

Characters of Christmas Series  
Herod the Great  
(Communion)

ETS: Herod's self-interest led to destruction and pain

ESS: Looking out only for our self-interests leads to destruction and pain

OSS: I want people to look out for the interest of others

PQ: Are you fighting against self-interest?

UW: Self-interest

**ME**

I know the **#1 question** is being asked by you and OF you during the Christmas season!

- It is the most common question
  - We ask it from our **children**, grandchildren, spouses, and friends

Do you know what the **#1 question** we ask during this time of the year is?

- “What do you want for Christmas”?

Do you know what the **#1 most frustrating response** is: “I don't know”

I was relieved yesterday when I asked **Laura** that question

- For weeks she'd been saying "**I don't know**" but on **Friday** she gave me a string of things that she wanted.
  - I promptly logged onto **Amazon!!**

## **WE**

Why do WE ask people "**What do you want for Christmas?**"

- We want them to be **happy!**
- We want them to be **excited** about getting gifts for us

Have you ever received a gift that was really for the benefit of someone else?

- Husband's gift: A **vacuum** cleaner for you for Christmas
  - (Not usually a good idea to get your wife kitchen appliances for Christmas!)

College: Ford Taraus

- Hinted they were going to get Laura a car
  - Told her father that Laura did not like Fords (**Found On Road Dead**)

- Laura's parents are BIG Ford People (Lincoln)
- What did they get her? A Ford Taurus

The gift was wonderful: A car!

- Laura was **thankful** but **hurt!**
  - They got what **they wanted** to get for her—even though **they knew** she didn't like Fords!

Complete this phrase: “Look out for .....(Number 1)”

Would you agree that WE are naturally selfish people?

- **Children** want the “**biggest or heaviest presents**”
  - Have you had your children get into a fight over a gift? “That's what I wanted” or “He got more gifts” or “I didn't get what I wanted!”

WE are naturally selfish people!

- Our inclination is to look out for our self-interest first!

What happens when we focus on our self-interest?

- What happens when we only “look out for number #1”?

**GOD**

## **New Series: *The Characters of Christmas***

Our first character of Christmas....

- Focused on his self-interest—all he worried about was what he wanted!

**Character:** Herod the Great

**Matthew 2:1-2** “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of **King Herod**, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, 2 saying, “Where is he who has been born **king of the Jews**? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him.”

- Tale of **Two kings**:
- **Problem:** King Herod thought HE was the “**king of the Jews!**”

### **History Lesson**

- Herod the Great was born in **72 B.C.** in **Idumea**, south of the Holy Land
- Eleven years later, in **63 B.C. General Pompey conquered** Jerusalem in 63 B.C. making the area of Palestine a **Roman province**.
- *Herod's father, Herod Antipas*, was a good friend of **Julius Caesar**

- Julius Caesar entrusted Herod's father with handling the issues in Judea

### **Corporate Ladder: Herod the Great**

- In **47 B.C.** when Herod was in his **mid-twenties**, he was appointed provincial **governor** of Galilee (which the area **Jesus** would later call **home**)
- In **41 B.C.** Herod and his brother Phasael, were named as **tetrarchs** by Roman leader **Marc Antony**.
  - In the Roman Empire, a tetrarch was one of **four joint rulers**

### ***Herod and Hyrcanus II***

- Hyrcanus II was **high priest** and had been appointed as an **Ethnarch** by Julius Creaser
  - *An Ethnarch provided political leadership over an ethnic group*
    - So, Hyrcanus II was proving political leadership over the Jewish people.

### **Antigonus was Hyrcanus' nephew**

- Antigonus formed an alliance with the **Parthians (Iran)**
  - Antigonus marched into town with **500 soldiers** and **kicked out** Hyrcanus II—who was the High Priest and ruler of the Jews--from power.

- As a result Antigonus **gained** the **adherence** of both the **aristocratic class** in Jerusalem and the **leaders** of the **Pharisees**.

