

Expansions on the Gospel of Saint Matthew

Introduction

The very thought of undertaking this project was daunting, actually close to a paralyzing experience. That sounds a bit dramatic but has an element of truth. For some time I had in mind assembling reflections on the Gospel of St. Matthew but was held back by several reasons which at the time were compelling. The most obvious one is that a super-abundance of information exists out there ranging from the scholarly to the devotional. Take your choice. Certainly you have plenty from one end of the spectrum to the other. On top of this is the familiarity many of us have with all four Gospels. With this in mind, there's a strong temptation to say "Why bother?" Giving into this mentality would come close to a defeatist attitude. At the same time I'd never shake the desire to put down some thoughts that have been percolating for some time. I simply wouldn't feel comfortable until they were out there.

On a personal level, over the years I've taken notes here and there on Matthew's Gospel and posted them on this homepage usually under the heading of liturgical reflections. This extends back to the year 2007. With this in mind, why add more? That was another excuse. Still, something kept urging me to tackle the Gospel not in bits and pieces but as a whole.

The only way to overcome any hesitancy was to jump in and see what happens. I figure it wouldn't take long to find out. Results of the decision would emerge on their own. As for the approach, it'd be a series of reflections with the intent of expanding the text beyond what's presented while staying within its bounds. Admittedly this is quite unprofessional as anyone can tell from the contents of this document. Nevertheless, I retained a desire to forge ahead, hoping it might be acceptable to some if not all readers. So instead of fearing to proceed, I decided to rely upon something deep within, hard to articulate. Socrates would call this a *daimon*, a benevolent guiding spirit within each and every one of us which has immediate access to the unconscious. That, in turn, is unbounded. Somehow a sacred text...scripture...is ideal to give voice to this *daimon* wishing to be heard as long as it's firmly under guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Almost as soon as I began jotting down material on St. Matthew's Gospel, I overcame my hesitation and discovered great pleasure in the process, never

tiring of the work. Actually I couldn't label it work but a genuine delight. Also I overcame my fear of familiarity with the text, that is, frequent exposure to hearing the Gospel proclaimed in a liturgical context, chiefly Mass and the Divine Office. Actually the project turned out to be pure, unadulterated fun. The guiding principle was clear—let's say coming from that *daemon* of which Socrates spoke—which is in line with the overall goal of this homepage. That principle, of course, consists in reading the text in the slow, deliberate manner of *lectio divina*. Outside this approach I recommend strongly not to bother going further.

Within the document at hand you'll find transliterated Greek and Hebrew words, some with a plus sign (+). That means the word has occurred previously. In most instances it's to preclude inserting a definition multiple times though sometimes that's necessary. Often transliterated Syriac words are included in parentheses with the capital letter S to designate them as such. That is a concession of sorts to the fact that an early translation had been made from the Greek into the Syriac. Indeed, Matthew's Gospel reads nicely...naturally...in Syriac.

Another point to be aware of...very much so...is the frequent use of the conjunctive *kai* translated most of the time as "and." It begins quite a few sentences which serves to move the reader along but more importantly, to show the close connection between events.

Postings will be made on a regular basis until the document is finished.

Chapter One

The very first word of Matthew's Gospel is *biblos* or book which evokes something rolled up as a scroll. In order to read from such a rolled-up object one has to unroll it or spread it out. This you can do depending on how short or long it is plus the space you have. If the scroll longer, you need a much larger table which you'd find in a library. If it's a double scroll where you roll from one spool to another, you can read certain parts of the parchment without taking up much space. This obviously differs from the leaves of a modern book, for a scroll involves more physical participation in how you handle the text

itself. Such a method is very much alive today when reading the *Torah* in synagogues.

Also compare *biblos* with *biblion*. The former applies more to the keeping of records whereas the latter to a document, that is, a longer composition. As for the only other reference to *biblion* in Matthew, see 19.7: “They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to put her away?’” Actually there are fewer New Testament references to *biblos* than to *biblion*. The Syriac ¹ translation is *kataav* or simply writing. That, of course, can apply to a scroll or anything else.

The association of *biblos* as the keeping of records fits in well with the keeping of a *genesis* or birth (it also applies to an origin) which here pertains to Jesus Christ. His birth doesn’t start off with his immediate parents but goes way back into Israel’s history, that is, to Abraham whom we may call its founder. He’s associated with King David according to the text which runs as, “son of David son of Abraham.” Note the following two: the precedence of David over Abraham to emphasize Jesus as kingly by nature and the lack of a conjunctive (*kai* or and) or the like between the two sons. It’s as though they merge into one. Matthew conveys the impression of being so excited that he can’t get his words out quickly enough. You could almost hear him blurting out or panting in haste “son of son of.”

As for the genealogy, there’s a whole string comprised of the conjunctive *de*—actually thirty-seven of them—which connects all the descendants together. *De* goes untranslated but its presence acts as guide as we move through one generation after another in this *biblos*. Because the names are given in rapid succession, the reoccurring presence of *de* is a visual reminder that makes the genealogy flow more smoothly.

So right after positing Jesus Christ as being of the lineage of King David and Abraham, Matthew begins with the latter who is the very source or *genesis*-as-

¹ Although this is not a scholarly document, it’s helpful to keep in mind that most likely the Gospel of Matthew was written in Greek. Apparently some have thought it was composed in Aramaic. Nevertheless, it’s Semitic by nature and thereby close to Hebrew sensibilities which is why on occasion references to the Syriac text are given. This Syriac connection has the ability to make Matthew’s text “more real” than the other Gospels. At least that’s a wholly unprofessional opinion.

origin, if you will. Then midway through he inserts King David. It's of supreme importance to establish Jesus right smack in the middle of the genealogy which for Matthew is a turning point...a hinge...upon which the sequence of names turns. Should we open the *biblon* at this point in the genealogy we have two ways to go: either forward where the right spool is thickest ² or to Jesus' immediate father or backward where the left spool is thinnest or to Abraham.

The establishment of Israel's kingship by David is paramount. However, it must be kept in mind that Saul was the first king who came to a tragic end. In fact, it must be kept in mind that, important as kingship was, the people's instance for a king went contrary to the Lord's wishes, actually very much so. As he said to the prophet Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" [1Sam 8.7]. Note the following two observations with regard to this important verse. First Samuel is to listen or *shamah* literally "in (b-) the voice of the people." This listening-in will reveal their rejection or *ma'as* of the Lord, the verb connoting an attitude of real distaste.

As for the beginning of the *genesis* at hand, the logical place is the source, Abraham or as he was known originally, Abram.³ Important as he is, the situation at hand takes into consideration his descendants, the first one being Isaac. Now with this first connection being established, all the others can flow easily. That flow continues up to King David where you can almost feel a pause built into the text. Also within this pause you can also feel the hidden presence of Saul, Israel's first king, lurking there although he isn't a part of Jesus' genealogy.

The unrolling of this *biblos* concludes with the immediate parents of Jesus, that is, Joseph who is presented as the husband of Mary "of whom Jesus was born" [vs. 16]. Matthew adds that Jesus is called the Christ which of course means Anointed One or in Syriac, *Mashyach*. End of story physically speaking. There's nothing further to be said of Jesus' lineage. However, should we look more closely, a new type of genealogy is on the threshold of being established which

2 Left to right, presuming the text is in Greek; right to left if it would be in Hebrew or Syriac.

3 For a detailed analysis of this genealogy, see **The Genealogy of Jesus Christ** posted on this same homepage. In a very real way it can be taken as a filler-in from vs. 2 through vs. 16.

begins with the first mention of a woman, Mary. As giving birth to Jesus Christ, this new genealogy is rooted in the action of the Holy Spirit.

All the three major periods (Abraham, King David and the Babylonian deportation) of the genealogy we've seen thus far have been played out in the medium of time and space. Hence, all the persons named are relative to a particular place as well as people and are of a different order than with the new form of lineage about to unfold. Now the Holy Spirit is the agent hovering in the background, using Mary's pregnancy to prepare that line of birth which will become the church.⁴ Later this same Spirit will give birth to the church at Pentecost whose genealogy will rest, if you will, on the persons of Jesus Christ.

The conjunctive *de* which is found thirty-seven times in the genealogy makes another appearance in vs. 18 and goes essentially untranslated. We could look at it in light as a connective or conjunctive between the physical genealogy and the new one introduced by the *genesis* of Jesus Christ. The first of two sentences in vs. 2 present it in a straight-forward manner with *houtos hen* or literally "thus was" for "in this way." Actually it's intended as an introduction to the event.

The second sentence of vs. 18 continues through the next verse as an extended sentence starting to fill out the "thus was" just noted, these words being a kind of introduction to it. First we have *mnesteuo* (*S makar*) or Joseph and Mary being betrothed followed by the verb *sunerchomai* with *prin* or before, literally to come together (the preposition *sun-* or with and the common verb *erchomai*, to come). Here its in the conjugal sense (*S shaoteph*: to associate, have in common, have fellowship). Note the time span. The former has been completed and the latter has yet to reach completion which means some kind of resolution of the tension has to come about.

4 With regard to this shift from a human to a spiritual genealogy, consider the remarkable underlined words of St. Leo the Great: (PG #54: **Sermo in Nativitate Domini** xxvi, caput 2): *Quisquis enim hominum in quacumque mundi parte credentium regeneratur in Christo, interciso originalis tramite vetustatis, transit in novum hominem renascendo.* The English is rather bland: "For any believer in whatever part of the world that is re-born in Christ, quits the old paths of his original nature and passes into a new man by being reborn." **The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers** Volume XII, p. 137. In other words, the *genesis* from Abraham through David to Jesus Christ is terminated. With Jesus Christ a *genesis* of a wholly different order comes into existence.

The means for this resolution is the verb *heurisko* in the aorist passive which implies that in time Mary was noticed as being pregnant. In the small village life of the day all it took was one person, perhaps a teenage contemporary, to spread the word. By the end of the day this *heurisko* was everywhere, having spread like a virus. As for the Holy Spirit or *Pneuma* + (S *Ruoch*), coming to grips with that was beyond the reach of everyone. So we have two extremes pitted against each other in young Mary: a pregnancy considered of doubtful origin and this strange, supernatural intervention. Some may even have thought the addition of the Holy Spirit could be a cover up of sorts, trying to pin a religious significance to it. As for Mary dealing with these events, she may even have pondered an abortion but obviously was afraid to let anyone else in on it.

Vs. 19 continues from the previous verse as an extended sentence seamlessly shifting from Mary to Joseph, her husband-to-be, the noun *aner* fundamentally as man compared with a youth. His reputation was just the opposite of Mary's which comes across to her contemporaries as somewhat suspicious and rightly so from their point of view, that is, the close contact involved with village life. Joseph is called *dikaios* (S *ki'na'*) or a just man. That sounds pretty generic but connotes an integrity that must have been recognized in the fishbowl-like environment in which he as well as Mary had lived all their lives. This rather generic quality comes to greater clarity when he refused to make a public fuss over sending Mary away. The verb is *apoluo* or literally to loose (S *shara'*, the same meaning) from with the adverb *lathra* translated as quietly but also implies stealth. The same applies to the Syriac *matshya'eyth*, in a clandestine fashion. As for Joseph's attitude, it's reflected in the verb *boulomai*, to wish or be willing and shows more deftness and restraint than the RSV's translation, "resolved." This preference for discretion is reflected in the verb *deigmatizo*, Joseph's wish not to expose her Mary, that is, to make a public example. Besides, that would reflect badly on him and his family for having allowed himself to be duped.

