**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 11-28-2021
Christmas Through the Eyes of Herod**

Last Sunday I shared with you that I recently attended a retreat. One of the ice breaker activities that the leader had us do was to sit in this big circle and roll the volleyball size kickball to one another. On the ball were written all different questions and we were invited, but not required, to answer the question that was closest to our hand as you picked it up. The question that I happened to have was what was my first paying job. So I got to share about my mowing lawns, which is what I did for some of my extended family that lived nearby. And those were some good memories.

But there were all different types of questions on this ball. One of the questions was what our earliest memory was?

The earliest memory that I can think of was my walking and biking around my parent’s house as it was being built when I was about 3 or 4.

I’m curious what your earliest memory is. Feel free to let me know, it would be interesting to hear.

But today I want to share a picture with you that was well before my earliest memory. (cue the slide).

This is a picture of me and my brother David. I was about 2 ½ years old and David was born the day before.

And as you might be able to tell, I wasn’t overly excited about it. At least, that was what my facial expression seems to be saying. Again, I do not remember this. Perhaps I blocked it out of my mind. 😊

But apparently, in my 2.5 year old mind, I was likely mourning the fact that I was no longer the baby of the household and that David was now getting the lion’s share of the attention.

Thankfully, however, David and I have a very good relationship today and I believe that the Lord has freed me up from my envy towards my brother that I had when I was 2.5.

Now why should I share this story today? I share this today because through Advent we are looking at Christmas though the eyes of various people. We are seeking to grasp what may have been going through their minds in light of the birth of Christ. What did they make of the birth of the newborn King? How did they process this?

And today, as we begin Advent, we are looking at Christmas Through the Eyes of Herod. And in a strange way, this picture reveals that some similarities between my little envious mind and a man who was very envious of another young child – Jesus Christ.

Let us turn to the Scriptures now and hear from Matthew 2:1-8, 16-18.

**2:1After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”**

**3When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:**

**6“‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’” 7Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”**

**16When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. 17Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:**

**18“A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted,
    because they are no more.”**

Sisters and brothers, as we try to grasp Christmas through the Eyes of Herod, it is helpful to take a closer look at who this man Herod was.

Herod was born in the year 73 BC and in the year 40 BC, the Romans, who ruled over that entire region, appointed Herod as King of Judea. Herod was basically a puppet king, in that he had to answer to the Romans and his rule was to keep the region as stable as possible.

Interestingly, even though Herod was made King of Judea, he was not actually Jewish. His father was an Idumean and his mother an Arabian. Not surprisingly, Herod was seen by some of the Jews as not being a legitimate king.

But with the help of Rome, by the year 37 BC he has crushed any opposition to his rule. And he ruled as a tyrant until his passing.

Herod loved power and was paranoid of anyone potentially taking authority over him. In fact, his suspicion led to him murdering his wife, at least two of his sons, as well as some of his close associates. Not a very nice guy.

At the same time, Herod was a good administrator and led in the construction of numerous projects, including the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem. And this led to him being known as Herod the Great because of some of those successes.

So with this background, it should not surprise us that Herod was not excited about rumors of the Messiah having been born.

Just picture yourself in Herod’s shoes. He had ruled for decades and now these Magi coming from far away came to Jerusalem asking him where the one born as King of the Jews was. And not only that, these Magi were prepared to worship this King.

And it appears that Herod basically blew a gasket, so to speak. Herod was disturbed, as the Scripture says.

And Herod, not surprisingly, tries to snuff out this new King as soon as possible. He tries to get the magi to give him all the information, but the Lord warns the magi to not go back to Herod and so God made a way for Jesus to be protected from what Herod was about to do. An angel from God comes to Joseph in a dream and tells him to get up and get out of here. Go to Egypt for safety from Herod. And Jospeh and Mary flee to Egypt with Jesus.

Now we do not know exactly how old Jesus was when Herod learned of his birth. Some scholars think that Jesus may have been as old as two. But Herod wanted to make very sure that the new king would not take his place and so he has all the boys 2 and under in Bethlehem put to death. What a terrible atrocity.

