

Joseph was a saint, but he was a man too and he had anger. Anger against Herod.

Not by nature a political person --- what good would it have done him? --- he did not normally waste energy liking or disliking power figures. But this time the distant King of Judea had trespassed into his personal life. Herod, God's dream revealed, wanted to kill the Bethlehem baby.

As he shook his poor wife awake for the hasty packing and flight, resenting started. He said goodbye to his tools, that there was no time to sell, and got madder. By the time he shut the door on a loved simple life at Nazareth, and neighbors and family there was no time to say goodbye to, he was seething.

Too much resenting can poison a life. So three days into their journey, God decided to show great mercy. Probably it would help Joseph if he could get things off his chest to Herod.

So the Most High did what only the Most High can do. He summoned Joseph, in the middle of sleep, and he summoned Herod, just passed out from one his drunken revels, to share the same dream together. Here was Joseph, in dreamland, his little son in his arms ... facing King Herod in his kingly regalia.

They both stared at each other a few moments; then somehow started to realize exactly who each was.

"You waste your time trying to defy me," hissed Herod. "I will find the child, and kill him, and then I will kill your wife and you."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, miserable excuse for a leader," spat back Joseph. "God will frustrate your designs, and one day, after your death, you will find yourself crouching at my son's feet, pleading for mercy." Both were surprised at the fearlessness in that voice. For a full minute they glared at each other with profound dislike.

But then the child loosed himself from Joseph's grasp, ran over and hugged Herod. There was stunned silence, and then a horrified Joseph saw the king's hand race for the golden dagger at his side. That was, until a tiny hand touched Herod's cheek, and the king became caught by the innocent affection and pleading of those little eyes looking up at him. He felt the pure unjudging love of Jesus. The strangeness and beauty of it made him shudder with joy, and he cried silently. In less than a minute, though, kingly pride and paranoia replaced that. "Damn those crafty astrologers," he murmured, and then abruptly disentangled himself from the child's embrace and left the dream.

Neither man would remember much when morning came. Yet when morning came, Joseph noticed his anger had left him. He understood that Jesus had come for love of Herod, just as much as love for him or Mary or Israel. He started to pray for Herod. "God will help us through this," he said to Mary, and smiled at God as he faced forward.