This *apoluo* or loosening-from is a commonly accepted practice in such a situation. What makes it stand out is the adverb *lathra* or quietly. Most other men would make a public show to proclaim their own feigned *dikaios* compared with Joseph who in this few words proves to be the genuine article. Given the village culture in which Mary and Joseph lived, it's no surprise that the two got together. There must have been a limited supply of marriageable youths to go

around, Mary's family also being attracted to Joseph's inherent *dikaios*. All this external interference, taken for granted in such a culture, served to heighten tension for them both as well as for their respective families. Pressure too was being applied by the villagers, a kind of extended family. Joseph had to act now or never.

The first word of vs. 20 in the **RSV** and **NIV** is "but," another instance of the connective *de* which serves to set in motion an action that will save the day. The tension of this moment is captured by the verb *enthumeomai* (S *raha'*: to think, suppose, be willing, to herd), to reflect upon. The noun *thumos* in the root basically means principle of life prefaced with the preposition *en-* or *in*. In sum, Joseph is doing some serious soul searching. Taking into consideration the parochial nature of their environment, he had to consider Mary's family and their future interaction with his own family should he not go ahead with the marriage.

So in the very process of Joseph's *enthumeomai* we have a sudden interruption heralded by *idou* which isn't in the Syriac. Joseph was wholly absorbed in himself and needed a wake-up call which took the form of an angel or *aggelos* being an envoy or one who is sent (S *malaka'*). The text doesn't give him an identity, just the fact that he's acting in accord with his nature. This angel didn't appear or *phaino* (to bring to light; S *chaz'*: to make visible, to heed) to Joseph in dramatic form. He comes across pretty much as a practical man, typical of his village, and preoccupied with making a living presumably as a carpenter. This demanded from the heavenly envoy a different approach. He decided upon a dream or when Joseph would be passive and more amenable to respond. The angel had been delegated by the Lord to contact Joseph, but the means by which do it was left up to him.

So one night—it had to be fast lest Joseph give in and send Mary away—the angel appeared to Joseph literally "according to (*kata*) a dream" or *onar* (S *chelam*; the verbal root means to be healthy, to heal). *Kata* represents a stealth way by which the angel comes in...we could almost say glides in...to do his thing without causing a major interruption. Otherwise, his appearance would be frightening Joseph. The Syriac verb for the noun, *chelm* means to be whole or sound, thereby giving the nature of a dream a positive, curative effect. In order to make sure that Joseph recognized the angel as genuine, not evil or a simple fantasy, the angel calls him "son of David." That, of course, reminds him of his

royal lineage. While true, Joseph is living in a village compared with Jerusalem where you'd expect such persons of royal lineage to reside. Although this bloodline is genuine, it seems that Joseph had a relatively vague connection. This might be through belonging to an extended family and family line, not uncommon at the time.

The very first thing the angel does is to put Joseph at ease by telling him not to have any fear in taking Mary as his wife, *phobeo* and *paralambano*. The Syriac for the former is *dakel*, also to dread; the latter literally to take beside or have Mary be *para-* Joseph. Note the way the angel describes her pregnancy, "that which is conceived" or the aorist passive of *gennaō* or to beget, to become the parent of, with the phrase "in (*en*) her." That lifts the fear Joseph had of taking as a wife, of someone who may have had sexual relations with another man. If she did and it was discovered after the marriage, it was a sure-fire way to bring shame not only upon the righteousness of Joseph but his family. As for "*en* her," it has a direct correspondence with the *ek* or "from the Holy Spirit" or *Pneuma* +. This *Pneuma*, of course, was mentioned earlier, but at the time Joseph was completely unaware of its action.

Vs. 21 continues as an extended sentence with the angel. As for Mary, she'll give birth to a son. It's up to Joseph to name him, that is, Jesus, for he will save not so much the people but save his people from their sins. The verb is *sozo* and the noun, *hamartia*, two words which are very familiar. The latter points to a condition opposite of what characterizes Joseph, that is, *dikaaios*. It has affected the people as a whole and thus requires a remedy, Joseph being an ideal candidate to assist with the restoration. The Syriac doesn't convey this; instead, it has the verb *chay*, fundamentally to live or as here, to make the people alive which sin (*S chta'* as that which has missed) had prevented them from being as such.

With regard to this angelic visit in a dream in vs. 23 we have reference to a prophet who goes unnamed. Matthew, of course, knows that it's Isaiah and is unconcerned whether his readers know it or not, wishing to keep his identity as secondary. What's important is the fulfillment or *pleroo* (*S malal* or to conclude, to satisfy) of the prophecy at hand, this verb as to make up for something that is lacking. The object of *pleroo* is *to rhethen* or that which has been said, *lego* through the unmentioned prophet.

Vs. 23 contains the prophecy at hand. First we have the version at hand followed by the original from Is 7.14:

“Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel.” *Idou* + or behold serves to get attention concerning the following two things Lord is about to say: 1) that a *parthenos* or a woman of marriageable age (*S btul*) is literally “to have in her stomach.” 2) that she is to beget a son, *tikto*.

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel. The person being addressed is King Ahaz and the occasion is when the Syrians under King Rezin were besieging Jerusalem but failed to capture it. Within this context Ahaz refused a sign or ‘*oth*’ from the Lord which consists of a young woman or *halmah*, a girl of marriageable age (compare with *betulah* or a virgin, not the same). Her identity isn’t given which is secondary to the child to whom she will give birth. Perhaps Matthew and some of his listeners see in the person of King Rezin and the Syrian army a sign...another kind of ‘*oth*...of the Romans occupying their land.

After presenting this verse from the prophet, Matthew adds a brief note as to the meaning of the proper name Emmanuel, that is, “God with us.” The verb is *methermeneuo* also as to translate, the preposition *meta-* prefaced to the root meaning to explain or expound which connotes an accompanying-with. And so it comes as no surprise that the angel who visited Joseph in a dream presented this image of King Ahaz and the prophet Isaiah.

Upon waking from this dream—chances are that by reason of its extraordinary nature Joseph did so in the middle of the night—he followed through on the angel’s command, *protasso* also as to give instructions, the direct nature of which indicated by the preposition *pros-*, direction towards-which. As for this *pros-*, it’s immediate object is Mary who is called his wife.

Vs. 25 concludes Chapter One which follows as an extended sentence beginning with vs. 24. The conjunctive *kai* translated as “but” plays an almost out-sized role by reason of an addendum to the dream and the prophecy it contained. Joseph did not know his wife, *ginosko* which parallels the Hebrew *yadah*, to know intimately or to have sexual intercourse. Then comes *heos* or “until”

which can be taken as the two having marital relations until after Mary gave birth to Jesus. Finally Joseph calls the name of this son Jesus or *Iesous* which he had received from the angel in a dream. Actually Jesus is a fairly common name so later when he grew up, he didn't stand out as someone special.

Chapter Two

The birth of Jesus is put forth in a matter-of-fact way, that he had come into existence in the village of Bethlehem when Herod was the local ruler, a client king of Rome. Actually the juxtaposition of these two names already casts an ominous shadow over the chapter which is about to unfold. As to offset this and to encourage his readers, Matthew introduces the wise men⁵ by *idou* + or behold. That is to say, we have an intervention out of the blue which will save the day or more accurately, prevent Jesus and his family from being annihilated. Even the very name *magos* signals that help has arrived. However, it hasn't come locally but from afar...really far off...from a place which isn't specified but as the text puts it vaguely, from the East. Actually East in and by itself has a mystique about it. Anyone who comes from there is endowed with a certain mysterious quality difficult to define but destined to have a lasting impact.

The word *magos* is of Persian origin which helps narrow it down a bit. As for who they are, it is a combination of astrologer and interpreter of dreams. Some folks may be uncomfortable with this in the Gospel, taking it as a tacit acknowledgment of their practices. On the other hand, their inclusion and coming to the new-born Christ is a sign of their submission to him, their powers included. All in all, we're dealing with genuine mystery-men who over the centuries have given birth to endless speculation.

As for how the magi perceived this birth and how it related to them in such a distant land we can only guess. Again, keep in mind that they got word in the East, that magic-mystical place just described where everything and anything is possible. As for the number of these mystery-men, that too isn't given. The same applies to their names. So instead of causing confusion, it has the opposite effect of creating a sense of mystery and excitement. Even their arrival is sudden and unexpected, coming to two young parents in a backwater village

⁵ The RSV has capital letters.

occupied by Rome. Note, however, that the magi didn't go to Bethlehem directly. They hadn't the slightest idea of their final location. Because they came from such a distance, it was only natural to make their way to the capitol, Jerusalem.

The presence of these magi in Jerusalem wouldn't have attracted much attention, that city being at the crossroads between east and west as well as north and south. All sorts of people passed through there. However, the magi drew immediate attention when they asked about the king of the Jews. You'd think the capitol would be the natural place to find him. Even the way these strangers spoke is provocative, evoking a certain naivete. Rome occupied the land and would be suspicious of anyone calling a local inhabitant a king. A few verses later we have Herod getting wind of this but thankfully no Roman official. However, surely word must have reached them. As for those the magi asked, we have no information but presume it was from both clerical and secular authorities.

Being versed in astrology and divinization, the magi may have sought out those like them which also roused suspicion in some quarters. Although such practices may have been common among the Israelites at the time—just look at the contentious history between the Lord and Israel over idol worship—a good many contemporaries must have continued these practices albeit in secret. So when those in charge got wind of all this, no doubt they were alarmed and rightly so. If the magi were simply visiting, hardly would they have garnered attention. So it seems the contacts they made in Jerusalem unwittingly turned out to be the ones to make the magi suspect.

As for the contact between magi and their counterparts in Jerusalem, their talk about having seen the star of a king was like adding fuel to the fire. Although they had come from the East, indeed a long way from Jerusalem, something local to have attracted their attention indeed was disturbing. If that weren't bad enough, when the magi expressed their intent to worship this newly born king of the Jews, they were inviting disaster. Most likely those whom they had encountered in Jerusalem must have thought them quite naive. Clearly they had no idea at their paranoid ruler. What made it worse was that these men let it be know they came to worship the newly born king, *prosskuneo* also meaning to give reverence, something that belongs to God alone. It was only a matter of time...very brief, a nanosecond in fact...that King Herod got a report about these

strangers. We don't know if he or any member of his court had encountered such visitors before but can presume they knew about them, having their ears close to the ground. All in all, the magi didn't get off on a good footing.

