

## First Sunday after Christmas    December 29, 2019

Year A – the Gospel of Matthew

# Living the Lutheran Lectionary

*A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.*

*An opportunity to make Sunday worship more meaningful and to make the rhythms of the readings part of the rhythms of your life.*

### Available on line at:

- ✦ [www.bethlehemlutheranchurchparma.com/biblestudies](http://www.bethlehemlutheranchurchparma.com/biblestudies)
- ✦ Through [www.Facebook.com](http://www.Facebook.com) at “Living the Lutheran Lectionary”, “Bethlehem Lutheran Church Parma”, or “Harold Weseloh”
- ✦ All links in this on-line copy are active and can be reached using Ctrl+Click

### Gather and be blessed:

- ✦ **Thursdays at 10 AM:** At Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 7500 State Road, Parma, OH 44134 and on line. Send an e-mail request for link to [weselohduh@hotmail.com](mailto:weselohduh@hotmail.com)
- ✦ **Fridays at 7 PM in a house church setting:** For details, contact Harold Weseloh at [puritaspastor@hotmail.com](mailto:puritaspastor@hotmail.com)
- ✦ **First Sunday of the month at 11 AM:** St. Philip Lutheran Church, 11315 Regalia Ave., Cleveland, OH 44104
- ✦ **Tuesdays at 12:00 PM (8pm Kenya time)** via Zoom to the Lutheran School of Theology - Nyamira , Kenya
- ✦ **On Facebook through Messenger** in a discussion group shared by people throughout the United States, Kenya and Uganda. Contact Harold Weseloh on Facebook Messenger.



*Flight into Egypt*, by [Gentile da Fabriano](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gentile_da_Fabriano) (1423) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flight\\_into\\_Egypt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flight_into_Egypt)

### Hymn of the Day

**Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 389    The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH) 105**

## “Let all together praise our God”

August Crull (translator) was born January 27, 1845 in Rostock, Germany... He was educated at the Gymnasium in Rostock, and at Concordia College in St. Louis and Fort Wayne where he graduated in 1862...In 1865, Crull graduated from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. He became assistant pastor at Trinity Church in Milwaukee and also served as Director of the Lutheran High School. Later he was pastor of the Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. From 1873 to 1915, he was professor of the German language and literature at Concordia College in Fort Wayne, Indiana. After his retirement he returned to Milwaukee, where he died on February 17, 1923...

Crull was a distinguished hymnologist and translated many hymns that appeared in several Lutheran hymnals. He published a German grammar and edited a book of devotions, *Das walte Gott*, based on the writings of Dr. C.F.W. Walther. His project of translating Lutheran hymns so they would be accessible to American Lutherans bore its first fruits when he published a book of English hymns at the Norwegian Synod publishers in Decorah, in 1877.

--www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/

- [https://hymnary.org/person/Crull\\_August](https://hymnary.org/person/Crull_August)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLs6bSodaS4> The congregation of Immanuel Lutheran Church of Colorado Springs
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxjrJ2cdP5o> Paul Manz arrangement played on a 1966 Moller organ by David Christensen.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8zCgEuxISM> Instrumental by Charles W. Ore From My Perspective II © 1995 Organ Works Corporation

Commentaries have been chosen because the author has written in a way that compliments the reading. Not all of the commentaries are from Lutheran sources. They have been edited for length and in some cases for additional content that is not in keeping with a Lutheran understanding of Scripture. Links are provided for those who wish to read the entire commentary.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001  
by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

**O.T.**– “I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD ”

**Psalm** – “Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them. ”

**Epistle** – “So you are no longer a slave, but a son... an heir through God. ”

**Gospel** – **“This was to fulfill... Then was fulfilled... might be fulfilled”**

**Isaiah 63:7-14; Revised Common Lectionary, RCL, Isaiah 63:7-9 (Next week: 1 Kings 3:4-15; RCL Jeremiah 31:7-14 or Sirach 24:1-12)**

*“Unfortunately the long standing tradition of celebrating Advent and Christmas is becoming replaced by the sole focus on a one or two day event.*

*Because of the enormous amount of resources invested into Christmas Eve or Christmas Day services, some churches have even opted to cancel their Sunday services following Dec 25th. By doing so the Church misses out on the opportunity to mediate upon today's readings from the lectionary.*

*It is common knowledge in the medical community that the holidays bring about a sharp increase in cases of depression, primarily due to people's unmet expectations for the season. The lectionary reading for the first Sunday after Christmas, Isaiah 63:7-9, provides a word to minister to those facing disappointment. Advent and Christmas are not singular events, but rather form a season of hope, lament, celebration, worship, penitence, and challenge. The lectionary readings, taken as a whole, provide guidance for the people of God to experience the full breadth of the significance of Christ's coming..."*

- [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=808](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=808) **Bo Lim** Associate Professor of Old Testament, Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, Wash.

