



Matthew 1–14

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**RIVERVIEW
CHURCH**

Prepared by Allen Browne for Riverview Church, 2023.

Original translation of Scripture used, unless noted otherwise.

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1 The birth of the king (Matthew 1–2)

Welcome to this study of Matthew's Gospel. There's nothing of greater significance for you to devote your life to than knowing Jesus. Our prayer is that we know him better as we open ourselves up to the God revealed in Christ, the Good News according to Matthew.

We'll take two chapters each week, one each session with a coffee break in between. To get the most from each session, read the two chapters ahead of time and jot down your thoughts as you journal your way through Matthew.

Your questions are welcome. While we can't spend long on any one verse, we'll try to cover the topics of interest to you. At the end of each week's notes you'll find links to commentary on specific verses, hopefully the ones you want to pursue.

What we'll focus on most is knowing Christ—who he is, and what he's doing. So, before we open Matthew, take a moment to jot down how you would describe Jesus' identity and mission.

Who was Jesus? How would you describe his identity?

.....

What did Jesus come to do? How would you describe his mission?

.....

There are many possible answers to these questions. What's most important for you?

At the end of this series, we'll revisit these questions and see how our appreciation for Jesus' identity and mission have grown.

Is the gospel in the Gospels? (Note: *gospel* with a small G means the good news message, whereas *Gospel* with a capital refers to the name of a book such as the Gospel of Matthew.)

The Gospels are accounts of Jesus' life. Richard Burridge compared them to other writings from the Greco-Roman era, and confirmed they are biographies.¹

So, do the Gospels contain the gospel? What is the gospel message?

For the Gospel writers, the gospel is a person. They want us to know who he was and what he did, for knowing him transforms us. In the Gospels we come to know the Christ: his birth, life, identity, relationships, teachings, leadership, self-giving love, faithfulness, death, and the authority he received as he was raised from tomb to throne. We see how he uses his authority to give life to God's world.

There was this moment when Peter realized who Jesus was: "You are the Christ!" Jesus responded, "Bless you, Peter! ... Now I can tell you who you are" (Matthew 16:16-18). We discover our identity, our mission, our purpose as we come to know him.

Any questions before we start with Chapter 1 of Matthew's Gospel?

¹ Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?* (Eerdmans, 2004).

1.1 Jesus in the Jewish story (Matthew 1)

Questions help us enter the story. What questions do you have from Matthew 1?

If you don't have questions yet, here are some you might like to ask Matthew:

1. If you wanted us to read your book, Matthew, why did you start with a list of names that are as interesting as reading a Jewish telephone book?
2. If you want us to know Jesus is our Saviour, why did you say *he will save his people from their sins*? Why his people? What were their sins? (Verse 21)
3. You quoted Isaiah 7:14 as a prediction of Jesus' virgin birth, but Isaiah was describing a problem eight centuries earlier and the word "virgin" isn't even in the Hebrew text. I don't get how you're using the Old Testament. (Verse 23)

Our first question is around Jesus' identity.

Who is the Christ? (1:1)

Matthew launches his book with an excited declaration of Jesus' identity. Jesus is: *Anointed son of David, son of Abraham*.

Depending on the translation you're using, you may see *Christ* or *Messiah* rather than *Anointed*. Matthew was writing in Greek, so he used the word *christos* meaning "anointed." *Christ* is not Jesus' surname; *Christ* is a title.

Matthew Bates reminds us, "Jesus Christ is *a claim not a name*."² And what a claim it is! To say that Jesus is the *Christ* is to say that he is God's *Anointed*—the ruler chosen and appointed by heaven for the world.

Matthew bases that claim on the Old Testament story. David was the fountainhead of all the kings of Judah, for God had promised him the kingship forever. But no son of David had been anointed as king since the kingdom fell almost 600 years earlier. If God's Anointed had now arrived, he was truly good news for all the people of God, the descendants of Abraham.

The king's arrival is the *gospel*. Gospel means good news. The arrival of God's anointed ruler to rescue God's people and bring us back under heaven's reign is the best news this planet has ever known.

