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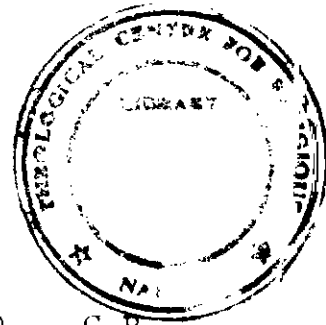
BIBLICAL DEPARTMENT

JESUS AS MESSIAH: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE
OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES IN Mt 1:1-2:23

BY

KAYE GIUSEPPE

TUTOR: Fr. LACOMARA AELRED, C.P.



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THOSE OF TANGAZA COLLEGE.

THIS IS A LONG ESSAY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR BACHELORS OF ARTS, RELIGIOUS STUDIES

NAIROBI,

FEBRUARY OF 1997

100

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D E C L A R A T I O N

I hereby declare that this is my original work. It has not been submitted to any college or university for academic credit.

The topic of the work is:

JESUS AS MESSIAH: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES IN Mt 1:1-2:23

Signed: .. *[Signature]*

Date: ... *17/02/97*

A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t :

Two third of this work is library research, so I thank all the scholars of scripture who through their works have enabled me to get some knowledge of the scripture.

I am grateful to all Tangaza College lecturers in the biblical department and above all my tutor Fr. Lacomara Aelred who made me to love studying scripture.

My gratitude also go to Sr. Margaret Aringo, FSJ, for all the time spent giving me some ideas and also helping me to find some relevant sources in the library for my work.

To my community in Allamano house, thank you very much for all the facilities I have enjoyed while working on this essay.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD.	Ano Domini
B.C.	Before
Christ	
Cf	Confer
Ed(s)	Editor(s)
Ibid	Ibidem,
meaning "In the same book, chapter, and passage.	
MT.	Mazoretic
Text	
Ltd	Limited
LXX	
Septuagint	
Op Cit	same book
but not in sequence	
P.	Page
PP.	Pages

I N T R O D U C T I O N

A: GENERAL REMARKS

Each Gospel writer namely: Mark, Matthew, Luke and John wrote to a specific community for a particular reason. Matthew wrote for a group of Christians who were undergoing a transformation from a predominantly Jewish - Christian church to an increasingly Gentile church, from a church whose roots and cultural origin were Palestinian to a church plunged into the midst of the Roman empire.⁽¹⁾ In writing the infancy narratives Matthew intended to prove that Jesus of Nazareth is the messiah, the fulfillment of all Old Testament expectations and prophecies. In doing so, he emphasized that:

1. God is the master of the entire salvation history.
2. The church is the true Israel
3. God has drawn near to dwell to the end of time with his people.

¹. Senior Donald, What are they Saying About Matthew?, (New York: Paulist Press 1983). P. 15

B: THE ISSUE TO BE INVESTIGATED

The central theme of investigation in this work is to show that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the fulfillment of all Old Testament expectations and prophecies as found in Mt. 1:1-2:23. In treating this theme, the writer will take each of the five citations used by Matthew in the first two chapters of the gospel and show its original meaning in the Old Testament. Secondly, the writer will show how Matthew used each theme in his Gospel to suit his theology.

This work will be limited to the first two chapters of Matthew's Gospel and more specifically to the five citations which the evangelist cited from the Old Testament. This is to show that Jesus is the Messiah on whom the Israelites pinned all their hopes.

The work is divided into three parts:
Part one covers: the salvation history which was under the direct and control of the divine providence; the church is the true Israel in which the expectations of the future Messiah have been fulfilled; Jesus as Immanuel, "God with us" - God has drawn near to dwell to the end of time with his people. Part two discusses: the four citations as found in Matthew 1:1-2:23. Mt 1:23, Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called

"Emmanuel"; Mt 2:6, "And you O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah are by no means among the rulers of Judah for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel".; Mt 2:15b, "Out of Egypt have I called my son".; Mt 2:18, "A voice was heard in Ramah and loud mourning, Rachel crying for her children and she would not be consoled, because they are no more".; Mt 2:23, "He shall be called a Nazarene". The conclusion deals with the pastoral approach based on personal experience and observations.

