

MATTHEW

Chapter 2

The Visit of the Magi

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶ “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’” ⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 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.” 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. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 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. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

In many ways, all of Matthew 2 is a continuous narrative, with the contrasting figures of the two kings, Herod and Jesus, dominating the entire chapter. However, since the Magi are only in 2:1–12, we are justified in considering the significance of this unit, all the while acknowledging the flow of the entire chapter. With his opening genitive absolute construction (τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ γεννηθέντος ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας, “Now after Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea,” 2:1), Matthew also recalls the events of 1:18–25 and links chapter 2 with chapter 1—and not only verbally. The themes of human ignorance and divine revelation, of “normal” expectations and hidden realities, flow seamlessly from chapter 1 and are magnified in chapter 2. From the account of Joseph and the naming of Mary’s child we learned that apart from God’s interruption and revelation, human beings will neither comprehend nor believe in God’s ways of working through his Christ, the Son of David and Son of God. That same contrast helps to drive forward the narrative of chapter 2 in even more powerful ways, through the contrast of the two kings as well as the unexpected believers who arrive in Jerusalem. (CC)

2:1 *Jesus was born* – τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ γεννηθέντος ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἐν ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου τοῦ βασιλέως—When was Jesus born? Modern scholarship places the death of Herod with a fair amount of confidence in 4 BC, based on Josephus’ account. If there is a direct relationship between the first appearance of the star to the Magi, the time of Jesus’ birth, and the age of Bethlehem’s murdered children, then Jesus will have been born in 6 BC at the earliest, and perhaps in 5 BC. (CC)

Bethlehem in Judea. A village about five miles south of Jerusalem. Matthew says nothing of the events in Nazareth (cf. Lk 1:26–56). Possibly wanting to emphasize Jesus’ Davidic background, he begins with the events that happened in David’s city. It is called “Bethlehem in

Judea,” not to distinguish it from the town of the same name about seven miles northwest of Nazareth, but to emphasize that Jesus came from the tribe and territory that produced the line of Davidic kings. That Jews expected the Messiah to be born in Bethlehem and to be from David’s family is clear from John 7:42. (CSB)

C 5 mi S of Jerusalem. Town where David was born and anointed king (1 Sam 16:1-13). (TLSB)

King Herod. Herod the Great (37–4 B.C.), to be distinguished from the other Herods in the Bible. Herod was a non-Jew, an Idumean (Edomite – descendant of Esau) who was appointed king of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. and gained control in 37. Like most rulers of the day, he was ruthless, murdering his wife, his three sons, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, uncle and many others—not to mention the babies in Bethlehem (v. 16). His reign was also noted for splendor, as seen in the many theaters, amphitheaters, monuments, pagan altars, fortresses and other buildings he erected or refurbished—including the greatest work of all, the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, begun in 20 B.C. and finished 68 years after his death. (CSB)

Named king of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 BC. Called “the Great” to distinguish him from his sons. He was a ruthless ruler whose paranoia caused him to kill family members and close associates. He likely died c 1 BC (the year of Jesus’ birth was calculated erroneously by later historians). (TLSB)

Matthew’s use of ἰδοὺ, “look!” (2:1b and 2:9b), marks out a two-part structure for 2:1–12. An unspecified length of time has passed after the birth of Jesus, when—look!—Magi from the east appear in Jerusalem, inquiring about the location of the King of the Jews who had been born. There is a contrast between the seeking Magi and Herod and those under his direction, who were unaware of the birth and star until the Magi arrived. This is the contrast between knowledge and ignorance, faith and unbelief, truth and hypocrisy. The difference between the two kings in the narrative is equally stark. Herod is already king, for Matthew so names him in 2:1, 3, 9. His rule is typical of worldly despots; he governs by fear, deceit, and murder. (CC)

Carson, *Matthew*, 86, is surely on target when commenting on the fact that “all Jerusalem” was troubled along with Herod (2:3): this was “not because most of the people would have been sorry to see Herod replaced or because they were reluctant to see the coming of King Messiah, but because they well knew that any question like the Magi’s would result in more cruelty from the ailing Herod.” In contrast, Luz (*Matthew*, 1:135–36) misreads the text when he thinks that Matthew’s narrative “is not concerned about historical realities” since Matthew allegedly is portraying Herod and the religious leaders in “beautiful harmony.” (CC)

D. A. Carson helpfully summarizes the career of Herod the Great:

Herod the Great, as he is now called, was born in 73 B.C. and was named king of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. By 37 B.C. he had crushed, with the help of Roman forces, all opposition to his rule. Son of the Idumean Antipater, he was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb and his building projects (including the temple, begun 20 B.C.) admired even by his foes. But he loved power, inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people, and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper. In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to

cruelty and in fits of rage and jealousy killed close associates, his wife Mariamne (of Jewish descent from the Maccabees), and at least two of his sons. (CC)

Behold The word, repeated in v.9, alerts the reader to something startling. (TLSB) Also in KJV)

Magi. Probably astrologers, perhaps from Persia or southern Arabia, both of which are east of Palestine. (CSB)

Greek term loosely referred to a wide variety of people interested in dreams, astrology, and magic. (TLSB)

Wisemen from the east – These Gentiles probably came from Persia, Babylon, or Arabia. Their kind of wisdom was not always God-pleasing. (TLSB)

Off the Magi are going when—ἰδοὺ, “look!”—God intervenes (2:9b). The star that the Magi had seen now reappears and guides them to the true King of the Jews. After they greet the King and offer appropriate royal gifts in an act of obeisance, the Magi apparently intend to return and report their experience to Herod. But no! God intervenes once again, and “warned in a dream” (2:12), the Magi depart by another way to their own country. Earlier through a message conveyed in a “dream” (1:20), God did not allow the well-meaning ignorance of Joseph to negate or contradict or even misunderstand the significance of Mary’s child (1:19–23). Just so, God will allow neither the naiveté of the Magi nor the designs of “Herod the king” (2:1) to threaten or thwart his plan to save all people, both Jew and Gentile, through Mary’s child, the true King of the Jews, who fulfills God’s promise that all nations shall be blessed through Abraham’s Seed (see the commentary on “Son of Abraham” in 1:1). As already exemplified by the women in Jesus’ genealogy, God works in unexpected and unknown ways—in Jesus, and in bringing others to the knowledge of Jesus. (CC)

A closer look at 2:1–12 will help to flesh out this overall theme of comparison and contrast. In particular, understanding the Magi in light of how a first-century Jewish reader/hearer would have seen them will show how Matthew’s portrait of the Magi fits into some of the overall themes of the Gospel. All agree that the Magi are *Gentiles*, and so their presence in Matthew 2 is another obvious anticipation in this very “Jewish” Gospel that Israel’s Messiah and true King has come for the blessing of all the nations. But that these Gentiles are *Magi* is also significant. Here we can pause to ask this question: How would a first-century Jewish reader have responded to the announcement in the narrative, “Look! *Magi from the east* appeared in Jerusalem” (2:1)? (CC)

Mark Allan Powell has carefully examined three questions about the Magi: (1) How did the Magi in Matthew 2 come to be regarded as “kings” in the history of interpretation? (2) How did interpreters come to regard the Magi as “wise” in the positive sense of the term? and (3) How would the first-century Jewish “implied reader” of Matthew’s Gospel have regarded magi? Regarding the first question, Powell shows that the Magi were not widely regarded as “kings” until the sixth century. Commentators long have known the relatively late origin of that interpretation, and so few today would hold that Matthew either portrays the Magi as royal figures or understood them as such himself. When Powell addresses the second and third questions, however, he argues provocatively against views widely held by other modern commentators.(CC)

It is commonplace for interpreters to regard the Magi as learned or wise in positive matters. As examples of this widely accepted interpretation, Davies and Allison call them “representatives of

the best wisdom of the Gentile world,” “eastern intellectuals,” and “open-minded Gentile wise men.” Luz describes the Magi as “wise and pious Gentiles who from the beginning seek that which is right, namely, to worship the child Jesus.” Brown states that the Magi in Matthew 2 “represent the best of pagan lore and religious perceptivity which has come to seek Jesus through revelation in nature.” (CC)

Nevertheless, Powell contends that the strain of interpretation that understands the Magi as “wise” in the sense of “learned in matters of significance” is invalid. Those who thus read Mt 2:1–12 have construed the narrative in a way that the evangelist would never have foreseen and that would have been alien to his original readers/hearers. Powell claims that the assumption that the Magi’s own “learning” is a positive thing emerged late in the history of interpretation. He writes:

In the patristic and medieval periods, the magi’s learning was often simply ignored. They were depicted as foreigners, as pious, and—after Constantine—as models of godly rulers. When their learning was addressed, however, it was universally denounced. Their so-called science or art was regarded as false knowledge, even as a false religion. It did not aid them in coming to the Christ but rather was rejected after they came to the Christ. (CC)

Powell is unable to find any reference that “actually extols Matthew’s magi as wise men” before the eighth century. It is only in the Enlightenment and on into the modern period that the Magi came to be generally regarded positively as scholars and seekers after truth, according to Powell. (CC)

Powell searches out what Matthew’s readers would have known by examining the roles and characterizations of μάγοι (“magi”) in Greco-Roman literature, Jewish literature, and the LXX. He concludes that although magi are often the servants of royal figures and kings, they themselves are never kings, and they are often portrayed as relatively powerless in relation to their overlords. More important, in the OT and in Jewish literature, magi are never “wise” in the sense of “learned in matters of significance,” and so the very translation of μάγοι as “wise men” ought to be avoided. The best example of this truth is the one OT narrative wherein “magi” figure: Daniel 2. In the LXX, the Babylonian courtiers who are summoned to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream are described as “the wizards and the *magi* and the sorcerers of the Chaldeans” (οἱ ἐπαιδοὶ καὶ οἱ μάγοι καὶ οἱ φαρμακοὶ τῶν Χαλδαίων, LXX Dan 2:2). However, when the king asks them to reveal both his dream and its interpretation, they declare that they are unable and even protest that no “wise man or *magus* or Chaldean” (σοφὸν καὶ μάγον καὶ Χαλδαῖον, LXX Dan 2:10b) had ever been asked to attempt such a task. These various Babylonian practitioners of occult learning, which would be anathema to a first-century Jewish audience, are lumped together as “Chaldeans” (Dan 2:4, 5, 10a), who refer to themselves as the Babylonian king’s “servants” (Dan 2:7). (CC)