That was the Jesus' gospel. Wherever he went among his people, this *Anointed son of David* announced *the gospel of the kingdom* and restored his people from all their sufferings (Matthew 4:23; 9:35).

But "the Christ" is a controversial claim. Other powers claim to rule the world. Caesar claimed to rule the whole Mediterranean region, with Herod appointed as king over the Jews. And in Jerusalem, the temple leaders, the Sanhedrin, and the elders of the people held significant power.

Those rulers do not take kindly to anyone else claiming to be king. They will join forces to eliminate any threat to their power. They might even crucify *the king of the Jews* (Matthew 27:11, 29, 37) to ensure this "Christ" cannot rule.

² Matthew W. Bates, *Why the Gospel? Living the Good News of King Jesus with Purpose* (Eerdmans, 2023), 9. Emphasis original.

So how will God's Anointed receive his authority? All they have is the power of death, but God has the power of life. God breaks the grip of evil and death over the world when he raises up his Christ and gives him *all authority in heaven and on earth*. Since heaven has given him the kingship, he commissions us to train *all the nations* to live under *his command* (28:18-20).

That's where the Gospel of Matthew takes us. That's the significance of Jesus' birth, identity, calling, life, death, resurrection and enthronement.

The arrival of the Christ fulfils the promises God gave to Abraham and to David (1:1).

God promised a nation to **Abraham**. This nation was to represent God to the nations. Through Abraham's descendants, God would restore the *blessing* of his leadership to the nations of the world (Genesis 12:1-3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:3-4; 35:9-12; Psalm 72:17).

God promised the kingship to **David** and his descendants forever (2 Samuel 7:11-16). The anointed son of David was to reign on earth as the representative of his Father in the heavens who was king of all nations (Psalms 2:2, 7-8; 47:8-9; 72:11; 96:10).

But God's nation had not served him. God's nation had fallen to Babylon.

The rise and fall of God's kingdom (1:2-17)

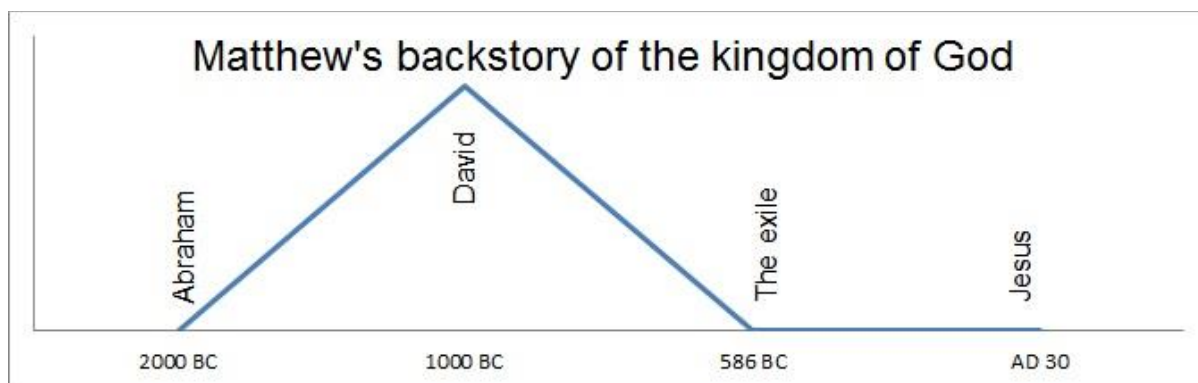
Matthew summarizes the generations of God's people in three stages:

- a) **The pre-kingdom era:** these 14 names are the leaders of Judah (David's tribe) from Abraham to King David (verses 2-6).
- b) **The kingdom era:** these 14 names are kings who reigned from David until the kingdom fell to Babylon (verses 7-11).
- c) **The post-kingdom era:** these 14 names are descendants of David who could not reign because the nation was captive to foreign powers (verses 12-16).

In summary, Matthew's genealogy tells the story of the rise and fall of God's kingdom:

Matthew 1:17 (NIV)

There were fourteen generations in all from **Abraham** to **David**, fourteen from **David** to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the **exile** to the **Messiah** [i.e. Anointed king].



