

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVESTITY
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'ISIDOR TODORAN' DOCTORAL SCHOOL

**TRADITION AND THEOLOGY IN
THE EPISODE OF JESUS BIRTH
ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL OF
MATTHEW (1, 18-2, 23)**

DOCTORAL ADVISER:

FR. PROF. TOFANĂ STELIAN, TH.D.

DOCTORAL CANDIDATE:

FR. BĂLAJ SERGIU-VASILE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Abbreviations..... | 7 |
| Introduction..... | 10 |
| 1. The relevance and the importance of the research..... | 11 |
| 2. Organization and research methodology..... | 11 |
| 3. The structure and the signification of the episode of the Saviour's birth in the dynamics of the Gospel according to Matthew..... | 13 |
| 4. Linguistic and structural unity of Matthew 1-2..... | 15 |
| 4.1 Linguistic unity of Matthew 1-2..... | 15 |
| 4.2 Structural unity in the episode of Jesus's birth..... | 20 |
| I. THE GENRE AND THE SOURCES OF THE EPISODE OF JESUS'S BIRTH (Mt. 1-2)..... | 23 |
| 1. Jewish old-testamentary tradition in the narrative of the episode of the Saviour's birth..... | 26 |
| 1.1 Old-testamentary prophecies..... | 26 |
| 1.2 Changes generated by the insertion of the prophecies in the original material..... | 31 |
| 1.3 Can some fragments of the Old Testament be regarded as a source for Matthew?... | 33 |
| 1.4 Did Matthew draw inspiration from the Gospel according of Luke? Is there a common tradition?..... | 35 |
| 2. Uncovering the pre-matthean material | 40 |
| 2.1 The pre-matthean material of 1, 18-25..... | 42 |
| 2.2 The sources of the episode Mt. 2, 1-12..... | 44 |
| 2.2.1 The exegetic-critical research of C.T. Davis and G. Soares Prabhu..... | 46 |
| 2.2.2 The suggestions offered by Davies & Allison, Raymond Brown and John Nolland..... | 50 |
| 2.3 The pre-matthean material of Mt. 2, 13-23..... | 55 |
| 3. The problem of the Midrash..... | 58 |
| 3.1. Defining a Midrash..... | 58 |
| 3.2. Moses and 'Jesus – the new Moses'?..... | 59 |
| 3.3. Can the episode of Jesus's birth in Mt. 1-2 be regarded as a Midrash?..... | 61 |
| II. THE CONTEXT OF THE SAVIOUR'S BIRTH. 'THE MATTHEAN ANNUNCIATION' – AN EXEGETICAL PERSPECTIVE | |
| 1. The righteous Joseph and the Virgin Mary – the issue of the betrothal 'μνηστευθείσης' (Mt. 1, 18-19)..... | 67 |
| 2. The role of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation of Jesus – a matthean perspective (ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου - Mt. 1, 19)..... | 71 |
| 2.1 'The Holy Spirit' in Jewish thinking considered from the perspective of the matthean 'pneumatology' in the episode of the Nativity..... | 73 |
| 2.2 The role of the Holy Spirit in Lc. 1, 35..... | 75 |
| 3. Joseph's dilemma and 'righteousness' ('δίκαιος ὢν' - Mt. 1, 19)..... | 77 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 4. The message given to Joseph in a dream | 79 |
| 5. The origin of the dream. Critical approaches..... | 80 |
| 5.1 The structure of the dreams in Mt. 1-2..... | 81 |
| 5.2 The origin of the matthean dreams..... | 84 |
| 5.3 The purpose of Matthew's use of dreams in the episode of Jesus's birth | 87 |
| 6. The interpretation of Jesus's birth (v. 22-23)..... | 90 |
| 6.1 The context of the prophecy in NT and VT..... | 90 |
| 6.1.1 The historical context of the prophecy (Is. 7, 14)..... | 90 |
| 6.1.2 The context in which it was uttered (Mt. 1, 23)..... | 92 |
| 6.2 Text exegesis. Critical approaches..... | 94 |
| 6.2.1 The introduction formula of the prophecy (Mt. 1, 22)..... | 94 |
| 6.2.2 Almah or betulah? Critical approaches | 96 |
| 6.2.3 The silence of the New Testament with regard to the virginal birth..... | 100 |
| 6.2.4 The Child's names and their meanings..... | 103 |
| 6.2.5. The origin of the prophecy | 107 |
| 6.2.6. The fulfilment of the angel's commandment (v. 24-25)..... | 109 |
| Conclusions..... | 113 |

