

Herod the Great

Herald

[Entering onto a crowded marketplace

May most mighty Lucifer / meet you with mirth!
Both of borough and town / from the fells and the firth,
Both king with crown / and barons of birth. 4.3
We hear rumours abound / that peace upon earth
Is foretold; 4.5
Give ear and attend 4.6
What I say to this end, 4.7
Lest woeful you wend 4.8
And harms you enfold. 4.9

Herod, the good king / by the devil's reknown,
All Jewry surmounting / sternly with crown, 4.11
Of all life now living / in tower and town, 4.12
Graciously greets you, / commands you bow down
At his bidding; 4.14
Love him with loyalty, 4.15
Dread him, that is doughty! 4.16
He charges you be ready 4.17
To learn of his liking. 4.18

Whoever on earth / against him complain, 4.19
And grievance give forth / be he knight, squire, or swain;
Whatever his worth, / the price must he pay 4.21
Twelve thousand fold, / yea, more I say 4.22
May ye trust. 4.23
He is wonderly woeful, 4.24
Weeping full sorely; 4.25
For a boy that is born here by 4.26
Stands he aghast. 4.27

Folk call him a king / and that we deny;	4.28
That it should it so fall / great marvel have I.	
Therefore over all / shall I make a cry.	4.30
Neither bellow nor bawl / nor look not to lie	
This tide!	
Carp of no king	4.334.32
But Herod, our lording,	4.34
Or hie home to your dwelling,	4.35
Your heads for to hide.	4.36
He is King of Kings / kindly I know,	4.37
Chief lord of lordings / chief leader of law,	
Throughout all the town / and unto the shore,	
Great dukes drop down / for his great awe,	4.40
And revere him.	4.41
Tuscany and Turkey,	4.42
All India and Italy,	4.43
Sicily and Syria,	4.44
Dread him and fear him.	4.45
From paradise to Padua / to Mount Flascon;	4.46
From Egypt to Mantua / as far as Camden;	4.47
From Sarceny to Sousa / to Greece all bow down;	
Both Normandy and Norway / kneel to his crown.	
His reknown	4.50
Can no tongue tell;	4.51
From heaven unto hell	4.52
None can praise him so well	4.53
But his good friend Sir Satan.	4.54
He is the worthiest of all / bairns ever born;	
Free men in his thrall / in terror are torn.	4.56
Begin he to brawl / many men feel his scorn;	4.57
Obey must we all / or else be forlorn	4.58
At once.	4.59
Drop down on your knee,	4.60
All that him see,	4.61
Displeased is he,	4.62
And may break your bones. <i>[Herod approaches</i>	

Here he comes now, I cry / that lord, I of spake;	
Fast afore will I hie / and make no mistake,	4.65
But welcome him worshipfully / and merriment make,	
As he is most worthy, / and kneel for his sake	
So low,	4.68
Down demurely to fall	4.69
As rank most royal.	4.70
Hail, the worthiest of all!	4.71
To thee must I bow!	4.72
Hail, loved lord! lo / thy letters have I laid;	
I have done all I could do / and peace have I prayed;	
Much more than I should do / I plainly assayed;	
But rumours do run so / that boldly they brayed	
Amongst themselves.	4.77
They carp of a king;	4.78
They cease not such chattering.	4.79

Herod

But I shall tame their talking,	4.80
And let them go hang them.	4.81
Stint, wretches, your din / yea, every one!	4.82
Till I have gone in / make never a moan;	4.83
For if I begin / I will break every bone,	4.84
And pull from thy skin / the carcass anon;	4.85
Yea, perdi!	4.86
Cease all this wonder,	4.87
And make you no blunder,	4.88
For I rip you asunder,	4.89
Be ye so hardy.	4.90
Peace both young and old / at my bidding, I said,	
For I own all the world, / I can strike you all dead;	
Whoever is too bold, / I brain him through the head;	
Speak not, or I have told, / what I will in this stead.	
You know not	4.95
What grief I will give.	4.96

Stir not till ye have leave; 4.97
For if ye do, I will you cleave 4.98
Small as meat for the pot. 4.99

My mirth is turned to pain / my meekness into ire,
This boy burns my brain / within I feel fire 4.101
If see this young swain / I shall give him his hire;
Should my will I not gain / Call me a soft silly sire
On my throne. 4.104
Had I that lad in hand, 4.105
As I am king in land, 4.106
I should with this steel brand 4.107
Break all his bones. 4.108

