

# THE HOLY GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, ACCORDING TO S. MATTHEW.

THIS and other titles, with the names of those that wrote the Gospels, are not the words of the Evangelists themselves. The Scripture itself nowhere teacheth us, which books or writings are to be received as true and canonical Scriptures. It is only by the channel of *unwritten traditions*, and by the testimony and authority of the Catholic Church, that we know and believe that this gospel, for example of S. Matthew, with all contained in it, and that the other books and parts of the Old or New Testament, are of divine authority, or written by divine inspiration; which made S. Augustine say, *I should not believe the gospel, were I not moved thereunto by the authority of the Catholic Church: Ego Evangelio non crederem, nisi me Ecclesia Catholica commoveret auctoritas. Lib. cont. Epist. Manichæi, quam vocant fundamenti. tom. viii. c. 5, p. 154. A. Ed. Ben. Wi.*

S. MATTHEW, author of the gospel that we have under his name, was a Galilean, the son of Alphaeus, a Jew, and a tax-gatherer; he was known also by the name of Levi. His vocation happened in the second year of the public ministry of Christ; who, soon after forming the college of his apostles, adopted him into that holy family of the spiritual princes and founders of his Church. Before his departure from Judea, to preach the gospel to distant countries, he yielded to the solicitations of the faithful; and about the eighth year after our Saviour's resurrection, the forty-first of the vulgar era, he began to write his *gospel*: i. e. the good tidings of salvation to man, through Christ Jesus, our Lord. Of the hagiographers, S. Matthew was the first in the New, as Moses was the first in the Old Testament. And as Moses opened his work with the generation of the heavens and the earth, so S. Matthew begins with the generation of Him, who, in the fulness of time, took upon himself our human nature, to free us from the curse we had brought upon ourselves, and under which the whole creation was groaning. A.—This holy apostle, after having reaped a great harvest of souls in Judea, preached the faith to the barbarous nations of the East. He was much devoted to heavenly contemplation, and led an austere life; for he eat no flesh, satisfying nature with herbs, roots, seeds, and berries, as Clement of Alexandria assures us, *Pædag. l. ii. c. 1.* S. Ambrose says, that God opened to him the country of the Persians. Rufinus and Socrates tell us, that he carried the gospel into Ethiopia, meaning probably the southern or eastern parts of Asia. S. Paulinus informs us, that he ended his course in Parthia; and Venantius Fortunatus says, by martyrdom.—*See Butler's Saints' Lives, Sept. 21st.*

## CHAP. I.

*The genealogy of Christ: he is conceived and born of a virgin.*

THE book of the generation of JESUS CHRIST, the son of <sup>a</sup>David, the son of Abraham.

2 <sup>b</sup>Abraham begot <sup>c</sup>Isaac. And Isaac begot Jacob.

<sup>d</sup>And Jacob begot Judas and his brethren.

3 <sup>e</sup>And Judas begot Phares and Zara, of Thamar. <sup>f</sup>And Phares begot Esron. And Esron begot Aram.

4 And Aram begot Aminadab. <sup>g</sup>And Aminadab begot Naasson. And Naasson begot Salmon.

<sup>a</sup> Luke iii. 31.—<sup>b</sup> Gen. xxi. 3.—<sup>c</sup> Gen. xxv. 25.—<sup>d</sup> Gen. xxix. 35.—<sup>e</sup> Gen. xxxviii. 29. 1 Par. ii. 4.—<sup>f</sup> Ruth iv. 18. 1 Par. ii. 5.—<sup>g</sup> Num. vii. 12.—<sup>h</sup> Ruth iv. 22.

CHAP. I. VER. 1. The first English Testament, divided into verses, was that printed at Geneva, by Conrad Badius, in the year 1557. A.—“The book of the Generation,” is not referred to the whole gospel, but to the beginning, as in Gen. v. “This is the book of the generation of Adam.” E.—*The book of the Generation*, i. e. the genealogy or pedigree, which is here set down in the first sixteen verses. In the style of the Scriptures any short schedule or roll is called a *book*, as the bill or short writing of a divorce, is called a little book. Matt. v. 31. Wi.—Jesus, in Hebrew *Jesuah*, is the proper name of Him, who was born of the Virgin Mary, who was also the Son of God, “a name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” Luke ii. It signifies *Saviour*, “because he was to save his people from their sins.” He was also called *Christ*, which signifies anointed; for though in the Old Testament kings, priests, and prophets were anointed, and though many were then designated by the name of *Jesus*, properly, and by an invariable custom of the New Testament, that person is exclusively signified, who, on account of the union of the divine and human nature, was anointed by the Holy Ghost *above all his fellows*. Ps. xlv. and Heb. i. 9. Whence in this turn the hypostasis is understood, in which the two natures, the divine and human, meet. E.

