

Wednesday Reflection

Title: The Mission of God's Community to God's Family

Date: December 28, 2025

ID: Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Scripture: Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

I am using R. T. France. The Gospel of Matthew. William B. Eerdmans Publishing. 2007.

N.B. No Christian should put stock in supersessionism, a theory that Christians replaced Jews as God's people. Nor should Christians engage in antisemitism. Instead, Christians might claim that we are an addition to God's people, adopted through our unity with Jesus. Matthew demonstrated that Jesus is "son of David and son of Abraham" (1:1-17). Those who unite with Jesus are adopted into the tradition.

Text: The designers of the feasts around the Lord's Nativity made of hash of the logical flow of scripture. Here's the trouble. The church's first attempt to celebrate these events combined Jesus's birth, the Magi's visit, and the Lord's baptism into one feast celebrated on January 6. The celebration included our feasts of Christmas, Epiphany, and the Baptism of the Lord. When the Western and Eastern Churches began going separate ways, the West disconnected the events to make separate feasts. The assigned scriptures for the feasts matched the events, not Matthew's order.

Matthew intended the Gospel for the Holy Family (Matt. 2:13-15, 19-23) to follow the Gospel for the following week's feast, the Epiphany (Matt 2:1-12). Inspiration rests with the evangelist, not the words on a page. The Holy Spirit's revelation is what the Spirit spoke into Matthew's heart and soul.

The revelation is still evident in the cut-and-paste job done for the Holy Family. Reading it as Matthew intended makes it more dramatic. Matthew passes over the birth itself; there are no angels singing the Gloria. He hastens to the coming of the magi. These people were from the east; they were foreigners (2:1). They did not know the faith (2:2). They were Gentiles. Israel's leadership was greatly troubled (2:3). King Herod was also ignorant of the faith (2:4). Herod began to plot against Jesus (2:7). Let's stop for reflection: Gentiles rejoiced at Jesus's birth (2:10). Gentiles recognized Jesus as King of the Jews (2:2). Gentiles brought the wealth of the nations to Jesus (2:11 see Isaiah 60:5/6). The news troubled Israel's leaders; the king thinks of murder (2:16).

Matthew engages in biblical typology. Events in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) become the pattern for interpretation of events in the Christian Scriptures (the New Testament). Here, the events surrounding Jesus's infancy are like those of the Exodus, the liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Herod looks like the Egyptian Pharaoh. Both kill Israel's boys (Exodus 1:15ff. and Matt. 2:16ff). Joseph takes his family into exile because of Herod's rage (Matt 2:13ff); Moses had to go into exile because of the Pharaoh's anger (Exodus 2:11ff). Dreams directed Joseph (Matt 1:20; Matt 2:13); the patriarch Joseph, who brought Israel to Egypt, was an interpreter of dreams (Genesis 40 and 41).

Here's where it leads: God constituted His people by bringing them out of Egypt. In Matthew, God constitutes a new community of His people when Jesus is called out of Egypt (Matt 2:15; France p. 81). I commend to you St. John's concise summary of this entire dynamic (John 1:11-13).

In Isaiah, God's people become the light to the nations (Isaiah 60). Matthew believes the new community is given this mission (Matt. 28:19). The magi, as foreigners and gentiles, represent the focus of the ministry. St. Paul gave us the best understanding of the mission (2 Cor. 5:17-20). God's new community has a mission to God's family—to all humanity—to reconcile everyone to the God of love by letting the God of love work through us.