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Gentiles in Matthew's infancy narrative

ABSTRACT

Scholars have frequently argued that the great commission rather than the beginning should be regarded as the key to the understanding of Matthew's narrative. Yet, the beginning of the gospel has several themes and elements that match with those of the ending. In some sense, the infancy narrative may be designated as a thematic prelude of the Gospel, similar to the *exordium* in classical rhetorical speeches. Therefore, the beginning and the ending usually match each other, even though the clues in the beginning are tiny, sometimes even unnoticeable by itself. The themes grow big to be noticeable and become more apparent as the story unfolds, until they are fully grown in the great commission at the end.

1. INTRODUCTION

Scholars have frequently argued that the great commission (Mt 28:18-20) rather than the beginning of the gospel should be regarded as the key to the understanding of Matthew's narrative. This implies that the gospel actually needs to be read backwards from the great commission as the climactic text of the Gospel. This was proposed by Michel in 1950 and has since become one of the mainstays of the interpretation of Matthew: "Ja, der Abschluss … lehrt das ganze Evangelium, die Geschichte Jesu, 'von hinten her' zu verstehen. Matt. 28:18-20 is der Schlüssel zum Verständnis des ganzen Buches" (Michel, 1950:21). France (1998:316) writes: "Thus the temporary restriction of the period of Jesus' ministry (10:5-5; 15:24) is swept aside, and the insistent indication throughout the gospel that Jesus is more than merely the Messiah of Israel are focused in the command from now on to make disciples of all nations".

However, with reference to Aristotle's *Ars Rhetorica* it is clear that too little emphasis is placed on the beginning of the narrative. Speaking of the προοἰμια of forensic speeches, Aristotle defines the function in analogy with other genres as providing "a sample of the subject, in order that the hearers may know beforehand what it is about, and that the mind may not be kept in suspense, for that which is undefined leads astray; so then he who puts the beginning … into the hearer's hand enables him … to follow the story … So then the essential and special function of the exordium is to make clear what is the end or purpose of the speech" (Aristotle, *Ars Rhetorica*, III. 14.5-6).

The intention of this article is to indicate how the beginning of Matthew's narrative provides hints of how his narrative will unfold with regard to the position of gentiles.

2. THE BEGINNING OF MATTEW'S NARRATIVE

Surely the Gospels can not exactly be defined as ancient Rhetorical speeches (Burridge, 1995).[1] However, the parallel with regard to the beginnings of each story or speech is significant. The study of the Gospels as narrative has enjoyed renewed attention since the late 1970s. It is

1 Burridge discusses the question "What are the gospels?" in the light of modern literary theory and classical literature.

realized that one of the things that is often lost when studying a Gospel, is that it is a narrative, presenting a sequenced story (Bock, 2002:206). In line with this narrative approach modern literary theory has dealt with the functions of narrative beginnings. Findings from these studies confirm much of how Aristotle viewed the function of the προοὶμιὰ Derret (1975:81) writes that reading the beginnings prepares one for the "hearing the gospels as a whole". Beginnings provide the reader with an opening into the world of the text, which allows him (or her) to progressively orient himself with it (Rabinowitz, 1987:58). They act as markers of space, time, themes, topics and characters. These markers are tentative and are in need of development within the narrative (Repschinski, 2004:4). The tentativeness of these markers invites the reader into the story and sharpens his expectation for the development of these markers within the story. Thus the beginnings awaken within the reader a predisposition for understanding the text. This means creating an implied reader who can serve as an appropriate recipient of the text. Howell (1990:115) even describes this as the "education of the reader". Aristotle calls the function of the beginning οἱῳον οῳδοποιησι᾽ τῷ ες̔πιὸντι, a road map to what follows (*Ars Rhetorica*, III. 14.1).

Just as the ending is important to grasp the ultimate message of a narrative, the beginning is also important (Moloney, 1992a:43). The beginning gives readers several clues about what a story will unfold and communicate in the process of story telling. In some sense, the infancy narrative (Mt. 1 and 2) may be designated as a thematic prelude of the Gospel, similar to the *exordium* in classical rhetorical speeches. Therefore, the beginning and the ending usually match each other, even though the clues in the beginning are tiny, sometimes even unnoticeable by itself. The themes grow big to be noticeable and become more apparent as the story unfolds, until they are fully grown at the end. Sometimes there are complications and challenges in the body, which in collaborate manner constitute exciting elements that make the story vivid or interesting and reveal the themes more clear. In this sense the beginning "forms the prelude to the whole of the Jesus story that Matthew is to tell" (Luz, 2005b:244).

