

The Three Kings eating out

Once, it was about 0 BC, there were three kings in the Middle East who went looking for a Michelin star restaurant. None of their own cities had such a restaurant, so in the late afternoon of a nice summer day, they decided to find one together. Expecting a special and mouth-watering dinner is a good reason to go out for every man and no less so for kings, as they are used to so many exquisite foods that only something really special can rouse their senses.

Balthazar, the eldest, travelled by camel, because with his 60 years he could not walk that far anymore. Melchior walked next to the camel, as with his 40 years he did not want to be seen as less fit as the 20-year-old Caspar, who already ran ahead of them to scout out the road. Of course, like many 40-year-olds, Melchior soon regretted his choice to walk, but he was too stubborn and too proud to complain. Besides, the perspective of a star-restaurant was enough to keep him going.

But finding a restaurant was not easy. They walked through a stony desert land, without cities, villages or people. There was only mountainous rock and sand around them, with sometimes small huts with water pits, small shrubs, the occasional small tree and some dry patches of grass. They encountered no people and without people, there are no restaurants. So before long, the three spoiled kings started to complain.

Balthazar said, "Here I am at my age, on a camel with an empty stomach. Where is that restaurant?"

"At least you are on a camel," Melchior said, "all this ploughing through the sand on foot is exhausting, mind you."

"Pff, you are not used to anything at all, are you?" Caspar responded, "I for one have come prepared." And he pulled an energy bar from out of his long travelling robe.

"Hey, give that to me!" Balthazar said, "I am the eldest and weakest here."

"I don't think so," replied Caspar, "Who is the one riding on a camel, you or me?"

"You piece of mischief!" Balthazar shouted.

"We could share it between us?" Melchior proposed, but because Christian charity of course did not exist at the time of this story, all three kings began to laugh at such a silly idea.

They walked on in silence. There was no sound other than the footsteps of the camel in the sand and the smacking of Caspar while eating his energy bar. After a short while Melchior grumbled: "Jesus Christ, can you stop smacking like that?! Who raised you?"

"Actually, my mother did," Caspar said and winked at Balthazar.

"And if I am not mistaken, it is your sister, Melchior, who married my father?"

"Pfff," Melchior said, "if my sister is your mother then I am sure she is not smart enough to raise a child the correct way."

"Women," Balthazar said, "who needs them anyway? Although Melchior's daughter is a very good wife to me."

"Wait," Caspar asked, "Melchior's daughter is Balthazar's wife? But Melchior is married to my sister!"

They walked on in a confused silence, each of the kings thinking about who had made the best choice for a wife.

"Just the other day, I heard about our distant relative Herod", Melchior said at last, to change the topic of conversation.

"According to rumours he is planning to kill a whole bunch of children in a village near here. I guess that it is just a rumour and not to be taken too seriously. Although uncle Herod has always been a bit unpredictable of course."

"Herod is an idiot and a maniac as well", Balthazar said. "Those rumours could well be true."

"Why would he do such a thing?" Caspar asked.

"They say he is afraid that some baby has been born that will end his reign or something like that. His courts' magicians have predicted that", Melchior responded. "I am actually not sure, I didn't really pay attention when they told me."

"What a load of rubbish", Caspar said, "who would believe such predictions?"