

Herod

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[0 : 00] In about two weeks will be Christmas. Do you have any tradition during this festive season? Are you looking forward to have some time off? Or are you one of those that have to work through the holiday and only have a few red days for a break?

Another father of my kids, who is an Italian, he told me that his German father-in-law would often visit them during Christmas. They did not get on very well because he feels that his father-in-law is too strict.

Everything needs to be right and exact, needs to be on the dock, so to speak. So to make his Christmas family gathering more bearable and entertaining, my friend would deliberately adjust all the clocks in his house to be out by one or two minutes and observe the reaction and expression of his father-in-law.

My friend said his father-in-law would want to do something to adjust all the clocks back to the exact time, but since it's not his house, he cannot do so without asking him for permission.

But being a German father-in-law, he's not willing to ask an Italian for his permission. So he just spent the whole time being disturbed.

[1 : 20] When you wanted things to go your way, when you wanted to take control, but the environment does not allow you to do so, it must be a very painful experience.

What if you are allowed to take control? What if you have the full reign? What would you do with it? What would you do to make sure you would not lose that control again?

Today we will reflect on King Herod, a man who also wants everything to go according to how he wants them, and consider having control as the most important thing.

Today we will see Christmas through his eyes, and as we prepare for the lead-up to Christmas Day, we will also take some time to see Christmas through the eyes of the angels, of Mary, and of Jesus' fathers.

As we reflect on King Herod today, let us answer three questions. Who is Herod? Who is this newborn king? And who is your king?

[2 : 29] Let us pray. Father, thank you for Jesus. Thank you for breaking into our world a little bit more than 2,000 years ago, and provide us with a way to be reunited with you.

As we reflect on the meaning of Christmas through King Herod today and other characters in the coming weeks, please help us to also reflect on the true meaning of Christmas to ourselves and what you have done for us.

Amen. So who is King Herod? The birth of Christ, Christmas, was predicted in the Old Testament and recorded in Matthew and Luke in the New Testament.

The record in Matthew was read out for us just now. So let's turn to it again in Matthew 2. It's saying in Matthew 2, verse 1 to 2, Jesus was born during the time of King Herod.

You will encounter three different Herod. They are all related, and today we are talking about Herod the Great, the very first Herod who made it to be a king and passed on the position to the other Herod that you will read in the New Testament.

[4 : 07] The Bible has not given us much detail about the background about this Herod, but we can rely on historians and from the time and also archaeology to know more about him.

Historians told us that Herod the Great was born an Edomite, followed the lines of Isaac, Isaac's oldest son, Esau.

In Genesis, the first book of Old Testament, we were told that Isaac is the son of Abraham, and he has two sons, Esau and Jacob. So those who follow the line of Esau are Edomite because they live around Edom.

And those who follow the line of Jacob are the Jews, which live in the land of Judea and Jerusalem. Herod shared the same ancestors with the Jews, going back to Abraham and Isaac, but he is not a Jew.

He is a descendant of Esau and Edomite. He obtained his position as the king of the Jews, his relatives, not by birth, but through careful political maneuvers, risking his life at every step in his dealing with the Romans.

[5 : 19] Despite the fact that he was appointed king by the Romans and was bound to carry out the will of Rome, Herod wants to set up something great and pass on his achievements and inheritance to his children.

He wants an empire that will last a long time. However, at the same time, he wants only to pass on his empire at the time that he feels, that is, feeding his schedule and his plan.

So he murdered whoever might challenge his place on the throne, including his wife and several of his sons and other relatives. Reflecting on Herod, wanting to control the destiny of his own life, I thought about someone that was in China around 247 BC.

He became the emperor of the Qing dynasty. His title was Qin Qi Wang. Qin is the name of the dynasty. Qi is the very first of the founder.

Wang means emperor. So Qin Qi Wang means the very first emperor of China. He was called by that title because he was the very first emperor of a unified China.