My name springs far and near; / the doughtiest, men me call
That ever wielded with spear; / A lord and king royal.
What joy is me to hear / A lad to seize my stall!
If I this crown may bear / that boy shall pay for all.
I anger; 4.113
I know not what devil me ails, 4.114
They torment me with tales, 4.115
That by God's own nails, 4.116
I'll be silent no longer. 4.117

What devil! Methink I burst / for anger and for spleen;
I fear these kings be past / that here with me have been.
They promised me full fast / ere now here to be seen,
Or else I should have cast / another plot, I ween;
I tell you. 4.122
A boy they said they sought, 4.123
with offerings that they brought; 4.124
It troubles my heart right nought 4.125
To break his neck in two. 4.126

But be they passed me by / by Judas in heaven,
I shall soon by and by / set all on six and seven.
Think you a king as I / will let them believe in
Any to have mastery / but what my self is given
By my right? 4.131
The devil me hang and draw, 4.132

If I that lurden know, 4.133
But I give him a blow; 4.134
That life I shall him smite. 4.135

For pity's sake I would / know if they were gone;
And ye therof were told / I pray you say anon;
For if they be so bold, / by God that sits on throne,
The pain cannot be told, / that they shall have each one,
For ire. 4.140
Such pains hard, never man tell, 4.141
So wicked and so cruel, 4.142
That Lucifer in hell 4.143
Shall burn their bones in fire. 4.144

First Soldier

Lord, think not ill if I / tell you how they are passed;
I cannot lie, truly: / since they were with you last,
Another road to fly / they sought, and that full fast.

Herod

Why, and are they passed me by? / Wey! Out! for fury I burst!
Wey! Fie! 4.149
Fie on the Devil! Where may I bide? 4.150
But fight for fury and at all traitors chide!
Thieves, I say ye should have spied 4.152
And told when they went by. 4.153

Fine knights to trust! / Nay, rougues ye are, and thieves;
I could yield up my ghost, / so sore my heart grieves.

Second Soldier

What need you be downcast? / There are no great mischiefs
That should make you aghast. /

Third Soldier

Why make ye such reproofs 4.157
Without pause? 4.158
Thus should ye not threat us, 4.159
Unseemly to beat us. 4.160
Ye should not mistreat us, 4.161

Without other cause. 4.162

Herod

Fie, lumpish liars! / lurdans each one! 4.163

Traitors and criers! / knaves, and knights none!

Had ye been worth your hire / thus had they not gone;

If I catch those caitiffs / I break ev'ry bone.

First, vengeance 4.167

Shall I see on their bones. 4.168

If they bide here at home 4.169

I shall ding them with stones. 4.170

Yea, never dare doubt me. 4.171

I know not where I may sit / for anger and despite;

We have not done all yet / if it be as I indite.

Fie! devil! now how is it? / As long as I have sight

I think not for to flit, / but king I will be right

For ever. 4.176

But stand I apart, 4.177

I tell you my heart: 4.178

I shall snare them fast, 4.179

Or else trust me never. 4.180

First Soldier

Sir, they went suddenly, / ere any man wist. 4.181

Else had we had them, perdi / ye take my gist.

Second Soldier

So bold, nor so hardy / in all the list 4.183

Was none of that company / durst challenge my fist

For fear. 4.185

Third Soldier

They durst not abide, 4.186

But ran them to hide. 4.187

If I had them spied, 4.188

I had humbled their pride. 4.189

What could we more do / to save your honour? 4.190

First Soldier

We were ready thereto, / and shall be each hour.

Herod

Now since it is so / ye shall have favour; 4.192
Go where ye will, go / by town and by tower, 4.193
Go from me! 4.194
I have matters to mull 4.195
with my privy counsel; 4.196
Clerks, you must me tell 4.197
Some words that will cheer me. 4.198

One spake in mine ear: / A wonderful talking,
And said a maiden should bear / a boy to be king;
Sirs, I pray you inquire / in all your writing,
In Virgil, in Homer / And all other thing 4.202
Both legend, 4.203
And poetical tales. 4.204
Epistles and missals; 4.205
Mass and matins, will never avail, 4.206
And ye need not attend; 4.207

I pray you tell quickly / now what ye find. 4.208

First Counsellor

Truly, sir, prophecy / It is not blind; 4.209
We read thus in Isaiah / he shall be so kind,
That a maiden, soothly / which never sinned, 4.211
Shall him bear: 4.212
"virgo concipiet,
Natumque pariet;" 4.214
"Emanuel" is set 4.215
His name, as told there: 4.216

"God is with us," / that is for to say.