When **Hycanus II** was **expelled** from Jerusalem by his nephew, **Herod fled** to Rome

When Herod got to Rome, he was **unexpectedly** appointed *King of the Jews* by the **Roman Senate**.

- Backed by Mark Anthony and the governor of Syria, **Herod returned** with a large Army to dethrone Antigonus.
- In **37 B.C.** Herod finally **defeated Antigonus** and took control not only of Jerusalem but of the region.

Herod worked hard trying to be *accepted by* the Jews as the *“king of the Jews”*

- His father was an **Edomite** (known as Idumaea)
  - **Edomites** were **descendants** of **Esau** (Esau was the brother of Jacob)
    - Jacob’s sons made up the 12 tribes of Israel
  - **Edomites** had **not** been **kind** to the Jews!
- Although Herod’s father was an Edomite, the family later **converted** to **Judaism**.

- *Herod was raised as a Jew*—even though he was **ethnically an Arab**

**Problem:** Even though Herod converted to Judaism, the Jew **did not** accept Herod as the “**king of the Jews**”!

- Although he “**converted**” to Judaism, Herod’s **actions** did not indicate that he was really a **converted Jew**!
  - According to the Jewish Encyclopedia Herod “**insulted the Jews by forcing upon them heathen games and combats with wild animals.**”
  - In Jerusalem, Herod erected a **golden eagle** at the entrance of the Temple
- The two major Jewish sects of the day, the **Pharisees** and the **Sadducees**, both showed **opposition** to Herod.
  - The **Pharisees** were **discontented** because Herod **disregarded** many of their **demands** with **respect** to the **Temple's construction**.
  - The **Sadducees**, who were closely associated with **priestly responsibilities** in the Temple, opposed Herod because he **replaced their high priests** with **outsiders** from **Babylonia** and **Alexandria**.

**Problem:** Herod may have been given the title “king of the Jews” but the Jews did not recognize him as “the king of the Jews”

**Matthew 2:1-2** “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, 2 saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him.”

- Herod: Proclaimed “King of the Jews” by the **Roman Senate** is being asked by these “wise men from the east” “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?”

**Matthew 2:3** “When King Herod heard this, he was *deeply disturbed*, and all Jerusalem with him.”

- *It was NOT in Herod’s self-interest to have another “king of the Jews”!*

By the time Jesus was born, Herod was an **old, paranoid** ruler!

- By this time, he had **killed three** of his **sons**, his **favorite wife**, **her grandfather**, **her mother**, his **brother-in-law**, not to mention some his **own subjects**.

- He frequently wrote to Rome **requesting permission** to execute one or more of his sons for suspected treason.
  - Eventually, even his patron and friend **Augustus** admitted, “I’d rather be Herod’s pig than his son.”

Herod knew that he had to do something to **stop** this “king of the Jews” who had been born!

**Matthew 2:4** “So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born.”

- Did you see the **shift** in the **language**? “king of the Jews” is NOW the “Messiah”
- Remember, Herod’s family had **converted to Judaism**—He had heard about the **Messiah!**

Herod apparently understood the **implications** of who this “king of the Jews” was!

- The Roman historian **Suetonius**, who lived in the late 1st and early 2nd century, had written: “There had spread over all the East an old and established belief, that it was fated at the time for men coming from Judea to rule the world.”

- The Roman **senator** and **historian Tacitus** who lived at the same time wrote: “There was a firm persuasion that at this very time the east was to grow powerful and rulers coming from Judea were to acquire a universal empire.”
- The **Jewish-Roman historian Josephus** writes in his *Jewish Wars* that the **Jews believed** that one **from their country** would soon become ruler of the habitable world.

Perhaps Herod thought he was the **FULFILLMENT** of those **prophecies!**

- He was going to be the “**great ruler**” from the East!

