
“King Herod the (NOT) Great”

Advent Sunday School Lesson on Matthew 2



In Nativity Noteworthies: Hero

es of the Christmas Story (Celebrated and Lesser-Known)

There are a lot of great truths to take from the story of Jesus’ birth. There are also a great many clichés and worn-out elements of the Nativity narrative. In this series, we will encounter several characters and look at the story through the lens of various perspectives. Some of these figures are already well-known, but others will be among the unsung heroes, at least for many people. Lessons will highlight who they are and their significance to the life of Christ and to our lives today.

The focus of this lesson is somewhat unusual, as we are looking at the “bad guy” in the story...King Herod is often mentioned in passing when we explore the Nativity narrative, but there are actually valuable things to be learned from examining his character. We see a significant contrast between the selfish earthly king and the selfless servant King of Jesus. We also notice the dangers of trying to live only for ourselves.

Character focus: King Herod, the tyrannous ruler appointed by the Romans to be king over the Jews. King Herod was paranoid and narcissistic, wanting only power and anxious for anything that might threaten that. Herod thought his power was within himself, but only God has true power!

Passage: Matthew chapter 2, selected verses.

Importance in the Nativity: Herod did evil and attempted to derail God’s plan, but nothing can stop the power of the true King. Additionally, though, when Herod’s



threat forced Mary and Joseph to flee to Egypt with Jesus, it fulfilled a prophecy that God had provided years before.

Significance to us: We don't want to be Herod! It may seem obvious and simple: after all, we aren't trying to physically hurt anyone or rejecting Jesus outright. But sometimes, when we act selfishly or greedily, we can lose track of who Christ is and how important He is. We want to be careful not to think too highly or pridefully of ourselves, but to live for Jesus first and foremost.

Materials Needed for this lesson: Paper, decorative materials, paper plates, crown shaped paper; dried macaroni or beans, streamers, stapler.

Bonus Ideas:

Don't miss all our [Christmas lessons for Children](#) and [Christmas Coloring Pages](#)

- [The Magi and King Herod \(Matthew 2\) Sunday School Lesson](#)
- [Two Very Different Kings Coloring Page](#) (included in download above)
- [J is for Jesus coloring page](#) (included in download above)
- [The Cold Hard Truth about Bethlehem We Often Forget](#)
- See more [Christmas Sunday School Lesson](#) on Sunday School Works!



Lesson Opening / Introduction Games

Try a couple of quick games to open the ideas of villainy and combatting selfishness. These games can be played with any age, but adjust to the understanding level of your crew.

- Name that villain! This game can be played in several ways, actually, depending on timing and audience. You might:
 - Play a matching game where students put together heroes with bad guys (using paper or picture cards)
 - Hold up a picture of a person and have students quickly identify who they are
 - Describe a villain or name a quote that they said, and see if kids can guess based on that
 - For older students, you might include historical figures such as Hitler or Bin Laden, or characters from older movies. For younger kids, consider featuring famous cartoon villains like the Grinch or Disney characters.
- What do you want? Have students browse catalogs or come up with lists of things that they would like to have if they could have anything. Talk about what they would do with unlimited wealth.
- What would you do? Discuss what students would do given power to control things like school, the town, or even the country! What kind of rules would they make? How would they guarantee power maintained?

Explain to kids that today they will learn about a very bad ruler who did some evil things. We will talk about how we don't want to be selfish and greedy like he was, but we need to celebrate Jesus always.



King Herod the (NOT) Great:

Matthew 2 Lesson for Sunday School

Explain to students that unfortunately, there are bad things and bad people in the world. This happens because God allows us to make choices, and we don't always make good choices. The good news, though, is that God can use bad things and overcome them, and still make good things happen. Ask if any children have heard about King Herod. Invite (older) students to look in the book of Matthew for the story. Younger students can hear a storybook version or paraphrased story...

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." -Matthew 2:1-2

The Magi were learned men who traveled a long way to find Jesus. They saw a special star and knew it meant that an important person had been born. But they weren't sure who that king was, so they went to Herod, who was at the time ruler over the Jewish people. They asked this king where the new king was, but that did NOT make Herod very happy...