## **The LORD's Day of Vengeance      Verses 1-6**

### **The LORD's Mercy Remembered**

<sup>7</sup>I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD,  
the praises of the LORD,  
according to all that the LORD has granted us,  
and the great goodness to the house of Israel  
that he has granted them according to his compassion,  
according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

<sup>8</sup>For he said, "Surely they are my people,  
children who will not deal falsely."  
And he became their Savior.

<sup>9</sup>In all their affliction he was afflicted,<sup>[a]</sup>  
and the angel of his presence saved them;  
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;  
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

<sup>10</sup>But they rebelled  
and grieved his Holy Spirit;  
therefore he turned to be their enemy,  
and himself fought against them.

<sup>11</sup>Then he remembered the days of old,  
of Moses and his people.<sup>[b]</sup>  
Where is he who brought them up out of the sea  
with the shepherds of his flock?

Where is he who put in the midst of them  
 his Holy Spirit,  
<sup>12</sup> who caused his glorious arm  
 to go at the right hand of Moses,  
 who divided the waters before them  
 to make for himself an everlasting name,  
<sup>13</sup> who led them through the depths?  
 Like a horse in the desert,  
 they did not stumble.  
<sup>14</sup> Like livestock that go down into the valley,  
 the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest.  
 So you led your people,  
 to make for yourself a glorious name.

### **Prayer for Mercy    Verses 15-19**

- a. [Isaiah 63:9](#) *Or he did not afflict*
- b. [Isaiah 63:11](#) *Or Then his people remembered the days of old, of Moses*

"The Sunday after Christmas is typically a "low Sunday." The energy and anticipation of Advent has given way to wonder at the incarnation. Travelers weary from star-lit journeys now rest and rejoice in the light that shatters all darkness.

And ever so gently, we fold and store away the Christmas pageant costumes, tuck the musical scores of our favorite hymns into file drawers, and turn our attention to the new year. But a prophet urges us not to be so hasty. "I remember," the prophet whispers, and then, with words likely first uttered to the community in exile or struggling to rebuild in its aftermath, the prophet ... testifies to the long history of God's outrageous generosity-testimony that, in these early days after Christmas, reminds us God has been our Savior "all the days of old" (63:9). Moreover, the prophet leaves no doubt that God's redemptive work, God's decisive intervention in the world, is not due to our righteousness...

As is common in laments, the prophet opens with praise to God's generosity (63:7-14; e.g., Psalms 76, 106, Nehemiah 9)-the first three verses of which comprise the lectionary reading (63:7-9).

The prophet praises God in terms that are general and broad-sweeping ("because of all that the LORD has done for us," 63:7). Verse 7, which in the Hebrew is framed by the term ("steadfast love"), emphasizes that God has acted (the verb "to do or show," occurs twice), God has acted on behalf of ("for us.to the house of Israel"), and God has acted on behalf of generously ("all.great"). God's generosity springs from God's character-God's abundant steadfast love, favor, mercy, and compassion. But why is it for us? The prophet puts the rationale on God's own lips: "Surely they are my people" (63:8), a claim that evokes God's

covenant with Israel (e.g., Lev 26:12; Deut 29:13). God's commitment to and faith in God's people ("children who will not.") inspires God to be their savior (cf. Isa 60:16; 63:1)...

Proclaiming this good news, and developing it further with memories of the Exodus (63:10-14), the prophet moves the community from praise to confession (63:15-64:12). Perhaps we do well to follow on this first Sunday after Christmas. Our advent joy still fervent, the prophet wraps around us the thick and well-worn mantle of God's many saving acts. God has been, God is, and God ever will be our Redeemer (cf. 63:16)-words of assurance and comfort for the exilic or postexilic community, no doubt, and for us today, whatever our distress (63:9) ..."

