ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

GENERAL

ISSA: The Greatest Story Never Told
Lois Drake
Snow Mountain Press
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Taktu the reigning king of the Kushan Empire is a member of the Order of Melchizidek. This order was once part of the city of Shamballa which strove to achieve peace and enlightenment. The city is now gone and all that remains is the honor of the Order and its members including the three wise men believed to have visited Bethlehem on the night of Jesus' miraculous birth.

It is the tenth birthday of Vima prince of the Kushan Empire and son to King Taktu. As the prince and the king are engaged in battle the queen is also struggling to save her life and the life of the baby princess. Life for this family will never be the same after today. Vima and his sister will be forced to go into hiding accepting new identities and living among strangers.

Somewhere in the vicinity of Nazareth a young boy is returning to his family after a long absence. The young boy's name is Jesus and he is the son of a carpenter. There is nothing outwardly royal about him but his life will become intertwined with royalty very soon. Jesus' mother Mary knows in her heart that Jesus will soon leave home again and she is concerned about his welfare. She also struggles with her own desire to keep him close in order to protect him from the dangers that await him.

This is the story of Issa or Jesus and his journey into the empire of Kushan. It provides a glimpse into the convergence of Jesus' missing years and the rise of the Kushan Empire in the Middle East. The adventure of two young boys Issa and Vima and their unlikely companions reads like a modern adolescent tale. Each of the young boys is preparing for a life of service among their peers. One will become royalty and one will live in obscurity. The battles between good and evil are classic and will cause readers to cheer for the good guys. The inclusion of a monkey who can detect good and evil is particularly interesting and will delight readers.

The author has taken a great deal of poetic license creating a fictitious life for Jesus. Religious scholars will find a great deal to argue with concerning Biblical references characters' personalities and Jesus' need for further teachings from ancient religions. However read simply as young adult fiction it is a well-written story.

Lois Drake has made good use of her experiences in Tibet and China. She provides readers a look at life in the early years of Middle Eastern culture. Historians will enjoy the descriptions of the inner workings of the Persian Kushan and Hun empires. The introduction of the Order of Melchizidek brings to mind *The Da Vinci Code* and its secret organizations.

Readers seeking religious fiction will not find it here. There are too many assumptions and too many biblical fallacies to be a clear representation of the gospel story. However readers seeking good fiction for middle school and young adult readers would do well to add this title to their collection. Drake has written a good story and presented some historical perspectives along the way.