Sermon follow-up
1/25/09
Matt. 2:1-23 – "The Boy Who Lived"
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Sermon Outline:

1. The Visit

- **The magi**
- **The star**
- **The gifts**
- **Jesus is the promised king and the new temple**

2. The Flight

- **Herod's response to the visit of the magi**
- **Herod gets duped**
- **A new exodus story – but with a twist**
- **Hosea 11:1 fulfilled**
    - **Hosea 11:1 is about Israel, not Jesus; the past, not the future; and it seems misplaced in Matthew's narrative – how does it work?**
- **Jesus is the new Moses and new Israel**

3. The Slaughter

- **Herod's track record**
- **Foreshadowing what is to come, both his death and the church's mission**
- **Jesus as sacrificial victim for the world**

4. The Return

- **Jesus the Nazarene**
    - **Jesus is the branch (Isaiah 11)**
    - **Jesus is a Nazirite (Numbers 6)**

5. The Point

- **Matthew is showing us Jesus' identity (multiple, overlapping typologies, all converging)**
- **Matthew is mapping out possible responses to Jesus**
    - **The anger of Herod**
    - **The knowledgeable apathy of the scribes and chief priests**
    - **The joyful worship of the magi**

For those of you not "in the know" the sermon title was based on the opening chapter of the Harry Potter series. Rowling patterns the life of Harry after Jesus in multiple ways, but the attack on him in his infancy is a rather obvious link.

Matthew 2 is a preacher's nightmare because it is so full of fluid, overlapping typologies that rely on an intricate knowledge of the OT most of us do not have. These diverse typologies include: Jesus as new Moses, Israel, and temple; Jesus as branch of Jesse and promised Davidic king; Jesus as great high priest; Jesus as Nazirite; Jesus as sacrifice for the sins of the world; Magi as representatives of Gentile kings; the holy family fleeing at night in a new Passover/exodus event; Herod as Pharaoh; Israel as Egypt; Joseph as new Joseph; and all that's just scratching the surface.

In terms of the identity of Jesus, the above typologies are a helpful catalog for how we should understand his person and work. We can add to the list: He is God in the flesh. There is no other way to understand the worship of the magi. If the worshipped one who is less than God, they engaged in idolatry. We cannot know exactly what their line of thought was, but the text clearly says they worshipped him. This is a full blown incarnational theology, even in Jesus' infancy. As the God-man, he is worthy of worship.

My plan in a couple of weeks is to look at this same event (mainly Herod's attack on Christ) but from the apocalyptic perspective of Revelation 12. For some connections between Mt. 2 and Rev. 12, see Dorinai's commentary on Matthew, 40ff.

In the sermon, I had to skip over the fourth point of the sermon, the holy family's return to Israel. Here is the gist of what I was going to say:

> We have the return of the holy family to Israel 2:19-23. Joseph is given a dream in which he is told to go back to Israel because those who sought the child's life are now dead. This is an almost verbatim quotation of Ex. 4:19. Moses had fled from his home because people wanted to kill him. The Lord comes to him and tells him he can now return because those who wanted to kill him are now dead. You can see how this reinforces

some of the themes we've just seen – particularly Jesus as the new Moses and Israel as Egypt.

But the key here is where the holy family ends up. They went to dwell in Nazareth. This is the last stop on the Messianic itinerary for quite a while. Matthew tells us they dwelt in Nazareth in order that it might be fulfilled, as it was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

Once again, one of Matthew's Scripture citations causes us problems. There is no passage in the OT that says the Messiah will be called a Nazarene. In fact, the village of Nazareth did not even exist in the days of the old covenant prophets. So what does this mean? We have to do some detective work to figure it out.

A big clue is found in the citation formula itself. In the other quotations, Matthew speaks of the words of a singular prophet (cf. 2:6, 15, 17). But here he says "prophet<u>s</u>" plural. No particular prophet is in view; rather, Matthew is capturing a theme or pattern found in the prophetic Scriptures as a whole.

The other clue is the name of the place they went to live. There is at least a double pun on the word "Nazareth." (Puns of this sort are lost on us because we read the Bible in translation, but they are quite common, especially in the OT. Puns are important – God likes words, and is indeed the ultimate wordsmith. He speaks to us with a kind of poetic flair. That his Spirit would inspire Matthew to play a "sound-alike" game in this passage is not a huge surprise.)

The word "Nazareth" is closely related to the word "nezer," which means twig, or stick, or branch. This is probably to be understood as an allusion to Isa. 11:1. Isa. 11 describes judgment – the Davidic family tree is going to be cut down, leaving only an obscure stump. But from that stump will come a branch of Jesse – a nezer of Jesse – that will grow strong. Jesus is that branch, he is that nezer, he is the fulfillment of Isa. 11, the one in whom the Davidic kingship is restored.

This makes sense: the point of Isa. 11 is that Messiah will come into a situation where the house of David has lost all its glory. He will come in lowly circumstances, in humility. That's a theme you find all over the prophets (cf. Isa 52-53)! Nazareth was a lowly, despised village. It was

"stickville." "Twigville." It was not a good place to be from; settling there deliberately was an act of humiliation. "Nazarene" was a derogatory, contemptuous term. You may remember the question raised in John 1, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" The Jewish answer was "no." Of course, the true answer is "yes," because this insignificant branch is going to grow into the greatest of all trees. Don't be fooled by his humble beginnings. The Nazarene is the true nezer.