VER. 2. He begins with Abraham, the father of the faithful, because to him the promise was made, that all generations should be blessed in his seed. *Theophylactus*.

VER. 3. See Gen. xxxviii, v. 6. & dein. and Zara of Thamar, her daughter-in-law. A.

VER. 5. See Josue. c. ii. & dein. We nowhere else find the marriage of Salmon with Rahab; but this event might have been known by tradition, the truth of which the divinely inspired evangelist here confirms. *Bible de Venise*. Rahab was a debauched woman, preserved in the pillage of Jericho, where she had been born. In this genealogy only four women are mentioned, of which two are Gentiles, and two adulteresses. Here the greatest sinners may find grounds for confidence in the mercies of Jesus Christ, and hopes of pardon, when they observe how the Lord of life and glory, to cure our pride, not only humbled himself by taking upon himself the likeness of sinful flesh, but by deriving his descent from sinners, and inspiring the holy evangelist to record the same to all posterity. A.

5 And Salmon begot Booz of Rahab. <sup>b</sup> And Booz begot Obed of Ruth. And Obed begot Jesse.

6 <sup>c</sup>And Jesse begot David, the king. <sup>d</sup>And David, the king, begot Solomon, of her that had been *the wife* of Urias.

7 <sup>e</sup>And Solomon begot Roboam. <sup>f</sup>And Roboam begot Abias. <sup>g</sup>And Abias begot Asa.

8 And Asa begot Josaphat. And Josaphat begot Joram. And Joram begot Ozias.

9 <sup>h</sup>And Ozias begot Joatham. <sup>i</sup>And Joatham begot Achaz. <sup>j</sup>And Achaz begot Ezechias.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xvi. 1.—<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings xii. 24.—<sup>3</sup> 3 Kings xi. 43.—<sup>4</sup> 3 Kings xiv. 31.—<sup>5</sup> 3 Kings xv. 8.—<sup>6</sup> 2 Par. xxvi. 28.—<sup>7</sup> 2 Par. xxvii. 9.—<sup>8</sup> 2 Par. xxviii. 27.

VER. 6. Extract from S. Chrysostom's first Homil. upon the first chapter of S. Matthew: “How, you will say, does it appear that Christ descended from David? For if he be born not of man, but of a virgin, concerning whose genealogy nothing is said, how shall we know that he is of the family of David? We have here two difficulties to explain. Why is the genealogy of the Virgin passed over in silence, and why is Joseph's mentioned, as Christ did not descend from him? . . . How shall we know that the Virgin is descended from David? Hear the words of the Almighty addressed to the archangel Gabriel: ‘Go to a virgin espoused to a man, whose name is Joseph, of the house and family of David.’ What could you wish plainer than this, when you hear that the Virgin is of the family of David? Hence it also appears that Joseph was of the same house, for there was a law which commanded them not to marry any one but of the same tribe. . . . But whether these words, *of the house and family of David*, be applied to the Virgin or to Joseph, the argument is equally strong. For if he was of the family of David, he did not take a wife but out of the same tribe, from which he had descended. Perhaps you will say he transgressed this law. But the evangelist has prevented such a suspicion, by testifying beforehand that Joseph was a just man. Beware how you attach crime to him, whose virtue is thus publicly acknowledged. . . . It was not the custom among the Hebrews to keep the genealogies of women. The evangelist conformed to this custom, that he might not at the very beginning of his gospel offend by transgressing ancient rites, and introducing novelty.”

VER. 8. *Joram begot Ozias*, three generations are omitted, as we find 2 Paralip. xxii; for there, *Joram begot Ochozias, and Ochozias begot Joas, and Joas begot Amazias, and Amazias begot Ozias*. This omission is not material, the design of S. Matthew being only to shew the Jews that Jesus, their Messiah, was of the family of David; and he is equally the son, or the descendant of David, though the said three generations be left out: for Ozias may be called the son of Joram, though Joram was his great-grandfather. Wi.—It is thought that S. Matt. omitted these three kings, Ochozias, Joas, and Amazias, to preserve the distribution of his genealogy into three parts, each of fourteen generations; and, perhaps, also on account of their impiety, or rather on account of the sentence pronounced against the house of Achaz, from which they were descended by their mother Athalia. 3 Kings xxi. 21. C.

10 \*And Ezechias begot Manasses. \*And Manasses begot Amon. \*And Amon begot Josias.