P A R T O N E: G E N E R A L T H E M E S

A. SALVATION HISTORY:

Mt. 1: 17 mentions four important events in the history of Israel: the call of Abraham, the accession of David, the Babylonian exile and the birth of Christ. The first three events are listed because, as Matthew saw it, history was under the direct and detailed control of the divine providence, and in the providential scheme the call of Abraham, the accession of David and the Babylonian exile were pivotal points of significance. Secondly the cause of Babylonian exile was Israel's apostasy. Third, the Babylonian exile gave rise to Jewish hope for a Davidic messiah who would restore Israel to her former greatness. Fourth, Matthew provides in the birth narrative an answer to the problem of Israel's apostasy: the birth of Jesus who will save his people from their sins (Mt 1:21).

Thus, what links the Babylonian exile to the birth narrative is the description of Jesus' salvific character. The genealogy coheres with the birth narrative because it adumbrates the story of salvation.

In this narrative Matthew is concerned with more than

Jewish history. The East, symbolized by Babylon, is not only a place of exile, not only a place whose name is redolent of shameful apostasy, but a place of revelation, the place of the star. It is a place from which the magi make their journey to honour Jesus. Babylon in the East is linked symbolically to the Magi of the East.

Matthew includes Babylon, the place of Gentiles, and the Magi, representatives of Gentiles, to suggest that the concern of his narrative extends beyond the reach of Jewish history. The Messiah honoured by the people of the East is the saviour of Jews and Gentiles, the redeemer of world history.⁽²⁾

B) The Church is the True Israel:

Matthew's infancy narratives also try to emphasize that the church is the true Israel in which the expectations of the future Messiah have been fulfilled. Now Christ, the Emmanuel dwells in it till the end of time. Matthew has reflected in depth on questions relating to the history of salvation. He tried to make clear the church's relationship to Israel. So the purpose of the Gospel and, more specifically, the infancy narrative is to portray the church as the "true Israel", which

². Jones John Mark, "Subverting the Textuality of Davidic Messianism: Matthew's Presentation of the Genealogy and the Davidic Title", in The Catholic Biblical Quarterly,

Washington D C: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, Vol. 56, No.2, April, 1994, PP 256 - 272

has replaced the Jews, the "false Israel" who have forfeited their place in the history of salvation as God's chosen people.⁽³⁾ This is more evident in Mt 2, when the Magi who represented the Gentiles came from the East to worship the new born baby, the King of the Jews. On the other hand, "when king Herod heard this he was perturbed and the whole of Jerusalem". In other words the Jews did not welcome the messiah whom they were awaiting.

Matthew was not only showing that the church is the true Israel in which God's promise for salvation was fulfilled in Jesus the messiah, but also solving some problems which had come up in his church community. Matthew's church, a majority of whose members were Jewish Christians, was concerned about its own identity as it was cut off from its Jewish roots and being absorbed into the Gentile world. Matthew, therefore, attempted to define Christian identity over against the reform of Jamnia. Jamnia was the seat of Jewish learning after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in A.D 70. It was from here that the Rabbis established a bulwark against external threats to Jewish life. Strict norms for Jewish identity were asserted to ward off the influence of pagans or of groups considered heretical.⁽⁴⁾

³. Kingsbury Jack Dean, Matthew, (U.S.A: Fortress Press 1977). P. 13

⁴. Senior Donald, What are they Saying About Matthew?, Op cit P. 6

The Jewish Christians, along with other groups considered heretical by the rabbis at Jamnia, were expelled from the synagogue. An important device for this was the insertion of the famous twelfth benediction into the Tiffilah or synagogue prayers: "For the persecutors let there be no hope, and the dominion of arrogance do Thou speedily root out in our days; and let Christians and Minim (probably meaning heretics) perish in a moment, let them be blotted out of the book of the living and let them not be written with the righteous". If anyone hesitated to read that prayer or to say "Amen" to it, they were liable to expulsion from the synagogue.⁽⁵⁾ This reform was instituted about A.D 85. Although prior to the events of A.D 70 the Jewish Christians had been part of the liturgical and synagogue life, that was no longer possible in the atmosphere of strict identity of the Jews - Judaism. Strict observance of the law replaced the central role that the liturgical life of the temple had played. Matthew was trying to assist his own Christians to survive the wrenching pain of transition by clearly affirming the authority and authenticity of Jesus' own teaching and at the same time countering the attacks from the synagogue. Matthew wrote his gospel during the critical transition period after the fall of Jerusalem and parallel to the formation of Rabbinic Judaism.⁽⁶⁾ So by referring to Jesus Christ as son of David,

⁵. *ibid* P. 7

⁶. *ibid* PP. 7 - 8

son of Abraham in Mt 1:1, He is emphasizing the fact that the promise to Abraham that through him all nations shall be blessed was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. And that the salvation brought by Jesus goes beyond the Jewish community to the entire church which is the new Israel. Even if the Jewish Christians were cut off from its Jewish roots, their faith in Christ was still valid.

