

03. Prologue Part I : The Infancy Narratives

Matthew 2



Matthew 1

Son of David

Son of Abraham

Son of God - Highlighted by portrait of Mary as a Virgin

1. Statement of her physical state

(requiring a miraculous Divine intervention)

2. Capturing the intimacy of her mystical communion

giving her first love to God

(the ideal for every conception)

Either way Matthew's focus is on Jesus as the Son of God

Matthew 2:1-2

Note the absence of a birth narrative

‘When Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the East came to Jerusalem and said: “Where is the king of the Jews who was born? For we have seen his star at its rising and came to pay homage to him.”



‘A star shall come out of Jacob,
and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel’(Balaam in Numbers 24:17)

‘In Hellenistic sources there are reports of a comet at the birth of Mithridates and in the Nero episode in Suetonius. There are also reports of comets or other light phenomena at the birth of gods. On coins of Alexander, of the Diadochi [Alexander’s rival generals], of Caesar, of Augustus, but also of Alexander Jannaeus and of Herod a star appears as the symbol of the king. Furthermore, the idea is widespread that every person has a star – important and wealthy people a bright star, the others a dim one – that comes into existence at birth and is extinguished at death. This idea is the basis of the popular astrology of that day’ (Luz I. 104).

Matthew 2:3-6

When King Herod heard that, he became dismayed and all Jerusalem with him. And he gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people and inquired of them where the Messiah is to be born. They said to him: “In Bethlehem in Judea, for thus it is written through the prophet: ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, you are by no means least among the princes of Judah. For out of you will come a leader who will shepherd my people Israel’ (Micah 5:2).

Matthew is preparing the reader for Jesus’ death at the hands of ‘the chief priests and scribes’ in Jerusalem.

Matthew 2:7-10

Then Herod summoned the magi secretly and inquired from them when exactly the star appeared, sent them to Bethlehem and said: “Go and question carefully about the child, and when you have found him report to me so that I too can come and **pay homage** to him.”

After they had heard that from the king, they went away, and behold, the star that they had seen at its rising went before them until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they **rejoiced** exceedingly.

Matthew 2:11-12

When they came into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. And they fell down, **paid homage** (see 29:9, 17; and 8:2, 9:18, 15:25, 20:20) to him, and opened their treasure chests and brought him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And because they received divine instructions in a **dream** not to return to Herod, they returned to their country a different way.

Midrash

‘May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service’ (Psalm 72:10-11)



Isaiah 60:1-6

‘Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn ... Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.’

‘A new christological perspective. Worship is directed to the Son of God. That is seen especially in the interpretation of the gifts. Since Irenaeus (Haer. 3.9.2) and Origen (Cels. 1.60) the **myrrh** has been understood as a reference to Jesus’ death (cf. Mark 15:23; John 19:39). Jesus receives **gold** as a king, **frankincense** as God, and myrrh as a human being. Sometimes the frankincense is also related to Jesus’ dignity as high priest. These interpretations of the gifts illustrate how the ancient church read individual passages of the Bible in the light of the church’s faith. The allegorical interpretation is of the greatest hermeneutical significance’ (Luz I. 107).

Mission to the Gentiles

God’s protection of the early Church from its enemies



Emperor Justinian died 565



San Apollinaire Nuovo, Ravenna

The names Balthasar, Melchior and Caspar first appear in the sixth century.

‘**Frankincense**, the resin of the frankincense trees that grow in southeast Arabia, India, and Somalia,

and **myrrh**, the resin of the myrrh trees that also grow in Arabia and Ethiopia, were used primarily in the cult but also for magical practices, at wedding ceremonies, for cosmetic purposes, and as seasoning or medication.

Both were regarded as very expensive (imported) luxury items.’

(Luz I.114)

Matthew 2:13

After the wise men had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream



Matthew 2:13-15

After the wise men had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.' (Hosea 11:1)

(see 'Israel is my firstborn son' Exodus 4:22)

Jesus is the New Moses

'Pharaoh sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian' (Exodus 2:15).

Matthew 2:16-18

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.

Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more' (Jeremiah 31:15)

- Compare the action of the pharaoh - Exodus 1:22
- Those to be transported into exile in Babylon were collected in Ramah in the tribal region of Benjamin (see Jeremiah 40:1). Hence the reference to Benjamin's mother, Rachel, 'weeping for her children'.

Matthew 2:19-20

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said,
'Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead.'

Compare Exodus 4:19-20

'The Lord said to Moses 'Go back to Egypt;
for all those who were seeking your life are dead'.
So Moses took his wife and his sons,
put them on a donkey and went back to the land of Egypt.'



Matthew 2:22-23

After being warned in a dream, Joseph went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazarene.'

Paul is accused of being 'a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes'.

(Acts 24:5)

נֶצְרִי (Isaiah 11:1)

'On that day the **branch** [נֶצְרִי] of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel. Whoever is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy' (Isaiah 4:2-3).

'The vow of a nazirite' (Numbers 6:2).

In Chapter 2 Matthew focuses on Jesus' **mission**.

Born in the city of David, he is to be the 'king of the Jews'(2:2).

He is to enlighten the Gentile world as well (2:1).

He is to fulfil the destiny for which Israel was called out of Egypt (2:15).

The offering of myrrh (2:11) and the weeping of Rachel (2:18)
prepare us for his suffering.

Matthew writes to captured hearts and minds with the wonder of Jesus' person, whose mission is to build the kingdom of God, and who through his preaching and his life revealed God as all-embracing love.