

**The Other Wise Man**  
*A Story Christian Story in Three Parts*  
*From the story by Henry Van Dyke*

**Characters:**

**Artaban**  
**Brother (/Man)**  
**Father**  
**Horse**  
**Hebrew (/Rabbi)**  
**Camel**  
**Mother & Baby**  
**Captain (/Soldier)**  
**(Rabbi)**  
**(Man)**  
**Slave girl**  
**(Soldier)**

**Props:**

**Cross**  
**Circle of sand coloured felt (90cm diameter)**  
**3 card crowns**  
**Blue bead**  
**Red bead**  
**Pearl**  
**4cm circle of black felt to place beads on - this can be moved along with Artaban**

**Part 1**

**Display the Christian symbol of the Cross.**  
**Roll out circle.**

I wonder if you know this story.

**Lay out 3 card crowns in the centre of the circle, point to each one to indicate counting to 3.**

The story of 3 Kings or Wise Men, the Magi, who saw a star in the sky and travelled far to bring gifts to a special baby.

I want to share with you a different story. The story of The Other Wise Man.

**Place Artaban figure on the right of the circle.**

His name was Artaban. Artaban was a wise man, he knew many things, but best of all he knew about the stars.

**Look up at ceiling. Guide a finger in a line in the air above the circle.**

Artaban had been watching the stars as his three friends had.

**Point to the 3 crowns.**

They were looking for the sign that would tell them where to find the new King who would be a saviour. A man who would bring light in the darkness.

Artaban sold everything he owned and used the money to buy three special gifts for the baby King. Three great gems.

**Place blue bead before Artaban.**

A sapphire as blue as a fragment of the night sky.

**Place the red bead before Artaban.**

A ruby redder than a ray of sunrise.

**Hold the pearl up between finger and thumb.**

And a pearl as pure as the peak of a snow-capped mountain.

When Artaban told his family what he had done, his brother said to him:

**Place Brother beside Artaban.**

“There is no King. No end will ever come to the fight between light and darkness. If you look for it, you are a chaser of shadows.”

**Remove Brother. Place Father beside Artaban.**

But Artaban’s father said:

“It is better to follow even the shadow of the best than to remain content with the worst.”

**Remove gems.**

**Point to the sky above Artaban.**

That night Artaban watched the skies for the sign that would begin his journey to meet the other three wise men.

**Keep gaze on the sky.**

At last a spark appeared; a point of pure white radiance.

**Trace the star’s progress to a point.**

Artaban’s heart soared with the star. He knew: “It is the sign, The King is coming, and I will go to meet him.”

**Place horse beside Artaban.**

Artaban began the ride to the Temple where he would meet the other three Wise Men. They would wait ten days before beginning their journey across the desert. Artaban rode his horse from early in the day to late at night.

**Place Artaban nearer to centre of circle.**

Evening of the tenth day, Artaban neared the Temple.

His horse stopped. Through the darkness Artaban saw a man lying across the road.

**Place Hebrew in the road.**

His clothes were rags, he was pale and feverish, he was a Hebrew. Artaban turned to leave the man to his death but the man let out a cry and grasped Artaban’s robes.

**Clench fist.**

Artaban was torn inside. How could he stay here and help this man when his friends were waiting for him? They would go on without him.

If he went on, the man would die. If he stayed, his life might be saved.

Should he risk the great reward of his faith for the sake of a single deed of human love?

**Pause. Place hands, palm-up, beside each-other like scales.**

**Wondering Questions**

*I wonder what might happen next?*

*I wonder what Artaban should do?*

*Have you ever given up something you really wanted for someone else?*

## **Part 2**

Artaban was torn inside.

If he went on, the man would die. If he stayed, his life might be saved.

Should he risk the great reward of his faith for the sake of a single deed of human love?

**Pause. Place hands, palm-up, beside each-other like scales.**

Artaban carried the sick man from the road.

**Support Hebrew in hand.**

Artaban brought water. He mixed herbs for medicine. Hours he worked, until the man sat up.

**Stand Hebrew up.**

“Who has saved me from death?”

**Point to Artaban.**

“I am Artaban, I am following a star to find the King who will bring light into the darkness. I can stay no longer, my friends will not wait for me. Here is the last of my food and medicine.”

The Hebrew raised his hands to heaven.

**Raise hands in blessing.**

“May God bless you for all you have done for me. I have nothing to give you in thanks but this: If you seek the Messiah, the saviour, don’t go to Jerusalem, our Prophets have said he will be born in Bethlehem.”

**Remove the Hebrew.**

**Remove the 3 crowns.**

Finally, Artaban reached the Temple. There was no sign of the Wise Men.

Artaban found a message, he read:

“We can wait no longer. We go to find the King. Follow us across the desert.”

“How can I cross the desert with no food and only a tired horse? I must sell my sapphire

**Hold sapphire between finger and thumb.**

and buy camels and food for the journey. I may never catch up with my friends.”

**Remove sapphire and horse.**

**Place Artaban and the camel in the centre of the circle.**

So the other wise man journeyed onward. A lonely figure on his camel, crossing the desert. Days, weeks, months passed.

**Move Artaban and the camel to the left of the circle.**

Finally, Artaban arrived at Bethlehem.

Artaban was tired but hopeful, bearing his ruby and his pearl to offer to the King.

**Remove camel. Place mother and baby beside Artaban.**

Artaban came to a house where a mother was singing to her baby. She told him of the strangers from the far East, they came three days ago, guided by a star. They had been to the house of Joseph of Nazareth and given gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh to their baby son. “But,” she told him, “They disappeared again and Joseph and Mary took the baby secretly away to Egypt.”

