**Lesson 13 Acts 12:1-24**

**Herod and St. Peter**

Last week we read about Peter explaining his vision to the “circumcised” Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem after they heard about the conversion of Cornelius and his family. We also read that there were many conversions in Antioch and other “Greek” cities. In Antioch the term “Christians” was first used. Emperor Claudius is emperor at this time, which helps to date the events somewhere between 41-54 AD. The leaders in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch who later went to Tarsus to find Saul to assist with the community in Antioch. There is a prophecy of a world-wide famine. The disciples donated funds, each according to his ability, to be sent back to Judea with Saul and Barnabas as couriers.

1. **When did you feel closest to God this week? Was there a particular verse or message in this week’s lesson from Acts 12 that you found inspiring?**
2. **Check footnotes for information on the King Herod mentioned in this chapter. There were several Kings named Herod in the New Testament. What do we know about this one?**
3. **What did this King Herod do to show his contempt of the Christians? See Acts 12:1-5.**

**Acts 12:1-5 1**About that time King Herod laid hands upon some members of the church to harm them. **2**He had James, the brother of John, killed by the sword, **3**and when he saw that this was pleasing to the Jews he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (It was [the] feast of Unleavened Bread.) **4**He had him taken into custody and put in prison under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. He intended to bring him before the people after Passover. **5**Peter thus was being kept in prison, but prayer by the church was fervently being made to God on his behalf.

1. **What was the response of the Church to the actions of Herod? See verse 5 above.**
2. **How is the time chosen for Peter’s trial and arrest reminiscent of the arrest and trial of Jesus? See Acts 12:3-4 above and Luke 22:1-4, 22:47-53 below.**

**Luke 22:1-41**Now the feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was drawing near, **2**and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking a way to put him to death, for they were afraid of the people. **3**Then Satan entered into Judas,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+22&version=NABRE#fen-NABRE-30187c)] the one surnamed Iscariot, who was counted among the Twelve, **4**and he went to the chief priests and temple guards to discuss a plan for handing him over to them.

**Luke 22:47-53 47**While he was still speaking, a crowd approached and in front was one of the Twelve, a man named Judas. He went up to Jesus to kiss him. **48**Jesus said to him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” **49**His disciples realized what was about to happen, and they asked, “Lord, shall we strike with a sword?” **50**And one of them struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. **51**[[o](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+22&version=NABRE#fen-NABRE-30235o)]But Jesus said in reply, “Stop, no more of this!” Then he touched the servant’s ear and healed him. **52**And Jesus said to the chief priests and temple guards and elders who had come for him, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? **53**Day after day I was with you in the temple area, and you did not seize me; but this is your hour, the time for the power of darkness.”

1. **Herod must have heard stories of jail breaks by Peter and John in the past. What did he do to make certain that Peter would have a trial? See Acts 12:6.**

**Acts 12:6** On the very night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter, secured by double chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while outside the door guards kept watch on the prison.

1. **How did Peter escape this time? See Acts 12:7-11.**

**Acts 12:7-11 7**Suddenly the angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and awakened him, saying, “Get up quickly.” The chains fell from his wrists. **8**The angel said to him, “Put on your belt and your sandals.” He did so. Then he said to him, “Put on your cloak and follow me.” **9**So he followed him out, not realizing that what was happening through the angel was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. **10**They passed the first guard, then the second, and came to the iron gate leading out to the city, which opened for them by itself. They emerged and made their way down an alley, and suddenly the angel left him. **11**Then Peter recovered his senses and said, “Now I know for certain that [the] Lord sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people had been expecting.”

1. **What does the Catechism of the Catholic Church say about angels in CCC 330, 332, 334 and 336 below?**

**330** As purely *spiritual*creatures, angels have intelligence and will: they are personal and immortal creatures, surpassing in perfection all visible creatures, as the splendor of their glory bears witness.

**332** Angels have been present since creation and throughout the history of salvation, announcing this salvation from afar or near and serving the accomplishment of the divine plan: they closed the earthly paradise; protected Lot; saved Hagar and her child; stayed Abraham's hand; communicated the law by their ministry; led the People of God; announced births and callings; and assisted the prophets, just to cite a few examples.194 Finally, the angel Gabriel announced the birth of the Precursor and that of Jesus himself.195

**334** In the meantime, the whole life of the Church benefits from the mysterious and powerful help of angels.20

**336** From its beginning until death, human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession.202 "Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life."203 Already here on earth the Christian life shares by faith in the blessed company of angels and men united in God.

1. **What was humorous about the escape of Peter and events afterward? See 12:12-19.**

**Acts 12:12-1912**When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who is called Mark, where there were many people gathered in prayer. **13**When he knocked on the gateway door, a maid named Rhoda came to answer it. **14**She was so overjoyed when she recognized Peter’s voice that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. **15**They told her, “You are out of your mind,” but she insisted that it was so. But they kept saying, “It is his angel.” **16**But Peter continued to knock, and when they opened it, they saw him and were astounded. **17**He motioned to them with his hand to be quiet and explained [to them] how the Lord had led him out of the prison, and said, “Report this to James and the brothers.” Then he left and went to another place. **18**At daybreak there was no small commotion among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. **19**Herod, after instituting a search but not finding him, ordered the guards tried and executed. Then he left Judea to spend some time in Caesarea.

1. **What happened to the guards that were watching Peter?**
2. **Read Acts 12:20-24 and the historical account of Herod’s death by Josephus. How and why did Herod die?**

**Acts 12:20-24** He had long been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, who now came to him in a body. After winning over Blastus, the king’s chamberlain, they sued for peace because their country was supplied with food from the king’s territory. **21**On an appointed day, Herod, attired in royal robes, [and] seated on the rostrum, addressed them publicly. **22**The assembled crowd cried out, “This is the voice of a god, not of a man.” **23**At once the angel of the Lord struck him down because he did not ascribe the honor to God, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. **24**But the word of God continued to spread and grow.

**The account of King Agrippa’s death is told by Flavius Josephus:**

"Now when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city Caesarea [...] There he exhibited shows in honor of the emperor [...] On the second day of the festival, Herod put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a truly wonderful contexture, and came into the theater early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment was illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it. It shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him. At that moment, his flatterers cried out [...] that he was a god; and they added, 'Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto reverenced thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature.'

Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery. But as he presently afterward looked up, he saw an owl sitting on a certain rope over his head, and immediately understood that this bird was the messenger of ill tidings, as it had once been the messenger of good tidings to him; and he fell into the deepest sorrow. A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. He therefore looked upon his friends, and said, 'I, whom you call a god, am commanded presently to depart this life; while Providence thus reproves the lying words you just now said to me; and I, who was by you called immortal, am immediately to be hurried away by death. But I am bound to accept of what Providence allots, as it pleases God; for we have by no means lived ill, but in a splendid and happy manner.'

After he said this, his pain was become violent. Accordingly, he was carried into the palace, and the rumor went abroad that he would certainly die in a little time. But the multitude presently sat in sackcloth, with their wives and children, after the law of their country, and besought God for the king's recovery. All places were also full of mourning and lamentation. Now the king rested in a high chamber, and as he saw them below lying prostrate on the ground, he could not himself forbear weeping. And when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, being in the fifty-fourth year of his age, and in the seventh year of his reign." (*Flavius Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 19.343-350*).