

Maybe it was his ghosts – twelve major battles and countless skirmishes are bound to leave scars – but now that peace had come to Camelot, Arthur had grown more introspective. It seemed to me that once it was clear the Saxons would not retaliate anytime soon, Arthur shed his warrior identity like chain mail after a battle.

He had taken to having nearly daily discussions with Father Dafydd over all matters of philosophy and religion. They debated and argued, but always walked away as friends. I had begun to suspect that since Merlin found the lull in war a good time to return to his neglected duties as Archdruid, Arthur was seeking a counselor. I wished I could fulfill that role, but it appeared to be a bond he could only share with another man.

“I’ve been a warrior my entire life,” he explained to Father Dafydd one bright spring morning. “I’ve finally achieved what my father, what all my ancestors attempted to do – unite our land in peace.” He ran a hand down his face. “I find myself disillusioned with the god of war. I feel as though Mithras has abandoned me. No,” he corrected himself. “that’s not entirely true. It’s as though our time together is at an end. So now I lay awake asking myself what comes next? To whom do I turn as a king of peace?”

Father Dafydd glanced at me hesitantly. “My king, are you certain you do not wish to speak in private? Oftentimes, confessions of the heart come easiest when one is alone.”

Arthur shook his head. “No. I have no secrets from my wife. All that I say to you is fit for her ears as well. We rule this land together, so I wish her to know what I am thinking.”

“Very well then.” Father Dafydd gestured to Arthur’s long consulate table. “Shall we sit?”

Once we were all seated, Arthur and I across from one another, Father Dafydd at the head between us, the priest cautioned us. “Know that I can only speak for my own faith.”

“I understand. That is why I am speaking to you and not to Merlin.”

“That is a good place to begin. Why approach a follower of Christ, when you have studied with the Druids? Why not consider sharing the faith of your spouse?”

Arthur studied me, but the faraway look in his eyes told me he was not seeing his wife, or his queen, but a priestess.

His eyes remained unfocused as he answered. “My father – Ector – sent me to the Druid’s isle because he felt it was the best way to prepare me for the future only he knew might come to pass. I was a secular student, never an acolyte. I learned the tenants of the Druid faith, but it never resonated with me like the Mysteries of Mithras did. I have participated in some of their most sacred rituals, felt divine power like I have never known since, but still I have no desire to join them.”

Arthur took a deep breath and blew it out noisily, shifting in his seat, now fully back in the present. “The Mysteries of Mithras are fading, all but consigned to history along with the golden age of the Romans. In the aftermath of Badon, I have seen tremendous acts of charity from those who claim Christ as their god. I understand the basic tenants of their faith, but I want to learn what inspires them, what drives them to selflessness in such a corrupt world.”

Father Dafydd was silent, staring at a space just over Arthur’s shoulder, as though trying to decide where to begin. “The main source of our inspiration is modeled in Christ. He is our one and only God made human, like us in all things but sin. Those who knew him pass on stories of his life, his actions in ministry and we seek to emulate them. Jesus said to us [insert Bible quote

about being like him or like the Father]. That is what we try to do in acts of love and mercy. He knew no enemies, no strangers, and so neither do we.”

That was a lovely picture of the idea of his father, but far from my actual experience. I didn't want Arthur thinking everyone lived in peace and harmony just because some priest dumped them in a vat of water and mumbled a Latin blessing over them. “But not all Christians are models of virtue.” I snapped, more harshly than I intended, my anger at hypocrites like Lyonesse and Father Marius giving my voice a harsh edge.

Father Dafydd ignored – or at least forgave – my tone. “Indeed, no. Christ's disciples are human just like everyone else. There are those who truly try to live his commands, while others say one thing and do another. It is unfortunate that mortal weakness colors people of all faiths. We have believers who commit the most grievous crimes and others who think everyone around them should share their zeal. But you cannot say your faith is free from such troubles, either. There was time not long ago when your Druids laughed while slaughtering our missionaries, and even today some of your gods' best known devotees are corrupt. No matter to whom we pray, we are still subject to the same weaknesses and whims.”

“So we can agree no one is perfect,” Arthur said, clearly irritated by the turn of conversation. “I have heard from some of my men that there are striking similarities between my faith and yours. What do you know about that?”

Father Dafydd shifted in his seat. “Well, I hesitate to draw too tight of parallels between our gods, for you know I believe mine is the only true God, but from what I have learned, you are correct. Both of our gods were born without the assistance of a human father – yours from a rock, mine from a virgin woman through the power of God. Both sought to act as a mediator or reconciler between heaven and earth. If your stories are to be believed, both died tragically, were

buried in a tomb and rose after three days. But where the stories differ is in one key point: no one can prove if Mithras was ever human.”

Arthur wrinkled his brow skeptically. “Go on.”

“It is said he was a being from beyond this world, but we have no record of his flesh and blood. His tale could be just that, a myth of our ancestors. If you draw strength from that and it helps you to live a good life, so be it. But we know for a fact that Jesus lived. We have historical records of his execution at the order of a Roman official. His own people turned against him. And we have the accounts of those who were with him before, during and after his death.”

“And that proves what?” I wasn’t trying to be argumentative. I simply wanted to know what point Father Dafydd was trying to make.

He turned to me, patient as ever. “Jesus’ humanity is key to his role in salvation. There are those who believe he was only divine, a god come down to our world like the ancients, but we call them heretics. God’s plan for mankind always involved a Savior, his son who was at once one in the same with him and human as well. This son would have to die for the people’s sins in order for

“But how can Jesus be both human and divine at the same time? And how can you claim to have only one god. Clearly there are three, if what I am told is correct.”

Arthur was hooked. I could see it in the glint in his eyes, the smile that betrayed his love of knowledge. I had seen that expression many times when he and I discussed politics or battle strategy. He wanted to know all there was to know. Like a hound on the trail of his prey, he would not stop until he had trapped an answer with which he was satisfied.

Personally, I cared little. I had my own faith and was firm in my beliefs. I appreciated Arthur’s willingness to let me know he was questioning his own, but what he chose mattered not

to me, as long as he didn't try to force it on me. Weary of the nuances of their arguments, I excused myself to let them continue their debate. I had the feeling this was just the first of many such conversations.