[6 : 39] All the dynasty that come after him inherited unified China and able to expand China based on what Qin Qi Wang has done. He did a lot of things that we still talk about today, such as connecting all the sessions of the defensive war around the 200 BC, which become the Great War of China.

And 2,200 years later, we still talk about it and the Great War is still standing as one of the wonders of the world. He was on a quest to find medicine that can grant him eternal life.

But after all the attempts at Pharaoh, he had a few big tombs dug out and filled them with clay or terracotta warriors, horses and chariots, in order that they would give him the protection and extend his reign after death.

Something that both Herod and Qin Qi Wang had in common are the great building projects. Qin Qi Wang connected the Great War and built tombs.

Herod was known to have built the port of Caesarea, restored the temple in Jerusalem, and built many theaters, cities, palaces, and fortresses.

[7 : 54] They both done so much to set up for themselves a legacy that they hoped will last for a long time. They both want to be in control.

But as you and me both know, things in life never go according to plan. Have you ever planned to achieve some great things, make accurate effort, with huge sacrifice to get there, and have the pin pulled from under you?

You walk carefully, like treading on thin ice, and someone jumped in and cracked everything. The question posed by the Magi in verse 2, where is the one who has been born king of the Jews, was such a stern reminder to Herod that despite all that he has done, all that he is doing, despite all that he has achieved, he is not really the king of the Jews.

He is not even born a Jew. He is the half-blooded king, if I may steal the title from a Harry Potter fan. So 1st Street told us that when King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

This could be one of the understatements in the Bible. It's like saying Jesus was hungry after fast for 40 days and 40 nights. If you put yourself in Herod's shoes, disturbed seems to be not very accurate or sufficient to describe how I would feel responding to that news.

[9 : 26] A new king that is not under my control has born, and has a right to be the king of the empire that I am building by birth.

And he has that right by birth. Being disturbed is such an understatement. And I believe all Jerusalem was disturbed too because they know what kind of person Herod is, what he will do to eliminate any threat to his thong.

Herod was disturbed about the news of someone who may threaten his thong, and he may also be disturbed because he doesn't know where he is born.

So in verse 4 to 5, he called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law to find out where the Messiah was to be born. It's interesting that Herod seems to know of the coming of the

Messiah, who is the rightful king of the Jews, but he had done everything as if this Messiah would never come, that he can keep controlling as a half-blooded king, a pretender to the throne. When they worked out where about the newborn king should be, in verse 7 to 8, it read, Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the stars have appeared.

[10:51] He sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so I too may go and worship him.

With what we just found out about Herod, it's so obvious that he's not going to go and worship the child Jesus. If you are Herod, what do you think are the justifiable actions to take towards this newborn king of the Jews?

This new threat to what you want to establish for yourself and your family? How far would you go to protect what you have worked hard to set up before your life?

Verse 16 told us that when Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious and he gave order to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and his vicinity who were two years old and under, according to the time he had learned from the Magi.

Herod killed all the boys in Bethlehem and his vicinity who were two years old and under to protect his control and lordship of the empire he is building. To him, there is a justifiable action to take.

[12:11] He had dealt with any threat to his throne in the same way all along, even to kill his wife and murder his sons. He wanted to hold on to whatever control he can exercise to ensure his plans of building his empire.

Succeeds. In Chen Qi Wong, quest to ensure his dynasty and Jews forever and to decide who remind his sons are more suitable to carry on his legacy.

He let his sons fight each other. In his quest for eternal life, he become very suspicious and his heart-like control of his dynasty drew many opposition.

In response to Chen Qi Wong, he burned all the books and literature that is not in line with the policy that he wants to enforce and murder any scholar that dare to speak up against him by burying them alive to drown them out.

The forced labor he put in place to connect up the Great Wall caused many men to be separated from their family. Husbands are taken away from their wife.

[13:20] Children become fatherless. One of the famous Chinese folk stories says that a wife so desperate to find her husband, she searched along the Great Wall every day and weeping and crying, and her cry cracked the wall.