The beginning of Matthew has several themes and elements that match with those of the ending. Firstly, it is talking not only about Jesus' story, but also salvation history. Matthew begins with Jesus' genealogy, "which extends back to Abraham." It corresponds to the resurrection appearance, which "points to the close of the ages (28:20)" and implies that "the plot of Matthew's gospel has something to do with salvation history" (Matera, 1987:241). Secondly, the Immanuel theme in 1:23 and 28:20 constitute an *inclusio* of Matthew (Bauer, 1988:124-125; Luz, 2005b:4). Thirdly, Jesus' status as the Son of God with authority appears both at the beginning and at the end. Fourthly, in relation to the third, the opposition to Jesus can be seen in both his nativity story and his passion story, while such opposition is overcome in both stories. In both the beginning and the ending, we see the Jewish leaders siding with Herod and Pilate. Fifthly, if we extend the ending to Jesus' passion narrative, the dreams of the magi and Pilate's wife may be included (Brown, 1994:805).

It can be noted that already in the beginning of the Gospel the Matthean community's open attitude toward the Gentiles can be detected. Firstly, the genealogy traces back to Abraham (1:1), who is the father of all nations. Secondly, four Gentile women, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and the wife of Uriah, are unusually included in Jesus' genealogy. Thirdly, the Gentile magi came to the infant Jesus to worship him, while the people of Jerusalem were suspicious about him. Fourthly, the infant Jesus flees from Herod's threat to the Gentile land of Egypt. Fifthly geographical names play a significant role in describing the way of salvation beyond Israel to the Gentiles.

3. THE SON OF ABRAHAM (1:1)

Relying on Foley's theory of "traditional referentiality," Carter (2004:261-262) contends that the

title βίβλος γενέσεως "evokes not just two isolated verses (Gen. 2.4; 5.1), but the larger Genesis accounts." When the evangelist communicates with his readers, the tradition that he shares with his first readers could supply a further understanding of the text (Carter, 2000:506). Thus Carter (2004:263) insists that by evoking Abraham in the title, the evangelist is recalling, "the divine purposes declared in God's promises to the Gentile Abraham in Gen.12.1-3 that he would be the father of many nations and that through him all nations will be blessed." However, it is not easy to decide if the inclusion of Abraham in Jesus' genealogy betrays Matthew's favourable view of the Gentiles. Our task would be to determine the tradition that the evangelist and his first reader might have shared.

On the one hand, Abraham is the father of the Jewish nation (Sim, 1998:250). On the other hand, he is also the father of all nations (Genesis 17:4-5), in whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:3). In the Second Temple period, Abraham is sometimes regarded as the link between Israel and the Gentile world (Josephus, *Antiquities* I.161-168; *b. Hagigah* 3a; *Genesis Rabbah* 14.6; cf. Romans 4:1-25; Galatians 3:6-29). Abraham could be seen as the first proselyte (Philo, *De Cherubim* 31; *De mutatione nominum* 76; *De somniis* 161; *De Abrahamo* 70) or even as the first missionary (*b. Hagigah* 3a; Josephus, *Antiquities* I.161-168) (Hayward, 1998:24-37). Therefore the designation of Jesus as the son of Abraham could be ambivalent. If we stress Abraham as the ancestor of Israel, then he could stand for particularism. If we stress the blessing that he will bring over the whole nations, however, then he could stand as a prototype for universalism.

According to Johnson (1969:151), the description of Jesus as the son of Abraham and the son of David mainly represents the idea that Jesus is the Messiah that the mainstream of Jews has waited for. However, the tradition that the Messiah is the son of Abraham is rare, except as recorded in *T. Levi* 8.15 (Luz, 2005a:158).

