

General Comments on Matthew 2

In this chapter Matthew contrasts the different reactions the rulers and wise men of the world have to the Messiah's birth. Magi from the East, led by God, travel great distances to bestow gifts upon the Messiah. At the same time Herod, the local despot, seeks to kill the Messiah, and is thwarted by God at every turn.

The Inspired Version (IV) has some significant differences from the KJV. Below, it is placed in parallel with the KJV.

KJV

1 Now when Jesus was born
in Bethlehem of Judaea
in the days of Herod the king,
behold,
there came wise men from the east
to Jerusalem,
2 Saying,
Where is he that is born
King of the Jews?
for we have seen his star in the east,
and are come to worship him.
3 When Herod the king
had heard these things,
he was troubled,
and all Jerusalem with him.
4 And when he had gathered
all the chief priests and scribes
of the people together,
he demanded of them

where

Christ should be born.

5 And they said unto him,

In Bethlehem of Judaea:
for thus
it is written by the prophet,

6 And thou Bethlehem,
in the land of Juda,

art not the least
among the princes of Juda:
for out of thee
shall come a Governor,

IV

1 Now when Jesus was born
in Bethlehem of Judea,
in the days of Herod the king,
behold,
there came wise men from the east
to Jerusalem,
2 Saying,
Where is the child that is born,
the Messiah of the Jews?
for we have seen his star in the east,
and have come to worship him.
3 When Herod the king
had heard of the child,
he was troubled,
and all Jerusalem with him.
4 And when he had gathered
all the chief priests, and scribes
of the people together,
he demanded of them,
saying,
Where is the place
that is written of by the prophets,
in which Christ should be born?
For he greatly feared,
yet he believed not the prophets.
5 And they said unto him,
It is written by the prophets,
that he should be born
in Bethlehem of Judea,
for thus

have they said,
6 The word of the Lord came unto us,
saying,
And thou Bethlehem,
which lieth in the land of Judea,
in thee shall be born a prince,
which art not the least
among the princes of Judea;
for out of thee
shall come the Messiah,

that shall rule my people Israel.
7 Then Herod,
when he had
privily called the wise men,
enquired of them diligently
what time the star appeared.
8 And he sent them to Bethlehem,
and said,
Go and search diligently
for the young child;
and when ye have found him,
bring me word again,
that I may come and worship him also.
9 When they had heard the king,
they departed;
and, lo,
the star, which they saw in the east,
went before them,
till it came and stood
over where the young child was.
10 When they saw the star,
they rejoiced
with exceeding great joy.
11 And when they were come
into the house,
they saw the young child
with Mary his mother,
and fell down,
and worshipped him:
and when they had opened
their treasures,
they presented unto him gifts;
gold,
and frankincense,
and myrrh.
12 And being warned of God
in a dream that they should not
return to Herod,
they departed into their own country
another way.
13 And when they were departed,
behold,
the angel of the Lord
appeareth to Joseph in a dream,
saying,
Arise,
and take the young child
and his mother,
and flee into Egypt,
and be thou there
until I bring thee word:
for Herod will seek the young child
to destroy him.
14 When he arose,
he took the young child
and his mother
by night,

who shall save my people Israel.
7 Then Herod,
when he had
called the wise men privily,
inquired of them diligently
what time the star appeared.
8 And he sent them to Bethlehem,
and said,
Go and search diligently
for the young child;
and when ye have found the child,
bring me word again,
that I may come and worship him also.
9 When they had heard the king,
they departed;
and lo,
the star which they saw in the east,
went before them,
until it came and stood
over where the young child was.
10 When they saw the star,
they rejoiced
with exceeding great joy.
11 And when they were come
into the house,
they saw the young child,
with Mary his mother,
and fell down
and worshiped him.
And when they had opened
their treasures,
they presented unto him gifts;
gold,
and frankincense,
and myrrh.
12 And being warned of God
in a dream that they should not
return to Herod,
they departed into their own country
another way.
13 And when they were departed,
behold,
the angel of the Lord,
appeared to Joseph in a vision,
saying,
Arise
and take the young child
and his mother,
and flee into Egypt,
and tarry thou there
until I bring thee word;
for Herod will seek the young child
to destroy him.
14 And then he arose,
and took the young child,
and the child's mother,
by night,

