

## The Feast of the Epiphany



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<sup>1</sup> When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.” <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
since from you shall come a ruler,  
who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star’s appearance. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage.” <sup>9</sup> After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> They were overjoyed at seeing the star, <sup>11</sup> and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way. (Mt 2:1-12)

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### Matthew’s Setting

As much as we want to combine the nativity stories of Matthew and Luke, they really have no points of contact other than the birth of the child Jesus. Luke’s story is set among the lowly shepherds; Matthew’s story is set among royalty, chief priests and wealthy foreigners. The desire to make them

one story is natural, but to do so misses the uniqueness and point of each gospel writer. Which would be a loss since Matthew's story arcs across the ages and geography of the Middle East.

The gospel for the Epiphany in Chapter 2 follows after the story of Jesus' birth (Mt 1) and comes before the inauguration of his public ministry in Matthew 3. The gospel passage is part of a larger narrative structure that includes the family's escape to Egypt and subsequent return to Nazareth (Mt 2:13-23). Within this larger text there are four episodes each of which revolves around a place name: Bethlehem, Egypt, Ramah, and Nazareth. The scenes in the chapter explain how Jesus, Son of David, was born in Bethlehem, was taken to the safety of Egypt as Herod murdered the Holy Innocents (echoing the loss in Ramah), why the family did not return to Bethlehem, and how Nazareth came to be his home. Each episode includes an Old Testament quotation that connects the stories of the Old Testament with the unfolding of events in the New Testament era. These are examples of Matthew's focus on scriptural fulfillment against the backdrop of the travelogue. In this, Matthew shows that the Messiah's itinerary was guided by the will and promises of God.

### **Son of David: King and Messiah**

This gospel story, peculiar to Matthew, underlines several themes in Matthew's presentation of Jesus the Messiah. It makes explicit reference to the detailed fulfillment of Scripture, in his place of birth (vv. 5–6), as well as alluding to another Messianic passage from the *Book of Numbers* (24:17). The Matthean treatment presents Jesus as the true 'king of the Jews' (v. 2) in contrast with the unworthy king Herod. It begins to draw a parallel between Moses and Jesus (in the escape and return from Egypt) which will be further developed in the rest of the chapter and in this particular gospel. And it shows Jesus as the Messiah of all nations, opposed by the leader of the Jewish nation but recognized as the fulfillment of the hopes of the Gentiles.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem – just as the prophets said and thus Jesus truly is Son of David (*cf* the genealogy with which Matthew begins the gospel). The royal note runs throughout the story. Not only from the birthplace, but also the encounter with dignitaries in the person of King Herod the Great (considered an interloper king) and the *magi* (not actually kings at all) seeking the new-born king. The contrasts are laced within the narrative: to the true King of Israel, born in Bethlehem, come the foreign *magi* bearing gifts due royalty. This action echoes the Queen of Sheba coming to see David's son Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-10) as well as scripture that points to the future Messiah (Ps 72 and Isa 60). It also points to the foreign prophet Balaam (Numbers 23) speaking of the "star's rising in the east."

Matthew 1 and its genealogy move in continuity with the OT story. It is here in Matthew 2 that the story is located as a present fulfillment in the world occupied by first century readers/listeners. It is a merging of biblical ages in which the promises of God to Israel are fulfilled. It is also a merging of other worlds. It is here that the gentile world begins to come to pay homage to the King of Kings – it is now that God "appears" to them. It truly is a revelation: an *epiphaneia*.

This text is the traditional gospel for the Feast of the Epiphany. In Greek *epiphaneia* derives from the verb "to appear" and means "appearance", "manifestation". In classical Greek it was used for the appearance or manifestation of gods. In Jewish scripture (LXX; Greek translation) the word occurs for manifestation of the God of Israel (2 Macc.15:27). In the New Testament the word is not used concerning the birth of Christ or visit of the Magi, but is used to refer: once to the revealing of Christ after the resurrection, and five times to refer to the Second Coming.

The traditional use of this text underscores the truth that Jesus is God's revelation to the whole world and quietly sets the stage for the resurrected Jesus' "Great Commission" (Mt 28:19) to the whole world.