There may be another allusion here, to the Nazirite vow. The law of the Nazirite is found in Numbers 6. Nazirites may not be well known, but they are all over the Bible. What is a Nazirite? Nazir means separation, to be separate. Nazirites are special holy warriors. A Nazirite is on a mission from God, and he comes under special rules until the mission is accomplished. Some are Nazirites for life, like Samuel, Samson, and John the Baptist. Now, Jesus is not a Nazirite in the technical sense for most of life. He drank wine and cut his hair. But in a more general sense, he was a Nazirite. He was on a mission. He was a "spiritual" Nazirite. And at the end of his life, he *did* take a Nazirite vow. In the upper room, at the Last Supper, right before going to the cross, he took a Nazirite vow: "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until I drink it with you in the kingdom." See, Nazirites, took a vow to not drink until their special work was done – and that's what Jesus does. When he goes to the cross, he goes to war – and he defeats sin, Satan, even death FOR US. He accomplishes his mission. The Nazarene is the true Nazirite.

A great explanation of Mt. 2:23 is found in Peter Leithart's essay, "He Shall Be Called a Nazarene" in the Biblical Horizons newsletter #13. I am obviously much more inclined to include the Isa. 11:1 branch reference than Leithart, but otherwise his article is a good summary of the issues involved.

Note that branch language is not only used in Isa. 11, but also Isa. 60, a passage that looms large in the background of Mt. 2 (cf. Isa. 60:21). So the Nazarene/nezer connection does not seem to be too much of a stretch.

This story gives rise to all kind of legends, some of which have made it into Christian hymnody, artwork, and storytelling. For example, the Scripture does not say there were three wise men, just that the group of wise men brought three gifts. Most likely there were many more than three, and it is virtually certain that

such important men traveled such a long distance with a rather large entourage of servants, body guards, etc. One legend from the Eastern church has it that the three wise men were named Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar (other branches of the church have different names). Many Chinese Christians believe one of the wise men was from China.

Matthew does not call these men kings, although in light of the fact that they were members of the royal court, that's not much of a stretch (cf. Ps. 72 ; Isa. 60). They were certainly royal figures.

Their visit not only ties in with explicit prophecies (e.g., Ps. 72, Isa. 60), it also recapitulates the visit of Queen of Sheba to Solomon (1 Ki 10), but with a twist – she visited a palace, they visited a lowly house. But in both cases the Gentile visitor brought royal gifts and responded to God's revelation in faith.

Magi were astrologers of sorts, but we cannot say in very much detail what that means in this case. Most likely these men were Zoroastrians. There is good reason to think Zoroastrianism was the name given Gentile God-fearing religion from Daniels' day onward in the Babylonian region. It later got corrupted into a form of paganism, but initially it was a non-Jewish version of the true faith. The magi were also political advisors, ruling figures, members of royal court – as we see in the book of Daniel.

Leithart shares some thoughts on the oddness of the way the magi's visit fulfills Scripture:

> Though the Magi fulfill these promises, the fulfillment is odd. The Queen of Sheba traveled to an impressive court to visit Solomon, and the prophets envision the nations on pilgrimage to a Jerusalem rebuilt with precious stones (Isaiah 54:12). But the Magi don't find the king of the Jews in Jerusalem or the king's court. They find him in the small town of Bethlehem, the child of humble parents. How will the nations be attracted to this? No wonder the Jews stumbled over Jesus.
> But a deeper reading of the Old Testament shows that this is how God has always worked. God brings Gentiles to salvation not when Israel is strong but when she is weak. Pharaoh seeks a blessing from Jacob after Jacob recounts the difficulties of his life (Genesis 47:7-10). Ruth the Moabitess attaches herself to Naomi when Naomi has nothing (Ruth 1:15-18). Namaan seeks out Elisha because of the testimony of a Israelite slave girl (2 Kings 5). Israel is most evangelistically effective during the exile, when

> they have lost king, temple, land. Paul was not thinking only of the New Testament when he said, "God has chosen the weak things of this world to shame the things which are strong" (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). That's the story of Israel.
>
> We sometimes think that our work for God's kingdom will be effective if we can get our act together, establish impressive institutions, build large churches, impress the world with our success. That has never been God's way. There is nothing wrong with cathedrals, but Rome turned to Jesus while the church was still in the catacombs. The message of Christmas is that God uses "things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God" (1 Corinthians 1:28-29). The story of the Magi shows that God displays His strength in our weakness, His glory in our humility, His wisdom in our folly, to make it clear that everything comes from Him and not from ourselves (2 Corinthians 4:7).

There is another twist. Just as Matthew 2 shows Israel becoming spiritual Egypt, so the magi are now true Israel:

> The magi come searching for Jesus from the east, from Persia, moving west toward the promised land, as Israel did following the Babylonian exile. As they travel, they follow a star, as Israel followed the pillar of cloud and fire from Egypt. They bring gold, frankincense, and myrrh to worship at the place where God had pitched his tent in human flesh. Meanwhile, Herod the king of the Jews reacts with horror at the thought of Jesus' birth, and tries to destroy the incarnate temple.
>
> Will the true Israel please stand up?