Daniel’s familiar account turns on the contrast between the Babylonian king’s courtiers and pious and faithful Daniel, to whom the true God gives the ability both to reveal and to interpret the king’s dream. The point of the narrative is that *contrast* between the incapable, uncomprehending magi and Daniel’s God-given wisdom. The magi are not “wise” in any learning that comports with truth and piety. And this is exactly why Matthew’s original readers would have been surprised by their appearance in Mt 2:1, which is probably why Matthew marks their appearance with “look!” (ἰδοὺ, 2:1). Magi did not worship the God of Israel; they were often servants of rulers who oppressed the people of Israel, and they were in league with a supernatural power that

opposed the one true God. No one would expect *magi* to come in search of the Child-King whose birth was prophesied in Holy Scripture. What, then, are *they* doing here? (CC)

To underscore how the original readers/hearers of Matthew's Gospel would have considered the Magi to be most "unlikely devotees," Powell also keenly describes the manner in which Matthew's narrative characterizes the Magi in 2:1–12. No information is forthcoming from the evangelist about how or why the visitors from the east concluded from the earlier manifestation of the star that the King of the Jews had been born.

Scholars often draw a connection between the star seen by the Magi and Balaam's prophecy in Num 24:17. This seems a likely connection, especially since the Palestinian Targum, the LXX, and documents at Qumran regard Num 24:17 as messianic (Nolan, *Royal Son of God*, 74). In the early second century AD, the Jewish leader Bar Kokhba ("son of the star") was so named, based on Num 24:17, by those who considered him a messiah (Schürer, *History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, 1:543–44). LXX Num 24:17 reads: "I will show him and not now; I am blessing, and he is not drawing near; a star will rise from Jacob [ἀνατελεῖ ἄστρον ἐξ Ἰακωβ], and a man will stand up from Israel and he will break the princes of Moab, and he will forage all the sons of Seth." How the Magi in Matthew 2 became aware of Num 24:17 (or another passage, such as Is 60:3) or were shown its significance—if indeed that is how they came to interpret the star's appearance—receives no explanation and no emphasis in Matthew's account. (CC)

Rather, they arrive in Jerusalem not knowing where the new King is. They must be guided by Scripture to know the correct town: Bethlehem, not Jerusalem, which was Herod's capital and the logical place to find a new king. From Jerusalem, they apparently need the guidance of the star to get to the house where the child and his mother reside. When they arrive at the house where the child and his mother are living, the Magi offer to him the kind of obeisance that would be offered to any other earthly king. They do not, in fact, show that they fully understand the kind of rule *this* King has come to bring. (CC)

The Magi bring *gifts* to the newborn King, and even here Matthew's description reveals that the Magi have not fully understood the significance of the child to whom they are paying homage. The gold, frankincense, and myrrh are the sorts of gifts that one would expect a monarch to receive. But Jesus is not a normal monarch! Although the history of interpretation is marked with attempts to interpret symbolically the gifts of the Magi, the number and variety of those attempts shows that there is not enough data to support such symbolic interpretation. (CC)

The Gospel of Matthew itself provides no support for a symbolic significance to the gifts. "Gold" occurs elsewhere in Matthew only in 10:9; 23:16, 17. "Frankincense" and "myrrh" never recur elsewhere in Matthew. There is a longstanding thread of interpretive tradition (already in Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.9.2) that finds in the gold, frankincense, and myrrh symbolic references to Christ's royalty, deity, and sacrificial death, respectively. See Luz, *Matthew*, 1:138; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:249. Positive support for this view is scarce. Moreover, if Matthew had wanted to associate "myrrh" with Jesus' death, he had opportunity to do so both in Mt 27:34 (cf. the parallel at Mk 15:23 and its use of σμυρνίζω) and in Mt 27:57–61, but he did not make the association explicit. Another factor in the history of the church's interpretation of the "gifts of the Magi" that should produce caution is the very plasticity of the symbolic approach. Not only have the gifts been interpreted in Christological fashion, they have often also been assigned a sort of paraenetic value. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 8.1, asserts that the Magi's gifts showed that they were truly offering their gifts

to God, for “it was knowledge and obedience and love that they offered unto Him” (*NPNF*¹ 10:50). According to Simonetti, *Matthew*, 1:28–29, Gregory the Great (*Forty Gospel Homilies*, 10.6) took the gifts to stand for wisdom, prayer, and the mortification of the flesh. See Luz, *Matthew*, 1:138, for an illuminating sample of various interpretations. If a nose turns out to be that waxen, perhaps it ought just to be left alone. (CC)

The best approach is simply to allow them to be “gifts fit for a king” that show the Magi’s genuine, yet limited, understanding and faith that God has sent a new king to his people Israel. (CC)

Song 3:6; 4:6, 14, each of which refers to “frankincense” and “myrrh” in connection with Solomon’s bride, may support a royal and priestly interpretation of the Magi’s gifts; cf. Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 764–65, 862–68. Those verses in the Song are the only places in the MT where “frankincense” and “myrrh” (לְבוֹנָה and מֵר) occur in close association. In the LXX, λίβανος, “frankincense,” and σμύρνα, “myrrh,” occur together only in those Song verses and in Sirach 24:15. “Gold” and “frankincense” in Is 60:6 have royal and messianic connotations because Isaiah 60 promises that in the time of eschatological salvation, the light of divine glory will shine in Israel, who will then receive the wealth of the nations, including those gifts, perhaps brought by the Gentile “kings” who are mentioned in Is 60:3, 11. Thus, on one level, the gifts of the Magi are a sign of their God-given, but still limited, understanding of who this Child-King is. Yet on another level, Matthew may intend for his readers/hearers to catch the allusion to the Song of Songs and to see in this Son of David an antitype for Solomon (Mt 12:42; cf. “Solomon, Wisdom, and Christology” in Mitchell, *Song of Songs*, 34–38). Isaiah 60 too supports the interpretation that the honor that these Gentile Magi proffer to the King of the Jews is an anticipation of those Gentiles who, in light of this King’s completed work and promised return, will become disciples through Baptism in the triune name (Mt 28:19) and will truly honor and worship “the King of the Jews who has been born” (2:2). In Davies and Allison’s phrasing, the Magi are “the firstfruits of the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations and their submission to the one true God” (Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:249). (CC)

Finally, as Powell notes, the Magi’s naiveté is manifest in that they are successfully duped by Herod’s evil plan to kill the child until they are warned in a dream not to return to Herod. In a word, Powell concludes, the Magi are portrayed not as wise men, but as fundamentally ignorant. The things they know that are worthwhile have all been revealed to them, and yet their knowledge and understanding are still limited. This narrative characterization of the Magi, coupled with the natural associations that the Gospel’s original readers/hearers would have linked to “magi” by their very nature, allows Powell to lay bare the powerful message that lies at the very center of 2:1–12. When Matthew writes, “Look, *Magi from the east* appeared in Jerusalem and said, ‘Where is the King of the Jews who has been born?’ ” the only conclusion that his readers/hearers may draw is not that “the magi [are] wise men whose learning leads them to Christ but [that they are] ignorant people to whom God reveals the Christ.” (CC)

Mt 2:1–12 thus shows continuity with 1:18–25 and with the entire Gospel. Can pious Joseph be expected to know God’s ways of salvation? No, God must send his angel to Joseph in a dream (1:18–25). Jerusalem with its chief priests and scribes should have expected the birth of the King of the Jews as prophesied in the OT, but those religious leaders are unaware of Jesus’ birth until Magi from the east arrive and announce it to them. Although the Magi were aware that the King has been born, they are unable to find him until they are guided by the Scriptures (2:6) and the star (2:9). Even then, the Magi unknowingly would have enabled Herod to kill the child if they had not been warned in a dream (2:12). When Peter confesses the truth of Jesus’ identity as Christ

and Son of God, will he be commended for his wisdom and clarity of insight? No, Jesus pronounces eschatological blessing upon Peter because the heavenly Father *revealed* Jesus' identity to Peter and enabled him to confess (16:16–17). Jesus' words in 11:25 express this important theme in Matthew's Gospel, and in all of Holy Scripture: "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you hid these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to infants." (CC)

Powell, "The Magi as Wise Men," 13, comments: "I think the implied readers are expected to respond, 'God revealed the truth about the Christ to a bunch of pagan fools while those who were wise enough to figure it out for themselves missed it.' Just like Jesus said." (CC)

There is unanimity regarding the identity of the Magi or their actual vocation, although there is some speculation that they were astrologers. Nor does Scripture identify the number of Magi who came to Jesus. The OT Book of Daniel makes reference to Magi (2:48). There it states that King Nebuchadnezzar placed Daniel in charge of all of the "wise men" of Babylonia. There is general agreement among biblical scholars that the Magi were Gentiles, not Jews. That makes the focus on this topic that Christ is the Savior of all nations. It was, and is, God's desire to reveal the birth of Christ to non-Jews as well as to Jews. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 1)

Jerusalem. Since they were looking for the "king of the Jews" (v. 2), they naturally came to the Jewish capital city. (CSB)

2:2 *king of the Jews.* Indicates the Magi were Gentiles. Matthew shows that people of all nations acknowledged Jesus as "king of the Jews" and came to worship him as Lord. (CSB)

It is surprising that these Gentile Magi would be looking for a Jewish king. Jesus comes for all nations. (TLSB)

ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων—I have taken the aorist passive participle τεχθεὶς (from τίκτω) as being in the attributive position with an adjectival function ("the King of the Jews who has been born") rather than as a substantive followed by "King of the Jews" in apposition ("the one who has been born, the King of the Jews"). To be sure, Matthew's style much more often (by a ratio of approximately ten to one) places a participle in directly adjectival position by repeating the article and placing both article and participle after the noun, as, for example, in 6:4: ὁ πατήρ σου ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ. But if the participle τεχθεὶς here in 2:2 is a substantive, the absence of the article with βασιλεὺς is puzzling; the article with "Jews" (τῶν Ἰουδαίων) would normally lead one to expect "King" to be arthrous. For adjectival participles in a similar construction in Matthew, see 3:7; 17:27; 25:34; 27:52. Herod, for his part, certainly understands the Magi's words to refer to "*the* King of the Jews," a direct rival to his power, for there can be only one king. (CC)

By contrast, the "King of the Jews who has been born" (2:2) is unknown, weak, in need of protection, even though his coming was prophesied in the OT. The true King will be found in lowly Bethlehem, where David himself arose, and not in Jerusalem—the capital, where the religious leaders who have led Israel's lost sheep astray and the false King Herod are found. After questioning the Magi, Herod succeeds in concealing from them his murderous intentions and sends them to find the precise location of the new Child-King. On the surface of the narrative, the powerful Herod seems to be in charge. (CC)

There was an assertion contained in their question. Their knowledge was definite as to His having been born. It was a fact beyond question or discussion. A Child has been born that is King of the Jews; His kingship is even now established beyond a doubt. The evidence which the Magi adduce for their belief is sensational. They had seen a star in its rising, just as soon as the phenomenon became visible; not any star, not a meteor provided for the occasion, not a comet of peculiar brilliance, not an extraordinary conjunction of planets, but His star, a star which was set in the firmament, or which flashed forth at just this time with unusual brightness. The appearance and, according to verse 9, also the guidance of this star was to them a definite sign, an unmistakable token of the fulfillment of a prophecy, tradition, or revelation which was known to them. It may have been that the prophecy of Balaam, Num. 24, 17, had been explained by their teachers as referring to an actual, physical star, or it may be, as the medieval legend, which is embodied in the Old Saxon poem of *The Heliand*, has it, that Daniel transmitted to the learned men of the East a tradition concerning this particular star. At any rate, they had come to worship Him whose coming the star indicated, to give Him divine homage and adoration by a gesture or ceremony of abject submission, placing themselves and all their possessions at His disposal. (Kretzmann)

star. Probably not an ordinary star, planet or comet, though some scholars have identified it with the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. (CSB)

The Magi may have seen a natural astronomical phenomenon, but more likely the appearance of the star was a miraculous event (cf. 9). They may have linked the star with a Jewish king through acquaintance with OT prophecy. (TLSB)

The Magi knowing OT prophecy isn't as far-fetched as it may sound. The Assyrians and the Babylonians (Eastern Lands) captured and carried off the brightest and the best Israelites to their own country. The Jews who went there carried with them scriptural knowledge and practiced their faith in this new land. It is very likely that they shared this with the Assyrian and Babylonian people. In this way the Assyrians and Babylonians would have learned about the promised Savior. (CC)

εἶδομεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα—A significant discussion exists around the nature of the star. Was it a “natural” phenomenon or something that should be described as “miraculous”? The former cannot be ruled out of court in advance, as Alford argues with some vigor. Allison shows how unlikely it is that a first-century reader of Matthew would have regarded the “star” as a natural phenomenon. One feature that makes it difficult to suppose that we should explain the star in terms of normal astronomy is its erratic, yet precise, movement. The star apparently appeared to the Magi some time before they arrived in Jerusalem (perhaps as much as two years earlier; see 2:16); then after they arrived, it led them by moving in some way until it stood over the exact place where the child was (2:9b)! Matthew’s combination in 2:9 of “look!” (ἰδοῦ) with the imperfect indicative προῆγεν, “began to go before/lead the way,” suggests that the star reappeared and began to move when the Magi required its further guidance. A natural phenomenon such as the convergence of planets or a comet could continue for days or weeks, but probably not for as long as two years, and it seems unlikely that such a natural occurrence in the heavens could lead the Magi to a specific house (2:9, 11). It seems likely that Matthew regarded the star of the Magi as a miraculous event, and hence so should we. (CC)

Another question is whether anyone else besides the Magi saw the star. The text does not declare it a private revelation (as were the dreams in 1:20; 2:12, 13, 19, 22; 27:19). On the other hand, Matthew nowhere says that other people witnessed the star, either in its earlier appearing (before the Magi arrived in Jerusalem) or later, when the star led the Magi from Jerusalem to Jesus. The

reaction of Herod and the people of Jerusalem in 2:3 indicates that they were unaware of the star, or at least had not perceived its significance. (CC)

From the east – ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ—While ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν in 2:1 with the anarthrous plural of the noun meant “from the east” (also 8:11; 24:27), the singular form of the noun here and the presence of the article both indicate that this phrase (repeated in 2:9) means “in its rising.” The prepositional phrase describes *when* the Magi saw the star, not *where*. The noun ἀνατολή, “rising,” may recall Num 24:17, which was translated by the LXX with a cognate verb: “a star will rise from Jacob [ἀνατελεῖ ἄστρον ἐξ Ἰακωβ].” The noun ἀνατολή may also reflect the noun קָרָא, “rising,” in “kings [will come] to the brightness of your rising” (Is 60:3), especially since Isaiah 60 (a traditional Epiphany text) has many other points of contact with Mt 2:1–12. (CC)

Greek term for “east” and “rising” is the same. (TLSB)

To worship – προσκυνῆσαι—Historically and narratively, what sort of reverence did the Magi intend to pay to the newborn King? There was a fine line between royalty and deity in the ancient world. When they arrived at the house where the child was, they “fell down and showed reverence to him” (2:11). As the commentary will argue more fully, the awareness of the Magi themselves (both as historical persons and as characters in the narrative) falls short of full knowledge of the significance of the child. Accordingly, the translation stops short of “worship.” Larry Hurtado comments regarding προσκυνέω that

the specific connotation of the prostration or other gestures depended entirely on what kind of honor the person offering the reverence intended to attribute to the figure receiving the gesture. . . . So we really cannot take every example of bowing and obeisance as “worship” in the “hard” sense of reverencing a figure as a deity. (CC)

In spite of this reserved understanding of προσκυνέω in the mouth and minds of the Magi, it is surely the case that the readers/hearers of Matthew’s narrative will see the honor that the Magi offer to the child as a foreshadowing of their own worship of Jesus, offered in light of his completed work that the Gospel itself will narrate. (CC)

Though the Greek word may also describe the reverence one would show a king, it commonly describes divine worship in the NT. (TLSB)

2:3 *was troubled* – Herod feared that his rule might be challenged. The people dreaded Herod’s rage and his cruel reaction to this report (v. 16). As an Idumean (Edomite), Herod continued the relationship of rivalry with God’s chosen people. (TLSB)

Ironically, Herod, a cruel, mean-spirited king was the instrument of God to direct the Wise Men to Bethlehem. This is still again ample evidence that God is in charge. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 1)

Edomites were descendants of Esau. They refused passage of Israel through their country when Israel was traveling through the wilderness to Canaan. Their country was located at the SE border of Palestine. They were continual enemies of Israel.

To learn that a king was born to the Jews must have been alarming for a person who knew that he was hated of everyone, and who was troubled in his guilty conscience. (Ylvisaker)

2:4 *chief priests*. Sadducees who were in charge of worship at the temple in Jerusalem. (CSB)

Current and former high priests. (TLSB)

He had not authority to assemble the Sanhedrin, and in this instance one third of the Sanhedrin was absent. It was theological assembly, met to render a theological decision. The high priests are not the leaders of the twenty-four orders in the priesthood, but the acting high priest and those who occupied the office prior to him. (Ylvisaker)

teachers of the law. The Jewish scholars of the day, professionally trained in the development, teaching and application of OT law. Their authority was strictly human and traditional. (CSB)

Students of God’s Word who interpreted and taught the Scriptures. (TLSB)

Another irony is that Gentiles told Jews about the birth of the Messiah. The Jewish people had awaited their Messiah for centuries, yet God chose to announce the Messiah’s birth through the lips of Gentiles. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 1)

Where the Christ was to be born – Herod’s question indicated his awareness of OT promises of a Messiah. (TLSB)

2:5 *it is written* – γέγραπται—The perfect stem (of γράφω) expresses ongoing result. In this Gospel, in which the fulfillment of Scripture is so strong a theme, ((a) E.g., Mt 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17) the word γέγραπται will be translated uniformly as “it stands written.” ((b) Also Mt 4:4, 6, 7, 10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31) (CC)

2:6 This prophecy from Micah had been given seven centuries earlier. (CSB)

You O Bethlehem – Micah spoke this prophecy more than 700 years earlier, at a time when Assyria threatened Judah. The birth of Christ fulfilled the promise of a ruler from Bethlehem. (TLSB)

The καὶ σὺ Βηθλέεμ, γῆ Ἰούδα ...—The text form of the OT citation is of some significance. It provides us with the first clear example of two phenomena that we will meet again in Matthew’s use of the OT, namely, (1) a composite OT citation and (2) Matthew’s own “adjustments” to the text of the OT. Both these phenomena are visible in figure 4. (CC)

Figure 4

The Old Testament Quotation in Matthew 2:6

^MT Micah 5:1	^LXX Micah 5:1	Matthew 2:6
וְאַתָּה בֵּית-לְחֶמֶשׁ אֶפְרַתָּה	καὶ σὺ Βηθλεεμ οἶκος τοῦ εφραθα	καὶ σὺ Βηθλέεμ, γῆ Ἰούδα
And you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,	And you, Bethlehem, house of Ephrathah,	And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
צָעִיר לְהֵיוֹת בְּאַלְפֵי יְהוֹנָדָה	ὀλιγοστός εἶ τοῦ εἶναι ἐν χιλιάσιν Ἰουδα	οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη εἶ ἐν τοῖς ἡγεμόσιν Ἰούδα