We read today the weeping and great mourning that was predicted, mentioned in verse 18, of those who had lost their children in Bethlehem and its vicinity is not the greatest concern of Herod.

They were just one of his necessary casualties. Have you met someone or known of anyone like Herod? Someone who is so determined to achieve what they have set up to do or to protect their ownership of things that they want to hold on to.

They are willing to sacrifice others to get there. Verse 19 told us that are universal threats that everyone needs to face. No matter how hard you try, no matter how powerful you become, Chen Chi Wang tried and failed.

Same goes to Herod and all of us. They say Herod died. We all have to face the fact that we will be dead one day. Herod died searching for the newborn king for the wrong reason.

[14:38] He wants to find him to kill him. You can live life, you can live life like a king in your life now, but without meeting a true king, you will only die disturbed and searching like Herod.

Herod questioned the people's chief priests and teachers of the law so that he knows of the Messiah, but he did not really know who he is and where to find him.

When he found out where to find him, when the opportunity presented for him to meet the Messiah, he was too busy building his empire. He rejected and ignored the chance for him to meet the one that can give him eternal life, the one that can ensure his achievement that really lasts to eternity. Instead of taking up the opportunity to meet the real king of his life, he killed off the only chance he could have to meet the Messiah. So who is this newborn king?

Who is this Messiah? Let's now look at this second question, who is this newborn king, by going back to verse 5. Verse 5 told us that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem in Judea.

[15:53] And for this is what the prophet was written. If we read on in verse 6, But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.

For all of you will become a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Messiah is a special Hebrew term in the Bible. In Greek, it is Christ.

Both means the anointed one, the king. Judea or the land of Judah is today what we call Palestine. And Bethlehem, this city, the name of that city actually means house of bread.

So this is where the bread of life, referred to in John 6, 48, come to earth. From this city to town, a ruler will come to shepherd God's people.

If you turn back with me to Matthew chapter 1, in verse 1 to 18, it says, this is how the birth of Christ, Jesus, the Messiah, come about.

[17 : 07] Jesus is the Messiah, a ruler who shepherds God's people. So what do you think of when you hear the term ruler? Do you think of someone high above you, very distant, a privilege with absolute power, something like Queen Elizabeth of England, or Donald Trump, or President Kim of the North Korea?

Jesus is not that kind of ruler. Reading on in Matthew 1, verse 20 to 21, when an angel appeared to Joseph to encourage him about the son he is going to have, he said, Joseph, son of David, you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

When Jesus was born, the Old Testament had already been translated from Hebrew to Greek, and Greek is a common language at the time.

Theologian Warren Wisby said that the name Jesus means Savior and comes from the Hebrew's name Joshua, which also means Savior saves.

Another theologian, Michael Horton, said, although the origin of the name Jesus is not very certain, the consensus is that it derives from the root to save.

[18 : 33] Jesus' name is descriptive of his relationship to his people in faithfulness and mercy. His mission is already embedded in his personal identity.

Jesus is the Messiah, the king who will save his people from their sins. Jesus is a king that was not born into a life of privilege or political power.

When he was born, his own race was under the authority of Rome. His birthplace was a place of occupied land governed by Herod, a pretender half-blooded king.

And in verse 22-23, all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

So Jesus is God with us to save us. Have you ever looked at Jesus from that perspective? Jesus is God and he comes to be with us to save us.

[19 : 46] Who is Jesus to you? Reading on from Matthew 2, verse 13, When they, the Magi, have gone, an angel of the Lord appealed 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. So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod.

And so was fulfilled with the Lord, what the Lord has said through the prophet, Out of Egypt I call my son. Jesus is about to save us because, sorry, Jesus is able to save us because he is 100% human, born of Mary, and he is also 100% God.

He is God the Son. It's not just another character of a story that was told once upon a time.

Because Jesus is truly human and truly God, he can save us from our sins by being our substitution to pay the penalty of our sins.