Ordinarily, the Bible condemns astrology, of the sort pagan magi would be involved in (cf. Isa. 47:13; see also Dt. 18:9ff; Isa. 8:19f; 44:24f). In this case, these faithful magi seem to have been looking they were trained to look for by the Jews they encountered. They probably knew of Scriptures like Num. 24, Ps. 72, and Isa. 60. Also, note that not all astrology was condemned under the old covenant because the book of Job presents the constellations as having been designed and identified by God himself (Job 38; cf. Amos 5:8, Ps. 147:4, etc.). God names the stars; he used them in that era to instruct and teach. The prophecies concerning Gentiles, especially Gentile kings would have greatly interested these men. They knew to expect some kind of sky revelation when the promised king came, and they knew that revelation would lead them to the right place.

Stars are multi-symbolic. From Gen. 1 onwards, stars represent earthly rulers (cf. Gen. 37; Mt. 24; the promise that Abraham's descendants will be like stars also means they will be kings, per Gen. 22; Ps. 19; Jdg. 5:31; etc; plus symbolism such as the American and Japanese flags). As signs of rulers, stars are connected with angels (Isa. 14:13; Rev. 12:4; etc.). Some passages indicate stars have a personal quality, e.g., Ps. 147:4, Isa. 40:26, etc. The medieval view that stars are somehow connected to angelic life-forms certainly has some measure of biblical warrant. For example, the star "appears" in Mt. 2:7, just as the angel of the Lord "appears" to Joseph multiple times in Mt. 1-2 (cf. Jdg. 13:6). Stars are also linked to the shekinah-glory of God. For example, in Ezek. 1, the shekinah glory "appears" to the prophet.

In the new covenant, men are associated with stars in a deeper way, in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12; 15; 22; cf. Phil. 2:15; Rev. 1; Eph. 2:6; etc.). This makes sense since men have now, in some sense, taken the place of angels as mediators of God's rule in the creation.

For more, see Doug Wilson, ed., *The Forgotten Heavens* and James Jordan, *Through New Eyes.*

Further confirmation that the star of Mt. 2 is the shekinah is found in Isa 35:1ff, which describes the joy of the nations when the kingdom comes. The prophet says, "They shall see the glory of the Lord." It seems this text is at least partially fulfilled in the visit of magi. They were certainly overjoyed. But how did they see the glory of the Lord? By seeing the star above and by seeing the child below.

Why wasn't the star seen by others? It seems non-believers are blind to the shekinah. See Ex. 14:19-20; Acts 9; etc. It seems that when God manifests himself in these special ways, it is not to convince unbelievers, but to encourage and guide believers. Perhaps Saul/Paul is the exception since he is converted by his vision of the shekinah. At the very least, we can say such revelation is selective. It is public, but not in any ordinary way.

Properly translated, the magi saw a "rising" star, not a star in the east. But since they were in the east, and guided them westward, the older translations are not altogether off base.

No astronomical phenomenon can fit the description of the star, as I pointed out in the sermon. Here are a couple of articles:

http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4220725/k.58F3/The_Star_of_Bethlehem.htm

http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4222079/k.62ED/Your_Bethlehem_Star_Article_is_Wrong.htm

Astronomical phenomenon were usually portents of bad news. Usually such signs were taken to mean that someone important was going to die. For example, a comet appeared during Herod's reign, and he had several nobles slaughtered just to show the portent was not about him but about *them.* In this case, the star signals not just good news, but *the* good news – the birth of the promised messiah.

Jim Jordan writes on Zoroastrianism in his notes on the book of Esther:

> Darius was a great champion of "Zoroastrianism," having been taught by Zoroaster himself, according to some authorities. Zoroaster's teaching is in so many respects to Judaism that it almost certainly demonstrates the influence of some devout Jew upon Zoroaster in the formation of his beliefs. It centered on a revelation of God in fire, corresponding to the revelation of God in the fiery glory cloud and in the altar fire in the Old Testament. It featured a Satanic opponent to God, who is often said to be equal to the good God, but may not always have been so considered. While much Zoroastrianism fell back into polytheism, authentic Zoroastrianism was severely monotheistic and creationist, and there were always those who held to the old, pure form of it. Interestingly, Zoroaster's own poems speak of God (Ahuramazda) and His attributes Good Word and Holy Spirit! The magi who visited Jesus at His birth were Persians, and almost certainly were faithful God-fearers. Thus, everything indicates that Darius, and also Cyrus, was a true God-fearing gentile. The religion of the Persian God-fearers came to be called Zoroastrianism, but

> we should not let the dualistic and polytheistic later forms of Zoroastrianism confuse us. There were faithful Persian God-fearers in Jesus' day, just as there were faithful Jews.
> Even if I have been too kind to Zoroastrianism, the fact is that Darius hated the polytheists. He would have been disposed to favor the Jews, for they alone, except for the Zoroastrians, were monotheists. I am pretty sure that any Zoroastrian who read the Hebrew scriptures would think they were saying the same thing he believed.

