




THE TWELVE VOICES OF



CHRISTMAS

— WOODROW KROLL —

The Twelve Voices of Christmas
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HEROD

VOICE OF DECEPTION

MATTHEW 2:1-12

Herod's was the voice of deception. He had no intention of worshipping a "pretender" to his throne. He wanted only to kill Him. In the great carol of Christmas, he was the singer in the minor key, clashing with the pure melody sung by the other singers. He will always be remembered as the voice no one wanted to hear.

Had you entered my presence, you would have bowed. I was known as Herod the Great, king of the Jews. I was the most powerful man in my part of the world, and I knew everything that went on in my region. I was in complete control.

People said bad things about me. It's true that I was ruthless. I drank heavily and was prone to outbursts of violence. But I was a cunning negotiator and a superb diplomat. I subdued the opposition and maintained order among the Jewish people for nearly 33 years. The emperor and all the powerful people in Rome were pleased with my reign.

Everything I did was absolutely necessary. I was the best thing that had ever happened to those Jews. They criticized me because I killed all my brothers and half-brothers, who could have challenged my reign, but I would do it again in a minute. I would have done anything to maintain my position as king of the Jews. I even murdered my wife, Mariamne. It was a shame too - she was my favorite. I had ten marriages and fathered 15 children. None of them pleased me.

When Mariamne's two sons, Alexander

and Aristobulus, realized I had killed their mother, I had to murder them as well. I can still hear those ungrateful Jews quip, "It's better to be Herod's hog than to be his son."

Why did people keep dwelling on these negative things? Didn't they know how much I did for them and that wretched land? I built cities and fortresses. I protected them from invaders. I introduced them to Greek literature, art and athletic contests. And for years I was involved in rebuilding the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. I left behind me roads and building and culture that they never could have dreamed of without me.

I did all that for those people and they didn't appreciate me one bit. All they remembered was the bloodshed. They talked about my deception and ruthlessness. They said I was cruel, cold-blooded and brutal.

I really didn't want to deceive those travelers from the East, but it angered me when they asked, "Where is the One who has been born King of the Jews?" What did they mean by that? I was the king of the Jews!

Jerusalem was a metropolitan city. We had visitors all the time, from the east, the west, from Africa, from all over. But some men had come from the east, I had heard, looking for a child they said was born King of the Jews. According to reports, they were saying something about coming to Judea to find Him, because they had seen His star rise in the east. I didn't remember seeing any star. But if they wanted to know, they should have come straight to me.

When that news reached me, I was frightened. So was everyone else in Jerusalem. They didn't want any more trouble stirred up, nor any more blood spilled. They knew I was determined to keep my throne. As long as I lived, only I would be king of the Jews. It had taken years of struggle to get where I was, and I wasn't going to give all this up to some baby.

I also didn't want such rumors to stir up the fanatics, who hated me. They would attempt an insurrection for sure, because they always wanted to rid their land of the Romans. I had to get to the bottom of this immediately.

My first thought was to get more information from the Jews, so I called in their chief priests and scribes and asked them if there was any truth to a prophecy that a Messiah would be born.

They said there was and that their prophet Micah had identified the village of Bethlehem in Judah as His birthplace. That was hitting too close to home. I knew I had to act quickly. I dismissed the Jews and had my aides set up a clandestine

meeting with the Babylonians. Everyone called them wise men - I was going to see how wise they were.

I would ask them when they had seen His star rise. That would tell me how long ago this baby had been born. (I wouldn't tell them what my real intention was.) Then I would order them to go to Bethlehem and find the young child and return to tell me, so I could worship Him.

I had no intention of worshiping this pretender to my throne. I wanted only to kill Him. If members of my own family had become expendable because they stood in my way, did the Jews think for one minute I wouldn't take the life of a little Jewish baby?

As the appointed hour they arrived at my palace. I found them to be more cooperative than I had expected, and they willingly pinpointed the time when they had first seen the star. I commanded them to go to Bethlehem, find the child and return here. My plan worked perfectly. When they returned, I would simply send a contingent of soldiers to kill the baby. That would be the end of that.

Well, I waited for these wise men to return to my palace. It must have been for about a week. I was nervous the whole time. Had they found the baby? Was He really the expected Messiah the Jews looked for? Could He really be a threat to my reign? The wise men held the answers to all these questions. Where were they? Why weren't they back? I waited.

Eventually I realized that they weren't coming. I had deceived them. Now they had deceived me and had apparently

returned to Babylon without my knowledge. I had to take matters into my own hands.

I sent soldiers to Bethlehem with orders to put to death every male child two years and younger. I knew they were innocent children, but what did I care? I did what I had to do. I was merely protecting my throne.

I learned later that in Jerusalem the whispers called this the slaughter of the innocents. They called this the most diabolical move of my regency. When people thought of me, they remembered only my deception and the killing of these innocent children - not the building I had erected, not the harbors I had dug, not the cultural and educational benefits I had brought to that land.

They didn't understand. I couldn't let a baby be a threat to me. It was hard enough keeping the Jews in line. If they had thought they had a champion, if they had thought their long-awaited Messiah had come, there would have been even more bloodshed.