He knows what it means to be displaced because he had to spend his childhood in a foreign country with his family to preserve his life for the right moment to fulfill the ultimate substitution on the cross.

[21 : 13] He breaks through all stereotypes of what we think a king is. He breaches the gap of all cultures to bring salvation to everyone. Jesus was born king of the Jews who lived in a life in a time under cultural influence of the Greek and the political influence of Romans and spent his childhood in Egypt.

Is this the Jesus that you know? And in verse 19 to 23, when those who were trying to take the child's life are dead, his whole family withdrew to the district of Galilee and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.

So it was fulfilled what was said through the prophet that he would be called an Assyrian. Jesus' life from birth to death was predicted by himself through the prophet.

Every step of Jesus' life was lived out as fulfillment to what he said in the Old Testament. In the first two chapters of Matthew, we have only looked at the first few years of Jesus' life.

The faith fulfilled what the Lord has said through the prophet already appeared about six times. The Old Testament of the Bible is God's redemptive plan being told and the New Testament is a fulfillment of that plan through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

[22 : 42] The birth of Christ, Christmas, is the beginning of the unfolding of God's grace-saving act of mercy towards us. Jesus is not a king that born and grew up in a palace with privilege that does not know his people.

Jesus was born and grew up in a humbly circumstance in an occupied land as an exile. The newborn king is Jesus, the Messiah, the one who saved us from our sins because he is the only one that had lived a perfect obedience life according to every letters of God's word.

No human is able to do so because we do not have the nature of God. The Son of God, Jesus, who is God, the Son, had died and resurrected to make way for us to be united with God.

Is that the Jesus that you know? Have you been seeing Jesus from that perspective? Do you honor Jesus as a king as he deserves to be honored?

Have you let Jesus take control of your life as a king that he should? We have looked at who Herod is and who is this newborn king.

[24 : 07] Now let's look at the last question that I want us to reflect on today. Who is your king? With Christmas just only a couple of weeks away, what has been occupying you and your mind?

Is it about how many days you will have for holiday? What you can do and where you can go? Is it about how you are going to fit all the gatherings of works and families in between those days?

Is it about how to make those gatherings more bearable like my friend did to his German family-in-law? Is it about what kind of gifts you should get for your friends or what kind of gifts you are hoping to get?

During the very first Christmas, the Magi was very busy. They were busy looking for the child Jesus. They found him by the help of God. Let's read from chapter 2, verse 9.

It said, After they had heard the king, they went on their way and the stars they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

[25 : 20] When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary. They bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, Frankenstein's and myrrh.

The star sent by God led the Magi to the child king. And when the Magi see the newborn king of the Jews, they were overjoyed and they came fully prepared to see him.

They were ready to bow down and worship him as king, offer up their treasure and present Jesus with gifts. They treat Jesus as their king even though they are not Jews.

They were well-educated wise men willing to travel a long distance to submit themselves to the newborn king of the Jews. Are you ready to face Jesus?

Are you ready to face your king? What gifts have you prepared to offer to him? What treasure have you bought for him? Have you ever prepared something as a gift and to find out that it's not suitable or not exactly what the other person would like to have?

[26 : 44] What did you do to avoid that embarrassment and headache again? I think the best way is to get to know the other person very well and even ask them directly.

So do you know your king? Do you know where to find him? King Herod was cruelest of Jesus' whereabouts and what did he do?

He asked someone that should know. If you're not sure where to find Jesus and who Jesus is, the Bible and someone who knows the Bible is the best place for you to start.

So please speak with anyone in the red vest or write your question about Jesus in the card in front of you and we will contact you to help you look for Jesus. So in that way, as you search for Jesus, you'll be able to find out what he wants from you.

So when you find him, you're ready to bow down and worship him and offer up your treasured gifts. We should learn from Herod asking other to help to learn about where Jesus is and what we should learn and we also should learn from the Magi putting in the action to find the real king.

