

A KING IS BORN

MATTHEW 2



A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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A King is Born: Matthew 2
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Matthew 2: Introduction

The gospel of Matthew begins with the nations coming to Jesus, bringing gifts to worship Him. Matthew's narrative will end with Jesus commanding His followers to make all the nations disciples. The visit of the Magi encourages us to believe that our ministry of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus will bear much fruit.

But not everyone will be happy to hear about Jesus. Herod wasn't, and a terrible toll was paid for His jealousy and rage. This episode also speaks to us about what we can expect as we carry out our mission for Christ.

Jesus is taken to Egypt by His parents, so that He can return from there as Israel did before Him. This chapter ends with Matthew reminding us that Jesus is the Branch and Offshoot of David.

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We hope you find this study of Ecclesiastes a challenging and stretching experience of journeying more deeply into the Word of God. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Good News for the World

Pray Psalm 72.18, 19.

Blessed *be* the LORD God, the God of Israel,
Who only does wondrous things!
And blessed *be* His glorious name forever!
And let the whole earth be filled *with* His glory.
Amen and Amen.

Sing joyously Psalm 72.18, 19.

[*\(Martyrdom: Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed\)*](#)

Now bless the God of Israel Who wondrous works performs!
And bless His Name, His glory tell both now and forevermore!

Read Matthew 2; meditate on Matthew 2.1, 2

Prepare.

1. What did the Magi intend in coming to Jerusalem?
2. What does it say about the “King of the Jews” that these Gentiles came to Him?

Meditate.

Luke makes the important point that the Good News of Jesus’ birth is for lowly, faithful people – like shepherds (Lk. 2.). Matthew takes a different tack in a passage which reaches back to the Old Testament and forward to “all the nations” (Matt. 28.18). Here the nations are coming to Jesus; by the end of this gospel, Jesus will command His people to go to the nations.

As he did in chapter 1 by introducing God Who is “with us” (cf. Matt. 28.20), so here he bookended his gospel again by making it clear from the beginning that Immanuel is not just for “the Jews” but for all nations. The Good News of Jesus is Good News for the world!

We don’t know how many *magi* made this journey, though we traditionally think of them as three – each one bearing a different gift (v. 11). Magi were “wise men” and would have had access to a royal court. Further, they would have required the permission of that court to take such a long journey and be away for some time. We can only wonder about the anticipation that would have taken hold in that Gentile court upon their return.

The Magi probably were alerted to the star from pondering Numbers 24.17, which promises a Star to rise and rule in Israel, Who would destroy the enemies of God’s people. But how would they know that text? They must have had the Scriptures which the Jews brought with them to Babylon. My sense is that this star was a special star – neither a comet nor the close juxtaposition of two planets, as is supposed by some. God could make the star and the light it emitted as surely as He could turn water to wine by merely thinking (Jn. 2); and He could just as easily have faded these out when their work was done. There is no need to try to shoehorn this star into a secular and scientific mindset. We wouldn’t do that with the angel which appeared to Joseph in chapter 1, so why should we feel compelled to do so with this star? God made the star, and He took it down. Greater wonders lie ahead in this gospel, and we need to consider them from God’s perspective, not man’s.

The Magi came “from the East” – where *they* were, not the star – to Jerusalem, for this was the

capital of Israel, where they might expect to find the newborn King. Matthew pinned their visit to the historical record, following accepted historiographical protocol, by referencing the ruler current at the time. They came to worship the King – literally, to bow on their knees before Him, a sign of honor and submission. Perhaps they read Psalm 72 as well?

In chapter 1, a Son was born, and Immanuel came among us. In chapter 2, a star is born, and a King has come for His throne. This is really getting good!

Reflect.

1. What should we learn from the Magi to guide our own relationship with Jesus?
2. What do we learn from them about paying close attention to every word of God in Scripture?
3. Why would a star be an appropriate way of announcing the birth of Immanuel?

*We must ask what it means that when our Redeemer was born, an angel appeared to the shepherds in Judea, but a star and not an angel guided the magi from the east to worship him. This was the reason: It was a reasoning being, an angel, who preached to the Jews as persons capable of using their reason. But a sign and not a voice guided the Gentiles, who were not prepared to make full use of reason to know the Lord. Gregory the Great (504-604), *Forty Gospel Homilies* 10.1*

Lord Jesus, You are the Light announced by the star. Let Your light shine through me today as I...