C) Jesus as Immanuel:

The central thought of the first gospel is that in the person of Jesus messiah, his son, God has drawn near to dwell to the end of time with his people, the church, thus inaugurating the eschatological age of salvation (1:23, 18:20, 28:20). Jesus the messiah as son of Abraham, is the hope of the Gentiles, and as son of David, he is the hope of Israel. He is Emmanuel, "God with us", God who actually dwells with his people of both Jewish and Gentile origin. What Matthew does in the first chapter is to ascribe the fulfillment of messianic expectation associated with Abraham and David to Jesus as the son of God. (7)

Jesus messiah is prominently the son of God. What is

7. Kingsbury Jack Dean, Matthew, Op Cit PP 30 - 33

more, this title encompasses also that expectation surrounding more particularly Abraham and David. By calling Jesus the messiah, the name "God with us", Matthew is trying to show that the God who was directing the history of the Israelites, his chosen people, is the same God who came to dwell with his people the church. God is still leading his people in the person of Christ till the end time when everything will be gathered together under Christ as its head.

PART TWO: PROPHEPIC QUATATIONS

A. Mt 1: 23: "Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (Is 7:14)

1) Its Context and Meaning in the Old Testament:

In general the background of these oracles is the period of the Syro - Ephramite war, 735-732 BC. It begins with the description of a meeting between the prophet and king Ahaz, on which occasion the prophet recommended a line of conduct based upon faith. The king's skepticism occasioned the prophecy of Emmanuel (Is 7:1-17). At the end, however, the failure of the Assyrians is clearly stated, a failure due to divine intervention. This intervention is linked with the coming of the messianic king, peace-loving, utterly just and full of the

gift of the spirit of Yahweh. Beside the fullness of the messianic vision which it gives, the prophet also shows a deep understanding of the religious sense of history and puts it into proper perspective: faith in God, as opposed to political intrigue and complex alliances.

Is 7:1-9 The policy of faith: The king of Damascus and the king of Israel were both intent on eliminating any obstacle to a grand alliance against Assyria. When the King of Judah opposed them they waged war in order to set up a more accommodating ruler in Jerusalem, the son of Tabeel.⁽⁸⁾ The enthronement of a foreign usurper practically implied, according to the manners of the time, the extirpation of the native dynasty. Now God had promised to David by Nathan's prophecy that his dynasty should last forever (2Kg 7: 16).⁽⁹⁾ The presence of Isaiah's son is symbolic; his name expressed faith in a survival or at least in some future restoration, in Hebrew; se'ār (= remnant), yāsûb (=shall return). The threat of the two kings will come to nothing. The situation will stay the same, both in Damascus, as well as in Samaria and Jerusalem. What is important here is the final pronouncement of the prophet, that the help of God and the realization of

⁸. Penna A., "Isaiah" in A New Catholic Commentary On Holy Scripture, Reginald C. Fuller ed. N.Y: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984. P. 575

⁹. Power E., "Isaiah" in A Catholic Commentary On Holy Scripture, Dom Benard Orchard ed. N.Y: Thomas Nelson and sons 1954. P. 546

the prophecy must come through sincere faith. In Hebrew, the connection of faith and survival is even more striking because of the assonance of the words: ta'amînu(=you will believe), te'āmenû (you shall be established). The policy of faith is the only way of salvation.