III. THE EPISODE OF JESUS'S BIRTH REFLECTED IN THE PROPHECIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. THE PROPHETIC DIMENSION OF THE INCARNATION

| | |
|---|------------|
| Old-testamentary prophecies and their significance for Matthew..... | 115 |
| I. The tradition referring to Christ's birth in Bethlehem. Purely theological statement or historical event? (Mt. 2, 6 – Mic. 5, 1)..... | 117 |
| 1.1 Old-testamentary context..... | 117 |
| 1.2 Proof of Christ's birth in Bethlehem – the prophecy in Mic. 5, 1..... | 118 |
| 1.3 The exegetical issues of the text..... | 121 |
| 1.3.1 Bethlehem – the home of king David? (Mt. 2, 1)..... | 121 |
| 1.3.2 The meaning of the term <i>Ruler</i> (מֹשֵׁל) from Mic. 5, 1 used by Matthew...124 | |
| 1.4 The origin of the prophecy..... | 125 |
| 2. The use of Hosea 11, 1 in Matthew 2, 15..... | 129 |
| 2.1 The historical background of Hos. 11..... | 130 |
| 2.2 The historical background of Mt. 2, 15..... | 131 |
| 2.3 The origin of the prophecy..... | 135 |
| 2.4 Elements of hermeneutics..... | 137 |
| 2.4.1 Sensus Plenior..... | 137 |
| 2.4.2. Sensus Literaris..... | 140 |
| 2.4.3 The prophecy's prediction | 140 |
| 2.4.4 Typological prefigurations..... | 141 |
| 2.4.5 An adequate solution: analogical correspondence..... | 145 |
| 3. The massacre of the innocents and the prophetic message (Mt. 2, 18 - Jer. 31, 15)..... | 147 |
| 3.1 The context of Jer. 31..... | 148 |
| 3.2 The context of Mt. 2, 18..... | 150 |
| 3.3 The sources of the prophecies..... | 152 |
| 3.4 The issue of the age of the infants and of the area where Herod's order was to be carried out..... | 154 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| 3.5 The account of the massacre of the innocents: imaginary construction of fact?..... | 155 |
| 3.6 Was the account of the massacre of the innocents invented for apologetic or polemic reasons?..... | 156 |
| 4. The return to Nazareth and the ‘enigma of the prophecy’ (Mt. 2, 23)..... | 159 |
| 4.1 The origin of the term Ναζωραῖος..... | 161 |
| 4.2 The biblical allusions to the term Ναζωραῖος..... | 163 |
| 4.2.1 Is. 11, 1..... | 164 |
| 4.2.2 Jud. 13, 5 and 16, 17..... | 165 |
| 4.2.3 Is the text of Is. 4, 3 to be found in Mt. 2, 23?..... | 166 |
| Conclusions..... | 169 |

IV. THE ISSUE OF THE HISTORICITY OF THE EVENT OF THE NATIVITY ACCORDING TO MATTHEW. NEW APPROACHES IN MODERN CRITIQUE.....170

| | |
|--|------------|
| 1. The historicity of the birth of Jesus. The text problematic..... | 170 |
| 1.1 Jesus ‘obeys’ geography: Jesus is born in Bethlehem of Judaea..... | 171 |
| 1.2 Jesus becomes a historical person: He is born during the time of Herod the Great... | 172 |
| 1.3 The wise men of the East – ‘witnesses’ of Jesus’s birth..... | 173 |
| 1.3.1 ‘Magus’ – the meanings of the term..... | 173 |
| 1.3.2 The meaning of the syntagma ‘from the East’ (ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν)..... | 174 |
| 1.3.3 Who are the magi? A question with no answer?..... | 176 |
| 2. The mystery of the ‘star of Bethlehem’ between faith and science..... | 180 |
| 3. The historicity of the event of Jesus’s birth reflected in the ‘details’ presented by Matthew..... | 184 |
| 3.1 The adoration of the magi..... | 184 |
| 3.2 Other details | 186 |
| 4. The historicity of the episode of Jesus’s birth. Objections | 191 |

V. THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE EPISODE OF JESUS’S BIRTH (MT. 1, 18-2, 23)..

| | |
|--|------------|
| 1. Jesus Christ – the son of David..... | 195 |
| 2. Jesus Christ – the son of God..... | 199 |
| 3. Jesus Christ – the King..... | 206 |
| 3.1 Jesus’s birth in Bethlehem of Judaea..... | 207 |
| 3.2 The opposition between Jesus ‘the born king’ and Herod ‘the king of the Jews’..... | 208 |
| 3.2.1 <i>The contrast between King Herod the Great and the Child ‘the new born king’</i> | 208 |
| 3.2.2 <i>The contrast between the way Jesus was welcome as a king</i> | 210 |
| 3.3 The gifts of the magi..... | 212 |
| 4. Jesus Christ – the true Messiah..... | 213 |
| 4.1 Fulfilment..... | 214 |
| 4.2 Typology..... | 215 |
| 4.3 Christology..... | 218 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 5. Name theology: Jesus and Emanuel..... | 220 |
| a) Jesus – ‘Saviour’. The Christological dimension of salvation..... | 220 |
| b) Emanuel – ‘God with us’ | 223 |
| Final conclusions..... | 225 |
| Bibliography..... | 228 |

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The event of 'Christ's birth' is recounted only in the first two chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (Mt. 1-2 and Lk. 1-2). Mark the evangelist neither narrates the birth of Jesus nor does he mention Joseph's name, whereas John presents solely the divine origin of Christ in his Gospel's prologue. There is no record of this episode in the Acts of the Apostle or in the Pauline Epistles (with the exception of the text found in Galatians 4, 4-5). The little interest shown by these writings in the episode of the Saviour's birth may be explained by the fact that it had not been regarded as a salutary act, as were Christ's Death and Resurrection.

Several elements of the episode of Jesus's birth presented by Saint Matthew in his Gospel are distinctly typical of his text: the wise men from the East, the star of Bethlehem or the massacre of the innocents are not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament. This particularity prompted me to meditate on the following question: where does this information come from and to what end was it employed by Saint Matthew the Evangelist. Could it be that the text in Mt. 1, 18-2, 23 which is now part of the canon of the Holy Scripture had existed previously as an independent narrative, preserved by tradition, where Matthew was able to take it from, or did he insert certain elements in the original episode, so as to serve his purpose?

This thesis attempts to investigate the traditions or the sources the Evangelist Matthew may have used when structuring his account of Christ's birth, as well as the theological inferences it generated.

I believe that an approach of the traditions underlying Matthew's version of the nativity (1, 18-2, 23), as well as that of the theology he wished to intimate thereby, is quite a challenging and provocative subject. A long time ago F.C. Burkitt warned that the reconstruction of the hypothetical sources employed by Matthew – a competent writer who made use of his predecessor's words with utmost liberty, combining and rearranging them in his own work – is extremely risky, if not outright impossible.

This research is very important both for the Romanian theological environment, in which there is no ample study to be found on the matter, as well as for the international scientific milieu, which does not approach this topic.

Regarded from a different perspective, this paper also tries to answer the questions that arise in the minds of the readers. My exegesis helps one to understand the context in which Jesus, the Son of God, was born, certain Jewish traditions of those times (the issue of the betrothal, the naming of the child), as well as the message Matthew wants to convey by recording the event of Christ's birth: the fulfilment of the messianic prophecies in the person of Jesus Christ.

Concerning the structure and the methodology of my research, this paper is divided into five larger parts, each of them comprising several chapters and subchapters.

The introduction offers a presentation of the structure and of the significance of the event of the birth of Jesus, seen in the larger picture of the Gospel's dynamics. The episode of the birth of Mt. 1-2 is composed of an introduction (the genealogy 1, 1-17) and five distinct episodes, characterised by the presence of a messianic prophecy. Although these five sections are autonomous, they can be read as a whole, as one single account, because they have been carefully fused together: the link is found in the first words of each scene. The presence of these 'key words' conveys the sense that this is a well structured, homogenous episode.

With regard to the meaning of this episode and the reason why Matthew chose to include it in his Gospel, there are various opinions: Raymond Brown and W. B. Tatum suggest the fact that the author intuited elements rich in Christological implications in the traditions relating the birth of Jesus; Krister Stendahl believes that the episode of Mt. 1-2 provides an apologetic and scriptural answer to the questions *Quis et Unde*; for Jack Dean Kingsbury the structure of this episode is the 'key' serving the theological purposes of the Evangelist; whereas Morton S. Eslin conjectures that it was added to the Gospel of Matthew in order to refute docetism. All theological speculations aside, it can be stated that Matthew the Evangelist inserts this narrative in his gospel because he considered Jesus's birth to be one of the salutary acts, along with His Death and Resurrection.

The second issue I addressed is the linguistic and structural unity of Matthew 1-2. I have shown that the first two chapters are considered to be a unit distinct from the rest of the gospel, since beginning with the third chapter both Matthew and Luke use Mark's material as a primary source, whereas the material used in chapters 1 and 2 derives from an entirely different source. I

have concluded that the connection between the first two chapters and the rest of the gospel (ch. 3-28) resides in structural elements (the literary structure of the Prologue is identical to that of the Epilogue) and elements of vocabulary (even without the term γεννάω – which appears 40 times in the episode of the birth – 67 of the 864 unique words or expressions used by Matthew appear in the first two chapters).

