

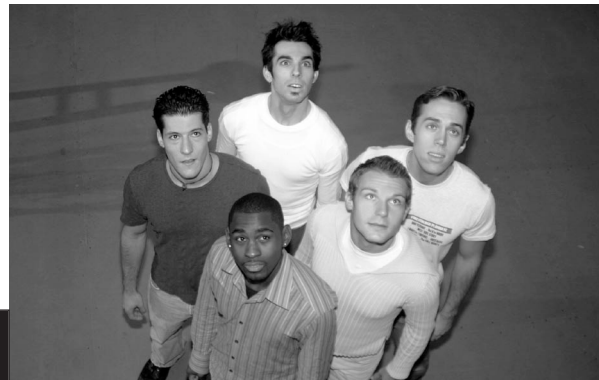
## ABOUT THE SHOW

### From Fable to Epic— The Story of *Follow Me*

For many of us, the Christmas story involves a magical journey on a donkey to a manger, the gentle sound of a crying babe, shepherds, three kings and the appropriate mix of barnyard animals simultaneously resolving in a perfect, glowing tableaux. And of course, an angel or two hovering dutifully by, ready to burst into a glorious song.

We *five* Kings. ▶

Historians say there were likely between five and twelve magi who visited the Christ child.



*Follow Me* is not that Christmas story.

Often reduced to a soft fable—the Christmas story can be void of personal interest and raw emotion. The actual birth of Christ, though a significant event, is only a piece of the Christmas story. To fully appreciate the miracle, we must also understand a broader picture and the historical account that is actually rich with human drama and political turmoil.

Tradition robs us of the opportunity to identify with Christmas by simply omitting all the juicy parts. When Joseph learns that Mary is pregnant by another, he has to defy culture and law to take Mary as his wife. He would have been hard pressed by family and religious leaders to “do the right thing and put Mary out.” Had Joseph done this, Mary’s entire community would have shunned

her and she would have most likely been forced to resort to begging or even prostitution—and quite possibly been stoned to death. Joseph had a tough decision to make, just like many of us do. And Mary’s character and ability to act on what she believed in, are truly miraculous in the face of a potentially disastrous outcome.

The story gets no prettier once Mary and Joseph commit. At the threat of the news of his birth, Herod ruthlessly kills all males under the age of two. Nothing says “Christmas” like the slaughter of the innocents.

The three magi are another part of Christmas lore. These curious fellows were of the ancient priesthood of the Medes—powerful, politically influential

men who read dreams, and studied the stars. Most nativity settings include three magi, but the bible and history only speak of three *gifts*. Historians suggest there were likely between five and twelve magi who visited the Christ child, and that they arrived when he was close to two years old—no where near a manger.

The gifts they brought foretold of Jesus’ purpose: gold represented his kingship; frankincense (a precious incense used in sacred rites) suggests his priesthood, and myrrh (an embalming spice) foreshadows his crucifixion.

The story of Elizabeth and Zacharias is also critical to Christmas. Their faithfulness was integral to the birth and life of Jesus. They had to fight against the odds too—culture would say Elizabeth was barren as punishment from God because of some secret sin. Yet, late in life, their true faithfulness is rewarded as Elizabeth & Zacharias miraculously conceive and she eventually gives birth to John, the forerunner of Jesus’ ministry. We don’t hear much about them at Christmastime, yet Mary goes to spend

three months with Elizabeth after she finds out she is with child. Mary found companionship and confirmation of her purpose, as we all need, in her cousin Elizabeth.

Each character is challenged to make decisions in the piece. Mary must decide to take Gabriel’s word. Joseph must decide to wed Mary. The magi must choose to follow the star and to defy Herod, and Herod chooses by his hand to slaughter innocent children. And so, we all must make decisions—to follow culture, self, or our divine purpose in life. Just like those surrounding the birth of Jesus, the decisions we make today will tell a story thousands of years from now.

The challenge for audiences of *Follow Me* is to rethink a comfy tradition, and to hopefully see deeper truths that resonate with their own experiences as they struggle with truth and ideals in an imperfect world.

*Follow Me* barely scratches the surface of the depth, beauty and power of the Christmas story. We’ve grown it from a 20-minute workshop that debuted in 2004, and expanded it to the full-length piece you see today. Our research has brought forth many more elements that we want to add to the production as we expand it even further for next year. Thank you for being a part of New York’s next holiday tradition, and we hope to see you at *Follow Me* 2006!