

Brian Wilbur, December 20, 2009

Advent 2009: Worship the King: An Exposition of Matthew 1-2

Matthew 2:13-23 (Scripture quotations from NIV unless otherwise noted.)

### ***Tonight's Sermon: Matthew 2:13-23***

*Note: I am indebted to several sources for help in the development of this sermon – especially for Sections C and D. These sources appear in the bibliography at the end of the manuscript.*

### **Introduction**

Before we work through verses 13-23, we need to revisit verses 1-12 in order to appreciate the chain of events. The Magi had come to Jerusalem seeking the king of the Jews, that they might worship him; they did not know where Israel's king had been born. So they inquired, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2). This inquiry reached the ears of King Herod and set the whole city on edge: "King Herod ... was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him" (Matthew 2:3). After learning that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, "Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him"" (Matthew 2:7-8). Herod, however, wants to kill the child, not worship him. So after the Magi find the child, worship him and present him with gifts, God tells them not to report back to King Herod. Look at verse 12: "And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they [the Magi] returned to their country by another route." When the instruction of an earthly king conflicts with the instruction of the heavenly King, you honor the instruction of the heavenly King.

Now we come to verse 13: "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."" When the angel appears in Joseph's dream, Joseph, Mary and the child Jesus are in Bethlehem. Herod, who wants to protect his own power, is intent on killing the child. So the child's life is in danger. God tells Joseph – the earthly, legal father of Jesus – to take the child and his mother to Egypt (around seventy miles away). God's choices and methods are always sovereign, but never random. As we shall see, this choice of protecting the child is loaded with significance.

Joseph, a righteous man and obedient servant of God, did what the angel said. Look at verse 14: "So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod."

Now notice the rest of verse 15: "And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."" Once again we see the pattern of promise and fulfillment. Far from being a meaningless detour, Jesus' escape to Egypt signified that Jesus was fulfilling God's purposes and plans revealed in the Old Testament.

The statement, “Out of Egypt I called my son,” comes from the prophet Hosea. Hosea 11:1 says, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” In Hosea 11:1, God is speaking about his chosen people Israel, whom he had “brought ... out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Exodus 20:2). And yet, in speaking about Israel, he is also speaking about Jesus, for Matthew’s gospel teaches us that Hosea 11:1 was not merely a word about the past; it was also a word about the future, and this prophetic word found its fulfillment in the life of Jesus Christ. So let’s reflect on the Christ-centered significance of Hosea’s statement. After that we shall close with a word about Jesus’ growing up in Nazareth.

### **A. Jesus is the Son of God**

First of all, the statement, “Out of Egypt I called my son,” teaches us that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Son of God in an utterly unique way. According to Luke 3:38, Adam was “the son of God.” According to Hosea 11:1, Israel – God’s covenant people – was the son of God. And all of us who belong to Christ are the sons of God (e.g., Galatians 3:26). But just because two entities have one thing, such as the designation “son of God”, in common, doesn’t mean that they have everything in common. God gifted Adam with sonship through creation. God gifted Israel with sonship through redemption. God gifts Christians with sonship through redemption as well. In other words, those who are mere creatures receive sonship by grace and grace alone; sonship is a gift.

Jesus’ Sonship, however, is not rooted in creation grace or redemption grace; Jesus’ Sonship is rooted in his eternal being. The Son has always been, in very nature, God: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14). “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16). “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrews 1:3).

Matthew 2:15 is the first mention of Jesus’ Sonship in Matthew’s gospel. But Matthew continues to reveal Jesus’ Sonship at significant times in his life. At Jesus’ baptism “a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased”” (Matthew 3:17). At his transfiguration “a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him”” (Matthew 17:5). And at Jesus’ death “the centurion and those with him” made this climactic confession: “Surely he was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54)!

Precisely because Jesus is the eternal and unique Son of God, we must fix our hearts on him. He makes God known to us in a way that no one or nothing else can. “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:18). Eternal life, true life, life as it was meant to be, is found in him and him alone: “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the

Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11-12).

## **B. Jesus, the Son of God, is the Fulfillment of Israel’s Story**

Secondly, the statement, “Out of Egypt I called my son,” teaches us that Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel’s story. You could even say that Jesus is the hub of the true Israel or the foundation of a new Israel. You cannot process Hosea’s statement without thinking of the nation Israel. Through the providence of God and the ministry of Jacob’s son Joseph, the family Israel escaped to the land of Egypt in the face of famine. In Egypt this family became a numerous people. They eventually fell into a condition of misery and suffering as slaves to the Egyptians. Against this backdrop, the Lord rescued the Israelites from the hand of the Egyptians and brought them out of Egypt. “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Israel had a high calling. Its calling was rooted in the call of Abraham: “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3). Israel’s calling was to “be for [God] a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). Israel’s calling was to be God’s representative on earth for the good of the nations. This global ministry purpose was captured in Psalm 67: “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations” (Psalm 67:1-2).

