

The Fourth Wise Man

There are several versions of this popular legend with the wise man coming from places such as Gaul as well as Persia. This is just one variant:

The best known presents given at the first Christmas are Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh, given by the three wise men. However legend has it that there was a fourth wise man, whose name was Artaban. He travelled from Persia to meet the others, carrying with him his gifts for the new King - three precious jewels - a sapphire, a ruby and a pearl.

On his way Artaban met an old Jew by the roadside, who was almost dying from fever. He decided to stay with the sick man until he was well and so he missed meeting up with the other three wise men who were on their way southwards. The Jew told Artaban that the prophets said that the King would be born in Bethlehem. Artaban sold his costly sapphire to raise money for the sick man, and only when the man had recovered, did Artaban set out for Bethlehem.

When he arrived in Bethlehem and made enquiries, he was told that the other wise men had left 3 days before. A young mother told him that the family he was seeking had fled, and that the people of Bethlehem were anxious because it was rumoured that King Herod was going to punish the town. While Artaban was in the Bethlehem, wondering what to do next, the soldiers arrived with orders to kill all the baby boys they could find. The young mother he had made friends with was very frightened because she had a young son, so when the captain of the soldiers ordered the child to be killed, Artaban came to the rescue and gave his ruby to the soldiers to buy the boy's life.

Artaban now had only one of his gifts left - the pearl, but he decided to keep searching for the king. Finally, after 30 years searching, he came to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. The city was buzzing with talk about the man named Jesus who claimed to be the son of God and who was to be crucified. Artaban wondered whether he could use his last jewel to save the life of this man, Jesus. But as he hurried through the streets of the city Artaban came across a young girl who was crying. She told Artaban she was crying because she was going to be sold into slavery to pay her father's debts. Artaban could not pass by and leave the girl crying so he gave her the pearl, the last of his jewels. At that moment Jesus passed by carrying his cross to the place of execution. He looked at Artaban, and on his face Artaban could see three big drops of blood that looked to him just like a sapphire, a ruby and a pearl. He knew that Jesus was the king he had been looking for all these years, and he also knew that although he was not able to worship his King, his precious gifts had been sold, or given away, to help others, and that was the same as giving them to Jesus.