11 \*And Josias begot Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

12 And after they were carried to Babylon, Jechonias begot Salathiel. And Salathiel begot Zorobabel.

13 And Zorobabel begot Abiud. And Abiud begot Eliacim. And Eliacim begot Azor.

14 And Azor begot Sadoc. And Sadoc begot Achim. And Achim begot Eliud.

15 And Eliud begot Eleazar. And Eleazar begot Mathan. And Mathan begot Jacob.

16 And Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David, are fourteen generations: and from David until the carrying away to Babylon, fourteen generations: and

\* 2 Par. xxxii. 83.—2 Par. xxxiii. 20.—2 Par. xxxiii. 25.

VER. 11. *Josias begot Jechonias, &c.* The genealogy of Christ, as it appears by the 17th verse, is divided by the evangelist into thrice fourteen generations, and so it is to contain 42 persons. The first class of fourteen begins with Abraham, and ends with David. The second class begins with Solomon, and ends with Jechonias. The third class is supposed to begin with Salathiel, and to end, says S. Jerom, with our Saviour Christ. But thus we shall only find in the third class thirteen generations, and in all only forty-one, instead of forty-two. Not to mention in these short notes other interpretations, the conjecture of S. Epiphanius seems the most probable, that we are to understand two Jechonias's, the father and the son, who had the same name. So that the true reading should be, *Josias begot Jechonias and his brethren, and Jechonias begot Jechonias, and Jechonias begot Salathiel.* Thus Jechonias named in the 12th verse is not the same, but the son of him that was named in the 11th verse; and from Jechonias the son, begins the third class, and so Christ himself will be the last or 14th person in that last series or class. There are several difficulties about reconciling this genealogy in S. Matthew with that in S. Luke, c. iii. But without insisting on all the particulars in these short notes, I hope it may suffice to take notice, that no one can reasonably doubt but that both the evangelists copied out the genealogical tables, as they were then extant, and carefully preserved by the Jews, and especially by those families that were of the tribe of Juda, and of the family of David, of which the Messiah was to be born. For if the evangelists had either falsified, or made any mistake as to these genealogies, the Jews undoubtedly would have objected this against their gospels, which they never did. Wi.—The difficulties here are: 1. Why does S. Matt. give the genealogy of Joseph and not of Mary? 2. How is it inferred that Jesus is descended from David and Solomon, because Joseph is the son of David? 3. How can Joseph have two men for his father, Jacob of the race of Solomon, and Heli of the race of Nathan? To the 1st it is generally answered, that it was not customary with the Jews to draw out the genealogies of women; to the 2nd, that Jesus being the son of Joseph, either by adoption, or simply as the son of Mary his wife, he entered by that circumstance into all the rights of the family of Joseph; moreover, Mary was of the same tribe and family as Joseph, and thus the heir of the branch of Solomon marrying with the heiress of the branch of Nathan, the rights of the two families united in Joseph and Mary, were transmitted through them to Jesus, their son and heir; to the 3rd, that Jacob was the father of Joseph according to nature, and Heli his father according to law; or that Joseph was the son of the latter by adoption, and of the former by nature. A.—*In the transmigration, &c.* or transportation to Babylon; i. e. about the time the Jews were carried away captives to Babylon. For Josias died before their transportation. See 4 K. xxiv. Wi.—Some think we are to read: Josias begot Joakim and his brethren; and Joakim begot Joachim, or Jechonias. Jechonias was son to Joakim, and grandson to Josias. The brothers of Jechonias are not known, but those of Joakim are known. 1 Par. iii. 15, 16. Besides this reading gives the number 14. A.—S. Jerom says that Jechonias, the son of Josias, is a different person from Jechonias who begot Salathiel, for the latter was son of the former; see Paralip. iii. where it is said that Zorobabel was son of Phadaia; but Phadaia is the same as Salathiel. E.—Mat. Polus affirms that every one the least conversant in Jewish story, must know that several genealogies which appear to contradict each other, do not in reality. *Synop. Crit.* v. 4, p. 12.

VER. 12. By the text of the first book of Paral. iii. 17, 19, it appears that Zorobabel was grandson to Salathiel. In comparing the present genealogy with that of S. Luke, (C. iii.) we find that in this last part S. Matthew has suppressed many generations, to bring the list to the number 14; for there are a greater number from Zorobabel to Jesus Christ in S. Luke, but in a different branch. V.—The evangelist was well aware that the suppressed names could be easily supplied from the Jewish records; and that every person could reply most satisfactorily to any objection on that head, who was the least acquainted with the Jewish tables. In the first fourteen of these generations, we see the family of David rising to the throne; in the second, a race of kings descending from him; in the last, the royal family descending to a poor carpenter. Yet, when every human appearance of restoring the kingdom to David's house was at an end, Jesus arose to sit on his father's throne, (Luke i. 32.) and of his kingdom there shall be no end. A.