As vs. 3 has it, Herod was troubled or *tarasso*, which means to cause movement by shaking. The same applies to the Syriac *zuh* but more graphic by reason of the violence and apprehension implied. Note that King Herod heard, that is, he did so plainly and simply, followed by *tarasso*, the two being synonymous. The same applies not just to Jerusalem but to "all Jerusalem," the two happening at the same incredible speed. Even a casual visitor to the capitol would feel the foundation quaking beneath his feet. When it subsided, everyone knew something not good was brewing though they couldn't pinpoint its source.

Interestingly King Herod didn't summon the magi which reflects not just hesitation but genuine fear of a potential threat to his rule; even worse was the potential of retaliation from his Roman overlords. Also he must have been embarrassed at receiving word of a newly born king of the Jews from foreigners, not locals. How could such event in his own back yard go unnoticed? We can be almost certain that such neglect set in motion a purge of his those members responsible for keeping tabs on such vital matters. So without missing a beat, Herod assembles (*sunago*) all the chief priests and scribes. Again, note "all" as in "all Jerusalem." As for the scribes, they're described as "of the people" which means their ears are supposed to be close to the ground and would provide the most accurate information about these strange visitors.

As for the chief priests and scribes, Herod inquired of (*para*) them, *punthanomai* or to determine something (S *sha'el*, to ask). We can be fairly certain this wasn't simply a consultation but given Herod's state of mind—his *tarasso* as well as that of all Jerusalem—it must have been very intense. He pressed each and everyone present as to where the Christ or the Anointed One was to be born. In unison the chief priests and scribes blurted out that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem. How or where they got this information isn't given. One source might have been the local soothsayers, those who had come in contact with the magi. Both groups collaborated as to the exact place of Jesus' birth and ended up with a typical Hebrew solution, a quote from one Israel's prophets.

The chief priests and scribes decided upon using traditional religious language because it was tried and true and therefore free from any taint of astrology or divinization. Easily they could hide behind the words, “it is written.” No one could contest that. As for the quote, compare the one at hand with the Hebrew. It should be noted that each begins with the conjunctive showing they are related to the verse before which deals with a siege. In other words, that should be taken into account while reading the two quote from Micah 5.2 as follows:

”But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel whose origin is from old, from ancient days.” Ephrathah is an alternate name for Bethlehem which translates as fruitful. Although the adjective *tsahyr* describing it can designate inferiority, it doesn’t apply by reason of this village giving birth, if you will, to a ruler or the verbal root *mashal* whose alternate meaning is to make like, to assimilate. Note the words “for me” as applied to the Lord. Despite this unknown mysterious ruler’s origins in a place called “fruitful” and “house of bread,” his origins are literally “from before” (*qedem*) and “from days long past” (*holam*). If Herod was aware of that—and thankfully he wasn’t—those consulting him would be in deep trouble.

“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.” *Elachistos* is the adjective for least and can apply to time (shortest) as well as number (fewest). The Syriac *bezyra’* connotes that which is despised. Despite all this, a ruler will emerge (*exerchomai*: to come forth), the participle *hegeomai*, to be in a supervisory position or in sum, to lead or to guide. The Syriac has *raha’* which also means to pasture as with sheep. The function of this ruler will be to guide Israel which the Lord designates as “my people,” the verb being *poimaino* which essentially means to pasture and is parallel with the just mentioned Syriac *raha’*.

We have no response from King Herod to the chief priests or scribes whom he had summoned and presumably didn’t put them to death. Instead, he accepted their response. As noted above, they accessed the most reliable source possible, the scriptures. Fortunately for them that satisfied their master who at once (*tote*, then) summoned the wise men but did so in secret, *lathra* +. The verb is *kaleo* or to call with *akiboo* which means to make a detailed inquiry. The adjective *akbribes* derived from this verb has the same idea but in a painful sort

of way. And we can be sure that Herod acted accordingly. As for the Syriac, the verb is *yeleph* (to learn) with the adverb *matshyayth*, or clandestinely. The reason for this secrecy? Herod wanted to avoid several potential power kegs: fear that he had acquiesced to strangers from a distant land and their magic arts which would go against sensibilities of the priestly class. Above all, he didn't want to rouse the local population who'd rush off to Bethlehem and see this king. Perhaps most importantly he didn't want to upset his Roman overlords. We can assume that this obsessive desire for secrecy as well as security extended to most if not all his court.

No doubt, King Herod had employed both flattery and coercion when he summoned (*kaleuo*) the magi secretly. In this way he was better able to know when the star had appeared and tried every way possible to shield it from his subjects. Note that he heard about this star in relation to Bethlehem, that its appearance in the far-off land from which the magi came led them directly to Jerusalem. Did Herod share any information about the Micah verse with the magi? Most likely he did which is why he sent them off to Bethlehem. That must have made the magi uneasy, for now they could see that their host was using them, having taken advantage of them. Indeed, up to the present they had acted in a naive sort of way and regretted it. At last, however, their eyes were open and took the necessary precautions to protect themselves. Yes, they had asked freely about the newborn king upon their arrival in Jerusalem but now could not do a thing about it. The cat was out of the bag and too late to regret having not kept their inquiries discreet.

After this tense interview with King Herod which was held in secret, the magi set off to Bethlehem with orders to search diligently. *Exetazo* is the verb, the preposition *ex-* or from implying that such a search would be done with the utmost thoroughness. Almost certainly Herod sent some of his agents to keep track of the magi who were well aware of this. As for *exetazo*, it's a kind of overkill because Bethlehem is a small place. So once the magi had discovered the child, they were instructed to inform him, *apaggello* also as to give an account. This would be followed by King Herod himself going to Bethlehem and worshiping the child, *proskuneo* + which is similar to the Syriac *sagad*, to give reverence. Obviously he said this tongue-in-cheek expecting the magi to believe him, again taking advantage of their naivete which by now had dissipated. The magi played along, having learned the hard way. Actually you'd think that Herod would have killed the newly born child then and there.

However, he was wily and willing to wait for a more suitable time. Again, currying favor with Rome was always in the back of his mind.

Vs. 9 reads “when they had heard (*akouo*) the king,” words which convey a lot more than face value. That is to say, the magi dutifully listened to all King Herod had said, keeping in mind that he was seeking to deceive them. Their ability to engage in astrology and related practices endowed them with greater sensitivity than most people. This enabled them to see right through the king and how he was manipulating them. At the same time they realized it was better to maintain an appearance of their original naivete so as not to rouse any suspicion.

As soon as the magi left (and did so with great relief) they saw the star, the same star which had brought them all the way to Jerusalem. *Idou* + or behold introduces the presence of this star which suggests two things. First, the meeting with King Herod took place under the cover of night. Second, it was visible to the magi alone, not to others nor to any agents of Herod who certainly were following them. *Idou* also suggests that the star had been invisible and appeared as soon as the magi left.

The star led the magi, *prosago* with the preposition *pros-* indicative of directness, of direction towards-which. Actually it was very easy to follow this star because it was the only moving object in the sky. And so the journey between Jerusalem and Bethlehem which normally would take five days was accomplished in one night or more accurately, almost at once. What makes it all the more remarkable is that part of the night was taken up with the magi meeting King Herod. Such was the miraculous power of this movable star. Finally it came to rest or *histemi*, the common verb meaning make to stand. This *histemi* was extremely accurate in its position over Jesus and his parents. The Syriac equivalent is *qum*, fundamentally as to rise, to stand firm, to exist and gives it a more dynamic air.

Were Mary and Joseph aware of this star? Surely they were, having seen it directly overhead for some time now. Instead of all the stars revolving around the North Star, they were revolving around the one directly above. Not only did Joseph and Mary marvel at this, but the local population must have done the same, especially shepherds who were out in the fields at night. Though not accounted for in Matthew’s Gospel, the shepherds to whom an angel appeared

in Luke's account must have been the only ones with an idea of what this was all about.

In vs. 10 the magi see the star. Compare with the previous verse when this same star had gone before them and rested over the place where Jesus was. The seeing at hand isn't different except in intensity; it was almost alive and reveals that the magi couldn't restrain themselves out of sheer joy. This response which is natural enough has none-too exaggerated words of *chairo*, *chara*, *megalos* and *sphodros*: to rejoice, joy, great and excessive. Jam all them all together and you have something inexpressible. The Syriac had *chada'*, *chadotha'*, *rava'* and *tav*, the last two literally as "great of good." As for their perception of the Christ child, all the text says is that he is a new born king...not God incarnate or the like. While that might be beyond the ability of the magi to comprehend, they seem to have an inkling that this baby was destined to be more than a mere king.

So armed, the magi entered the house (*oikia*) where they saw Mary with her child, Joseph not being mentioned who may have been out at the moment. Note that they simply went in. No need to knock on the door, for the star had informed Mary of their presence. Besides, their joy as just described was so great that it did away with the usual formalities. As for the house, perhaps it belonged to Joseph or to some member of his family. No cave nor manger are involved which suggests that this incident had occurred some time after Jesus' birth. As soon as the magi saw Jesus, they did the following almost simultaneously: *pipto* or fell down which suggests worship sudden amazement, *proskuneo* + or worshiped (S *naphal* and *sagad* +) and opened their treasures, *thesauros*.

As just about everyone knows, these gifts are gold, frankincense and myrrh which have received endless speculation as how they related to the new born babe. Apart from all this, Mary (and later Joseph who had entered the house) hadn't a clue as what to do with these things. We can assume that after they had overcome their astonishment, the magi did all the explanation as to the gifts as well as using the opportunity to reveal their true identity. At the same time they were keenly aware of King Herod monitoring their every move through spies. What, then, did Joseph and Mary do with the three precious gifts which were way, way beyond imagining for two peasants? Chances are they distributed some discreetly but at a later time because the magi informed them

that King Herod was out for Jesus' blood. Also they must have kept most for their own needs. Indeed, the three gifts would provide a comfortable life in Egypt to where they were about to flee including accommodations and so forth along the way.

Vs. 12 concludes this episode with the magi by saying they were warned in a dream about what was to happen. This suggests they may have stayed the night or perhaps a bit longer as guests of Joseph, Mary and their newly born son. Who wouldn't ask such generous strangers to stay as long as they wished? Besides, it was part of the local custom to care for strangers. Almost certainly the magi didn't linger because they had promised a report to King Herod as noted in vs. 8. However, they were warned against this, the verb *chrematizo* (the Syriac is *chaza'* or simply to see) suggesting divine intervention as by some kind of revelation which here turns out to be a dream, *onar +*.

There's no word about an angel. Perhaps the star had something to do with this which from here on isn't mentioned because it had fulfilled its mission. The magi picked up and left for home by a different way. Despite the inconvenience, they took a circuitous route to avoid detection. Upon reaching home, many friends and associates inquired as to their trip which in the first place they took pains to conceal under the guise of some diplomatic mission. Once that was out of the way, the magi settled in for a long wait, one for which they were prepared, to monitor developments with regard to the child they had visited. However, most likely they didn't live long enough to see Jesus active in his ministry some thirty years later. The only unfortunate news they heard was that indeed Herod had tried to dupe them and slew all male children in Bethlehem. However tragic this had been, it came as no surprise. Also they were delighted that Joseph took his family to Egypt and remained there until the death of King Herod.