MT Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible
LXX Septuagint

little to be among Judah's thousands	very small are you to be among Judah's thousands—	by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah,
מִמֶּךָ לִּי יֵצֵא לְהִנָּחֵל מִשְׁרָאָל	ἐκ σοῦ μοι ἐξελεύσεται τοῦ εἶναι εἰς ἄρχοντα ἐν τῷ Ἰσραηλ	ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ ἐξελεύσεται ἡγούμενος,
from you for me he will go out to be Ruler in Israel,	from you for me he will go out to be for a Ruler in Israel,	for from you will come forth a Ruler
וּמִצְאֲתָיו מִיָּמֵי עוֹלָם:	καὶ αἱ ἔξοδοι αὐτοῦ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἐξ ἡμερῶν αἰῶνος.	
and his goings-out are from old, from days of eternity.	and his goings-out are from the beginning, from the days of eternity.	
MT Micah 5:4)	LXX Micah 5:3	
וְעָמַד וְרָעָה בְּעֹז יְהוָה	καὶ στήσεται καὶ ὄψεται καὶ ποιμανεῖ τὸ ποίμνιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἰσχύι κυρίου.	
And he will stand and shepherd in the strength of Yahweh.	And he will stand and see and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord.	
MT 2 Sam 5:2	LXX 2 Sam 5:2	
אַתָּה תִּרְעָה אֶת־עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל	σὺ ποιμανεῖς τὸν λαόν μου τὸν Ἰσραηλ.	ὅστις ποιμανεῖ τὸν λαόν μου τὸν Ἰσραήλ.
You will shepherd my people, Israel.	You will shepherd my people, Israel.	who indeed will shepherd my people, Israel.

As for the first phenomenon, the first three lines of Matthew's citation are from the first three poetic lines of Micah 5:2). The fourth line of Micah's prophecy, however, continues (to quote LXX Micah 5:1), "and his goings-out are from the beginning, from the days of eternity" (αἱ ἔξοδοι αὐτοῦ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἐξ ἡμερῶν αἰῶνος). In place of that fourth line, Matthew's fourth line is "who indeed will shepherd my people Israel" (ὅστις ποιμανεῖ τὸν λαόν μου τὸν Ἰσραήλ, Mt 2:6). While Micah 5:4) predicts that the Ruler will "shepherd" (ποιμανεῖ in LXX Micah 5:3, as in Mt 2:6), Matthew's fourth line is closer to 2 Sam 5:2, the words of Israel to David at Hebron: "And the Lord said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel' " (καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς σέ σὺ ποιμανεῖς τὸν λαόν μου τὸν Ἰσραηλ). By bringing together two OT Scripture passages (a common Jewish exegetical practice attested in the Qumran scrolls, ca. 250 BC–AD 50), the second of which was spoken to David himself, Matthew's report of the religious leaders' reply to Herod strengthens what is already present in Micah 5:1, namely, that the King to come from Bethlehem will be a descendant of David. (CC)

In the second place, the form of the text from Micah 5:1 that Matthew has given us varies from both the MT and the LXX in obvious ways. The comparisons are evident from the literal English translations in figure 4. (CC)

It is evident even from the English translations that the MT and the LXX are extremely close to one another; the LXX is a literal translation of the MT. In the first three lines, Matthew's citation

most significantly differs from both the MT and the LXX by its addition in the second line of the adverb οὐδαμῶς, “by no means,” and by the insertion in the third line of the explanatory γάρ, “for,” to explain *why* Bethlehem is by no means least among the rulers of Judah. Of course, as noted above, the greatest divergence is in the fourth line, which is not from Micah 5:1 at all; the third-person form of the verb (ποιμανεῖ, “*he* will shepherd”) is from Micah 5:3, but in other respects that line is drawn from 2 Sam 5:2. (CC)

What shall we make of Matthew’s addition “by no means”? It is true that, strictly speaking, the evangelist cites the words of Jerusalem’s chief priests and scribes as *they* quote from the OT. But there seems to be no reason to think that Matthew wanted his readers/hearers to think that the religious leaders’ citation was flawed. In 2:1, Matthew himself writes, “Now after Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea . . . ,” and the scribes respond to Herod’s question regarding the birth of the Christ with, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it stands written through the prophet . . .” So we may conclude that Matthew himself endorses the text-form of Micah 5:1 that he also reports in Mt 2:6. And we shall see, as the commentary addresses the many OT citations in this Gospel, at times the evangelist exercises a certain freedom to offer OT citations in ways that do not correspond exactly to any extant version of the text of the OT, insofar as textual criticism allows us to know what Hebrew and Greek versions of the OT text might have been available to the evangelist. (CC)

How shall this “freedom” be described? The specifics of this example here in 2:6 afford the opportunity to describe the two most important ways in which Matthew exercises his freedom in citing the OT. In the first place, he is free not to cite the OT text with absolute precision when an “equivalent” translation will do—without changing the meaning involved in any appreciable way. (CC)

Thus *The Inspiration of Scripture*, (a report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, March 1975), 11, affirms:

The predication of inerrancy to the Bible does not imply that when the New Testament reproduces and applies Old Testament statements this must always occur by means of verbatim quotations, or that there must be verbal correspondence between parallel accounts of the same event wherever they are found either in the Old or the New Testament.

Each writer in errantly imparted God’s truth as the Holy Spirit moved him to do so in his own way, from his own perspective, and for his own purposes.

For instance, the MT reads “and you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,” the LXX has “and you, Bethlehem, house of Ephrathah,” and Matthew has “and you, Bethlehem, land of Judah.” There were at least two towns in Israel named Bethlehem. “Ephrathah” (MT Micah 5:1) identifies this one as the Bethlehem just south of Jerusalem in Judah, and Matthew conveys this same identification by replacing the more obscure “Ephrathah” with “land of Judah.” (CC)

In the second place, the evangelist Matthew and other NT writers are free to paraphrase the wording of an OT citation in order to bring more clearly into view a theology that both adorns the message of their own NT writing and is consistent with the message of the OT passage. (CC)

France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 173–74, explains that Matthew is at times adapting the [OT] text to allow the reader to see more clearly how it has found its fulfillment in Jesus. Thus in [Mt] 2:6 where Micah described Bethlehem as “little” among the clans of

Judah [Micah 5:1 (ET 5:2)], Matthew has “by no means the least”; *it was, of course, Bethlehem’s future greatness in contrast with its present “littleness” which was the point of Micah’s description*, but Matthew, in view of the prophecy’s fulfillment already in Jesus, can indicate in his version that Bethlehem is no longer so “little.” (emphasis added) (CC)

Thus Matthew has added “by no means” and “for” to introduce an explicit contrast: Bethlehem is *in no way* least, *for* Israel’s Ruler-Shepherd will come forth from Bethlehem. But here Matthew has not violated the sense of the OT text, for this contrast is already implicit in Micah 5:1 in the wording of both the MT and the LXX. Bethlehem is declared to be little among the clans of Judah indeed. Nevertheless, precisely from Bethlehem will go forth Israel’s Shepherd-King. Matthew’s additions to Micah have made explicit a feature that was implicit in the OT text of Micah and that is consistent with its message. (CC)

In sum, caution is needed before one concludes that Matthew’s way of citing an OT text has introduced an intentional variation or change in its theological significance that is not in harmony with the intent of the OT passage. See also the discussion of Matthew’s rendering of מְלֶכֶךְ by παρθένος in the textual note on that word in 1:23. (CC)

will be a shepherd – Wording based on the Lord’s commissioning of David as king of Israel. (TLSB)

ὅστις ποιμανεῖ—The pronoun ὅστις may, at times, express either a more general sense of “whoever” or a qualitative sense of “such a one, one who, to be sure” (BDAG1 and 2, respectively). The qualitative sense may very well be in view here (BDAG, 2 a), so it is rendered, “*who indeed* will shepherd ...” (CC)

Their opinion was given without hesitation; it reflected the current opinion and agreed with Talmudic tradition. In their Scriptural proof they do not quote the Old Testament passage literally, but combine the words of the prophet, Micah 5, 2, with 2 Sam. 5, 2. Incidentally, their answer was shaped by some interpretation due to rabbinical teaching. "Art not thou the least?" the text inquires. Bethlehem may be little in size and influence, especially as compared with its metropolitan neighbor, but it is by no means the least in dignity and distinction. It may have been considered small and insignificant among the thousands of Judah, the cities that could boast a population of a thousand or more families, but it still had the best-founded claim for excellence among the princes of Judah. (Kretzmann)

Out of the despised village One should come forth, should regard it as His native town, who would combine the qualities of a Ruler with those of a tender, loving Friend and watchful Guardian. He whose birth was to distinguish Bethlehem-Judah, would be a Prince and Leader, who would make the shepherd's sleepless devotion for those entrusted to him His life's object. (Kretzmann)

2:7 *ascertained from them what time the star appeared* – It should be noted that the Gentiles told the Jews about the birth of Jesus even though the Jews had waited centuries for this. It is important to be constantly in God’s Word so we don’t miss what should be obvious to us. (CC)

Herod calculated that the child was born when the Magi first observed the star. (TLSB)

τὸν χρόνον τοῦ φαινομένου ἀστέρος—Literally, this is “the time of the appearing star.” Wallace calls it “the shining star.” The attributive adjectival participle is present stem. Since the star is not

shining at this moment in the narrative (“We *saw* his star,” 2:2), I have given an inceptive translation “*began to appear*” for the present stem participle. (CC)

John 1:10-11 “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”

2:8 *bring me back word, that I can come worship him* – He who practices evil shuns the light. He is a hypocrite, pure and simple. (Ylvisaker)

Herod sought to deceive the Magi, hoping they would report back to him what they found, that he might finalize his plan to kill the infant king. (TLSB)

2:9 *they went their way* – They left Jerusalem, apparently all alone and with only general directions to guide them. Herod wanted no talebearers from among those that patterned after him. (Kretzmann)