My hunch is that the magi were the faithful remnant, preserving the true Zoroastrian, God-fearing faith. They got this faith from Daniel and other faithful Jews in exile. Remember, in the book of Daniel more than one world emperor passes a law favoring the Jewish religion. The Jewish faith was well known, and spread widely in this period. Not all converts circumcised and became full-fledged Jews; many become what were known as Gentile God-fearers. It is not unthinkable that a group of converts from the 500s B.C. would preserve that faith down to the day of Jesus' birth. In fact, it's highly probable.

The gifts the magi bring to Jesus are multi-symbolic. I presented a couple ways of looking at the symbolism in the sermon. The gifts can be understood as kingly, pointing to Jesus as the new Davidic king/new Solomon; or priestly, pointing to Jesus as the new tabernacle/temple, and new anointed priest. Here are some other ways of looking at the gifts:

> Myrrh – priestly, used in anointing oil for priests
>
> Gold – kingly, for obvious reasons
>
> Incense – prophetic, symbolizing intercession/prayers of prophets for others (Gen. 20:7 + Rev. 8:)

Or

> Gold – priestly, since gold is used in holy environments like the tabernacle/temple

Myrrh – kingly, since it is used in preparing a body for burial, and the distinctive mark of a biblical king is giving himself sacrificially for his people (Mk. 15:23)

Frankincense – prophetic, symbolizing heavenly rule and intercession

See Davies and Allison, 248ff on gifts; see Davies and Allison, 250f on Jesus/Solomon typology connected with these gifts.

Another exodus theme in Mt. 2: The magi engage in civil disobedience and lawful deception in order to protect the Hebrew seed, just like the midwives in Ex. 1. Like those midwives, the magi feared God and did what was right in his sight, even at great personal risk.

There are two deceptions in the passage. Herod lies to the magi, telling them he wants to worship the Christ child. The magi deceive in return, by failing to return word to Herod as they had agreed. There is no moral equivalence in these lies. Herod lied in order to take life, the magi lied in order to save life. In the case of Herod, we see lies and murder going together in combination. The magi only use deception as a means of defense and a way of protecting the innocent.

Even so, the tyrannical regime of Herod does shed blood, the blood of innocent children. We need to recognize that Satan's war on God's people often turns from cold to hot, and there can be casualties. Martyrdom is in intrinsic to the church's calling in a fallen world.

We might want to consider ways in which the Herods/Pharaohs of our day seek to attack the seed. Our government, for all its empty rhetoric and bluster, is rapidly moving towards many explicitly anti-family, anti-child positions. Already, through divorce laws, abortion laws, secular schools, etc., the state is showing its potential to war on covenant children. Many of the issues that face us require dream-like wisdom to navigate, as God gave to Joseph and the magi. We need to pray for God to guide our steps even as he did theirs, that our holy children may be protected.

However, God ultimately strikes Herod dead (and if Josephus' account is to be believed, it was not a pleasant death). Herod's death not only fulfilled the exodus pattern (= Pharaoh's death); it also fulfilled the word of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah

60, which as we have already seen stands behind Matthew 2 in all kinds of ways, says that nations and kingdoms that do not serve God's king will perish (v. 12).

Another lesson to be learned from the flight of the magi and the flight of the holy family: Not only is it ok to deceive, it is also ok to run. If tyrannical rulers come looking for our children to kill them, we can lie to protect them. We can lie to protect one another. But we can also flee, if that looks to be the best option. In this case it was. When Herod is thirsting for blood, we best not let him get near our children.

There is a "sacred geography" at work in Mt. 2. One example of this is the magi's movement westward.

Adam and Eve, Cain, and Israel all moved eastward when they were sent into exile. The entry way into the tabernacle and temple was on the east side, so that one moved westward to return to the presence of God. Going east is going into exile; moving west is returning in exodus.

The magi are participating the new exodus by traveling westward toward Jesus.

Here is Leithart's explanation:

> The typology of the passage actually goes deeper. From Genesis 3, West-to-East movement is always movement away from God's presence and His house (cf. Genesis 3:24), but East-to-West movement is movement back toward God. Traveling from Persia to Israel, the magi are moving back to the garden, following the footsteps of Abraham (Ur to the promised land), Joshua (entering land from Moab), Israel returning from exile. The Magi are moving back toward Paradise, incarnate in Bethlehem.

There are also some interesting aspects to the holy family's departure from Israel to Egypt. They left at night, recalling, the Passover and the Israelites midnight departure from Egypt. Also, Jesus' family and the magi left Israel at same time, forming a "mixed multitude" as it were. This also matches the original exodus in the book of Exodus, which includes Jews as well as Gentile God-fearers, who will

be woven together into one body during their 40 years of wilderness wandering. Finally, Herod died in the midst of his efforts to kill Jesus, just as Pharaoh died pursuing the Israelites in the original exodus. The whole sequence of the holy family fleeing to Egypt and returning all happened quite quickly because we know that Jesus was presented in the temple on his 41st day (Lk. 2:22ff).

Certainly Mt. 2 was not the first time Herod polluted the land and stained the nation with the flow of innocent blood. He was a disturbed, paranoid ruler, a bloodthirsty tyrant. Because he saw Jesus as a rival to his own power, he was hell-bent on destroying the child.

