

HEROD – The King who Couldn't Kill Jesus

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It may seem strange to listen to the account of the visit of the Magi at this time of year. The text is chosen because of the reaction of King Herod.

What do we know about King Herod? He was known as Herod, the Great. Herod (73-4 BCE) was the pro-Roman king of the small Jewish state in the last decades before the common era. He started his career as a general, but the Roman statesman Mark Antony recognized him as the Jewish national leader. During a war against the Parthians, Herod was removed from the scene, but the Roman Senate made him king and gave him soldiers to seize the throne. As 'friend and ally of the Romans' he was not a truly independent king; however, Rome allowed him a domestic policy of his own. Although Herod tried to respect the pious feeling of his subjects, many of them were not content with his rule, which ended in terror. He was succeeded by his sons.

Herod was not of the line of David. Herod was a Hasmonean, thus, not the rightful king of Israel. In Jerusalem, the king built a new market, an amphitheater, a theater, a new building where the Sanhedrin could convene, a new royal palace, and last but not least, in 20 BCE he started to rebuild the Temple. Herod did all this to try and appease his subjects.

Herod was ruthless. He killed many of his wives and children. Herod the Great, in the last years of his reign, became paranoid, thinking that someone was plotting to kill him to take his throne.

When the Magi arrive searching for a newborn King of the Jews, Herod wanted to find out where this threat to his throne was so he could have him killed.

With the flight into Egypt, Jesus escaped the wrath of Herod who wanted to kill him. Many innocent children were slaughtered at the hands of this paranoid king, but he couldn't kill Jesus.

It's ironic, that when Pontius Pilate finds out that Herod, who is Herod Antipas – one of Herod the Great's sons who survived and appointed king over Galilee – was in Jerusalem, Pilate sent Jesus to him to be tried. Here was a golden opportunity to put Jesus to death. Instead, he wants to be amused by Jesus. The events that transpired before Herod are only recorded in the gospel of Luke.

And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him

again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves

Even though given as opportunity to kill Jesus, he allows Jesus to be taken back to Pilate. However, not without some ridicule from his soldiers.

Just a sideline note, in the Early Church, early Christians saw the trial of Jesus as Satan at work. In the trial (or trials) of our Lord this would be the fourth time that He would be led in bonds through the streets of Jerusalem. First, He was taken to the house of Annas; then, the secret illegal meeting with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin; then, to Pilate; and now to Herod. Satan arranged a two-fold antichristian witness against the Savior with two wicked ecclesiastical judges, Annas and Caiaphas, and two evil civil judges, Pilate and Herod. The apostolic church understood that there was a satanic coalition between the heathen and the Jews against the Messiah.

The same is true today. Satan still is at work to bring Jesus down in the hearts and minds of individuals. Throughout the world, the name of Jesus is being mocked and ridiculed. Christianity is taking a beating and followers of Christ are being persecuted.

Jesus was meek and mild. He was not weak and complacent. He was loving and forgiving. He was not callous and uncaring. Jesus acted justly and loved mercy and he walked humbly with God. That is what God requires, even from us.

This coming holy week we once again experience our King of kings and Lord of lords being just in an unjust situation; showing mercy in the face of merciless people; and humbly obeying the will of his Father, being a servant who was obedient even unto death.

Herod couldn't kill Jesus. Satan thought he had accomplished the dastardly deed, but couldn't kill Jesus. Jesus could not be killed – but willing laid down his life as the ransom for all. He was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised for our iniquity; upon him was laid the chastisement of us all. With his stripes we are healed. Amen.