Pray Psalm 72.7-17.

David foresaw what God intends for the Kingdom of His Son. Pray that God will use you today to realize more of His glorious rule on earth, as it is in heaven.

Sing Psalm 72.7-17.

Psalm 72.7-17 ([*Martyrdom: Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed*](#))

Let righteousness abundant be where Jesus' reign endures;
let peace increase from sea to sea 'til moonlight shall be no more.

And let the Righteous rule the earth, and let His foes bow low;
let nations praise His matchless worth, and all His bidding do.

The Lord the needy rescues when he cries to Him for grace;
all they who suffer violence find mercy before His face.

Let Christ be praised and all the gold of Sheba be His right;
let blessings to His Name be told, and prayers made both day and night.

And let the earth abound with grain, let fields His fame proclaim;
and may our King forever reign and nations bless His great Name.

2 Trouble for the World

Pray Psalm 2.11, 12.

Serve the Lord with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,
And you perish *in* the way,
When His wrath is kindled but a little.
Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.

Sing joyously Psalm 2.11, 12.

(Agincourt: [O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!](#))

Rejoice with fear in Jesus' grace, and worship before His exalted face!
Beware His anger and judgment grim: How blessed are all who rest in Him!

Read Matthew 2.1-8; meditate on verses 3-8.

Prepare.

1. How did Herod respond to the news of Christ's birth?
2. According to the "chief priests and scribes of the people", why did Christ come?

Meditate.

Herod was "troubled" by the news that a "King of the Jews" had been born. And when Herod was troubled about something, the people he ruled became troubled as well. Herod was an unstable and violent man, who was not above taking extreme measures when he felt his authority was being challenged.

Here is a theme that will run throughout the gospel of Matthew, and that continues throughout the course of the Kingdom's coming on earth: Wicked people do not find the Good News of Jesus good at all. It challenges their autonomy and threatens their settled way of life. It is for them a fragrance of death to death (2 Cor. 2.15, 16), and they will resist it with all their power. We must not lose sight of this fact.

Matthew continues anchoring his narrative in the deep waters of the Old Testament by reporting the answer of the priests and scribes to Herod's query concerning the place of the Christ's birth. Their ready reply, quoting Micah 5.2, indicates that expectation of Christ's coming was in the air at this time. People understood the message of the prophets, albeit imperfectly. The teachers of Israel taught this to the people, and the people doubtless talked about it with one another, and longed for it in their souls. As we shall see, they were not expecting a King like Jesus, but one who would deliver them from captivity to the Romans and restore the greatness of their nation. This misguided thinking would make it difficult for many to accept the claims of Jesus.

Herod wanted to know when the star first appeared, announcing the birth of the King, so that he could get a general idea of how old the Child was – information he would put to nefarious and deadly use, as we shall see. He sent the Magi to Bethlehem to complete their mission, but insisted they return to give him the details concerning the whereabouts of the Child. Of course, he had no intention of worshipping Christ, but only of destroying Him.

It is interesting to note in verses 3-8 how “King” and “Christ” were conflated in the minds of Jewish leaders. The King Who was to be born in Bethlehem would be the Christ, the Anointed One of Psalm 2, Who would come to rule His people and all the nations (cf. Ps. 49.8-12). This much they understood; yet they could not understand – and would not accept – the manner of His conquering and rule. Jesus came as a Shepherd; the Jewish leaders were looking for a military champion, like David. Their view of the coming King was colored by Israel’s past and by their perception of what would be needed to overthrow Rome. They understood just enough of the Scriptures to develop a misguided notion about the coming King. They should have read and meditated on more of the Old Testament, for they might have learned to look for a Shepherd/King rather than a Warrior/King. Here’s a lesson for us: Make sure you have searched the Scriptures thoroughly before you decide your view on anything at all. Let the Scriptures shape your views, and don’t use the Scriptures selectively to support your ideas.

Reflect.