The first part of the thesis is focused on uncovering the sources or the traditions that underlie the episode of the Saviour's birth from Mt. 1, 18-2, 23. Where did Matthew draw inspiration from when he wrote the first two chapters? I have considered several hypotheses: a) the five old-testamentary prophecies – found in Mt. 1-2; b) the account of Christ's birth given by Luke in his first two chapters; c) a Midrash on an old-testamentary text.

a) I have shown that the episode of Jesus's birth found in the Gospel according to Matthew contains five old-testamentary prophecies (1, 22; 2, 6, 15; 2, 17; 2, 23) that are introduced by the formula: 'all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet'. The formulas introducing messianic prophecies are meant to highlight the fact that the events taking place in the New Testament are their fulfilment. The presence of the five prophecies in Mt. 1-2 intrigued the scholars and made them ask the following questions: a) did the traditions relative to the birth of Jesus – which Matthew had explored – also contain these prophecies or were they added later by the author? b) did Matthew structure the episode of Christ's birth around the old-testamentary prophecies? Although the opinions vary significantly, here are just two antipodal possible answers: a) for K. Stendahl, the prophecies are the nucleus or the embryo from which the narrative develops, and b) R. Brown believes that the prophecies have been added by the evangelist himself. In my attempt to find an answer to this query, I have analysed two aspects: a) the context in which the five prophecies of Mt. 1-2 were introduced, in relation to the other prophecies of the rest of Matthew's gospel, and b) the suggestion according to which the five prophecies can be eliminated from the narrative without causing a notable difference.

As a result of this I have come to the following conclusion: the episode of the birth of Christ is not dependent on the old-testamentary prophecies: it neither derives from them, nor is it constructed around them as it was surmised by G.D. Kilpatrick, L. Vaganay or W. Knox. The suggestion that the Old Testament prophecies had generated the episode of the Saviour's birth

cannot be accepted. First of all, Matthew had gathered the traditions dealing with this birth and then he inserted old-testamentary prophecies in his text (G. Strecker, E. Hirsh, K. Stendahl, R. Brown).

b) The scene of the birth of our Lord is presented by both the gospel according to Matthew and that of Luke (Lk. 1-2). This prompted my following question: did Matthew draw on the Gospel according to Luke for inspiration? Is there a common tradition? In an effort to answer this question, I have listed the differences separating the texts of Matthew and Luke (Lk. 1-2 makes no mention of Herod the Great, the visitation of the three magi, the flight into Egypt, the massacre of the innocents, the return to Judaea, the journey to Galilee and Nazareth, and does not contain old-testamentary prophecies), as well as the many similarities of the two accounts (the references to Joseph and Mary, the virginal birth, the part played by the Holy Spirit etc.).

Although many have suggested answers for this problem, most of them gravitate around saying that either the two evangelists used different traditions, or that they operated their own selections from a common tradition. Even if Luke focuses on the Virgin Mary and Matthew on Joseph, it cannot be said that this fact illustrates insurmountable differences separating them. God revealed Himself to both Mary and to Joseph. Each of the evangelists made use of the material they were provided with by tradition, according to their own intentions. However, J. Schmidt shows that while there are no irreconcilable differences between the two versions of Messiah's birth, the scene in Matthew makes sense only if we assume that he had no knowledge of the material presented by Luke.

c) Some of the exegetes believe that the Midrash on the birth of Moses may have been a source for the episode of nativity related by Matthew. This hypothesis determined my analysis of this matter, in an attempt to determine whether a Midrash can be considered to be the 'source' of the birth episode in Mt. 1-2. First of all, I have defined the Midrash – 'an accurate commentary on a given scriptural text'. Secondly, I have presented the idea put forward by several scholars suggesting that the evangelist Matthew had taken into account the episode of Moses's birth recorded by Midrashic tradition when he described the birth of Jesus (Renée Bloch, René Laurentin and Salvador Muñoz Iglesias).

The analysis of these suggestions reveals that the Gospel according to Matthew and its episode of Christ's birth cannot be considered to be a Midrash because the Gospel did not emerge from a development of old-testamentary passages. Although the essential characteristic of a Midrash is that it's centred on a biblical text and although the Gospel of Matthew contains numerous allusions to or quotes from the Old Testament, it is difficult to state that the first gospel of the New Testament is a Midrashic explanation of old-testamentary texts. The evangelist does not present such a text and then searches for an event in Jesus's life to which it may be connected; he does the exact opposite: he first presents the episode of the life of Christ in which an old-testamentary text finds its fulfilment.