Is 10-17 The Immanuel; If Ahaz has faith, God is ready to guarantee the result by a sign, the choice of which is left to Ahaz. The reply of Ahaz is a very religious one on the face of it (Dt. 6:16; Mt 4:17); but in fact he does not want a sign since he does not believe in the policy of faith. He had already asked for Assyrian help. It is this fact which explains Isaiah's protestation and his warning. However, the sign will still be given but - and the whole context seems to imply this - it will now be a sign of destruction, and not some indication of favorable intervention; it will proclaim the certainty of the Assyrian invasion in Is 7:18- 20.⁽¹⁰⁾

The sign itself provoked endless debate; Isaiah is addressing the royal court, which feared for its safety before the approaching foe and for the permanence of the Davidic dynasty. The promises to David, (2Sam 7, 23:1-7; Ps 89), the theological foundations of the state, were being put to test. Isaiah's words which are loaded with cultic overtones, are reminiscent of a dynastic oracle. Indicating a young woman,

¹⁰. *ibid* P. 575

possibly among the company present, certainly known to them, he declares that she is pregnant and will soon bear a son who will be named Immanuel (God with us). Probably the young woman was one of the king's wives. If so, Isaiah's words are an announcement of the birth of a royal son with a name suggestive of the promise of dynastic permanency.⁽¹¹⁾

It was a royal successor to David that Judah pinned her hopes on for the welfare of God's people. The child about to be born, therefore, may be the young Hezekiah in whose birth Judah would see the continuing presence of God among his people and another renewal of promise made to David. Nevertheless, the solemnity of the oracle and the name of Emmanuel lend credence to the opinion that Isaiah's perspective does not stop at the perspective of Hezekiah; it moves ahead to the ideal king of David's line through whose coming God could finally be said to be definitely with his people. This does not mean of course, that Isaiah foresaw the fulfillment of this prophecy in Christ, but he expressed the hope that Christ perfectly realized. Matthew and the church have seen in the birth of Christ from the virgin mother the perfect fulfillment of this prophecy.⁽¹²⁾

¹¹. Bright J., "Isaiah 1" in Peake's Commentary on the Bible, Matthew Black ed., London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd 1962. P. 496

¹². Frederick L. Moriarty, "Isaiah 1 - 39" in The Jerome Biblical Commentary, Raymond E. Brown, ed. London: Prentice - Hall International, Inc 1968. PP. 270 - 271.

Young woman is correct; virgin derives from LXX. An almah is a woman of a marriageable age. Whether virgin or not. Hebrew has "the" young woman, which possibly indicates a specific young woman known to the court, or a class of women. Isaiah's words are reminiscent of a birth oracle (Gen. 16:11ff; Judg. 13:3-5 ; Lk 1:31-35); almost identical words occur in the Ras Shamra texts announcing in passages relating to the covenant with David (2Sam 23:5), and perhaps on some cultic response as well.⁽¹³⁾

2) The Matthean Use of Isaiah 7:14

Matthew saw in this text scriptural support for both the Davidic and the divine aspects of the who and the how of Jesus' identity. The Isaian verse immediately preceding (7: 13) has Isaiah introduce his prophetic sign by addressing the King as "House of David". Matthew has been trying to explain that Jesus is truly of the house of David, a Davidic descent that is not at all negated by the fact that Joseph begot him legally rather than naturally. And here he has a text addressed to the house of David which speaks of a virgin being with child and giving birth to a son. Matthew has also been trying to explain that this way, which involves the

¹³. Bright J. "Isaiah 1" in Peake's Commentary on the Bible Op cit P. 496

creative action of the Holy Spirit rather than the sexual action of a man, means that Jesus is God's son as well as David's. The same text that foretold to the house of David the unique manner in which the messianic child would be conceived also foretold that the child would be Emmanuel, which means "God with us".⁽¹⁴⁾

Matthew presents the event as the fulfilment of Is 7: 14. The saving event of the Gospel gives the word of the Old Testament, which is a declaration of the power and will of God to save, a new dimension of reality. The text of Isaiah is quoted according to the LXX, except for the reading "they shall call" (LXX: "you shall"; MT: "she shall call."). The LXX used parthenos, "virgin", to translate the Hebrew word in Is 7:14 for "young girl" (almah). This gives the text of Isaiah a new dimension of reality and Matthew uses it to affirm the virgin birth. His emphasis, however, seems to be more on the declaration of a saviour who shall be called Emmanuel, "God with us" than on the word parthenos. The birth initiates the messianic age to which the whole of Old Testament looks forward. The age begins with the birth of a child, and this is the force of the illusion to Isaiah. Jesus realizes the presence of God among his people in an entirely

¹⁴.Raymond E. Brown, The Birth of the Messiah, Op cit
PP 149 - 156

new way. (15)

Emmanuel, "God with us" forms the key-note of Matthew's christology and ecclesiology. A similar note is struck in the final verse of the Gospel: "And behold, I am with you always until the end of the age" (Mt 28: 20).

