

“It’s A Boy!” *Herod Speaks*
Message for December 16, 2018
North East United Methodist Church
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Today, this third Sunday in Advent, we continue our series, looking at how several people responded to the news “It’s A Boy!” how they responded to the birth of Christ.

We think on these things because Advent is a time to prepare our hearts not only for the celebration of the birth of Christ, but also for His “second coming,” when Christ will return and we will stand before Him.

We have looked at how Mary and Joseph responded to the news “It’s A Boy!” They responded with trust, faith, courage, obedience, and humility. Today, we look at how a king responded to the birth of the “King of Kings.” Today we look at Herod.

Matthew 2: 1-12 (NKJV) -

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

*‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
 Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
 For out of you shall come a Ruler
 Who will shepherd My people Israel.’”*

Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.”

When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

Herod was a cruel king. He had his wife, Mariamne I, executed, as well as two of his favorite sons, Alexander and Aristobulus. Throughout his life, he grew increasingly paranoid, having another son, his oldest, Antipater III, executed just five days before his death.



The Jewish people hated Herod as a foreigner and a friend of the Romans. Historian Josephus writes, “*He was a man who was cruel to all alike and one who easily gave in to anger and was contemptuous of justice.*” Herod was quick to defend his throne against any threat.



In the world of the first century an expectation circulated that a ruler would arise from Judea. Roman historian Suetonius writes, *“Throughout the whole of the East there had spread an old and persistent belief: destiny had decreed that at that time men coming forth from Judea would seize power [and rule the world].”*

Herod, with his paranoia and constant defense of his throne, would have seen this coming Messiah, King, as a threat to his reign; therefore, Herod sought to destroy him. First, he asked the Wiseman to find Jesus and return, telling him where to find this new king, so he could go worship him. When the Wiseman did not return, Herod took matters into his own hands.

Matthew 2: 13-18 (NKJV) -

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.”

Then he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”

Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:

*“A voice was heard in Ramah,
Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children,
Refusing to be comforted,
Because they are no more.”*

Unleashing his anger, Herod killed every child less than two years of age in Bethlehem.



Herod could not give up control. Power. Prestige. Control. These drove his life. His need for power and riches got in the way of his discovering the Savior of the world, a Savior for all humankind, both rich and poor, high and low. He was so close. The Christ child was born five miles south of Jerusalem, in the little town of Bethlehem. Five miles. And because of his need for power, for control, he missed Him.

Christ is even closer today. James 4:8 (NKJV) states, “***Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.***” Yet, so many of us like Herod allow many, many things to come between us and Christ. Like Herod, we often are not willing to give up power, control, prestige, riches, and habits in order to humbly bow before the King of Kings. There are so many that are close, so close. There are many, in church, who have even invited Christ into their lives, but are keeping Him at a distance. They are so close, yet still holding back from truly knowing Him as King.

Dr. Andrew Bonar tells the story of how in the Highlands of Scotland, a sheep would often wander off into the rocks and get into places that they couldn't get out of. The grass on these mountains is very sweet and the sheep like it, and they will jump down ten or twelve feet, and then they can't jump back again, and the shepherd hears them bleating in distress. They may be there for days, until they have eaten all the grass.



The shepherd will wait until they are so faint they cannot stand, and then they will put a rope around him, and he will go over and pull that sheep up

out of the jaws of death. Once someone asked Dr. Bonar, *“Why don’t they go down there when the sheep first gets there?”*

“Ah!” he said, *“they are so very foolish they would dash right over the precipice and be killed if they did!”*

Dr. Bonar goes on to write, *“And that is the way with men; they won’t go back to God till they have no friends and have lost everything. If you are a wanderer I tell you that the Good Shepherd will bring you back the moment you have given up trying to save yourself and are willing to let Him save you His own way.”*

Herod had found his spot of grass. He was appointed King of the Jewish state of Israel by the Roman Senate. Herod made sure his plot of grass was safe. He was famous for the fortresses he built such as Herodion, Machaereus, and Masada.



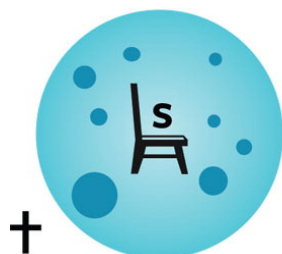
Herod constantly fought to keep his throne and to gain the popularity of the people, issuing building project after building project, working constantly in trying to save himself and his throne.

Herod’s self-sufficiency kept him from coming face to face with the Savior. For those of us in control, that have it together, what use do we have for a Savior? We can do it ourselves right?

Paul has something to say about that. Beginning in **I Corinthians 2:14**, *“But people who aren’t Christians can’t understand these truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them because only those who have the Spirit can understand what the Spirit means.”*

Here Paul is describing those who are NOT Christians. They cannot understand the things of God.

Self-Directed Life



- S** Self is on the throne
- +** Christ is outside the life
- Interests are directed by self, often resulting in discord and frustration

This person has not brought Christ (represented by the cross) into His life (represented by the circle). Furthermore, the person, like Herod, has placed “self” (represented by the “S”) on the throne. The person wants to be “boss,” in charge and in control.

PRAY for those who have not accepted Christ.

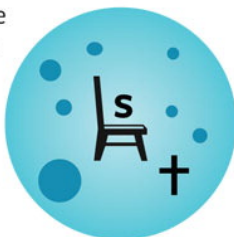
Now, many of us here would say, “Well, that’s not me. I’ve accepted Christ into my life. I believe.”