Second Counsellor

Another says thus- / trust me ye may: 4.218
*"Of Beth'lem a gracious / Lord shall spring,
That of Jewry courageous / shall aye be King
Lord mighty;
And him shall honour 4.222 4.221
Both King and emperor." 4.223*

Herod

Why, and should I to him cower? 4.224
Nay, thou tell'st lies too lightly! 4.225

Fie! the devil thee speed / and me, make I moan!
This has thou done indeed / to anger me alone:
And thou, knave, thou thy fee / shall have, by cock's bone!
Thou know not half thy creed! / Out, thieves, from my throne!
Fie, knaves! 4.230
Fie, dotty-pols, with your books! 4.231
Go cast them in the brooks! 4.232
Your wiles and your tricks 4.233
Make my wit rave! 4.234

Heard I never such a rant: / that a knave so slight
Should come like a saint, / and rob me my right;
Nay, he shall recant: / I shall ding him down straight.
Beware! I say, let me pant; / now think I to fight
For anger; 4.239
My guts will out burst 4.240
But I this lad crush; 4.241
Without I have a vengeance 4.242
I may live no longer. 4.243

Should a carl in a cave / but one year of age,
Thus make me to rave? /

First Counsellor

Sir, peace this outrage!	4.245
Away let you wave / all such language.	4.246
Your worship to save, / is he ought but a page Of a year?	4.248
We two could him truss with our mere wits between us;	4.250 4.249
So, that if ye say thus,	4.251
He shall die on a spear.	4.252

Second Counsellor

For fear that he reign, / do as we set forth: Throughout Bethlehem / and all over the earth, Make knights to run, / and put unto death	4.255
All male children / from time of their birth, Till years two;	4.257
This child may ye kill	4.258
Thus at your own will.	4.259

Herod

Thou show'st here great skill	4.260
Such a plot to brew!	4.261
If I live in this land / a long life, as I hope, By this dare I warrant / to make thee Pope.	4.263
O, my heart is rising / for joy it does hop!	4.264
For this noble tiding / thou shall have a drop Of my good grace;	4.266
Marks, moneys, and pounds,	4.267
Great castles and grounds;	4.268
Through all seas and sands	4.269
I give thee the choice.	4.270
Now will I proceed / and take vengeance.	4.271
All the flower of knighthood / call to allegiance.	
<i>[Calling the Herald]</i>	
See to it, I thee bid: / it may thee advance.	

Herald

Lord, I shall make speed / and bring them, perchance,
To thy sight. *[Goes to the Soldiers]* 4.275
Hark, knights, I you bring 4.276
Here new tiding. 4.277
Unto Herod the King 4.278
Haste with all your might! 4.279

In all the haste that ye may / in armour full bright,
In your best array / look that ye be dight. 4.281

First Soldier

Why should we stray? /

Second Soldier

This is not all right. 4.282

Third Soldier

Sirs, without delay / I dread that we fight. 4.283

Herald

I pray you, 4.284
As fast as you may, 4.285
Come to him this day. 4.286

First Soldier

What, in our best array? 4.287

Herald

Yea, sirs, I say you. 4.288

Second Soldier

Somewhat is in hand / whate'er it may mean.

Third Soldier

Tarry not for to stand / there, where we are bidden.

Herald

King Herod all worshipful / well be ye seen! 4.291
Your knights are come / in armour full sheen,
To do your will. 4.293

First Soldier

Hail, mightiest of all! 4.294
We are come at your call 4.295
For to do what we shall, 4.296
your wish to fulfill. 4.297

Herod

Welcome, lordings, Iwys, / both great and small!
The cause now is this / that I send for you all:
A lad, a knave, born is / that should be king royal;
But I kill him and his / my spirit quite will fail.
Therefore, Sirs, 4.302
Vengeance shall ye take, 4.303
All for that lad's sake. 4.304
Of your fame man shall speak 4.305
Wherever you go, Sirs. 4.306

To Beth'lem go your way / through the countryside scout,
All male children to slay: / look you be stern and stout.
If their years are but two / that you find round about,
Leave none living this day / that lie in swaddlingclout,
I say you; 4.311
Spare no babe's blood: 4.312
Let all run in flood, 4.313
If women wax mad. 4.314
I warn you, sirs, to speed you; 4.315
Hence! Now go your way / and get you there. 4.316

Second Soldier

This may mean great affray; / but I will go before.

Third Soldier

Ah, think, sirs, I say / I will bite like a boar.

