

Episode: Christmas Series No. 8

Narrator: King Herod

Primary Scriptures: Matthew 2

Story Summary: King Herod tells about the impending birth of Jesus

Location: Jerusalem

Time: Circa 4 BC

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Matthew 2:8

Herod the Great is one of the most fascinating characters in the Bible, partially because his story plays out against the backdrop of world events. In 63 BC, the expanding reach of Rome was displayed when Pompey the Great captured Jerusalem. A war of rebellion by the Israelites loomed, so in stepped the peacekeepers, including Herod the Great. He was appointed governor of Galilee in 47 BC, and helped keep war at bay while still collecting taxes.

Herod was a friend of Mark Antony, but successfully changed sides to Octavian, who would become Emperor Augustus. In 40 BC, Herod was appointed King of Judea, and ruled as a client king. He would keep that title until his death in about 4 BC.

Herod was known as Herod the Great because of his astounding building projects including the renovation of the Temple and Temple Mount, the creation of the deep-water port Caesarea Maritima, and elaborate palaces at Masada and Herodium.

Herod was known for his brutality and his extreme loyalty to Rome. He died in Jericho, but was buried at his fortress south of Jerusalem, Herodium. Due to a putrefying illness known as "Herod's Evil," he lived his final years in a pain so extreme that he attempted suicide. According to the historian, Josephus, Herod was so concerned nobody would mourn his death that he commanded a large group of distinguished Jews be killed at his death so there would be large public displays of grief. This command was, fortunately, not carried out.

While alive, Herod seemingly killed several of his family members because he was paranoid about their desire to displace him. It is against the backdrop of all of these circumstances that the wise men came to him asking for his help in locating the King of the Jews. According to Matthew 2:3, King Herod, along with all of Jerusalem, was disturbed when the Magi made their request. Herod's paranoia would have kicked into high gear, and was certainly the reason he concocted a plan to find the supposed king and kill him.

When the plan of Herod did not work, he gave orders to kill all the baby boys less than two years old living in the vicinity of Bethlehem. Herod's desperate plan did nothing but cause useless harm and pain. Thanks to an angel's warning, the baby Jesus was on his way to Egypt, or had already arrived there.