

What Child is This?

Part Three - Herod: Threatened by the True King

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Matthew 2:1-20

I. Born a King, Born a Threat

Herod was the son of Antipater, an “Edomite” in Old Testament terms, meaning a descendent of Esau, and his mother was from Arabia. Esau’s descendants were not considered fully “Jewish” in a sense. While his family accepted the Jewish religion, he has no ancestral rights to the throne. He is not “king of the Jews” by birth.

He fought his way into this political role, supported by the Roman overlords, and ruthlessly defended his rule.

The records tell of how he killed members of his own family when he suspected some kind of threat to his power, including killing his own beloved wife. As his power increased – he became known as “Herod the Great” – as his power increased, so did his paranoia, and his grip on maintaining that power.

Jesus is King

“This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah [which means “King”]; so “...the genealogy of Jesus the King, the son of David, the son of Abraham:” – Matthew 1:1.

To Herod, and “all Jerusalem with him,” this child born “king of the Jews” is a *threat; a threat to the status quo, to the power they hold.*

The text the priests cite is from Micah 5:4: “Bethlehem...for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people, Israel.” – Matthew 2:6b.

Jesus is Shepherd

The imagery of a “shepherd” is a key motif for good and loving leadership in the Bible. This coming ruler will be a “good shepherd.” And Jesus, in John 10, takes up this motif and applies to himself: “I am the *good shepherd.*” And he goes on to say, “I lay down my life for my sheep.” That’s how *this* King rules.

Jesus is Saviour

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” – Matthew 1:21

The name “Jesus” was a common name in Hebrew culture. It’s the name “Joshua” in English, or “Yeshua” in Hebrew. This name means “The Lord saves.” This name sends us back to the story of Joshua in the Old Testament. This young man leads God’s people through the waters of the Jordan River and into the promised land after Moses’ death, fulfilling what Moses couldn’t.

II. Reckoning with The Darkness

Advent is a season for us to be honest about the darkness. Honest about our need for saving. Advent is a moment for us to grieve what is lost and broken.

W.H. Auden has a poem titled “September 1, 1939”, named for the day WWII began. He writes about the universal human tendency to cover up our unease and sense of estrangement with sentimentality and denial, with hustle, and noise.

Faces along the bar cling to their average day:
The lights must never go out,
The music must always play.
All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
The furniture of a home;
Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or good.

- - W.H. Auden, “September 1, 1939”

Auden identifies our defenses – the ways we try to insulate ourselves from our real and true condition – as a “fort” that we make as comfortable as possible, to fend off our fears.

We light Advent “candles,” because they are a signal of “light” that is coming with the arrival of Jesus. But we can’t miss it – **we light them *in the dark***. We light them **because of *the dark***. So, Advent is not a time to embrace “fort building” – for adding noise and glitter as a distraction; it’s a time to help us be honest. To address our tendency toward denial and to accept the situation as it is. Ultimately, to accept that we need *this Saviour*.

Advent is a space **for honesty about our predicament. For personal repentance**. For turning to God – or back to God – and to find in him our salvation and new life.

This section shows us how even the ***most evil*** of the evil – *that* evil cannot stop God’s good plan. It shows how **God is at work in and for a world in pain**.

“Before the Prince of Peace had learned to walk and talk, he was a homeless refugee with a price on his head.... No point in arriving in comfort, when the world is in misery; no point in having an easy life, when the world suffers violence and injustice! If he is to be Emmanuel, God-with-us, he must be with us where the pain is.” – N.T. Wright

III. What Kind of King?

Matthew 27:35-44

Where God is “with us” is also in the darkest of all places. In the greatest pain, and injustice. In the place of great shame and humiliation. ***Even there***, is where God is.

- The Saviour *could have* saved himself but chooses not to out of love for you. In order to take your place. To save you. To save us.
- The King *could have* ruled with a sword and scepter but chooses to wear thorns, showing that what restores the world to wholeness is self-giving love.
- The King *could have* rightfully kicked every ruler off every throne, but he’s enthroned on a cross, with an invitation for you and me to bend our knees to the only rightful king and let him rule our hearts.

IV. On Dethroning Myself

At a heart level – maybe King Jesus is more a threat to us than we might like to admit?

The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus is King. Jesus is Lord. It’s good news that the God who made you, and loves you, has come to lead you, to be with you.

It’s Good News...

- a. Because the true King, who made you and loves you, is the only one who can give you life as it was meant to be.

It’s good news because...

- b. This King lays down his life so you can be free and be his, forever.

It’s good news because...

- c. It means you’re not *ultimately* in control of the world.

In this text, we see two very different responses to Jesus.

Herod, and all Jerusalem, were “disturbed” at the announcement of Jesus’ birth. The Magi were “overjoyed” to find him.

Ask yourself: where is your heart in relation to this news that Jesus, the King, is here?

V. From Disturbed to Overjoyed

The Lord’s Prayer: The Ultimate, Daily De-Throning Practice

There is a sense in which we need to have a daily mode of opening our hands in surrender, in yielded-ness; a way of saying, “I step off the throne.” And Jesus gives us that in the prayer he taught us to pray – and to pray *daily*.

1. God's Name to be Honoured: Our Priority

"Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be **your name** [*not mine*]

Hallowed, or "most honoured," be your name – *not my name*.

In a world of self-promotion, in obvious and less obvious ways, praying this prayer frees me from feeling the impulse toward showing-off. From being seen as special, or spectacular.

Aiming my heart at God's glory is not because God is needy, but because I am. And the worst thing for me would be to try and fill this "needy beast" inside me, my own heart, with my own glory.

2. God's Kingdom and Will: Our Longing

"**Your kingdom** come [*not mine*]
"**Your will** be done... [*not mine*]
- Matthew 6:9b-10

In praying for God's name to be honoured, and his kingdom and will to come, we're praying against that part of our selves that is working against God's good design, that part of ourselves that leads away from God's heart.