Nolland (2005:72) regards it "a mistake to find any hint of good news for the Gentiles" here. However, when we examine how Abraham was used in Matthew, we can say that the inclusion of Abraham in Jesus' genealogy reveals the evangelist's interest in the salvation of the Gentiles (Combrink, 1983:76; Charette, 1992:66-72; Bauer, 1996:149; Byrne, 2002:58-59). Firstly, John the Baptist challenges his contemporaries' notion that they are the descendents of Abraham, while insisting "God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham" (3:9). Secondly, Jesus also prophesies that many will come from east and west to recline at the table with Abraham and other patriarchs (8:11-12). This corresponds to later Jewish literature's description of Abraham as the father of many nations (1 *Macc* 12:19-21) or the first proselyte (*b. Hag*. 3a) (Davies and Allison, 1988:158) and to Paul's argument that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham, Jew and Gentile alike (Romans 4:1-25; Galatians 3:6-29). The designation of Jesus as the son of Abraham by itself may not be clear evidence of this fact. However, examining this reference along with other usages of the phrase in Matthew, it provides positive supplementary evidence for the evangelist's universalistic interest.

In the conclusion of his report on the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew states that Jesus is the one who will save "his people" from their sins. For the connotation of τὸν λαὸν αυτοῦ (1:21), Sim (1998:250) contends that "his people" "must be the Jews, the people of Israel." He bases his opinion on the usage of the word in Matthew. Sim argues that the "his people" is used to denote the Jews "exclusively." In Jesus' genealogy Matthew "takes pains to demonstrate Jesus' Jewish pedigree and his relationship to the Jewish people" (Sim, 1998:250).

However, we cannot tell that the word λαὸσ is used exclusively for the Jews in Matthew. The word has no specific reference. Therefore it could imply any people according to its literary context. The word is used in Matthew to denote Israelite people in most cases, because the context of its story lies within Israel. But in 1:21 it means only "people" who are sinful and who

therefore need salvation. Jesus in Matthew is described as the Lord of the entire universe. In the Great Commission, the risen Lord claims his authority over the heaven and the earth. His universal authority has been noted throughout the whole gospel. Moreover, Jesus' affinity to David is emphasized in Matthew's genealogy to express that Jesus is the Davidic Messiah, not that he is the Messiah exclusively for the Jews.

In conclusion, the inclusion of Abraham in Jesus' genealogy may not by itself stand positively for the evidence of Matthean community's engagement of the Gentile mission. But in context of other elements in Matthew, this can betray the evangelist's view on the Gentiles. Luz (2007:85) suggests that along with the four women in the genealogy, Abraham can function as the father of the proselytes. When read along with the Ultimate Commission's universalistic goal, then it reveals the concern for the Gentiles.

4. FOUR WOMEN IN JESUS' GENEALOGY (1:2-16)

It is unusual but not unprecedented to include women in Jewish genealogies (Genesis 11:29; 22:20-24; 35:22-26; 1 Chronicles 2:18-21, 24, 34, 46-49; 7:24; *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 1-2) (Davies and Allison, 1988:170). Therefore the inclusion of women reveals that the evangelist has a specific intention with when referring to them (Brown, 1993:71-74; 590-596; Davies and Allison, 1988:170-172). It is interesting that Matthew does include women in his version of genealogy, while Luke, who shows much interest in women, does not (Freed, 1987:3). It is also remarkable that more well-known Jewish women like Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel are missing (Viljoen, 2006:251). Inclusion of four women in Jesus' genealogy has been frequently regarded as foreshadowing of the concern of Jesus for sinners and Gentiles. Heffern (1912:77), Byrne (2002:59-60) and Luz (2007:84-85) for example argue that the evangelist included four women "on account of their heathen origin or associations." They are included "as historic instances of God's eternal purpose to call all nations" (Heffern, 1912:81).

In his study on genealogies, however, Johnson (1969:178) suggests that four women were presented "to show that in every respect the Pharisaic expectation of the Messiah had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth." But the lack of the necessary evidence concerning Rahab (Gundry, 1994:15; Levine, 1988:68; Davies & Allision, 1988:170) and the anachronism of the sources (Levine, 1988:68) demonstrate flaws in Johnson's reasoning. Appealing to Johnson's argument, Sim (1995:22-23; 1998:218-220) challenges the idea that all four women in the genealogy were Gentile. According to him, the ethnic identity of the women is unknown or cannot be categorized as purely Gentile (see also Levine, 1988:71-80). Several other suggestions of the common denominator for the four women have not been successful (Stendahl, 1995:69-80; Levine, 1988:80-88).

