

Bible Study 2022-2023

Class #7

10/25/22

Reminder

- We will not meet for Bible Study on Tuesday, November 1st All Saints Day
- Please go to Mass as it is a Holy Day of Obligation

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- **Matthew 2:2** *“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him”*
 - Father asked how did these men from the East know about this story?
 - He pointed out that the people of *Israel* (including the *Benjaminites* and *Levites*) had been in *Babylon* and *Mesopotamia* for at least 70 years
 - By the first century, there were many Jews remaining in that region
 - The Law, the prophets, and the wisdom literature had been taken by the Jews into captivity where they established synagogues for their weekly worship
 - Much of this Jewish literature had been adopted and absorbed into the local pagan prophetic guilds

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- So, the story about a king of Israel who someday would be foreshadowed by a star (**Numbers 24:17**) was passed down causing many of the pagan scholars to be watching for the prophesied star
- When they saw this new star in the East, they wondered if this could be the fulfilment of the Jewish prophesy
- Thus, they mounted their camels and headed for *Jerusalem*
- Most likely, it took them a year to get there from *Persia*
- Upon their arrival, they began to ask about the new King of the Jews

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- **Matthew 2:3-6** “ *When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled,... for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel*”
 - Matthew reminds us over and over about the problems with King *Herod*
 - The Greek word here is “**stirred up**” not “troubled”
 - Father said it was like a big dust cloud covered Jerusalem
 - *Herod* had to ask where the Christ was supposed to be born?
 - Once again, the “Christ” and the “King of the Jews” was the same thing

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- Obviously, *Herod* did not know the answer to this question because he was an *Edomite* who was without a Jewish education
- The Jewish leadership told Herod that the “Christ” was to be born in *Bethlehem of Judea* (**Micah 5:2**) where King David came from)

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- **Matthew 2:7-9** *“Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared;...till it came to rest over the place where the child was”*
 - Father asked that we highlight the word “time”
 - *Herod* wanted to determine the age of this child
 - *Bethlehem* was only about 5 miles from *Jerusalem*
 - One can see it from the top of the *Mount of Olives*
 - Thus, when the wise men came out of the gate of *Jerusalem*, they saw the star was over the top of that small village

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- **Matthew 2:10-12** *“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy;...they departed to their own country by another way”*
 - If one looks at the text, we can see that (by this time) Jesus is a child living in a house (not an infant in a stable - cave)
 - When the wise men arrived, they fell down and worshiped him
 - The story that Jesus was born in a stable is in Luke’s gospel (as Matthew tells us about the events before and after his birth, but nothing about the actual birth itself)

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- The shepherds coming to the stable are all from Luke's gospel
- Here, Matthew is telling us about an event that happened about one year after Jesus' birth (many believe that they arrived on the night of his birth)
- Matthew tells about the wise men worshiping Jesus and the gifts of gold (for a king), frankincense (is for God) and myrrh (is for his burial)
- Father pointed out that this was the fulfillment of **Isaiah 60:1-6** (*Isaiah 767-697 BC*)
 - The first half (of Isaiah) is about death, doom, and destruction - (Isaiah 1-39)
 - The second half is about restoration – (Isaiah 40-66)

Isaiah 60

- **Isaiah 60:1-6** *“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you....They shall bring gold, frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord”*
 - Father pointed out that right off the bat we can see the imagery here
 - To “shine” refers to the star
 - God is the “great light” that they will see
 - They are going to come to the light of Israel (the nation that sits in the light of the *Torah*)

Isaiah 60 (Cont)

- This means that the nations around *Israel* (who were in the darkness) will come to the *Torah*, the light of *Israel's* God
- This is the passage from which we get the words of the Hymn “We Three Kings”
- These wise men are called kings in this hymn because the author was trying to tell us that this is the fulfillment of **Isaiah 60**
- This is about the Gentile nations being gathered (years later) to the Lord
- All of the prophets (as discussed by Luke in **Acts 15**) spoke of how the Gentiles at the end of time would gather to God's people Israel and become one with them

Isaiah 60 (Cont)

- This happened to explain why the people of God today are no longer only the Jews
- The people of God are now “catholic” (universal)
- Matthew is demonstrating that the prophecy from *Isaiah* has been fulfilled in the reason the Gentiles were bringing gold and frankincense sense to worship Yahweh, the God of Israel, was because they had given up on their pagan ways and foreign gods and turned to worship the one true God
- This happened briefly during the time of *Balaam*, the prophet who, for a brief moment, began to prophesy to the one true God his story of the kings, bringing their gifts to the light (Jesus)

Isaiah 60 (Cont)

- Matthew is trying to show that at this point Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy
- Jesus is the seed of *Abraham* through which all nations shall be blessed
- Further, Matthew tells us that the kings also gave the baby Jesus “myrrh,” which was something used for the dead
- It was a strong and pungent smelling spice (along with nard) that the Jews used to anoint a body, and hopefully to offset the stench of death
- In fact, Matthew related that Jesus was given gold (for the king), frankincense (for the divine king), indicating that this baby Jesus would get myrrh as well because of His death

Isaiah 60 (Cont)

- Here, Matthew is hinting at what is to come
- This means that Jesus was not just a king in the line of *David* through a miraculous conception, but that he is the divine king of old who is now also a human king
- Thus, Matthew can say that he is immortal and will live forever (after he dies)
- Father concluded that this is the reason for the murder of Jesus

