**Acts Chapter 12**

12:1-5

* This Herod is Harid Agrippa I, the third Herod in a line of rulers of the area around Jerusalem. Herod the Great ruled when Jesus was born, and was responsible for the massacre of infants; Herod Antipas imprisoned and killed John the Baptist during Jesus’ ministry; Herod Agrippa I persecuted the early church; and we’ll meet Herod Agrippa later on in Acts.
* Herod was a leader who was under the power of the Roman government, but also managed to be well liked by most of the Jewish people he ruled. We see that he was careful as he persecuted the church to do it with the favor of other Jewish rulers
* Herod would have been known as King of the Jews, so the Christian church, who claimed to follow Jesus as “King of the Jews” was threatening to him.
* This story sets the scene for this chapter, which marks the halfway point in the story of Acts. We will be finishing with the original twelve apostles and the church in Jerusalem and the areas around it to Paul and the churches that spread through the Roman empire.

12:6-19

* This is the second of three escapes from prison that we will read about in Acts. Luke probably includes all three stories because the theme of God freeing God’s people is important to the whole of the early church.
* The whole story of Peter’s rescue from prison is humorous. Peter can’t tell if what’s happening is real or a vision; when Rhoda sees Peter at the door, she’s so excited she leaves Peter outside to tell the others; the church, who is actively praying for Peter’s release can’t believe that he actually might be free.
* Peter has to run away and lay low, so James, the brother of Jesus, who would continue to lead the Jerusalem church for the rest of his life.
* It is important to see that the early church, full of faithful people, still sometimes prayed for something that they didn’t really believe would happen.
* Have you ever been surprised by an answer to prayer? Have you ever struggled with faith and doubt in the midst of prayer?
* What does our church pray for regularly? Do we really expect that God will answer us?

12:20-25

* We return to Herod, bookmarking this chapter and finishing the threats to the early church that could be found in the area around Jerusalem: the high priests, the Pharisees, and finally the King.
* Luke ends this chapter and this section of Acts by showing that God’s Word has won out over all the powers in Judea that would try to stop it. The church continued to grow and now we will move on to see Saul travelling and teaching throughout the empire.
* From other ancient sources, we know Herod died in 44 c.e., so this is about 12 years since the death and resurrection of Jesus.
* We haven’t had a lot of moments that show how much time has passed in the book of Acts, but here we see that it’s been 12 years, which is really a long time.
* What has God done in our church in the past 12 years? What might happen in the next decade?

