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February 12th: Genesis 42 & Matthew 2

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The brothers visit Egypt. The visit of the Magi, the flight to Egypt, and settling in Nazareth.

Some passages referenced:

Micah 4-5 (Rachel in the context of the prophecy of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem); 2 Samuel 5:2 (Davidic allusion in the prophecy of Jesus' birth); Psalm 72:8-11, Isaiah 60:1-7 (nations coming to bring tribute); Numbers 24:15-19 (Balaam's prophecy); 1 Kings 11:14-22 (Hadad the Edomite); Hosea 11:1 (out of Egypt); Jeremiah 31:15-20 (Rachel's weeping and the promise that follows); Exodus 4:19-20 (Moses returning to Egypt after the death of those who sought his life); Isaiah 11:1 (the promised branch); Judges 13:5-7 (Samson the Nazirite); Exodus 4:22 (Israel, God's firstborn son)

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Genesis chapter 42. I am a man of faith, and I have seen the face of the Lord. I have seen the face of the Lord.

I have entered by the Gate of Galilee. I am coming, and I am coming tomorrow. I am coming, and I am coming when you have called me.

And I will come. I will come when you have called me. I will come.

I will come On the third day Joseph said to them, Do this and you will live, for I fear God. If you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words will be verified, and you shall not die. And they did so.

Then they said to one another, In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul when he begged us, and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us. And Reuben answered them, Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen, so now there comes a reckoning for his blood.

They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them, and he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.

And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man's money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them. Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed.

And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack. He said to his brothers, My money has been put back. Here it is in the mouth of my sack.

At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, What is this that God has done to us? When they came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us and took us to be spies of the land. But we said to him, We are honest men, we have never been spies. We are twelve brothers, sons of our father.

One is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan. Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, By this I shall know that you are honest men. Leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way.

Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I shall know that you are not spies, but honest men, and I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land. As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack.

And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid. And Jacob their father said to them, You have bereaved me of my children. Joseph is no more, and

Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin? All this has come against me.

Then Reuben said to his father, Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you. But he said, My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left.

If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to Sheol. In Genesis chapter 42 we see something akin to a game of musical chairs. Similar stories to those we've seen in previous chapters are being played out, but people are in different positions.

How will they act when tables are turned? When they have power that they did not have before? When they have the opportunity to replay something that they did in the past? Jacob sends his sons down to Egypt to get food there. The severe famine that's affecting the area seems to be beyond the specific local factors of Egypt, the particular winds and the Nile, but has many different factors that are affecting many different places within the wider region. Jacob sends ten of his sons down to Egypt to get food, the sons of Leah and the sons of the handmaids.

And as he sends them down, he holds Benjamin back. Why does he hold Benjamin back? Benjamin is all that remains to him of Rachel now that Joseph has gone. And also he doesn't seem to trust the other brothers.

He fears that harm might happen to Benjamin. Where would that harm come from? Well maybe from the other brothers. He's already seen what happened when he sent Joseph to the brothers, and now he's fearful of sending this other son of Rachel to the brothers.

There is a great rift in the family along the lines of the favoured and the unfavoured wife and the sons, and he has already seen that this rift can be expressed not just between the brothers but also against him. His son, his oldest son Reuben, has attempted a coup against him, sleeping with Bilha, his concubine. The ten brothers arrive in the land of Egypt and they bow down to Joseph.

And here once again divine intention is foregrounded. What are the odds that Joseph and his brothers would encounter each other again under these circumstances, even with Joseph having risen to power in the land? They're truly astronomical, but yet God is bringing about the fulfilment of Joseph's dreams. They do not, however, recognise Joseph, even though Joseph recognises them.

We've seen stories of disguise already, in the story of Jacob and Isaac and receiving the blessing, but also in the story of Tamar and Judah. Seeing his brothers, Joseph is reminded of his dreams at this point. But the dreams don't teach Joseph exactly what to do.

He's seen his brothers and he knows that God is bringing to pass something that was

foretold in the past, but at this point he really has to decide how he's going to respond to the situation. He begins by accusing them of being spies. Now it's worth thinking back to the story of chapter 37.

The first thing that set him at odds with his brothers there, the first inciting incident, was his bringing back a bad report on the sons of the handmaids. In that story, that language is the language of spying. And now he begins by accusing his brothers of being spies.