- [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=16](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=16) **Christine Roy Yoder** Associate Professor of Old Testament, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA

**Psalm 111; RCL, Psalm 148 (Psalm 119:97-104; RCL, Psalm 147:12-20 or Wisdom of Solomon 10:15-21)**

*Also the Psalm for this Sunday in Years B and C, the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany in Year B and Proper 23 in Year C.*

### "The ABC's of Theology"

*In his commentary in the Westminster Bible Companion series, James Limburg titles Psalms 111 and 112, "The ABC's of Theology" and "The ABC's of Anthropology," respectively.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is that the two neighboring psalms are "twins." Each psalm is 22 lines, divided into 10 verses. Each psalm is an alphabetic acrostic -- with each half-verse beginning with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet, from alef to tav (from "A to Z," so to speak).*

*Psalm 111 is mostly about theology -- it is about God. Whereas Psalm 112 is mostly about anthropology -- it is about the human response to God. Themes introduced in Psalm 111 are echoed in Psalm 112. For instance, Ps 111:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Psalm 112:1 says, "Happy are those who fear the Lord." Or, Psalm 111 confesses about God's character: "The Lord is gracious and merciful"(verse 4b). Psalm 112 says God's people reflect God's character: "they are gracious, merciful, and righteous" (verse 4b)..."*

- [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1216](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1216) [Rolf Jacobson](#)  
Professor of Old Testament and Alvin N. Rogness Chair in Scripture, Theology, and Ministry, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn. (Also referenced to Living the Lutheran Lectionary, Dec 30, 2018 at <https://www.bethlehemplutheranchurchparma.com/BibleStudies/46254/DownloadText>)

## Great Are the LORD's Works

**111** <sup>[a]</sup> Praise the LORD! (Hallelujah!)"

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,  
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

<sup>2</sup> Great are the works of the LORD,  
studied by all who delight in them.

<sup>3</sup> Full of splendor and majesty is his work,  
and his righteousness endures forever.

- <sup>4</sup> He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered;  
the LORD is gracious and merciful.
- <sup>5</sup> He provides food for those who fear him;  
he remembers his covenant forever.
- <sup>6</sup> He has shown his people the power of his works,  
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.
- <sup>7</sup> The works of his hands are faithful and just;  
all his precepts are trustworthy;
- <sup>8</sup> they are established forever and ever,  
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.
- <sup>9</sup> He sent redemption to his people;  
he has commanded his covenant forever.  
Holy and awesome is his name!
- <sup>10</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;  
all those who practice it have a good understanding.  
His praise endures forever!

- a. Psalm 111:1 This psalm is an acrostic poem, each line beginning with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet

“In this Psalm, we have an example of someone who trusts God, not because he fears God and his judgement. Instead he trusts God because he has come to the point of knowing that God is good. Many people look at God, although they do not know Him, and decide to fear Him. This psalm teaches us that we can look at God and decide to trust Him because He is good. Let’s look at the advantages of trusting in the goodness of God. There are **four advantages** to trusting in the goodness of God. God shows us four examples of His goodness and they reveal to us what He is able to do for us...

1. God displays His works, so we trust Him by remembering His works (verse 2)...
2. God gives to us, so we can trust Him to provide for our needs and more (verse 7)...
3. God inspires reverence, so we can trust Him to make good on His promises (verses 7-9)...
4. God shares with us, so we can trust Him to help us overcome our problems (verse 10)...

- <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/jimerwin/2013/10/13/psalm-111-10-trusting-in-the-goodness-of-god/>  
**JIM ERWIN** “ A Christian husband, father, mentor, and pastor who tries to live for Christ everyday in this post-modern, digital world.” Senior Pastor, Washburn First Baptist Church, MO

**Galatians 4:4-7; RCL, Hebrews 2:10-18 (Ephesians 1:3-14: RCL, the same reading)**

*“While Paul's letters do not relate any narrative traditions about Jesus' birth, he does speak profoundly about the meaning of the incarnation.*

*This passage from Galatians 4 reflects on God's sending of his Son in the context of a larger theological argument about what it means to be children of God and co-heirs with Christ..."*

- [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1128](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1128)  
Elisabeth Johnson Professor Lutheran Institute of Theology, Meiganga, Cameroon

## **Sons and Heirs Verses 1-7**

<sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup>And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

## **Paul's Concern for the Galatians Verses 8 - 20**

### **Example of Hagar and Sarah Verses 21- 31**

"The choice of this text as a reading for during the on-going celebration of Christmas is appropriate.