Star that they had seen...went before them – ὁ ἀστήρ, ὃν εἶδον ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ, προῆγεν αὐτούς—The aorist indicative εἶδον must be rendered by an English pluperfect, “the star, which they *had* seen,” to make clear that it precedes in time the main verb, προῆγεν, “began to lead the way,” an imperfect indicative that signals a new event. Since the Magi needed to ask concerning the birthplace of the King of the Jews, the star may have stopped guiding them when they arrived in Jerusalem. It is also possible that previously the star did not lead them at all; when its rising signaled the birth of the King, they went to inquire in Jerusalem because that was the capital. In any event, now the star guides them to the house with the holy family (2:9, 11). (CC)

The star the Magi had seen in their homeland now guided them from Jerusalem to the very house where Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were living (v. 11). God was obviously leading these Gentiles in their quest for the King of the Jews. (TLSB)

2:10 *they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy* – Apparently they were disturbed and uncertain until the star reappeared and reaffirmed them in their pilgrimage. (Concordia Journal – November 1984)

Matthew piles one expression of joy on another to emphasize the Magi’s feelings. (TLSB)

2:11 *house*. Contrary to tradition, the Magi did not visit Jesus at the manger on the night of his birth as did the shepherds. They came some months later and visited him as a “child” in his “house.” (CSB)

the child with his mother Mary. Every time the child Jesus and his mother are mentioned together, he is mentioned first (vv. 11, 13–14, 20–21). (CSB)

worshiped him – Unclear whether the Magi worshiped Jesus as true God or revered Him only as an earthly king. “Worship” implies they realized that Jesus was more than just a human king. (TLSB)

gold ... incense ... myrrh. The three gifts perhaps gave rise to the legend that there were three “wise men.” But the Bible does not indicate the number of the Magi, and they were almost certainly not kings. (CSB)

The Magi’s gifts to Jesus were expensive but not uncommon presents for a king. (TLSB)

Gold suggests royalty. Incense was used in connection with worship. Its aromatic smoke symbolized the God-pleasing prayers of the people ascending to the throne of God. (PBC)

One could not approach a royal personage without bringing gifts. These treasures bore evidence of the love in their heart for the Savior. Gold was a gift to Him as a king, incense as God, myrrh to suggest His suffering and death. (Ylvisaker)

myrrh. Myrrh symbolizes Jesus suffering and death. (PBC)

2:12 *not to return to Herod* – Once again God miraculously intervened. The Magi accepted His direction. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 1)

This was to allow time for the Holy Family to escape to Egypt, God kept Herod in the dark about where Jesus was. (TLSB)

2:1–12 God uses a star, Scripture, and a dream to guide the Magi on their way to and from Bethlehem. They are the first of many Gentiles to worship Jesus. Today, through His Word, the Father guides people of all nations to Christ. Jesus is the “star” the Father provided for us so that we can see our Savior. The Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts through the Gospel, and like the Magi, we joyfully offer our gifts of thanksgiving to Jesus. • “Holy Spirit, light divine, Shine upon this heart of mine; ... Let me see my Savior’s face, Let me all His beauties trace; Show those glorious truths to me Which are only known to Thee.” Amen. (LSB 496:1–2) (TLSB)

The Escape to Egypt

¹³Now 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.” ¹⁴And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵and 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.”

2:13-23 Mt 2:13–23 continues the account of Jesus’ earliest years and of the radical contrast between the two kings (Jesus versus Herod/Archelaus). These verses are also remarkable in that in the compass of one page of Greek text, Matthew gives us no less than three of his ten OT citation formulas (this happened “in order that what was spoken by the prophet might be fulfilled,” 2:15, 17, 23). Both in the way that he narrates the events of this text and in the particular OT citations that he applies to the child, Matthew proclaims that Jesus is the true King of God’s people—and even more than that, Jesus himself embodies the people. Matthew’s Christological focus shifts in a remarkable way. As chapter 2 progresses, Jesus’ identity as “King of the Jews” (2:2) leads into another proclamation about the child whose life must be saved by God and faithful Joseph. Jesus *is* the people of God, summed up in himself; he is “Israel reduced to one.” Jesus is God’s Son on behalf of the nation, God’s son (Mt 2:15, citing Hos 11:1; cf. Ex 4:22; Deut 8:1–5; Jer 31:20 [LXX 38:20]). We learn from Matthew 2 that Jesus’ identity as Son of God denotes not only *who* he is, but also *what* he has come to do and *how* he will do it. (CC)

The contrasting irony between the power of the evil King Herod, and then his son Archelaus, and God’s plans for Jesus is laid bare through Matthew’s structuring of 2:13–23. In 2:13–15, Matthew rapidly tells how in a dream God revealed to Joseph that Herod was planning to kill the child and how God directed Joseph to flee to Egypt. Joseph obeys, and with the child and the child’s

mother, he departs to Egypt and stays there until Herod's death. The purpose of this movement to Egypt and back was to fulfill the Scripture of Hos 11:1. (CC)

Remarkably, the evangelist first narrates both the holy family's flight to Egypt and its significance as OT fulfillment. Only after that does Matthew describe that when Herod realized that he had been mocked by the Magi, he slaughtered the children of Bethlehem and then sometime later, died (2:16–19). Thus Matthew first gives his readers/hearers the divine overview and scriptural fulfillment (2:13–15), and only after that does he describe the historical events (2:16–19). The message is clear: the evil kings will have no power over this child! Neither Herod nor his son has ultimate control over these events. The child is the one who fulfills Scripture. In 2:16–23, Matthew narrates rapidly these events: (1) Herod's unsuccessful attempt to slay Jesus and his murder of Bethlehem's children; (2) the death of Herod; (3) Archelaus' accession to the throne of Judea; and (4) the holy family's residence in Nazareth of Galilee. As Dorothy Jean Weaver has put it so well:

All outward evidence to the contrary, Herod is not in fact the genuine "king over Judea" nor is his "power" genuine power. Instead, true kingship belongs to Jesus "the one who has been born king of the Jews" [2:2]; and true power belongs to Jesus "the child" (2:8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 20, 21), who says nothing, takes no actions, and is by contrast totally vulnerable to the initiatives of those around him. And with this fundamental redefinition of terms the narrator signals to the reader that from here on and throughout the narrative both "kingship" and "power" are realities to be understood in a paradoxical light and to be identified in the unlikeliest of forms and places.

Yes, in the unlikeliest of places Jesus establishes the reign of God—even on a cross, under a sign that proclaims, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (27:37). Even the sequence of Matthew's narrative in 2:13–23 proclaims God's surprising and lowly ways of ruling and saving. Herod plots and acts in vain; even his madness serves the fulfillment of Scripture by Jesus (2:15, 17–18, 23). (CC)

But there is much more. In 2:13–23 Matthew proclaims remarkable truth about Jesus through the three OT fulfillment citations. In the first two citations (in 2:15 and 2:17–18, from Hos 11:1 and Jer 31:15 [LXX 38:15], respectively), Matthew develops a remarkable typology: Jesus is the "embodiment" or "representative" or "summary" of the nation of Israel. Under the leadership of Moses, God had liberated his "son" from Egypt (Hos 11:1). But this nation-son has rebelled against God and desperately needs the salvation that Jesus has come to bring to his people (1:21). In the third citation (2:23), Matthew offers a sort of summary statement regarding the prophetic Scriptures' message that the Messiah will be despised and rejected; see the commentary below for the explication of those passages and the Christology they entail. Before commenting upon the typological significance of the OT citations in this section, however, I should offer the reasons why a very common view should (at the least) be downplayed severely. (CC)

2:13-15 Matthew narrates how God's angel came to Joseph in a dream and warned him to take "the child and his mother" to Egypt, to keep the child safe from Herod's lethal plotting. Joseph obeyed, and remained in Egypt until Herod's death. These events took place, according to Matthew, for the purpose of fulfilling the Lord's Word through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son." This is a direct citation from Hos 11:1 in which Matthew has specifically preserved the singular noun "son" in the Hebrew as opposed to the LXX's plural "his children" (see the textual note on 2:15). In order to grasp the significance of this OT citation, we will look at the context of Hos 11:1 and then compare the message therein with how the citation functions in the Gospel's narrative. (CC)

Hos 11:1 stands in the middle of the prophet's oracle concerning rebellious and sinful Israel. The threat of judgment is prominent throughout Hosea 9–10. The nation's idolatry (10:5–6) and injustice (10:13) have brought God's promise to wage war and destroy (10:14–15). Hosea 11, even though it contains moving declarations of God's love for Israel (11:1–4), continues chapter 10's theme of judgment upon Israel at the hands of Assyria (11:5–7), though the promise of eventual restoration for Ephraim is also clearly present (11:8–11). (CC)

Three points may be emphasized about Hos 11:1 in its original context. In the first place, Hos 11:1 was not a prediction in the usual sense of the word. This verse forms part of the prophet's oracle against Israel and specifically recalls Israel's past history at the time of the exodus: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." In the second place, the prophet's language of the nation as "God's son" reflects of a common OT articulation that originated at the time of the exodus in God's words to Moses in Ex 4:22–23: "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says Yahweh: Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.' " To emphasize, *at the exodus* Yahweh became Father to a "son," the nation Israel, in fulfillment of the promises to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 2:24–25; 3:6, 14–16). Third, Hos 11:1 contrasts the exodus (fifteenth century BC), when God in love chose the nation Israel to be his "son," with the subsequent history of the nation that rebelled against the Lord, all the way down to the time of the prophet himself some seven centuries later (eighth century BC). Israel in Hos 11:1 had failed to be the "son" God chose the nation to be, and so the people stood under the threat of God's judgment. (CC)

Now in the context of Matthew's Gospel, a "son" has come to save his people from their sins (1:21). He is "Son of David," "Son of Abraham," and "Christ" (1:1). Yet he is not Joseph's son, but rather is God's Son, as 1:18–25 has made clear. Through the OT citation from Hos 11:1, however, Matthew presents an additional layer of meaning for Jesus' identity as God's Son. Matthew here is offering a "Jesus as Israel" typology that involves comparison and contrast, and that assumes that God has now begun to perform his greater act of end-time salvation of which the exodus, great though it was, served as only the type. Before describing more fully the implications of Jesus' identity as Israel/Son of God, a few words are in order about the complex and somewhat protean topic of biblical typology. (CC)