### **Commentary**

Jesus is born, the magi arrive in Herod's court stirring the pot as it were, consultations are made, the magi are told to go to Bethlehem, the star locates the Holy Family, and the magi do homage to the child. Meanwhile Herod plots and assumes the magi will return via Jerusalem and help the King fill in the details regarding this newborn king. But "*having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, [the magi] departed for their country by another way.*" It is a simple story in the telling, but less in the details, especially when those details pique our curiosity.

All commentaries have some comment about the actual years that Jesus was born. We know that both Matthew and Luke report that Jesus was born while Herod the Great sat upon the throne of Judah. Herod died *ca.* 4 BC. and there are few other historical "anchors," and so the exact date of Jesus' birth is impossible to state with great certainty - and so we are forced to look for clues in the text itself. We are also interested to know if there was a gap of time between Jesus' birth and the events described in Matthew's narrative. Things to consider:

- In 2:9 and 11, Matthew describes Jesus as *paidion*, a small child, a word not normally describing an infant/baby. In Luke 2:12 and 16, the sacred author refers to Jesus as *brephos* which means "baby" or "infant." [even though the translators choose "child" in the NAB]. That being said, in Luke 2:27, some 40 days after his birth, Luke describes him as *paidion*, "child" although we would still consider Jesus as an infant/baby. Language does not provide definitive clarity.
- The information about the star provides no clarity since we have no information beyond speculation. The chapter might well contain several indications suggesting that the visit of the Magi took place some time after the birth of Jesus so that he is now a 'child' not a 'babe' Even that is less than clear.
- Herod's murder of all children under two (v.16) would hardly be necessary if the birth was known to be very recent. Against this backdrop, the *magi* arrive in Jerusalem.

All in all, we simply don't know the answer to the questions of date and "gap."

### ***The Magi***

To understand the power of this story, the listeners must first come to a new understanding of the *magi*. Many English translations render this Greek word, "wise men." That is being far too kind about these visitors. Perhaps, because these visitors *from the East* have been held up as such good models of faith, we have been afraid to really present them for what they were. Originally, in 6th century BC Persia, *magi* were dream-interpreters. By Jesus' time, the term referred to astronomers, fortune-tellers, or even con-men. In fact, our word "magic" or "magician" comes from this word "*magi*". They were not so much respectable "wise men" or "kings" but charlatans in a practice condemned by Jewish standards. This same word occurs in Acts 13. Barnabas and Saul meet Elymas, a Jewish *magi* (or *magus* in the singular). This is how Paul describes him in verse 10:

*"You son of the devil, you enemy of all that is right, full of every sort of deceit and fraud. Will you not stop twisting the straight paths of (the) Lord?"*

*Magi* in Jesus' day were not models of religious piety but Matthew makes them the heroes in his first story following the Savior's birth. The *magi* come from a group that doesn't worship the God of Israel. They are the wrong race, the wrong denomination, the wrong religion. They don't practice orthodox worship. Yes, they give the child Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, but those are elements used in their trade/magic. The *magi* would have been much better models of unbelief and false trust; than models of faith, trust and worship. Some would say their appearance is "too good to be true."

Objections to the historicity of this story have been made mainly on two grounds. First, it is regarded as an artificial construction around chosen Old Testament texts. Secondly, the account is said to bear

all the marks of pious legend. But in fact, with the exception of the moving star in v. 9, there is nothing historically improbable in the account, and the fact of a comparable visit by eastern Magi to Nero in AD 66 (*Dio Cassius* 63.7; *Suetonius, Nero* 13) vouches for the probability of this story rather than otherwise. It may perhaps be added that a church which soon found itself in serious conflict with astrology is not likely to have invented a story which appears to favor it.

### ***“From the East” - where exactly?***

St. Matthew only says, “*Wise men came from the East.*” The *magi* are not unknown to history. Herodotus, the Greek historian, describes a priestly caste of *magi* among the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC Medes reported to have had special powers to interpret dreams. The *magi* survived/adapted to the transition of power from the Medes to the Persians and the shift to the state religion of Zoroastrianism. Over time the term *magi* came to be loosely applied to men adept in various forms of secret lore and magic. The book of Daniel describes *magoi* as flourishing in every corner of Babylon. Matthew’s description seems to favor viewing them as proto-astronomers/astrologers. That they are gentiles is an assumption taken from their origin “in the East.” It should be noted that by the first century AD there were large Jewish communities living “in the East” as a result of the many diasporas. This leads some scholars to speculate the *magi* of Matthew’s story are Babylonian Jews, but most consider them as Gentiles.