The mother gave Artaban food and drink and he played with the baby.

**Hold up hands in alarm.**

Suddenly the streets were filled with noise, people were crying and screaming. “The soldiers! The soldiers of Herod! They are killing our children!”

**Hold arms to chest.**

The mother clutched her baby and hid in the house.

**Move Artaban in front of the mother and child. Place the Captain before him.**

Artaban stood in the doorway, barring the way. Soldiers rushed down the street with blood on their hands and dripping from their swords.

**Wondering Questions:**

*I wonder, what might Artaban do next?*

*I wonder, what you would do?*

*I wonder if Artaban will find the King?*

## **Part 3**

Artaban stood in the doorway, barring the way. Soldiers rushed down the street with blood on their hands and dripping from their swords.

**Hold hands wide, palm up.**

**Hold hand, palm forwards to show halt.**

They stopped when they saw Artaban. The captain went to push him aside. But Artaban said: "There is no one here but me, I will give this jewel to the captain who will leave me in peace."

**Remove ruby and hold between finger and thumb.**

He took out his ruby, red as drop of blood.

The greedy Captain took the ruby and ordered: "March on. There is no child in this house."

**Remove Captain and ruby.**

Artaban prayed:

**Clasp hands together.**

"God of truth, forgive my sin. I told a lie, but it was to save the life of an innocent child. Two of my gifts are gone. Shall I ever be worthy to see the King?"

Beside him the mother wept for joy and said to Artaban:

**Place hand over Artaban in blessing.**

"You have saved the life of my baby, may the Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine on you and give you His peace."

**Remove mother. Place Artaban to the front of the circle.**

Artaban did not give up his quest, he travelled to Egypt. He looked everywhere. He spoke with many people asking about the child King.

**Place Rabbi beside Artaban.**

Finally, Artaban spoke to a Rabbi who told him "The King will not be found in a palace among the rich and powerful. Look for him among the poor, the sad and the oppressed."

**Remove Rabbi.**

Artaban passed through many countries searching.

**Place hand on heart, point over the land.**

Though he found none to worship, he found many to help.

**Hand to mouth, stroke with hand, hold hands together.**

He fed the hungry, healed the sick and comforted the captive. As he did this, many years passed.

**Take out the pearl.**

But he had not forgotten his quest. His last jewel, the pearl, had become more precious the longer he carried it close to his heart.

**Remove pearl.**

Artaban searched for the King for 33 years. His was an old man, tired and ready to die.

**Move Artaban to the back of the circle.**

He came at last to Jerusalem. Many people were heading out of the city. Artaban asked where they were going.

**Place Man beside Artaban.**

A man answered. "A man called Jesus of Nazareth, who has done many wonderful things, is to crucified. Pilate has sent him to the cross because he said he was the King of the Jews, the Son of God."

Artaban knew this was the man he had been searching for. He was hopeful; perhaps he might use his pearl to pay Jesus' ransom and save his life.

**Remove Man.**

Old Artaban hurried after the crowd. Just as he reached the city gates, a soldier dragged a girl into the street.

**Place Slave Girl and Soldier beside Artaban.**

The girl begged Artaban:

"Save me! My father has died and I am taken as a slave to pay off his debts."

Artaban hesitated.

This was the old conflict of his soul. Twice had he parted with the jewels meant for the King for the sake of human love. Now came his final choice.

Was this his great opportunity, or his last temptation?

His heart was divided.

**Hold out hands palm up beside each-other like scales.**

**Pause.**

**Hold pearl between finger and thumb.**

He took the pearl from around his neck, never had it looked so radiant. He gave it to the slave.

**Place pearl on other palm.**

"Here is your ransom. It is the last of my treasures for the King."

As he spoke, the sky darkened and the ground shook.

**Cast hand over them to show darkness.**

The soldier fled in terror, but Artaban and the girl crouched beneath the wall.

**Remove Soldier and pearl.**

Artaban's quest was over and he had failed. He had given the last of his jewels away. But he knew he had done his best; he had spent his life looking for the light, he had not found it, but he knew he would do the same again.

The earth gave one last pulse. A heavy tile, shaken from the roof, fell and hit Artaban on his head.

**Gesture striking his head. Lie Artaban down.**

He lay with his head in the girl's lap.

**Hold Artaban in palm.**

Blood trickled from the wound.

The girl cradled his head and then looked around thinking she heard a voice. Then she heard Artaban say:

"Oh my Lord, I have never fed you, or given you water. I have never cared for you in sickness or in prison. 33 years I have searched and I never saw your face or gave you my gifts, my King."

Then the girl heard the other voice clearly:

**Hold other hand above Artaban.**

"Artaban, whatever you have done for the least of my people, you have also done for me."

Joy filled Artaban's face and his last breath left his lips.

**Place hand over Artaban. Close hand and remove him behind your back.**

Artaban's journey had ended, his treasures were accepted. The Other Wise Man had found the King.

**Wondering Questions:**

*I wonder if you think Artaban made the right decisions?*

*I wonder whose voice said : “Whatever you have done for the least of my people, you have done for me.”?  
I wonder what it means?*

*I wonder if you think Artaban’s final rewards were greater than those of the Three Wise Men?  
What were those rewards?*

*I wonder what a Christian might learn about faith from this story?*

*I wonder if you are a chaser of shadows? Have you always done your best?*