Rather than attempt to discuss the full range of scholarly description and definition, I can offer a brief synopsis of salient points from the particularly helpful discussion in Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture*. Davidson attempts an inductive study of key NT texts in order to arrive at a description of how the NT writers read the OT typologically. He describes the "historical" and "theological" structures involved in the argument of 1 Cor 10:1–13, placing greatest emphasis upon that text since his study then reveals a continuity between the hermeneutics of 1 Cor 10:1–13 and other significant NT passages that employ typology. (CC)

Three "historical structures" are involved when the NT authors read the OT typologically according to Davidson. First, the OT types are events, "historical realities." "Second, there is a *historical correspondence* between the OT events and the NT realities." This correspondence entails "specific parallel details as well as more general 'similar situations.'" Third, there is an increase or escalation in the movement from OT type to NT antitype "because the NT realities constitute the climactic, eschatological destination toward which the OT events point." (CC)

Davidson determined that four "theological structures" are also characteristic of NT typological readings of the OT. First, the NT fulfillment of the OT type is understood eschatologically, that

is, as a part of the final in-breaking of God's reign, which has already begun in the earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and which will be completed at his return. Second, the NT antitypes relate to and partake of Christological and soteriological realities: "The τύποι [OT 'types'] and NT correspondents carry either a positive or negative moral 'charge' depending upon their relationship to Christ." Third, there is an ecclesiological structure in that the church as the true continuation of God's covenant people Israel participates in the NT realities that fulfill the OT types. Fourth and finally, there is a complex prophetic structure in that the OT types (a) were prefigurations of NT realities, (b) were arranged by divine design, and (c) possessed a *prospective*, "must-needs-be" character that not only anticipated, but required their fulfillment in NT realities. That is to say, it is not that types only came into existence in light of later NT retrospection. Rather, the NT proclaims that all along God designed the OT realities and events as forward-looking, even if the realities to which they pointed were not made explicit until the NT writers proclaimed their fulfillments in Christ and his church. Within this broad historical and theological framework as generally described by Davidson, then, there is room for both Law and Gospel—negative contrasts and exhortation, and positive comparison and proclamation. (CC)

This understanding of typology helps us comprehend Mt 2:15. Jesus, Son of God, travels to Egypt because of the threat to his life, and then he returns to Israel after Herod dies and the threat has been removed. This happened so that Hos 11:1 "might be fulfilled" (Mt 2:15), even though the prophetic passage was not worded as a prediction. Rather, Hosea described a past *history* that was incomplete—the story of a people who failed to achieve the purpose for which God had called them out of Egypt. Therefore Israel's history yearned for repair and restoration and achievement of God's *telos*. God had chosen a people to be his own and loved them like a father loves his son. The son, however, did not requite his love, but instead ran away, and is running away still (see the commentary on 3:1–12). What God did once to make for himself a people, *in history* God is now again doing in a greater and unexpected way, for the last days have begun, the Christ has been born, and the reign of heaven is at hand (3:2). The first exodus, by the saving power of God, took place when God redeemed his "son" from bondage in Egypt. (Hos 11:1). The second and greater end-time exodus, by the saving power of God, will take place through God's perfect Son, on behalf of God's fallen and sinful "son." (CC)

Jesus the individual is God's Son in his own person. Even as a child, Jesus is God's Son, not by any process of adoption, but by right. He recapitulates or summarizes and repeats the history of the nation of Israel. The sons of Israel went down to Egypt and came up again; Jesus the Son goes down to Egypt and comes up again. The sons of Israel came up from Egypt because God was freeing them from bondage and captivity. Jesus, on the other hand, comes up from Egypt in order that he might live and grow and finally save his people from their bondage to sin (Mt 1:21). With the first "son," God was acting to save "him." God had acted to save his second and greater Son from Herod (Mt 2:12–15), and now God is acting so that, through Jesus, he would save Israel. *Historically*, Jesus takes the place of Israel, and reenacts its history, but where Israel failed, Jesus succeeds. (CC)

Theologically, this "Jesus as Israel" typology proclaims that God's Son has come to take the place of Israel, God's son. This vicarious aspect of the typology comes to clearer focus in the Baptism that Jesus receives from John (3:13–17) and in his conflict with Satan in the wilderness (4:1–11). It is implicit already here in 2:15 in the way that Matthew proclaims OT fulfillment in the movements of the Child-Messiah. Who is Jesus? He is Israel, the nation, summed up into himself. What has he come to do? To save his people from their sins (1:21), to be sure. Yet how is his identity as *Son* of God involved in that? By undergoing his own exodus from Egypt, Jesus enacts his identity as God's end-time, final Son. And there is more. This perfect Son offers perfect obedience to his Father's will to save the people. How will he do that? By going where they went

(to Egypt and back), by standing where they stood (in the waters of the Jordan), by fighting and winning spiritual battles where they fought and lost (in the wilderness for a period of forty years), and ultimately, by dying where and how they deserved to die: in their place as the ransom payment in the place of the many (20:28; 26:28). (CC)

Nothing will deter this plan or prevent it from achieving God's goal. Herod tries to do just that, as only Matthew's narrative makes known to us. Although Herod fails in his purpose, he succeeds in murdering perhaps twenty male children, two years old and younger, in and around the village of Bethlehem. God allowed this evil deed, but he did not purpose it, nor is he ever the cause of evil. That is why the evangelist writes: "Then [τότε] what was spoken ... was fulfilled" (2:17) instead of his usual formula for fulfillment using a purpose clause, "in order that [ἵνα or ὅπως] what was spoken ... might be fulfilled." The only other time Matthew uses this construction is in 27:9, regarding the money paid Judas for betraying Jesus—another evil deed that God foreknew, but did not purpose. Because the slaughter of Bethlehem's children and the subsequent mourning played a role in the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, it stands as an antitype for the mothers of Israel ("Rachel" of Jer 31:15) who mourned when their children were taken from them into exile during the time of the prophet Jeremiah. (CC)

Interpreters often point out that Jer 31:15, which speaks of Rachel weeping, is the only gloomy note in the entire chapter of its OT context. The prophet Jeremiah mentions the weeping in Ramah as a way of describing the exile into which Judah's captives have gone under the power of Babylonian conquest (Jer 31:15; cf. 40:1–2). Rachel's "children" (31:15) stand for the nation suffering under divine judgment. Jeremiah quickly rushes in, with the next verses, to proclaim hope and the promise of return from exile and restoration of Israel's fortunes (31:16–19). God declares his love for his "son" Ephraim (31:20) and ultimately promises a new covenant and the forgiveness of sins (31:31–34). Accordingly, although Rachel weeps rightly over the exile, the divine judgment imposed upon the nation for its sin, there is hope and the promise of restoration. (CC)

In a much greater way, so it is in Matthew 2. Evil has come upon the land, though it is not God's purposeful punishment, but is caused by Herod's malice (see above on "*then* what was spoken ... was fulfilled" in 2:17). Nevertheless, the restoration of the nation and the promised new covenant are already dawning in the person of God's Son, who comes to restore God's "son." God's Son will establish a renewed and better covenant between God and Israel, indeed, God and all humanity. God will accomplish this plan in his Son, Jesus. Now that the scriptural plan has begun to be fulfilled, even unthinkable evil such as the murder of Bethlehem's children can serve and become part of what God is doing in and through Jesus. After the sixth-century exile to Babylon and weeping over judgment and sin, God brought hope. In a greater and final way, the sins of the people and their leaders will not have the last word in Bethlehem or in Israel. In the Christ, God's Son on behalf of God's "son," God will bring hope and restoration for all humanity. (CC)

Should the "holy innocents" be regarded as *martyrs*? From one perspective, the answer would be negative. We normally think of martyrs as those who have been killed because they confess faith in Christ, and that is not why Herod slew the children of Bethlehem. Rather, he killed them because he feared one of them *might be* the Christ. While Matthew's readers/hearers can certainly expect that the male children in Bethlehem would have been circumcised and thus were members of God's covenant people, they were not martyrs as we normally use that term. (CC)

However, the children of Bethlehem do occupy a unique place in Christian history because of what God was doing in Jesus at that unique time and place. Indeed God was at work and was even able to take up human evil and sin and cause it to be known as part of the scriptural plan that

was fulfilled by the Christ Child. The babes of Bethlehem would not have been slaughtered if the Christ had not been born among them. In that sense, then, they did die for the sake of Christ. Their deaths on account of Christ prefigured the martyrdom of those who would bear Christ's name. Thus the church's observation of Holy Innocents' Day on December 28 can rightly be the occasion—as will all the martyrs' days—to praise and honor the One who died and rose for the martyrs and for all. (CC)

Herod the Great probably died in 4 BC, although there is a scholarly debate surrounding the absolute dates involved. Although Matthew does not tell us how long the holy family stayed in Egypt after Herod's death, it had to encompass the time it took for the various delegations to go to Rome and for the imperial deliberations to seat Archelaus as ruler of Judea. When Joseph, with Mary and her child, drew near to Judea, however, Archelaus' already well-deserved reputation for violence gave Joseph pause, and he was afraid to go back there (2:22). (CC)

Once again, God warned Joseph in a dream (2:22; see also 1:20; 2:13, 19), and he departed to Galilee and dwelt in Nazareth. Thus it came about that the Christ, Son of David (1:1) and Son of God (2:15), would grow up in a town that is not even mentioned in the OT, and to which no messianic promises were attached. Yet the prophets had foretold that God's Messiah would be "despised and rejected of men" (Is 53:3). His lowly and unexpected heritage in Nazareth would become a byword to some, a signal that they rejected him. (For the negative connotations attached to "Nazarene," see the textual note on it in Mt 2:23.) This is God's way when his salvation comes down: men will despise it until light dawns upon them. (CC)