In four verses, Paul describes in succinct prose the salvific design of the Christ event...

This is story of redemption of amazing scope! Paul, in fact, can speak of the Christ event as "by which the world has been crucified"(Galatians 6:14). That is, the world as he knew it before Christ no longer exists. Something completely different -- of the order of the difference between life and death -- has taken its place. All this is why the church celebrates the birth of the baby Jesus in the Christmas season!..."

- [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2274](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2274) Erik Heen John H.P. Reumann  
Professor Emeritus in Biblical Studies, The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia

\*\*\*\*\*

"The adoption language in Galatians is framed in masculine categories (the word in Greek is not "children" but "sons"), and this is not incidental. In the Jewish culture of the time the inheritance and leadership of the family was located in the male heirs and male family members. Yet, strikingly, as Galatians itself demonstrates, just as circumcision had been replaced by the more egalitarian initiation sacrament of baptism, the benefits of "sonship" were now extended to all genders and socio-economic statuses -- women, men, children, and even slaves. All human beings were to be equally included in the new covenantal family of God solely on the basis of God's grace expressed by the sacramental covenant badges of faith and baptism (see also Galatians 3:28-29).

This first point concerning "sonship" and its subsequent application to all genders, sexes, and socio-economic statuses provides us with an important take-away. It is easy -- and indeed, often necessary -- to carefully and critically discern when the Bible is speaking descriptively about a cultural artifact in the text that no longer applies to us today. One example of this would be the argument concerning head-coverings for women in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

Yet, with issues concerning masculine language in the Bible, interpreters sometimes exhibit a tendency to automatically “correct” the supposedly sinister patriarchal bias of the original biblical authors. While this is appropriate in some contexts, we ought to be careful that we do not carry out such hermeneutical moves prematurely. To do so would be to risk stripping the biblical texts of potentially insightful exegetical elements that are contained in the particular grammatical structures and words used by the original authors.

In Galatians, for example, the use of masculine terminology actually demonstrates the radical progress away from Jewish and Greco-Roman patriarchy that was occurring in the earliest Christian church. Here the focus on the language of “sonship” is not a patriarchal shackle needing to be removed and retranslated into a contemporary key. Rather, by redirecting its reference away from a Jewish culture of male priority and patriarchy sonship itself is redefined by Paul. In Christ, “sonship” now refers to the full and equal inclusion of people of any age, gender, or socio-cultural status (see also Galatians 3:28-29) in the family of the people of God...”

- [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3521](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3521) **John Frederick**  
Lecturer in New Testament, Trinity College Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

+++++

“Besides being the second reading for the first Sunday of Christmas, this passage is assigned for "The Feast of Mary, Mother of Our Lord" on August 15th.

For those who may have missed Mary's feast day or any who are inclined to take this lesson as an opportunity for a meditation on Mary, feel free. After all, a church council meeting in Ephesus in 431 A.D. considered this passage (and others) in its theological deliberations regarding Mary. The consensus reached by this Third Ecumenical Council was that Mary is properly called *theotokos* (Greek for "God-bearer") rather than "merely" *christotokos* ("Christ-bearer"). In fact, you might offer a spell-binding sermon on the intricacies of the early Christological debates and how, in the fourth century, a bishop named Nestorius taught that Mary gave birth to the human Jesus but not to the divine logos, and how another bishop, Cyril, led the charge to keep the human and divine natures united within Mary's womb. You *could* do that.