and departed into Egypt:
15 And was there
until the death of Herod:
that it might be fulfilled
which was spoken of the Lord
by the prophet,
saying,
Out of Egypt have I called my son.
16 Then Herod,
when he saw that he was mocked
of the wise men,
was exceeding wroth,
and sent forth,
and slew all the children
that were in Bethlehem,
and in all the coasts thereof,
from two years old and under,
according to the time
which he had diligently inquired
of the wise men.
17 Then was fulfilled
that which was spoken
by Jeremy the prophet,
saying,
18 In Rama was there a voice heard,
lamentation,
and weeping,
and great mourning,
Rachel weeping
for her children,
and would not be comforted,
because they are not.
19 But when Herod was dead,
behold,
an angel of the Lord
appeareth in a dream
to Joseph in Egypt,
20 Saying,
Arise,
and take the young child
and his mother,
and go into the land of Israel:
for they are dead
which sought the young child's life.
21 And he arose,
and took the young child
and his mother,
and came into the land of Israel.
22 But when he heard that Archelaus
did reign in Judaea
in the room of his father Herod,
he was afraid to go thither:
notwithstanding,
being warned of God in a dream,
he turned aside
into the parts of Galilee:
23 And he came and dwelt

and departed into Egypt;
15 And was there
until the death of Herod,
that it might be fulfilled
which was spoken of the Lord,
by the prophet,
saying,
Out of Egypt have I called my Son.
16 Then Herod,
when he saw that he was mocked
of the wise men,
was exceeding wroth;
and sent forth and
slew all the children
that were in Bethlehem,
and all the coasts thereof,
from two years old and under,
according to the time
which he had diligently enquired
of the wise men.
17 Then was fulfilled
that which was spoken
by Jeremiah the prophet,
saying,
18 In Ramah there was a voice heard,
lamentation,
and weeping,
and great mourning;
Rachael weeping
for the loss of her children,
and would not be comforted
because they were not.
19 But when Herod was dead,
behold,
an angel of the Lord
appeared in a vision
to Joseph in Egypt,
20 Saying,
Arise,
and take the young child
and his mother,
and go into the land of Israel;
for they are dead
who sought the young child's life.
21 And he arose,
and took the young child
and his mother,
and came into the land of Israel.
22 But when he heard that Archelaus
did reign in Judaea,
in the stead of his father Herod,
he was afraid to go thither;
but, notwithstanding,
being warned of God in a vision,
he went
into the eastern part of Galilee;
23 And he came and dwelt

in a city called Nazareth:
that it might be fulfilled
which was spoken by the prophets,
He shall be called a Nazarene.

in a city called Nazareth,
that it might be fulfilled
which was spoken by the prophets,
He shall be called a Nazarene.
24 And it came to pass
that Jesus grew up with his brethren,
and waxed strong,
and waited upon the Lord
for the time of his ministry to come.
25 And he served under his father,
and he spake not as other men,
neither could he be taught;
for he needed not
that any man should teach him.
26 And after many years,
the hour of his ministry drew nigh.

Comments on Matthew 2

1 NOW when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, 2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. 3 When Herod the king had heard [these things], he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. 5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, 6 And thou Bethlehem, [in] the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. 7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found [him], bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

v1-8 After Jesus' birth, foreign wise men arrive at Jerusalem (v. 1) and enquire after the Messiah (v. 2). Herod is disturbed by this news (v. 3), so he gathers all of the local scholars and insists they tell him where the Messiah has been born (v. 4). They tell him the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem (v. 5), according to the prophecies (v. 6). After learning this, Herod comes up with a scheme to use the wise men to find out who the Messiah is, so he may dispose of him. He summons the wise men and asks them when the star appeared (v. 7), so as to determine the age of the child. He then tells them the child is to be born at Bethlehem, and to go and find then child and then report back to him (v. 8). Herod's intent is to use the unwitting wise men as spies to find out who the Messiah is, so he can dispose of him.