VER. 16. *The husband of Mary.* The evangelist gives us rather the pedigree of S. Joseph, than that of the blessed Virgin, to conform to the custom of the (1248)

from the carrying away to Babylon till Christ, fourteen generations.

18 Now the birth of Christ was thus: \*When Mary, his mother, was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19 Whereupon Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing publicly to expose her, was minded to put her away privately.

20 But while he thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying: Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost.

21 And she shall bring forth a son: \*and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

\* 2 Par. xxxvi. 2.—\* Luke i. 27.—\* Luke i. 81. Acts iv. 12.

*Hebrews*, who in their genealogies took no notice of women: but as they were near akin, the pedigree of the one sheweth that of the other. Ch.—*Joseph the husband of Mary.* So he is again called, v. 19: but in v. 18, we read, *when Mary his mother was espoused to Joseph.* These different expressions of being husband, and being espoused, have occasioned different interpretations. Some think that Joseph and the blessed Virgin were truly married at the time of Christ's conception: others, that they were only then espoused, or engaged by a promise to marry afterwards. S. Jerom says, when you hear the name of husband, do not from thence imagine them to be married, but remember the custom of the Scriptures, according to which, they who are espoused only, are called husbands and wives. Wi.—That Jesus, who is called Christ, was of the seed of David, is also evident, as S. Augustine affirms from various texts of the holy Scriptures, as in the epistle to the Romans, where S. Paul, (c. i.) speaking of the Son of God, says, *who was made to Him of the seed of David, according to the flesh.* See also the promises made to David, 2 K. vii. Ps. lxxxviii. and cxxxi. and spoken of Solomon, as a figure of Jesus Christ. E.

VER. 18. The account of the birth of Jesus Christ follows his genealogy. From these words, "before they came together," Helvidius and others have started objections, which have been answered long ago by S. Jerom, where he shews in many examples from Scripture, that the words *before* and *until* do not signify what happened afterwards; for that point is left indefinite, but only what was done before, or not done. Thus when it is said, *Sit thou at my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool*, Ps. cix, by no means signifies, that after the subjection of his enemies, the Son of God is no longer to sit at the right hand of his Father. In common conversation, when we say that a man died before he reached his 80th year, we do not mean that he afterwards attained it. Or, should we say that Helvidius died before he did penance, we cannot mean that he afterwards did penance: the same conclusion should be deduced from the words, "before they came together," the end being accomplished by the power of the operation of the Holy Ghost, without their going together. If we should advance, that such a man was cured before he went to a physician, the natural inference would be, that he did not go to a physician at all. Thus also in the language of Scripture, the word *first-begotten* does not mean after whom others were born, but before whom no one was born, whether there were further issue or not. And the reason is, because the law required that a sacrifice should be offered for the first-born, and that he should be redeemed very soon after his birth; nor did it allow the parents to wait and see if any other son should be born. E.—True and perfect marriage, and continual living in the same, without knowing each other. S. Aug. l. ii. Cosen. Evang. c. i. B.

VER. 19. And Joseph her husband, knowing her strict virtue, was surprised at this her pregnancy, but "being a just man," and not willing to expose her, by denouncing her, or giving her a bill of divorce, he had a mind to dismiss her privately, committing the whole cause to God. Let us learn from Joseph to be ever tender of our neighbour's reputation, and never to entertain any injurious thoughts, or any suspicions to his prejudice. A.

VER. 20. *Fear not to take, &c.* i. e. fear not to marry her, if we suppose them not yet married, or if married already, the sense is, fear not to keep and remain with thy chaste wife; lay aside all thoughts of dismissing and leaving her. Wi.—As the incarnation of the Son of God was effected by the whole blessed Trinity, it may be asked why this operation is peculiarly attributed to the Holy Ghost, not only here, but in Luke if, and in the apostles' creed? The answer is, because as power is attributed to the Father, wisdom to the Son, so goodness is attributed to the Holy Ghost, and the gifts of grace which proceed from it. Estius in diff. loca.