*When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. –
Matthew 2:3-4*



Herod was a very bad man. He had been made the ruler of the Jewish people, but he did not really love or serve God. In fact, he loved himself more than anything. He was afraid of anything that might go against his rule and power. So when he heard about this “king”, he worried that it would be something that might try to take over his throne. So he tried to find out more from the wise men:

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” –Matthew 2:7-8

Well, Herod did NOT want to worship Jesus, as we know. In fact, he wanted to kill him! Fortunately, though, God’s plans are not to be thwarted. The wise men did not go back to Herod and divulge where Jesus was, but they took a different route home instead...

And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. –Matthew 3:12

Unfortunately, Jesus was not completely safe. Herod still wanted to hurt him and even tried to find ways to do so. But God was watching over it all, of course. He sent a special angel messenger to guide Mary and Joseph to take care of the precious baby:

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴ And he rose and took the



child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” –Matthew 3:13-15

With younger students, you may prefer to omit the element about Herod’s slaughter of babies. This is a tough part of the story. With older students, it can actually be a good way to draw similarities between Jesus and Moses: involvement with Egypt; a wicked ruler; escape from infant slaughter...God always has a plan, and the whole Bible (Old and New Testaments) center on the person of Christ! Also, it is positive to note the fulfillment of prophecy. God’s plans are always fulfilled. He can use good and bad circumstances to work His benefits. So Jesus had a temporary stay in Egypt, but God sent a messenger once again to Joseph...

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, ²⁰ saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.”... and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. ²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.
–Matthew 3:19-23

Again, we see how prophecy and plans had a hand on the early years of Jesus. Everything that happened in His life was planned and foreseen long before. The bad guy never wins in the end!

So what else is essential for us to recognize here? Herod made a lot of mistakes. He wanted to trust in his own power, and he was greedy lest anyone else encroach upon it. He rejected the joy and true power that come from God. We might think we are in no danger of doing the same...but think about how easy it is to grow



caught up in our own thoughts and desires. Especially during the Christmas season, we might unfortunately miss out on the beauty of Jesus by focusing attention on our wants, or on the frantic details of things going on. Let's be sure to recognize the most important part of the story, and of our lives! The attention goes back to Jesus. God had a plan for Him, just as He has a plan for us. Let us step away from greed and busy schedules, and emphasize the true king!

Close the lesson with prayer and thank God for loving us and coming to die for us. Ask for help to be genuinely selfless and put Jesus first in everything we do.



The True King: Sunday School Crafts

Craft: “Jesus is the real King” Crown

- Decorative markers or crayons
- Glitter (optional!)
- Paper or cardboard crown
- Stickers

Procedure:

1. Decorate the cardboard crown with markers, stickers, and more! Use puffy paint or glitter if you feel extra daring.
2. Add a verse or caption.
3. Fit to student’s head and enjoy!

“Celebrate the Heavenly King” instrument

You will need:

- Paper Plates
- Tape, glue, or stapler
- Stickers
- Decorative materials
- Crepe streamers, pipe cleaners (optional)
- Dried macaroni, beans, or rice

Procedure:

1. Decorate the paper plates with markers and stickers. Add verse or caption, if desired.



2. Place streamers and/or pipe cleaners in the center of the inside of the plate.
3. Carefully add dried noodles, rice, or beans.
4. Staple the paper plates together to enclose the dried goods.
5. Make sure all holes are sealed. Shake and make a joyful noise!



“Jesus is the True King!”

Craft Ideas for Sunday School

Don't be like Herod! Craft Ideas for Celebrating Jesus as the True King

Every now and then, it's good to visit a “bad guy” character with kids, mostly for the sake of emphasizing what we do NOT want to do. Students may not know much about Herod, the villain of the Nativity story, and there's no great need for them to have too much information about him. However, by contrasting Herod's greed and evil with Christ's selfless love, the beauty of the Messiah is all the more appreciated. These crafts celebrate the HERO and true King of the story and of our lives.

Don't miss all our [Sunday School Bible Crafts for Kids](#) or [coloring page that compares Herod to Jesus](#).

Bible Verses or Craft Captions:

Jesus is the true King!