It is interesting that Matthew presents the mother of Solomon as the wife of Uriah, not as the well-known Bathsheba. Here the evangelist seems to colour her as a Gentile, regardless of her actual ethnic background (Byrne, 2002:60). At the time of writing of the gospel, the four women were regarded by the then contemporaries as Gentiles or proselytes. They were by birth Canaanites (Tamar and Ruth), a Moabite (Ruth) or a Hittite (Bathsheba). Tamar's is said to be "a daughter of Aram" in *Jubilee* 41:1; *T. Judah* 10:1 (Johnson, 1969:159). Bauckham (1995:320) proves that those references cannot be used for this purpose. Sim (1995:22-23; 1998:218-220) questions if Tamar and the wife of Uriah can be categorized as Gentiles. Still, appealing to Philo, Bauckham (1995:320) admits that she was a Canaanite. Even though, or because, they were regarded as proselytes in some sources (Johnson, 1969:159-170), they can foreshadow the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church (Bauer, 1996:149; *pace* Sim, 1995:22; 1998:219).

All four women may not be categorized as Gentiles. However, according to Heil (1991b:545),

who tries not only to find the similarities between the four, but also to evaluate them with their differences, the two, Rahab and Ruth, suffice to reveal that Jesus is "the Messianic Son of Abraham, who fulfils the universalist hope" (so Nolland, 1997:534-537).

5. THE VISIT OF MAGI (2:1-12)

The birth narrative of Jesus contains a story of the Gentile magi, who travelled to Bethlehem via Jerusalem to worship the infant Jesus. This is the only visit presented in Matthew. It implies that "the commission to be Son of Abraham (1:1) is here already going into effect" (Combrink, 1983:77).

The Gentile identity of the magi can scarcely be doubted (Byrne, 2002:60), even though recently the ethnical identity of the magi has been challenged by Sim (1999:980-1000). According to him, they represent Matthew's community, while the people of Jerusalem stand for the homeland Jews. However, it is not adequate to say that the magi from "the East" can stand for Matthew's community in Antioch (Byrne, 2002:61 n.10). The existence of Jewish magi does not necessarily indicate the Jewish identity of the magi in our pericope. Rather their way of saying "King of the Jews" (2:2), "the East" as their origin, the probable implication of fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 60:6 and Matthew's report that they returned to their own country (2:12) all provide positive evidence for their Gentile identity (Byrne, 2002:61-62). By evoking Isaiah 60:6 and thereby linking the magi with this tradition, the evangelist presents them not just as individual Gentiles, as but as representatives of the Gentiles who participate in the divine eschatological purposes (Carter, 2004:273-274).

Their visit is contrasted with Jerusalem's negative response to the news (2:3). The verb ταράσσομαι is used to denote a negative feeling associated with an unpleasant event (Mayordomo-Marín, 1998:290-292). In their response, the people of Jerusalem are not different from and allied with Herod the king, who stands as the opposition to the newborn king. This alliance is questionable, because at that time Herod was unpopular among the Israelites (Luz, 2007:113). Horsley (1989:52) regards Jerusalem as a synecdoche for "official Jerusalem" consisting of the high priestly families and thinks that it does not represent the Jewish people as a whole (see also Davies and Allison, 1988:238; Combrink, 1983:78; Viljoen, 2008:851). It is noteworthy, however, that later in the passion narrative (27:15-26; cf. 21:10) the crowd of Jerusalem again allies with the leaders of Jerusalem to oppose Jesus (Viljoen, 2006:254). Even though Matthew describes Jesus' sympathy for the crowds elsewhere (9:36; 14:14; 15:32), here they are contrasted with the Gentile magi to foreshadow their rejection of Jesus at his trial. The description of the response of Jerusalem seems to reveal the evangelist's point of view. As early as Origen, the story of the magi's visit has been understood as signifying the Gentile mission (Luz, 2007:108).

In this sense, the visit of the magi can also be compared midrashically to Joseph's brothers (Derrett 1975:103). They came and bowed down before the Messiah. This is "what was expected of God's own people" (Viljoen, 2006:255). Thereby the story of the magi implies the admission of the Gentiles into the church (Daniélou, 1964:490). In the narrative of the magi's visit, the overall imagery of the Jews is negative and contrasted with them. The chief priests and scribes of the people are included in this negative description of the Jews: They knew where the Christ would be born, but did nothing. The magi came to worship the newborn king just with a tiny knowledge that a star can give; the scribes did nothing with their specific knowledge of the Scriptures. Ironically, later (27:63) they repudiate Israel's eschatological king as a fraud (Kingsbury, 1995:187). Luz (1995:27; so Davies and Allison, 1988:238) finds a contrast here between "the elite of the holy people of Israel" and "the pagan elite."