VER. 21. *Jesus . . . he shall save, &c.* The characteristic name of Saviour was peculiar to the Messiah, by which he was distinguished, as well as by the adorable name of Jesus. The expectations of both Jew and Gentile looked forward to a saviour. S. Augustine, in the 18th book, 23d chapter, de Civitate Dei, introduces a curious anecdote. He mentions there, that he received from the eloquent and learned Proconsul Flavianus, a book containing in Greek the verses of one of the Sybils, which related to the coming of Christ. The substance of them is much the same as occurs in the prophecies of Isaiah, from which Virgil has likewise copied into his *Pollio*, many of the sublime thoughts which we find in that beautiful eclogue. It is remarkable that of the initials of these verses, S. Augustine had formed an acrostic to the following import, *Ignovus Xpiatus Deus vios curat*; that is, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Saviour. A.

22 Now all this was done that the word might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet, saying:

23 \*Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

24 And Joseph rising up from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto him his wife.

25 And he knew her not till she brought forth her first-born son, and he called his name Jesus.

## CHAP. II.

*The offerings of the wise men: the flight into Egypt: the massacre of the innocents: and the return from Egypt.*

NOW<sup>b</sup> when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of king Herod, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.

\* Isai. vii. 14. . . .<sup>b</sup> A. M. 4000, being four years before the common account

VER. 22. The Greeks in general, after S. John Chrysostom, look upon this as a continuation of the angel's speech to S. Joseph. The other Fathers and commentators think it a reflection of the evangelist.

VER. 23. *Behold a virgin,* &c. The Jews sometimes objected, as we see in S. Justin's dialogue with Tryphon, that the Hebrew word *alma*, in the prophet Isaias, signified no more than a *young woman*. But S. Jerom tells us that *alma* signifies a *virgin kept close up*. Let the Jews, says he, shew me any place in which the Hebrew word *alma*, is applied to any one that is not a virgin, and I will own my ignorance. Besides the very circumstances in the text of the prophet, are more than a sufficient confutation of this Jewish exposition; for there a *sign*, or miracle, is promised to Achaz; and what miracle would it be for a young woman to have a child, when she had ceased to be a virgin? Wi.—How happens it that nowhere in the gospels, or in any other part, do we find Christ called *Emmanuel*? I answer, that in the Greek expression the name is given for the thing signified; and the meaning is: He shall be a true Emmanuel, i. e. a God with us, true God and true man. E.—The text says, *they shall call*, i. e. all men shall look upon Him as an Emmanuel. Again, *his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty, the Prince of peace*, &c. i. e. He shall be all these, not so much nominally, as really and in effect. A.

VER. 24. The heretic Helvidius argues from this text, and from what we read in the gospel of Christ's brethren, that Christ had brothers, and Mary other sons. But it is evident that in the style of the Scriptures, they who were no more than cousins were called brothers and sisters. A.

VER. 25. See note on ver. 18.—S. Jerom assures us, that S. Joseph always preserved his virginal chastity. It is "*of faith*" that nothing contrary thereto ever took place with his chaste spouse, the blessed Virgin Mary. S. Joseph was given her by heaven to be the protector of her chastity, to secure her from calumnies in the birth of the Son of God, to assist her in her flight into Egypt, &c. &c. We cannot sufficiently admire the modest reserve of both parties. Mary does not venture to explain to her troubled husband the mystery of her pregnancy; and Joseph is afraid of mentioning his unreasoning doubts, for fear of troubling her delicate mind and wounding her exquisite feelings. So great modesty, reserve and silence, are sure to be approved by heaven; and God sends an angel to Joseph in his sleep, to dissipate his doubts, and to expound to him the mystery of the incarnation. A.

\* V. 1. Liber Generationis. Βίβλος γενέσεως. So Gen. v. 1. Hic est liber generationis Adam, Βίβλος, &c.

† V. 11. See S. Epiphani. her. vi. pag. 21. Edit. Petav. *ἐπειδὴ τινες* &c.

‡ In transmigratione, *ἐν τῇ μετοικίᾳ*, i. e. circa tempus transmigrationis.

§ V. 16. Joseph virum Mariæ, τὸν ἀνδρα Μαρίας. And V. 19, vir ejus, ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς. But V. 18, *μηστέρους*, sponsa, desponsata, is not properly the same as *γαμῖν*.

|| V. 23. Ecce Virgo, ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος. So is it read, not only here in S. Matt. but in the Sept. Isai. vii. S. Hier. l. 1. Cont. Jovin. tom. iv. parte 2. pag. 174. Ostendat mihi, ubi hoc Verbo (Alma) appellentur et nuptæ, et imperitiam confitebor.

