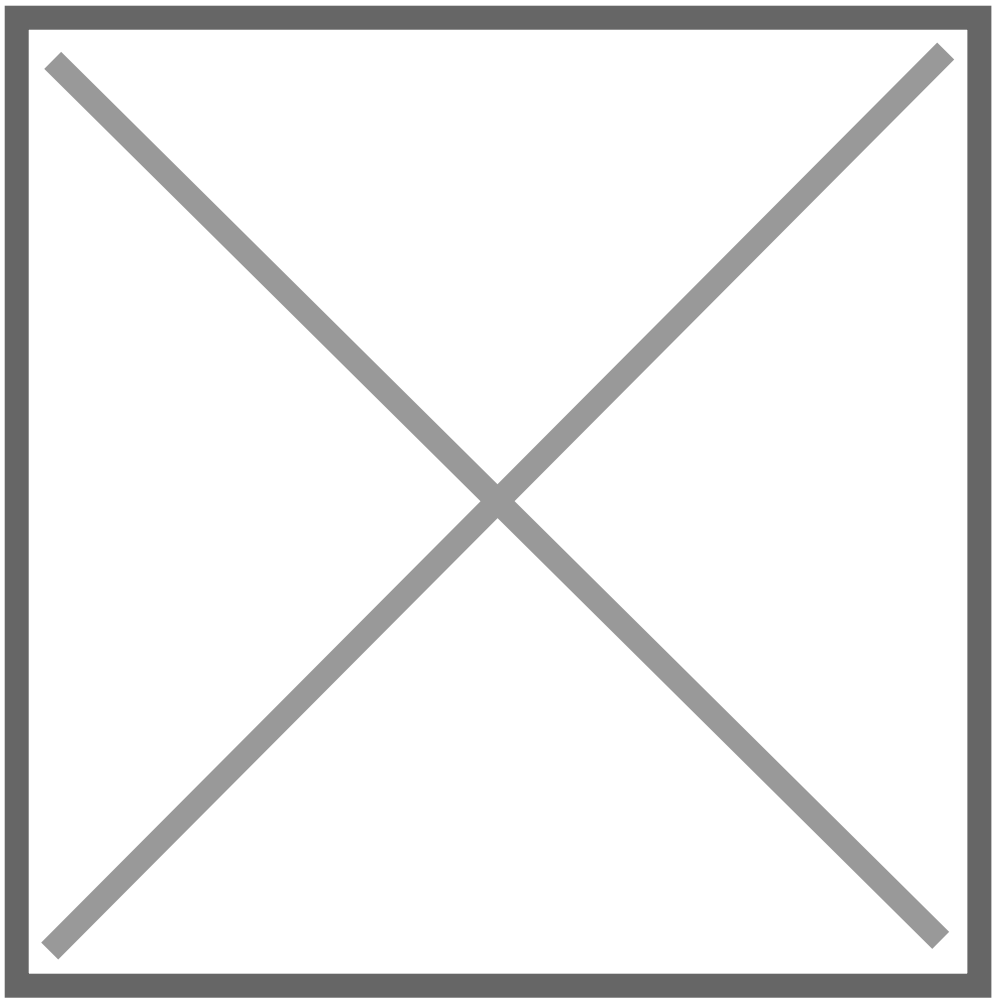
Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