First Soldier

When I start my play / I shall kill me a score;
Herod all hail! 4.320
We shall for your sake 4.321
This massacre make. 4.322

Herod

Now if you do well my work 4.323
My reward shall not fail. 4.324

Second Soldier

Play our parts now by rote / and handle them well.

Third Soldier

I shall strike at their coats / and make them to yell.

[First Woman enters]

First Soldier

Hark, fellows, you dote / yonder comes trouble;
I wager a groat / she likes me not well; 4.328
Let us part. 4.329
Dame, think it not ill, 4.330
Thy child if I kill. 4.331

First Woman

What, thief! against my will? 4.332
Lord, save his dear heart! 4.333

First Soldier

Abide now, abide / no farther thou goes. 4.334

First Woman

Peace, thief! shall I chide / and make here a noise?

First Soldier

I shall humble thy pride / when kill we these boys!

First Woman

May evil betide / look well to thy nose, 4.337
False thief! 4.338
Let me have at thy hood. 4.339

First Soldier

What, whore, art thou mad? *[He kills the child]*

First Woman

Out, alas, my child's blood! 4.341
I cry in my grief! 4.342

Alas for shame and sin! / Alas that I was born!
Of weeping who may stint / to see her child forlorn?
My comfort and my kin, / my son thus dead and torn!
Vengeance for this sin / I cry, both even and morn.

Second Soldier

Well done! *[Second Woman enters]* 4.347
Come hither, thou old stry! 4.348
That lad of thine shall die. 4.349

Second Woman

Mercy, lord, I cry! 4.350
It is my own dear son. 4.351

Second Soldier

No mercy you merit: / your moans move me naught!

Second Woman

Then thy skull shall I cleave! / Will'st thou be clawed?
Leave, leave, now I bid! /

Second Soldier

Peace, bid I, bawd! *[He kills the child]*

Second Woman

Fie, fie, for pity! / Fie, full of fraud! 4.355
No man! 4.356
Have at thy tabard, 4.357
Harlot and holard! 4.358
Thou shall not be spared! 4.359
I cry and I ban! 4.360

Out! murder! Man, I say / cruel traitor and thief!
Out! alas! and welaway! / My dear child and life!
My joy, my blood, my play / that never gave man grief!
Alas, alas, this day! / I would, my heart should cleave
In sunder! 4.365
Vengeance I cry and call, 4.366
On Herod and his knights all! 4.367
Vengeance, Lord, upon them fall, 4.368
And make the world wonder! 4.369

Third Soldier

This is sure greatest game / that ever may be;
[Third woman enters]
Come hitherward dame! / ye need not to flee! 4.371

Third Woman

Will ye do any harm / to my child, and me? 4.372

Third Soldier

He shall die, I thee swear / his heart's blood shall thou see.
[He kills the child]

Third Woman

God forbid! 4.374
Thief! thou shed'st my child's blood! 4.375
Out, I cry! I go near mad! 4.376
Alas! my heart is all on flood, 4.377
To see my child thus bleed! 4.378
By God, thou shall rue / this deed that thou has done.

Third Soldier

I bid thee not stray, / by sun and by moon. 4.380

Third Woman

Have at thee say I! / this dagger for thy loins!
Out on thee cry I / have at thy groin 4.382
Another! 4.383
This keep I in store. 4.384

Third Soldier

Peace now, no more! 4.385

Third Woman

I cry and I roar, 4.386

Out on thee, man's murderer! 4.387

Alas! my babe, my innocent; / flesh of my flesh! for sorrow

That God me dearly sent, / torment as sharp as arrow!

Thy body is torn and rent, / I cry both even and morrow,

Vengeance for thy blood, thus spent / out! I cry, and harrow!

First Soldier

Go lightly! 4.392

Give over these groans! 4.393

Haste, trollopes, hence to your homes,- 4.394

Or by cock's bones 4.395

I shall not ask politely! 4.396

They are fled now; I wot / they will not abide.

