

## **Christmas for Herod**

Matthew 2:1-8, 13, 16

PW Emerson – 12/1/2019 – Ten:27 Ministries

In the early 90s, there was a young pastor in his first year leading a church in Indiana. He decided on a Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion service—the first ever. He wanted everything to be perfect. It almost was. Snow fell that afternoon. A junior in high school, Melody, played “What Child Is This” on the flute. Three generations—a grandmother, her daughter, and granddaughter—lit the Advent candles. We sang the carols “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” “Away in a Manger,” and “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” They read the story—Mary, Joseph, the baby, and the manger. I remember thinking: It was shaping up to be a Hallmark card of a worship service, a picture-perfect Christmas moment as any church had ever known.

That’s when Danny’s beeper went off. Danny was a member of the volunteer fire department. When his beeper sounded—as it often did— Danny ran out of the sanctuary. Everyone had gotten used to it, but it was still disconcerting. Then those assembled started singing “Silent Night.” As they got to “Wondrous Star, lend thy light,” Danny ran back in and shouted that church member Bob’s mother’s house was on fire. Bob’s family ran after Danny. Danny’s wife got up and left. Everyone had to choose between listening to the preacher’s sermon or slipping out one by one and going to a big fire. By the time the story got to Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, the crowd— and I use that term loosely—was made up of those who were waiting for a ride home and those who had fallen asleep. That’s not how Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion services are supposed to turn out.

Tragedies should wait until January, because they don't fit our ideas about Christmas.

That's why King Herod doesn't fit the Christmas story. The horrifying sequence of events in Matthew's Gospel doesn't feel like it belongs in the Christmas story. The most difficult part to cast in the Christmas pageant is King Herod.

Walmart sells a variety of plastic Nativity scenes for the yard, but there are no glow-in-the-dark King Herods.

No Christmas card has this verse from Matthew on the front: "A voice was heard in Ramah, / wailing and loud lamentation" (Matthew 2:18). This part of the story may not seem to fit, but we need to hear it. Like a lot of stories, we have to hear the whole story or we get the story wrong.

The part of this story that we're used to leaving out—the sadness, suffering, and death—is most important. It's the hard part that explains why this child is a holy child.

#### Matthew 2:1-8

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup>and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

<sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be

born. <sup>5</sup>“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

<sup>6</sup>“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

<sup>13</sup>When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

Let’s take a look at King Herod in the Christmas story.

He was referred to as Herod the Great.

He was appointed by Rome to look over the Jews, to keep them in line.

Herod was the King of the Jews.

That wasn’t a title from God nor from the Jews.

Rather it was bestowed on him by the Roman Senate.

Because Herod was not Jewish by birth, the Jews were angry with this.

Herod was brutal .....

- Herod murdered his wife’s brother because he was popular with the Jews
- Herod killed his mother-in-law
- Herod murdered his wife, Mariamne, because he was suspicious of her

- Herod murdered both her sons
- Herod murdered his own son and heir

Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor, said “I’d sooner be Herod’s swine than Herod’s son.”

Human life meant nothing to Herod.

The historian Josephus called him “barbaric,” another writer dubbed him “the malevolent maniac,” yet another named him “the great pervert.”

It’s incredible the lengths Herod went through to hold onto his throne.

So, when magi come saying they have come to worship the one born king of the Jews (verse 2) OF COURSE he was disturbed (verse 3).

Also in verse 3 it says that all Jerusalem was disturbed with him.  
Of course! They are worried Herod would go on a killing spree!

Herod asked the magi when the star first appeared

Herod summoned the chief priests and teachers of the law to find out where the child, the Messiah, was to be born.

They said that’s easy – Micah 5:2

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
though you are small among the clans<sup>[a]</sup> of Judah,  
out of you will come for me  
one who will be ruler over Israel,  
whose origins are from of old,  
from ancient times.”

Herod gets information from the Magi & the chief priests & teachers of the law so  
Herod would know where to start looking for this rival

Herod tried to deceive the magi

He said he wanted to know where the child was so that he, Herod, could find and  
worship him.

If only he had done that!!!

But we know that it was just a lie.

Herod was intent in taking out his rival.

James 4:17

If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it  
is sin for them.

Herod knew what he should have done.

Herod knew what was the right thing to do.

Herod was too blinded by his position of power and prestige.

Herod was much more concerned with power and control than truly following  
God.

Herod may have had the title “king of the Jews” but his heart from far from God.