B) Mt 2: 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 govern my people Israel" (Micah 5: 1 and IIsam 5:2)

1) Its original context in the Old Testament

LXX: "And you, O Bethlehem, house of Ephrathah are too small to be among the thousands of Judah; from you there will come forth for me a leader of Israel." "You will shepherd my people Israel."

MT: "And you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, small to be among the clans of Judah; from you there will come forth for me one who

¹⁵. John L. McKenzie, "The Gospel According to Matthew", in The Jerome Biblical Commentary, Raymond E. Brown, ed. et al, London: Prentice - Hall International, Inc 1968. P. 68

is to be a ruler in Israel." "You will shepherd my people Israel."

Ephrathah: Ephratah, originally the name of a clan in Bethlehem to which Jesse the father of David belonged (1Sam 17:12), was sometimes used as a name for Jerusalem (Gen 35:19; 48:7). Bethlehem may have been added here as an explanatory gloss on the name of Ephrathah (Gen 35:19), which is clearly the antecedent to "who" (cf "among the clans"). The insignificance of the clan Ephrathah and the limitation of Bethlehem contrast with the power and splendour of Jerusalem. Yet the capital city would fail and peace would come from the shepherd background of David's native town (1Sam 16:11 and Mic 5:4; 1Cor 12:9). Ruler; Jer 30:21 also uses this word, not king in a messianic context. King may have been discredited by the recent experience of the monarchy.⁽¹⁶⁾

The Davidic ruler of Israel will rise from the district of Ephrathah. This king is not the present but the future monarch. The prophet is not saying that the king will be born in Ephrathah, but that he will spring from the royal line of David. After the conquest of Canaan, Bethlehem was settled by the Ephrathah clan of the tribe of Judah. Therefore, Bethlehem is also called Ephrathah (Jos 15:59; Ruth 4:11).

¹⁶. D. Ryan, "Micah", in A New Catholic Commentary On Holy Scripture, Reginald C. Fuller, ed., N.Y: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984. P. 711

Bethlehem literally, "House of Bread", is located 5 miles south of Jerusalem. In Mt 2:5-6, in the midrashic interpretation of this text, it is shown how it was understood at the time of Jesus' birth. This oracle fits in well with the theology of Micah and his contemporary Isaiah.⁽¹⁷⁾

a) Who will govern my people Israel IISam 5:2

David was anointed king of Judah and later he was asked by the elders of Israel to extend his reign over them. But the two kingdoms did not coalesce, they remained two distinct kingdoms though under one leader. It has been called a personal union in which the government of the two states joined in the person of David".⁽¹⁸⁾ The verb ra a, "to shepherd", and the title nagid, "chief" correspond to 2Sam 7:1-8 and indicate that both units were placed here by Deuteronomistic redactors. A pastoral ruler using persuasion is depicted.⁽¹⁹⁾

¹⁷. Philip J. King, "Micah", in The Jerome Biblical Commentary, Raymond E. Brown, ed. London: Prentice - Hall International, Inc. 1968. P. 287

¹⁸. James C. Turro, "II Samuel", in The Jerome Biblical Commentary, Raymond E. Brown, ed. London: Prentice - Hall International, Inc. 1968. P. 174

¹⁹. Antony F. Campbell, and James W. Flanagan, "1 - 2 Samuel", in The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Raymond E. Brown, ed. London: Prentice - Hall International, Inc. 1968. PP. 155 - 156.

2) Matthew's use of the formula citation of Micah 5:1
and IISam 5:2

This is the second of the four scriptural quotations which articulate the narrative, showing the theme of fulfilment in Christ. Matthew continues the son of David motif by this formula citation joining two passages, namely Mic 5:1 and IISam 5:2. The first of these states that from Bethlehem will come one who is to be a ruler in Israel. Since Bethlehem was David's place of origin, Micah was speaking of a Davidic king. The Davidic implication is made explicit by the addition of IISam 5:2 ("you will shepherd my people Israel"), for that line was spoken to David when, as king of Judah, he was being asked by the tribes of Israel to extend his sovereignty over them as well. This shepherd motif of the IISam passage protects against an interpretation of Micah that would support an absolute ruler and offer backing for a tyrant like Herod.