Once the magi had departed (*anachoreo*, also as in vs. 12), an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph literally "according to a dream," *kata* with *onar +*. We don't know if it was the same *aggelos + (S malaka')* who appeared in 1.20 encouraging Joseph to take Mary as his spouse, the verb *phaino* being used in both instances. It'd come as no surprise that before departing, the magi informed this would happen to Joseph, so he was prepared. In fact, they were tempted to take him along with Mary and Jesus, but the journey would be too long. Besides, they

knew an association had to be made between them and Egypt. In this way their stay there would concur with biblical expectations.

In vs. 13 this angel or essentially messenger told Joseph to rise and to do so in the literal sense in order to take his wife and child with him. The verb is *paralambano*, literally as to take along side or *para-*. They are to flee to Egypt and to do so that very night and remain there until the angel tells Joseph when to return. All this had to be done under the cover of darkness. The family had to literally sneak out of town without rousing anyone's attention, especially any of King Herod's spies. These spies were at the ready to send a military detachment of some sort to kill Jesus, *apollumi*, a word connoting utter destruction and would not allow any obstacle to stand in the way.

Perhaps Joseph decided to leave at the same time as the magi, disguising himself and Mary as part of that group. A little out of town one group would head south and the other east. When in the morning the families of both Joseph and Mary discovered they had suddenly picked up and vanished, they were left utterly clueless as to why. However, that didn't last long because Herod was about to inflict terrible destruction upon the local community in his attempt to kill Jesus. As noted above, thankfully Joseph and Mary had the gifts from the magi to facilitate their sudden departure as well as to provide for settling in Egypt. Although the time frame is secondary, their time in Egypt seems to be approximately three and a half years. By the time he left, Jesus was four years old and barely could recall his life there. As for the specific location, none is given nor is that of any significance for the narration at hand. The time certainly wasn't long enough to establish lasting ties there.

Word of King Herod's death spread like wildfire which meant some kind of political shift was about to take place. On top of everyone's minds was that Rome would be involved which spelled trouble. However, that didn't mean much for people like Joseph and Mary. On a larger scale, their sojourn in Egypt was meant to fulfill the *rhethen* + or what was spoken by the prophet who goes unidentified, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." The Hebrew text reads in full as "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" [Hos 11.1]. Obvious reference is to Moses who led Israel from the bondage of Egypt across the Red Sea and into the Sinai wilderness. However, the verses which follow have a dark side. Vs. 2 sums it up well. The more the Lord called (*qara'*), the more the people withdrew from him. In other words, *qara'* had an

inverse effect. While this doesn't apply to Joseph, Mary and Jesus, it suggests they had a role in countering it. Throughout Israel's history something much larger, albeit hidden in the background. That consists of the tendency to stray from the Lord just as dominant as it had been at the time of the Exodus and for many years thereafter.

Vs. 16 finally brings us to what everyone had feared all along, namely, King Herod taking out his wrath. We saw seeds of this back in vs. 3 with him being troubled or *tarasso* and that extending to the whole of Jerusalem. Much of it had to do with having been duped by the magi instead of the other way around, the verb being *empaizo*, to subject to derision. The verbal root is *paizo* or to play like a child, to sport, so when the preposition *em-* or "in" is prefaced to it, we have something especially negative in terms of deriding (S *bazach* or to mock, insult).

Thus *empaizo* leads automatically to the following two responses. First, *thumoo* or to be angry where one's deepest passions are aroused (S *chamath*, to burn with anger). Second, killing all the male children under two years of age in Bethlehem and surrounding areas. One can imagine the guilt Joseph and Mary much have experienced for the rest of their lives, the birth of their son being directly responsible for such an unprecedented slaughter. It'd come as no surprise that their sojourn in Egypt would contribute to this, having fled in the dead of night. Hopefully their absence would help put to rest any suspicions.

While Joseph, Mary and Jesus were on the way to Egypt or perhaps already in Egypt, they couldn't but recall the pharaoh ordering the Hebrew midwives to kill all the male children (cf. Ex 1.16). As for this age, Herod ascertained it from information he got from the magi who unwittingly gave it to him. Such attention to details reveals the true character of King Herod. Couple this with *thumoo* or intense anger mentioned above and obsessive attention to detail, you have a genuine loose canon. When the magi learned of it, it was bound to be a source of regret and pain for the rest of their lives. The only comfort they derived was having been instrumental in allowing Joseph, Mary and Jesus to escape.

Unknown to Herod, the magi, Joseph, Mary and the respective families is a much larger force at work in all this. At the same time you can't help but wonder if they ever made the association between the tragedy that befell them and how it tied in with Jeremiah's prophecy. As for this prophecy and as in

most cases, it consists in a certain fulfillment, *pleroo* and *rhethen* (both +), this being the first time where Matthew actually names the person. Although the two verses are fairly similar, they are paralleled as follows; first comes the one from Jeremiah 31.15 followed by the one at hand:

“Thus says the Lord: ‘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 not.’” This verse is situated within the larger context of the restoration of Israel and is inserted in order to show that the Lord is concerned for his people and that they shouldn’t weep. This he does in an authoritative fashion by prefacing his words with “Thus says the Lord.” Matthew surely was aware of this context which is why he picked out the verse. Note the impersonal way *qol* or voice is presented even though it belongs to Rachel. It makes her weeping or *bakah* all the more poignant which is described as both lamentation and bitter weeping, *noah* which connotes wailing and *bakah* as *marar*, to be bitter. In other words, Rachel refuses to be consoled for the death of her children, *nacham*, whose alternate meaning is to lament. Their death is presented in the starkest possible terms, ‘*eynenu* or “they are not.” Plain and simple; they do not exist. The situation refers to Rachel, mother of Joseph and Benjamin, lamenting their exile.

“A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled because they were no more.” *Klauthmos* and *odurmos* are the nouns echoed in Rachel’s weeping or *klaio*, to weep bitterly. Note the verb *thelo* or to wish, a less stronger word for refusing along with *parakaleo*, literally to call to one’s side, *para-*. Also the Greek *ouk esin* or “not is” is equivalent to the Hebrew ‘*eynenu* above, “they are not.”

Vs. 19 begins with good news. That is, it uses the verb *teleutao* or to die with regard to King Herod...good news in that this verb implies more than just dying but a period of time coming to an end or completion. In this case the end is beneficial for Joseph, Mary and Jesus. However, they probably wanted to wait some time before returning home to make sure that the next ruler didn’t carry through on his Herod’s plans. However, the Lord soon informs Joseph that it’s okay. Still, this idea of a king of the Jews having been born was unsettling for any ruler in Jerusalem. As noted several times earlier, the real issue was how this would go over with Roman authorities which is why most likely the local authorities tended to squelch any report of a king.

As soon as Herod died—*teleutao* or came to an end—we have the exclamation *idou* + or behold which goes both ways, if you will. Backward in the sense of relief at Herod's death and forward in the sense of good news. At first the Lord was prepared to send one of his angels or *aggelos*, perhaps the same one who had appeared to Joseph on two separate occasions. Then he changed his mind. The Lord too was excited at the death of Herod and decided to step in and appear (*phaino* +) himself. After all, Jesus is no ordinary person. It'd come as no surprise that the Lord thought of Joseph's predecessor by the same name and noted for his dreams and which got him into big trouble with his family. However, eventually that Joseph rescued Egypt from famine. Right away the Lord told Joseph to rise just as the angel did in vs. 13, telling to take his family and flee from Herod's impending wrath. Note that the Lord doesn't mention King Herod, referring instead to those who had sought Jesus' death which suggests that he wasn't unaided in his vindictiveness.

Without missing a beat, Joseph informs Mary (Jesus still too young to grasp what's going on), both packing up and leaving Egypt. We have no details as to what they did for some three plus years but most likely lived off income from the gifts of the magi. Indeed Joseph put aside some money for the return trip which started at once. Both the trip to and from Egypt must have gone along the coast, the quickest way. While in Egypt, the three didn't rouse any attention, for the Egyptians were used to foreigners in their midst. In fact, Joseph must have associated with a local synagogue for the duration, they thinking him nor Mary and her child as anything special.

When you first take a look at vs. 22 you'd think that the Lord had misled Joseph. Yes, those who did seek his son's death are no more. However, Herod's son Archelaus took over which made Joseph justifiably hesitant to return to Bethlehem. Besides, what kind of reception would he get after having disappeared into the night some three and half years ago? Even worse, people haven't forgotten the trauma King Herod had brought upon their community by slaying so many of their young male children. As noted earlier, they'd be quick attribute that to the birth of their son and those strange visitors called magi. As for the presence of Archelaus on the throne, it had one benefit for Joseph. It provided an excuse for him to avoid Bethlehem and opt for somewhere else.

So with this in mind, it was time for the Lord to intervene with another dream. By now Joseph had come to expect guidance from this. Mary understood and did her best to support her husband. By now the significance of their son was growing stronger which remained a difficult thing around which to wrap their heads. The verb for providing the warning is *chrematizo* as in vs. 12 which revealed Nazareth as a safe area in which to settle. Neither an angel nor the Lord are connected with this dream which turns out to have greater significance than Joseph could imagine, for it's tied in with fulfilling a word, *pleroo* and *rhethen* (both +) he was unaware of at the time.

A footnote in the **NIV** points out that Nazareth isn't mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures. One possible connection is the judge Samson noted in Judg 13.6-7: "Then the woman came and told her husband, 'A man of God came to me, and his countenance was like the countenance of the angel of God, very terrible; I did not ask him whence he was, and he did not tell me his name; but he said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son; so then drink no wine or strong drink and eat nothing unclean for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth to the day of his death.'" In light of this association, we can say that the frightful events of Chapter Two come to a successful though sobering conclusion and prepare the way for Jesus' public ministry.

Chapter Three

The opening words of this new chapter, "in those days," can be understood as representing a time, say after Pentecost, when people were looking back to when Jesus began his ministry. There's a certain fondness in referring to them much as one would look back at the early years of a beloved family member. Actually "in those days" is an invitation to make a story, freely and knowingly embellishing it out of love. As for the time frame, there are two major periods. The first is backwards from Pentecost as just noted and the second is from the event at hand or Jesus' baptism onward. That consists of some thirty years from where we had left off with Chapters One and Two. How much of the early years of Jesus are remembered by the current generation is up for grabs. The same applies to the visit by the magi. Surely those old enough to recall that mysterious event must have wondered how they made out upon returning home. No one seems to have any information about them which most likely is what the magi would want. We can assume that the star which guided them to

Bethlehem never departed but kept them informed in a mysterious, non-verbal fashion regarding subsequent events.