On the other hand, it is likely that the Apostle Paul did not have the fight against Nestorianism and the consensus regarding Christ's "hypostatic union" in mind when he wrote "born of a woman." **In fact, when the entire passage is considered, we see that it is less about the relationship of Christ's humanity and divinity, and more about the believer's relationship with God through Christ...**

- [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=208](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=208)  
**Hans Wiersma** Augsburg College, Minneapolis, MN

**Matthew 2:13-23; RCL, the same reading (Luke 2:40-52; RCL, John 1:(1-9), 10-18)**

*The Gospel reading this (Sunday) after Christmas strikes a new tone for the season by dramatically leading us away from anticipation of Advent and revelry of the holidays to the tenuous and dark days between promises and their fruition.<sup>1</sup>*

*Threats abound, but God carefully orchestrates Jesus' earliest days according to Matthew.*

*Though as an infant Jesus cannot act in his own defense, God's steady protection and Joseph's faithful obedience combine to ensure his safety in a world of danger. Even as potential disaster threatens Jesus, ancient prophecies come to life and guarantee Jesus' ineluctable mission. From the very first, the road Jesus walks is marked by both God's promises and human resistance. Jesus is both the living presence of God's promises and a consistent irritant to those in power.*

*Three prophecies anchor three narrative movements so striking that [artists throughout the ages have been drawn to them...](#)" (continued after the reading)*

## **“The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 2nd Chapter”**

### **The Visit of the Wise Men    Verses 1-12**

#### **The Flight to Egypt**

<sup>13</sup> Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” <sup>14</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt <sup>15</sup> and remained there until the death of Herod. **This was to fulfill** what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

#### **Herod Kills the Children**

<sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. <sup>17</sup> **Then was fulfilled** what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

<sup>18</sup> “A voice was heard in Ramah,  
weeping and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”  
(Jeremiah 31:15)

## The Return to Nazareth

<sup>19</sup> But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, <sup>20</sup> saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." <sup>21</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. <sup>23</sup> And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets **might be fulfilled**, that he would be called a Nazarene.

**"This is the Gospel of the Lord" "Praise to You, O Christ"**

"Church leaders and biblical interpreters often note that the Gospel of Luke reports Jesus' birth in terms of its effect on peasant people (e.g. shepherds), while the Gospel of Matthew presents it as a grand event, eliciting responses from powerful representatives of the Roman and Jewish worlds (Matt 2:3-4), as well as drawing the attention of visitors from other lands (Matt 2:1-2). That may be true, but the gospel lesson for today makes clear that, even in Matthew's Gospel, the "glory days" of gold and frankincense and myrrh did not last for long.

The reading for today is organized around movements between four geographical settings that, taken together, relate a downward spiral for Jesus' apparent career and success:

**Bethlehem** is where Jesus is at the start of the lesson (cf. 2:1). It is the "city of David," a place of great importance in Israel's tradition and God's plan. Even Jesus' opponents knew (or learned) that this was precisely the spot where the Messiah should be born (2:3-6)...

**Egypt** (vv. 13-15) is a land with ambiguous connotations. It is, of course, the place of bondage from which God had to deliver the people in the exodus. But it is also sometimes a place of refuge (1 Kings 11:40; 2 Kings 25:6; Jer. 43:1-7)... It is not, of course, a detour without precedent: another Joseph, who was also guided by God through dreams, once brought his family here (Gen. 37--50)...

**Galilee** was commonly known as "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Matt. 4:15). Though once a part of the northern kingdom of Israel, the land had never really been recovered since its fall to the Assyrians, and it was now widely populated with "foreigners." The Jews in Judea considered Galilean Jews only a step above Samaritans...

**Nazareth** is even worse. This little agricultural village, with a population of about 500, was so insignificant that, at one time, some historians and archaeologists denied that such a place had ever existed. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" may have been a proverb of the day. Certainly, these words of Nathanael recorded in John 4:46 would have represented a popular sentiment..."

- [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=17](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=17) **Mark Allan Powell** Professor of New Testament, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, OH

+++++

“Three prophecies anchor three narrative movements... Let's examine them in turn.

### **Fleeing to Egypt**

First, Matthew recounts how Jesus' family was spared from Herod's furor... For Matthew, this escape is not simply an expedient move or an accident of history. Instead, scripture foresaw this geographical detour on the way to Jesus' true hometown. God chose this path in the distant past. Citing Hosea 11:1, Matthew appeals to a prophecy originally focused on the people of Israel but now referring to Jesus alone...

Egypt also evokes the story of Moses and the liberation of Israel from the tyranny of slavery, an echo that will reverberate even more powerfully in the next prophetic fulfillment.

