



The Tenth Day of Christmas
January 3, 2021
"We Three Kings"/"Star of Wonder"

As a child with an early ability to harmonize, I was always in the children's Christmas pageant. How marvelous that God chose to become flesh and we get to tell the story! I also remember feeling tamped into a box every year: "There's only one Mary, and she doesn't sing. And kings are obviously boys, and they won't participate unless they have something important to do. Besides, the other kids really need you to hold down that lower part." I came to dread the pageant, and viscerally disliked the plodding, repetitive, absolutely essential-to-the-story "We Three Kings of Orient Are," a carol especially written by John Henry Hopkins, Jr. for a Christmas pageant in the middle of the nineteenth century.

So, when *The Roches*, sisters out of Park Ridge, New Jersey, released their Christmas album *We Three Kings* in 1990, I was eager to try to understand why they chose this song to title their quirky, eclectic, beautiful gift to the season. And their version of this story of the adoration by the wise men has indeed become an essential part of my family's celebration of the Twelve Days of Christmas.

First, there's the driving western-tuned guitar, pulling the magi from the east, accompanied by a klezmer-like soprano sax, reminding us of the kings' origins. Then, Maggie embodies Gaspar, who acknowledges the miracle of the royal birth – *born a king on Bethlehem's plain*. Next, Terre as Melchior reveals the incarnation – *worship him God on high*. Piercingly, Suzzy as Balthazar brings the crucifixion right into the stable – *sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, sealed in a stone-cold tomb*.

But where is Hopkins' triumphant hallelujah of the resurrection? *Glorious now behold Him arise, King, and God, and Sacrifice; Heav'n sings Hallelujah: Hallelujah the earth replies*. As the Roches tell the story, we're not there yet. Instead, a shepherd, not gifted with special sight, alone in the hills above Bethlehem, is drawn unknowingly into the mystery of the night.

Star of Wonder in the Heavens, wonder what you want of me. Should I follow you tonight?

Prayer

Triune God, at times we are lost and alone in the darkness. Yet, there are signs and portents of your great love for us everywhere, if only we can stop and see. And seeing, what can we do but follow, though we don't quite understand the mystery to which you draw us. Give us courage and faith, until we come to you. Amen.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jan Hames', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jan Hames
Office Administrator

Listen: "We Three Kings"

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