However, it is worth noting that a doubt has been expressed as to whether Mt 2:5b-6 is truly to be classified as formula or fulfilment citation, since it lacks the usual formula: "(All) this was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet." Moreover, the citation is not presented as the evangelist's comment but is part of the direct speech of the

chief priests and scribes. However, the latter point explains the former since it is the priests and scribes who are speaking. They could scarcely have been quoted using the fulfillment formula. In this instance, Matthew has chosen to make the citation part of the direct speech of his opponents to show their obduracy. Even though they can read the scriptures correctly, they do not choose to believe.⁽²⁰⁾

c) Mt 2:15b: "Out of Egypt have I called my son"

1) Original meaning of Hos 11: 1

The theme of the divine call and of Israel's disobedience is taken up again with an even clearer allusion to the Exodus as the moment of divine choice. From the beginning, Israel was the object of Yahweh's compassionate and tender love. Her cool, deliberate and stubborn rejection of this love provokes Yahweh to anger, and this anger moves him to punish, even tempts him to destroy his son (Hos 9:11ff 10:6ff). In the conflict between anger and love, it is Yahweh's love which prevails. Anger is just an interlude; it is Yahweh's love which will control the history of his people and give them a fresh start in the promised land.

²⁰. Raymond E. Brown, The Birth of the Messiah, Op Cit pp. 184 - 186.

In Hos. 1-3 the love of Yahweh for Israel was expressed in terms of marital love. Here Yahweh is compared to a loving father who cares for his son and lavishes affection on him, only to have it spurned. The figure of the "child" emphasizes that Yahweh loved Israel from the beginning, at a time when he was helpless (Ez 16:4ff). His love for Israel moved Yahweh to help, to care for, educate his son. It is on this long and demanding process of upbringing and education that the stress is laid rather than on the idea of generation. In this context of Baal worship, however, Hosea may be emphasizing that Israel is more truly the son of Yahweh than of Baal and the mother goddess.⁽²¹⁾

b) Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1 (Mt 2:15)

On the Matthean level, it is important to note that Matthew's formula citation of Hosea 11:1 ("out of Egypt have I called my son") is not foreign to the historical setting of the basic story to which it has been appended. This text is applied in Mt 2:15 to the return of Christ from Egypt. Christ is identified with Israel, and Israel with Christ. He sums up its hopes and aspirations, and in him will her destiny be fulfilled. Christ is now the chosen instrument of God, is more truly his son than Israel. God will work through him to

²¹. D. Ryan "Hosea" in A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture, Reginald C. Fuller, ed. N.Y: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984. P. 684

bring salvation to his people who have, as it were, gone into bondage in Egypt. In calling Christ from Egypt, God inaugurates a new era of salvation which begins with a new exodus and aims at life in a new promised land.⁽²²⁾

Matthew sees that the filial relationship of God's people is now summed up in Jesus who relives in his own life the history of that people. If the whole people was God's "son", how much more is that title applicable to him who will save his people from their sins (Mt.1:21). The designation of Jesus as God's son is left to God speaking through the prophets; for divine sonship is a matter revealed by the Father in heaven and does not come from a human source (Mt 16:16-17).

The combination of divine sonship and the Exodus found here is also found in the story of the Baptism of Jesus. There, after God has said of Jesus "This is my beloved son" (3:17), Jesus is led into the desert for forty days and forty nights before he returns to take up his ministry - a symbolic re-enactment of Israel' forty years in the desert before entering the promised land.⁽²³⁾

²². *ibid* P. 684

²³. Raymond E. Brown, The Birth of the Messiah, Op Cit PP.214 - 215

4) Mt 2:18 "A voice was heard in Ramah weeping and loud mourning, Rachel crying for her children and she would not be consoled, because they are no more."

1) Its context and meaning in Jer 31:15

For Jeremiah the figurative allusion to Rachel crying for her children is probably a reference to the captivity and deportation of the tribes of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians in 722-721 B.C, since some of the principal Northern tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim were reckoned as her descendants, along with Benjamin. Yet there is a possibility that Jeremias is referring just to the Benjaminites whose fate was entwined with the southern kingdom 587 B.C. Jer 40:1 tells us that the captives from Judah and Jerusalem were taken to Ramah. In addition to the problem as to which captivity was in Jeremiah's mind, we have the problem of how Matthew understood Jeremiah. Although Jeremiah describes Rachel as crying for her children God's message to her is to stop weeping and crying, since the children are going to come back from the land of enemy (Jer 31:16-17). In other words this is a message of Joy and hope, none of which appears in Matthew.⁽²⁴⁾

2) The Matthean use of the quotation:

²⁴. Raymond E. Brown, The Birth of the Messiah, Op Cit PP. 205 - 206

Matthew introduces a deeply moving quotation from Jer 31:15. A mother's loss of her own children is a unique grief. In Gen 35:16-20 Rachel grieves not because her son dies but because she dies in giving birth to him. In Jeremiah, she weeps for the exile of her sons Joseph and Benjamin.