Why had they been sent into exile? Because they had not been faithful to their agreement (covenant) to serve the LORD their king. Since they refused to serve him, the LORD had handed them over to serve other rulers. But the covenant also promised that God would keep the door open for them to return to him:

Deuteronomy 30:1–3 (NIV)

¹ When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come on you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, ² and **when you** and your children **return** to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, ³ then **the LORD** your God **will restore** your fortunes and have compassion on you **and gather** you again from all the nations where he scattered you.

Five centuries later, they were still waiting for God to pardon and restore them as his kingdom. Fourteen generations had waited for God to send his Anointed ruler.

Saviour of his people (1:18-21)

And then God does something astounding! Mary is pledged to be married to Joseph, but he finds out she's pregnant. He decides to *send her away* (the technical term for *divorce*). He plans to do so discretely so as not to cause her further shame.

God upsets Joseph's divorce plans with a prophetic message. In a dream, a heavenly messenger explains that Mary is pregnant not because of unfaithfulness but because of a life-giving act of God. Joseph must not judge her as guilty and exile her. God is overturning the exile of his people and their guilt, rescuing them through her child.

I'm offering my own translation to help us hear the familiar text in a fresh way.

Matthew 1:20-21 (my translation)

²⁰ While he was considering these things, look: an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, "Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to receive Mary as your wife, for her Spirit-initiated conception is holy. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you will name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

God calls Joseph to accept the child and give him a name as if he was his own. In Hebrew, the name Jesus was *Joshua* or *Yeshua*. It means, *Yah(weh) Saves*. Jesus is the God-anointed descendant of King David who finally rescues his people from the devastating effects of their disobedience to the heavenly sovereign, restoring them as the kingdom of God.

God with us (1:22-23)

In this child, God was restoring the covenant relationship with his people that disintegrated when he sent them into exile. God calls Joseph to do the same for Mary.

Matthew says this is how God had always planned to restore his people into his reign:

Matthew 1:22-23

²² This whole thing has come about to **fulfil** the word of the Lord through the prophet, ²³ "See, the virgin will conceive and bear a son and people will call him Immanuel" which translates as "God-with-us."

Matthew wants us to know that Jesus *fulfils* everything God had promised his people through the Old Testament prophets. We'll see him use this word again and again. Each time, there's an OT story behind this claim.

The quotation in verse 23 is from Isaiah 7:14. Isaiah 7 comes from the time of the divided kingdom when:

- Ahaz was king of Judah (in Jerusalem).
- Pekah was king of Israel (in Samaria).
- Rezin was king of Aram (in Damascus).

Israel and Aram threatened to invade Judah.

Ahaz was outnumbered, and scared witless. Isaiah assured him Judah would not fall, since the Davidic king was appointed by God. But trusting God was crucial: *If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all* (7:9).

Isaiah asked, “What do you need to see to trust God’s got this?” Ahaz refused any sign:

Isaiah 7:13–16 (NRSV)

¹³ Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also?”

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. **Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. ...**