In other words, Israel ought to have been able to say: “Do you want to know what God is like? Do you want to understand his wisdom and his ways? Then come and see; look at the way we do life; listen to our teaching; join with us in the praise of God; share our gladness and sing for joy in the presence of the Holy One.”<sup>1</sup>

But Israel failed. Referring back to Matthew 1, Israel was exiled to Babylon. It ought to have been otherwise. Israel ought to have flourished as the faithful people of God. Babylon ought to have seen Israel’s flourishing and been drawn to Israel’s God. Instead, Israel forfeited its life and strength, and was exiled to Babylon.

Lest there be any confusion, Israel’s failure was inevitable; sinful people cannot portray the character of a holy God. Moreover, Israel’s failure was purposeful; Israel’s failure pointed up the need for a Savior – for One who would succeed where the nation had failed.

Look at the context of Hosea’s statement:

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them. Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent? Swords will flash in their cities, will

destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans. My people are determined to turn from me. Even if they call to the Most High, he will by no means exalt them” (Hosea 11:1-7).

Notice the contrast between Israel and Jesus. Israel was loved by God and called by God. But Israel turned away from God and would not be exalted by the Most High. Jesus was also loved by God and called by God. Unlike Israel, however, Jesus always did what was pleasing in the sight of God (John 8:29). “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission” (Hebrews 5:7). Unlike Israel, therefore, Jesus has been exalted: “God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every knee” (Philippians 2:9).

Jesus succeeded where Israel failed. Jesus is the personal embodiment of all that Israel ought to have been: Jesus is prophet, priest and king. Jesus is where you go if you want to know what God is like. Jesus is the One who redeems and fulfills Israel’s story. And Jesus is the One who redeems and fulfills our story.

Each one of us is created in the image of God. Our calling is to be image-bearers of God, faithfully reflecting God’s character, wisdom and purpose. Our calling, quite frankly, is to humbly and lovingly rule the earth, in fellowship with and under the sovereign rule of heaven’s glorious King. This was Adam’s high calling as the creaturely son of God. But Adam turned away from this high calling. Like Adam and Israel, each one of us has turned away from our God-given calling; “each of us has turned to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6).

The good news of the gospel is this: God comes to us and rescues us. Be glad that Jesus went to Egypt. Do not miss the significance of the symbol. Egypt is a symbol of slavery, misery and suffering; Egypt is a symbol of all that is contrary to human flourishing; Egypt as a symbol is the antithesis of a land flowing with milk and honey; and lest we forget, Egypt as a symbol ultimately represents the dominion of sin in the domain of spiritual darkness.

If you, therefore, can identify with Egypt, be heartened by the fact that Jesus came into your world – a world of sin and suffering – in order to rescue you. Jesus is the true light who came into the world (John 1:9). Where does the light shine? “The light shines in the darkness (John 1:5),” writes the apostle John. The light shines in Egypt. The light shines in this world of sin and suffering. In Christ, we too are called out of Egypt. In Christ and in Christ alone, Peter’s words to us are true: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

### **C. Jesus, the Son of God, is the Turning Point in Redemption History**

Thirdly, the statement, “Out of Egypt I called my son,” teaches us that Jesus is the turning point

in redemption history. By redemption history, I simply mean the historical unfolding of God's work in redeeming for himself a people from their bondage to sin. Matthew 2:15 points to Jesus as the One through whom all of God's promises break forth into the world with power and grace. Before I try to explain this, let me say that I feel that this truth is beyond my ability to articulate well. I do not know all that was in Matthew's mind when he wrote verse 15 and also verse 18. My goal is to get us into the ballpark of the significance of these verses.

As I mentioned above, Israel failed to fulfill its mission. In the context of Israel's failure and the consequences of its idolatry (e.g., exile to Babylon), the Old Testament prophets looked forward to the dawn of a new day – to a new exodus, to a new covenant. Consider the train of thought in Hosea 11 (remember, Matthew quoted Hosea 11:1): “Out of Egypt I called my son.... Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent? .... They will follow the LORD; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west. They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria” (Hosea 11:1, 5, 10-11). The prophet looks forward to a new day; this day has arrived with the coming of our Lord.

Or consider Jeremiah 30-31. In Matthew 2:18, Matthew quotes Jeremiah 31:15. In Matthew 2:16-18, we learn that Herod made an effort to eliminate the holy child by giving orders “to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under.” This has been called “The Slaughter of the Innocents.” Verses 17-18 make it clear that even this was tragic event was the fulfillment of Holy Scripture: “Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: “A voice heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.””

In Jeremiah 31:15 the tears are for the children of Israel who had been exiled; in Matthew 2:16 the tears are for the children who have been slaughtered. How is Matthew 2:16 the fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:15?

It is interesting to look at the context of Jeremiah 31:15. Jeremiah 30-31 is actually a hope-filled passage. Consider: “‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess’” (Jeremiah 30:3). Then: “‘In that day, declares the LORD Almighty, ‘I will break off their bonds; no longer will foreigners enslave them. Instead, they will serve the LORD their God and David their king [remember, Jesus, the Son of David, is the true king!], whom I will raise up for them’” (Jeremiah 30:8-9). And after the tears of Jeremiah 31:15, the Lord actually says to weep no more: “‘Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded,’ declares the LORD. “They will return from the land of the enemy. So there is hope for your future,” declares the LORD. “Your children will return to their own land’” (Jeremiah 31:16-17). Finally, we come to the climactic promise of the new covenant (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). How shall we put all this together?

