

Series: Christ The King Is Born #1335

Title: Matthew 2.1-3

Herod the Not So Great

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. In the text before us this Christmas season we read about two *contrasting* kings. Let me read verses 1-3 of Matthew's Gospel chapter 2. **"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.' ³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."** Jesus is the first King mentioned. He is born King of the Jews. Herod is the second king mentioned. He is also King of the Jews, as appointed by the Roman government. In order, we have taken Herod first, saving commentary on Jesus for a bit closer to Christmas Day.

Herod, born in 72BC, died in 4BC. And thus far we have said that Herod, in human terms, earned the name by which he is best known, Herod the Great. He did some truly great things, and we highlighted them last time. Albeit for selfish reasons, still, Herod did many things to enhance the lives of the people he ruled. However, he also did many things to destroy the lives of the people he ruled. You need to know about these things as well. For example, did you know that Herod was paranoid and the paranoia led him into many suspicions. Always watching for some enemy to seize power and control from him, Herod did not hesitate to lash out in a most merciless manner.

Perhaps he was most vicious with his own family. His wife's brother, a man by the name of Aristobulus, who served as the high priest, Herod had him drowned. And then put on quite the show at the funeral of Aristobulus, pretending to weep and cry, being gutted with sorrow. Herod the showman! And, even closer to his own household, Herod initially had two of his own sons killed, and eventually a third son as well. He had his mother-in-law killed. And to top it all off, remember his wife Mariamne that I told you about? Her as well, murdered by her own husband. Herod, now can we call him the Not So Great, driven by megalomania regularly spun into uncontrolled rage that resulted in the killing of the members of his own family.

Even Caesar Augustus, in Rome, once said of Herod, "I would rather be Herod's pig than his son (*The Christbook*, F. Dale Bruner as quoted in *The Jesus Way* by Eugene Peterson, 201)." "I would rather be Herod's pig than his son," and that coming from Caesar who is not exactly a saint or opposed to knocking off *his* own opposition.

And then there is this story, emerging from the ancient sources, which reveals a ruler with a deep psychosis. As the time approached for his own death, he ordered the most prominent and well esteemed citizens of Jerusalem to be arrested. Herod knew he was dying, his body racked with disease. And he knew that because he was not popular with the people under his charge, no one would mourn for his death, so he gave orders for these citizens to be executed at the very moment he himself died. This way, there would be mourning in Judea when Herod died. Oh, the mourning and weeping would not be for him, but it would give the impression that it was! Now, anyone who thinks like this definitely has an evil and twisted dark heart and mind. Herod, the Not So Great.

For us, the people of God, the clearest demonstration of Herod's cruel sin is the order he gave in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 2, verse 16. Matthew 2.16 says, **"Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi."** Notice that Herod "became very enraged." There is that unchecked anger again unleashed from his soul and he slew (that is slaughtered) all the male children, in Bethlehem and all that vicinity, two years old and under, all in attempt to kill Jesus – true King of the Jews.

Imagine that? Do not let verses like this just pass you by. Think of the parents and grandparents and older brothers and the sisters of these baby boys killed on the order of an evil tyrant. King Herod the Not So Great.

So that we get the full impact of this heinous act by Herod, I want to read to you most of Matthew chapter 2. As you listen, you will learn that Herod dies. The truth is, Jesus was born and Herod died in approximately the same year, and this is not an irony but rather the very plan of God! What does that tell us about who the true King is here? It is Jesus! But, as I said earlier, we will be coming to Him later. For now, also listen for how determined Herod is to kill Christ, hear the fear Jesus' earthly father Joseph has, and do not miss how God protects baby Jesus and His parents from Herod the Not So Great.

I will read from Matthew chapter 2, repeating verses 1-3 (read earlier) and then continuing on from there. **"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.' ³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born."** (I will skip down to verse 7. This is Matthew 2, now verse 7.)

⁷ Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, 'Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found *Him*, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.' ⁹ After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over *the place* where the Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned *by God* in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

¹³ Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.' ¹⁴ So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. ¹⁵ He remained there until the death of Herod. *This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called My Son.'*

¹⁶ Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. (Verse 19. I am reading Matthew chapter 2 and now down to verse 19.)

¹⁹ But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, ²⁰ 'Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead.' ²¹ So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. ²² But when [Joseph] heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Then after being warned *by God* in a dream, [Joseph] left for the regions of Galilee, ²³ and came and lived in a city called Nazareth. *This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'*"

I *love* that! Herod died. Jesus lived. Thus ends our brief biography of Herod. You know, there are still many Herods all around the world. Kings and sometimes Queens. Presidents and Prime Ministers and Premiers. Tyrants. Rulers. Psychopaths. And these still want to kill Jesus and Christ's disciples. The church in the world is under severe persecution. From a very human perspective it looks like we Christians are losing, it looks like we are being squeezed tight under human authority and tyrannical rule. It looks like loving and obeying and following Christ is going to get us cancelled and killed. Herods are on the thrones.

But these verses in Matthew 2 speak of two kings. Herod is the human king. Jesus is the God King. And Jesus Christ is our King, and He is coming again *soon*! This Christmas worship King Jesus! King of kings and Lord of lords. Join us again on Monday because God Is.

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