That maybe was what they accused him of being, a spy for his father, but now he presents them as spies. They have to disclose and be open with him in order to prove their innocence. Now if he was just inquiring about their family and asking about their father and their brothers, the nature of his interest might have been suspicious.

However, by beginning with an accusation, he puts them on the back foot and puts them in a position where they have to protest and prove their innocence, but they are none the wiser about the true cause of Joseph's interest in them. Joseph puts them in prison and they're placed in prison for three days. We've already seen the importance of three days earlier on in the story.

It's three days until the chief cupbearer and the chief baker will be raised up to a higher position or removed from their office. Joseph insists that they bring Benjamin back with them. And why is he doing this? Perhaps because he's wondering whether Benjamin is safe.

To their mind, he's just testing the truth of their story. But for Joseph, the real concern is, is Benjamin safe? Have they done with Benjamin what they did with him? Have they tried to cast him out of the family, leaving only the children of Leah and the handmaids? Why have only ten of them come? Surely there is another brother that could have come too. The fact that this son has not come with them is deeply suspicious to him.

And so he wants to check their story. He wants to confirm that there is indeed another brother, that the other brother is safe, and also that he wants to see Benjamin again. Benjamin, when he left, was only an infant, presumably.

And now Benjamin is probably around the age that he was when he was sold into slavery. Hearing this request, the brothers are dismayed and they talk among themselves. They recognise in the situation some recompense for what they have done to Joseph.

So Joseph sees the fulfilment of his dreams in their bowing down to him. And they see that their punishment is coming upon them for what they did to Joseph. Both parties then recognise that this is a significant encounter and that many events of the past are coming back at this moment.

Reuben protests that they should have listened to him. They should have spared Joseph.

His name means, see a son.

And he was given that name because the Lord has looked upon my affliction. That's the reason why Leah gave Reuben that name. And he saw the affliction of Joseph and tried to act in that situation, living up to his name.

But Simeon did not. And so hearing the conversation, Joseph decides to take Simeon and hold Simeon back rather than Reuben. Simeon is the one that seems to be more in with the rest of the brothers.

He was part of the plan. He did not stand against it in the same way. Reuben was the natural choice at first.

He was the oldest, the firstborn. He was presumably the leader of the plot against Joseph. But the revelation of the fact that he stood against his brothers in the plot to kill Joseph suggests to Joseph that Simeon is the one to hold back instead.

Simeon is next in line to Reuben. Simeon was given his name because the Lord has heard that I am hated. But he did not show any care and concern for the hated son, for Joseph.

The other thing about Simeon that might make him a more apt choice is he's the second son of Leah. He's going to hold back the second son of Leah in order that they bring the second son of Rachel, Benjamin. When they find their money in their sacks on the way back, they are deeply concerned.

They've left a brother in Egypt and they are returning with money in their sacks. What is their father going to think? How are they going to return to Egypt when it might look that they are not just spies but also thieves? They might see that this is a trap set for them. And it gives them an incentive not to return.

They've got their money and they've got their food. Do they value the brother over their money? They're now given the choice to have money in their hands and to leave their brother behind or to go on the dangerous mission back to Egypt to gain their brother again and to give back the money. There's a replaying of the choice that they had earlier with Joseph.

Are they going to bring back the son and give up the money? Or are they happy to bereave their father and to destroy their brother for their own pockets and their own security? When Jacob sees them returned, he is concerned too, probably for different reasons. He fears that they have done something to Simeon and want to do something to Benjamin too. He has already had his sons returned to him with tokens of a dead brother.

Where did the silver come from? They have two different stories. They have the story of

Simeon being held back by the ruler of the land. But they also have this story about this money just turning up in their sacks.

Where did the silver come from? Jacob puts the pieces together perhaps of Simeon gone and the money in the sacks. And maybe at that point it comes to his mind this helps to explain the seeming death of Joseph too. This has happened before and it's a very troubling memory.

Reuben offers at this point to kill his two sons, Jacob's grandsons, if he doesn't bring Simeon back. And Reuben is probably not the sharpest tool in the box. This is an exaggerated and ridiculous offer.

But he cannot truly protest innocence in both the case of Simeon and of Joseph. He is to some degree complicit. So upping the stakes of it all by offering to kill his sons is a way of trying to recover some degree of trust from his father in a situation where he knows he's not trustworthy anymore.

It's reminiscent of the story of Judah and Tamar in some ways too. Tamar married Ur, then Ur died. Tamar then was taken by Onan and Onan died too.