I believe that the text in Mt. 1, 18-2, 23 cannot be regarded as a Midrash (a composition based on Old Testament texts) as M.D. Goulder states, as a Haggadic Midrash (M.M. Bourke), or as a 'legend' written in order to provide religious clarification (M. Dibelius and R. Bultmann), but as a *collection of traditions* with a scriptural commentary. The way in which Matthew uses these old-testamentary quotes may reflect the Midrash-Pesher technique; this idea is radically different from the hypothesis that the narrative itself would be the author's exercise of creative Midrash on the Old Testament (R. H. Gundry).

Having listed these problems, I have tried to identify the original material or the nucleus Matthew had at his disposal when he wrote this episode and the elements which he inserted in his work. I have stressed the fact that it should be distinguished between what the evangelist received from the tradition and his personal contribution. A first observation: none of the evangelists had all the traditions at hand when they wrote the gospels. Moreover, each evangelist focused on what was relevant for those for whom the gospel was written and on what was important to be emphasised. Matthew made use of the extant oral and written traditions in order to convey a message destined to his readers.

In order to uncover the pre-matthean material I have analysed the suggestions offered by C.T. Davis, G. Soares Prabhu, Davies&Allison, Raymond Brown and John Nolland and I have reached the conclusion that when he had written the episode of the nativity, Matthew had a primary source at his disposal, a nucleus made up of four units: 1) 1, 18-21; 24-25; 2) 2, 1-2; 9b; 11; 3) 2,13-15a and 4) 2, 19-21. To this nucleus Matthew added the five old-testamentary prophecies and created several narrative sections (cf. 2, 1-2; 3-9a, 10; 12; 16-18; 22-23).

With regard to the literary sources employed by the evangelist in writing the scene of Christ's birth, the scholars have yet to reach a consensus. The tradition recorded in Mt. 1, 18-2, 23 is understood in its relation to various materials such as the traditions having to do with the births of the Old Testament, the fragment of Genesis 25-35, Judaic folklore, the episode of Moses's birth recorded by Josephus Flavius and the Rabbinic writings, or a Haggadah read during the Jewish Passover. Nevertheless, all scholars eventually come to the following conclusion: the episode of the birth of Jesus is profoundly Jewish in character, as it is recounted using the language, the structure and the content of Jewish tradition.

In the second chapter I approached a series of exegetical issues:

1. The function of Mary's betrothal to Joseph. After having presented the Jewish traditions concerning marriage and the three steps it implied (betrothal, the marriage proposal and the nuptials), I have concluded that the conception of the Saviour had taken place in the interval between the Kiddushin (betrothal) and Nissuin (nuptials). Any intercourse between the Virgin Mary and Joseph, her betrothed, is out of the question!

2. Jesus's conception 'by the Holy Spirit' - ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου.

For a better understanding of this expression, I have presented the way in which the Holy Spirit was seen in Hebrew thinking, as well as the pieces of information provided by the Gospel of Luke in chapter 1, v. 35. The conclusion was that Jesus was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, without any male involvement. 'The text speaks only about the mysterious origin of Jesus, but not about how the conception actually occurred' (C. Preda).

3. The importance of the dreams narrated by Matthew.

Five dreams are mentioned in the episode of Christ's birth: 1, 20-25; 2, 12; 2, 13-15; 2, 19-21; 2, 22. The first issue was that of uncovering the source or the tradition Matthew used when he wrote about the dreams. I laid emphasis on the content and the structure of this 'source-dream'. After reconstructing the source-dream I tried to reveal the part belonging to the author, by highlighting the inner conflicts or by drawing parallels to other materials (the dream of Acts 46, 2-4). Next I analysed the structure of the dreams of Mt. 1-2 and I showed the reason or the purpose for which they were recorded by Matthew in the episode of the birth of Jesus. The conclusion I reached is the following: the structure of the dreams presented by Matthew are not derivative from the symbolical dreams of Joseph and Jacob in the book of Genesis (as R. Brown,

G. Soares Prabhu and Gundry suppose), neither are they derived from contemporary Hebrew materials (as Crossan proposes) because the dreams of Joseph are visual and symbolic, completely different from the auditory dreams presented by Matthew. It seems that Matthew is the one who generated the format of the dream based on the angelic revelation (Bertram Smith).

