

Scene VII – Herod’s Palace

(It’s Herod’s palace. Sitting on his throne is King Herod. The throne should be on a raised platform if possible. Standing by his side is Xerxes [zerk-sees] his chamberlain.)

Herod: You know Xerxes, I think tomorrow should be ‘Everyone-wears-a-goat-on-their-head Day’. That’s my royal proclamation. See that my subjects are informed.

Xerxes: Very good, sire. I shall let the people know that it is the mighty King Herod’s wish that all shall wear goats upon their heads. Do you have a preference what type of goat, sire?

Herod: Nice brown goats. None of those nasty black and white ones.

Xerxes: Very good sire. I shall see to it straight away.

(Xerxes starts to leave. Herod is clearly overexcited and can’t contain a giggle.)

Xerxes: Sire?

Herod: You’d really do it, wouldn’t you?

Xerxes: I am your chamberlain, sire. I am bound to do your bidding.

Herod: It was a joke you see. And you fell for it! Goats!

Xerxes: Oh. I see. **(Without enthusiasm)** A-ha-ha. Your majesty should be on the stage.

Herod: You fall for it every time, Xerxes. Like the time I said people had to strap hedgehogs to their feet; and the time I said people had to put a finger up their nose and talk backwards for a week; and the time I said everyone had to jump up and down shouting ‘I’m a spring cabbage – boing, boing, boing’.

Xerxes: (Dryly) Every one a priceless gem, sire.

Herod: Oh, lighten up. Where’s your sense of humour?

Xerxes: Chamberlains are specifically chosen for their serious natures, sire.

Herod: (Mimicking Xerxes) ‘Chamberlains are specifically chosen for their serious natures, sire’. You can be such a drag sometimes. Right, who is coming to bask in my glory this morning?

Xerxes: There are three astrologers from the east. They are well known for their wisdom and are here on a quest. You sent for them, if you recall.

Herod: Yes, yes, of course I remember. Send them in.

(Xerxes exits, returning a minute later with Caspar, Balthasar and Melchior. The wise men are carrying gifts.)

Xerxes: May I present to your royal majesty, Caspar, Balthasar and Melchior.

(The wise men kneel before Herod.)

Herod: Ooh...presents. You shouldn't have.

(The wise men look at each other nervously.)

Herod: Well? They're not going to open themselves: pass them over.

Caspar: (Clears his throat nervously.) Um...they're not for you my lord.

Herod: What?

Balthasar: We have brought gifts to give to a baby who shall be a king.

Herod: I'm a king. And although I'm not a baby I can certainly be child-like.

Xerxes: Childish.

(Herod gives Xerxes a look.)

Herod: Presents now, please!

Melchior: We have come to your kingdom following a star. Our astrological charts tell of a baby who will be born in lowly circumstances but is destined to be king of heaven and earth.

Herod: What?! I'm the king! Me! And no one else! Xerxes!

Xerxes: Yes, sire?

Herod: Remove these 'tourists' from my court.

Xerxes: Very good, sire.

(Xerxes shepherds the wise men from the room.)

Herod: Wait!

(The wise men stop and turn.)

Herod: Where is this baby?

Caspar: We don't know. The star will lead us to his birthplace.

Herod: Well when you find him, come back and tell me where he is. I would like to 'honour' him myself.

Melchior: Of course, your majesty.

(Wise men exit. Xerxes returns to the king's side.)

Xerxes: Should I find a present to give to the baby on your behalf, sire?

Herod: You're an idiot. This baby cannot be allowed to live. Xerxes! Inform my army that they should go into my kingdom and kill every boy-child under the age of two. That is my royal proclamation.

Xerxes: **(Pauses for a second, deciding whether Herod is being serious. Decides he isn't and laughs.)** Oh yes, sire! Very good! Murder all the children! **(Throws his hands up.)** Aaarrrghhh!

Herod: I'm being serious!

Xerxes: **(Wiping his eyes with mirth.)** Of course you are, sire!

Herod: I really mean it!

Xerxes: (Stops laughing.) Oh. You're being serious. Don't you think that might be a slight over-reaction, sire?

Herod: I'm the king, and the king I shall stay. I'm not having some young usurper spoiling things.

Xerxes: But those astrologers said they would tell you where he is. You don't need to kill *all* the baby boys.

Herod: It's better to be safe than sorry. You have heard my royal proclamation – make it so, before I raise the age limit to include you!

Xerxes: Very good sire, I'll see to it straight away. **(As he exits he mutters:)** Nutter!