St. Matthew only says, “*Wise men came from the East.*” He does not say a long distance, nor does he mention camels. Where is the East? There is considerable scholarship that places more emphasis on Matthew’s use of the term “*the East,*” and argue that Babylon, Persia, etc., was not the referent. For first century Jews the East was the traditional land of Edom, Gilead, and Moab, but in Matthew’s time, those lands were part of the Nabatean Empire. The Nabateans are not some “lost tribe” but were historically known as one of the great commercial and trading empires that controlled the trade and trade routes between the Mediterranean nations and the Arabian peninsula nations.

If you have ever been to Petra in Jordan, you were at the heart of the Nabatean Empire. Today Petra is a historical site of international importance, but here in the United States we are more likely to know Petra because of its use in the pivotal final scene of the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*.

Petra was built by the Nabatean people who emerged in the sixth century BC from nomadic people of the Arabian Peninsula, but assimilated many peoples from other nations who sought refuge in their lands - or opportunities in their economy. The Nabateans became experts in trading and they were perfectly situated to dominate the commercial enterprises of their day. Enclosed by towering rocks and with its own water sources, Petra not only possessed the advantages of a fortress, but controlled the main commercial routes that passed through it to the port of Gaza in the west, to Bosra and Damascus in the north, to Aqaba on the Red Sea, and across the desert to the Persian Gulf. By the second-century BC the Nabateans were a trading empire.

While there is scholarly debate about the origins of the Nabatean people, it is strongly indicated that they share a common origin with the Jewish people – not through Jacob, but through Abraham’s son, Ishmael, and via Jacob’s brother, Esau. But history also brought them together again with their Hebrew kin.

In the aftermath of the Babylonian invasion of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem, while many Jews were taken to Babylon, the Jewish historian Josephus records that many more became refugees, scattering into Arabia where they would have been received in the Jewish trading colonies stretching as far south as Medina and Yemen. Key among those cities was Tayma, a center of Nabatean trans-Arabia trading.

At the same time, after Israel's destruction by Babylon, the Edomites moved west into traditional Judean lands — and the Nabateans expanded their lands to include Edom, Moab and Gilead. In time, many northern Nabateans converted to Judaism, all part of the great melting pot that was the Nabatean kingdom. Family, commercial and political interests were well intertwined between the Nabateans and Judah, so much so that they were allies in the second-century BC Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid overlords of Judah. In short, the Nabateans had a political and economic interest in what happened in Judah and who was in charge — and especially so near the time of Jesus' birth since King Herod the Great was definitely not a friend to the Nabateans.

Add to this melting pot, the *magi* of the Babylonian and Persian royal court. Some adapted, others became refugees. Historical records show that many of them fled to Tayma where they settled and were assimilated into Nabatean life. They brought their skills in mathematics, court administration, teaching, and astrology. By the time of Christ, the Nabatean magi would have had deep exposure to the Abrahamic religion, were neighbors to Judah, and were influential advisors in the court of the Nabatean King. Meanwhile, the magi of Persia had faded and were no longer influential. They would not have had any reasons to care about a newborn king in Judah.

The Nabatean magi would have had religious, cultural, political, and economic reasons to care — and would be watching the stars for signs in order to advise the Nabatean King. And when the signs appeared, they would have brought gifts for the newborn king. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh? These people are the trading center of Arabia at the height of their economic power — and Jerusalem was on their regular trade route. They knew the way.

St. Matthew only says, “*Wise men came from the East.*” He does not say a long distance, nor does he mention camels. Where is the East? For Judah, it is not Persia, Africa, or beyond. For Judah, the East always has been Arabia. Did magi from Petra visit the newborn King in Bethlehem? I think so. And if true, it makes the historicity of their visit easily viable.