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- **Matthew 2:19-20** *“But when Herod died, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child are dead”*
 - Just when things start going well, an angel tells Joseph to move back to *Israel*
 - Father said that the incidents related to Joseph in the Old Testament and this Joseph were not a coincidence
 - Matthew is reminding us that both:
 - Were dreamers
 - Went to Egypt to save Israel from death (Old and New Testament)
 - Refused to have relations with a certain women:
 - Joseph and the General’ Potiphar’s wife
 - Joseph and Mary whom he wanted to quietly

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- Father also discussed the role of artwork in the teaching of the faith
 - The older Joseph was depicted as having a staff that flowered as a symbol that he was the chosen husband of the Blessed Mary
 - Aaron's rod blossomed as a sign that he was to protect the Arc of the Covenant as it represented God dwelling among His people

Matthew 2

- **Matthew 2:13-15** *“Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream,...for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him”*
 - Father reminded us of the earlier Joseph, the dreamer who was sold into *Egypt*
 - This Joseph does exactly what the angel told him to do
 - While they were in *Egypt*, *Herod* decided to kill all the young boys who might be the sought after king of the Jews

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- **Matthew 2:16** *“Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and 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 which he had ascertained from the wise men”*
 - *Herod* could have ascertained from the wise men that Jesus was approximately 1 year old
 - To ensure he got the right one, he established a buffer of up to 2 years old
 - Father said that what happened is exactly the picture of the crazy *Herod* given to us by *Josephus* and other sources

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- It had been reported that *Herod* had killed children in other instances, to include several of his own sons, right up to the moment of his death
- He was paranoid that one of them might try and take the throne from him while he was still king

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- **Matthew 2:17-18** *“Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachael weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled because they were no more”*
 - *Ramah* was a town in the tribal region of *Benjamin* where the Jewish captives were assembled by the Babylonians for exile
 - This event is recorded in **Jeremiah 40:1**
 - Also, *Rachael*, the favorite wife of *Jacob*, died in childbirth (of *Benjamin*) at this location
 - She died on the journey from *Bethel* to *Bethlehem* (her tomb can be seen today)

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- **Matthew 2:20-23** *“Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel,...He shall be called a Nazarene”*
 - *Joseph* was afraid to return to *Judah* because *Herod* the Great’s son *Archelaus* was just as crazy as his father
 - He was so wicked that the Roman Government deposed and exiled him to Rome
 - Just before this, *Joseph* was told by an angel in a dream that even though *Herod* (the Great) was dead, he should go to *Galilee*

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- Father pointed out that the major reason for him to go to a town called *Nazareth* was to fulfill something that a prophet had said
- Further, Joseph grew up there, and it was a Davidic village
- To get the full picture of this decision, we need to look at what Matthew and Luke said about it
 - *Joseph* was in *Nazareth* when he was betrothed to Mary before they went to *Bethlehem* (where his ancestors came from) to comply with the Roman census
 - Thus, they returned to *Nazareth* from *Egypt* to fulfill a message spoken by the prophets, who said that the Messiah would be called a *Nazarene*

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- Father pointed out that this causes a problem, for nowhere in the Bible can we find this quotation
- In fact, we cannot find even a single prophet who said this
- Contrary to some commentators who believe that Matthew was playing games here, Father Sebastian is convinced that this is not so because Matthew expected his audience to know the Old Testament like the back of their hand
- The problem arises because there are no quotation marks in Greek
- This means the only way we know something should be in quotes is by the context and the flow of a sentence

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- Further, there is one Greek word used in this sentence that is not only confusing for a translator, but it leads to this problem
- Father asked that we look just before, “he shall be called a Nazarene,” and remember that there are no quotation marks in the Greek
- He then asked, what would cause a translator to place these quotation marks in the English version?
- It is the Greek word *oti* or *hoti* which means “because or “that,” and can be used in all sorts of different ways
- Thus, if we retranslate this English phrase to “and he went and dwelt in the city of Nazareth that was spoken of by the prophets, then he might be called a ‘Nazarene’”

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- Father asked what do we think of when we hear the word “Nazarean”?
- Unfortunately, some think of the word “Nazirite”
- Again, this causes two problems
 - First, no prophet ever called the Messiah a Nazirite
 - Second, if Jesus took the Nazirite vow (from **Numbers 6**), he would have been the worst practitioner ever (He drank wine, and touched lepers and dead people)
- Father said there was one other option to explain this text
 - Greek does not have a “Z” sound, only a “TH” sound

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- Matthew was saying that the entire episode was based on the name of the town
- The name of the town *Nazareth* (today written as *Nat serith*) means “branch town”
- Thus, if we go to the prophets, we find passages that say the Messiah will be “a branch” (this is the interpretation from the Fathers of the Church as well)
- **Isaiah 11:1** says: *“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots”*
- The stump of Jesse is an image of a tree that has been cut off by the Babylonian exile
- Often, within a few months, a shoot grows out of the stump because there is still life within the roots

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- In Israel, the line of David, the tree of Jesse, had been cut off during the Babylonian Exile
- All of a sudden, a “branch,” comes forth its roots called in Hebrew *naetser*, implying that **Isaiah 1:1** is all about the idea that the line of David has been cut off, and then life begins to come out of its roots (the line of David is still there)
- This is what Matthew 1 and 2 are all about
- In fact, it is the whole theme of the infancy narrative
- We hear further evidence of this in **Jeremiah 23:5-8; 33:14-16; Zachariah 3:8; 6:12**

Matthew 2 (Cont)

- The entire concept is confirmed in **Isaiah 11:2**, where the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, which we will see in the Baptism of Jesus
- At this time, we will begin our study of the Nativity according to Luke (Luke 1 & 2)