And Judah had to send Shelah to Tamar and he was not willing to do so. To actually lose two of his sons and then give a third was too much for him to do. But yet had he done so he would have received sons in return.

In the same way in the story of Joseph, if Jacob is to receive the two lost sons back, he has to give that third son. He has to give Benjamin. Pay attention to the language that Jacob uses at this point.

My son. Not your brother. It's my son over against the murderous brothers.

His brother. Not your brother. The other half of the family is virtually disowned at this point.

Benjamin seems to be the only one left to him. He speaks of him in that way as if he was the only child he had remaining. Jacob possibly now suspects that the sons of Leah and the handmaids are just devouring his family.

His hope and his life is hanging on by the thread of Benjamin alone. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol. A question to consider.

Joseph places the brothers in a position to test what they will do with regard to Simeon and Benjamin, replaying certain themes of the story in which he was sold into slavery. But Joseph is also placed in a position by God. His dreams seem to be coming to pass.

God has placed him in power over his brothers. I want you to reflect upon the ways in

which this would serve as a test for Joseph too. Matthew chapter 2. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose, and have come to worship him.

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet.

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 shepherd my people Israel. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly, and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the child. And when you have found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him. After listening to the king, they went on their way.

And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them, until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother.

And they fell down and worshipped him. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

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. And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod.

This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Out of Egypt I call my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise man, 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 man.

Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. 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. But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Rise, take the child and his mother,

and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.

And he rose and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in the place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee. 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.

Matthew chapter 2, Matthew is placing Jesus within the preceding narrative, but also demonstrating Jesus' credentials as the Messiah. It's important that he established the site of Jesus' birth. Jesus is associated with Nazareth, he's called Jesus of Nazareth, but yet he's also someone who, if he is to be the Messiah, needs some sort of association with Bethlehem.

Matthew chapter 2 brings these two things together, helps us to understand how Christ is both a Nazarene, and also someone who is the son of David come from Bethlehem. The Magi come inquiring about the one who is to be born King of the Jews. This is the first introduction of this expression, and in both times in the Gospel, it's voiced by the Gentiles.

It's a Gentile way of understanding the Messiah, perhaps. Themes of kingship are prominent within this section. There's the star and the Magi, and there's also Herod, who's described as the King.

Many different theories have been brought forward for the nature of the star, some have seen it as a comet, others a planetary conjunction, some a nova or supernova, and others have suggested that this should be seen as the Shekinah glory, leading them through the wilderness. That connection would certainly heighten the irony of the situation, where magicians who were associated with the opponents of Aaron and Moses in Egypt are now coming to the land of Israel in search of the King of the Jews, whereas the King in the land is going to act the part of Pharaoh and seek to kill the baby boys. So there's a certain ironic reversal taking place here.

It's an inverted Exodus, perhaps. In the book of Daniel, the Magi also appear. As opponents, but then also as people that Daniel will rule over and lead.

We might also compare the Magi with the Queen of Sheba. The Queen of Sheba comes a long distance to see Solomon's wisdom and to bring gifts to Solomon. In Isaiah chapter 60 and also Psalm 72, there are references to kings coming that distance to greet Israel and to see the rise of their Messiah.

Psalm 72 verses 8 to 11 seems to stand in the background of part of what we're reading in this chapter. May he have dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. May desert tribes bow down before him and his enemies lick the dust.

May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute. May the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. May all kings fall down before him.

All nations serve him. Isaiah chapter 60. All darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples.

But the Lord will arise upon you and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around and see they all gather together.

They come to you. Your son shall come from afar and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. Then you shall see and be radiant.

Your heart shall thrill and exult because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you. The wealth of the nation shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you.

The young camels of Midian and Ephah. All those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense.

They shall bring the good news, the praises of the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you. The rams of Nebareth shall minister to you.

They shall come up with acceptance on my altar and I will beautify my beautiful house. All of this is coming to pass in the story of Christ. In Christ, Matthew presents these kings coming from afar, bringing tribute as an expression of the tribute of the Gentiles brought to the Messiah and to Israel at the time of the kingdom's dawning.

The chief priests and the scribes who within this story are characterized as if they were the magicians in the court of Pharaoh because they're associated with this pharaonic character of Herod, they declare that the Messiah will be born in the city of David, in Bethlehem of Judea. They refer back to the prophecy of Micah chapter 5 verse 2, but there's also an allusion to 2 Samuel chapter 5 verse 2 which refers to the fact that David is going to be established as the king, the one who will shepherd the people Israel rather than Saul. And this plays off the character of Herod as well.

