

The Fourth Wiseman (1985)

Not rated (TV film). Running time: 1 hour 12 min.

Our Advisories: Violence 4; Language -0; Sex/Nudity -1.

Our star ratings (1-5): 4.

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Matthew 25:40

One of my fondest memories from the 4th grade is when teachers had more choice as to how and what they would teach, and no one worried about religion being injected into the classroom. During December just before lunch period our teacher read to us a chapter a day from Henry van Dyke's classic story "The Story of the Other Wise Man." What a magical time that seemed for me. The teacher suggested that we listen with our eyes closed. We did, and thus in those pre-TV days it was easier to see our journeying with Artaban and feeling his heartbreak and anxiety as he missed first, his rendezvous with the other Magi, and then, arriving in Jerusalem and then Bethlehem, right after the other magi and the Holy Family had left. But just in time to witness Herod's soldiers hoping to kill the Christ Child amidst the slaughter of the innocents. It is to save at least one life that Artaban uses one of his precious gems to bribe a soldier. Refusing to go back home, Artaban, to the disgust of his servant Orontes decides to keep searching for the Christ Child for years to come, but each time arriving just a little too late.

In 1985 Paulist Pictures adapted the story for television, with a stellar cast directed by Michael Ray Rhodes. (Full disclosure, Mike is now a friend of the editor and of this

publication, but I saw and loved this film long before meeting Mike.) Martin Sheen plays Artaban, and Alan Arkin is his reluctant servant Orontes. He always wants to go back home because the father of Artaban has promised the slave his freedom if he brings back the young master safely. The fine supporting cast includes Eileen Brennan, Harold Gould, Adam Arkin, and Charlie Sheen. (Yes there are two pairs of father-son actors in the production.)

A physician as well as magi, Artaban has sold everything to purchase three precious gems, but along the way as he confronts great need, he gives them up one by one in order to help a person in trouble. Thus when he finally catches up with Christ, it not only seems too late, but the saddened magi, now an old man near death, believes he has nothing to give.

As with *Les Miserables*, the film could be seen, through the lives of the two main characters, as a study in contrast. Artaban lives for others, sacrificing much and gaining much, though in an unexpected way. Orontes lives for himself, giving service to his master grudgingly, and reaps what he deserves.

This powerful story at 72 minutes could be shown at a December family supper, or broken into 5 or 6 parts and shown to a class on Sunday mornings. It is currently available from Vision Video, so go to the link and type in the title to find it and its price: info@visionvideo.com.

Vision Video, P.O. Box 540 | Worcester, PA 19490
1-800-523-0226