

JEREMY CHRISTMAS

A Yuletide Story

BY WALT SCOTT



Escapee From State Prison Spent 5 Years As Minister

SALEM (AP)—A man who escaped from the Oregon state prison in 1952 says he spent his five years of freedom as a minister. Billy Robert Milligan made the comment as he talked with a reporter in the state prison here Monday night. Milligan was taken into custody in Texas several weeks ago and then returned here. "I didn't live in constant fear during the five years of my freedom, but I knew sooner or later that I would be picked up," he said. "I can't preach laws I haven't obeyed," said Milligan, lanky, blond and 28. "Everything I do now will be to glorify God," he said. Milligan said he spent most of the time in Dallas, Texas, worked at several jobs and also was a minister in an Assembly of God Church. Milligan said he was sent to the prison on a two-year term for car theft. Prior to that, he said, he had just been roaming around following his discharge from the service. After serving one year, Milligan said, he walked away from the prison's annex. Milligan said he will go into court soon and enter a plea of guilty to an escape charge.

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Council Not Unanimous On Wisdom Of Expedition

By GEORGE W. CORNELL, Associated Press Religion Writer. The caravan stood in readiness. It had taken nearly three months to prepare for the 1,200-mile journey. Shouts of leather-shirted cavalry officers mingled with the bawl of animals as supplies were loaded. Somewhere . . . somewhere in Judea . . . was the destination. The chief camoleer rushed about, yelling instructions and gesturing violently, as sweating slaves hoisted rope crates and grain bags to the backs of kneeling freight beasts. Dust swirled in the bright Persian sunlight. Blankets, tents, foodstuffs, water flasks and other necessities, along with chests of rare treasures, were stowed on the wooden pack saddles, divided equally by weight on either side, and bound to the uprights. Since it would be a rigorous trip, only about 400 pounds of cargo, two-thirds the usual maximum, was placed on each camel. A crowd of jostling townspeople looked on, women veiled in their chadors; dark, hirsute men with laughing eyes. "A fool's expedition! Those greybeards chase the wind." Behind a brick wall, inside the palace of the royal Magian Council, a circle of white-gowned men sat around a fire, staring silently into its leaping flames. Among them were the three—the number and their identifications are matters of divergent ancient accounts, but the most common listing is used here—who had determined to track the genesis of a star. They were Melchior, pale, old, white-bearded; Gaspard, a tall, ruddy young priest, and black-skinned Balthasar, of medium size and stature, whose ancestors may have come to Persia in the days when its empire stretched to Ethiopia. Not all their fellow Magi condoned this quest to honor a hypothetical "Blessed One" of alien birth. Nor would they, as the ensuing years proved, accept its validity. It smacked of national disloyalty. But the tenacity of High Magus Melchior and his supporters had overcome this narrow view. The strange mission was decreed. Seeking Divine guidance, the counsellors sat now to "contemplate the beams of the fire with a

most pious mind." So their prophetic Zarathustra, had taught. So Moses heard God on fiery Sinai and in a burning bush. Finally, the group rose and filed out of the altar room. After farewell embraces, the three travelers donned their turbans and fur-trimmed cloaks, strode out to the waiting train and mounted their dromedaries. "Khikh!" The guttural command burst from the camoleers. They jerked at the halters, and the beasts rose, growling, to their feet. The troop of mounted bowmen moved forward, the golden eagle of Persia fluttering on their banners. The long trek was on. In what city the march began is uncertain, but since the Magian priesthood served as one of the two councils to the king, it may have begun at Hecatompylos, the northern capital "of a hundred gates." Or, they may have left from the winter castle in Ctesiphon, with its stately domes and arcades, or from the former hundred-columned capital at Persepolis, or the once-sovereign western city, Susa. At any rate, despite some traditions saying each of them came from different places such as Media, India, Tharsis, Arabia, Nubia and Ethiopia, this is flatly refuted by the Apostle Matthew who cites a single homeland — "their own country." The overriding evidence is that this was Persia. In the original Greek, Matthew's gospel specifies the "Magi," who at the time of Jesus' birth and for centuries before were widely known as the learned priestly caste of Persia. Matthew's original language also connotes "the Far East," and comparisons with other documents of the era show this was the common phrase used for the area of Persia, since it then was under a Parthian dynasty. The weight of tradition agrees. It may be that other nationalities sometimes mentioned refer to racial backgrounds, since in the past heyday of Persian empire their regions had been included. Some still were. Thus, the venturesome Magi, leaving behind Persia's barren expanse of Drangiana with its salt

water lakes and yapping jackals, traveled on through the wooded foothills of the Zagros. The caravan climbed the steep trails into the mountains on Persia's western rim, and descended into the lowlands beyond. Wild boars, cheetahs and other carnivores infested the area and bulbous sang from the box trees. The military escort was supplied as a routine to such royal entourage, even though the fratricidal King Phraates IV, dominated by an Italian concubine he called "the goddess Musa," had no taste for the mission. The squadron of helmeted archers, with their fine-limbed horses, led the column down into the plain of Apolloniatis, on past the proudly independent city of Seleucia beside the Tigris, and as far as the Euphrates bridge. For them to go farther might have appeared warlike. The Magi and their retinue of servants likely continued from there alone. A long, hard road, of many months, lay ahead. They tramped on. The saddles chafed their legs; the sun burned their skin and dust caked their eyes. The trip took six months to a year, other travel logs of the period indicate. What kind of men were these who discerned a still small voice, and pursued it across a continent? The annals of that time tell of their knowledge and insight. Philo, then an Alexandrian philosopher, said the Magi "behold the books of the nature with more acute perception than usual." A contemporary Roman scholar, Apuleius, calls them "Divinely wise."

The Wisdom of Solomon says the Magi "seek for God being conversant with his works." The ancient Greek geographer, Herodotus, said that in all the world's ignorance was one shining exception—the truth-loving Magi. Many other ancient scholars, Plutarch, Diogenes, Laertius, Pliney, all speak of the Magian acuity. They were official tutors of princes, Persian and Parthian alike. But none of this explains the impetus that took them hundreds of miles, in scorching heat of day and chill of night, across the wide Syrian desert to Haleh or Tudmor, and on along the dusty highway to Damascus. They camped at night in their black goat-hair tents, for it would not be fitting for regal personages to stop in foreign hostels, with their dancers, boxers, knife-throwers and comedians balancing unperfected infants atop poles. The brilliant star they had seen "in the east" or more specifically translated "at the rising" apparently did not guide them, for Judea lay to the west beside the Mediterranean—not to the east. Part of their secret may have been in their "Zandavesta," the heavy, mystical record of which only one of 21 books survive. Or it may have been in the labyrinthine, dateless processes of the

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