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” -Matthew 19:14

Hip Hurray! Let's Celebrate Jesus's Birthday!

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. -Hebrews 12:9

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! -Psalm 100:1



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Craft one: “Crown Jesus King”

You will need:

- Decorative markers or crayons
- Glitter (optional!)
- Paper or cardboard crown (see our [crown craft template](#) or ask for some extras at Burger King)
- Stickers



Procedure:

1. Decorate the cardboard crown with markers, stickers, and more! Use puffy paint or glitter if you feel extra daring.
2. Add a verse or caption.
3. Fit to student’s head and enjoy!



Craft Two: “Celebrate Jesus Noisemaker”

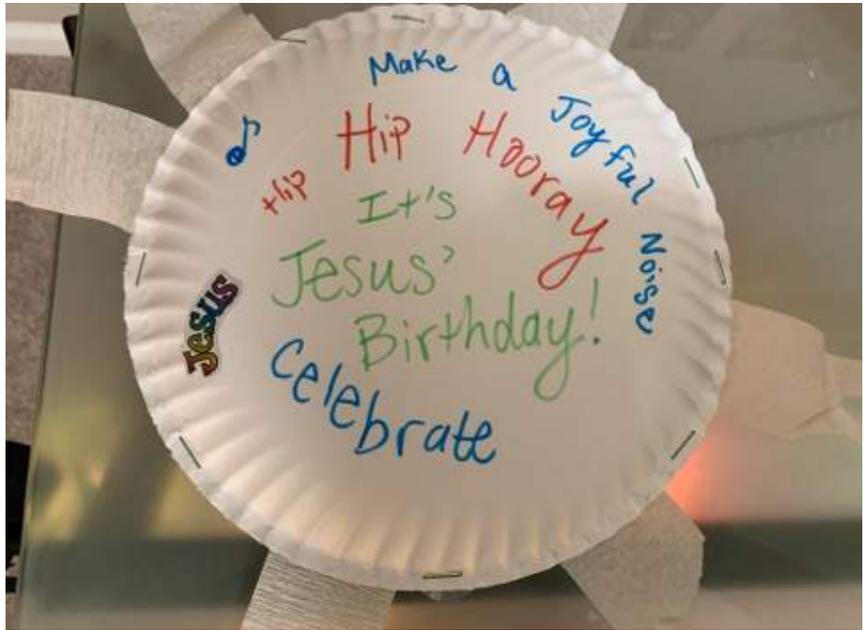
You will need:

