Cassiopeia, Cepheus, Corona Borealis, Andromeda, Pegasus, and more. From the time I was a little boy, I watched the stars at night the way a loving parent watches his newborn child. I began to keep a notebook where I drew and wrote about the stars I saw. I knew the stars lived in the heavens, but I tried to make them come alive in the pages of my little book.

One night, I saw a star I'd never seen before. My fingers rushed through the pages of my notebook as I double-checked...but no! This *was* a new star. It was like nothing in my book. The star shone with a peculiar brightness as it danced on its own high up in the sky.

I spent that night, and the next several days and nights, studying my books and maps. The wise ones from the past had written that a strange, bright star would one day appear in the sky, heralding the birth of a king to the Jewish people—a king unlike any other the world had ever known. "Could it be?" I asked myself. I was not Jewish, but I did not want to miss the opportunity to meet the greatest king ever. And so I grabbed some of my things and headed out to see where the star would lead me.

It was a long journey, full of hot days and very cold nights. More than once, I thought about turning back and returning to the land that I loved. Things took a turn for the better when I came across two other star gazers named Caspar and Melchior. Like me, they were following the bright, strange star in the heavens. In the city of Jerusalem, a king named Herod helped us. We told him we had learned that the long awaited King of the Jews had been born, and that we were trying to find him. Herod said, "Ah, yes, I see. The King of the Jews is to be born in the town of Bethlehem, the birthplace of our ancestor King David. Go there. Then come back and tell me exactly where he is, so that I, too, may visit him and give him honor."

We continued to follow the light of that star toward the town of Bethlehem. Just when we thought we were too tired to take another step, the star's light shone brilliantly over a humble home. Our hearts filled with joy! We were welcomed into the small house, and when the young parents placed their baby son into my arms, I felt as if I were holding a piece of heaven. I knelt down and gently rocked the child. "The light of the world," I whispered, "You are the light of the world. *You* are the brightest star of the heavens." Soon Caspar and Melchior were opening their bags, and we gave the baby king gifts of treasure.

We spent a few days with the family, and my heart almost broke open with the joy that I felt. On our last evening, I slept fitfully. In my dreams, I saw an angel pointing to King Herod, who held a sword in his hands. When I looked at King Herod in that dream, he scared me. The next morning at breakfast, Caspar and Melchior said that they, too, had had bad dreams about Herod. As I held the baby one last time, I said to my traveling companions, "We must not go to see Herod, for he means to harm the child." Thus we journeyed home without stopping to see Herod. As we traveled, my heart felt both joyful and heavy. I had held the greatest king in my arms. Yet why would a ruler such as Herod want to harm the baby?

I am an old man now. I have lived my life far, far away from Bethlehem. I do not know what happened to that baby, that star of heaven. Perhaps you will learn the story. Perhaps you can share it with me. If so, please send your story to "Balthasar, the Star Lover." I thank you.