1. What does it mean that Christ came to “rule” as a “Shepherd”?
2. Meditate on Micah 5.2-5. The priests and scribes omitted some of this in reporting to Herod. What did they fail to tell him?
3. Why is it important that we understand the Gospel will always “trouble” some people?

*When Herod learned of the birth of our King, he resorted to crafty means to prevent his earthly kingdom from being endangered. He demanded that it be reported to him where the child was to be found. Pretending that he wished to worship him, he would have destroyed him if only he could find him. But of what avail is human malice against the divine plan? Gregory the Great (540-604), *Forty Gospel Homilies* 10.2*

Lord Jesus, I worship You as King and Christ! Use me today in advancing Your rule as I...

Pray Psalm 2.1-10.

Christ is going forth today, conquering and to conquer, advancing His Kingdom, putting His enemies under His feet, and bringing many new sons and daughters into the household of the Lord. Pray that He may do so today through you.

Sing Psalm 2.1-10.

Psalm 2.1-10 (*Agincourt: [O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!](#)*)

Why do the nations vainly rage, conspiring together from age to age?

Earth’s kings and all of their counselors stand against the Lord and His Right Hand:

“Now let us cast His yoke below, His Kingdom authority overthrow!
Throw off His Law, reject His Word; no more be governed by this Lord!”

The Lord in heaven laughs in wrath at all who embark on this cursed path.
His angry Word to them is plain: “Yet shall My King in Zion reign!”

Proclaim the message far and wide, that God has exalted the Crucified!
From heav’n He sent us His only Son, Who has for us salvation won!

To Christ the Lord be given all who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes to break the prideful, sinful ones.

3 The World at His Feet

Pray Psalm 96.1-4.

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song!
Sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, bless His name;
Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.
Declare His glory among the nations,
His wonders among all peoples.
For the LORD *is* great and greatly to be praised;
He is to be feared above all gods.

Sing joyfully Psalm 96.1-4.

(Mit Freuden Zart: All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above)

Sing to the Lord! O, bless His Name! All nations tell His glory!
Salvation's tidings loud proclaim; let earth rehearse His story!
For God is greatly to be praised; His throne above all gods is raised –
Fear Him, and sing His glory!

Read Matthew 2.1-12; meditate on verses 9-12.

Prepare.

1. What gifts did the Magi present to Jesus?
2. How did the Magi know to return to their country without going back to Herod?

Meditate.

As the Magi left Herod, the star appeared again, directing them to Bethlehem, and to the house where Mary and Joseph were with Jesus. The star “went before them” and “stood still” – again, indicating that this was a special star, created and employed for a special purpose. The Greek uses the word “star” (ἀστήρ, *aster*), but this can refer to either a star or a planet.

The Magi rejoiced to see the star, for they knew they were about to reach the destination they had looked forward to for so long. Here's a lesson for us: We are on a journey, not unlike those Magi, to behold the face of Jesus (1 Jn. 3.1-3). We have no star to guide our way; better, we have God's Word and Spirit. Do we see ourselves as on a journey to Jesus, glimpsing Him as we journey by the light from His Word? Does each ray of light, shed on our path, lead us to rejoice in Him? And what offerings are we preparing to bring before Him, when we see Him as He is?

We note that the family is now abiding in a house. Mary and Joseph would have stayed in Bethlehem longer than those who had come to be counted for the census, since they presented Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem eight days after His birth (Lk. 2.21). Perhaps this was the home of a family member, or one they rented for a short time. The Magi did not appear before Jesus as He lay in the manger, but at some later time, albeit, probably not the two years that Herod calculated.

The Magi “fell down and worshiped Him.” They recognized His majesty and glory, even as He lay in His mother's arms. Their gifts – gold, frankincense, and myrrh – were expensive, to say the least. Each is symbolic, of course, and points us again back to the Old Testament. The gold brings to mind the promise of Psalm 72.15 (cf. Is. 60.6, 7), while myrrh recalls Psalm 45.8. Both of these psalms celebrate the greatness of the coming King and the glory of His reign. Frankincense was used to

sanctify offerings to the Lord (Lev. 2.1-3) and to enhance the bread offering which was always before the Lord in the tabernacle (Lev. 24.5-10). It is possible the Magi may have understood these details. They certainly would have arrested the attention of every Jew who read or heard about them. They symbolize the reign of Jesus, and suggest that He Himself had come as an offering, and that He would have a continuous Presence before the Lord.