### ***The Star***

The idea that the birth and death of great figures were accompanied by astral phenomena was widely accepted in ancient societies. The “*star at its rising*” has been variously interpreted as a new star (supernova), a comet, or the conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn. Matthew likely draws upon the Old Testament story of Balaam, who had prophesied that “*A star shall advance from Jacob*” (Numbers 24:17), though in that verse the star means not an astral phenomenon but the king himself. The *magi* saw the star ‘at its rising’

Attempts to identify the ‘star’ as a regular astronomical phenomenon have generally focused on three possibilities: (1) A planetary conjunction (of Saturn and Jupiter) in 7 BC. (2) A comet, usually Halley's, which unfortunately appeared too early, in 12/11 BC. (3) A nova (a star which, owing to an explosion, appears temporarily with extraordinary brightness). But no known astronomical phenomena account for the movement of the star as described in v. 9 — something the Egyptian astronomers were consistent in records. This perhaps indicates that what Matthew describes is guidance by a miraculous occurrence, even if the initial interest of the *magi* was aroused by some cosmic phenomena.

Magi understood stars; they looked for and understood signs in the sky. A special star (new star? comet?) made sense to them. In addition, the text tells us that they came from the east and that they saw the star at its rising. The sign came to them where they were; in a way that they understood and in the place where they were at.

Brown (*Birth of the Messiah*, 170) writes:

Matthew's age would not have found bizarre the claim that a star rose to herald the birth of the King of the Jews and subsequently guided magi-astrologers in their quest to find him. Virgil (*Aeneid* II 694) reports that a star guided Aeneas to the place where Rome should be founded. Josephus (*Jewish Wars* VI v 3; #289) speaks of a star that stood over Jerusalem and of a comet that continued for a year at the fall of the city. He says (v 4; ##310, 312): "God has a care for men and by all kinds of premonitory signs shows His people the way of salvation," and relates this to the Jewish belief that "someone from their country would become ruler of the world" (see also Tacitus *Histories* V 13). It is true that Pliny (*Natural History* II vi 28) combats the popular opinion that each person has a star which begins to give light when he is born and fades out when he dies; yet the thesis that at least the births and deaths of great men were marked by heavenly signs was widely accepted.

Thus, much of what we might find strange in this text, would have been considered quite natural to the first readers of Matthew.

From time to time there are astronomers or other interested parties that begin to research the background and possibilities of the astrological phenomena that may be behind "*his star at its rising.*" Given Matthew's overall motif in this passage – foreigners and leaders of a non-Jewish religious cult – and Matthew's use of "fulfillment" passages regarding the Messiah, one should first look to Number 24:17. This is the story of Balaam, a *magus from the east* who is supposed to curse Israel but instead bless it: "*I see him, though not now; I behold him, though not near: A star shall advance from Jacob, and a staff shall rise from Israel*" (Num 24:17). Here Matthew finds fulfillment.

### ***The Gifts***

"*After their audience with the king*" Herod the magi set out to Bethlehem to find the newborn King. Matthew tells that upon their discovery of Mary and child "*They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*" Matthew simply tells us of the gifts but makes no hint at intending their symbolic meanings. (And on a technical note, the account is specific about the three gifts, but never specifically says there are three magi.) The traditional understanding of the meaning of the gifts is as follows:

Gold symbolizes *royalty and kingship*. It recognizes Jesus as the King of the Jews and reflects his divine authority. This gift honors Jesus as a king who will reign not in earthly power but in spiritual sovereignty.

Frankincense, a resin used in worship and temple rituals, signifies *divinity and priesthood*. It points to Jesus' role as the mediator between God and humanity, underscoring his divine nature and the prayers offered through him.

Myrrh, an aromatic resin often used in embalming, foreshadows *suffering and death*. It highlights Jesus' future sacrifice for humanity and his role as the suffering servant.

This traditions are the basis upon which we infer the Magi's recognition of Jesus' unique identity:

- King: gold acknowledges his royal lineage as a descendant of David (see Matthew 1:1-17).
- Divine: Frankincense represents worship due only to divinity (Exodus 30:34-38 describes its use in sacred incense).
- Sacrifice: Myrrh points to Jesus' suffering and death (John 19:39 mentions its use at his burial).