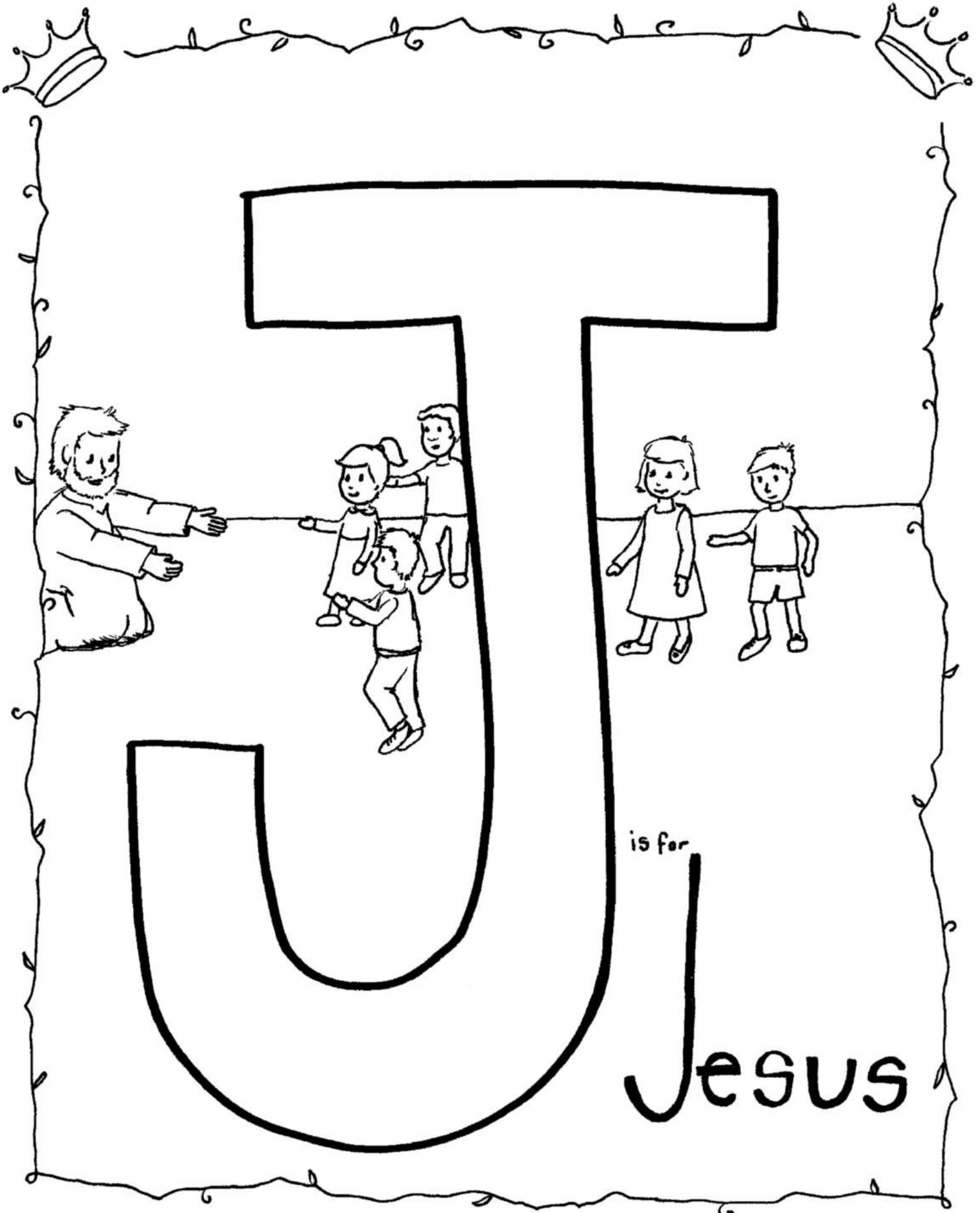
- Paper Plates
- Tape, glue, or stapler
- Stickers
- Decorative materials
- Crepe streamers, pipe cleaners (optional)
- Dried macaroni, beans, or rice



Procedure:

1. Decorate the paper plates with markers and stickers. Add verse or caption, if desired.
2. Place streamers and/or pipe cleaners in the center of the inside of the plate.
3. Carefully add dried noodles, rice, or beans.
4. Staple the paper plates together to enclose the dried goods.
5. Make sure all holes are sealed. Shake and make a joyful noise!