v1 "Herod the king", the Easton's Bible Dictionary entry for Herod the Great:

Herod the Great - (Matt. 2:1-22; Luke 1:5; Acts 23:35), the son of Antipater, an Idumaeen, and Cypros, an Arabian of noble descent. In the year B.C. 47 Julius Caesar made Antipater, a "wily Idumaeen," procurator of Judea, who divided his territories between his four sons, Galilee falling to the lot of Herod, who was afterwards appointed tetrarch of Judea by Mark Antony (B.C. 40), and also king of Judea by the Roman senate.

He was of a stern and cruel disposition. "He was brutish and a stranger to all humanity." Alarmed by the tidings of one "born King of the Jews," he sent forth and "slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under" (Matt. 2:16). He was fond of splendour, and lavished great sums in rebuilding and adorning the cities of his empire. He rebuilt the city of Caesarea (q.v.) on the coast, and also the city of Samaria (q.v.), which he called Sebaste, in honour of Augustus. He restored the ruined temple of Jerusalem, a work which was begun B.C. 20, but was not finished till after Herod's death, probably not till about A.D. 50 (John 2:20). After a troubled reign of thirty-seven years, he died at Jericho amid great agonies both of body and mind, B.C. 4, i.e., according to the common chronology, in the year in which Jesus was born.

After his death his kingdom was divided among three of his sons. Of these, Philip had the land east of Jordan, between Caesarea Philippi and Bethabara, Antipas had Galilee and Peraea, while Archelaus had Judea and Samaria.

Here is an excerpt from the entry on "Herod" under "Herod the Great" from the 1870 edition Smith's Bible Dictionary:

...his domestic life was embittered by an almost uninterrupted series of injuries and cruel acts of vengeance. The terrible acts of bloodshed which Herod perpetrated in his own family were accompanied by others among his subjects, equally terrible, from the numbers who fell victim to them. According to the well-known story, he ordered the nobles whom he had called to him in his last moments to be executed immediately after his decease, that so at least his death might be attended by universal mourning. It was at that time he must have caused the slaughter of the

infants at Bethlehem; and from the comparative insignificance of the murder of a few young children in an unimportant village, when contrasted with the deeds which he carried out or designed, it is not surprising that Josephus has passed over it in silence....

v3 Herod obviously wants to eliminate competition and quash any hopes for rebellion against the Roman government in which he serves.

The statement "and all Jerusalem with him" is ambiguous. There are two possible readings. The first being that news of the Magi's visit and the apparent birth of the Messiah of the Jews spread throughout Jerusalem, thereby causing a furor. The second being, with Herod being upset, he makes causes trouble for everyone else. Herod's anxiety results in him afflicting those around him. Support for the latter would be v. 16. If the former is intended by Matthew, he is being very obscure about it.

v4-6 The IV has considerable differences from the KJV. The main difference in v. 4-5 is the explicit reference to "the prophets" in the IV where the KJV leaves it implicit. In v. 6, the KJV and IV both paraphrase Micah 5:2, but differently. The KJV emphasizes a political ruler, where the IV emphasizes a spiritual ruler. Micah 5:2 is ambiguous as it just says "ruler", and the corresponding Hebrew term is also ambiguous.

Note the proof text quoted in v. 6 is blatantly messianic, and Matthew isn't the one forwarding it as such. It is the priests and scribes who are quoting it, whereas it is Matthew employing the proof tests in v. 15 and 18. Use of messianic proof texts is a common means of exegesis at this time.

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. 11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

v9-12 The Magi are sincere and spiritual in their intent and therefore are led to find the Messiah (v. 9-10) , worship (v. 11), and are subsequently warned by God not to return to Herod (v. 12).

God is guiding these righteous Gentiles to success while thwarting the wicked Gentiles.