CHAP. II. VER. 1. King Herod the Great, surnamed Ascalonite, was a foreigner, but a proselyte to the Jewish religion. S. Jerom.—This city is called Bethlehem of Juda, to distinguish it from another Bethlehem, which was situated in the division of the tribe of Zabulon. A.—*Wise men*.\* Both the Latin and Greek text may signify wise philosophers and astronomers, which is the common exposition. The same word is also many times taken for a magician or soothsayer, as it is applied to Simon, (Acts viii. 9.) and to Elymas, Acts xiii. v. 6. and 8. Some ancient interpreters think these very men might have been magicians before their conversion. See a Lapide, &c.—*From the east*. Some say from Arabia, others from Chaldaea, others from Persia. Divers interpreters speak of them as if they had been kings, princes, or lords of some small territories. See Baron. an. i. sect. 29. Tillemont, note 12. on Jesus Christ. The number of these wise men is uncertain. S. Leo, in his sermons on the Epiphany, speaks of them as if they had been three, perhaps on account of their three-fold offerings. What is mentioned in later writers as to their names, is still of less authority, as Bollandus observed. There are also very different opinions as to the time that they

2 Saying: Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and we are come to adore him.

3 And Herod the king hearing *this*, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 And assembling together all the chief priests, and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born.

5 But they said to him: In Bethlehem of Juda: For so it is written by the prophet:

6 \*And thou Bethlehem, the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come forth the ruler, who shall rule my people Israel.

7 Then Herod privately calling the wise men, inquired of them diligently the time of the star's appearing to them:

called Anno Domini. Luke ii. 7.—<sup>c</sup> Mich. v. 2. John vii. 42.

star appeared to these wise men, whether before Christ's birth, or about the very time he was born, which seems more probable. The interpreters are again divided as to the year, and day of the year, when they arrived at Bethlehem, and adored the Saviour of the world. Some think not till two years after Christ's birth. See S. Epiphani. her. xxx. num. 29. p. 134. And S. Jerom puts the massacre of the Holy Innocents about that time in his chronicle. But taking it for granted that the wise men came to Jerusalem and to Bethlehem the same year that Christ was born, it is not certain on what day of the year they adored him at Bethlehem. It is true the Latin Church, ever since the 4th or 5th age, has kept the feast of the Epiphany on the 6th day of January. But when it is said in that day's office, *This day a star led the wise men to the manger*, it may bear this sense only, this day we keep the remembrance of it; especially since we read in a sermon of S. Maximus (appointed to be read in the Roman Breviary on the 6th day within the octave of the Epiphany) these words: *What happened on this day, he knows that wrought it; whatever it was, we cannot doubt but it was done in favour of us*. The wise men, by the 11th verse, found Jesus at Bethlehem, where his blessed mother was to remain forty days, till the time of her purification was expired. And it seems most probable that the wise men came to Bethlehem about that time, rather than within thirteen days after Christ's birth: for had they come so soon after Christ was born, and been directed to go, and make diligent inquiry at Bethlehem, which was not above five miles from Jerusalem, it can scarcely be imagined that so suspicious and jealous a prince as Herod would have waited almost a month for their return without searching for the new-born king. But it is likely, being again alarmed by what happened when Jesus was presented in the temple at his mother's purification, he thereupon gave those cruel and barbarous orders for the massacre of those innocent infants. Wi.

VER. 2. *We have seen his star*. They knew it to be *his star*, either by some prophecy among them, or by divine revelation. This star was some lightsome body in the air, which at last seemed to point to them the very place where the world's Redeemer lay. We know not whether it guided them during the whole course of their journey from the *East to Jerusalem*. We read nothing more in the gospel, but that it appeared to *them in the East*, and that they saw it again, upon their leaving Jerusalem to go to Bethlehem. Wi.—The wise men, in the Syrian tongue *maguscha*, are supposed to have come from Stony Arabia, near the Euphrates. They might have preserved in this country the remembrance of the prophecy of Balaam, which had announced the coming of the Messias by the emblem of a star, (Num. xxiv. 17.) which was to arise from Jacob. The star which appeared then, was the symbol of the star which Balaam had predicted. A.

VER. 3. Through fear of losing his kingdom, he being a foreigner, and had obtained the sovereignty by violence. But why was all Jerusalem to be alarmed at the news of a king so long and so ardently expected? 1. Because the people, well acquainted with the cruelty of Herod, feared a more galling slavery. 2. Through apprehension of riots, and of a revolution, which could not be effected without bloodshed, as the Romans had such strong hold. They had also been so worn down with perpetual wars, that the most miserable servitude, with peace, was to the Jews an object rather of envy than deprecation. A.