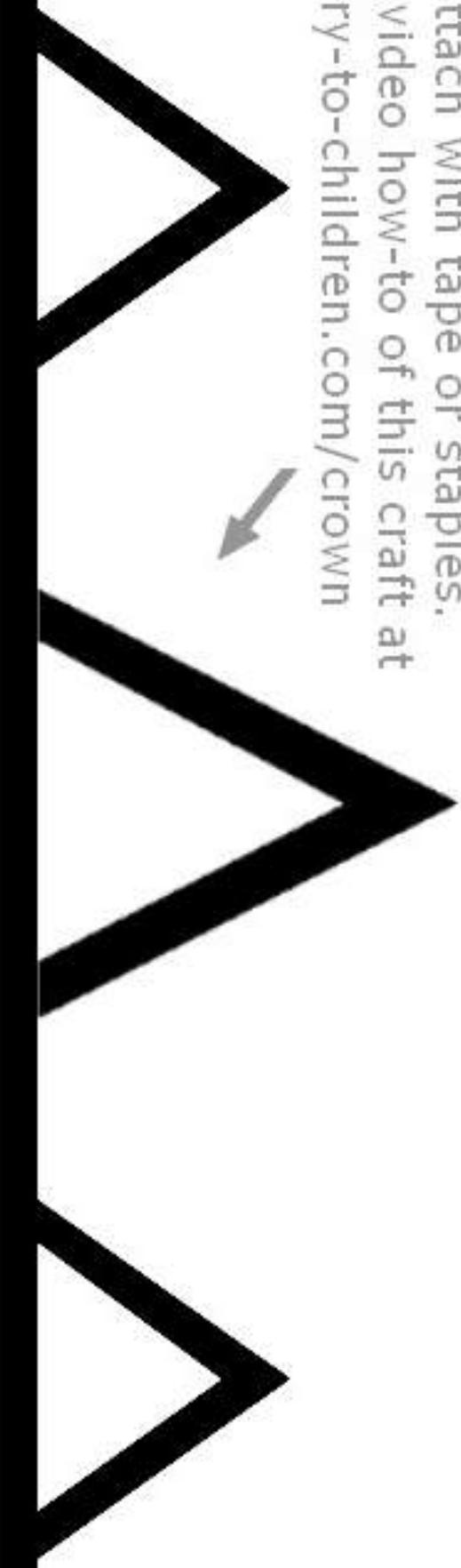
is for

Jesus

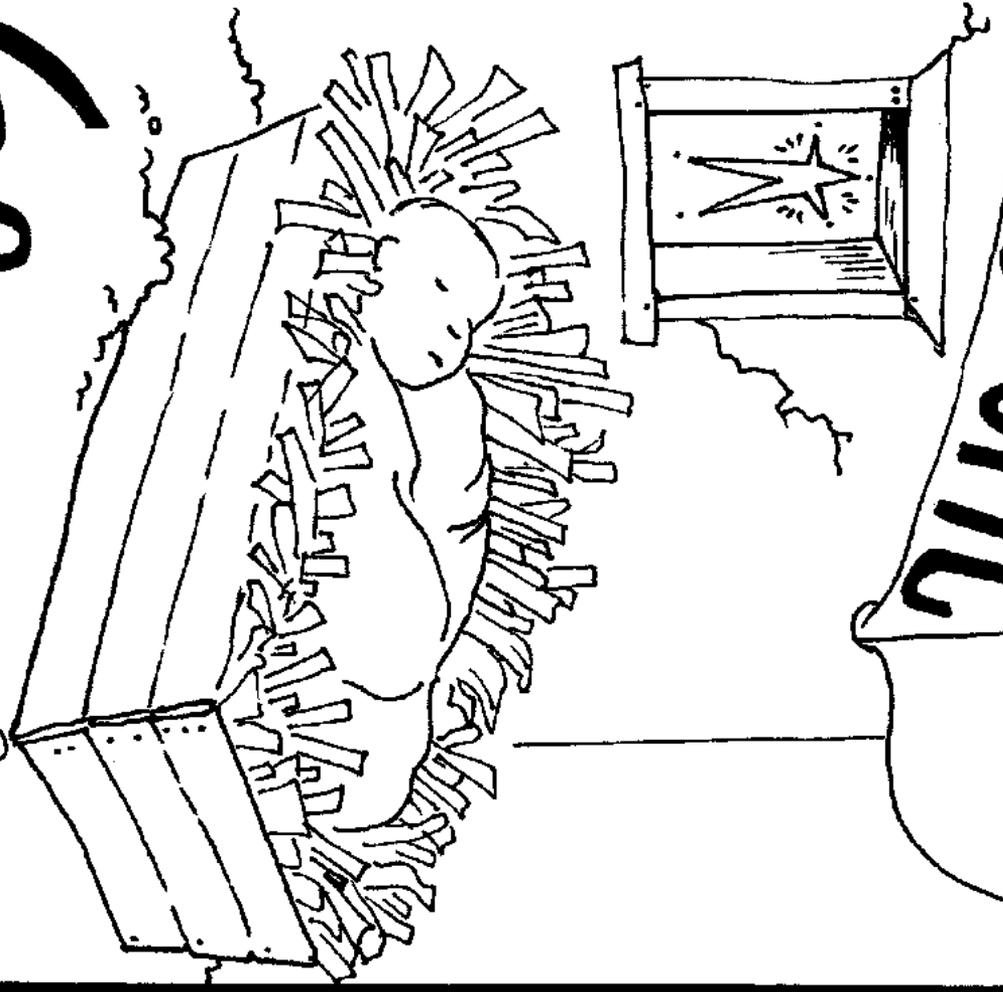
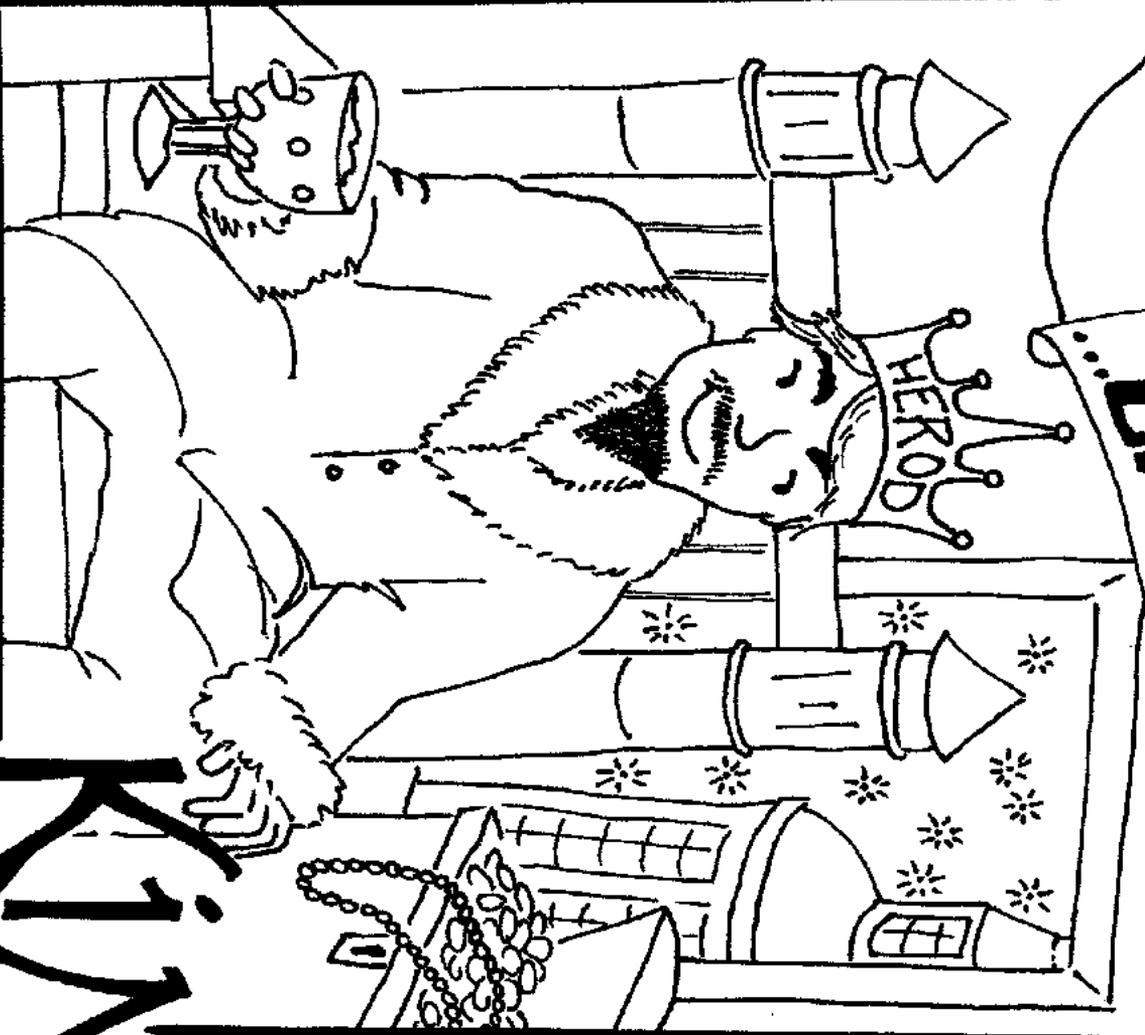
Extra strips to extend
crown as needed.



Cut along these pattern lines,
then attach with tape or staples.
See a video how-to of this craft at
ministry-to-children.com/crown



Two... Very... different



Mandy Grace '10

Kings

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