At first sight this citation seems out of place, for Rachel's children were of the tribe of Benjamin not Judah (in whose territory Bethlehem lies). D. Danube argues that the mention of Rachel is due to the typology of the new Israel, for she was a wife of Israel - Jacob. More probably the reason is connected with the fuller context of Jer 31: 15-17: Rachel is told not to weep because her sons will return from exile in Babylon, as Jesus will return from his exile in Egypt. It was perhaps suggested also because Rachel's tomb is traditionally situated in Bethlehem. ⁽²⁵⁾

E) Mt 2:23 "He shall be called a Nazarene"

1) The text of Is. 4:3 and Judg. 16:17

a) Is 4:3 The branch of the Lord: Branch (semah) may refer to the messianic king (Jer 23:5; Zech 3:8) who comes from the line of David. The word semah, along with a synonymous

²⁵. Henry Wansbrough, "Matthew" in A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture. Reginald C. Fuller, ed. N.Y: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984. P. 908

expression in Is 11:1, became a classic term for the messiah. The branch could also refer to the remnant, which will escape the impending judgement. The latter seems more probable in this passage. A third possibility, based on the parallelism characteristic of Hebrew poetry, matches "branch" with "fruit of the earth". The phrase would, in this case, refer literally to a renewal in nature that would characterize the ideal Judah of the future.⁽²⁶⁾

b) In Judg 13:1-16:31, Samson is portrayed as a popular hero dedicated to the service of Yahweh from his mother's womb and charged with the mission of beginning to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Philistines. As a Nazirite and a warrior he may never shear locks since his dedication and his warfare are life long.⁽²⁷⁾

A Nāzîr was any man or woman consecrated to God for limited period of time. During the period of consecration the Nāzîr could take neither wine nor any other fermented drinks; his hair could not be cut, and all contact with a corpse was forbidden. The regulations in Num 6:1-27, codify a very ancient practice and adapt it to the levitical ritual. Instead of a consecration for life, this set of rules reduced

²⁶. Frederick L. Moriarty, "Isaiah 1 - 39" in The New Biblical Commentary, . Op Cit P. 269

²⁷. John Huesman "Judges" in A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture. Reginald C. Fuller, ed. N.Y: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984. Op Cit P. 300

the commitment to a temporary vow. In the story of Samson (Judg 13:2-7) the consecration was for life.⁽²⁸⁾

2) Matthew's use of Is 4:3 and Judg 16:17

The reference to a prophecy here poses a classic problem of interpretation since there is no exact correspondence to any known Old Testament text. The most probable explanation of the "quotation" is that it is a wordplay based on the Hebrew text of Is. 11:1, "A shoot shall rise from Jesse, and a branch (neser) shall sprout from his roots." There is an assonance between the word neser and the town Nazareth.

"Nazarene" is primarily applicable to Jesus because he has dwelt at Nazareth; and therefore the formula citation in this chapter. "Nazarene" is secondarily applicable to Jesus because he is the messianic branch of the house of David (the neser) and because he is a Nazarite (Nāzîr), the Holy One, dedicated to God's service from birth. It is the last derivation that Matthew has in mind when he says, "He will be called a Nazaraios". He is citing known scripture and has two definite prophetic passages in mind. The passages are Is 4:3 ("He who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be

²⁸. Frederick Moriarty, "Numbers" in The Jerome Biblical Commentary. Raymond E. Brown, ed. London: Prentice - Hall International, Inc, 1968. Op Cit P. 89

called Holy") and Judg.16:17 ("I have been a Nazarite of God from my mother's womb").