And so with Chapter Three things really get under way concerning what Jesus is destined to accomplish. At the same time the thirty year interval cannot be overlooked or willfully forgotten. They act as a silent witness throughout the entire ministry of Jesus right up to his ascension into heaven. Also these years provide a key to unlock the concentrated three years of this ministry from where we derive our information about Jesus, some 99.9% of it. So at this point we can set before us the concluding verse of St. John's Gospel, "But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."

Vs. 1 of Chapter Two opens with a certain flourish, John the Baptist making his appearance as designated by the verb *paragignomai*, literally to be present or to be nearby, *para-*. His appearance is just as sudden as Jesus, the two coming on the scene almost as one man. Their connection goes way back to John leaping in the womb of his mother Elizabeth upon her greeting Mary who likewise was pregnant. The verb *skirtao* is revealing. It applies to the bounding of young sheep out of joy. Was there a connection between the two men growing up? Almost certainly, this continuing pretty much up to the present even though it might seem otherwise. However, there was a change when John went off into the desert which marks a time when the two men went their separate ways. While continuing along in Nazareth Jesus was well aware of John living in the wilderness as what amounts to his own herald. Word either about John or directly from him must have reached Jesus though one gets the impression that each man respected the other's way of life and remained separate. Only in this way would their future meeting be eventful. It should be noted that despite any physical separation, the *skirtao* by John in his mother's womb and Jesus acknowledging it is where their bond truly lies.

As for John, he was engaged in preaching or *kerusso* (S *karaz*, to proclaim, teach, recite) which had a definite public quality about it. Originally it took place in isolation in the wilderness of Judea, *eremos* being the noun for such a deserted or empty place. That means people went out there, not the other way around, John coming to them. So did John just start his *kerusso* or have a disciple inform people that he was doing it? Let's stick with the former though it's known that

John had followers, some of whom later contacted Jesus. John would be out there physically isolated and one day cry out but not loudly what the text at hand records. This reverberated far beyond the wilderness, penetrating all the inhabited areas of the area. No place was immune to this reverberation.

The first word John uttered aloud all by himself was *metanoeo*, literally to put one's mind (*noos*) behind or after, *meta-* (S *tuv*, to return). In sum, his was a message of a need to first experience remorse and then make amends. All he had to do was to say this one word out loud. Once set loose, this word acted like a magnet and drew people to him while he didn't have to budge an inch. In close association with this *metanoeo* message is the kingdom of heaven being at hand. The verb *eggizo* (S *qarev*, to be near, complete) connotes a drawing near or approach which is pretty much continuous. *Basileia* obviously has implications of royalty and hierarchy with regard to this order, and *ouranos* the place where the person embodying such royalty resides. So in essence John's insight is that such a transcendent form of governance is in the process of coming to each person. Although most people didn't realize it, all this was extraordinary. As for that coming, it requires putting one's mind after (*meta-*) all obstacles standing in the way of its approach. If John were to speak such in Jerusalem, he'd run into trouble at once because that was the seat of kingship or rule, that in turn being subject to Rome.

John's words pertain to a conversion which at once remind Matthew of the prophet Isaiah. Here he's following the time-honored Jewish practice of appealing to scripture pretty much as did the chief priests and scribes when dealing with King Herod. This appeal to Isaiah is just about the highest authority available which puts John the Baptist pretty much on the same level. Also it gives indirect insight...not direct, of course...into the bulk of John's preaching. Like a rabbi, he spent all his time not so much preaching in the way we take it but sitting down and engaging in passionate give-and-take with those who came to him.

Here are the two verses from Isaiah (40.3):

“A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’” This is the second mention of *qol* + or voice, the first being in vs. 2 of which Matthew was aware. Note that it's presented in an impersonal way though obviously attributed to the Lord. In

both instances he wishes to stand back a bit instead of coming off with it directly. Such indirectness is a more subtle and hopefully lasting way the Lord will get attention. It just might make people pause a moment while rousing their curiosity. And so the Lord decides to try it out not once but twice in rapid succession. Here *qol* is in the constant act of calling or *qara'* + and does so in the wilderness or *midbar*. Although *midbar* superficially seems to be derived from *davar* or to speak in the sense of giving utterance, it is not. However, you can't but help make an association. Thus *qol* is like a beacon but only made of sound which goes out continuously to reach people wherever they happen to live.

The function of this voice calling is twofold, the first to prepare or *panah* which means to turn. Here it's with regard to *derek* which applies to a going or journey with regard to the Lord. Secondly, it's to make straight or *yashar* which also applies to making level with regard to a *mesilah*, more as an embanked or raised highway suggestive of traversing swampy areas. It's location is not in *midbar* but in *haravah* which is suggestive of sterility.

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” The very sound of the verb *boao* for crying is more suggestive than *qara'*, a kind of prolonged utterance coming from deep within the person doing it. The three words of note are *eremos* + or the general noun for wilderness which isn't as evocative as *midbar* or *haravah*, *etoimazo* or to prepare as well as to make ready and *euthus* or straight as in a line.

Vs. 4 presents a well-known image of John with a garment or *enduma* in the general sense made of camel hair, a leather belt and food as locusts and wild honey followed by *tote* + or “then.” This introduces vs. 5, almost as though the image of John formed by his *qara'* was the agent that beckoned people to him. More precisely, *qara'* is put in terms of “Jerusalem and all Judea” not to leave out the region around the Jordan. Taken literally, that would be a significant amount of people. Most likely they streamed out to the wilderness over an extended period of time which is what the verb *ekporeuo* suggests (*ek-* from). John couldn't handle this alone, so over time he recruited disciples who like Jesus shortly afterwards helped him out. However, they never achieved status like the latter but most likely drifted toward them upon John's death. Despite the unforgiving desert landscape, there was sufficient water because John had taken up his position by the Jordan River. That means people could have stayed longer than usual while taking in John's message before returning home.

Vs. 6 continues from the previous verse, the two being linked with the conjunctive *kai*. Not only did people listen to John preaching, he baptized them, *baptizo* (S *hamad*, to dive, penetrate) which originally means to dip and not mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures. Simultaneous with this *baptizo* is the confession of one's sins, *exomologeō* being an admission of wrongdoing, with the preposition *ex-* (from) making the root *homologeō* (to speak together) all the more forceful (S *yedah*: to know, perceive). As for any follow-up to all this, it isn't mentioned once the people have returned to their regular lives. To be sure, the Romans authorities took notice. Though there's no record of them doing anything about John as well as the constant stream of people visiting him, it suggests that they wrote it off as another Jewish sect doing its thing. To interfere might aggravate the situation unnecessarily.

Among the constant stream of people coming and going two groups in particular got John's attention, namely, the Pharisees and Sadducees. They just stood there, watching and not making any move to get closer. It was easy to see who these men were by their distinctive religious garb. Most people gave them the cold shoulder, knowing they came not to listen nor to be baptized but to keep an eye out on them. Chances are these Pharisees and Sadducees took note (literally) of some people they knew or knew about and reported them to the chief priest back in Jerusalem.

The text says that the Pharisees and Sadducees came for baptism (*epi* or upon with the noun *baptisma*). Not true, really, but most likely put on an appearance in order to get closer to John. Some may have gone through with being baptized which means they had to invent sins and confess them, a dead give-away of their insincerity. However, John stopped them dead in their tracks. No small wonder he exclaimed that they are a brood of vipers, *echidna* usually of the poisonous variety. Indeed, those nearby heard this and couldn't agree more heartily.

In the same breath John snapped out that someone had warned them of the wrath to come. The verb *hupodeiknumi* means literally to show by tracing out, the root *deiknumi* or to show prefaced with *hupo-* or under. The object here is *orge* (S *rogaz*) or wrath, most likely coming from God. The Pharisees and Sadducees were stopped dead in their tracks with this question, rhetorical by nature but penetrating right to the bone. It made them back off at once to a safe distance, fearful that some of the crowd may make a rush at them. On a

positive note, there's a chance a few showed their sincerity in wanting to be baptized but did so at a later time when things quieted down.

On the other hand, in vs. 8 John extends hope to both Pharisees and Sadducees, communicating to them the same message of repentance presented to everyone, here using the noun *metanoia*. However, he tacks on a condition, knowing that these men are less open than others coming to him. They are literally to make (*poieo*, the common verb to do) fruit which is worthy or *axios* of the *metanoia* at hand. Then in the next verse which is an extended sentence John cautions them not to lean up their religious heritage. That consists of appealing to Abraham as their father. In fact, all those who came out to John can make the same claim. Actually the Pharisees and Sadducees were mortified to be rebuked, the first time someone had the courage to do this. If they were honest enough, they would recognize that John was spot on.

To add insult to injury, John says in an almost casual manner that God is able to make children of Abraham from stones. In other words, no big deal. He then compares these representatives of official Judaism to a tree which fails to yield good fruit and therefore is to be cut down and cast into the fire. The fruit such a tree bears is good or better, *kalos* which connotes beauty in the sense of being elegant.

In vs. 11 John continues to speak with the Pharisees and Sadducees more than any other people who come to him since he wishes them to return to Jerusalem with something to remember him by, and in this he succeeds. Not only does he put his own mission in jeopardy, he speaks of someone who will supersede him. Note that John says he is baptizing you with water, that is, he's doing it to those present, but it's doubtful they acquiesced. Also note the phraseology with the two prepositions *en* and *eis*: "in water into *metanoia* +."

As for the unidentified person to come after him, John doesn't let on who it is although he's fully aware that it is Jesus. Use of the adjective *hikanos* or worthy connotes sufficiency or being adequate when it comes to his baptizing with water as well as the Mystery Man who will be baptizing with the Holy Spirit. The very comparison in and by itself is indicative of this lack of being *hikanos* and intimates a certain provisional nature of the mission in which John is engaged. So while John is very much intent upon baptizing people for repentance, he's doing this with an awareness that it's incomplete and needs to

be filled up in some way or another. How that will come about isn't his business nor that of any else.

One thing is certain, however. The two baptisms of which John is speaking require a thorough dipping or immersion, the original meaning of the verb. By its very nature, water rolls off a person. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit or *Pneuma* + first mentioned in 1.18 baptizes with two aspects of its own character. That consists of wind (for *Pneuma* is as such) and more ominously, fire. Also this fire can be taken as blowing through a person. Did the Pharisees and Sadducees know what John was talking about? Holy Spirit has a definite New Testament ring which Matthew has inserted. Indeed the Spirit or *Ruach* plays an important role Jewish religion, but here it's being used with different twist.

The image of wind is also tied in with that of a winnowing fork. It's used to toss grain into the air...into the *Pneuma*...so as to separate the grain from anything superfluous. Once this has been done, and we can assume that fire was part of the winnowing process, the wheat will be gathered into barns and the chaff burned. Note that the fire is not capable of being extinguished or quenched *asbestos* (S *daka'*, to make pure). And so John leaves off his discussions abruptly with the Pharisees and Sadducees, turning attention to those on the banks of the Jordan awaiting baptism. We can assume they departed at once, not speaking much with each other, for they were too confused. The problem they faced now was how to report what they encountered to their higher-ups in Jerusalem. We can be assured that from now on they kept an even sharper eye on John's activity, awaiting the Mystery Man of whom he had spoken.