God warned the Magi “in a dream” not to return to Herod, but to return to their native country by a different way than that by which they had come. We might be curious as to how Matthew knew this. It could be that the Magi mentioned it to Mary. More likely, the Holy Spirit – Who is the divine Author of Matthew’s gospel – simply impressed it on the disciple as an important detail to include here.

What has been a joyous and peaceable narrative thus far is about to take a violent and terrifying turn.

Reflect.

1. In what ways is our journey of faith like that of the Magi?
2. According to Romans 12.1, 2, what offering should we make to the Lord? When should we make it?
3. Meditate on the image of those Magi, bowing on their knees to worship Jesus. Read Matthew 28.18-20. How should this image and that mandate encourage us in our calling as witnesses for Christ (Acts 1.8)?

And so do we too offer gold to the newborn king if we shine in his sight with the brightness of the wisdom from on high. We too offer him incense if we enkindle on the altar of our hearts the thoughts of our human minds by our holy pursuit of prayer, so as to give forth a sweet smell to God by our heavenly desire. And we offer him myrrh if we mortify the vices of our bodies by our self-denial. Gregory the Great (540-604), *Forty Gospel Homilies* 10.6

Today, Lord Jesus, I offer myself for Your glory and Kingdom. Help me as I...

Pray Psalm 96.8-13.

Offer praise and thanks to the Lord of glory! Worship Him in the splendor of holiness! Go forth to declare that He reigns as King and Lord, and that He is coming again in glory!

Sing Psalm 96.8-13.

Psalm 96.8-13 (*Mit Freuden Zart: All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above*)

Bring offerings sweet to Him, our Lord, in holy garments praise Him!
Tremble before Him, all the earth; among the nations raise Him!
The earth is fixed, it will not move; the peoples will His justice prove –
Exalt the Lord and praise Him!

Let heaven sing with lusty voice; let earth and sea sing sweetly!
Let fields and trees in Him rejoice, for He is coming swiftly
to judge the world in righteousness, the peoples in His faithfulness –
He comes; exalt Him greatly!

4 Egypt Revisited

Pray Psalm 114.1, 2.

When Israel went out of Egypt,
The house of Jacob from a people of strange language,
Judah became His sanctuary,
And Israel His dominion.

Sing contemplatively Psalm 114.1, 2.

(Duke Street: [Jesus Shall Reign](#))

When Israel out from Egypt went – they of God’s gracious covenant –
out from a land of language strange, into their midst Jehovah came.

Read Matthew 2.1-15; meditate on verses 13-15.

Prepare.

1. Why did Joseph take his family to Egypt?
2. How does Matthew tie this episode in with the Old Testament?

Meditate.

God goes ahead of His people and the events of their lives, because He knows all things, and He does all things well. So it is a good idea to heed His Word, even though what He speaks may seem unlikely or inconvenient.

The message to Joseph is plain: Herod will try to destroy the Child born to Mary. He is commanded to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt. He doesn’t know for how long, or where precisely he will end up. But they were fleeing certain death in the land of Judea, just as Jacob and his sons fled to Joseph in Egypt to escape the famine that was ravaging the land of Canaan.

Joseph was a man of faith. He didn’t quibble about the inconvenience of having to go to Egypt. He obeyed immediately, because he understood that the angel who spoke to him in his dream could be relied upon to convey the will of God. He gathered his family and their things and left immediately for Egypt, in the middle of the night.

Matthew uses this episode to point back to Israel in the Old Testament, the events of whose lives were meant to point forward to the coming of Christ. God has His Son retrace the experience of Israel in Egypt. Thus we learn to read the Old Testament in a forward-looking manner, seeing Christ on every page. The prophet Hosea (Hos. 11.1) echoed the words of the unbelieving Balaam (Num. 24.7-9) in pointing ahead to the coming of the King and Messiah of God’s people.