2:13 The miraculous events surrounding the birth of our Lord continue into his early childhood as the holy family is afforded divine protection and guidance. "An angel" may refer to the same unnamed angel who informed Joseph of the incarnation, since the identical Greek phrase occurs in 1:20. That revelation, like the two described in vv 12, 13, occurred in a dream—a frequent mode of divine communication in the Old Testament (cf. Num 12:6–8; Joel 2:28). In contrast, the announcements to Zechariah and Mary were made by the angel Gabriel in person (Lk 1:11–38). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 1)

Many people closely associate the birth of Christ with the adoration of the Magi, but the text indicates that the Magi may have visited up to two years later. First, in Mt 2:11, they are said to have entered the house (*oikia*) where Jesus and Mary were, not the stable in which he was born. Second, 2:16 indicates that Christ may have been born up to two years before the Magi arrived in Judea. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 1)

An angel of the Lord – ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατῶναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ—This "angel of the Lord," like the one in 1:20 (also the one in 2:19), is not to be identified with the OT "Angel of Yahweh." The verb φαίνεται is a historical present tense, the first such usage in Matthew's Gospel. The same form, as indeed this entire clause, is precisely repeated in 2:19, and this repetition links 2:13–18 to 2:19–23. In and of itself, an occurrence of the historical present in narratives is not of great significance. However, it is not a common feature of Matthew's style (except for forms of λέγω that introduce direct discourse; see, e.g., 4:6, 10, 19). Therefore, I have chosen to give the historical presents in Matthew's narrative an emphatic translation, as here: "An angel of the Lord *did* appear." (CC)

In a dream – This mode of revelation points to the gospel narrative as fulfilling the OT, in which dreams, along with visions, were God's regular method of revealing His will. However, Scriptures also frequently warns against believing false claims of prophetic dreams. How blessed

we are to have the sure written Word in contrast to the uncertain origin of dreams and visions. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

Flee to Egypt – After all the trouble and suffering the Israelites had endured in Egypt before the exodus, it might seem like a strange place for Joseph and Mary to go with the Christ Child. But it was not strange at all. First of all, we need to realize that Egypt had been a traditional place of refuge. Abraham had gone to Egypt during a famine (Genesis 12:10). Jacob and his family of 70 souls took refuge in Egypt for the same reason (Genesis 46), and they became a mighty nation there. They remained in Egypt until God led them out under Moses some 400 years later. Jeroboam fled to Egypt when Solomon tried to kill him (1 Kings 11:40), and Uriah also fled to Egypt (Jeremiah 26:21-23). There were many Jews in Egypt at this time, so Mary and Joseph could feel quite at home and secure there. Furthermore, Matthew informs us that the flight to Egypt (and the return to the land of Israel) fulfilled a prophecy of Hosea (11:1). God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, and their exodus foreshadowed the calling of God’s Son from Egypt. Matthew directly states that Hosea was not only recording an event in Israel’s history; he was also foretelling an event in the life of God’s Son, the Messiah. (PBC)

C 175 mi SW of Jerusalem, outside Herod’s jurisdiction. Joseph was told to stay in Egypt till he received further instructions. (TLSB)

Must we say that God was unable to protect His Son in Bethlehem? By no means. One word only, and all the designs of Herod would have been brought to naught. In the eternal council of God, however, there was laid out for Jesus a path in humility and suffering. Therefore it was prophesied, and therefore it must come to pass. (Ylvisaker)

2:14 *he (Joseph)* – Joseph’s father, Abraham, in faith “when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going” (Heb 11:8). So now Joseph also goes in faith without knowing where exactly in Egypt they were to live. Notice the word order that places the principal person first “take *the child* and his mother.” While *anachōreō* in v 13 simply means “depart,” in this verse it has the nuance “withdraw, take refuge” (BAGD p. 63b, 2.b.). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

during the night – νυκτός—This is the classical Greek use of a word for time (“day,” “hour,” “night,” etc.) in the genitive case with an adverbial meaning to express the “time within which” the action of the clause’s verb occurred. The actions “got up,” “took,” and “departed” all happened “during the night,” the same evening Joseph learned of the danger to the child. (CC)

Joseph obeyed the angel’s command that very night. (TLSB)

LEFT – In verse 13 *anachoreo* simply means “depart,” in this verse it has the nuance “withdraw, take refuge.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

to move on – Yes, tell the church of Jesus Christ to move on! Sometimes we see only the dangers ahead. The forces of godlessness increase. The frontiers of an unbelieving world close in. Whatever financial gains we make are more than used up in inflationary costs. We can barely maintain the church activities which we have begun. How can we hope to advance in our mission work? And besides, who will listen to us any more in this corrupt, evil world! How did we ever get involved in all our expansion work? Let’s dig a hole for ourselves and crawl in! Tell the people of God to move on! What will happen to the enemy is vividly pictured in verses 23-31. (PBC – Exodus 14)

2:15 *the death of Herod.* In 4 B.C. (CSB)

Out of Egypt I called my son. This quotation from Hos 11:1 originally referred to God's calling the nation of Israel out of Egypt in the time of Moses. But Matthew, under the inspiration of the Spirit, applies it also to Jesus. He sees the history of Israel (God's children) recapitulated in the life of Jesus (God's unique Son). Just as Israel as an infant nation went down into Egypt, so the child Jesus went there. And as Israel was led by God out of Egypt, so also was Jesus. How long Jesus and his parents were in Egypt is not known. (CSB)

In Hos 11:1, the Lord referred to Israel as "My son," whom He called out of Egypt at the time of the exodus. Jesus is here named as God's one and only Son, who was the representative and substitute for all Israel. God would also call this Son out of Egypt to redeem His sinful people. (TLSB)

Why to Egypt? There were closer safe places, and Egypt was filled with idolatry and hatred toward the Israelites. Or why didn't God cause Herod to die a few years earlier than he did (v 20)? Whether or not Joseph had these questions, he simply obeyed in faith. And whether Joseph realized it or not, in this way the prophecy of Hos 11:1 was fulfilled. Just as God's children—the sons of Israel—had sojourned there, suffering persecution, so God's Son, persecuted, did too, until he too was led into the land first promised to Abraham some two millennia earlier. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 1)

But the similarity stops there. Jesus recapitulated the history of the nation of Israel, but without committing the nation's sins. When the holy family returned to Israel (vv 19–23), there was no grumbling, no desire to return to the fleshpots of Egypt, no forty-year punishment of wandering in the wilderness, no doubts about their ability to enter the land as God instructed. Christ took Israel's place and ours, walking in their shoes and ours, facing the same dangers and hardships, but without sin. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 1)

In short, this history of Christ's early life shows that even from birth he was fulfilling the law for us, completing perfectly what Israel (and we) failed to do. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 1)

Matthew again emphasizes how Jesus, even as a toddler, is fulfilling the OT Scriptures. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

The OT citation is from Hos 11:1b. A literal translation of the entire poetic verse in the MT is this:

For Israel [was] a youth and I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son [יְהוָה].

The LXX has one crucial difference from the MT, namely, in how it treats the MT's reference to Israel as Yahweh's "son." The LXX, literally rendered, reads: "Because Israel [was] a babe and I loved him, and out of Egypt I summoned his children" (μετεκάλεσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ). On the assumption that Matthew was aware of the LXX text known to us, he avoided it and instead gave his own literal translation of the MT's last clause: "Out of Egypt I called my son" (ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐκάλεσα τὸν υἱὸν μου, Mt 2:15). Matthew has chosen the simple verb ἐκάλεσα (from καλέω) rather than the compound form in the LXX (from μετακαλέω). Most importantly, he has preserved the singular reference to "son" as opposed to the LXX's "children." This is the first

time in Matthew that Jesus is explicitly referred to as God's "Son." Theologically, this OT citation is of immense importance. (CC)

2:13–15 After God's warning, Joseph immediately flees with his family in the middle of the night. This is an example of how God protects His people. When threatening challenges surround us, we trust that God is in control and that He will protect us. Most of all, we know that He has already protected us from our greatest enemies: sin, death, and the devil. • Heavenly Father, keep me from ever doubting Your protecting care. Amen. (TLSB)

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. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: 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."

2:16-18 These verses are not part of the pericope, but we may note in passing that "these children became the 'protomartyrs' among the witnesses of Christ," the first to die on account of Christ (Joh. Ylvisaker, *The Gospels* [Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1977] p. 98). Read also Rev 12:2–6. Satan, the red dragon, was behind the attempt to kill the baby Jesus. He is also behind the killing of many children through abortion, etc. This author had a former Satanist confess that she had two abortions for the sole purpose of sacrificing them to Satan. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 3, Part 1)

2:16 *saw that he had been tricked.* Herod waited in vain for the Magi to return and report where the new king was living. (TLSB)

kill all the boys ... two years old and under. The number killed has often been exaggerated as being in the thousands. In so small a village as Bethlehem, however (even with the surrounding area included), the number was probably not large—though the act, of course, was no less brutal. (CSB)

The figure probably reflects how long it had been since the Magi first saw the star. Since Herod did not know which young boy might be his potential rival, he ordered a mass killing of all male children up to two years old in Bethlehem and the surrounding region. These young boys, traditionally called "The Holy Innocents," are regarded as the first martyrs in the NT. (TLSB)

Satan, the red dragon, was behind the attempt to kill the baby Jesus. He is also behind the killing of many children through abortion. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

2:17 *was fulfilled* – τότε ἐπληρώθη τὸ ρηθὲν—Matthew normally introduces his OT fulfillment citations with either ἵνα or ὅπως to form a purpose clause: ἵνα/ὅπως πληρωθῆ τὸ ρηθὲν, "in order that what was spoken ... might be fulfilled." Only here and in 27:9 (regarding the payment given Judas and his suicide) does Matthew describe the fulfillment of Scripture using a temporal clause: "Then [τότε] what was spoken ... was fulfilled." Although God takes and uses evil deeds such as the slaughter of Bethlehem's little ones to bring his scriptural plan and promise to fruition, Matthew avoids declaring that it was God's purpose that the children in Bethlehem die (or that Judas commit suicide). (CC)