Vs. 13 begins with *tote* + or "then" which plays an important role, actually a decisive one. Jesus now comes on the scene in order to be baptized by John. Jesus was aware of the contentious encounter between John and the Pharisees and Sadducees, so he must have waited a while until things had settled down. His *paragignomai* + or literally coming beside (*para-*) is suggestive of John's baptism with water and Jesus' baptizing with the Holy Spirit though the latter won't happen for a while. Still, it's prefigured through his own baptism. Thus with the meeting of these two we have a definitive transition from water to *Pneuma* and to fire.

Nothing is said as to what prompted Jesus to leave home. We can presume that he took considerable care to prepare his family, not simply walking away. Perhaps he may have joined several others turning the journey to the Jordan River into a kind of pilgrimage. Now he was going to meet his cousin, the same man who leapt in his mother's womb. Indeed, John must have done the same *skirtao* upon Jesus' arrival. This provided ample warning that Jesus was in the vicinity, yet indistinguishable among so many awaiting to be baptized. Thus this *skirtao* linked Jesus with John while Jesus was still in Galilee and was the agent, if you will, that prompted Jesus to come.

Vs. 14 has John the Baptist toying with the idea of not baptizing Jesus, *diakoluo* being the verb translated as to prevent. The preposition *dia-* or through prefaced to *koluo* or to prevent suggests greater hesitancy on John's part, a preventing-through, if you will. With all good intentions in mind, he's standing in the way and expresses this to Jesus as a need to be baptized by him. We can assume that he has in mind not water but the above mentioned *Pneuma* and fire.

Despite this protestation John relents. It's clear that Jesus doesn't want to engage in an argument or talk down to John. Instead he says simply "Let it be so," the verb *aphiemi* conveying the sense of letting go, of releasing. Not only that, he includes John as a participant; both are to fulfill all righteousness. The verb *prepos* conveys the suitability of the situation and ties in nicely with the notion of *dikaiosune* or righteousness, more accurately "all righteousness" or righteousness in its totality. Using the verb *pleroo* + in conjunction with it suggests that something had been lacking or more accurately, not quite present until the time at hand. Now there's a convergence between John, Jesus about to be baptized and the mission for which he was baptized. And so vs. 15 concludes with the short sentence, "Then he consented," *aphiemi* +. The alternate translation? End of story. Let's get on with it.

Vs. 16 simply says that Jesus was baptized, pure and simple. We can assume that he didn't wish to draw attention to himself as someone special. Therefore he took his place in the line waiting to move up. At least the Pharisees and Sadducees weren't around but even if they were, presuming the self-effacing way Jesus comported himself, they wouldn't notice him as standing out. They had a general idea that someone special, a supposed messiah type might show up, and if he did, would make a show of himself. They got this information from John himself who kept on harping in a very public fashion about someone

extraordinary is about to come. As for the Pharisees and Sadducees, no splash = no messiah.

At once Jesus emerged from the Jordan River followed by *idou* + or “behold” which introduces in somewhat dramatic form the Spirit or *Pneuma* + of God coming down upon him. Note two factors involved here. The first is *euthus* or immediately with regard to leaving the Jordan and the second is that Jesus is the only person Matthew mentions as seeing this *Pneuma*. For this to happen, the heavens or *ouranos* + had to split, the plural more indicative of the physical sky, not the dwelling place of God. Only then could the *Pneuma* of God descend as a dove and rest upon Jesus, the common verb *erchomai* + with the preposition *epi*.

Vs. 17 is part of an extended sentence beginning with the last verse and has a second *idou* +. In a way, both serve as conjunctives...more than conjunctives...insofar as they show immediacy and connected-ness between events. As for the one at hand, it consists of a voice from heaven where *houtos* or “this” is like another *idou*. It shows that Jesus is the son of this voice’s who is *agapetos* or beloved, an adjective with the same meaning as *agape*, that hard-to-define divine love. The voice is not impersonal but tied in with the first person singular who is well pleased, *eudokeo* which recognizes that which is good, *eu-*being adverbial form of *agathos* prefaced to *dokeo*, to think or to suppose. So if a son is mentioned, clearly the voice must come from a father.

Chapter Four

This chapter begins with another occurrence of *tote* or “then” which bears resemblance to a conjunctive because it shows the close connection between Jesus’ baptism and his experience in the wilderness or *eremos* +. Was there an interval between the two events? Temporally speaking, yes in light of *tote*. However, that’s incidental because the relationship between Jesus and John is inseparable going all the way back to John’s *skirtao* or leaping like a young lamb in his mother’s womb. Thus Jesus “brings” John with him into the wilderness. As we know, John the Baptist spent a good number of years in the desert before he began preaching, that having become his natural habitat. It must have been difficult for his parents to accept but given what Luke’s Gospel says of them, it was the natural thing to do.

As for Jesus, he simply walked out of the water, dried off and immediately headed for the wilderness. It'd be more accurate to say that he was led there which means something or someone else was doing this *anago*. Everyone who had just been baptized were in what we'd call today an assembly line. As soon as one person was baptized, he or she simply would walk out of the Jordan River followed by the next. Jesus did the same, of course, but there was something different which made him stand out. People could see that he wasn't doing it on his own. Neither was he acting robot-like. He was being guided, not governed, but some mysterious presence which was upon him. Such was the visible effect of the Holy Spirit upon (*epi*) Jesus as noted in vs. 16.

As Jesus gradually disappeared from view, John paused for one final glance while performing his baptism rites, knowing that the two never would see each other again. In fact, there was no need for any dialogue between the two men. The same applied when they met for the first time and when Jesus simply fell in line to be baptized. It should be noted that going into the desert wasn't far away, for the very location in which he was sufficed to be called a wilderness.

Some among the crowd were struck at the way John greeted Jesus, like two long-lost friends which made them wonder what it was all about. However, Jesus slipped away before anyone could discover their relationship. John had cultivated a formidable appearance, so no one dare approach him. There was simply no need for any conversation between John and Jesus not because both knew each other but that their respective missions transcended the need for words. It's one of those things you either see or don't see it. Actually explaining it away is a waste of time and would be detrimental to their relationship.

The reason for Jesus having entered the desert was to be tempted by the devil, *peirazo* (S *nasa'*, to make trial of) as to discover the true nature of a person which in the end is what temptation is all about. *Peirazo* didn't happen in a vacuum. The agent involved is the *diabolos* or devil which derives from the verb *diaballo*, literally to cast through and thus connotes being at variance as well as to slander. The Syriac equivalent is '*akelqarza*' which means accuser, adversary, slanderer. So when the *diabalos* saw Jesus headed for the wilderness, he was delighted. This, in fact, was his native territory where he'd have the upper hand or so he thought. But before that the devil kept a keen eye on Jesus, how he related with John while being baptized. This just might offer a clue as how to

get at Jesus. However, he was in for a rude surprise. He realized that he had a strong chance of being defeated when seeing the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus. That means he'd have to deal not with one but with two persons, something he didn't expect.

Vs. 2 mentions Jesus fasting for forty days and forty nights, the number forty being applied equally to both. It's a way of spreading out not so much the time at hand but of drawing attention to its significance instead of just mentioning forty days. Right away the number forty evokes Moses being on "the mountain of God" [Ex 24.13]. It should be noted that before Moses went up, he entered the cloud or *hanan*; more accurately, he went into its very midst, *betok*. From that central position he began his ascent of the mountain, rather, the cloud raised him up effortlessly as an elevator and deposited him on the very top. From this unique vantage point the forty days and forty night formed a kind of enclosure not so much a period of time. And this enclosure, despite being on a mountain top, was the most spacious place on earth.

We can assume the same thing pretty much happened to Jesus, the Holy Spirit acting as that *hanan* to bring him from the Jordan River into the wilderness though there's no specific mention of a mountain. In his case the time at hand applies to his fasting (*nesteuo*) with the somewhat droll observation, "and afterward he was hungry." Apart from the temptations the details of what transpired during that time aren't given nor can they be given. Two things we know for certain. John the Baptist knew what Jesus was in for, and that the end of the time spent there signified the beginning of his ministry just like he had done. Also the devil was watching Jesus all the time, furtively of course, because he knew the Holy Spirit was present as well.

When Jesus was hungry the devil figured it might be a good time to make his move. However, he made a fatal mistake. Yes, Jesus was hungry but the Holy Spirit, being a spirit, was not. As for the devil, vs. 3 introduces what seems to be not another spiritual being but the same devil with a different name, *peirazo* +. Here it's a participle which can be rendered as "the one tempting." This captures the devil's true nature because at all times he's engaged in tempting and never stops doing so. Such constancy is enhanced by the verb *proserchomai* or to come to with the preposition *pros-* prefaced to the common verbal root signifying continuous direction towards-which. The Tempting (using the participle as his name) took this approach knowing that its directness and

suddenness may succeed in catching Jesus off guard. More importantly, he hoped this onslaught would bypass the Holy Spirit which had come to rest upon Jesus. If he could pull it off, indeed it would be a major accomplishment.

The Tempting did manage to approach Jesus but while posing his request, he was completely unaware of being watched by the Holy Spirit. This shows how uninformed he was. And so begins the first of three temptations or in sense, five temptations. Why five? Because the Tempting essentially includes two occasions when he calls Jesus Son of God. However, he doesn't use this title in the third one. The devil starts with the obvious. Jesus is to turn the stones into loaves of bread. Given the environment, stones were strewn everywhere and being essentially limestone, bore a resemblance to baked bread.

Without missing a beat, in vs. 4 Jesus gives the first of three responses from scripture, the manner in which they're presented giving this the air of a Greek chorus. He does so in a matter-of-fact way, neither bothered nor even tempted if we could put it as such but simply wanting to get the Tempting out of the way as quickly as possible. In this way he could commence his public ministry. At the same time Jesus recognized the importance of this contact with the Tempting, for future generations would find inspiration in how to handle the devil.

To the first proposition posed by the Tempting Jesus responds in typical Jewish fashion, "it is written." That gives the words he's about to say a certain authority but one in a mocking fashion which is twofold. First the scripture in and by itself and second, the one saying it. This is the first such incident where Jesus-as-God quotes scripture which means special attention is to be given to these incidents. Obviously Matthew was keenly aware of this as well as the other Gospel writers.

The first scriptural quote is from Dt 8.3, the two versions being as follows:

"And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone but that man lives by everything the proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord."

This fuller version about manna confirms what many readers suspected as soon as they began to read Matthew's account, that Jesus willfully identifies himself with Israel's experience in the Sinai wilderness. Here being hungry has a direct correspondence with being humbled (*hanah* +) which refers to the Lord sending manna and quails when the people grumbled for lack of food and water (cf. Ex 16 +). What's noteworthy is that it occurs shortly after the dramatic crossing of the Red Sea, the defining moment in Israel's history. The important word in the verse at hand is *lemahan*,⁶ "that." The reason? *Lemahan* makes a transition from the distress described in the Exodus incident to knowing or *yadah* + where it leads. That consists in man having his primary source of life not so much in God but more specifically in everything that comes from his mouth.

