

Oh, what a terrible mistake the king had made! He didn't want to kill John. But he had offered to give his step-daughter anything she asked for, and made the promise in front of all his guests. He was embarrassed not to keep his word. And so he foolishly ordered that John be killed, and that his head be given to his wicked step-daughter. She carried the gruesome trophy to her mother.

The girl ran to her mother for advice. What should she ask for? A palace of her own? A stable of beautiful horses? A vineyard or a farm? But no, that's not what they asked for. They had the meanest wish ever. They wanted the head of their enemy, John the Baptist, brought to them on a serving plate. Can you imagine anyone wishing for something so wicked?

"Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you." He promised her, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

The king invited many guests to his palace for a fancy dinner to celebrate his birthday. There were court officials, military commanders, and government leaders of Galilee, all eating and drinking and having a lovely time. Herodias' daughter danced for all the guests, and the king was very pleased—so pleased, in fact, that he made a very foolish offer.

It sounds like the bad guys won, doesn't it? But they didn't, really. John had finished his work. And because John trusted God, he went to live with Him in heaven after he died. John couldn't wish for anything better than to live forever with the Savior he told people to trust.

But what about Herod, Herodias, and Salome? Well, we don't know for sure. But they are all dead now, just like John. And if God didn't change their hearts before they died, they are suffering forever in hell. If someone could ask Salome *now* what she wanted more than anything, what do you think it would be?

Perhaps to make Herodias happy, or perhaps in a fit of anger, King Herod threw John into prison. The king liked to listen to John talk (even though he never quite understood what he was saying) and thought John was a holy man, but King Herod didn't want to follow God. So King Herod kept John handy in the prison, right up until the big party.

King Herod married a woman who had been married to his brother, Philip. For some reason Philip and his wife Herodias decided to stop being married, and Herod and Herodias decided to try being married to each other instead. John told King Herod that God's plan was for marriage to last a lifetime, and that it was wrong to stop being a husband and wife just because you wanted to marry someone else. He said that King Herod should not have taken his brother's wife as his own. This made Mrs. King Herod very angry. She didn't like anyone telling her husband that she should not be the queen.

Many people heard John speak and believed what he said. They allowed John to dip them in water—a special kind of baptism—as a picture of how they wanted to start over and really love and obey God. But other people were angry with John because he said they were sinners—that they were doing things wrongly. John even made the *king* mad by telling him that he disobeyed God.

An article for children from Matthew 14

## The Meanest Wish Ever

Susan Verstraete

Let's play a wishing game. Imagine that your mom or dad said, "Tell me what you would like. Whatever it is, I will give to you." Wise parents would never say such a thing to their child, but what if they did? What would you ask for?

A very long time ago, a very unwise king made just such a foolish offer to his stepdaughter, and you'll never, NEVER, NEVER guess what she asked for! It was the meanest wish ever. But let me tell you the story from the beginning.

Before Jesus began traveling around Israel, teaching and healing people, God sent a messenger—a prophet—to prepare the people to hear Jesus. His name was John the Baptist, and he was a very brave man. Because he spoke words that God told him to speak, he often said things that made wicked people angry.

But because John wanted to obey God, he said them anyway. He told the people that God was displeased with their sins and that God wanted the people to love Him and obey His laws.