VER. 6. *And thou Bethlehem*, &c. This was a clear prophecy concerning the Messias, foretold by Micheas; (c. v. 2.) yet the words which we read in the evangelist are not quite the same as we find in the prophet, either according to the Hebrew or to the Greek text of the Sept. The chief difference is, that in the prophet we read: *And thou Bethlehem art little*; but in the evangelist, *thou art not the least*. Some answer that the words of the prophet are to be expounded by way of an interrogation, *art thou little*? It is certain the following words, both in the prophet and in the gospel, *out of thee shall come forth a leader or a captain*, &c. shew that the meaning is, *thou art not little*. S. Jerom's observation seems to clear this point: he tells us, that the Jewish priests, who were consulted, gave Herod the sense, and not the very words of the prophet; and the evangelist, as an historian, relates to us the words of these priests to Herod, not the very words of the prophet. Wi.—The testimony of the chief priests proves that this text of Micheas was even then generally applied to the Messias, and that to Him alone it must be referred according to the letter. V.



8 And sending them into Bethlehem, said: Go, and search diligently after the child; and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I also may come and adore him.

9 And when they had heard the king, they went their way: and behold the star which they had seen in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the child was.

10 And seeing the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11 And entering into the house, they found the child with Mary his mother, and falling down they adored him: \*and opening their treasures, they offered him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

12 And having received an answer in sleep, that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their own country.

13 And when they were departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying: Arise, and take the child and his mother, and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the child to destroy him.

14 Who, rising up, took the child and his mother by night, and retired into Egypt:

15 And he was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by

the prophet, saying: <sup>b</sup>Out of Egypt have I called my son.

16 Then Herod perceiving that he was deluded by the wise men, was exceeding angry, and sending, killed all the men children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremias the prophet, saying:

18 <sup>a</sup>A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning: Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

19 But when Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt.

20 Saying: Rise, and take the child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead who sought the life of the child.

21 Who, rising up, took the child, and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

22 But hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judea in the room of Herod, his father, he was afraid to go thither: and being warned in sleep, he retired into the parts of Galilee.

23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled, what was said by the prophets: That he shall be called a Nazarene.

\* Psal. lxxi. 10.

<sup>b</sup> Osee xi.—Jer. xxxi. 15.

VER. 11. *And going into the house.* Several of the Fathers in their homilies, represent the wise men adoring Jesus in the *stable*, and in the *manger*. yet others, with S. Chrys. take notice, that before their arrival, Jesus might be removed into some little house in Bethlehem.—Prostrating themselves, or *falling down*, they *adored him*, not with a civil worship only, but enlightened by divine inspiration, they worshipped and adored him as their Saviour and their God.—*Gold, frankincense, and myrrh.* † Divers of the ancient Fathers take notice of the mystical signification of these offerings; that by *gold* was signified the tribute they paid to him, as to their *king*; by *incense*, that he was *God*; and by *myrrh*, (with which dead bodies used to be embalmed) that now he was also become a *mortal man*. See Amb. l. 2. in Luc. c. ii. S. Greg. &c. Wi.—The Church sings, “*hodie stella Magos duxit ad præsepium*,” but it is not probable that the blessed Virgin should remain so long in the open stable, and the less so, because the multitude, who hindered Joseph from finding accommodations either among his relatives or in the public caravansaries, had returned to their own homes. E.—*They adored Him.* Therefore, in the eucharist also, Christ is to be adored. For it is of no consequence under what appearance he is pleased to give himself to us, whether that of a perfect man, a speechless child as here, or under the appearance of bread and wine, provided it is evident that he is there; for in whatever manner or place he appears, he is true God, and for that alone he is to be adored. Frivolous is the objection of certain sectarists, that Christ does not give himself to us in the blessed eucharist to be adored, but to be eaten. For Christ was not in Bethlehem, nor did he descend from heaven to be adored: He tells us in the xxth chap. of Matthew, v. 28, *that the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister*; yet he was adored on earth, even while he was in his mortal state, by the magi, by his disciples, by the blind man that was cured of his blindness, &c. &c. “*Let us imitate the magi. Thou seest him not now in the crib, but on the altar; not a woman holding him, but the priest present, and the Holy Ghost poured out abundantly upon the sacrifice.*” S. Chrys. hom. xxiv. in 1 Cor. Hom. vii. de Sancto Philog.

VER. 14. It is very probable that Joseph, with Jesus and his Mother, remained in some part of Egypt, where the Jews were settled, as at Alexandria. That many Jews dwelt in Egypt, particularly from the time of the prophet Jeremy, is evident from Josephus, and also from the first chapter of the second book of *Machab.* Mention is also made of them in Act. ii. and Act. vi. under the name of *Alexandrines*.

