

Of Lizards and Kings

Now that Christmas is packed up, it's back to our bondage
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So the baby is born. Now what?

The problem with baby kings is that they grow up and want to rule. Say what you want about Herod the Great, he was not confused on this point. The man who would be tetrarch at Rome's pleasure saw the handwriting on the wall: If this man is king, then I am not. The town isn't big enough for both of us.



Have you ever asked yourself why the inquiries of the Persian astrologers (whom we fete on Jan. 6) shook up not only Herod but “all Jerusalem with him” (Matthew 2:3)? For that matter, have you ever wondered why it is that when Jesus freed a Gerasene resident from his demons, the story did not end, “then the people all hailed Jesus as their savior and king,” but ended thus: “then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region” (Mark 5:17)?

Queen Elizabeth of Great Britain, now there's the kind of royalty we want in our lives. The Beatles sang, “Her Majesty's a pretty nice girl, but she doesn't have a lot to say. Her Majesty's a pretty nice girl, but she changes from day to day. I want to tell her that I love her a lot, but I gotta get a belly full of wine. Her Majesty's a pretty nice girl. Someday I'm gonna make her mine, o yeah. Someday I'm gonna make her mine.”

Christmas was mostly fun, and now we can pack it up in boxes till next year. It's all under our control, which is the way we like it: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). Having some autonomy, that's the thing. Jesus is a little pushy when He moves from swaddling clothes and Hallmark cards to a whip of cords in the Temple. It's all right that He performed an exorcism on that poor man, but why drive all our pigs into the sea and drown them (Mark 5:11-13)? Isn't a man's livelihood sacred anymore!

C.S. Lewis tells of a strange encounter between an Angel and a man with, shall we say, a “lizard” problem (The Great Divorce). The man and the twitching red creature on his shoulder are inseparable, the reptile constantly whispering things into his ear, the man sometimes smiling in response but overall wearied of the relationship — and therefore grateful when the Angel offers assistance. “‘Then I will kill him,’ said the Angel, taking a step forward. ‘Oh — ah — look out! ... You didn't say anything about killing him at first. I hardly meant to bother you with anything so drastic as that.’ ‘It's the only way,’ said the Angel.”

When it comes to the point, the man is reluctant to be freed of the lizard and desperately fabricates a variety of excuses: “I'm sure I shall be able to keep it in order now. I think the gradual process would be far better than killing it.” “The gradual process is of no use at all,” replies the Angel. Finally the truth is outed: “Get back! You're burning me. How can I tell you to kill it? You'd kill me if you did.”

The lizard now unsheathes his coup de grace, whispering more loudly than ever into the man's ear: “He can do what he says. He can kill me. One fatal word from you and he will! Then you'll be without me for ever and ever. It's not natural. How could you live?”

And there it is. We love our bondage, when it comes right down to it. We want to keep the status quo, thank you very much. Oh, there are aspects of it we like to complain about, but all in all it works for us. In fact, we are deeply committed to the way things are. Jesus is a threat to our “lizards” (too embarrassing to go into descriptive detail here), and we are convinced that we can't live without them — not any kind of meaningful living, at least.

Those who submit to the surgery find it hard, but survivable. Nor do they ever want to see that wretched lizard again, for a glorious stallion has grown from its smoldering ashes. Let Jesus be King.