Second Soldier

Let us run hot-foot; / now would I we hied, 4.398

And tell of this lot, / how we have betide. 4.399

Third Soldier

Thou can nothing do here / that have I descried;

Go forth and wend, 4.401

Tell thou Herod our tale! 4.402

For all our avail, 4.403

I tell you, sans fail, 4.404

He will us commend. 4.405

First Soldier

I am best of you all / and ever have been; 4.406

The devil have my soul / if I be not first seen;

It fits me to call / on my lord, as I ween. 4.408

Second Soldier

What needs thee to brawl? / Be not so keen 4.409
In this anger; 4.410
I shall say thou did best - 4.411
Save myself, as I guessed. 4.412

First Soldier

Wey! that is most honest. 4.413

Third Soldier

Go, tarry no longer! *[They go back to Herod]*

First Soldier

Hail Herod, our King / full glad may ye be! 4.415
Good tiding we bring: / harken now to me 4.416
We have been riding / throughout all Jewry: 4.417
Now know ye one thing- / that murdered, have we,
Many thousands. 4.419

Second Soldier

I held them full hot, 4.420
I struck them and smote; 4.421
Their dams now, I wot, 4.422
Cannot bind them in bands. 4.423

Third Soldier

Had ye seen how I fared / when I came among them!
There was none that I spared, / but I laid on and dang them.
I am worthy a reward, / where I was among them.
I stood and I stared / no pity to hang them 4.427
Had I. 4.428

Herod

Now, by mighty Mahowne, 4.429
That is good of reknown! 4.430
If I wear this crown. 4.431
You shall each have a lady, 4.432
Fully fairly arrayed, / to wed at your will. 4.433

First Soldier

So have ye long said, / but have not paid the bill!

Second Soldier

And I was never flayed / for good nor for ill.

Third Soldier

Ye might hold, you well paid / our wish to fulfill,	
Thus think me:	4.437
with treasure untold,	4.438
If it like that ye would,	4.439
Both silver and gold,	4.440
To give us great plenty.	4.441

Herod

As I am king crowned / I think it good right!	
There goes none on ground / of such main and might	
A hundred thousand pound / is good wage for a knight,	
Of pennies good and round: / now may ye go light	
With store.	4.446
And ye knights of ours	4.447
Shall have castles and towers,	4.448
Both to you and to yours,	4.449
For now and evermore.	4.450

First Soldier

Was never none born / by down nor by dale,	4.451
Nor none ever before / that thus did prevail.	

Second Soldier

We have castles and corn, / much gold in our mails.

Third Soldier

It will last evermore / I tell you no tales;	4.454
Hail in the highest!	4.455
Hail lord! Hail King!	4.456
We are forth faring! <i>[They leave</i>	4.457

Herod

[Addressing the crowd/audience]

Now may Lucifer bring you	4.458
Where he is lord friendly;	4.459
Now in peace may I stand / I thank thee, each one!	
And give of my land / that belongs to my crown.	
So come close at hand / both of burgh and of town;	
Marks each one a thousand / when next I am come,	
Shall ye have.	4.464
I shall make no delay	4.465
To give that I say!	4.466
When next I come this way,	4.467
And then may ye crave.	4.468
I set by no good, / now my heart is at ease,	4.469
That I shed so much blood / I may rule as I please!	
For to see this flood / from the feet to the knees	
Methinks it is good / yea, I laugh till I wheeze;	
By God's moon!	4.473
So light is my soul,	4.474
That to honey turns my bile;	4.475
I may do what I will,	4.476
And bear up my crown.	4.477
I was cast into care, / so frightly afraid;	4.478
But I no more despair: / for low is he laid	4.479
That I most did I fear; / so have I him flayed.	
It would great wonder be / where so many strayed	
In harm's way,	4.482
That one should escape,	4.483
And unharmed take flight,	4.484
When so many childer	4.485
For their blows have no balm.	4.486

A hundred thousand, Iwis / and forty are slain,
 And four more thousand; this / makes glad my heart plain;
 Such murder in the land / shall never be again.
 Had I had but one bat / at that sweet swain 4.490
 So young, 4.491
 The deed had been spoken 4.492
 And not been forgotten, 4.493
 were I dead and rotten, 4.494
 Told by many a tongue. 4.495

 Thus shall I teach knaves / example to take: 4.496
 If any man rave, / other masters to make, 4.497
 Be they boastful and brave, / think not I shall quake!
 False sovereigns shall none save, / your necks shall I strike
 In sunder. 4.500
 None King shall ye call 4.501
 But Herod the royal; 4.502
 And if any man shall, 4.503
 He suffers for that blunder. 4.504

 For if I hear it spoken / when I come again, 4.505
 Your brains shall be broken / so have heed of pain;
 What it may betoken / it shall be so plain; 4.507
 I say without joking, / I have but disdain 4.508
 For the squeamish. 4.509
 Sirs, this is my counsel- 4.510
 Be not too cruel, 4.511
 But *adieu* - to the devil! 4.512
 I know no more French! 4.513