VER. 15. *Out of Egypt have I called my son.* † S. Jerom understands these words to be taken out of the prophet Osee, (C. xi. 2.) and granted they might be literally spoken of the people of Israel: yet as their captivity in Egypt was a figure of the slavery of sin, under which all mankind groaned, and as their delivery by Moses was a figure of man's redemption by our Saviour Christ, so these words in a mystical and spiritual sense apply to our Saviour, who in a more proper sense was the Son of God, than was the people of Israel. Wi.—The application of this passage of the prophet to Christ, whereas in the simple letter it might appear otherwise, teaches us how to interpret the Old Testament; and that the principal sense is of Christ and his Church. B.

VER. 16. By this example, we learn how great credit we owe to the Church in canonizing saints, and celebrating their holydays: by whose only warrant, without any word of Scripture, these holy Innocents have been honoured as martyrs, and their holyday kept ever since the apostles' time, although they died

not voluntarily, nor all, perhaps, circumcised, and some even children of pagans. Aug. ep. 28. Orig. hom. iii. in diversos. B.

VER. 18. *A voice was heard in Rama.* § S. Jerom takes *Rama*, not for the name of any city, but for a *high place*, as appears by his Latin translation. Jerem. xxxi. 15. But in all Greek copies here in S. Matthew, and in the Sept. in Jeremy, we find the word itself *Rama*, so that it must signify a particular city. Rachel, who was buried at Bethlehem, is represented weeping (as it were in the person of those desolate mothers) the murder, and loss of so many children: and Rama being a city not far from Bethlehem, in the tribe of Benjamin, built on a high place, it is said that the cries and lamentations of these children, and their mothers, reached even to Rama. Cornel. a Lapide on Jerem. xxxi. thinks that these words were not only applied by the evangelist in a figurative sense, but that the prophet in the literal sense foretold these lamentations. Wi.

VER. 23. *He shall be called a Nazarene, or a Nazarene.* [Jesus was called a *Nazarite*, from the place where he was bred up in Galilee; and the Christians by the Jews were sometimes called *Nazarenes*, from Jesus of Nazareth. The evangelist would shew that this name, which the Jews through contempt gave to Christ and his disciples, had an honourable signification: and that this title was given in the predictions of the prophets to the Messias. But where, or in what prophet? For we find not the words exactly in any of the prophets. To this S. Chrysostom answers, that S. Matthew took it from some prophetic writings that have been lost. S. Jerom gives two other answers: first, that the word *Nazarene*, from the Hebrew *Nezer*, signifies *separated*, and distinguished from others by virtue and sanctity: and so some that were particularly consecrated, and devoted to the service of God, were called *Nazareans*, as Joseph, (Deut. xxxiii. 16,) Sampson, Judges xvi. 17, &c. Thus a Nazarene signifies one that is *holy*: and all the prophets, says S. Jerom, foretold that Christ should be holy. Therefore also it was that S. Matthew did not cite any one prophet, but the prophets in general. The second answer is, that a *Nazarean* (if derived from the Hebrew *Netzer*) signifies a *flower*, or *bud*; and so in the prophet Isaias, (c. xi. v. 1.) it is foretold of the Messias, that a *flower shall ascend from the root of David*. Wi.—The reason why Jesus is called of *Nazareth*, and not of Bethlehem, is, because he was educated there, and was generally supposed to have been born there. Hence he was called the Galilean; and the people argued from that circumstance, that he was not the Messias, nor even a prophet, saying, *Can the Christ come from Galilee? Search the Scriptures, and see that out of Galilee a prophet riseth not.* John vii. 52. Again, in Nazareth the word was made flesh, though in Bethlehem he was produced to the world; and our Lord gives himself the same title, when he addressed Saul. *I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.* Act. xxii. He remained at Nazareth till he was about 30 years of age. A.

\* V. 1. Magi, *oi Matoi*.

† V. 11. Aurum, &c. Pulcherrimè, says S. Jerom on this place, *Juveniora Munerum Sacramenta comprehendit*,

Thus, Aurum, Myrrham, Regique, Hominique, Deoque, Dona ferunt. See S. Amb. in Luc. l. ii. c. ii. S. Greg. hom. x. in Evang. &c.

‡ V. 15. *Ex Ægypto vocavi filium meum.* In the Sept. *ra riva avroù*, filios ejus.

§ V. 18. *Vox in Excelso audita est.* Jerem. xxxi. 15.