¹⁶ Before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

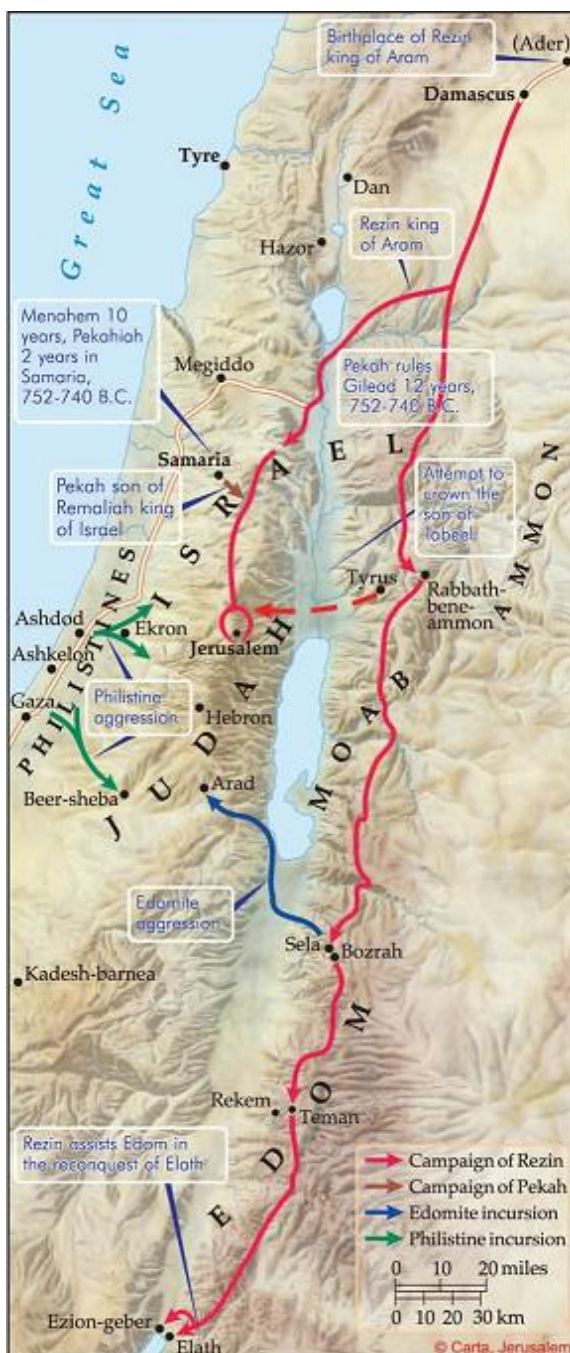
Every time Ahaz saw this child in the palace, he was reminded of the God who always reigns and had established him as the anointed son of David: “God is with us!”

Within two decades, Israel and Syria had fallen. Assyria invaded. Judah would have fallen too if Hezekiah had not trusted God. But eventually the kings of Judah did fall to Babylon because of the unfaithfulness of kings like Manasseh, Hezekiah’s son (2 Kings 21).

So how would God’s people be restored? They needed a faithful son of David who could restore the presence of God reigning among his people. They still needed the *Immanuel* child, the one who was *God-with-us*.

Virgin conception (1:22-23)

You may have noticed that the NRSV of Isaiah 7:14 spoke of a *young woman*. The Hebrew language has a word for virgin (*bēṭû-lāh*), but Isaiah did not use that word. He merely spoken of a young woman of marriable age (*‘āl-māh*). Isaiah was not promising a virgin birth in Ahaz’s palace.



Rose Then and Now Bible Map Atlas with Biblical Background and Culture (Rose Publishing, 2012), 97.

Matthew wrote in Greek. Naturally, he used the Septuagint, the Greek translation available to him. The Septuagint does use the term for a virgin (*parthenos*). So Matthew makes the point that God brought his Christ into the world through a virgin, just as the Septuagint had said 200 years earlier.

The anointed son of David was born without a human father. He was Immanuel—the divine presence with us, the faithful king who would save his people and restore the whole earth to heaven's reign.

Joseph enacts the gospel (1:24-25)

Matthew is not saying there's something wrong with sexual relations. God blessed humans with the capacity for procreation. It's what he intended from the beginning (Genesis 1:28). Nevertheless, some churches have tied guilt to sexual desire. For Catholics, if Mary was the mother of God, she must have been a perpetual virgin. It's not what Matthew says:

Matthew 1:24–25 (NIV)

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Joseph listened to the angelic dream. Instead of sending Mary away, he brought her home! That's what God was doing for his people through his child. God was bringing his people home from all the places where they had been scattered, home to live as his nation in his Anointed, in Immanuel.

Joseph recognized what God was doing when he gave Mary's son the name *God-rescues* (Jesus).

Your thoughts?

1.2 Jesus on the global stage (Matthew 2)

What questions do you have on Matthew 2?

Here's some more to consider:

1. If God used the stars to communicate with the magi, is it okay to use horoscopes to discover our destiny?
2. I'm offended at Herod murdering all those children! If this is what Christmas means, it's not suitable for children. Or for decent adults.
3. How can verse 15 use Hosea 11:1 like that? Wasn't Hosea talking about Israel coming out of Egypt in the exodus, not about Jesus fleeing to Egypt?
4. Verse 23 quotes something that isn't even in the Old Testament. How can this be a proof-text that someone from Nazareth could be the Messiah?