Interestingly there's no mention of *davar* + or word-as-expression coming from the Lord's mouth but "everything" or *kal*, also as all. That "all" implies stuff other than what's verbal. And so the divine mouth both speaks and breathes out what is necessary for human life. Shortly after this incident, the Israelites moved on and found no water to drink. Again, they complained, but the Lord struck a rock for water. The theme in both instances? That the people prefer complaining instead of trusting in God. It's precisely this is what Jesus had in mind during his wilderness experience.

"Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

Note two instances of the preposition *epi* or upon, with regard to bread as well as *rhema* or word. The distinction between *logos* (*S melal*: also as sentence, precept) and *rhema* is that the former is God's Word objectively recorded in the Bible, whereas the latter is the word of God spoken to us at a specific occasion. As for this *rhema*, it goes forth or *ekporeuo* + through (*dia*) the mouth of God.

The second temptation is when the devil (*diabolos* +) takes Jesus into the holy city or Jerusalem, *paralambano* + (*S davar* ⁷, or to lead). Here the *para-* of the verb as beside doesn't necessarily mean the two left the wilderness together for the city. Describing this incident is more a being in Jerusalem by way insight, for both share a distinctly spiritual nature transcending space and time and therefore not requiring place-to-place movement.

⁶ *Lemahan* is quoted a second time in this verse (RSV) but is not in the Hebrew text.

⁷ Not to be confused with the Hebrew *davar*.

Once in the holy city, if you will, the devil literally stands (*histemi* +) Jesus upon the extreme edge of the temple. Such is the meaning of *pterugion*, a position by guaranteed to make anyone dizzy. However, given what's intimated by *paralambano* above, this poses no problem. In this the second temptation the devil calls Jesus the Son of God and taunts him to cast himself off the *pterugion*, assuming he'd just float out there or fly around...quite ridiculous by any standard. At this point it's the devil's turn to quote scripture, that is, Ps 91.11-12:

“For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.”

God will order angels or messengers (*mal'ak*) to attend to the psalmist, that is, *tsava'* as well as order them to act as guards, the verb *shamar* meaning to be watchful as someone on a city wall. They—and the number of messengers in their new role as guards isn't given—are to carry out their mission with regard to all the ways or *derek* + of the psalmist. As for their hands (and we can assume more than one pair), they will lift up the psalmist to prevent him from dashing his foot against the stone. Given the situation at hand, these messenger in their role as guards will prevent Jesus from hitting his foot against the *pterugion* or edge of the temple. The lifting up or *nasa'* involved doesn't necessarily mean that Jesus will fly off the *pterugion* but simply won't fall. As for the angels, they were both deeply insulted at the way the devil had distorted scripture yet saw a vindication of what Jesus effects from it.

“He will give his angels charge of you” and “On their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone.” Here the two verses of Psalm Ninety-One are treated as separate.

Entello (S *paqad*, also to entreat, to visit) or to command consists of the verbal root *tello* or to come forth, to accomplish, prefaced with the preposition *en-* or *in*. It pertains to the psalmist, that is, *peri* or around him. Like the Hebrew verse, these angels (*aggelos* +) will lift up the psalmist to prevent him from striking his foot against a stone, *pros* indicative of direction towards-which.

In response, Jesus engages in a scriptural dual, quoting...hurling...another verse back to the devil. Again he uses the authoritative words “it is written” with a direct challenge from Dt 6.16 which runs in full as “You shall not put the Lord

your God to the test as you tested him at Massah.” This historical reference is Ex 17.7: “And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah because of the fault-finding (*ryv*, strife or contention) of the sons of Israel and because they put the Lord to the test (*nasa'*⁸, verb) by saying, ‘Is the Lord among or not?’” As for *ryv* and *nasa'*, they fit in well with the devil’s intent to subject Jesus to himself. However, Jesus throws them back at the devil as implied in the Deuteronomy verse in which the Exodus reference is included.

Vs. 8 is part of an extended sentence running through vs. 9. It introduces the third and final temptation of Jesus, this time the devil taking him to a very high mountain, *paralambano* +, the same *para-* at work, if you will, as with regard to the pinnacle of the temple meaning the two went there side by side. Again, taking isn’t to be understood in the physical sense despite the element of accompaniment. Note that in the devil’s two attempts to thwart Jesus height is involved: first the temple’s pinnacle and now literally into (*eis*) a mountain described by the adverb *lian*, excessively (high). From this vantage point the devil showed Jesus each kingdom in the entire world as well as the glory (*S shuvcha'*, also praise, honor) proper to them. The verb is *deiknumi* or to show with the intent of being apprehended, and that’s exactly what happened. The Syriac is *chava'* or to make manifest or clear. Indeed, the mountain was high enough—and hence the need for it to be *lian*—that Jesus could look down on all kingdoms no matter where they were located on the earth.

In vs. 9 the devil promises to give all the kingdoms to Jesus provided he fall down and worship him. The *pros-* of *proskuneo* (S *sagad*: to render obeisance, to adore) is suggestive of directness which is precisely what he wanted from the very beginning...not simply worship but adoration. Jesus responds by telling him to get lost, *hupago*, the preposition *hupo-* or from under, this suggestive of pulling out from beneath. It’s a strong verb but tinged with a certain humor Jesus presented somewhat on the sly to the devil because already his Father holds in his hands all the kingdoms of the earth and that in the near future he would suffer death for their redemption.

This last temptation gives rise to a final quote Jesus takes from scripture using again the authoritative words “it is written” quoting from Dt 6.13:

⁸ Not to be confused with *nasa'* above or to lift up, the letter “s” being *shin* with the dot over the left side.

“You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him and swear by his name.”

The previous verse is worth keeping in mind, for it sets the tone of what we have here. That is to say, Moses bids the people not to forget the Lord who brought them from Egypt commonly called a house of bondage or literally “servants,” a fancy name for being a slave. Such warnings against forgetfulness are numerous in the Hebrew scriptures and pretty much on the same plane as the three commands in the verse at hand: *yare’*, *havad* and *shavah* or fear, serve and swear. *Havad* is the verbal root for *havadym* or servants as in house of bondage just noted.

After having been rebuked three times and having heard the threefold command of the last verse, the devil said to himself “enough.” While *vs. 11* has *aphiemi* + or to leave, it’s more like a slithering away. This shameful retreat is why Matthew has *idou* + or “behold.” It serves to introduce angels or messenger first to come or *proserchomai* +, the *pros-* being indicative of direction towards-which-and minister to Jesus. Once this *pros-* has happened (and it does so immediately), the angels commence their *diakoneo*. We don’t know how many angels were present but since Jesus is the person involved, it’s easy to assume that a real tussle in heaven ensued so as to be counted among their number. Who could blame them for fighting over the privilege, and who wouldn’t long to be witness to this? Most likely *diakoneo* (note the *dia-* or through connoting thoroughness) consisted in bring food. So if the angels vied mightily, they must have racked their brains to prepare the best possible meal one can imagine. One thing is for certain. They didn’t just drop off a food basket.

In *vs. 12* Jesus hears that John the Baptist had been arrested, *paradidomai* (*S shalam* or to deliver, to give up, come to an end) which contains a *para-* representing a giving over or giving beside which unfortunately has happened. The time frame is rather fuzzy. Jesus had just spent forty days and forty nights in the desert dealing with the devil also known as the Tempting after which angels came to minister to him. Apparently during this interval the arrest took place, Jesus having heard of it later most likely through John’s disciples. Given the tone he had adopted from the beginning of his ministry, John anticipated his arrest and informed his disciples to pass word on to Jesus should he be taken into custody. That’s it. No details about who or why, but certainly the Pharisees and Sadducees are suspect. They’re the ones from Jerusalem who

came to spy on John at the Jordan. While the text doesn't explain why John was arrested, we know it's because he had denounced King Herod for his marriage which was outside Jewish law. Also nothing is said about the throngs who had come to him for baptism. It seems they simply melted away which is exactly what the Jewish authorities had wanted.

As for the Pharisees and Sadducees who must have played a role in John's arrest, calling them a brood of vipers must have been a part of it. Their attention had been directed against John, of course, not Jesus who at this point wasn't on their radar screen. However, soon he'll take center stage. The only response from Jesus is that he withdrew to Galilee, the verb being *anachoreo* (S *shana'*, to change, remove, transfer), the preposition *ana-* suggestive of back-ness prefaced to *choreo*, to separate. As for Galilee, that's the place he came from. Note too that Joseph went there, having been warned in a dream (cf. 2.22).

Vs. 13 continues as an extended sentence with Jesus leaving Nazareth and taking residence in Capernaum, the verb *katoikeo* (S *hamar*, also to settle), meaning to live in a certain place for an extended period of time. The preposition *kata-* as down suggests settling in. There doesn't seem to be a reason for the move as from a threat. However, Jesus feels a pull to remain in this area of Zebulun and Naphtali so he can identify with the verses about that place of which Isaiah had written. And so this is the first scriptural passage where Jesus perceives a direct connection between himself and the scriptural heritage of his nation. The only way to see if these verses resonate is to actually go ahead and make the move.

To start off with the prophet Isaiah is no small thing given how highly regarded he is in Israel's heritage. In light of this the verb *katoikeo* fits in just right because Jesus had to be in this place a while so as to absorb the significance of Zebulun and Naphtali as it pertains to himself. Associations as this one, of course, will occur throughout Jesus' ministry, so it's important to accustom ourselves to this. If Jesus establishes this right now at the threshold of his ministry, he'll become more comfortable with further scriptural associations when they present themselves. An essential ingredient is the verb *pleroo* (S *malal*, also to complete, satisfy) along with *rhethen*, both having been mentioned earlier. This *pleroo* isn't done in isolation, as something Jesus' contemporaries or Christians later saw but as having been inserted almost in a physical manner

with regard to Jesus himself. While this is unique to Jesus, certainly it bears imitation through participation.

As for the scriptural passage at hand (Is 9.1-2 ⁹), it runs as follows:

“But there will be no gloom for her that was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.”

Muhaph is the noun for gloom, the only use of the term in the Bible whose verbal root suggests darkness. It signals the presence of anguish or *mutsaq* (note similarity in sound) which has two other biblical references, Job 36.16 and 37.10. The Lord singles out Zebulun and Naphtali, both of which had suffered the most during the Assyrian invasion and had been brought into contempt or *qalal*. This verb suggests having been cursed, that is, by the Lord through the agent of the Assyrians.

Note the contrast between two times or *heth* which is not unlike the Greek *kairos*, a proper time or opportunity where the notion of temporal duration is secondary: that which is former and that which is latter. As for the verb *kaved* as “will make glorious” with respect to the *derek* + or way of the sea, it applies to travel and the transport of merchandise across the Mediterranean Sea. This making *kaved* will start there and extend inland, hence the mention of Galilee beyond the Jordan, that region designated as “of the nations,” *goy* often applying to non-Israelites.