Leithart offers these thoughts on his violent, political reaction to the news of Jesus' birth:

> While Gentiles rejoice at Jesus' birth, Herod and the Jewish leaders are troubled (v. 3). Herod cannot rejoice at the news of a new king, whom he sees as a rival to his own power. Many Jews receive Jesus, but Jerusalem, the center of Jewish leadership, is hostile to Jesus from the beginning. Rather than receive Jesus, Israel's leaders prefer to play the role of court scribes to the bloodthirsty power-monger, Herod. Jerusalem confirms its reputation as the city that kills prophets; she will be left desolate as a result (cf. Matthew 23:37-38).

The fact that this massacre of the innocents is not recorded in other histories should not bother us in the least. Bethlehem was a small village; not much news worthy happened there. The number of babies killed was tragic, but still small compared to Herod's other atrocities (and certainly very small compared to the number of babies we slaughter daily in our abortion mills).

I mentioned in the sermon that the beginning of Matthew foreshadows the end. Leithart develops this thought this way:

> Jesus' infancy anticipates His passion, a point that Matthew makes by including multiple verbal and thematic connections between his opening and closing chapters. One example: Matthew is the only NT writer to quote Jeremiah by name, and he quotes him twice - in 2:18 and 27:9-10.

The first describes the slaughter of the infants, the latter the field purchased with Judas's blood-money.
Since Matthew is presenting Jesus as the true "son," the true Israel (2:15), this parallel of beginning and end also applies to Israel's history. Abraham's history begins with a call from Ur; Israel's national history begins with an exodus from Egypt. Israel's history concludes (in the OT) with the call to return from Babylon (especially in the MT, where Cyrus's decree closes the canon).
As the true Israel, Jesus' history has the same inclusio. And that suggests that there is an "exilic" moment at the end of the gospel story, matching the exile-and-return of chapter 2. The ending exile-and-return would seem to be the cross and resurrection. Thus, Matthew's structure, which reveals the structure of Israel's history, gives us an atonement theology that highlights the cross as Jesus' endurance of the curse of exile.

The wise men do not say they were looking for a personal savior, but for a king. This text is shot through with royalty and political overtones. Look at all the mentions of kingship: several mentions of Herod as king, the magi as royal figures, the magi's gifts as symbolic of royalty, the star as a sign of kingship. It is very evident that this passage is about the clash of two kingdoms – Herod's kingdom which is all about outward show and pomp, and Jesus' kingdom which is clothed in humility and focused on service.

In short, this is a highly politicized text. It's a story of 'king vs. king.' It's about competing royal claims. Who is the real king of the Jews? Who is the real fulfillment of the Davidic promises? Matthew's answer is obvious. Herod's throne is really Satan's throne. Jesus is ushering in a different kind of kingdom.

The birth of a royal son in a monarchy would normally be a cause for huge celebration. But in Herod's case it causes vexation and rage because the son is not his own. And even if had been, the child would not have been safe (Herod killed three of his own boys when he suspected them of treason). In this case, the king is seen as a subversive presence in the nation, which is why Herid aims at his destruction.

Upon returning from Egypt, the holy family goes to live in Nazareth, a lowly village. This is part of the anti-snobbery theme in the gospels. God uses the lowly and unrecognized to accomplish his grand and glorious purposes.

The use of Jer. 31:15 to frame the slaughter of the infants seems to be an odd choice. Rachel died giving birth near Bethlehem. Jeremiah uses that event as a metaphor to describe the national death of exile followed by the new birth of the nation (read Jer. 31 as a whole). In Matthew, the text from Jeremiah is said to be fulfilled by Herod's massacre of babies. Originally the story was about the death of a mother; now it about the death of children. Originally, Jeremiah had in view the exile and new exodus; how these themes relate to the slaughter of the babies by Herod is not at all clear to me at this point, though Mt. 2 definitely has a new exodus theme.

How should we unpack this? Here are some tentative thoughts:

In Jer. 31, Jeremiah picks up on the event of Rachel's death to describe the exile and promised exodus. In Jeremiah 31 taken as a whole, we find weeping will give way to gladness. The exile into Babylon looked like death for Israel, but as the exiles passed by Rachel's grave, they would be reminded that God is one who brings new life out of death. The same is true in Matt. 2. The children have died; they cannot be brought back. But through Jesus, something even greater, and more comforting is going to happen. The weeping and loud lamentation, even of those who have lost sons, will turn to joy because this one child survived to fulfill his mission. The hope promised to Rachel will finally be realized. (See David Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel*, 42.)

Here are Leithart's thoughts:

> Matthew's quotation from Jeremiah 31 (2:18) supports this. He quotes the one gloomy verse in a passage concerning return from exile and new covenant. Rachel weeps for her children that are gathered at Ramah and packed off to Babylon. But Matthew intends for the reader to bring the whole chapter to mind, and to realize that Rachel's lamentation will give way to joy. This anticipates the pattern of the end of Matthew's gospel, where the Messianic woes of the cross are the pathway to the joy of resurrection. In chapter 2, the woes are the woes of exile, and joy is the joy of return. The same is true at the end of the gospel.