**Matthew 2:5-6** “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet: **6** And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”

- Herod did not come out of Bethlehem—which meant he *was not* the fulfillment of the prophecies!
  - There were no prophecies about Herod!
- But there were prophecies about this “**king of the Jews**”!
  - The prophecy was that this “**King of the Jews**” would be “**a ruler**”

Herod's rise to power had been **costly!**

- Required him to **fight a war** to gain control of Jerusalem!
- He **banished** his *first wife* (Doris) and **son** so he could marry the **Mariamne**, the granddaughter of Hyrcanus II hoping he could secure his **claim to the throne** and **gain** some **Jewish** favor.
- Btw, he had Mariamne **executed** a few years later!
- Btw, the **son** he had with Doris, he had **executed** the same year the Magi came looking for Jesus!

*Herod was NOT going to allow this **baby** to **waltz** in and take over as the “king of the Jews!”*

Herod provides a WARNING of something WE all have to fight!

**Fight Against Self-Interest**

The desire of our sinful Human Nature is make decisions based on our self-interest.

- **Politicians**—*no matter what party*—make decisions based on their **self-interests**
  - Politicians will tell you what they *think* you want to hear hoping you will *reelect* them.

- They may, and usually **don't fix** the problem, so they can continue to campaign against the problem.
- **Corporations** make decisions based on their **self-interests**
  - They have to satisfy their **stock holders** so they can return a dividend
  - They are willing to get behind anything that they think is **politically or socially beneficial** to their bottom line.
- **YOU and I** make decisions based on our **self-interests**
  - Our self-interests is in the form of **comfort**
  - Our self-interests is in the form of **pleasure**

It is human nature to look out for ourselves first!

**Herod** was all about **Herod!**

- Built massive buildings
  - **Renovated the Second Temple** in Jerusalem
  - **Expanded the Temple Mount** towards its north
  - Built a massive building called the **Tomb of the Patriarchs** in Hebron
    - Built supposedly over the cave in which **Abraham was buried**

- It is considered by Jews to be the **second holiest place** in the world, after the Temple Mount!
- Lavish **palaces** for himself
- **Fortresses** for his protection in places like **Masada**.
- Built the remarkable **port of Caesarea**, named after Caesar Augustus
  - *(It was in his self-interest to keep Caesar happy!)*

## Fight Against Allowing Self-Interest to Drive Decisions

Notice the characteristics of the real “**King of the Jews**” — “**a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.**”

- This “**King of the Jews**” would be “**Shepherd Israel**”

What does a shepherd do?

- A **shepherd leads** the sheep to food
  - The true “**king of Jews**” would feed His people the Word of God
    - He would be the “**living water**” and the “**Bread from Heaven**”
- A shepherd **protects** the sheep

- The true “king of Jews” would protect His people by **praying** for them, freeing them from the **power of demonic oppression**
- The true “king of Jews” would ultimately provide a way to protect ALL who would trust in Him, protection from the **penalty from their sin.**

HOW would the TRUE “king of Jews” “Shepherd Israel”?

- He would “Shepherd Israel” by NOT Looking out for His own self-interests!

Years later, after the TRUE “king of Jews” came to “Shepherd Israel”, the **Apostle Paul challenged the followers** of the TRUE “king of Jews”!

**Philippians 2:5-7** “Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, 6 who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. 7 Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity.”

- **Matthew 2:2** The wis men asked: “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?”
  - God took on human flesh and was “born” into the human race!

**Philippians 2:7b** And when he had come as a man, & he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.

- The TRUE “king of Jews” -- “*emptied Himself!*”

What does it mean that Jesus “emptied Himself”?

- He **voluntarily** accepted the *limitations* of being a human being.
- He **hid** His glory from the people.
- He gave up the *independent* use of some of His attributes as God
  - As God, Jesus is **all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere present**, etc. However, when He “emptied Himself” He only used those attributes when **God the Father directed** Him to do so.