Well, Paul says there is a second type of person in the church. This is the Worldly or Fleshly person. **I Corinthians 3: 1-3** – “*Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn’t talk to you as I would to mature Christians. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you milk and not with solid food, because you couldn’t handle anything stronger. And you still aren’t ready, for you are still controlled by your own sinful desires. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn’t that prove you are controlled by your own desires? You are acting like people who don’t belong to the Lord.*”

Paul is talking about a second type of person who has accepted Christ...

Self-Directed Life

- Legalistic attitude
- Impure thoughts
- Jealousy
- Guilt
- Worry
- Discouragement
- Critical spirit
- Frustration



- Aimlessness
- Fear
- Ignorance of spiritual heritage
- Unbelief
- Disobedience
- Loss of love for God and others
- Poor prayer life
- No desire for Bible Study

...but they are not living by faith. They are still being controlled by their own “desires” and selfish wants. This person has invited Christ (the cross) into their lives (the circle), but refuses to step off the throne of their lives and give Christ control.

This is where the daily battle takes place. Every day, when we awake, we must make a conscious decision to “RELINQUISH” our throne to Christ, to be the last type of person in the church Paul speaks of.

PRAY for those who have invited Christ in but refuse to give Him control.

The last type of person in the church that Paul describes is the Spiritual. The spiritual person has accepted Christ and has allowed Christ to take the steering wheel instead of ride in the passenger seat. The person has given Christ the throne of their lives and is allowing Christ to control, guide, and lead them, wherever Christ wants to take them. Paul talks about this group in **I Corinthians 2: 15-16** – “*We who have the Spirit understand these things, but others can’t understand us at all. How could they? For, ‘Who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who can give Him counsel?’ But we can understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.*”

Christ-Directed Life

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness



- Life is Christ-centered
- Empowered by Holy Spirit
- Introduces others to Christ
- Has effective prayer life
- Understands God’s Word
- Trusts God
- Obeys God

When we “*have the mind of Christ,*” we have allowed Christ (the cross) to not only be in our lives but to be in control of our lives (the circle), our futures, our thoughts, our actions. We have placed Christ on the throne.

How often I battle with this? How often in my ministry I try to keep control? I try to be the one on the throne making sure everything gets done instead of leaving it in God’s hands. How often I try to plan out how tomorrow and the next day and the next year will go? How often I feel that it will ALL fall apart if I don’t do it instead of trusting the one who created the universe, who hung the stars in the sky? Instead, I am trusting one who has trouble solving the simplest of problems...ME.

What about you? Are there times you feel you need to be in control, you feel the success of the ministry rests on you? Or what about times you don’t want to relinquish the throne of your life to God? You are afraid of what He might ask you to do. You like your life, your little plot of grass, just the way it is and when God comes looking for you to take you somewhere else...you run? Perhaps you believe you are self-sufficient. You can handle whatever comes your way. You are strong and self-reliant, dependable. You believe in God but you don’t really need him in the day to day? Are you seeking His guidance for the future or have you got your life all planned out?

PRAY for strength to relinquish control each day and keep Christ on the throne.

A gentleman tells the story about his son wanting to help him out in the yard one fall day. There really wasn’t much for him to do in the back, but he had left the leaf blower around front, fully intending to blow the fallen leaves off the driveway when he finished winterizing the garden in the back. “*Go around front,*” he said, “*And blow the leaves off the driveway.*”



His son disappeared, and the man returned to pulling up old tomato plants and picking the last of the Brussels sprouts and was soon so engrossed in his

work that he forgot all about his son. It was quite some time before the man remembered his son's offer of help, and then realized that he didn't hear the leaf blower running. He hurried around front, and there on the side of the drive lay the leaf blower, completely untouched. His son lay on his stomach on the concrete, manfully "blowing" at the leaves.

Who is in the driver's seat? Who is in control? Whose power are you using to do ministry, change lives, take care of your children, grow your marriage, change your habits, become the person you were created to be? Whose power are you using?

One last story. Pastor Ben Patterson writes, "It took nearly seven years for me to lose confidence in myself. It came by way of two ruptured discs in the lumbar region of my back. The doctor had prescribed six weeks of total rest, just to determine whether surgery would be needed. My first thought was OK, I guess I'll get a lot of reading done. But due to the pain, the painkillers, the muscle relaxants, and lying on my back, my eyes didn't focus well. I read one book in six weeks. And I couldn't lie in bed, either; it was too soft. So the six weeks were spent on the floor. The pain was horrible, and humiliating. A trip to the bathroom was a race between my bladder and my capacity for pain. Sometimes I had to lie down on the bathroom floor to recover from the trip before I could do what the trip was for.

I was of no use to the church, so I thought. I couldn't preach, I couldn't lead meetings, I couldn't make calls. I couldn't do anything but pray. So I asked my wife to bring me the new church directory with the pictures of all the church members in it. I decided I would pray for every member every day I was on the floor. It took nearly two hours for me to do this. Don't misunderstand: this wasn't great piety. Mainly I was bored and frustrated. But very quickly these times of prayer became sweet.

Toward the end of my convalescence, I had taken a walk and was back on the floor resting and thinking about going back to work. I said to the Lord, "You know, these times of prayer have been sweet. It's too bad I don't have time to do this when I'm at work." Then the Lord spoke. He addressed me: "Stupid." That was his word. He said it in a pleasant tone of voice, though. He said, "Stupid, you have the same twenty-four hours each day when you're sick as when you're well. The trouble with you, Ben, is when you're well, you think you're in charge; when you're sick, you know you're not."

Here's the question: Will you react like Herod to the news, "It's A Boy" and fight to hold the throne OR will you step down, allow Christ to take the throne, and bow before the King of Kings?

Amen.