

# A King in Flight–Pain and Hope in God’s Love

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## **Matthew 2:10-23**

<sup>10</sup> When the Magi saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> And going into the house, they saw **the child with Mary his mother**, and they fell down and did obeisance to him. Then, opening their treasures, they **offered him gifts**, gold and frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they departed to **their own country by another way**.

<sup>13</sup> Now when they had departed, behold, an **angel** of the Lord appears by a **dream** to **Joseph** saying, “**Get up; take the child and his mother**, and **flee into Egypt**, and stay there till I tell you. For **Herod** is going to **seek** for the child, to **destroy him**.”

<sup>14</sup> And he **got up and took the child and his mother** by **night** and withdrew into **Egypt**. <sup>15</sup> And he stayed there till the **death of Herod**, in order to **fill up** what was said by the Lord through the prophet, “*Out of **Egypt** I called **my son**.*” [Hosea 11:1].

<sup>16</sup> Then, when Herod perceived that he had been treated as a fool by the Magi, he was exceedingly enraged. He **sent** and **killed** all the **little boys in Bethlehem** and its countryside who were **two years** old under under, according to **the time** that he ascertained from the Magi. <sup>17</sup> Then what was said through **Jeremiah** the prophet was **filled up**:

<sup>18</sup> “**A voice** was heard in Ramah,  
**crying** and great **lamentation**,  
**Rachel weeping** for her **children**,  
and she did not wish to be comforted,  
because **they are no more**.” [Jeremiah 31:15]

<sup>19</sup> But when Herod died (in 4 bc), behold, an angel of the Lord appeared by a dream to Joseph in Egypt, <sup>20</sup> saying, “**Get up; take the child and his mother** and go into the **land of Israel**, for those seeking the child’s life have died.”

<sup>21</sup> And he **got up and took the child and his mother** and entered into the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that **Archelaus** was reigning as **king of Judea** in place of his father Herod, he was **afraid** to go there. But when he was given **guidance by dream** he withdrew into the districts of **Galilee**. <sup>23</sup> And when he arrived, he settled in a town called **Nazareth**, in order that **what was said through the prophets** might be **filled up**, that he will be called “**Nazorean**.” [Cf. Isaiah 11:1]

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## **Hosea 11:1-4 [Cf. Gen 15:13; Exod 4:22]**

<sup>1</sup> When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. <sup>2</sup> The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. <sup>3</sup> Yet it was I who taught Ephraim (= Israel) to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. <sup>4</sup> I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.

## **Jeremiah 31:13b-17a [Cf. Hos 9:16-17]**

<sup>13</sup> I will turn their mourning into joy, | I will comfort them and give them gladness for sorrow. | ...

<sup>15</sup> Thus says Yahweh: | A voice is heard in Ramah, | lamentation and bitter weeping. | Rachel is weeping for her children; | she refuses to be comforted for her children, | because they are no more. | <sup>16</sup> Thus says Yahweh: | Keep your voice from weeping, | and your eyes from tears; | ... they shall come back from the land of the enemy; | <sup>17</sup> there is hope for your future.

***Isaiah 11:1-2 [Cf Isa 4:2; 53:2; 60:21; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech 6:12; also Isa 49:6-8]***

<sup>1</sup> A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch (Heb. Nazer) shall grow out of his roots. <sup>2</sup> The Spirit of Yahweh shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh.

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## **Jesus' Birth – How God Fills up His Story**

Matthew tells of Jesus' birth to help us learn how to hear and understand Jesus' whole story.

There's no sweetness in Mt's narrative, except the Magi's joyful gifts. It's more like the crucifixion: ambiguity and doubt, signs, deception and betrayal, flight and unjust murder. Like Paul's story of Jesus' birth in Phi 2:6-8: emptying, form of a slave, obedient to death.

Mt punctuates the narrative with references to prophets in scripture. These are sometimes taken as proofs for unbelievers: ancient predictions fulfilled in Jesus' birth. But none of them works that way. We've seen overview in royal genealogy with women; virgin conception by Holy Spirit; Messiah's birth in Bethlehem manipulated by Herod, not needed by Magi.

Now Joseph, the dreamer, takes "the child and his mother" into Egypt in flight from danger.

Mt cites Hos 11:1. No prediction. Rather a reference to a basic pattern: Exile (Eden, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Sin), enslavement, threat of death by king; Exodus, God delivers the slaves. But even with the faithlessness and failure of those delivered, God's love persists.

Again Mt cites Jer 31:15. No prediction. Image of Rachel weeping over lost tribes of Ephraim & Manasseh (dead and gone) and later Benjamin with Judah in exile. But basic pattern: even death and exile for real rebellion can't stop the hope in God's creative and restorative love.

Third Mt cites "the prophets" in the wordplay between "Nazareth" and "Nazorean." He shows extensive reflection about many uses of the image of the "Branch" (Nazer, Isa 11:1) for Israel and the Messiah showing how God can restore life and growth to a cut off stump. The Heb verb nazar means to preserve/guard. Through his Servant God preserves/saves others.

## **The Empire Strikes!**

All of this interpretation surrounds the awful story of Herod, who embodies the enslavement and exile of humanity in the world of empire, power, ego-centrism, violence, fear, deceit, manipulation. Herod recognizes the sign the Magi have seen – a true king anointed by God. He tries to get them to do his searching, using data from religious leaders. He wants to protect his own power, assassinate rivals (standard), while himself slave of a larger empire. His search is frustrated. He uses Magi data and strikes with unfettered fury, revealing the iron fist behind the Pax Romana. Rational terror. Horror! Maybe 20 babies! Mothers wailing!

2000 yrs later we can recognize every element. But for our enlightened world, Herod's a piker.

We can see worse almost any day in Yemen or Syria, or the 8,500 kids that silently die of malnutrition every day in our world (UNICEF). We see children victimized all the time.

We know that Herod's power is the real power, and we've settled down in Herod's world.

We just look at other things! God's king looks weak: a toddler in a family seeking asylum.

Herod can't get him this time. He dies too soon. But rulers, priests, crowds will crucify him.

## **God's King Strikes Back!**

Mt's drama must unfold. The exiled king must strike back! He does! He empties himself to bring his enemies home from their exile in violence & fear into hope & new life. He's vulnerable in this world but not defeated. He is exiled, crucified, but he conquers death with new life. He strikes back with forgiveness, reconciliation, life, loves his enemies and dies to give them life.

Which kingdom is real? Which will last? Which do I live by? Which do I trust? Which is Christmas?