Two facts are necessary to understand Matthew's association and rendition of these texts: first, that Hebrew Nāzîr is rendered in Greek both by hagios (holy) and Nazaraios; second, that Jesus was known in the ministry as "the holy one of God" (Hagios Theou). The latter title was unusual, being employed for an individual only once in the whole Greek bible, namely, of Samson in Judg 16:17. Knowledge of this would tell Matthew that a special title of Jesus appeared in one of the prophetic books. However, the Hebrew of this unique passage called Samson a Nazarite, so that a more literal Greek rendition would produce the title as Naziraios. We would thus have an association of the "Hagios Theou" title of Jesus with Naziraios, which, in turn, is a close echo of Nazaraios, the designation born by Jesus because of his home town Nazareth. The Hagios/Nazaraios interchangeability presumably reminded Matthew of another prophetic passage where it was actually promised "He will be called Hagios" (Is 4:3). Knowing the equivalence, Matthew was perfectly free to read it: "He will be called a "Nazaraios". He thus had a citation with the place name Nazareth and a prophecy that Jesus would be a Holy One of God set aside like Samson from his mother's womb. The memory of Samson the Nazarite could not have been divorced from the words spoken by the angel of the Lord to his mother: "The boy will be a

Nazarite of God from birth, and he will begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines" (Judg 13:15). Had not the angel of the Lord said a very similar thing of Jesus the Nazariaos: "He will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21)?⁽²⁹⁾

PART C: C O N C L U S I O N:

In Mt 1:1-2:23, the evangelist is trying to show that Jesus of Nazareth is the messiah, the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies. He based his argument on three major points:

- God is the master of the entire salvation history.

- The church is the true Israel in which all the prophecies have been fulfilled.

- God has drawn near to dwell to the end of time with his people.

The message of Matthew is still very much relevant to the Christians of today as the church which is still on the way to God the creator. The church still sees Christ as the messiah, fulfilling all our expectations. Christ came to lead the church back to the Father. The one God who was the master of the salvation history of the Israelites, is the same God who

²⁹. Raymond E. Brown, The Birth of the Messiah, op cit pp. 223 - 224

is directing and caring for the church to its final destiny. It is through Christ that the church moves towards God, the creator of all beings. Like the Israelites, Christians always turn to God in moments of crisis - wars, hunger, hatred, crisis of faith, incurable diseases etc. In such moments they look for a saviour to restore the original order or situation.

This saviour is

Christ sent by the Father to rescue his people, the new Israel.

Man is ever confronted by the presence of evil in the world. Evil gives birth to sin and sin gives birth to death. More often man finds himself in a state of spiritual death, doing things contrary to his vocation to be holy as his Father in heaven. This causes a feeling of guilt in man in the presence of God. In such situation man looks for a saviour. Matthew provides an answer to the problem: the birth of the messiah who will save his people from their sins and hence from that state of guilty. Christ instituted the sacraments in the church to support the Christians in their journey towards the Father whenever they fall away from the grace of God. The salvific character of Christ in the sacraments points back to the salvation history which God started since creation. This points to the fact that the one God who was directing the history of his people, the Israelites is the same God guiding the church.

Matthew in the infancy narratives stressed that the church is the new Israel in which the expectations of the future Messiah have been fulfilled. The church is the true Israel. However, the church is still experiencing some problems which were common in Matthew's community. Since Christianity has penetrated all the continents, almost all Christians are from the non Jewish background. On the other hand, the remaining Jews are ever growing less and less in number and more insignificant. Though Christianity has its roots from Judaism, it has taken up another direction, incorporating many elements from other cultures of the world. It is no longer the same religion identified with Judaism. Now the church is struggling to find its own identity as it is being absorbed in the multiplicity of cultures. It is not more than two years ago that the church in Africa had a synod, trying to define her identity and relevance to the people of Africa. Being faced with same problems like that of Matthew's community, the message of the infancy narratives is still relevant to today's Christians as they struggle to find their identity . By referring to Jesus Christ as son of Abraham (1:1), the evangelist is emphasizing the fact that through him all nations shall be blessed, was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. And that salvation brought by Jesus goes beyond the Jewish community to the entire church which is the new Israel.

Through the incarnation of the word, God has drawn near

to dwell to the end of time with his people, the church. The God who was directing the history of the Israelites, is the same God who came to dwell with his people the church. God is still leading his church in the person of Christ till the end of time when everything will be gathered together under Christ as its head. Through the sacraments we experience God's presence in the church. In the Holy Eucharist, in the person of Christ, we experience the presence of God among his people, the church. And above all in the ministers of the sacraments who are the representatives of Christ in the church. Since man was created in the image of God, every human being is the temple of God where He dwells. Through our fellow neighbours we experience the presence of God.

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