

**King Herod - Hope**  
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Matthew 2:3-8; 16-18

You may consider yourselves lucky that I'm dead! My name is Herod. I was a military general and a regional governor. But most of you have heard of me in my most famous position—"King Herod".

I am remembered fondly by some—because I led great building projects like the restoration of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, and the modern port city of Caesarea. Of course, the huge tax burden I placed on the Jewish citizens, to pay for these projects, wasn't very popular with some...

It's been said that I knew how to get things done and was a skilled politician. Because I was only half-Jewish, my loyalties aligned more with Rome and the political power I could amass, than they did with "my people".

I also was known for ruling with a "strong hand"—utilizing a secret police force to imprison and silence my detractors, and to inhibit public protests against me. I killed my father-in-law and several of my ten wives. I was ambitious...ruthless...unscrupulous...and heartless. Ah, but what's a ruler to do?

Which is why, when I learned from three astronomers who traveled through from the lands East of my Judean kingdom, that a baby prophesied to be king of the Jews had just been born, I tricked them into telling me where that birth would take place. They replied with an answer from the holy writings, by saying: *"In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.'"*

So those so-called "wise men"? I sent them on their way, asking that they return to me with news of the exact location of that baby. Naturally, I told them I planned to visit him myself, so I could pledge my own loyalty to him.

But of course that was just a ruse! I would *\*never\** step down for such a "king"!

But those confounding astronomers never returned to me! They tricked me! I was furious!! So I ordered the slaughter of all children age two or younger, to ensure I would not be dethroned by some peasant brat!

But, obviously, I failed in that task. Unbeknownst to me and, as history has shown, the infant had been whisked away to Egypt before I could send my soldiers to kill him. And ultimately, I died a painful and gruesome death—one which many would say I deserved...

Yet, today I address this assembly of people who again are beginning another season of what you call "Advent"—the coming anew of your Christ. Today, the first candle of your Advent wreaths will be lit—the candle you call "hope".

And what message of "hope" does someone like me have for you, this body of people who are celebrating over 2,000 years of the reign of that long-ago baby king?

I would hope that your own ambitions, jealousies and passions won't rule your hearts as they did mine. I would hope that you will not value your own accomplishments in this life over the greatness of God, as I did.

For your real hope—for this life *and* the next—*\*is\** in Christ. Not in a king. Not in an elected official. Not in your own skills...or feats...or building projects. The hope is that Jesus Christ brings release to captives, comfort to the poor and the afflicted, and a voice to those without a champion. Jesus is our hope!

*(light first blue or purple candle)*