The TRUE “king of Jews” -- “*humbled Himself!*”

- What does it mean that Jesus “humbled Himself”?
  - **Humbled Himself** by “taking the form of a servant”
  - **Humbled Himself** by **going** where God the Father sent Him
  - **Humbled Himself** by **saying** only what God the Father told Him to say
  - **Humbled Himself** by **doing** only what God the Father told Him to do

Even though Jesus is God, He submitted Himself while on earth, under God the Father.

## Fight Against Self-Interest

HOW do we Fight Against Self-Interest

### Humility

Where do we display humility?

**Philippians 2:3-4** “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. 4 Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.”

- Humility requires that we “consider others as more important than yourselves”

**REALITY:** The more “**seniority**” you achieve the more difficult this is to do!!

- Seniority can come in many forms
  - **Position** in your **family** (Matriarch, Patriarch, etc.)
  - **Position** in your **job** (Manager, Vice President, Supervisor, etc.)
  - **Position** by **experience** and **knowledge**

Jesus had the **ULTIMATE position**: “The King of the Jews”  
Yet, “He humbled Himself”

- Humbled Himself ultimately by willing allowing His creatures to **crucify** Him
- Humbled Himself ultimately by dying on a cross like a **common criminal**
- Humbled Himself ultimately by dying for our sins—even though we “**Rejected and Despised**” Him

**Communion:** Remembrance of what Christ did for us!

- Attempt to **KEEP** Christ from sacrificing Himself for us
- Attempt to **KEEP** Christ from providing the way of salvation
- Attempt to **KEEP** Christ from growing up

**Fight Against Self-Interest by Exercising Humility!**

“consider others as more important than yourselves.”

- Consider the interests of the **underling** at work to be more important than your **self-interest!**

How does that work?

- You **listen** to them
- You **support** them
- You **encourage** them

- You are **willing** to put **your interest aside** to help them

Challenge: **Philippians 2:4** Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others.”

God responds to HUMILITY!

- Jesus’ willingness to **humble** and **empty** Himself cost Him his life

Communion: NOT possible *IF Jesus was looking out for His own self-interests!*

- The cross would have NEVER happened
  - “**Not my will**” – human desire was NOT to be whipped, beaten, mocked and tortured on a cross!

Communion: ONLY possible because *Jesus was NOT looking out for His own self-interests!*

- “**Not my will but Yours be done**”

Because Jesus did not look out for His own self-interest, we are celebrating communion today!

**Philippians 2: 9-11** “For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10

so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow— in heaven and on earth and under the earth— 11 and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

- Communion: We are “Confessing that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father”

God responds to HUMILITY!

- **1 Peter 5:5-6** “All of you clothe yourselves with humility *toward one another*, because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time,”

IF you and I don't **FIGHT AGAINST SELF-INTEREST**, the **results** will be tragic!

**Matthew 2:7** Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the *exact time* the star appeared.”

- Herod needed **details** so he could find this “king of the Jews” and **exterminate** him!

**Matthew 2:8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search *carefully* for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.”

- Magi went to Bethlehem and found the TRUE “King of the Jews”
  - The **worshipped** Him and **presented** gifts to the family
- An **angel** appeared to **Joseph** telling them to flee to Egypt “For Herod is about to search for the child to **kill** him.”

## **FIGHT AGAINST SELF-INTEREST WHY: SELF-INTEREST DESTROYS**

**Matthew 2:16-18** “Then Herod, when he realized that he had been outwitted by the wise men, flew into a rage. He gave orders to massacre all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, in keeping with the time he had learned from the wise men. 17 Then what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 18 A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

- Herod’s self-interest **destroyed innocent** children
- Herod’s self-interest **destroyed the joy** of many families

*Herod's life is a picture of the DESTRUCTION caused by SELF-INTEREST!*

Earlier I mentioned that Herod had **banished** his **wife (Doris)** and **son** so he could marry the **Mariamne**, the granddaughter of Hyrcanus II in 37 B.C.

- He did this hoping to secure his **claim to the throne** and **gain** some **Jewish** favor.