2:18 *Ramah...Rachel weeping for her children* – Ramah was five miles north of Jerusalem, on the border of Israel. It was a place where Jewish captives had been assembled for deportation to Babylon (Jeremiah 40:1). Rachel was Jacob’s favorite wife, childless for years, finally the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. She died in childbirth. Rachel weeping for her children represented all the Jewish mothers who wept over Israel’s tragedy in the days of Jeremiah. She also typifies the grieving mothers at Bethlehem as Matthew points out. (PBC)

Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, died in childbirth and was buried in Ramah, just north of Jerusalem (Gn 35:16–20). Years later, Jeremiah pictured Rachel weeping for the Israelites who were exiled to Babylon. These OT stories of suffering anticipated the suffering caused by Herod. The sound of weeping was heard again when Herod slaughtered the infant boys of Bethlehem. (TLSB)

But God acted in Bethlehem, scarred by atrocity and horror, by sending His own Son to bring life and hope. Because of His death on the cross for our sins, His triumphant resurrection from the dead, and His ascension into heaven, He will one day return to wipe all tears from our eyes. (LL)

φωνὴ ἐν Ῥαμὰ ἠκούσθη ...—The OT citation is from Jer 31:15 (LXX 38:15). Matthew’s form of the verse differs from both the LXX and the MT, although none of the differences materially affect the meaning of the citation. Scholars do not agree on how to account for Matthew’s form. The LXX manuscripts B and A actually differ significantly from one another! LXX Jer 38:15 is not a particularly skillful translation of MT Jer 31:15. The Hebrew nouns in the second poetic line, “wailing” and “weeping of bitterness,” are almost surely to be taken in apposition to “voice” in the first line, but the LXX gives the nouns in the second line as genitives, resulting in “A voice is heard in Ramah of lament and weeping and mourning.” (CC)

One part of Matthew’s version of the OT citation may be of some importance. The Hebrew of Jer 31:15d–e is, literally, “Rachel is weeping for her sons; she is refusing to be comforted for her sons”; thus the prepositional phrase *לְבָנֶיהָ*, “for her sons,” occurs twice. The LXX does not reflect the first instance of the prepositional phrase, and for the second “for her sons” it uses *ἐπὶ τοῖς υἱοῖς αὐτῆς*, which is a literal and excellent translation of the Hebrew phrase. Matthew’s citation does not reflect the second instance of the prepositional phrase, and for the first one Matthew gives us Rachel lamenting “her children” (*τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς*). While this too is an acceptable and accurate rendering of the Hebrew phrase, there may be a conscious choice on Matthew’s part not to designate the male children of Bethlehem as Rachel’s *sons*; hence Matthew uses “children” (*τέκνα*) instead of “sons” (*υἱοῖς* in the second instance in the LXX). (CC)

In chapter 2, Matthew is concerned to identify only one “son” in the narrative, namely, Jesus, the Son of God. Although certainty is not possible, it is at least plausible to see a deliberate choice by the evangelist to offer an accurate rendering of Jer 31:15 (LXX 38:15) that avoids any confusion over who is the “son” in this account. Matthew has taken “sons” in both the LXX and the MT and deliberately rendered it as “children.” His purpose in so doing is to emphasize that Jesus is the true and only “son” and fulfillment of all of Israel’s history. In Matthew 1–4 only Jesus is called “son” (*υἱός*), and he is so designated repeatedly.” (CC)

2:16–18 The young boys of Bethlehem die, but Jesus escapes. He escapes death at the hands of Herod, that later He might die on the cross for all sinners, even ones so cruel as Herod or so young as two-year-olds. Jesus sacrificed His innocent life to redeem all people from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Trusting in Jesus, we have perfect innocence before our Father in

heaven. • We praise You, Jesus, for willingly giving up Your life at the proper time for our salvation. Amen. (TLSB)

The Return to Nazareth

¹⁹ But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 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.” ²¹ And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 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. ²³ And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

2:19 when *Herod died* – Josephus, the Jewish historian of that period, relates that Herod suffered a terrible disease which burned him inwardly and caused a stench for others around him. After Herod died, Caesar Augustus divided Herod’s portion of the empire between Herod’s three sons. To Archelaus one half of the kingdom was given, which was Judea, Idumea, and Samaria. He was to become king, if he proved worthy of the position, but that was not to be the case. Nine years later charges against him were leveled by his brothers, and he was exiled to Vienne, where he died. Antipas was given Galilee and Perea, and he ruled 42 years before he was driven into exile. He was the murderer of Christ’s forerunner, and the one whom Jesus called a fox. Philip was given five smaller tracts of land. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

It may have been only a matter of a few months that Joseph and Mary and the Christ Child remained in Egypt. Herod died about Easter time 4 B.C. The Jewish historian Josephus in his *Antiquities* reports that Herod “died of...ulcerated entrails, putrefied and maggot-filled organs, constant convulsions, foul breath, and neither physician nor warm baths led to recovery.” (PBC)

2:20-21 *land of Israel* – This expression, used nowhere else in the NT, suggests that Jesus’ return from Egypt was like ancient Israel’s leaving Egyptian slavery to dwell in the Promised Land. (TLSB)

2:22 *Archelaus*. This son of Herod the Great ruled over Judea and Samaria for only ten years (4 B.C.–A.D. 6). He was unusually cruel and tyrannical and so was deposed. Judea then became a Roman province, administered by prefects appointed by the emperor. (CSB)

After Herod’s death, this son was made ruler of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea. A brutal tyrant, he was deposed and exiled in AD 6. (TLSB)

After the death of Herod, Caesar Augustus divided Herod’s portion of the empire between Herod’s three sons. To Archelaus one half of the kingdom was given, which was Judea, Idumea, and Samaria. He was to become king, if he proved worthy the position, but that was not to be the case. Nine years later charges against him were leveled by his brothers, and he was exiled to Vienne, where he died. Antipas was given Galilee and Perea, and he ruled 42 years before he was driven into exile. He was the murdered of Christ’s forerunner, and the one whom Jesus called a fox. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Galilee. The northern part of Palestine in Jesus’ day. (CSB)

Joseph had evidently planned to go back to Bethlehem in Judea, but God if the directed him elsewhere. (TLSB)

The temple authorities in Jerusalem tended to look down on people living in Galilee because they came into contact with many more Gentiles. (TLSB)

2:23 Again a fulfillment of Scripture. While elsewhere Matthew cites specific prophecies by referring to them as spoken by “the prophet,” meaning that he has a specific prophet in mind each time (1:22; 2:5, 15, 17; 3:3; 4:14), here Matthew simply makes a general reference to “what was said through the prophets.” The meaning of this general reference is an old crux that has been the subject of much discussion. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Joseph takes Jesus to Nazareth, an obscure town nowhere mentioned in the Old Testament. The Greek word in our text is not easily related philologically to the town name of Nazareth, and it may have had another meaning than simply “a resident of Nazareth” (cf. *BAGD* p. 532). Nathanael asked, “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (Jn 1:46). “Nazarene” appears to have been a synonym for “despised” (cf. Is 53:3, “He was despised and rejected”). Another possibility is that “Nazarene” relates to “Nazirite,” since the Hebrew and Greek words are quite similar. Num 6:1–21 describes the role of a Nazirite. Also, the location of Nazareth in Galilee (v 22) makes the prophecy Matthew describes in 4:12–16 relevant here too. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Perhaps the most plausible explanation is that Matthew is referring to prophecies that the Messiah would be a Branch from the line of David. Is 11:1 uses *netser* (pronounced *nay-tser*), which would be rendered into a Greek word similar to the one in our text. There are also other prophecies of Christ as a Branch or Shoot, but they use a different Hebrew word, *tsemach* (Is 4:2; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12). In any event, the adjective *Nazarene* was frequently applied later to Christ and Christians, both in Scripture and in extra-biblical literature. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Nazareth. A rather obscure town, nowhere mentioned in the OT. It was Jesus’ hometown (13:54–57; see Lk 2:39; 4:16–24; Jn 1:45–46). (CSB)

While Matthew only mentions that Mary and Joseph made their home in Nazareth after the flight to Egypt, Luke notes that Mary and Joseph were from Nazareth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

Small, insignificant town not mentioned in the OT. Hardly the place from which to expect the Messiah. (TLSB)

Prophets – Does not refer to one prophet but to OT prophets in general. (TLSB)

He will be called a Nazarene. These exact words are not found in the OT and probably refer to several OT prefigurations and/or predictions (note the plural, “prophets”) that the Messiah would be despised (e.g., Ps 22:6; Isa 53:3), for in Jesus’ day “Nazarene” was virtually a synonym for “despised” (see Jn 1:45–46). Some hold that in speaking of Jesus as a “Nazarene,” Matthew is referring primarily to the word “Branch” (Hebrew *nešer*) in Isa 11:1. (CSB)

Because Nazareth was a despised place, someone coming from there would also be despised. Matthew’s comment reflects the surprising character of the outcome of these prophecies. That

many would despise the Messiah is reflected in various OT prophecies (cf Ps 22:6–8, 13; Is 53:2–3, 8). (TLSB)

To be called a Nazarene was not a compliment among the Jew. Nazareth was an undistinguished place. When Philip found Nathanael and told him that they had found the Messiah in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael's response was, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46) Pontius Pilate also intended it as sarcasm when he composed the superscription for Jesus' cross: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (John 19:19). (PBC)

2:19–23 God's revelation leads Joseph to take Mary as his wife. He later flees to Egypt and finally settles permanently in Nazareth with God's guidance. These events may have seemed confusing to Joseph, but God had a plan. All of the Lord's leading was to fulfill OT prophecies. We do not always know where God is leading us, but we can be sure that He will be with us and that His plans are for our good. • Loving Father, help me to pray with Jesus, "Your will be done," and follow where You lead. Amen. (TLSB)