### ***Herod***

Matthew is not concerned with the historical Herod (see *Note 2:1* below). Herod serves as a foil for the conflict against the kingdom of God. When the *magi* contacted the king, "*King Herod heard this, he*

*was greatly troubled.*” Matthews is not referring to the psychological turmoil of one man, but the clash of the two claims of kingship. The theme of conflict is one that occurs throughout Matthew’s narrative. When we read that *and all Jerusalem* was troubled with the king, it is not in sympathy with Herod, but rather the tension that comes from their own memories of the unrest that comes with rival claimants to the one throne. Add to that the patina of messianic arrival. Just as at the end of the gospel when Jerusalem will be implicated in the passion and death of Jesus, those troubles are nascent even now.

*More than you probably want to know about King Herod - feel free to skip ahead.*

From the Anchor Bible Dictionary we know that Herod (the great) was born in the late 70s BC. into an aristocratic family of *Idumean* descent. *Idumea* was the Hellenized name of Edom, one of the traditional enemies of Israel. When the land was conquered by Judas Maccabees (167 BC.) and again by John Hyrcanus I (125 BC.), all the inhabitants were forcibly converted to Judaism. Herod’s father, Antipater, was adviser to Hyrcanus II and later held office in his own right when he was appointed *epitropos* (overseer) of Judea in 47 BC. The rise to power of both Antipater and Herod was predicated first and foremost on their unswerving loyalty to Rome. Both father and son were convinced that, following the conquest of Judea by Pompey in 63 BC., nothing could be achieved without the consent and aid of Rome. This principle was inviolable, and it guided their actions under all circumstances and at any price. At the age of 25 Herod was appointed governor of Galilee by his father and gained a reputation as a vigorous ruler by his aggressive campaign against brigands in the area.

By the late 40s, however, Herod’s political fortunes took a turn for the worse. The murder of his father in 42 BC. put him on the defensive with regard to Jerusalem’s aristocracy. Taking revenge on what it considered a tyrannical usurper, this nobility attempted to have Herod removed through Roman intervention, only to be thwarted by the steadfast loyalty of the Romans to Antipater’s memory and Herod’s proven abilities. Nevertheless Herod was finally forced to flee Judea in 40 BC. when the Hasmonean *Mattathias Antigonus* joined with the Parthian invaders to oust both Herod and the Romans. Herod then made his way to Rome, where he was formally crowned King of Judea. He returned to Judea in 39 BC., and in the summer of 37, after a stay of some two years during which Herod and the Romans were pitted against *Antigonus* and the Parthians, Herod was finally able to claim his kingdom. He proceeded to rule for the next 33 years.

Herod’s reign can be divided into three periods. The first was one of consolidation, lasting from 37 to 27 BC. The second, from 27 to 13 BC., was a period of peace and prosperity, marked by Herod’s close relationship with Rome and her leaders on the one hand and an ambitious building program on the other. The third period, from 13 to 4 BC., was marked by domestic strife and misunderstandings with Rome which greatly took its toll on Herod’s health in his later years.

### ***Worship***

Three times in this text (vv. 2, 8, 11) the phrase “*pay him homage*” is used. This is a single word in Greek (*proskuneo*) that refers to a posture of worship -- bowing down; and an attitude of worship. It seems clear that Herod expresses the desire to “worship” Jesus, but one thinks it would have been a false worship. His attitude is one of fear (v. 3) for his own position and status. Many ask, “If Herod and the religious leaders know where the king is to be born and if they really wanted to worship him, why don’t they go with the Magi?” It is perhaps no more complicated that the powerful center resists God’s purposes, while the lowly (Bethlehem) and marginal (the Gentile *magi*) embrace them.”

There needs to be a willingness to act on what one believes. Getting people to go through the proper motions of worship does not mean that they have the proper attitude of worshiping God. Mark Allan

Powell (*God with Us: A Pastoral Theology of Matthew's Gospel*, 41-2) suggests what Matthew considers the proper response to Jesus – and it's not worship!