Eventually, after Herod passes away, God instructs Joseph to take his family back to Israel.

So friends, as we ponder Christmas through the Eyes of Herod, what is the big takeaway for us today?

**Simply this, don’t be a Herod.**

Specifically, I want to share 3 ways that we can succeed in not being a Herod.

**First, do not seek to be King or Queen of your life**. Jesus is meant to be our King.

Now there is nothing wrong in and of itself with having earthly power, such as being a King or Queen or President, as long as it doesn’t go to your head and you recognize that Jesus is your King.

It is easy to forget in all of this that Jesus came for Herod. Jesus loved Herod and He desired to save Herod from his sins. But sadly, Herod’s heart was hard and it prevented him from coming to follow Jesus.

Like Herod, all of us can live in a way that we want to be our master. We want to be King. We as a human race naturally want to be in control and want to be the master of our own destiny or our own captain, so to speak.

I think of the Disney movie, *The Lion King*, and Simba the lion singing “*I Can’t Wait to be King*.” Sadly, most people in the world desire to be king or queen of their life.

They want control. They want the final say. They think about themselves first.

Even if we have followed Jesus for years, it is a good reminder to remember that we are not called to be king or queen of our life.

Scripture says that we have been bought with the price. The blood of Christ was shed for us and we are His.

Isaiah 43 says **“But now, this is what the LORD says – He who created you, Jacob, He who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are Mine.”**

We are Christ’s. We are His. Jesus came to redeem all of us and to bring us back to God. We are His. He is our King. So please, do not be a Herod by trying to be your own king or queen.

**Second, celebrate what God is doing in others.**

Herod was meant to celebrate Christmas, but instead became an Ebenezer Scrooge. I was meant to celebrate my brother David’s birth, but instead, I was moping around in self-pity.

One way to practice not being queen or king of our life is to celebrate what God is doing in others. Our Triune God is so amazing and He is at work in each of our lives. Let us celebrate what God’s doing in other people’s lives. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice, Scripture says.

Celebrating God’s work in others keeps us less focused on ourselves. So let us find out what God is doing in other people’s life and celebrate. Celebrate in prayer. Share in their joy. Rejoice in their successes as if they were your own.

**And third, remember that living with Jesus as your King brings true joy and peace and hope and love to your life.**

Herod had money and power and influence, but he certainly did not have peace or joy or love or hope.

There are many celebrities that have money and power and influence, but they are empty inside, because they have themselves as their own king or queen. There is no life in that. It’s very sad really.

Truly there was no joy in Herod’s life. All that he cared about was himself and his status and his money and his power. But that is a very empty life. Certainly, money and power did not buy happiness for Herod, nor will they for us.

There is nothing wrong with having money and power, as long as it’s used for God’s purposes. In contrast to Herod, think of the magi or wise men in the story. They were wealthy. They had status. But they recognized that they were to worship Jesus as their King. They didn’t see Jesus as an inconvenience or a rival, but as the divine king who came for them.

But in Jesus, with Him as our King, we have all we need. We are spiritually rich in Him. He gives us joy and peace and hope and love. He provides for our physical needs. He is our perfect King and we can trust in Him.

Let us pray, Heavenly Father, none of us wants to be a Herod. Help us to learn from how he viewed Christmas and see to live completely opposite.

Help us to always remember that You are our King, Lord Jesus. May we live to bring glory to Your Name.

Help us Lord to celebrate what You are doing in the lives of others, and not to be envious or jealous of them. We thank You that You are at work in each person’s life.

And Lord Jesus, we give You thanks that we are spiritually rich in You. You give us hope, You give us peace, You give us joy, and You fill us with Your love.

All glory to You, holy Trinity, now and forever, Amen.

 Sources:

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The Gospel According to Matthew – Leon Morris

[www.BibleGateway.com](http://www.BibleGateway.com)