The magi from the east

In Chapter 1, Matthew presented Jesus in the Jewish story. But Jesus isn't only the Messiah for Jewish people; he is God's anointed king for the whole earth. That's the title he receives by the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel. He dies as *the king of the Jews*, and rises with *all authority in heaven and on earth* (Matthew 28:18).

In Chapter 2, Matthew reveals Jesus' authority on the global stage.

When he was born, visitors from the east arrived in Jerusalem asking, "Where is the newly born king of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east and we came to pay him homage" (2:2).

To the east of Israel and Jordan, it's all desert (Arabia). These visitors must have come from further east: Babylonia or Persia. Those empires had captured and ruled the Jews in previous centuries.

Matthew describes the visitors as *magi*. It's a Persian word, from which we get "magician." *Magi* were trained in occult arts such as interpreting the stars or dreams. According to Daniel 2:2, Persian kings employed *magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers* to advise them.

The *magi* observed which stars were ascendant, and when a wandering star (planet) entered a constellation that they associated with a particular power—much like astrologers do today. Based on how they understood the sky, these magi concluded that the rising of a particular star represented a new king for the Jewish people.

That doesn't mean God is fine with astrology. God's Law for this people explicitly banned occult practices such as reading omens (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). But these foreigners had no other way to hear from God. They were looking to the stars, so God used the stars to speak to them! God uses whatever it takes to reveal himself to people.

Given the magi's interest in the stars, it's possible that some of the Jewish people had told them about Balaam, an ancient prophet from the east who made the journey to the Promised Land to curse God's people. When he got there and began listening to what the God of Israel had to say about his people, Balaam declared only blessing for

them. This pagan prophet even announced the rise of a Davidic king:
A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel. (Numbers 24:17).

In the 1200 years since Balaam's prophecy, the Davidic dynasty had risen, and fallen. The star the magi saw convinced them it was rising again. They travelled over 1000 kilometres to meet the new king. Apparently God knows how to reveal himself to the nations, and the revelation of God is in his Christ, his anointed ruler for the world.

It is God who reveals his Christ. It will be another three decades before Peter and the disciples realize who Jesus is. When they declare, "You are the Christ," Jesus tells them, "This was not *revealed* to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:16-17). God is the one who reveals his Anointed ruler. Salvation comes through the revelation of the Christ. God can and does reveal himself and his Christ to people who are searching in all the wrong places—pagan prophets like Balaam, and occultists like these magi.

Sometimes people wonder how God can save people who've never heard of Jesus, who have not responded to the gospel in the way that we expect. I guess God knows how to reveal himself to people. And to evaluate their hearts.

The leaders in Jerusalem

The magi's visit stirs up the hornet's nest in Jerusalem:

Matthew 2:1-4 (my translation)

¹ When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Judea, during the reign of King Herod, look, portent advisors from the east turned up in Jerusalem.

² They asked, "Where is the newly born king of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east and we came to pay him homage."

³ When King Herod heard, he was shaken, and all Jerusalem with him.

⁴ Assembling all the chief priests and Bible scholars, he made enquiry of them as to where the anointed ruler is born.

Here's the problem. Herod had besieged and captured Jerusalem in 37 BC. He executed his opponent (Antigonus). The Roman Empire then proclaimed Herod the Great as "king of the Jews." Herod was partly Jewish (Idumean), but he was not about to tolerate anyone else being born as *king of the Jews*.

The chief priests and Torah teachers were completely unaware of the Messiah's birth. They had the written revelation of God, but after 600 years of foreign rule they were not expecting God's anointed to be restored to them.

The temple leaders know that the anointed ruler should come from David's lineage. David was a shepherd from Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:2). One of the minor prophets had spoken of Israel's demise, and a future time when a descendant of Bethlehem would once again reign (Micah 5:2). Tragically, the Jewish people who had God's written revelation were less aware than foreigners who relied on gazing at the stars!

Matthew implies that the Jerusalem temple leaders had little interest in protecting *the newly born king of the Jews*. It's almost like they're colluding with Herod—ignorant of or complicit with Herod's intentions to preserve his own power.