### **The Slaughter of the Innocents**

Once Herod realizes that the magi have circumvented the conspiracy to eliminate this newly regnant king of the Jews, his instinct to preserve his power at all costs kicks in... so he orders the extermination of all children born "in and around Bethlehem." Herod will not take the chance that this child has slipped out of the city. According to Matthew, Jeremiah 31:15 had already prophesied the cries of anguish that would arise in Israel over such grievous oppression.

This genocidal act is never mentioned in other ancient witnesses of Herod's cruelty; Matthew is the sole record of these widespread murders. However, the parallels to the execution of Jewish male infants at the hands of Pharaoh are striking (Exodus 1:15-22). Herod is a new Pharaoh. Feeling his political power slipping away, he lashes out with great malice but also in vain. Both Pharaoh and Herod precipitate devastating losses of life yet ultimately fail to prevent the birth of a powerful leader of Israel. Both Moses and Jesus are born under the threat of death; both are guided by God's protective hand...

### **Back Home to Nazareth**

Though born in Bethlehem, Matthew's Jesus is from Nazareth. This is the geographical appellation he will carry.

After an angel announces the death of Herod to Joseph, the coast is clear for the family to return home to Bethlehem of Judea. However, after learning that Herod's son Archelaus now ruled Judea, the family makes a new home in Nazareth in Galilee. For the third time, Matthew points to a prophetic promise: "He will be called a Nazarene."

However, unlike the first two prophecies, there is no single prophecy in the Hebrew Bible or Septuagint that reads quite like the prophecy Matthew quotes. Is Matthew citing a now lost prophecy? Is Matthew here eliding the difference between Nazirite and Nazarene? Or perhaps is Matthew's reference to "the prophets" a wide appeal to the many promises of God? Though there is no particular reference we can be certain is Matthew's source here, the threefold appeal to the scriptural guarantee of Jesus' earliest days argues that Jesus' mission is neither coincidence nor solely the product of human effort.

### **Preparing the Path**

Matthew here prepares a prophetic path for Jesus to walk. A seeming detour into Egypt is actually a prophetic call; even Jesus' hometown reverberates with prophetic resonance...

Therefore, Matthew's trust in the prophetic promises is not mere naiveté; his faith is not simple. The narrative of these threefold threats upon Jesus' life bristle with authenticity for such tyranny was well known to ancient peoples. Matthew's trust in God's providence emerges

not from an overly active credulity but from a faith that expects God to reign in a world where the dominance of the powerful seems unchangeable."

- [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3121](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3121) Eric Barreto Weyerhaeuser Associate Professor of New Testament, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J.



"It must be hard to get a good night's sleep when angels keep showing up in your dreams."

- *Agnus Day* appears with the permission of <https://www.agnusday.org/>

What are we to conclude? That Jesus, who started out so promising, has faded fast? That his "fifteen minutes of fame" are over? No, we cannot conclude this, because Matthew advises us that everything is transpiring according to God's plan. God directs the holy family at every juncture. And, even more important, every move they make has scriptural significance: Bethlehem in Mic. 5:2 (cf. Matt. 2:6); Egypt in Hos. 11:1 (cf. Matt. 2:15); Galilee in Isa. 9:1 (cf. Matt. 4:15); and Nazareth in . . . well, actually, no one's sure just where that reference to Nazareth is found (cf. Matt. 2:23), but Matthew thinks it must be in "the prophets" somewhere (prominent conjectures regarding what he had in mind involve references to the "shoot (nezer) of Jesse" in Isa. 11:1 or to the Nazarites in Judg. 13:5-7)...

Another prominent theme in this lesson is that of God's providential care, linked to the metaphor of parental love (Matt 2:15; cf. Isa 63:8-9, the first lesson for the day). Coming as this Sunday does at the end of a calendar year, the day could be devoted to remembrance of what God has accomplished in the congregation and church at large throughout the past year, with attention to the meticulous way in which God guides and provides for us—even when events do not appear to be transpiring as we would wish...

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=17](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=17) Mark Allan Powell Professor of New Testament, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, OH

+++++  
 How are you doing with *The Matthew Challenge*, a handwritten copy of the book of Matthew by the Last Sunday of the Church Year (Christ the King Sunday),  
 November 22, 2020.

Chapter 3 ends with the baptism of Jesus, celebrated in the church year on January 12. Thirty years went by quickly. (9 verses to go to be on schedule by the end of the month)