When I look at the news, I see all sorts of

- Politicians
- Professional Athletes
- Actors & Actresses
- Business Executives from every field

And many others .....

All more concerned with building their empire and hanging onto their power to be distracted by doing what is right by God

It is said that two kinds of birds fly over the California deserts: the hummingbird and the vulture. All the vulture can see is rotting meat because that is all he looks for. He thrives on that diet. But the hummingbird ignores the carcasses and the smelly flesh of dead animals. Instead, he looks for the tiny blossoms of the cactus flowers. He buzzes around until he finds the colorful blooms almost hidden from view by the rocks. Each bird finds what it is looking for.

What are you looking for in the world?

Herod’s anger was evidence of his pride. He could not permit anyone to get the better of him, particularly some foreigners!

Wickedness grows as anger is allowed to control the life

## Verse 16

<sup>16</sup>When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Herod had tried to trick the magi into sharing the location of the child.

Herod was trying to be clever.

When Herod realized he had been outwitted, he was furious!

- Herod is very old and very sick.
- He is slowly losing control of his kingdom.
- He is dying and he knows it.
- He is angry over being tricked by the Magi.
- He still must do something about the baby that would take his throne.

In short, he is out of his mind with rage, frustration, fear and pain. He is insanely jealous and nearly insane. He is a bloody killer by nature. All the worst instincts of a lifetime of cruelty now come to the surface.

Herod's initial aim was to kill one child – now he kills every child 2 and under – about 20

Herod allows his pride and lust for power to control his life.

John 8:44

<sup>44</sup>You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

In verse 19, we see that Herod died.

Josephus says that when he died maggots had eaten away part of his body. He died in agony—insane, tormented and delirious.

Throughout history, leaders have known right from wrong.

When they made their ambitions above God, they were judged by God.

In Numbers 22, the prophet Balaam was sought out to bless the Moabites.

When God told him not to do it, he went anyway.

God sent an angel with a sword to kill Balaam.

Before arriving at the angel, Balaam's eyes, heart and mind were opened and he repented.

Otherwise he would have been killed.

In I Samuel 15, God told his anointed king, Saul, to destroy everything and everyone conquered in the battle with the Amalekites.

However, Saul chose instead to keep the best for himself.

Saul disobeyed God; the kingdom would be taken from him.

To the Christmas event, Herod brought hostility.

Herod stands as a symbol for the kind of world Jesus came into. He represents the world's welcoming committee for the Son of God.

It's not the way you thought it would be, is it? Jesus is born and the rulers try to kill him.

John 1:11

"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Herod stands for the bloodthirsty, cruel, vindictive side of the world system, a world where human life is cheap, a world where killing is accepted and even expected.

Herod died but his spirit lives on. To this day there are those who are offended by Jesus, even by the mere mention of his name. They oppose spiritual truth and want to erase every trace of Christmas from public life.

History tells us that Herod died a horrid death. It is said that his crimes had affected his brain. After he murdered his wife, he became insane, he contracted a disease from a harlot.

He ordered his sister to lock up all the noblemen in Judea and to execute them on the day of his death so that there would be mourning in Israel. When he died his sister released the prisoners.

We can learn a lot from Herod's life and also his death.

What are your priorities this Christmas?

What are your priorities in life?

The ultimate question is not how someone else responds but how you respond to Jesus.

Are you with Herod, more interested in protecting positions of power and prestige?

Are you with the Scribes who knew the truth about the baby but were indifferent and apathetic, not wanting to be bothered? Are you too busy to get involved?

Or are you more like the magi?

They went out of their way to find Jesus.

They gave great gifts, gifts of great value.

The magi were determined to worship Jesus, in every way imaginable.

They acted, worshipping and protecting Jesus.

One thing strikes me about everyone involved in Matthew's recording of the Christmas events .....

Everybody involved had the same basic information.

- They all knew a baby had been born in Bethlehem.
- They all knew who the baby was.

What was their response?

- Herod knew and tried to kill him
- Scribes knew and ignored him
- Magi knew and worshipped him.

It is not what you know that is important, rather what you do with what you know that saves you.

- If you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God from heaven ... .
- If you believe that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah ... .
- If you believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world ... .
- If you believe that Jesus Christ came to save you from your sins ... .
- If you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross in your place ... .
- If you believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead ... .
- If you believe that Jesus Christ ascended into heaven ... .
- If you believe that Jesus Christ will one day return to the earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords ... .

If you believe all of that ... then do what the Magi did and worship Christ the new born king!