

Matt 2.19-23: KING HEROD DIED: KING JESUS LIVED – AND LIVES!

[Chelmsford: Carols by Candlelight 18 December 2011]

HEROD DIED – THE CHILD LIVED TO BECOME KING

“**Herod died**”, wrote Matthew (2.19).

It is a historical fact that after a reign of some 33 or so years marked by violence and intrigue, Herod the Great died a lonely and horrible death of cancer at Jericho in the spring of 4 BC.

Herod was an evil man.

During his life-time he killed his wife Mariamne, and his two sons Alexander and Aristobulus. This caused Emperor Augustus to observe that it was better to be Herod’s pig than his son!

Herod was a butcher

To ensure that there was mourning at his funeral, Herod ordered his soldiers that at the time of his death, they should kill some notable political prisoners: *“So shall all Judea and every household weep for me, whether they wish it or not”*

And, of course, after having been tricked by the wise men, he killed in Bethlehem every male child under two – to be fair this wasn’t a vast number: there may have only been twenty or so boys. But even so, that is still a massacre.

But in the end – **Herod died**, while thanks to a God-inspired dream God Joseph & Mary and their baby son escaped to Egypt, where they lived until Herod died.

Yes **Herod died** – the child lived.

In one sense there was nothing surprising about the dying of Herod and the living of the child: it is a biological fact that old men die, whereas normally babies live and grow up.

But this is no more biological fact. The child lived to fulfil his destiny

The child lived to become King – and not just King of the Jews, but King of all

Listen to the words of Paul to the church in Ephesus: **“God raised Jesus from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but forever”** (Eph 1.20-21 Peterson)

HERODS CONTINUE TO THREATEN – BUT JESUS OUTLIVES THEM ALL

Down through the centuries there have been other Herods who, recognising the incarnate Son of God as a threat to all that they have stood for, have sought to murder him in his cradle.

There was Herod’s grandson, ***Herod Agrippa I***, who tried to persecute the infant church out of existence. He killed James, the brother of John (Acts 12.2). He imprisoned Peter, intending to execute him also (Acts 12.3). He became drunk with illusions of his own divinity (Acts 12.22). But in the end he was eaten up with worms and died (Acts 12.23). Herod died, Jesus lived.

Another ‘Herod’ was *Nero*, the Roman emperor. He ordered Christians to be wrapped up in the hides of wild beasts and torn to bits by dogs; others he nailed to crosses, while yet he tarred yet others and then set fire to their bodies to illuminate a circus staged for the crowds in his gardens. Yet in the end this ‘Herod’ died and Jesus lived.

As early as AD 403 Jerome wrote: “*Even in Rome itself paganism is left in solitude. Every pagan temple in Rome is now covered with cobwebs. They who once were the gods of the nations remain under their leaking, lonely roofs with horned owls and other birds of the night*”.

And so the story has gone on.

Down through the centuries people have tried to do away with Jesus, but have failed.

Adolf Hitler was in many ways a re-incarnation of Herod.

He threw many a faithful German Christian into his concentration camps.

But in the end this 20th ‘Herod’ died, but Jesus lives.

Idi Amin, a former president of Uganda, was another Herod – he killed and persecuted many a faithful Ugandan Christian. But this African Herod eventually died, whereas Jesus continues to live – and reign in the hearts of millions.

“**At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**” (Phil 2.9-11). Already this vision is being turned into reality.

Today over 2 billion Christians – some 33% of the world’s population – declare that Jesus is their Lord.

TODAY’S HERODS WILL HAVE THEIR DAY – JESUS WILL OUTLIVE THEM TOO

Not all modern-day Herods employ the crude and violent methods of Herod the Great.

Today many seek to smother Jesus by creating a climate of cynicism and ridicule, and in this way destroy the Christian church.

We sometimes feel overpowered by the ‘Herods’ present within the media, who seek to create doubt and confusion within the minds of many faithful Christians today.

It doesn’t help that the present head of BBC’s religious services is not a Christian

A lot of air time is given to so-called alternative views of Jesus

Militant atheists like Richard Dawkins have a field day, poking fun at Jesus

The novelist Philip Pullman last year published his imaginative retelling of the story of Jesus, with the title *The Good Jesus and the Scoundrel Jesus*

There is even a web-site entitled *unfollowingJesus.com*

BUT if the story of Herod has anything to say, it is this: we have only to wait for God to finish the story – these modern Herods will die and Jesus will outlive them all!

And on that day, says John, “**the kingdom of this world**” will become “**the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ for ever and ever**” (Rev 11.15 NRSV).

TONIGHT JESUS MAKES A BID FOR YOUR HEART

In the meantime Jesus seeks to win our love and our allegiance
But unlike the Herods of old, Jesus forces no one to love him and give him their allegiance.
Unlike the Herods of today, Jesus manipulates nobody into his Kingdom.

Instead, he waits for us to respond to his offer of love and life.

He waits for us to invite him to be King of our lives

“Listen!”, he says, **“I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in”**.

In the words of one of the carols we sang earlier: *“Where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in”*

I believe that tonight that King Jesus is making a bid for the hearts of each one of us here.

In coming to our world to be our Saviour, he has given his all for us that we might share the blessing of heaven itself.

Let me encourage you to make Jesus your Lord and Saviour and discover the difference that he can make to life.

Or if frankly you have too many questions, then resolve tonight to join a new programme we are running next term, called *‘Looking for Love. Want it. Need it. Find it.* And in so doing discover the reality of God’s love for you.

But whatever you do, don’t push Jesus away.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, tonight we have been celebrating your coming into our world to be our Saviour. Help each one of us to welcome you into our lives. So we say, Lord, Jesus, come and deal with all that is wrong in my life; come and give me strength to face the challenges before me; come and give me hope for the future. Come, Lord Jesus, come.