Joseph and his family remained in Egypt until the death of Herod. At that point, directed again by an angel, they returned, but not to Judea – where Herod’s son was now on the throne (Matt. 2.19-23).

It is not always convenient to obey the commands of God. It is, however, always wise; and it is always the way of life to do so. Joseph will disappear from Matthew’s narrative after chapter 2. But we have seen enough of him in these first two chapters to gain valuable lessons in faith: When God speaks, no matter what He says, believe Him, and obey Him. Even if what He speaks may seem unlikely or impossible, and even if what He requires seems uncertain or inconvenient.

Reflect.

1. Typically, angels don't speak to us in dreams. So how can we know what God wants of us?
2. Why was it not convenient for Joseph and his family to flee to Egypt? Why was it wise to do so?
3. Meditate on Numbers 24.7-9 and Hosea 11.1. Who came out of Egypt with Mary and Joseph? To what end? How does the Numbers passage point back to Genesis 49.8-12? How does it point to God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12.1-3). How does the juxtaposing of all these Old Testament references help us to think about Jesus?

*While Palestine plots, it is Egypt that receives and preserves the One for whom the plots are designed! This is reminiscent of the patriarch Jacob, who also sought succor in Egypt, anticipating the coming of our Lord. John Chrysostom (344-407), *The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 8.2**

Thank You for leading me out of "Egypt", Lord. Help me to shine Your light today as I...

Pray Psalm 114.3-8.

When Jesus came out of Egypt, the course of history changed. When He came out of the tomb and into your life, everything became new. Thank the Lord for the newness you enjoy in Him, and ask Him to send you, like a fount of living waters, to the people you'll see today.

Sing Psalm 114.3-8.

Psalm 114.3-8 (*Duke Street: [Jesus Shall Reign](#)*)

He His dominion o'er them set; at His command the dark sea fled.
Jordan subsided at His Word; mountains and hills obey our Lord.

What ails the sea that it should flee? Jordan, that it should withered be?
What makes the mountains skip like rams? What makes the hills spring up like lambs?

Tremble, O earth: the Lord is near! Jacob's great God is present here!
He from the rock sweet water brings, making the flint gush flowing springs.

5 Unpitying Portent

Pray Psalm 10.1-3.

Why do You stand afar off, O LORD?
Why do You hide in times of trouble?
The wicked in *his* pride persecutes the poor;
Let them be caught in the plots which they have devised.
For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire;
He blesses the greedy *and* renounces the Lord.

Sing contemplatively Psalm 10.1-3.

(Aberystwyth: Jesus, Lover of My Soul)

Why stand off, O Lord, afar? Why in times of trouble hide?
Wicked men in foolish pride seek Your precious flock to harm.
Many plots do they devise; catch them in their wicked schemes!
Greed and lust fill all their dreams, while they curse You, God most wise.

Read Matthew 2.1-18; meditate on verses 16-18.

Prepare.

1. Why did Herod order this terrible slaughter?
2. How did Matthew link even this tragedy to Old Testament prophecy?

Meditate.

It is simply not possible for us to get our minds around the horror of this scene. Herod, furious at the Magi's having snubbed him, sent a contingent of Roman soldiers to Bethlehem, where they murdered every male child under the age of two. Herod calculated two as the outside age, based on what he had learned from the Magi about the time of the star's appearing. He included two kinds of buffer room in his wretched deed – one of age and the other of extent (Bethlehem and “all its districts”) – just to make sure. But what difference did it make to him? He could have slaughtered the entire town and not felt a twinge of guilt.

Sixteenth-century painter Peter Bruegel the Elder captured the chaos, confusion, and horror of this scene, by setting it in a contemporary context in his painting, “[Massacre of the Innocents](#).” Parents beg for mercy, soldiers kick down doors, children are torn from their mother's arms to be slaughtered like geese or pigs, and the looming presence of armed soldiers turns a peaceful village into a scene of terror.

Those faithful people of God who endured this tragedy and loss would have been comforted by the remainder of the passage from Jeremiah 31, which Matthew begins to quote here (Jer. 31.15):

Thus says the LORD:

“Refrain your voice from weeping,

And your eyes from tears;

For your work shall be rewarded, says the LORD,

And they shall come back from the land of the enemy.

