

# 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. *[Herod approaches*

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 lurdens 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