[27 : 55] Herod was given a chance to meet the real king of the Jews but instead of going to meet him, he sent someone to do it. Even the religious people at the time who can tell Herod where Jesus is did not go to meet the king but the Magi went and they got to see the child king and pay

their respect and honor but Herod did not because he was not sincere and authentic in his searching.

He said he wants to worship Jesus but his actions say something else. His mind was preoccupied with other things with the worry of losing the control of his pretended kingdom. His mind was preoccupied with what to do to eliminate any new threat to his control. He's not willing to hand over his kingship yet. What are you not like in terms of holding on to things that you do not want to let go?

What are you like in terms of being disturbed and distracted? How sincere and authentic in your worship of Jesus our Savior and Messiah.

Jesus started his ministry in going from town to town to teach people about the kingdom of God after he turned 30 years old. In Luke 10 it tells us that Martha opened her home to Jesus and his disciples to do their teaching.

[29 : 29] As soon as he entered the house Martha's sister Mary sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he had to say. But Martha was distracted by all the preparation that had to be done.

And she complained to Jesus and wanted Jesus to tell her sister Mary to stop sitting on her bedside and get up and help her. And this is what Jesus said to her.

Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things but few things are needed or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her.

Jesus deserves our full attention and his message and his message is worth for us to drop everything to listen to. He is the only one thing that is needed for life.

Is that who Jesus to you? With all that need to be prepared for the first season, it is easy to forget the most important things. The only one thing that is needed is to be at Jesus' feet.

[30 : 42] The best gift you can get for your family and friend is to tell them about Jesus. However, with the demand of life on us from family and work, we are often worried and upset about many things.

Do you feel like being snowed under all the time? Don't be like Martha who gets worried and upset about many things. Be like Mary who chooses to be at the feet of Jesus to hear what he has to say. Jesus' teaching is the only one thing that is needed. Jesus is the only one who born to save. The newborn king comes to be ruler who shepherds God's people.

If you are God's people, Jesus is your shepherd and he will lead you to the right place to meet your needs. Do you believe that he will look after you much better than what you try to plan to do?

If you believe he will, follow him. Don't wander around like a sheep. Don't just follow the herd. Make sure you are following the shepherd. Listen to his voice from the Bible and you will not go astray.

[31 : 56] If you have been a regular member of St. Paul's, what time did you get here today? Have you signed up to join a community group?

And what time did you arrive in the last group meeting? Why are you here? Why are you here just to clock in, to make yourself feel good about yourself, to take off what you think is the requirement of being a Christian?

Are you here to truly treasure Jesus together with us in bringing glory to God and joy to others? Is Jesus truly your King?

What effort are you making to be on time at church and your gathering with your brothers and sisters? What arrangement have you made so that you can stay behind to fellowship and be part of God's family on Sunday?

Are you always arriving after the singing worship finished or rushing off to your lunchtime appointment with your friends? Are you here today to worship Jesus?

[33 : 02] Do you worship Jesus and getting to know him more and more every day of the week? In your day-to-day life, is Jesus the true king of your life? Or does your day-to-day life show that you have rejected him and even tried to kill him because he is threatening the kingship and control of your life?

Have you welcomed the newborn king with joy like the Magi? Or are you protecting the lordship of your life in your own palace like King Herod?

How far would you go to ensure your career goes according to your plan? How far would you go to ensure you get what you want for your life and your family?

Do you truly believe Jesus will look after you because he is your shepherd? A writer and theologian Kim Keller said there is a little herod in all of us.

We are in many ways just like Herod when we feel that the control of our life is being threatened by any outside force. We will do whatever we can to hold on to that control and we are not willing to let someone else to be king of our life.

[34 : 16] Is Jesus the Messiah, the king of your life? Are you ready to see your Savior Christ? Or are you too busy and distracted, worried and upset about many things?

Just as Jesus said to Martha, the only one thing that is needed, the thing that once we have chosen will not be taken from us, is sitting at Jesus' feet with attentive ears and listen to the fulfillments and wonders that he unfolds by his life.

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