13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. 14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: 15 And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

v13-15 After the wise men leave, Joseph has a night vision wherein an angel warns him to take his family and leave for Egypt so as to protect them from Herod (v. 13), and he does so that same night (v. 14). Joseph stays in Egypt until after Herod dies, in fulfilment of the prophesy (v. 15).

v14 In v. 13 the angel says "Arise", the Greek "egeiro" meaning "get up". Here Joseph "arose", meaning he immediately woke up after the night vision, and packed up the family and left that very night.

v15, 18 In these two verses Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1 and Jeremiah 31:15 respectively. Both quotes are blatantly acontextual and neither are overtly messianic, as is the proof text employed in v. 6. This forces us to consider Matthew's intentions. As discussed in the comments on Matt. 1:23, Matthew appears to be using these passages less than literally as he forwards a general context as opposed to specific exegesis. He is using these passages as types.

Types are necessarily contextual, because one selectively extracts certain pieces of meaning from something to hold it up as the symbol. For example, the serpent raised up on the staff, which is later used to represent the resurrection. Or the Liahona, which is later used to represent the Scriptures. Or David being an ideal king for Israel. David was a murderer and adulterer in his personal life, but this is ignored when he is held up as an ideal king, because as king he unified Israel and worshiped the Lord. Matthew appears to be doing the same thing. He must be drawing the text out of context to create symbolic types.

The only other alternative is to assume Matthew was so unfamiliar with the texts that he was quoting them ignorantly. This seems impossible as the very ability to quote the text presumes either memorization or having the texts at your disposal.

v15 One would assume Matthew chose this quotation from Hosea 11:1 because it cast the Exodus along with a reference to a "son".

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, 18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping [for] her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

v16-18 When Herod realizes his scheme has failed he lashes out and has all of the children in and around Bethlehem executed (v. 16). The result is similar to the what Jeremiah wrote (v. 17), that Rachel weeps for her children and cannot be comforted (v. 18).

v16 As noted above in the selection from Smith's Bible Dictionary quoted above, Herod may have had the children under two executed at his own death. However, the text states he did it out of anger for being snubbed by the Magi, which suggests an act of passion rather than one of plotting which the executions after this death appear to have been. Also, it is plain from v. 15 and 19 that Joseph keeps the family there in Egypt until Herod's death. This suggests the executions at Bethlehem did not coincide with the mass executions which attended Herod's death, as Herod was still alive.

19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. 21 And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: 23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

v19-23 After Herod's death, Joseph has a night vision wherein an angel (v. 19) tells him it is safe to go back into Israel (v. 20). Joseph takes the family back to Israel (v. 21), but when hears that Archelaus rules in his father's stead he is filled with fear (v. 22). Joseph then receives an additional vision telling him to move to the land Galilee (v. 22). Joseph does so, and settles the family in Nazareth, as prophesied anciently (v. 23).

v19 As an aside, the documented revelations Joseph has are all presented as visions of angels in night dreams, cp. v. 22, 1:20.

Angels appear in plain sight to Mary and Zacharias, but not to Joseph. Different people have different modes of revelation.

v22 The KJV is obtuse because of the "notwithstanding". The New American Standard (NAS) renders it:

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 [by God] in a dream, he departed for the regions of Galilee.

v23 The verse is referencing another proof-text or type from the Prophets. Whatever the original source was, it is no longer available to us. Matthew is referencing something the ancient Jews held to be Scripture, which is now unknown.

v23+ The IV inserts 3 verses between the last verse of the ch. 2 and the first verse of ch. 3 using the KJV chapter and verse delineations. The IV informs us Jesus waited until the calling for his ministry to start in earnest (v. 24). While waiting he deferred to his father, presumably referring to Joseph, echoing Luke 2:51. He was quite intelligent and apparently learned from spiritual sources as there was no man who could teach him, echoing Luke 2:46-47 (v. 25). Then, after some time passes, at the age of thirty, the time for his ministry arrived (v. 26). This sets the stage for his baptism at the hands of John in the next chapter, which is the first act of Jesus' public ministry.

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