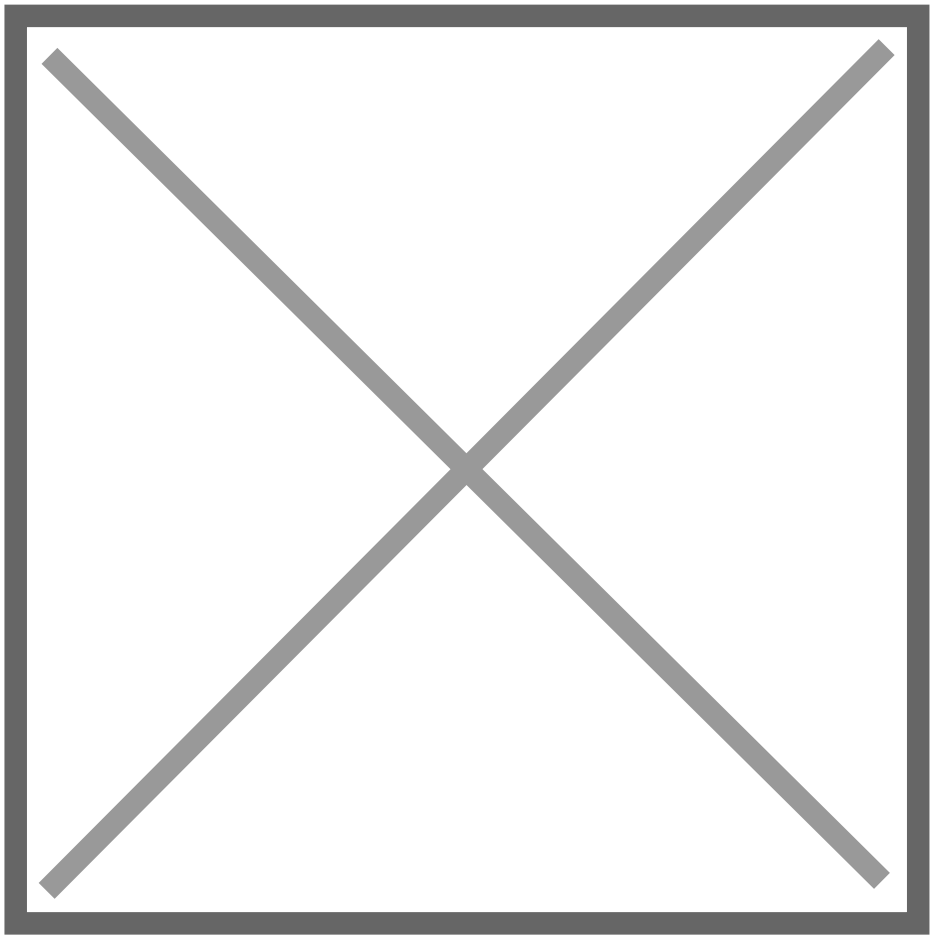
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“Herod was anxious to see Jesus” (Luke 9:9).

Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great who inherited a fourth of his father’s kingdom, is depicted in the gospels as obsessed with John the Baptist, whom he executed for criticizing his incestuous marriage to his brother’s wife. He is a weak man driven by his fears and passions, trapped by Herodias, his wife, into beheading John at his birthday party because he promised her daughter any request after she danced for his guests.

Herod is haunted by the Baptist, whom he once listened to in the dungeon before he had him brutally murdered, and he imagines that John has been raised from the dead as one of the ancient prophets. When the ministry of Jesus succeeds that of John, Herod wonders if Jesus is not the reincarnated Baptist. Luke captures Herod’s ambivalent feelings of both respect and fear for John by saying that Herod wanted to see Jesus. Despite his shameless life of excess and corruption, there is still a spark of religious curiosity in him.

Herod gets his wish when Pilate sends Jesus to him during his trial. But instead of satisfying Herod’s desire to question him, Jesus remains silent. After mocking him with a royal robe, Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate, who was equally confounded by Jesus and ends up being trapped by the crowds into executing him rather than have word get back to Rome that he had been lenient with a supposed rival to Caesar.

Jesus continues to haunt history and, by contrast, to expose rulers who are corrupted by power and paranoia. His integrity shames the ambitious and violent calculations of those who cling to privilege and status as the only measure of success. Jesus is the spark of truth that invades the consciences of those hiding in the darkness, offering them a last chance to regain their integrity. We do not know the full fate of Herod, but there is hope in his epitaph that he wanted to see Jesus.

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