> Jeremiah 31 interestingly reverses the situation on which it's based, the death of Rachel. In Genesis, Rachel dies in Bethlehem, with Ramah nearby; in Jeremiah (and Matthew), Rachel weeps for her children who are not. The death of the mother shifts to the death of her children. Why? How did Jeremiah find a type of exile in Rachel's death? Perhaps this needs to be read through the lens of Isaiah 54, which describes return from exile as an end to barrenness, and this in turn would lead back to Rachel's lamentation for her barrenness in Genesis.

Herod called scribes and chief priests. These were his own magi, of sorts. But tuhyey are not truly wise; at most they have a pseudo-wisdom. Note that these two groups were the conservative and liberal parties of the day. Usually, they disagreed on everything. Herod calls both parties to cross check their answer. They give the same answer, so he knows they're both shooting straight. (It would sort of be like a President consulting with both Rush Limbaugh and Nancy Pelosi – if they give the same answer, he knows its right.)

In this case, both parties agree and cite Micah 5:2. Later, of course, they will also agree that Jesus should die. They could not agree except where Messiah was to be born and that he was worthy of death.

The Micah 5:2 citation poses problems of its own, since the text used is not identical to any version of the OT we know. See Davies and Allison, 242ff for a discussion.

There is definitely a Joseph typology in the passage. In Genesis and in Matthew, we meet a man named Jospeh who is righteous, chaste, interprets and/or has revelatory dreams, moves to Egypt, and acts to spare his family.

Leithart gives his take:

> Matthew emphasizes the role of Joseph in Jesus' birth and early life. Joseph, like his namesake from the book of Genesis, receives revelation

through dreams (1:20; 2:13, 19, 22). Also like the Old Testament Joseph, he takes his family into Egypt to find safety (2:13). Joseph and Mary similar to the parents of Moses, who preserved him from a murderous king (Exodus 2:1-5), and like Moses himself in bringing his family back to the land where infants are slaughtered (cmp. Matthew 2:19-23; Exodus 4:20). All this is part of Matthew's typological demonstration that Jesus is the greater Moses, the true Israel.

In addition to these parallels with Old Testament figures, Joseph is a model disciple of Jesus. He discovers his betrothed wife is pregnant, and under the Law he has every right to charge her with adultery and press for her execution (Deuteronomy 22:23-27). Joseph is a "righteous man" (Matthew 1:19), but his righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees (cf. Matthew 5:20), for he knows that mercy is at the center of the law's concerns (Matthew 23:23). He is a model disciple, and his form of righteousness shows the continuity between the first Moses and the Last.

It is interesting that Egypt serves as the place of refuge. It had done so before (e.g., Abraham, Joseph). Later in the prophets, God promises to heal and bless Egypt (Isa. 19). The fact that Egypt serves as safe haven for Jesus is a pointer to the Gentile nations welcoming the Messiah.

Meanwhile, the Israel-as-Egypt motif is confirmed by Revelation 11.

More on Hosea 11:1 –

The placement of the quotation is odd. Matthew has put a text about a call out of Egypt right at the point in the narrative when the holy family is heading for Egypt.

In Hosea's day, Israel was unfaithful (as portrayed in Hosea's marriage to a prostitute). Israel had expanded her borders, but it was nothing more than a claf fattened for slaughter or a bloated corpse. Because of Assyrian weakness, it looked like a golden age for Israel…but the gold turned out to be nothing more than thin plating and it quickly chipped off.

Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1. In context, this is a reflection on the original Passover and exodus. That's why we find the language of sonship here. God adopts Israel as his son in the Passover/exodus event. The firstborn in Egyptian homes was given to the Angel of Death, but Israel becomes God's firstborn.

The whole passage reads as something of a messianic itinerary. One way to summarize passage is to focus on movement – from Bethlehem, to Egypt to Nazareth.

Another way of structuring the passage is by using the Scripture fulfillment formulas as markers.

The Hosea 11: 1 citation is an interesting test case for hermeneutics. Leithart puts it this way:

> The fulfillment formulae are of great hermeneutical interest, revealing something of Matthew's way of reading prophecy. Matthew's fulfillments turn on reversals and puns. Jesus fulfills Hosea 11:1, but Israel has become Egypt; "he will be called a Nazarene" depends on plays on Nazareth with Hebrew words, *nazir* and *netzer* at least. The logic of Matthew's fulfillment formulae is very elusive, but I assume there is a logic there, which would become more apparent from deeper study of the passages he cites.
> But Matthew's fulfillments don't fulfill the OT in a kind of photographically precise way, and this is the way that many have used the fulfilled prophecy apologetically - Hosea said God's son would come out of Egypt; Jesus came out of Egypt; therefore, Jesus is Messiah. These fulfillment formulae are also directly relevant to what Jesus says about the "law and prophets" in chapter 5. If Jesus' life fulfills prophecy in a strange, paradoxical, poetic way, shouldn't we expect His ethics to fulfill the law and prophets in the same manner?

Elsewhere:

> "Fulfill" describes something surprising. Who would have thought that "Out of Egypt I called My Son" (Hosea 11:1) would be fulfilled in Jesus'

> escape from Herod? The deepest story that Hosea told was the one he didn't know – the story of Jesus.

