



When we think of the Wise Men, the image that often comes to mind is of three sages following a star, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh for the Baby Jesus. However, there is a fascinating and lesser-known legend: that of Artaban, the so-called “Fourth Wise Man.” This story, while not found in the Gospels, has inspired generations with its profound message about faith, compassion, and the search for God in everyday acts.

The Story of Artaban

The legend of Artaban was popularized by American writer Henry Van Dyke in his story titled *The Story of the Other Wise Man*, published in 1895. According to this narrative, Artaban was a Persian sage, like the other Magi. After observing the star that heralded the birth of the King of the Jews, he decided to embark on the journey to worship Him. He carried with him three precious gifts: a ruby, a sapphire, and a pearl of great value, which he intended to present to the Messiah.

However, on his way to meet the other three kings, Artaban encountered an injured man by the roadside. Moved by compassion, he stopped to help and sold the sapphire to cover the man’s treatment. This act of kindness delayed him, and when he arrived at the agreed meeting place, the other Magi had already departed for Bethlehem. Determined to continue, Artaban set out to find the Baby Jesus on his own.

Throughout his life, Artaban encountered many people in need. Each time he did, he sacrificed one of his gifts to help. Finally, after years of pilgrimage, he arrived in Jerusalem just as Jesus was being crucified. There, he had only the pearl left, which he was willing to offer to save a young slave girl. Before he could do so, an earthquake struck, and Artaban was mortally injured. In his final breath, he heard a heavenly voice saying, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (cf. Mt 25:40).

Theological and Spiritual Teachings

The figure of Artaban offers us a profoundly Gospel-centered vision of faith in action. Unlike the other Magi, who arrived directly in Bethlehem with their gifts, Artaban found Christ in those in need. This illustrates Jesus’ central teaching about loving one’s neighbor as an expression of love for God.

The story also highlights the idea that our search for God does not always follow the path we envision. Artaban never reached the manger, but he lived a life of total self-giving to others, embodying Christ’s message even before meeting Him. This reminds us that true worship of



God is carried out in our daily acts of love and service.

Historical and Symbolic Relevance

Although Artaban is a legendary figure, his story reflects important historical and cultural aspects. The Magi, as described in the Gospel of Matthew, were sages from the East, possibly astrologers from Persia or Babylon. Their presence in the Gospel narrative symbolizes the universality of Christ's message, which transcends borders and cultures.

The figure of Artaban expands this symbolism by representing those who seek God not only through celestial signs but also in human encounters. His story emphasizes that the journey to God is full of interruptions that, rather than pulling us away from Him, draw us deeper into His heart.

Practical Applications for Our Lives

The story of Artaban is not just an inspiring narrative; it also offers valuable lessons for our daily lives. In a world marked by haste, materialism, and indifference, Artaban invites us to reflect on how we live out our faith.

1. Seeing Christ in Others

Artaban recognized God's presence in the people he encountered along his journey. This is the call of Jesus in the Gospel: "I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink" (Mt 25:35). Our faith becomes real when we serve those in need.

Reflection: How can you recognize Christ in the people around you? Perhaps in a neighbor who needs support, a colleague seeking comfort, or a stranger requiring help.

2. Practicing Generosity and Sacrifice

Artaban sacrificed his most valuable possessions to ease the suffering of others. This challenges us to ask what we are willing to give out of love for God and neighbor.

Reflection: Consider how you can share your resources, time, or talents with those in need. True generosity is not measured by quantity but by the heart with which it is given.



3. Trusting in God's Plans

Artaban did not fulfill his original plan, but his life was a constant offering of love. This teaches us to trust that even when things do not go as we expect, God is at work in our story.

Reflection: When facing failures or disappointments, ask yourself: What is God teaching me in this situation? How can I continue to serve Him despite the challenges?

A Message for Our Time

In a society that often values individual success over the common good, Artaban's story challenges us to reevaluate our priorities. It reminds us that true worth lies not in what we accumulate but in what we give. In a world full of division and suffering, we need examples of compassion and selfless service more than ever.

Artaban did not reach Bethlehem, but he found Christ in every act of love. His life invites us to do the same: to seek the King not only in churches or moments of prayer but also in the streets, hospitals, and broken hearts.

Conclusion

The legend of Artaban is a powerful reminder that the path to God is not always straight or easy, but it is always worth it. It teaches us that every act of love is a way to worship the King of Kings and that holiness is found in daily gestures of kindness.

May this story inspire us to live with generosity, compassion, and unwavering faith. Like Artaban, we can turn our search for God into a life that reflects His love to the world.