Matthew may be hinting at how the story will unfold. The animosity between the temple and the king is the primary theme of Matthew 21–28, as the temple leaders collude with the appointed Roman leader (Pilate) to get rid of the king of the Jews.

Responses to the king

So begins the divisive question of Jesus' identity. While foreigners have come to pay him homage, the man who calls himself "king of the Jews" feigns allegiance (verse 7), assisted by the temple leaders who know nothing of him. Jesus' identity becomes the question that divides the world (Matthew 10:34).

Traditionally, there were three wise men because they offered three gifts as tribute to the king. In reality, it would have taken a larger caravan to make the journey with these precious gifts in safety.

Once again, God speaks to the magi in a language they can understand: through a dream. They realize Herod's intentions are evil. They avoid returning through Jerusalem (verse 12).

Herod realizes the wise men have seen through him. They have not led him to the newborn king, so Herod take drastic action. He had already *ascertained from them precisely when the star sign appeared* (verse 7), so he's ready to act:

Matthew 2:16

Then Herod, seeing his authority mocked by the portent advisors, was very angry. Sending his agents, he executed all the children in Bethlehem and surrounding areas from two years and under, in keeping with the time he had established through the portent advisors.

This is crazy! Harmless children are wiped out to protect a tyrant's power. It's not inconsistent with what we know of Herod. Josephus (a Jewish historian) describes how Herod had members of his own family executed because he considered them a threat to his reign.

But this kind of suffering is not new to the Jewish people. Jeremiah described the exile to Babylon as Jacob's wife (Rachel) weeping in her grave as the children of Israel were slaughtered trying to defend Jerusalem for the Davidic kings.

Jeremiah 31:15 (NIV)

This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

That was when they went into captivity. As Matthew has already pointed out, they're still suffering in captivity to foreign powers as they wait for the Messiah to save his people (1:17, 21).

Their suffering at the hands of evil rulers goes all the way back to when they were slaves of Pharaoh. Remember when Moses was born? Pharaoh treated the Hebrew slaves as a potential threat (Exodus 1:10). His actions were not so different from Herod's: *the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, ... "If you see that the baby is a boy, kill him"* (Exodus 1:15-16).

Jesus' birth—like Moses' birth—reveals how the rulers of this world hold power. To gain power, they use war as Herod did in 37 BC. To hold power they assassinate their enemies or even their own family as Herod did more than once.

Death is what holds the world in slavery to powers that are not God. That's why Scripture describes death as the ultimate enemy (e.g. 1 Corinthians 15:26). If God is to rescue his world from its dominion by evil powers and restore it to the reign of his Son, the ultimate enemy God must remove is death itself.

The asylum seeker family

Before Matthew's Gospel is over, God's anointed will overcome death, but for now he must escape death:

Matthew 2:13-15

¹³ When they'd gone, see, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, "Get up! Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt and stay there until I tell you, for Herod is about to seek the child to destroy him." ¹⁴ He got up and took the child and his mother in the night and fled to Egypt, ¹⁵ and stayed there until Herod met his end. So this is how the word of the Lord through the prophet was fulfilled, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

The son God sent as his anointed ruler is safer in a foreign land than he is in the land God promised Abraham. At less than two years of age, Jesus is a refugee.

Australia has a history of not being kind to refugees. Asylum seekers who come to our shores tend to be treated with suspicion. Rather than care about what horrors they're escaping, we're concerned about whether they will take our jobs or dilute our culture or take a share of our wealth and lower our standard of living. I guess our attitudes haven't changed much from Herod's with his concern for what would benefit himself.

Jacob's family had originally gone to Egypt to seek refuge from a famine (Genesis 46). They ended up in slavery there (Exodus 1). In Jewish memory, "Egypt" was associated with both the sufferings of slavery and God's promise to rescue them:

- Jeremiah was constantly comparing the exile to Babylon with Israel's original enslavement in Egypt, calling the people to trust God and not to go back there (e.g. Jeremiah 42).
- Isaiah promised that God would provide a new "exodus" from Babylon, like the day God led them out of slavery through the Red Sea (e.g. Isaiah 43:14-19).
- Hosea promised that God would do for Israel what he had done when he rescued his nation from Pharaoh's grasp (Hosea 11:1).