The treasures the magi offered to the baby Jesus remind readers of Isaiah 60:6, which

enunciates the eschatological pilgrimage of Gentiles (Davies and Allison, 1988:250-253). The visit of the magi with their treasures also recalls the visit of the queen of Sheba with gold and spices (1 Kings 10:1-10; cf. Psalm 72:10-11). In this sense Isaiah's eschatological prophecy is now fulfilled in the magi's presentation of gifts to the king of the Jews (cf. 12:28; 11:12).[2] For Matthew, the eschatological time has begun with Jesus' nativity.

This story is recorded only in Matthew and compared to Luke's story of the shepherds. Gundry (1994:26-32) thinks that Matthew's Gentile magi story is a rework of Luke's story of the Jewish shepherds. If we connect the details of one story with those of the other, we can easily find many corresponding elements. However, they are not sufficient to tell for certainty whether the one is a rework of the other. Daniélou (1968:76) even insists that the magi were an invention of Matthew designed to suggest the idea of the admission of the Gentiles into the church. Even though there are many Matthean characteristics in the story of the magi, it is generally argued that there was a well-developed tradition, which lay behind this version (Derrett, 1975:108; Nolland, 1998:283-300; Davies and Allison, 1988:190-195). In any rate, it is telling in relation with our topic that Matthew records the story of the magi, while Luke records the story of the shepherds, who probably are Jewish.

6. THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT (2:13-15)

Matthew records how Jesus' family came to reside at Nazareth. The evangelist narrates that being instructed in a dream Joseph took his family to Egypt to escape the massacre by Herod (cf. France, 1979:98-120; Luz, 2007:120). The evangelist reminds readers that the prophecies through Hosea and Jeremiah were fulfilled. For those, who are acquainted with the rescue of the sons of Israel from Pharaoh, it would be not difficult to see a new Moses or a new Israel in Jesus (Luz, 2007:119; Allison, 1993).

Here Matthew's fulfilment quotation of Hosea 11:1 is introduced after Jesus' flight to Egypt and before his return to Israel. This is introduced as a typological application, i.e. an analogical correspondence between Israel's exodus and Jesus' flight (Howard, 1986:320-322; Viljoen, 2007a:315).[3] The evangelist is applying Hosea's words to Jesus, an individual, rather than to the historical Israel. It seems to refer to Jesus' flight to Egypt, rather than his later return to Israel from there (McCartney and Enns, 2001:103; Keener, 1999:109; Turner, 2008:91; *pace* Davies and Allison, 1988:263; Nolland, 2005:123). The quotation would seem "not fit(ting) neatly together" (France 2007:77-78). That is why Gundry (1967:93-94) tries to read the quotation with temporal sense (since Egypt), without excluding the spatial meaning. However, Jesus' exodus from Israel to Egypt is deliberately compared to patriarchal Israel's exodus from Egypt to Canaan. Thus the literal Egypt becomes an allegorical Canaan, while the literal Israel (Canaan) becomes an allegorical Egypt (McCartney and Enns, 2001:103). Matthew's record of the time of flight at night matches well to this: The *Passover Haggadah* reports that Israelites left Egypt at night (Allison, 1993:156). Here and in other passages (cf. 1:1, 18-25[4]; 3:17; 4:1-11; 14:33; 16:16; 27:40, 43), Matthew presents Jesus as a new Israel, or the real Son of God, recapitulating certain

2 If we take 11:12 as the kingdom of heaven's breaking into this world with force, then this may indicate that the kingdom is already inaugurated (Beasley-Murray, 1986:91-96). Beasley-Murray (1986:71-146) adds the following as implying the presence of the kingdom: 11:5-6, 11, 29; 13:1-9, 16-17, 24-30, 31-32, 36-43; 44-46, 47-50; 18:23-25; 20:1-16; 22:1-14.

3 See Sailhamer (2001:91, italics are his), who argues that Matthew "was drawing the *sensus literalis* from the book of Hosea and it, in turn, was drawn from Hosea's exegesis of the *sensus literalis* of the Pentateuch" and McCartney and Enns (2001:99), who object to the idea.