There is hope in your future, says the LORD,

That your children shall come back to their own border. (Jer. 31.16, 17)

These verses remind us of David's confidence in the Lord at the death of his own son, how he expected one day to go to where his son was, although he knew there was no bringing his son back from the dead (2 Sam. 12.15-23). There would have been great sorrow and weeping in Bethlehem, but the Word of God would have brought sweet comfort to those who knew to trust Him, come what may.

In the face of horrors, tragedies, losses, and persecution, true believers weep and mourn. But we do not grieve as those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4.13). We have the comfort of God's Word, and the assurance that He does all things well and for our good. That may not make sense to unbelievers, but we know it to be true, and thus, through our weeping and sorrow, we cling to this promise in the joy of the Lord.

Herod hated Jesus, and he didn't even know Him. And that's part of the reason why people hate Jesus around the world, and why they persecute those who do. They don't know Him. They don't understand that His suffering – here portended by the slaughter of the innocents – is the only way through death to true and eternal life.

Reflect.

1. Why do people today persecute believers in Jesus Christ?
2. Should we come under persecution, where should we turn in Scripture to comfort one another?
3. How should we pray for those who suffer loss, tragedy, setbacks, or persecution?

*Ramah was Saul's city. Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was the son of Rachel, whose memorial was near Bethlehem, where these wicked deeds were done. Therefore, since the babies were killed in Bethlehem, where there is a monument to Rachel, this is why Rachel is described as weeping. Anonymous (no date), *Incomplete Work on Matthew, Homily 2**

Lord of life and every good thing, give me grace to endure and to serve you, even when...

Pray Psalm 10.12-18.

Pray today for Christians who are suffering for the Name of Jesus in various parts of the world. Call on God to help them, and to enable them to keep focused on Him as Savior and King.

Sing Psalm 10.11-18.

Psalm 10.11-18 ([Aberystwyth: Jesus, Lover of My Soul](#))

"Where, oh where, is God?" they say. "He has hidden out of sight!"
Rise up, Lord, in all Your might! Rescue those who You obey.
Wicked men Your judgment scorn; You observe their sinful ways.
Be our refuge, be our stay! Break the oppressor's evil arm.

Evermore, Lord, You will reign! Nations perish from Your land.
You will with Your people stand; hear our cries of woe and pain!
Strengthen now our hearts, O Lord; vindicate Your people dear.
Drive away our every fear; help and preserve us by Your Word.

6 Exodus to Nazareth

Pray Psalm 132.8-10.

Arise, O LORD, to Your resting place,
You and the ark of Your strength.
Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness,
And let Your saints shout for joy.
For Your servant David's sake,
Do not turn away the face of Your Anointed.

Sing joyfully Psalm 132.8-10.

(Finlandia: Be Still My Soul)

Arise, O Lord, come to Your resting place;
Your holy presence meet with us in might.
Clothe us with righteousness in Jesus' grace,
and we will shout to Your divine delight!
For David's sake, turn not away Your face,
but look upon us in Your holy light.

Read Matthew 2.1-23; meditate on verses 19-23.

Prepare.

1. Why did Joseph take his family to Nazareth?
2. How was this a fulfillment of yet another Old Testament prophecy?

Meditate.

The death angel signaled to Moses and the people of Israel that the time for departing Egypt had come. In Jesus' case, "an angel of the Lord" appeared to Joseph, commanding him to leave Egypt and return to "the land of Israel." Herod was dead, and so the fear of violence against Jesus was lessened.

Lessened, but not altogether removed. Herod's son, Archelaus, now ruled in his father's place. Joseph feared him, and God appeared to him in a dream, directing him to continue northward to Nazareth in Galilee.

Matthew has been careful throughout these first two chapters to show us God's intimate leading in the events of Jesus' birth, flight to Egypt, and return to the land of Israel. He is setting a tone here. Every aspect of Jesus' life and ministry will be equally guided and superintended by God and His angels, although we only get occasional glimpses of this throughout the rest of the gospel (cf. Matt. 4.11). God is always present with Jesus, and Jesus promises always to be present with us (Matt. 28.20). We do not always perceive His Presence, or the work of His angels on our behalf; but He is there, and they are watching over us, just as we see in these early chapters of Matthew's gospel. We should let Matthew's story encourage us about the reality of the unseen realm and our place in it.