Remember how Moses kept telling Pharaoh the LORD's message, "Let my people go!" Because of the promises God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Hebrews belonged to God. Of all the nations of the earth, they were the first to inherit what God was planning. In that sense, they were God's firstborn son. That's the ultimatum God gave Pharaoh:

Exodus 4:22–23 (ESV)

²² Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is **my**

firstborn son, ²³ 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.’ ”

Now God's eternal Son is following the path trodden by Israel, the first nation to serve the Heavenly Father as his son. The saviour God has sent his people is not taking up the weapons of death to defeat the tyrants like Pharaoh or Herod. The eternal Son is putting aside his majesty, taking the place of a slave, walking where Israel has walked, into slavery, as the Son who will bring about the new exodus, delivering the people of God not only from specific tyrants like Pharaoh or Herod but from the domain of evil and death, the powers that have been oppressing God's world all along.

That's the new exodus Hosea promised: *When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son* (Hosea 11:1).

That's what Matthew saw Jesus doing: fleeing from the tyrants who were now in control, to lead a new exodus from the power of death (Matthew 2:13-15).

Incognito

Our calendar was designed to start from the birth of Jesus, but we didn't quite get the calculations right. King Herod died in 4 BC, and Jesus was already in Egypt when that occurred (verse 19). The birth of Jesus must therefore have been around 4–6 BC.

With Herod's death, God calls Jesus' family to return, just as he called Moses to return after Pharaoh's death (Exodus 2:23 – 3:11). Herod's son Archelaus was now reigning, but he has a reputation even worse than his father. The Jews eventually sent a delegation to Rome to get Archelaus deposed.

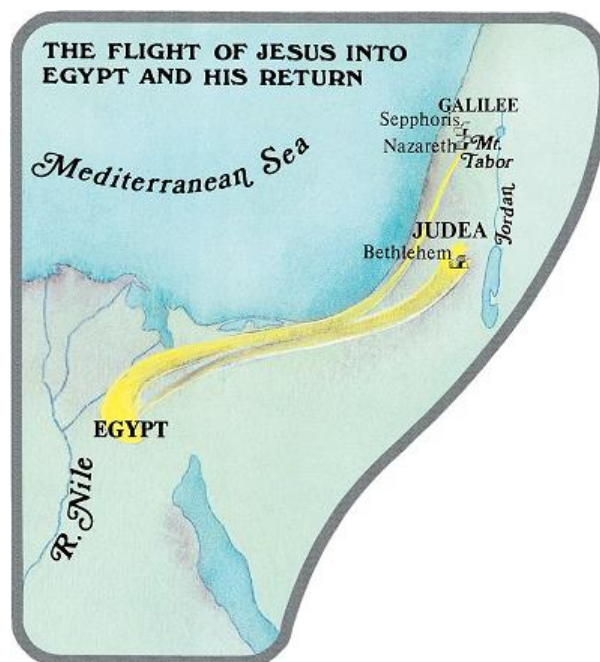
So it's hardly surprising that Joseph doesn't trust Herod's son. He doesn't take the future king back to Bethlehem where he was born: it's too scary to have the anointed king in that place.

Matthew 2:22-23

²² Hearing Archelaus was king of Judah in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Warned in a dream, he withdrew to the areas of Galilee, ²³ where he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.

That's how the word spoken through the prophet was fulfilled, “He will be known as a Nazarene.”

Nazareth was about 100 kilometres north of Jerusalem, 30 kilometres west of the Sea of Galilee. It was Mary's hometown (Luke 1:26), but not a particularly significant place. About 5 kilometres away was Sepphoris, one of the most important cities of Hellenistic Galilee, and a place that Herod Antipas had built up.



F. F. Bruce, *Bible History Atlas*, (Carta Jerusalem, 2005), 68.

Nazareth had no significance in Jewish history either. It's not even mentioned in the Old Testament. That's why Matthew's final comment in Chapter 2 is puzzling: what prophetic reference did he have in mind?