Still if worship is an appropriate response, it is not the ideal one. For Matthew, the ideal response to divine activity is repentance. . . . Indeed, Jesus never upbraids people for failing to worship or give thanks in this gospel (compare Luke 17:17-18), but he does upbraid those who have witnessed his mighty works and not repented (11:20-24). We know from Jesus' teaching in Matthew that people can worship God with their lips even when their deeds demonstrate that their hearts are far from God (15:3-9). Thus, the responsive worship of the crowds in 9:8 and 15:31 is commendable but will be in vain if performed with unrepentant hearts.

The *magi* are not orthodox, yet they are obedient and respond to the mighty works of God – they are like the merchant in search of the pearl of great price (13:45) and the women at the tomb on Easter morning (28:8) – they are filled with joy.

And so the *magi* set a course for home. Their departure is no less supernatural than their arrival.

### A deep dive into one passage

For those intrepid among the readers, consider this passage:

<sup>5</sup> *They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: <sup>6</sup> 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"*

Some manuscripts name the prophet by inserting the name Micah or Isaiah. In fact the quotation is mostly likely a combination of Micah 5:1 and 2 Sam 5:2. While the text is considered a combination of Micah 5:1 and 2 Sam 5:2 it does not reflect exactly either the standard Hebrew (MT) or Greek (LXX) of the Micah passage (the 2 Sam portion is virtually exact). Compare the three:

NAB – Mt 2:6	LXX – Mic 5:1	MT – Mic 5:1[2]
““And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler [ <i>hēgemōn</i> ], who is to shepherd my people Israel.””	And you, O Bethlehem, <b>house of Ephrathah, are too small to be among the ruler of thousands of Judah</b> ; from you there will come forth for me a <b>leader [<i>archōn</i>] of Israel</b> . You will shepherd my people Israel.	And you, O Bethlehem, <b>Ephrathah, small to be among the thousands of Judah</b> ; from you there will come for me one who is to be a ruler <b>in Israel</b> . You will shepherd my people Israel

The table above tries to annotate the differences.

“Land of Judah” could have been substituted for “Ephrathah” to clarify for Matthew’s audience that it was the Bethlehem five miles south of Jerusalem, not the one in Galilee (see Josh. 19:15) that was intended.

There is also another source that sheds some light upon this OT passage. *Targumin* are an Aramaic translation of the OT, often with added text and marginal notes indicating how a passage was to be understood. The *Targum* of the Minor Prophets very explicitly takes this text as messianic: “*And you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, you who were too small to be numbered among the thousands of the house of Judah, from you shall come forth before me the anointed One, to exercise dominion over Israel, he whose name was mentioned from of old, from ancient times.*”

Micah prophesied in the eighth century BC, warning both Israel and Judah of impending judgment. As



so often happens with the OT prophets, short- and long-range prophecies are starkly put side by side. Micah 4:6–13 alternates between predictions of the more distant return from exile and of more imminent judgment. Micah 5 begins with this latter theme, but the rest of the chapter returns to the more distant future, promising a ruler who will shepherd his flock in the Lord’s strength and majesty and bring peace to the land.

Micah 5:1 consciously predicted that the tiny city of Bethlehem would produce an Israelite king “*From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; Whose origin is from of old, from ancient times.*” Though not as clear as Isaiah,

“For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful, From David’s throne, and over his kingdom, which he confirms and sustains By judgment and justice, both now and forever” (Isa 9:5-6)

this final clause suggests a king who is more than a mere human. Some scholars have seen Mic. 5:3 (“*Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time when she who is to give birth has borne, And the rest of his brethren shall return to the children of Israel.*”) as then consciously alluding to Isa. 7:14: the woman who gives birth, ending the time of Israel’s abandonment, is the virgin who will supernaturally conceive.

This is the only OT text in Matt. 1–2 not explicitly described as “fulfillment” text. If 2:6 is the continuation of the Jewish leaders’ words, it could be that Matthew was unwilling to attribute the fulfillment formula to the hostile high priests and scribes. This is also the only text of the five in the infancy narrative that can be viewed via a very straightforward scheme of prediction and fulfillment, with no multiple or deeper levels of meaning or use of typology. Micah prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, and now it has happened.

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