4. The virginal birth of Jesus. The text witnessing this truth is Mt. 1, 23 and was taken by Matthew from Isaiah 7, 14. I have attempted an exegetical approach of the terms 'almah' and 'betulah' so as to gain a deeper understanding of what they mean precisely. My conclusion was that the Hebrew term 'almah' used in Isaiah 7, 14 (MT) refers to a young maiden of marriageable age. Though the idea of virginity could be understood in this term ('almah' refers to both an unblemished virgin preparing for marriage, and to a young woman was not necessarily a virgin – G.J. Wenham), the Hebrew 'betulah' is the technical term which most accurately expresses it.

The prophecy of Isaiah does not underline the way in which the child is to be conceived, but it does call attention on God's intervention which will become apparent by the virginal birth. For Matthew the evangelist the prophecy made by Isaiah to king Ahaz was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ: the Davidic Messiah born by the intervention of the Holy Spirit. According to the context described in Mt. 1, the weight is laid on the accomplishment of an old-testamentary promise in the person of Jesus-Emmanuel, Who is God Himself, actually present among people. Cyrus Gordon argues that Mary's virginity (Mt. 1, 18-25) does not depend on the meaning implied by Is. 7, 14, but it is clearly specified in Mt. 1, 18-25.

In the third part of the paper I presented the prophetic facet of the Incarnation. I stated from the onset that Matthew the evangelist is the one who most often and most explicitly uses texts from the Old Testament, five of which are found exclusively in the episode of Jesus's birth.

I have shown that the old-testamentary prophecies found in the Gospel according to Matthew can be studied and regarded from several perspectives. K. Stendahl analysed the text of these prophecies with the purpose of finding out in what milieu they had been written; G. Strecker and W. Rothfuchs examined the function of these prophecies and provided a new understanding of Matthew's theology; R. H. Gundry compared the meaning of the old-testamentary passages quoted by Matthew to their original, 'literal' meaning in order to substantiate the way in which the evangelist had used those texts. Richard S. McConnell believes that the old-testamentary prophecies found in the Gospel according to Matthew are meant to prove that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Law and that He is the Messiah who had been announced

by the prophets of the ancient times. George M. Soares Prabhu suggests that Matthew himself is responsible for the old-testamentary prophecies found in his gospel. They have been modified and re-elaborated, rather than elaborated and mechanically integrated in the Gospel. The emphasis is laid on the distinction between the elements that are characteristic to the author and those taken from tradition. The purpose is to discover the source underlying the episode of the nativity.

By the means of the exegetical analysis of the five prophecies in Mt. 1-2, I tried to answer three questions: a) the textual form of the prophecy; b) its origin; c) its sense or its meaning. I also paid special attention to the context in which these prophecies were used in both the Old and the New Testament. The analysis yielded the way in which these prophecies were adapted and integrated into the episode of Christ's birth.

I subsequently accentuated the fact that each prophecy of Mt. 2 contains a toponym. K. Stendahl analysed the significance of these geographical references, showing that once the birthplace of Jesus was indicated in the episode of the magi and by the prophecy of Micah 5, 1, the other episodes of chapter 2 were dedicated to the wandering of the Messiah and the reason behind it: why He left Bethlehem, where He took refuge, how He returned from there and how He was directed toward a new home, in short the way in which the child of Bethlehem became the prophet of Nazareth.

Stendahl also asks what this geographical material on Jesus is meant to suggest. If the first chapter presented Jesus as the true Messiah and Son of David, what are these geographical pieces of information meant to say about Him? They have to underline the fact that Messiah's mission is to be universal, going beyond the people of Israel. R.T. France stated that the purpose of the use of the geographical elements of Mt. 2 is not only apologetic, but also definitively Christological; on the other hand the geographical elements form the structure of this chapter.

The next step was to show that Matthew wrote in order to be understood, he transmitted a message that was to be easily grasped by the readers of his Gospel. Nevertheless, these readers had different levels of understanding: some were initiated, others less so. Hartman distinguishes between a 'surface understanding', accessible to any reader, and a more profound comprehension, which only those with a good knowledge of the Old Testament or of the traditions used by Matthew were privy to.

After that I addressed each prophecy, analysing the old-testamentary context in which it had been uttered, the way it was articulated in the larger context of Matthew's Gospel, certain differences between the Hebrew and the Greek texts, some elements of hermeneutics, as well as the message it conveys.

To conclude, the prophecies mentioned by Matthew highlight the fact that what God had promised to the Hebrews came to be fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ. They are also correlated with temporal and geographical data on the life of the Saviour. The places where Jesus has been (Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth) are analysed and highlighted by the evangelist by the constant reference to the fulfilment of the prophecies, which in their turn are used to interpret the life of Christ as a unique event.

