

Bible Heroes

King
Herod
The Great

Teachers
Story notes



Essential Teachers notes:

This is a dark story, it is probably not the first choice for many, but if your group is looking for something different and has already covered the Christmas story multiple times this is an important element that is often overlooked. That Mary would not have exchanged all the gifts for one less mother's grief is unquestionable, the price of bringing Jesus into the world was felt by everyone he encountered in his early days.

Main Passage : Matthew 2

Herod's palace was huge, between its two wings in the enormous courtyard stood a few travellers looking totally impressed. "This must be the place" they whispered amongst themselves. Eventually they were shown into a very grand room and met the great King Herod. They weren't the only one looking pleased, the palace officials had told King Herod that the travellers had brought gifts and King Herod loved getting gifts.

Silence fell and one of the men stepped forward looking excited

"Great King Herod" he proclaimed in a loud voice. "We are Magi, we study the heavens for signs. When we saw a huge star rising in the west we knew it must mean a powerful new ruler had been born. So we have travelled many days and nights to find the land under which it rose. We have bought gifts for the child and wish to worship this powerful new king."

The room froze. The smiles dropped from the faces of those who had crowded to hear, King Herod looked like someone had punched him. The Magi saw the change and they started to look worried too.

"What child?" roared the King, his face starting to turn purple. "I am the only king." - he turned his back on the men and calling his advisers stormed out of the room. The Magi looked puzzled, obviously they had said the wrong thing.

Herod was furious. Not only did he have to deal with the religious priests who rule the masses and the Roman empire breathing down his back now he had a king he would have to battle, a king so great his arrival was written in the stars. Herod didn't stand a chance against someone so great. Fear and jealousy mixed in his mind. Quickly he sent all his officials into a panic. He needed to know everything. The Magi were quizzed about the star while scribes were called to tell Herod of any prophecies regarding kings.

Herod discovered the Jewish messiah would be born in the town of Bethlehem, to a descendant of the great King David. It was said the Messiah's kingdom would be so great it would have no end. More fear, more jealousy, Herod's thoughts turned dark, he had a terrible idea. A really evil thought. The child was just a baby and babies can't lead armies or steal crowns. A smooth voice whispered in his head "If you could find the baby you could have him killed." "Wait Herod" - came another voice in his head "he's just a baby." Sometimes ideas tempt you to do something, other times they tell you what you should do. Herod had a choice - which voice would he listen to?

Herod called the Magi. He told them all he knew and asked them to come back when they found the child because he too wanted to worship him. Herod was lying. He wanted to know if the stars were true, if there really was a king. The magi left to find the child and Herod waited. He waited days, and weeks and every day his anger and jealousy grew. Finally he realised the travellers would not return. Herod didn't know they had been warned in a dream to take a different road home. He didn't know that Joseph had also had a dream telling him to run to Egypt with Mary and Jesus.

Again he had to choose what to do. He could walk away, risk losing his crown to a new king when the child grew up, if the child even existed. But Herod didn't choose that. Herod chose to kill instead. Because Herod didn't know which child to kill he killed them all, every baby boy under the age of 2 born in Bethlehem. If only Herod had looked a bit closer he might have seen that Jesus would be a different kind of king, not interested in Herod's crown.

Jesus, that small child laying in a manger had come at a great cost. Mary had been at risk of being stoned for carrying a child before her wedding, Joseph had needed to abandon his home and work, Magi had risked dangerous journeys to reach him and now the town that heard his first cry was full of mothers crying for their lost children. Jesus was a refugee until a few years later the great king Herod died and they returned, not to Bethlehem but Nazareth. Everyone had made choices, some good, some bad but the best choice of all was made by God, to send his son to Earth.

Today's hero is Herod the Great, because he shows us the gift of a choice.