4 Nolland (2005:3-12) insists that we can find no Son of God Christology in Jesus' nativity story.

experiences of Israel (Allison, 1987:75-76). While Kingsbury (1991:40-83) proposes that "the son of God" is the most prominent and important Christological title, to which all other titles are subordinate, Allison (1987:76) furthers that Jesus as the Son of God (as the embodiment of Israel) recapitulates the experiences of Israel.

Not only the fact that Jesus fled to the Gentile area of Egypt, but also the fact Israel is figuratively regarded as Egypt, a Gentile area, implies much in relation to our topic. As we will see later, from the point of Matthew Israel's status as a chosen and privileged people is seriously challenged and questioned, even though they are not abandoned completely (cf. 3:9; 8:10-12; 10:14; 11:20-24; 21:43; 22:9). With Jesus' flight the whole world (Egypt, the East, Israel) are seen in Jesus' nativity story. Thereby Matthew depicts Jesus not just as the saviour of Israel, but of the universe as the story unfolds (France, 1981:237-240).

The flight of Jesus into Egypt foreshadows his rejection throughout the gospel and his crucifixion at the end. As the Immanuel motif corresponds to the ending, Jesus' rejection as a child corresponds to his final rejection as an adult. Viljoen (2006:254) notes that chapter 2 is full of geographical names, while chapter 1 is full of personal names. Accordingly both serve "serve an apologetic purpose of describing the way of salvation beyond Israel to the Gentiles."

7. GEOGRAPHICAL ITENERARY (MT 2)

Already in 1960 Stendahl in his article *Quis et Unde? An analysis of Matthew* (reprinted 1995) pointed out how Matthew 2 is dominated by geographical names (1995:71). This is even more striking in contrast to chapter 1, which has no single one. The chapter begins with Bethlehem of Judea, then takes the reader to Egypt, then describes the massacre at Bethlehem, takes the reader out to Egypt back to the land of Israel, bypasses Judea, takes one into Galilee and settles down in Nazareth. Obviously this itinerary is intentional (Viljoen, 2007b:703). These geographical names indicate what is really important for Matthew's narrative. This is reiterated by Matthew's substantiation of these geographical names by formula quotations (Mt. 2:6 and 2:15). Obviously this geographical information provides the structure of Matthew 2, but also of the "Christological geography" of the Gospel. Read as part of the *exordium* of Matthew's Gospel they also give prominent markers for the further development of the plot.

Once it has been recognized that Matthew 2 is focused on geographical names, the relation with Matthew 1 becomes significant. Chapter 1 focuses on personal names while chapter 2 on geographical names. In both cases these names serve an apologetic purpose of describing the way of salvation beyond Israel to the Gentiles.

8. CONCLUSIONS

From the literary point of view, the beginning is an insignificant part of a gospel. It contains many clues that show the direction to which the story is heading. In Matthew, there are many corresponding themes and elements between the beginning and the ending, including Jesus as Immanuel and the Son of God, unsuccessful oppositions to Jesus, and dreams. The genealogy and the story of Jesus' birth contain many signals for the inclusion of Gentiles in the salvation history, as much as the Ultimate Commission summarizes the story and provides the key to view the whole narrative. From the very beginning, Matthew includes the Gentiles in his scope.

Matthew's genealogy presents Jesus as the son of Abraham, evoking the fact that Abraham was promised to become the father of all nations. This is supported by Matthew's usage of Abraham (3:9; 8:11-12). Matthew also includes four Gentile women in Jesus' genealogy. Even though some of them cannot be clearly identified as Gentile, at least two of them (Rahab

and Ruth) are clearly Gentiles and suffice to show Matthew's interest in the Gentile mission. Matthew's inclusion of the magi's visit also reveals the theme of universal mission. The Gentile identity of the magi cannot be doubted, when we consider their call of Jesus as the king of Jews, their origin from the east and return to their home country. Allusion to Isaiah 60:6 also implies that they were Gentiles. Their visit is contrasted with Jewish people's response. Also Matthew describes Jesus' flight into Egypt, where the literal Egypt becomes an allegorical Canaan and the literal Israel (Canaan) becomes an allegorical Egypt. Overall the description of Gentiles in the beginning of Matthew is very positive.

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