In the fourth chapter I presented the historicity of the birth of Christ and to that effect I brought a series of arguments:

a) The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem of Judaea, during the reign of King Herod the Great.

By my exegesis (the examination of the old-testamentary context, the reference to the city of David, the sense of the term *Ruler*) I have stressed the fact by the birth in Bethlehem Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Micah 5, 1. The importance of this prophecy resides in the fact that it had been uttered by the very elders and scribes of the people who Herod had gathered. I have then shown that Jesus was born during the reign of King Herod the Great, a figure recorded by historians, at the time of the census organised by Quirinius.

b) The wise men of the East – ‘the witnesses of Jesus's birth’.

In my exegesis I tried to answer two questions: who were the magi and where did they come from? It appears that the magi were not kings. Almost all the exegetes (U. Luz, W. Hendricksen, David Hill) reject the idea that the wise men were real, considering there is no basis (neither Ps. 72, 10, nor Is. 60, 3) for the assumption that these magi were ‘kings’. Most scholars believe that the royal character attributed to the magi is an error that surfaced within Christian tradition. Moreover, it appears they were not three wise men (W. K. Lowther Clarke and C. S. Mann) but rather three pagan priests who probably also mastered the art of astrology (Stelian Tofană).

As to the place wherefrom they hailed, the syntagma ‘from the East’ – ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν is very general. They may have come from Persia, being Persians or Medes (a view supported by Clemet of Alexandria, Diodore of Tarsus, John Chrysostom, and Cyril of Alexandria among

others), or from Chaldea (Babylon), an opinion supported by Origen and other exegetes. It is certain that these magi came from the Orient, they were not Jews, but pagans, and they represented all those who had been initially excluded from the divine promises on account of being gentiles; as such, by virtue of their welcoming attitude towards the Messiah, they became the receivers of the salutary work of Christ.

c) The star of Bethlehem.

Throughout time, many theologians, historians and astronomers have tried to unravel the mystery of the star of Bethlehem, in the hope of matching the information given by the Gospel of Matthew to the historical and scientific data.

The occurrence of this celestial phenomenon is primarily based on scriptural arguments (the magi say they were led by this miraculous star, 'for we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him' – the fulfilment of the prophecy in Num. 24, 17). However, the appearance of a miraculous star on the birth of Jesus is also proven by the Holy Fathers (Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Justin the Martyr and Philosopher, Saint Ignatius of Antioch) and by the calculations of the astronomers (Johannes Kepler or C. Pritchard).

On the one hand, these arguments have shed some light on the tradition used by Matthew when he wrote the episode of the birth of Jesus, and on the other hand, they have answered some of the objections voiced against the historicity of the data in Mt. 1-2.

To sum up, it may be said that the old-testamentary prophecies mentioned in Matthew are correlated with temporal, chronological, and geographical data referring to Jesus's life, by the means of which the evangelist showed that Messiah was not the negation of time or of space, because He 'obeyed' geography and accepted history. For Matthew the story of Jesus is a unique series of events.

In the last part of my research I presented some of the theological aspects emerging from the episode of the birth of Jesus. From the very beginning I stated that by inserting this episode in his Gospel, Matthew had no intention of drafting a complete biography of Christ: he wanted to convey the idea that Mt. 1, 18-2, 23 had a special theological import.

In the first two chapters, Matthew wants to explain *who* Jesus is and *where* He was born, with the theology of the nativity of Christ underlying the pieces of information the evangelist provides. K. Stendahl revealed the theological reasons behind every chapter. Thus, the first chapter answers the '*Quis*' question. Jesus is 'the Son of David, the Son of Abraham' (Mt. 1, 1),

the Saviour of His people (Mt. 1, 21), but also Emmanuel – God with us (Mt. 1, 23). The second chapter answers the ‘*Unde*’, namely where was Jesus born, and what places He has been to until settling in Nazareth (Bethlehem, Rama, Egypt, Nazareth).

Jesus is not only ‘the Son of David’ or ‘the Son of Abraham’, but also the Son of God. Several elements from the nativity episode from Mt. 1, 18-2, 23 emphasise the divinity of Jesus: a) the prophecy of Mt. 1, 23: *Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, ‘God with us’*; b) the prophecy of Mt. 2, 15: *Out of Egypt I called My Son*, according to which Jesus recapitulates the entire history of the people of Israel in a positive sense. By employing this prophecy regarding Jesus (Who must flee to Egypt in order to escape Herod’s plans) the evangelist wishes to point out that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; c) J. D. Kingsbury considers that the term ‘young Child’ used by Matthew in the second chapters is a substitute for the title of ‘Son of God’; d) the conception by the Holy Spirit; e) the virginal birth.