The rather cryptic reference to Jesus being a "Nazarene", as fulfilling words "spoken by the prophets", appears to be a double play on words. On the one hand, it may hark back to the office of a Nazirite, a man set apart and sanctified from birth for holy living, who by his example and work would "begin to deliver Israel" from his enemies (Num. 13.5). Just as plausibly – and perhaps more so, given the emphasis on Jesus' descent from David in chapter 1 – the words "Nazareth" and

“Nazarene” appear to derive from the Hebrew word, נָצַר, *netser*, which means a sprout or shoot. Jesus is the sprout or shoot or offspring of David, Who is celebrated in Psalm 132 and elsewhere as inheriting the eternal throne promised in God’s covenant. The “Branch” referenced in Isaiah 11.1 and 60.21 – where it is “branch” – points first to Christ, then to the people of God who “branch” from Him and have eternal life in the new heavens and new earth. The purpose of each of these “branches” is to glorify God and to be an everlasting light for Him. Jesus’ going to Nazareth as the “Branch” thus signals the inbreaking of the coming day when the “branch” of His people will live in His Light forever (cf. Matt. 4.12-16).

Matthew continues resorting to Old Testament prophecy and imagery, building up our understanding of Jesus by undergirding his account with the rich tapestry of Scriptural revelation which would have been well known by the Jews of his day.

Reflect.

1. What does it mean for us that Jesus is the “Branch” of David?
2. Meditate on Hebrews 11.1. Faith depends on believing in unseen things, and acting on their reality. Matthew wants to encourage us in this. How does his story thus far help us benefit from the unseen realm?
3. In each case with Joseph, God led him – whether by an angel or by Himself – by speaking a word to him. How does this counsel us in seeking to know the will of God for our lives?

But if “the Nazarene” is interpreted to mean “holy” or, according to some, as “flower,” this is the designation found in many instances. For Daniel calls him “holy” or “of the holy ones.” Likewise we find in Isaiah: “A branch from the stock of Jesse and its flower.” Even the Lord says of himself in the Song of Songs, “I am the bloom of the plain, the lily of the valleys.” Cyril of Alexandria (375-444), Fragment 16

Jesus, You are the Vine, and I am Your branch; help me to bear fruit for You today as I...

Pray Psalm 132.11-18.

Thank God for His covenant, and for Jesus Who fulfills it for us, and rules at the Father’s right hand. Seek His Presence and His rest to go with you throughout the day ahead.

Sing Psalm 132.11-18.

Psalm 132.11-18 ([*Finlandia: Be Still My Soul*](#))

Remember, Lord, the oath You swore to David;
do not turn back, do not deny Your Word:
“One of your sons, with your throne I will favor,
and He shall keep My cov’nant evermore,
and walk within My testimonies ever.
Thus He shall ever rule as Israel’s Lord.”

God dwells among us, and He will forever,
to meet our needs and clothe us with His grace.
He has to us sent Jesus Christ, our Savior,
and made us His eternal resting-place.
His foes are banished from His presence ever,
but we shall reign with Him before His face.

7 Where is He?

Pray Psalm 66.13-16.

I will go into Your house with burnt offerings;
I will pay You my vows,
Which my lips have uttered
And my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble.
I will offer You burnt sacrifices of fat animals,
With the sweet aroma of rams;
I will offer bulls with goats. Selah
Come *and* hear, all you who fear God,
And I will declare what He has done for my soul.

Sing joyfully Psalm 66.13-16.

(Regent Square: Angels from the Realms of Glory)

To Your house we come with offerings, what we vowed, Lord, help us do.
O, receive our praise and homage as we give ourselves to You.
Come and listen, all who fear Him: hear what this great God can do!

Read aloud and meditate on Matthew 2.

Prepare.

1. Who wanted to know, “Where is He?”, in this chapter? Why?
2. Two responses to the birth of Jesus are indicated in chapter 2. What are they?

Meditate.