D. A. Carson may have it right when he comments:

“Matthew has already made the Exile a turning point in his thought (1:11-12), for at that time the Davidic line was dethroned. The tears of the Exile are now being “fulfilled” – i.e., the tears begun in Jeremiah’s day are climaxed and ended by the tears of the mothers of Bethlehem. The heir to David’s throne has come, the Exile is over, the true Son of God has arrived, and he will introduce the new covenant (Matthew 26:28) promised by Jeremiah.”<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the days of promise have arrived: Jesus, the Son of God, is the turning point in redemption history. Jesus came to bring an end to captivity (to sin); Jesus came to lead a new exodus (out of sin); Jesus came to create a new covenant (in order to reconcile sinners to God and transform them into a holy people); Jesus came in order to sit on David’s throne so that we might sing:

“He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes he nations prove  
The glories of his righteousness,  
And wonders of his love,  
And wonders of his love,  
And wonders, wonders, of his love.”<sup>3</sup>

Let us praise Jesus, the Son of God, as the Lord of history.

#### **D. Jesus, the Son of God, is Called a Nazarene**

Fourthly, we come to Matthew 2:19-23. After Herod’s death, the angel told Joseph to take the child and his mother back to Israel. Eventually the Holy Family settled in Nazareth. The end of verse 23 makes us curious: “So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene.”” Unlike the other mentions of prophetic fulfillment in Matthew 1-2, this statement doesn’t have a clear Old Testament address. The other four mentions of fulfillment, as the NIV footnotes show, take us in a rather straightforward way to Isaiah 7:14, Micah 5:2, Hosea 11:1, and Jeremiah 31:15. But there may be an answer to our curiosity. The other four mentions of fulfillment refer to “the prophet” in the singular: the prophet (Matthew 1:22, 2:5, and 2:15), and the prophet Jeremiah (2:17). In Matthew 2:23, however, Matthew does not say through “the prophet,” as if he has one particular prophet in mind. Instead Matthew says “through the prophets,” as if he is not thinking of one particular prophet but of the collective testimony of two or more prophets. So the statement, “He will be called a Nazarene,” may be a way of summarizing the testimony of two or more prophets who anticipated something about the Messiah. In any case, that Jesus ended up in Nazareth – far from being random – was actually in accord with the word of the prophets.

It is worth noting, if only briefly, the contrast between this final designation for Jesus – “He will be called a Nazarene” – and the other designations for Jesus in Matthew 1-2: Immanuel, King,

Messiah, Ruler, Shepherd of Israel, and Son of God. Do you see the contrast? What might learn from the fact that the eternal, glorious, royal, sovereign Son of God was called a Nazarene? Something important, I think, and we mustn't fail to see the beauty of it. In John's gospel, we come upon a conversation between Philip and Nathanael. "Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph"" (John 1:45). Upon hearing that the Messiah was from Nazareth, Nathanael replied: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there" (John 1:46)?

There was nothing grand or majestic or sublime about Nazareth. It wasn't the kind of place where champions are born or kings are crowned. It wasn't the kind of place that gives you a head start or natural boost into the limelight. Don't miss the juxtaposition: the eternal, glorious, royal, sovereign Son of God was called a Nazarene. This, dear friends, corresponds to the very heart of the gospel: he who was in very nature God made himself nothing (Philippians 2:6, 7) and became poor for our sake (2 Corinthians 8:9).

According to Matthew 5:35, Jerusalem is the city of the great king. Bethlehem is the city of David, who served as Israel's great king and is the father of the royal line. But we do not say, "Jesus of Bethlehem." We do not say, "Jesus of Jerusalem." Instead we say, "Jesus of Nazareth." Though we bestow upon Jesus the highest titles, when it comes to his geographic name-identification, he is identified with that which is altogether common, Nazareth (see, for instance, Matthew 21:11, Matthew 26:71, Mark 14:67 and also Acts 24:5).

Some see in this an anticipation that this Messiah would be despised and rejected, in keeping with the prophet's words: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hid their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:3).

Brothers and sisters, marvel that the gloriously unique Son of God became a common man, that the eternal Word became mortal flesh. Marvel that the extraordinary King of heaven came to earth and lived an ordinary life in an ordinary place. Marvel that while we – with sinful motives – so often seek to make a name for ourselves, King Jesus made himself nothing and was content, humble, loving, worshipful and sinless in simple, everyday life for two-plus decades in Nazareth. And as you marvel, remember (and even perhaps sing) these words:

"Why lies He in such mean estate,  
Where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here  
The silent Word is pleading.  
Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,  
The cross be borne for me, for you.  
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Deuteronomy 4:5-8

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew Volume 1: The King and His Kingdom Matthew 1-17*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001: p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Watts, "Joy to the World."

<sup>4</sup> William C. Dix, "What Child Is This?"