

Kirkwall Presbyterian Church
'Herod the Great – a resume'
Matthew 2:16-23; Matthew 25:31-40
January 11, 2026
By Keith Marcy

Introduction: *During the month of December, we looked at different Bible characters in the Christmas story – Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the innkeeper. Along with considering the Magi (wise men), we considered the bright light in the sky which these scholarly men from an eastern country called 'His Star'. It was not a star as we know stars. It did not have an orbit. It was a specific 'Light' that appeared when Jesus was born many miles from Bethlehem. Contrary to Christmas cards, there was no star at the Stable, no star to lead the Shepherds. This light led the Magi northwest along the Euphrates River before an abrupt change of direction in the vicinity of Haran leading these scientists/theologians southward toward Jerusalem.*

It was during a stopover in Jerusalem that the Magi met up with the unforgettable King Herod. Last Sunday we looked at Matthew's record of events when the lying king asked them to return with information so he could also worship the newborn King. God alerted them to Herod's scheme, and they went back home by a different route. The furious Herod (it didn't take much to make him lose his marbles), issued the order for his soldiers to kill all boys under two years in Bethlehem and district because his target was to end the life of Jesus! He missed! Jesus was safe in the care of Mary and Joseph in Egypt – where Herod had no authority whatsoever. Today we take a closer look at the king who caused so much grief and sorrow in Bethlehem. I have gathered information from the scriptures but also from the writings of Josephus, a Jewish historian. I wove this information into a supposed Resume in an attempt to grab the attention of my hearers and readers. Partway through there will be an interruption when the town crier throws an imaginary copy of the Jerusalem Daily towards the pulpit. I begin now with the reading of Herod's Resume...

To all the Empires of planet Earth—

At the young age of 25, I was appointed King of Galilee by my father who was a high ranking official in the Roman army. A few years later, some fiercely proud Jews from Judah staged a revolt against Rome. Rome retaliated swiftly and did not stop until Jerusalem's massive walls lay in ruins, and the glorious temple was completely destroyed. The Roman Senate, seeing my skills at controlling the Jews, appointed me as King of

Samaria, Judah and, of course, Galilee. Hence began my 36-year reign. Immediately, I took the necessary steps to prevent future rebellions by having all Jewish noblemen who might finance another rebellion killed. Their wealth nicely enhanced my royal treasury as I began a massive building campaign. To appease the proud Jews, I married a Jew, Mariamne, granddaughter of the Jewish High Priest.

Next, I made plans to expand and remodel the destroyed Jewish Temple. The level plain where the former Temple stood was too small to accommodate my vision of a palace for me and a Temple for them. So, I enlarged the plain with huge quarry stones and dirt. (*Hmmm – sounds like this man was a terror with a sledgehammer and a shovel!*) The resulting structure was breathtaking.

To prevent Jews in other parts of my Kingdom from becoming jealous, I built temples, palaces, arenas for gladiator contests, miles of aqueducts to carry water, and fortresses. I even built a harbor and a port city on the Mediterranean coast. I named it Caesarea, after the Roman Caesar – (*got to grease the political wheels, you know.*)

But problems came up close to home. My beautiful Jewish wife, Mariamne, went behind my back and arranged for her brother to be the Jewish High Priest. I arranged for her execution and her brother too. She had borne me two sons. I now feared I could not trust them, so I had them killed. Also, Mariamne's mother – I erased her from history. Politics is a dirty business, so anyone I saw as a 'maybe' threat to my superiority, I had them extinguished, relative or not!

This is only a brief account of my successful thirty-three-year reign. But I can do more. Therefore, if you would like to see your kingdom purged from internal conflict and raised to be a monument of success, I would be honored to do so. I include no references. Most men do not know how to reiterate the truth regarding my ingenious reign. Just come and visit me in Jerusalem. I would just love to expand my territory, and I am so capable! Yours sincerely, HEROD 'THE GREAT'!!

WOW! What a man! He just told us so himself.

I guess he wrote this before he issued the order for his soldiers to kill all male children under the age of 2 in Bethlehem because he wanted to eliminate the Son of God from the Earth. Unknown to him, the Son of God was safe with Mary and Joseph in Egypt.

It is interesting, don't you think, that King Herod's health began to fail soon after the infanticide in Bethlehem? Historical records by Josephus, tell us that his problems began with severe itching, somehow related, they think,

to severe intestinal problems, shortness of breath, convulsions, and gangrene. We cannot help but wonder if his cruelty and orchestrated murders and political scheming had exhausted the patience of God. It seems the murder of little children may have been the last straw.

(Throw the newspaper.)

What's this?

The Jerusalem Daily, actually delivered before noon!

Must be some earth-shattering news. Only once before has it been early – that was the day the editor's wife gave birth to triplets! Bear with me while I cut this tape...

Open Paper. Hold up page.

HEROD IS DEAD

Josephus' history tells us that day sparked a great rejoicing all over the Promised Land. In his death, Herod was not so great!

For Herod, however, his misery in his death will be mild to the misery he will face when his soul is called before the King of Kings. Matthew describes the event.

Read Matthew 25:31-46.

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in Heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.

Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Then He will say to those on His left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not invite me in. I needed clothes and you did not clothe me. I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.'

Goodbye Herod!

I conclude this morning by putting this vivid description from the lips of Jesus, recorded by the Jewish apostle, Matthew, in Biblical context.

The righteous – those who are invited to take their inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven – are those who Jesus presents before God as faultless because they have received the righteousness of Jesus Himself. And when was that awarded to them?

The hour they first believed. They received a new nature, a kind nature, a giving nature. And living for Jesus, they did all those things Matthew described.

The unrighteous did not do those things because they never accepted the fact that they need a Savior and therefore they do not have a Savior because they never, in their life, sought The Savior, The Christ, The Son of God.

Herod wanted nothing to do with Jesus. He sought to kill Him in infancy.

Is Jesus your Savior? The Bible declares that we all – every one of us needs a Savior. It also says emphatically that there is only One who can save us from the wrath of God. That One is the Son of God. He Himself said: *"All who come to Me in faith, I will never, no never cast away!"*

Don't be a Herod. You come!

AMEN.