Festive Fiasco

by Aileen Fisher

Melchior cursed as he drew on the reins of his camel, and turned to face his companions.

"It's no good, guys," he said in despair, "we're lost."

Balthasar and Caspar agreed.

"Blame the weather," said Balthasar.   "That cloud cover ruined the whole enterprise," he said angrily.   "And we were not led to expect a sea voyage!"

"So where the hell are we?" asked Caspar.

Melchior peered through the murky darkness.

"I see lights in the distance.   Perhaps that is Jerusalem."

"Well, only one way to find out.   Let's go."

Wearily they urged the camel on.   As the lights of the town or village drew nearer, all their thoughts were to find a nice warm inn, with decent food and good beer, and a cosy bed for the night.

As they neared the lights, the suspicion grew that this was no village, but a sizeable town.

A sign loomed out of the darkness.   What place was this?

"Never heard of it."

"But wait."

"Perhaps we are in luck."

"What does it say?"

"Well, it BEGINS with 'B'"

Optimism dies as they spelled out the remaining letters.

'I-R-M-I-N-G-H-A-M'