

## Level 2 Question #1

First off, let me say I was able to see irony much more easily than symbolism. Not sure what it means but if we were sitting together you would've noticed it right away. I did.

I found lots of irony in the birth narrative. First off is the question the magi ask Herod, "Where is the king?" right to his face. You can't get more ironic than that. He was king over the Jews. But he wasn't King OF the Jews. That king had just showed up in Bethlehem. And to answer the questions in the paragraph, I doubt the Jews really accepted Herod as king because he wasn't "all" Jew (despite what we learned about the genealogy last week), and was placed there by Augustus. Herod's deceitful responses when he "secretly called the wise men" and then lied to their faces, "that I may come and worship Him also" and cruelty, "put to death male children" most certainly fit with the historical background you provided.

Also it seemed ironic that the magi, with the general revelation, had great knowledge and almost faith in their knowledge and their prophecies that the baby would be where they had been told he'd be. After all they rejoiced with "exceeding great joy." The chief priest and scribes had the higher revelation, but boy they sure didn't turn out to be the ones with the faith. How could this baby born in a manger, of all places, be a king? And the irony of their lack of revelation becomes evident as they narrative of Jesus' life plays out.

Ok I'm trying symbolism. I think I'm not really getting it, but I'm finding parallels. So first off, there's the obvious one of Joseph, Mary and the baby going away from their home, being led by God while babies are dying. Definitely parallels the story of Exodus, just traveling in the opposite direction and without a miracle. But the miracle of the baby's conception and birth had already occurred. So I guess both stories have a miracle in them. Jews of Matthew's time would definitely draw the parallel and would therefore gain understand of this most important event since it draws on the "our story" of the God delivering His people. After all Jesus came to deliver us, just like God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt.

I also thought of Joseph's dreams. Joseph has a lot of dreams that are recorded. There's 4: Matthew 1:20-21, 2:13, 2:19-20 and 2:22. That's a lot. Joseph of the Old Testament had a thing with dreams also, interpreting them and it benefitted him and Israel. Joseph of the New Testament didn't need to interpret the dreams because God was guiding him and it would benefit all Israel and the world. Maybe in the comparison of the Josephs we see that when God lives within us we can hear him directly and not need someone to interpret.

Also the dreams were a kind of provision for Joseph and his new family. God provided a way of escape and provided for them (we kind of have to assume that since there's no detail about the time in Egypt) just like He provided escape and for the Israelites in the first Exodus.

I think these techniques are a really cool way to enhance the story of Jesus' birth. People can read the birth narrative and just read the words and find amazing things. But these connections and motivations are like a hidden level that Matthew and God put in there just for those who want to go deeper into the text. Just like there are things hidden for people who go deeper in God there are insights and special revelations for those who dive deep into the scriptures. (I assume someone has told you about our Deep Dives on Wednesday nights)

## Level 2 Question #2

I think an important thing these verses show about God is that He has a plan and He will do what needs to be done to make sure that it works out. This is shown with all the times the angel visits Joseph in the dreams, because the angel is bringing God's words for the plan of action. This is also shown every time Matthew brings Old Testament prophecy/scripture into the text. The birth of the child had been foretold and here is the child right now!

But the most important thing that the verses show about God is how He loves His children. At Jesus' baptism God speaks, "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased." The heart of any and every child would jump if those words were spoken to them here on earth and definitely in heaven. My greatest hope in life is that I will hear these words when I meet God face to face.

I think that Joseph is such a great character. I have always found him intriguing and was glad to get to know him better this week. These verse really show Joseph's obedience. Whenever God tells him to do something he does. Go here! He goes. Don't go here! He goes not there, but elsewhere. But the deeper thing is how closely Joseph is connected to God. He has such a willing and open heart to be able to hear God in these dreams. Since the Holy Spirit had not yet been given to us, the dreams were a great way for Joseph to model for those of us to come after him how to "hear" God and follow Him. His behavior from the first dream (take Mary as your wife) to the last (Go to Nazareth) was exemplary. (Can you tell I've become quite a fan?!)

The attitudes and behaviors of the Magi I discussed in the first question. To summarize, they were Gentiles who followed the prophecy and worshipped a king who would become king of heaven and earth, which included them. They were kind of the first believers! And they brought valuable gifts showing honor and reverence, all good traits and behaviors.

Herod, also discuss in question #1, fell well short of the mark of positive behavior before the magi and Jesus even appeared on the scene. His paranoia revealed a distinct lack of trust in God. And his dictates reveal a man who really did not know or serve God at all.

Satan behaved exactly like one might expect Satan to behave. The bringer of lies did his job trying to test Jesus, but he was so clearly outmatched. I always liked it when Satan quoted scripture himself. It has always served as a warning to me.....you can find people who are not godly using things that are. Clearly trying to get Jesus to be relevant & self-serving, spectacular and powerful (credit PPT) was just what he is still doing today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Back to the good guys now. John the Baptist clearly knew his role so he must also have been able to hear from God clearly. And he was obedient to what he was called to do. And he was respectful and reverent as he showed when Jesus came to be baptized. He baptized Jesus even when he didn't think he should, because Jesus said that was how it needed to be. So he set his feelings aside and stepped into his calling and was obedient. His warning to the Pharisees and Sadducees is also interesting. He reminded me of Jeremiah a bit. (I recently read Jeremiah) He's dressing them down for sure, but then in the midst of the scolding (verse 11 there's hope and the prophecy of what good things will be available when the "one coming after me" arrives. It happened in Jeremiah on a larger scale, chapters of doom and destruction and then one that says something like – return to me and I will help you, or I will replace your stony heart.

Finally there's Jesus who I am not worthy to comment on. Look at how He treats John. He listens to John's concerns but He points out to John that this is how things need to be, that John needs to baptize Jesus. There is the obvious resistance of the devil during the testing. But always with scripture, the Word of God. After all Jesus is the Word, so that makes sense. And overcoming the temptations means that He took them for us. We can give our temptations to Jesus because he can handle them. He handled the devil in person, what could be harder than that? Jesus was so obedient. He went to John for baptism. He endured the testing so God could see what kind of son He had. He won the victory over Satan in the wilderness just like He would win victory over the grave. And he didn't yell, post mean things on social media, whine, etc. He followed the plan the Father had because that was what He was supposed to do. Isn't that awesome?