Herod is a Saul-like character, one whose authority will ultimately be taken from him and the one who has all true authority, all authority in heaven and earth is Christ. Many have seen here an allusion in part to the story of Balaam and Balak. In the final oracle of Balaam, he says, I see him, but not now.

I behold him, but not near. A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel. It shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.

Edom shall be dispossessed. Seir also, his enemies shall be dispossessed. Israel is doing valiantly, and one from Jacob shall exercise dominion and destroy the survivors of cities.

Here we see a descendant of Edom, Herod the Idumean king, and a descendant of Jacob standing up against each other. Jesus is the true king of the Jews and Edom is going to be dispossessed. The Idumean king Herod might also recall some of the conflict between Israel and Edom in the past.

We might think, for instance, of the story of Hadad in chapter 11 of 1 Kings, which has a number of similarities with the story that we read of Christ here. And the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite. He was of the royal house in Edom.

For when David was in Edom, and Joab the commander of the army went up to bury the slain, he struck down every male in Edom. For Joab and all Israel remained there six months, until he had cut off every male in Edom. But Hadad fled to Egypt, together with certain Edomites of his father's servants, Hadad still being a little child.

And moving ahead a few verses, But when Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers, and that Joab the commander of his army was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, Let me depart, that I may go to my own country. This is very similar to the story of Christ escaping from Israel to go to Egypt, to take refuge there while Herod is seeking the life of the baby boys. This story is playing out again, but the roles have been reversed.

It's as if Christ is taking upon himself the burden of the sins of David's house. And the fact that it is an Idumean king that's persecuting him, brings to mind the rivalry and the opposition and the mistreatment of Edom by David in the past. In the gifts that they give to the infant Jesus, the Magi present him as the king, but also in some ways as the brigrum.

The brigrum, the lover, is connected with spices, with precious stones and metals and other things like that. Jesus is not just the king, he's the brigrum of the people. Dreams are important within the story, not just for Joseph, but also for the Magi.

The Magi are led by dreams and Joseph is led by dreams. Joseph is led by a dream to take Jesus and Mary into Egypt. We can think about the fact that in the previous chapter he's been introduced to us as Joseph, the son of Jacob.

Now there's another Joseph, the son of Jacob in the Old Testament. And Joseph, the son of Jacob in the New Testament, is playing out something very similar in terms of pattern of life. He's someone who has dreams and he's someone who leads his people down into Egypt to take refuge.

In being delivered into and then later from Egypt, Jesus is a new Israel. And to underline this point, Matthew quotes Hosea 11.1. The verse in Hosea 11.1 refers to Israel and the first exodus, but Matthew says it is fulfilled in Jesus and his deliverance from Egypt. Now part of what we're seeing here is that Matthew is using the Old Testament in a far more creative way than many people think.

Many people think that there's an Old Testament verse and it directly points to Christ and then there's the New Testament fulfillment. But then there's a problem when we see verses like Hosea 11.1.1 which clearly do not refer in the first instance to Christ. They refer to specific historical events.

And it might seem to us as if Matthew is just taking verses randomly from the Old Testament and applying them for his own theological purposes without any regard for the original purpose or context. However, it's important to have a sense of the richer theology that Matthew is operating in terms of. He does not treat what happens to Christ as a straightforward fulfillment of a prediction but rather something that's playing out a parallel, a model and a fulfillment.

The Old Testament deliverance of Israel from Egypt was a symbol of something yet to come. We should also note the various versions of themes that can be seen in this chapter. Jesus is brought out of Egypt, much as Israel was brought out of Egypt.

But Jesus is brought out of Egypt as one who has taken refuge in Egypt from a pharaoh-like figure who's on the throne of Israel. The chief priests and the scribes are the ones associated with the pharaoh figure whereas the magicians are the ones that come from afar following the light to come to meet the king of the Jews. The irony of the situation should not escape us.

Jesus has a background in the surrounding Gentile world within Matthew's portrait continuing the themes that we see in the genealogy where the women that come in are Gentiles for the most part. In describing the massacre of the innocents, Matthew again draws attention back to the Old Testament. This, he argues, was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah.

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.