Compare darkness or *choshek* with *muhaph* of the previous verse which is more in reference to the light of the sun. To have walked in such darkness is not to know where one is going. As for the light (*‘or*), nothing is said regarding its source but seems to appear not at once illuminating the darkness but more as a guiding beacon even though it’s called great. A second category, if you will, follows those who walked in darkness, persons who dwelt in a land of deep darkness or *tsalmaveth* which is a compound of *tsel* (shadow) and *maveth* (death). They may be called residents of Sheol or the underworld. For persons in this *tsalmaveth* the same light or *‘or* has shined upon them, the verb being *nagah*.

⁹ This verse is 9.1-2 in the Hebrew text.

Here the light is above shining below compared with the people who have seen a great light, that is, from a distance.

"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali toward the sea across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

Note the two uses of the verb *kathemi* or to sit down, *kata-* being the preposition for down. Similarly, *phos* or light occurs twice. To the first belongs a more comprehensive or general *skotia* or darkness. While in that *skotia*, the people have seen a great light or *phos*. With regard to the second, it's comprised of death and has two parts: *chora* or region which is a larger expanse and shadow, *skia* applying to the presence of someone or something with a limited range. In other words, death isn't as comprehensive as first imagined. Here *phos* is active compared with the active seeing of the first group. That is to say, *phos* has dawned, *anatello*, this verb having the same root *tello* as found earlier but prefaced with the preposition *ana-*, above or upon.

Go back a bit, if you will, to the *katoikeyo* or dwelling in vs. 13 associated with Jesus taking up residence in Capernaum. It connotes a certain domesticity compared with the almost prison-like nature of *kathemi*, that is, sitting down in darkness. Both verbs have the same preposition *kata-* prefaced to them but inferring two very different though parallel states. In addition to this, the *katoikeyo* of Jesus becomes a means by which he perceives his relationship with those who are *kathemi*. It should be noted that the two verbs...sitting down and being in one place...belong to two very different realities which concur in a mysterious fashion.

Vs. 17 brings to a certain conclusion this part of Chapter Four, that is, everything is now in order for Jesus to begin his ministry which is why Matthew has *apo tote +*, literally "from then." It enables Jesus to proceed backed up with authority resting upon the prophet Isaiah. There's a close association between *kerusso* and *lego* (both +). *Kerusso* or to preach is that which is within Jesus and associated with the presence of the Holy Spirit which has come down upon him at his baptism. *Lego* or to say is that which flows from his mouth. The *kerusso/lego* is identical word-for-word to that of John the Baptist in 3.2, the key words being *metanoeo*, *eggizo* and *basileia* associated with heaven. When we hear such a sentence either from John or from Jesus sometimes we think that's

it, nothing more. In the case at hand it's better to consider Jesus' words more as a summary where each of the three verbs (plus heaven) are dissected to a greater measure in accord with the capacity of those hearing them.

After John had been arrested, news of it spread like wildfire. Now they hear the same words from this relatively unknown man who seems to enjoy a special relationship with John. No small wonder that many thought John had escaped or was set free. Indeed, a confusing time, even a mistake of sorts on Jesus' part that he had to correct. Perhaps that's why right away we move into his calling of the first disciples which represent a necessary pause in the action to make sure Jesus is on the right path.

The remaining verses of Chapter Four, that is, vss. 18-25, signal a major shift in the Gospel. What we've seen before this point is a lead-up to Jesus' ministry, a necessary set of details that makes him uniquely qualified. Now we see all this put in motion by a somewhat casual image of Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee, the verb being *peripateo* with the preposition *para*. That is to say, Jesus is literally walking around-beside or *peri-* plus *para*. He has a hunch that something is destined to come of this particular walking but doesn't know exactly what it is nor does he care to know. He's confident that it will reveal itself to him at the appropriate time. Perhaps Jesus had done this *peripateo para* a number of times earlier, this being the first one recorded. On these walks there was plenty of scenery to take in as well as observing many of the locals engaged in fishing and in related activities. Early on he caught sight of the two sets of brothers and decides then and there that he'll summon them at the appropriate time.

So on one walk or *peripateo para* Jesus happened to see Simon and Andrew, the former designated as Peter, a name that even now before Jesus meets him signifies the important role he will have later on. Actually Jesus meets the two at work casting nets into the sea. Apparently they are doing this from the shore, not on a boat, perhaps because it was early in the morning when the fish were within easy reach. Jesus, who doesn't know a thing about fishing, isn't struck by this fact. However, there was a certain earnestness with which the two brothers worked, most likely being assisted by some hired help.

Simon and Andrew must have seen this man many times walking (*peripateo para*) the lake. There was something different about him, the way he watched

them work which made them feel self-conscious. They didn't engage in any conversation except a good morning or the like. Then one morning (again, assuming it's that time) Jesus comes by and says with the same casualness he had shown while out for a walk that they come after him. What's astonishing is that he claimed to make them fishers of men. It was so outlandish yet so attractive that they simply abandoned their work and hired help. At first walking away from a lucrative source of income sounds incredibly noble and given the context of the Gospel, worthy of imitation for living the Christian life. However, fishing was boring and tedious work as well as unpredictable. So the two brothers saw in Jesus an opportunity to break away from this and figured that if being with him didn't pan out, they could return to their former livelihood.

This readiness to move on is recounted in vs. 20. It begins with the important adverb *eutheos* which seems to be a variation of *euthus* noted earlier on several occasions. Also it's with the verb *akoloutheo* which has a fuller sense than to just go after. It implies going in the same direction, having the same goals and following a person who has taken the lead. Thus *eutheos* and *akoloutheo*, while noble in and by themselves, are conditioned by that just mentioned desire to make sure the brothers' fishing business wasn't put in jeopardy.

Jesus has taken his first big step by picking Simon and Andrew to follow him. The three continued walking (a joint *peripateo para*, if you will) along the lake. Surely the brothers were filled with all sorts of questions as to Jesus' identity, why he called them and what they'd do next. Indeed, it sounded very exciting. As they moved along, Simon and Andrew would cast a furtive glance back at their hired help whom they left pretty much in a state of shock. Nevertheless, as the two moved on, they hoped their bosses would return shortly. Given the close, intimate relationships of that time and culture, these men were part of an extended family.

The problem with Jesus is that he wasn't from the Capernaum region but had come from Nazareth some thirty miles away. That made him an outsider of sorts and by no means familiar with the fishing industry on the lake. That aside, his experience with John the Baptist must have formed part of the common discussion as the three walked along. Shortly they came across two other brothers, James and John. Instead of fishing from the shoreline, the two were in a boat along with their father who was on land mending nets. Unlike

Simon and Andrew, Jesus didn't summon these brothers nor did they bother engaging in a conversation however small. The text simply says that they left the boat immediately, *eutheos* and *akoloutheo* (both +).

Why so? They could see Jesus, Simon and Andrew having an intense, animated discussion which was evident even at a distance. Obviously this sparked their interest even though they hadn't a clue as to what it was about. While both brothers flanked Jesus, they were struck by the unusual expression on their faces. It was a combination of joy, peace and above all, simply glad and to be at ease in the company of this perfect stranger. As they found out shortly, both not only followed Jesus but left their father. It'd come as no surprise that like Simon and Andrew, they saw in Jesus an opportunity to escape their dreary existence. Besides, they had their father who would mind the business just in case. So at this point the group totals five men. We can assume that both pairs of brothers knew each other, perhaps even were rival fishermen, which implies that Jesus wasn't in the habit of collecting random strangers.

As for the other disciples, they aren't mentioned by name until Chapter Ten nor do we hear anything about Jesus calling them either now or later. We only know that somewhere along the line they joined him. It'd come as no surprise that they were attracted to Jesus because of the effect he was having on those already in his company. Also it seems likely that these two pairs of brothers accompanied Jesus while he was going all over Galilee. They had the benefit of knowing the area and thus making the tour...arduous in and by itself...easier to bear. In vs. 23 the verb *periago* is not unlike the sense of *peripateo* when Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee. The root *pateo* means to walk whereas *ago* implies leading or carrying and thus fits in better with a more extended area to cover.

The just noted *periago* is intimately bound up with both teaching and preaching in the various synagogues. Jesus is always on the move, never settling down. We don't have any record of how long he stayed in a given place which is incidental to his teaching and proclaiming, *didasko* and *kerusso* + (S *yalaph* and *karaz*: to teach, inform, train and to proclaim, to teach publicly). We can imagine he did this in a rabbinic style which involves a lively give-and-take instead of standing in front of an audience while imparting his message. Although the people may have been unsophisticated, they were thoroughly imbued with their religion which would make them more responsive than we might assume.

As for *periago* ->*didasko*->*kerusso*, they are focused upon two things, “gospel (S *savrata*’: from *savar*, to announce, declare) of the kingdom” and healing or *therapeuo* (S ‘*asa*’, to restore). As for the phrase in quotation marks (*euaggelion* and *basileia* +), it occurs two other times in this Gospel and *euaggelion* once: 10.35, 24.14 and 26.13. As for *euaggelion*, fundamentally it means good news and comes from the same verbal root as *aggelos*, messenger or angel. Note the adverbial form *eu-* prefaced to it is important because it describes the mode in which is done, that is, well having a less static connotation. As for the healing, *pas* or “every” occurs twice. It conveys the image of Jesus constantly at work in his *therapeuo* or more precisely being in a given place while people brought the ill and afflicted to him. The phrase literally “in the people” along with the adjective *pas* suggests that Jesus was fully involved. While the teaching and preaching are important, by far the healing outstrips both because it’s so immediate. Perhaps due to them having been healed they were more responsive to what Jesus had to say.

The conjunctive *kai* begins vs. 24 to show the close connection of Jesus’ *periago*->*didasko*->*kerusso* leading to *euaggelion* and *therapeuo* (walking->teaching->proclaiming). Obviously this is bound to attract attention which it does throughout parts of Syria, the area north of Galilee and towards Damascus. It prompted even more people to seek out Jesus for healing which he does gladly though there’s no mention of teaching and preaching. Jesus is giving the people what they so desperately need but at the same time knows it isn’t enough. Vs. 24 enumerates five general categories of such afflictions which are all within the reach of Jesus’ healing touch. Also he seems to be doing this on his own though as noted earlier, having the two sets of brothers familiar with the area would be a great help. As for their expectations in following Jesus, what they’ve experienced so far exceeds their expectations. It certainly beat fishing.

Chapter Four concludes with mention of great crowds which follow Jesus, *akoloutheo* being used here as with Simon and Andrew as well as James and John. As for the noun *ochlos* or crowd, it suggests a bunch of unruly people gathered together. Actually they were well-behaved simply because they were so desperate and in need of healing. Again, Jesus’ teaching and preaching were incidental. Five places are mentioned from which this *ochlos* was composed suggesting it was a force to be reckoned with. We have no mention of the Roman authorities being aware of this. Perhaps it was a bit early for word to get

out but get out it did in short order. Just the mere mention of an *ochlos* is foreboding enough for the future.