When it comes to Jesus, Matthew suggests, there is no middle ground. Either you worship Him and devote your best to Him, or you will try to rid Him from your purview and presence. Love Him or hate Him. Believe in Him or deny Him. Surrender everything to Him, or do everything in your power to be done with Him.

This plotline will continue to unfold throughout the remainder of Matthew’s gospel. We’ll see it in the book of Acts, hear it testified of in all the epistles, and learn the broad scope of its unfolding in the book of Revelation. This trajectory continues into the early years of the Christian movement, throughout the entire course of Church history, and into our own time.

Following Jesus is a hard road. No matter how long, dangerous, or merely inconvenient the journey, they who love Him will make it, every day of their lives, giving Him their dearest affection and most precious gifts as they do.

No one can be a “little bit” Christian, or even “mostly” Christian. If we say we believe Jesus, then we fall before Him like those Magi, and give to Him all the best we have of our time, talents, and treasure. We devote ourselves entirely to Him, and we shall see, throughout the rest of Matthew’s narrative, that He expects nothing less of those who would follow Him in this world.

Meanwhile, the world wants to destroy Jesus. Make no mistake about it. If they could, unbelievers in every walk of life would outlaw all teaching and worshiping and mentioning of the Name of Jesus Christ. And they would shame and silence anyone who even looked like he might be associated with

the Lord. For now, however, the Spirit and grace of God restrain the worst that the unbelieving world might do against the Name of Jesus.

Restrain, but not eliminate. In this life, those who follow Jesus must understand that His way is fraught with challenge and danger. But as the Word of God protected Joseph, Mary, and Jesus in Matthew 2, so that Word protects all who go with Jesus to bring His Light to the world. That doesn't mean we won't suffer – stay tuned in Matthew's gospel – but it does mean that our eternal wellbeing, as followers of Jesus, is never in doubt.

Reflect.

1. Why did Herod want to destroy Jesus? Do we see this same attitude in our world today? Explain.
2. Was it convenient for Joseph and Mary to flee with Jesus to Egypt? Should we expect following Jesus to be convenient for us? Explain.
3. What do you learn from Matthew 2 to deepen your commitment to following Jesus?

Let us now observe how glorious was the dignity that attended the King after his birth, after the magi in their journey remained obedient to the star. For immediately the magi fell to their knees and adored the one born as Lord. There in his very cradle they venerated him with offerings of gifts, though Jesus was merely a whimpering infant. They perceived one thing with the eyes of their bodies but another with the eyes of the mind. The lowliness of the body he assumed was discerned, but the glory of his divinity is now made manifest. A boy he is, but it is God who is adored. How inexpressible is the mystery of his divine honor! Chromatius (fl. 400), Tractate on Matthew 5.1

Lord Jesus, today I give You my best in all things, as I...

Pray Psalm 66.1-12.

Pray that those who know Jesus will take the Good News of Him to the people around them; and that the people who hear that Good News will respond in worship.

Sing Psalm 66.1-12.

Psalm 66.1-12 (*Regent Square: Angels from the Realms of Glory*)

Shout for joy to God, all people, sing the glory of His Name!

Give Him glorious praise and say, "How great Your pow'r and great Your fame!

All the earth shall worship gladly as they praise Your glorious Name!"

Great and awesome is our Savior in the works which He has done.

He the sea and river dried to let His people cross as one.

Then our joy was great to worship Him our mighty, sovereign One.

He the nations watches ever – all you rebels, humbled be.

Bless our God, all men and nations, praise His Name eternally!

He preserves our souls, and He will keep His paths beneath our feet.

You have tried us, Lord, as silver, and have brought us into nets,

made us carry heavy burdens, let men trample o'er our heads.

But through all Your grace sustained us and has brought us through to rest.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Matthew's gospel is addressed mainly to Jewish readers, but it is also a gospel for the nations. How does chapter 2 show this?
2. What "gifts" should our Lord Jesus receive from us each day?
3. Why is the unbelieving world so hostile to the Name of Jesus? Should we expect to experience this hostility? In what ways?
4. How did Jesus fulfill the promise of the *netser*? What does this mean for us, as His followers?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Matthew 2? How are you putting that lesson to work in your Personal Mission Field?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.