Yes, Matthew's "fulfillment" passages suggest a surprising, poetic kind of biblical interpretation. If we cannot square this with our own way of reading Scripture, then we need to change our hermeneutic. Many who are committed to a grammatical-historical style of interpretation are baffled (if not embarrassed) by Matthew's OT applications here. That tells us the grammatical-historical method is seriously wrong. Matthew is not doing something only an apostle can do (as if inspiration gave one license to play fast and loose with the text). He's showing us the right way to read the Hebrew Scriptures. If we cannot model our method of interpretation after the apostles, who can we imitate?

Doriani points out Herod's dilemma: If he doesn't believe the biblical prophecies about Jesus, why bother killing him? And if he does, doesn't he know that such attempts will be futile (not to mention wicked)? See Dorinani's commentary, 31f.

Leithart on writes on the Nazarene theme, in Mt. 2:23:

> Matthew is not quoting a particular passage here. Instead, he is alluding to various passages that describe the Messiah as a holy one and as the Davidic branch. Providentially, for those with eyes to see, Jesus' hometown reveals His Messianic identity.
> We need to remember the whole story-line of the Branch of David to get the idea. At the beginning of Isaiah, the Lord threatens to cut down all the lofty cedars and oaks that have exalted themselves in pride. He is going to devastate the forest of Israel.
> The Davidic house is one of the proud trees that is going to be brought low. The Davidic tree is the tallest of Israel's trees; it is the royal tree, in which all the birds of the air find nest. Because of the pride of the Davidic kings, however, the Lord will cut down the tree and leave only a stump. But this is not the end of the story. When there is nothing but a dried up old stump, the Lord is going to start over again, and a shoot, a branch, is going to spring miraculously from the dead stump of Jesse's house, and that branch will grow into a tree, a tree larger and higher than the Davidic tree ever had been, a tree in which all the birds under heaven and all the

> beasts of the earth will find rest, an imperial tree greater than the royal tree of David.
> And this tree will be a tree of life, whose leaves will heal the nations and whose fruit will delight and nourish all peoples.
> Jesus is that branch, now grown into a tree, now flourishing with fruit. He is the vine of the true Israel, rising from the dead stump of the Davidic vine in order to give us the rich food of this table. Jesus is that branch, for the prophets have said, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Mt. 2 is a text foreshadows what is to come in a variety of ways. One thing we see is a surprising and divergent set of responses to Jesus, which come into sharper relief as the gospel progresses. Matthew's story sets up a contrast between unbelieving Jerusalem and believing Gentiles.

See Dorinani's commentary , 29ff on various responses.

Leithart has these helpful insights:

> "In my beginning is my end," wrote T. S. Eliot in his poem "East Coker." That is certainly true for Jesus. As Matthew tells it, His birth foreshadows His death.
> Already at His birth, Jesus provokes murderous and paranoid rage among the leaders of Israel. Already at His birth, there is a bloody slaughter. Already at His birth, the chief priests and scribes gather together to determine what to do with Him. It is appropriate that the magi bring along myrrh, an ointment used for burial (John 19:39), for Jesus was born in blood.
> The gifts of the magi are materials used in the temple at Jerusalem. Gold covered the temple walls and was beaten into cherubim; frankincense was one component of the incense that ascended to Yahweh; myrrh was included in the holy oil that consecrated priests.
> At the same time, the magi bring gifts fit for a king, and acknowledge that Jesus is the King who resides in Jerusalem's temple. They honor Him as a divine king.
> These two aspects of Matthew's birth narrative seem to be in tension: His birth foreshadows His death, yet at the same time He is hailed as King of the Jews. Kings are supposed to kill people, not die. Right?

> Kings do deal in death, but in Scripture the supreme act of kingship is when the king gives his life for His people. Jesus is never more kingly then when He stands between the serpent and the bride, so that His bride can be saved. Jesus is never more glorious than when He is lifted up on the cross.
> In another poem, "The Journey of the Magi," Eliot speaks of the magi seeing "three trees on the low sky" and "six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver" as they make their way to Jerusalem. Truly, for the King of the Jews, His beginning is His end.

Leithart points out helpful tropes (applications) in this chapter:

> We are the body of Christ, and His life-history becomes our life-history. Jesus recapitulates the history of Israel, and does it right. And in so doing, He also anticipates the history of the church.
> The history of the church is marked by periods of oppression. At times, Herod has been on the throne of the new Israel. But when that happens, the Lord always rescues His sons, and prepares a new, fruitful land for them.
> The history of the church is marked by persecutions. But the Lord never leaves the blood of the infants unavenged. Rachel's lamentation gives way to rejoicing, and blood leads to redemption.
> Disciples of the Nazarene, we are all Nazarenes. We are all holy warriors, consecrated for battle. We are all branches in the Branch, who is growing into the dominant tree of the forest. We all share our Savior's humility, and humiliation, so that we can share His glory.

Leithart rightly sees this story as a warning against over-sentimentalizing Christmas (and Epiphany):

> For most Americans, Christmas means warm feelings, forgiveness, kindness, generosity. It means putting our differences aside and getting along. Celebrating Christmas means celebrating liberalism and toleration. As in so many ways, our celebration of Christmas borrows scraps from the table of Christian faith. We like "peace on earth, good will toward men."