The theology of the episode of the birth of Christ is also illustrated by the royal image of Christ Matthew depicts from three perspectives: earthly king (27, 11,29,37,42), a king risen to the heavens (13, 24-30, 36-43) and an eschatological king (25, 31-46; 19, 28). Even more so, Jesus is a king from His very birth for Matthew. This is very clearly underlined in Mt. 1, 18-2, 23. Although the titles ‘king’ and ‘king of the Jews’ do not appear in 1, 18-25, but only in 2, 1-23, the fact that Jesus is royal is pointed out in the first chapter by the fact that Matthew mentions the special role the young Child of royal blood will play (the bloodline of king David – Mt. 1, 6). Several other data provided by Matthew strengthen this idea: a) Jesus’s being born in Bethlehem of Judaea; b) the opposition between Jesus ‘the born king’ and Herod ‘king of the Jews’; c) the meaning of the gifts brought by the magi.

Another theological aspect is the one identifying Jesus as the Christ or the Messiah. Matthew says ‘The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ’ – Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Mt. 1, 1). This is done by the juxtaposition of the two names: Jesus and Christ.

Evangelist Matthew presents Jesus Christ as the true Messiah from His very birth. In order to prove this truth, Matthew stresses the fact the old-testamentary prophecies referring to Messiah are fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

The theology of the nativity episode also resides in the two names the Child is given: Jesus and Emmanuel. The purpose of the Saviour’s incarnation by the intervention of the Holy

Spirit is presented by Matthew by the explanation of Jesus's name: salvation from sins (Mt. 1, 21).

There are two things I emphasised in reference to this name: a) this name was chosen by God Himself, it was not chosen by Matthew; Joseph is the one who names Jesus, but the name had been revealed to him by God in a dream; b) the role of Jesus will be a spiritual and moral one: He will save people from sins. As opposed to the kings of the Old Testament, considered to be persons through whom God protects His people from their enemies, Jesus will free the people not only from the enemies, but from the bondage of sins. Jesus's superiority over the kings of the Old Covenant resides in this very ability to free the people from their sins, and whereas His predecessors had been sinners (David-Mt. 1, 6) Jesus is without sin.

The name 'Emmanuel – God with us' describes the nature of the Child (true God) on the one hand, and on the other hand the mission or the work He will perform (His presence among the people). This name is an interpretation of Jesus's future soteriological mission. By coming into this world, God will once again be reunited with men, the distance between Him and men will be abolished, and the man will once again close to the God from whom he had strayed away by sinning.

I believe the name 'Jesus' defines His work (God the Saviour), and the name 'Emmanuel' indicates who He is (God with us).

As to the way in which Matthew the evangelist made use of certain traditions referring to the birth of Jesus Christ in episode of 1, 18-2, 23, I can say the following:

1. The episode of the nativity cannot be regarded as a mere composition of Matthew (a fact accepted by G.D. Kilpatrick, R. H. Gundry, C. T. Davis, R. Brown or W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison) in which only a few of the fundamental elements of the tradition were inserted, such as the Bethlehem reference, the name of Jesus's parents or the virginal birth, because the almost complete lack of chronological connections and the frequent presence of dreams suggest the idea that the episode of Mt. 1, 18-2, 23 is rather a complex creation structured with the use of several sources – not an organic work, constantly and freely developing.

2. The fragment of 1, 18-2, 23 was not a homogenous, perfectly structured and conserved body of text, which Matthew simply extracted from the tradition and added to his gospel without bringing his personal contribution (as G. Strecker suggests). Analysing the similar literary structure of the Prologue (Mt. 1-2) and the Epilogue (Mt. 27-28) and the vocabulary of Mt. 1-2,

also present in the other chapters of the Gospel, it can be said that Matthew the evangelist not only used certain traditions referring to the birth of Christ, but he also left his personal mark on the material. It appears that behind the two chapters there is a single tradition composed of four units (fragments) similar in both structure and language: 1) 1, 18-21; 24-25; 2) 2, 1-2; 9b; 11; 3) 2,13-15a and 4) 2, 19-21. Thus, Matthew edited his source in two ways: by integrating the prophecies in its composition (cf. 1, 23; 2, 6, 15b, 18, 23b) and by creating narrative sections (cf. 2, 1-2; 3-9a, 10; 12; 16-18; 22-23) connecting the episode of the Nativity (structurally and conceptually) to the rest of the Gospel (C.T. Davis).

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