

December 27, 2009/Matthew 2:7-23 (ESV¹)

Mat 2:7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.

Mat 2:8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

Herod was completely unscrupulous ... and completely apostate ... think of this ... if these Magi are right, for the sake of holding the throne, Herod is willing to kill Messiah ... that should speak to us about the wickedness of our fallen hearts ... except for the work of the Holy Spirit, in order to remain "in charge," we would gladly kill the Lord of Glory ... we are naturally usurpers of the royal throne, haters of God ...

any of Herod's subjects would have known better than to have believed him at all about this matter ... but maybe he figures that these foreigners might be hoodwinked into doing his bidding for him ...

Mat 2:9 After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

Mat 2:10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

as we have discussed before, what these men saw, we don't know ... but by the leading of the Holy Spirit and some kind of extraordinary celestial happening, they make their way to Bethlehem and to the very place that Jesus and His family is now residing ...

Mat 2:11 And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

going into the house, they saw the child ... this is clearly some time after the birth of Jesus ... we're not in the stable and the word used for Jesus is not the one that would be used for a newborn ... this is a "child" not a newborn ...

they bowed down and worshiped Him ... these gentiles understood that they were not in the presence of anyone ordinary ... the circumstances may have been ordinary, but the child is not ... again, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these guys know that this is Messiah, somehow uniquely God's own Son ...

they have brought with them gifts that are at once extremely precious/valuable and extremely fitting for the child that they are there to worship ... there is gold, the metal of kings ... when these wise men present Jesus with gold they acknowledge His absolute right to rule ... there is frankincense, an incense of a priest ... Boice commenting on this verse points out that incense was never mixed with sin offerings ... only the meal offerings which were not for sin contained incense ... Jesus was without sin ... and there is myrrh, a precious ointment used to dress dead bodies ... actually, quite and odd, even offensive gift to be given at the birth of a baby ... except that this child was to be our sacrifice ... Jesus is indeed our King, our High Priest and our eternal Sacrifice ... these gifts (already shortly after His birth) speak to these roles ... they would have been extremely rich gifts for the family of a poor carpenter ... gifts whose sale may well have financed the coming flight to Egypt to save the life of the child ...

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Mat 2:12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

if one wanted to sermonize here, there's a lesson that these wise men have carefully sought Jesus, He's been revealed to them, and now they go a different way ... their manner of walking is not of their own choosing nor that of another human being ...

Mat 2:13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, 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."

years before, God had preserved Israel in Egypt ... now He keeps His Son safe in Egypt ..

Mat 2:14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt

Mat 2:15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

neither the Magi nor Joseph need to be told something twice ... they hear what they understand to be the Word of God, and they obey ... the Magi go home without passing again through Jerusalem, Joseph gets up in the middle of the night and heads out for Egypt with his young wife and the child ... it's about 70 miles from Bethlehem to the Egyptian border, Egypt is a well-ordered Roman province at this time, and there's a large Jewish population there where Joseph likely has relatives and should have no trouble finding work ... this too, in the providence of God, is properly in place at just the right time ...

Ryle: "Let us observe, for another thing, how the Lord Jesus was 'a Man of Sorrows,' even from his infancy. Trouble awaits Him as soon as He enters into the world. His life is in danger from Herod's hatred. His mother and Joseph are obliged to take Him away by night, and 'flee into Egypt.' -- It was only a type and figure of all His experience upon earth. The waves of humiliation began to beat over Him, even when He was a suckling child.

The Lord Jesus is just the Saviour that the suffering and sorrowful need. He knows well what we mean when we tell Him in prayer of our troubles. He can sympathize with us, when we cry to Him under cruel persecution. Let us keep nothing back from Him. Let us make Him our bosom friend. Let us pour out our hearts before Him. He has had great experience of affliction."

the OT quote in verse 15 is from **Hosea 11:1** ... in the short run, it referred to the calling of God's children, the people of Israel, out of Egypt ... here Matthew sees that as prefiguring the work of Christ, God's true Son ... one can also see in God's preserving the baby Moses from an attempt to kill Jewish male children a foreshadowing of the preservation of Jesus ...

Mat 2:16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

given who Herod was, this is only what one would expect ... someone who is willing to kill his own kids is not going to think anything of slaughtering a few dozen of his subjects' kids in a little burg outside of the capital ... the fact this act is recorded nowhere else in history says more about the kind of murderous

stuff that was standard fare for Herod than anything else ... in historical terms, this is awful, but in another way, simply part of the scene ... (to give another indication of the heartlessness of Herod, it is worth knowing that as he felt death approaching he had many of the most prominent people of Jerusalem rounded up and gave orders that they were to be executed as soon as he died ... he recognized that otherwise no one was going to mourn his own death, and he wanted to make sure that his passing was marked with mourning) ...

Mat 2:17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

Mat 2:18 "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

this is a quote from **Jeremiah 31:15** ... Rachel was buried in Bethlehem ... Ramah was another small town close to Jerusalem ... the original reference in Jeremiah had to do with the people of Israel passing by Rachel's grave as they marched off to exile in Babylon ... here the application is made that from her grave Rachel witnesses the slaughter of Jewish children outside Jerusalem, to calm the paranoia of an insane king ... the Jeremiah passage goes on to give hope for the future (in the return of the captives) ... probably Matthews wants us to see in this quote hope for the future in the baby king of Bethlehem ...

Mat 2:19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

Mat 2:20 saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead."

Mat 2:21 And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

Mat 2:22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.

Mat 2:23 And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

there is no specific OT quote close to "He will be called a Nazarene." ... in all probability, Matthew is using "Nazarene" as a term of contempt and referring generally to the notion that somehow Messiah would also despised ... in the common view, He won't be "Jesus of Bethlehem" (though that is where He was born) but rather Jesus of Nazareth .. not Jesus from the royal town, but Jesus from the sticks, counted to be of no importance by those who are big shots ...

so Matthew has carefully explained to us how it is that Jesus is qualified by royal descent and birth in the city of David to be Messiah of the Jews, and yet came out of Egypt and called Nazareth home ... how it is that gentile wise men chose to worship him, while better informed Jews didn't bother to make short trip to seek him out ...