Some readers have wondered if Matthew was thinking of the Nazirite vow mentioned in Numbers 6. Others have wondered if Matthew was thinking of the way Isaiah and Jeremiah spoke of the Messiah as the *Branch* (e.g. Isaiah 11:1). That word—*nēšer* in Hebrew—sounds a bit like Nazareth.

Or Matthew's point may be that the prophets said nothing about Nazareth. Unlike Bethlehem, Nazareth has no prophetic significance, so when people heard Jesus was from Nazareth their usual reaction was, "Huh? From where?" (e.g. John 1:45-46).

For the next 30 years, Jesus grew up as a nobody from nowhere. The king from heaven stepped down to be born in David's town. He lived as a refugee in Egypt, and then in an out-of-the-way place, far from the capital, insignificant, unnoticed.

This is how R. T. France expresses it in his commentary on *Matthew* (NICNT series published by Eerdmans, 2007), page 95:

On this view, then, the words "He shall be called a Nazorean" represent the prophetic expectation that the Messiah would appear from nowhere and would as a result meet with incomprehension and rejection. Of course the prophets could not speak specifically of Nazareth, which did not even exist when they wrote. But the connotations of the derogatory term Nazorean as applied in the first century to the messianic pretender Jesus captured just what some of the prophets had predicted—a Messiah who came from the wrong place, who did not conform to the expectations of Jewish tradition, and who as a result would not be accepted by his people. Even the embarrassment of an origin in Nazareth is thus turned to advantage as part of the scriptural model which Matthew has worked so hard to construct in this introductory section of his account of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

Remember *Strider* in *Lord of the Rings*? When the hobbits first meet him at the Prancing Pony Inn, they have no idea they're talking to Aragon, the future king. He's incognito.

Matthew 2 begins in Bethlehem, birthplace of the kings. But the newborn king is soon in exile because the rulers do not recognize God's authority. It's been Israel's story for a long time: they do indeed need a new exile. So the chapter ends with the king in Nazareth, unrecognized, far from the corridors of power. At least for now.



Reconstruction of a first century carpenter's shop, Nazareth village. Photo by Allen Browne. 2017.

1.3 Conclusion

Jesus is the heaven-sent king. He liberates the earth from enslavement to other powers that are not God, the evil that's apparent in tyrants who kill even babies to keep their own power. Religious leaders who claim to serve God can be complicit with evil.

That's why God's Christ is such good news! Imagine a world restored in Immanuel, the king who is God with us. That's a world of restored relationships—people restored to God, and to each other.

But God's Christ does not make himself king through conquest over any potential threat as Herod did. As Matthew showed, God's Christ was already in God's world as a refugee. As a no one from nowhere, he lived incognito, waiting for his Father to make him known, relying on his Father's power.

No one else is worthy of the title. Jesus' authority is given by heaven, not taken on earth. There is no one else worthy of the name that he has been given.

What do you hear about Jesus in the first two chapters of Matthew?

If you'd like to explore further, these links provide more context for Matthew's Gospel:

Mat	Matthew's Gospel: outline and summary
Mat	Matthew's main message
Mat	The message of Matthew's Gospel (podcast)
Mat 1 – 10	Kingdom summary: Matthew 1–10
Mat 1 – 5	Matthew 1–5 reveals Jesus fulfilling Torah

And these links provide more detail on specific verses in the first two chapters:

Mat 1:1-17	Why ancestry.com?
Mat 1:18-25	Immanuel
Mat 1:22-23	Our king among us
Mat 2	Five inspirational angles on Christmas
Mat 2:1-10	King of the Jews
Mat 2:1-12	How did the magi find Jesus?
Mat 2:13-15	Jesus fulfils what?
Mat 2:16-23	God as asylum seeker
Mat 2:17-23	An unknown from nowhere

If you're reading this on paper, scroll down the Matthew in this index to find the links:

<https://allenbrowne.blog/scriptureindex/>

In preparation for next time, read Matthew 3–4. Jot down your thoughts about what God had to say about Jesus' identity (Chapter 3), and how Jesus approached his mission to liberate the people of the earth from domination by evil (Chapter 4).