**Mariamne** had her own SELF-INTERESTS too!

- One year after their marriage, in 36 B.C., Mariamne **vehemently** insisted that Herod made her **18 year old brother** Aristobulos a **High Priest**.
  - In 35 BCE – Aristobulus drowned at a party on **Herod's orders**.

Mariamne's **mother** (and the now deceased Aristobulos' mother), **Alexandra** *blamed Herod*

- Alexandra wrote to **Cleopatra**, begging her assistance in avenging the boy's murder.
- Cleopatra in turn urged **Mark Antony** to **punish Herod** for the crime,
  - Antony sent for Herod to come to **Rome** and make his **defense**.
- In the interest of SELF-INTEREST, Herod left his young wife in the care of his **uncle Joseph**, along

with the instructions that if Antony should kill him (Herod), Joseph should **kill Mariamne**.

- Joseph eventually divulged this information to

**Mariamne**

- **Mariamne** did not see it as proving Herod's devotion to her, but quite the opposite!

Herod had a sister, **Salome**

- Salome did NOT want Mariamne to live because if Mariamne were to be killed, the Salome would be in power.

Salome was looking out for her SELF-INTRESTS!

- When he got home his sister from Rome, Salome accused Mariamne of committing **adultery** with **Joseph**

- Herod initially **dismissed** the charge after discussing it with his wife, but when she asked about why he had given the order for Joseph to kill her should Herod be killed, Herod then became **convinced** of her **infidelity!**

- Herod thought: “Why would Joseph tell her of my order unless they were committing adultery?”

- Herod then had **Joseph executed** and his **mother-in-law Alexandra confined**, but Herod did not punish his wife.

A few years later, Herod went to visit **Augustus**.

- In the interest of SELF-INTEREST, he again ordered that *if something were to happen to him*, **Mariamne** and her **mother** were to **be killed**.
  - Mariamne again **learned** of this **order** and became **convinced** that Herod really did not love her.
- When Herod return Mariamne gave him the **cold shoulder** and expressed her **hatred** towards **him**.

Salome saw the rift and again thought she could take advantage of the rift for her Self-interest!

- Salome started to feed Herod **false information** about Mariamne and said that Mariamne was trying to **poison** him.
- In **29 BC**-- Herod put Mariamne on **trial** on a charge of **adultery**.
  - His sister, **Salome**, was **chief witness** against her.

Looking out for her SELF-INTEREST, **Mariamne's mother Alexandra** made an appearance and *incriminated her own daughter-Mariamne!*

- WHY? Historians say her mother was **next** on Herod's list to be **executed** and did this only to save her own life.
  - Mariamne was executed

The fact that Alexandra was looking out for her self-interests was revealed!

- **Alexandra declared** herself **Queen**, stating that **Herod was mentally unfit** to serve.
  - Josephus wrote that this was Alexandra's **strategic mistake**; Herod **executed** her without trial.

On and on the story goes!

**FIGHT AGAINST SELF-INTEREST**  
**WHY: SELF-INTEREST DESTROYS**

**WE**

**PQ: Are you fighting against self-interest**

Communion = Remembrance of **Christ's Humility!**

Do people think of HUMILITY when it comes to you?

- Do you look out only for your self-interests or for the interests of others?

- Do you see others as “more important” than yourself?

Are you willing to sacrifice for others?

- **Communion:** Christ sacrificed for you!

God notices those who DO NOT live for their self-interests!

- God rewards those who “**humble**” themselves before Him!
  - First reward: **Salvation!**

**Communion:** Salvation because Christ laid His self-interests aside

- **Laid aside** Self-interests as a **Man**
- **Laid aside** Self-interests as **God!**

**PQ: Are you fighting against self-interest**

- It is a fight!
  - Our sinful flesh wants our **self-interest** to be **first!**

As you partake communion and pray ask God to search your heart!

- Humble yourself before Him
- Lay aside your self-interest!