As usual, it's important to go back to the original context to see where these words come from. Matthew is bringing to mind the memory of Israel's exile. At this location, this was where the Judean captives were taken from Ramah and this mourning of Rachel is mourning the exile of her children.

But there is the immediate promise after that that her children will be restored, that there is hope for her future, that God will visit her in her plight. This is not the first time that Rachel might be lurking in the background of Matthew chapter 2. In verse 6, there's a citation from Micah chapter 5 verse 2. And looking in the broader context of Micah chapter 4 and 5, there are many references back to the struggle of Rachel in birth with Benjamin and the way in which she almost died in that situation. But now there's the promise that there will be a child that comes from Bethlehem.

Rachel died on the way to Bethlehem as she gave birth to Benjamin, who was the ancestor of the first king of the people, Saul. But now, finally, they're going to arrive at Bethlehem and it's going to be from Bethlehem that the true king is going to arise. So Rachel's story is in the background in chapters 4 and 5 of Micah.

And now Rachel's story again is recalled from Jeremiah chapter 31. She's the one who stands as the great matriarch of the people as they go out into exile from the place near her death. She mourns and she weeps for them.

And as she weeps, God will hear her voice. These children will be restored. And the immediate verse that we have next is the death of Herod and the appearance of an angel in a dream to Joseph telling him to return to the land.

Now notice the way that's described. But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. For those who sought the child's life are dead.

And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. In Exodus chapter 4, we find something very similar. And the Lord said to Moses in Midian, go back to Egypt for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.

So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey and went back to the land of Egypt. These are very similar because Moses is being connected with the characters of Jesus and Joseph. The pattern of the Exodus is being played out again.

Returning to the land of Israel, Joseph avoids the region of Judea because Archelaus is reigning there in the place of his father Herod and has a bad reputation too. And he goes to the district of Galilee instead. The realm of the older Herod, the Herod that has just died, was divided between Herod Antipas in Galilee and Perea, the east of Jordan, Archelaus in Judea and then also Philip.

The chapter ends by connecting Jesus with the town of Nazareth where they settle in the district of Galilee. And on account of settling in Nazareth, we're told that what was spoken by the prophets would be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene. Now this is a very strange reference and there are many different theories to account for it.

There is no Old Testament verse that is clearly referenced here. Some have proposed Judges chapter 13 verse 7 where it's told that Samson shall be a Nazarite. But the word here is Nazarene, it's not Nazarite.

The words may be similar but there seems to be some difference. The birth oracles connected with Samson and Samuel may have some similarity with John the Baptist. And while Jesus does play the part of a Nazarite at the very end of Matthew, it doesn't seem that he plays a Nazarite more generally.

He's one who comes eating and drinking. The other thing is that this is connected with the place name, the place where he ends up settling. So any explanation would seem to have to take account of that.

Others have suggested a connection with the Hebrew word for branch, Netzer in Isaiah chapter 11 verse 1. Maybe there's something there. There shall come forth of shoot from the stump of Jesse and a branch from his root shall bear fruit and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. So it may be a reference to the shoot or the branch that comes up.

Now whatever we're supposed to make of this, it has to connect with Nazareth. And I think the most promising suggestion I've seen brings those two things together and it's suggesting a play upon words that Matthew is doing something a bit more creative here. Jesus is the branch but also the branch that comes up out of dry ground, out of unpromising soil and Nazareth is a new town.

It has under a thousand inhabitants. It's a place that has no particular auspicious things associated with it. In John's Gospel chapter 1, Nathanael asks can anything good come out of Nazareth? Nazareth seemed to be a place that was not really regarded very highly and in that sense it fit.

This may be what it looks like for the Messiah to arise out of dry ground and this lack of recognition of his origins is appropriate to a figure who comes as it were incognito rather than with great fanfare from a centre of activity and power. What Matthew has done by this point though is present a strong apologetic for Christ's identity as one born in Bethlehem, as one associated with Nazareth, as one to whom the riches of the kings come, as one who plays out the story of Israel being delivered from Egypt again. He is one who bears all of the hallmarks of the true Messiah, the true leader of the people.

A question to consider. In Exodus chapter 4 verse 22, God describes Israel as my first born son. In Matthew chapter 2, Matthew quotes Hosea chapter 11 verse 1, out of Egypt I have called my son.

How do you think that Matthew's use of Hosea chapter 11 and the Exodus tradition is serving his characterisation of Christ both in relationship to God and in relationship to Israel?