> We resonate to the message of joy and hope. We promote all the happy, up-beat things the Bible says about Christmas.
> But the biblical Christmas story is far more complex, far more realistic. Alongside "peace on earth" is Mary's warning to rich rulers that they are going to be cast down. Alongside the joy of the shepherds is Zacharias's song about enemies and those who hate us and the triumphant "horn of salvation." Alongside the baby in a manger is the king in his court, looking to stamp out every threat to his throne.
> Jesus brings peace, but He brings peace by first bringing a sword. He brings salvation, but in Scripture, salvation always comes through purifying judgment. He does come to knit together Jew and Gentile in one new man, but He first divides between brother and brother, father and son, mother and daughter.
> By all means, enjoy the delights of our American Christmas. But don't let the sentimental mood of the season obscure the hard edges of the biblical story.

Neither can we spiritualize the story:

> Modern Christians instinctively spiritualize the story of the gospel. When Jesus is called "King of the Jews," we think that refers to His "spiritual" kingdom. Herod didn't think so. Herod knew that Jesus' birth was a threat to his power…

> According to Matthew's gospel, Jesus is the true Israel who recapitulates the history of old Israel. Matthew begins with a phrase from Genesis, "the book of the genealogy" (1:1; cf. Genesis 5:1; 10:1; 11:27; etc.). Joseph shares a name with the last patriarch in Genesis. When Herod threatens Jesus, Joseph flees to Egypt, as Israel fled from Pharaoh. In chapter 4, Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness, and in chapter 5 Jesus is a new Moses standing on a mountain delivering the law. At several points, the story of Jesus-Israel reverses that of old Israel. The threat to Jesus doesn't come from a Gentile king, but from the "King of the Jews." Herod, not Pharaoh, is slaughtering infants, and Joseph flees from Israel. Ironically, Egypt is a safe-haven. When Matthew quotes Hosea's "Out of Egypt I called My Son," he's saying that Herod's Israel is the new Egypt. Jesus will lead an exodus out of Israel.

> First-century Israel was bubbling with messianic expectations in which religion and politics were so closely entwined that they could not be

> separated at all. Think of the Middle East today, and you'll have a very close analogy. The main questions had to do with Israel's relation to Rome and Israel's future. Some Pharisees wanted to drive the unclean Gentiles from the Holy Land, and engaged in direct-action protest to make their point. The Essenes thought Jews themselves were the main problem, so they withdrew from the land and waited by the Dead Sea for their opportunity to become the true Israel. Sadducees, the priestly and aristocratic class, cozied up to the Romans. Herod had worked hard to befriend the right Romans, and he knew that anyone bearing the title "King of the Jews" would be a political nightmare. Better to kill a few babies than endanger the whole country. During His ministry, Jesus offered a different program for Israel's future. Instead of resisting Romans, Jesus said Jews should "make friends quickly" and "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:25, 43). When Romans requisitioned supplies and service, Jesus' disciples were to comply cheerfully (5:38-42).
>
> Unbelievers and pagans often understand the political import of Christianity more clearly than Christians. Jews persecuted the early Christians because they threatened to change Jewish customs, and thereby threatened the future of Israel. Romans persecuted Christians because they proclaimed that Jesus, not Caesar, was king. Innumerable modern believers have been slaughtered for the same reason. The gospel isn't "apolitical." It simply proclaims a different politics. Jesus called His disciples, as NT Wright puts it, to a "revolutionary way of being revolutionary."

I'm afraid a lot of Reformed people have too much in common with the scribes and Pharisees: we have Bible knowledge, but it does not lead us to worship and serve Jesus. Knowledge becomes an end in itself and so it puffs up rather than humbles. Soren Kierkegaard understood this well and warned about the dangers of Christian scholarship:

> The matter is quite simple. The Bible is very easy to understand. But we Christians are a bunch of swindlers. We pretend to be unable to understand it because we know very well that the minute we understand it, we are obliged to act accordingly. Take any words in the New Testament and forget everything except pledging yourself to act accordingly. My God, you will say, if I do that my whole life will be

> ruined. How would I ever get on in the world? Herein lies the real place of Christian scholarship. Christian scholarship is the Church's prodigious invention to defend itself against the Bible, to ensure that we can continue to be good Christians without the Bible coming too close. Oh, priceless scholarship, what would we do without you? Dreadful it is to fall into the hands of the living God. Yes, it is even dreadful to be alone with the New Testament.

Besides standard commentaries, see C. J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the OT*, esp ch. 2 and David Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel*, 36ff. Both of these books are excellent biblical theological studies.

Some links for the Leithart quotations above (and other good, related stuff):

http://www.leithart.com/archives/002613.php

http://www.leithart.com/archives/003016.php

http://www.leithart.com/archives/002597.php

http://www.leithart.com/archives/003064.php

http://www.leithart.com/archives/002981.php

http://www.leithart.com/archives/003069.php

http://www.leithart.com/archives/002581.php

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http://www.leithart.com/archives/003030.php

http://www.leithart.com/archives/002613.php