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## Christological τόποι (Places) in Matthew’s Infancy Narrative

In order to commemorate his deceased companion and collaborator St. Paula, St. Jerome described her journey to the Holy Land: “She came to Bethlehem and upon entering the Redeemer’s birthplace saw the Virgin’s holy stable and manger in which “an ox knows its owner” (Isaiah 1:3). “She wrapped him in swaddling clothes [...] The Magi who paid homage to God, the star shining above, the Virgin Mother, the hardworking breadwinner, and the shepherds who came at night to see the Word Incarnate” (Luke 2:8).<sup>1</sup> The inhabitants of Bethlehem, who would later reflect upon the written Word of God in the site of the Nativity, remembered their first encounter with Jesus’ place of birth in such a suggestive and picturesque way.

Two evangelists, Matthew and Luke, described Bethlehem, a small town in Judah where Jesus was born. The Gospels written by them begin with a theological account of the Redeemer’s youth. Despite the difficulties in describing the literary genres of the first two chapters of the

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<sup>1</sup> Z listu 108 św. Hieronima do Eustochium, [in:] *Do Ziemi Świętej. Najstarsze opisy pielgrzymek do Ziemi Świętej IV–VIII w.*, selected, edited, and preface by P. Iwaszkiewicz, Kraków 2010, p. 88.

Gospel infancy narratives,<sup>2</sup> both hagiographers share certain historical facts: the Mary's Virgin Birth, Jesus' birth during Herod's rule of Israel, a legally valid marriage between Mary and Joseph, and Nazareth as a place where the Holy Family lived. Each of the evangelists described the above-mentioned events in a unique way, taking into consideration the needs of the community to which he addressed the Gospel and the contemporary social, political, and cultural situation. Specific τόποι appear in the authors' infancy narratives. Matthew describes Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Egypt, Ramah, and Nazareth. It is worth analyzing the editorial concept of each evangelist with regards to the abovementioned geographic places and his theological conception in order to discover deeper contents of the studies on the Redeemer contained in the infancy narratives.

In his commentary on the second chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Raymond E. Brown has treated the text as a drama that the evangelist wrote in two acts and five scenes.<sup>3</sup> The first act is the search for and the adoration of the Magi (Matthew 2: 1–12), and the second act consists of the Holy Family's flight from Herod and entry into Nazareth (Matthew 2: 13–23). Specific τόποι and Old Testament quotes are broader delimitations:

- Scene I Matthew 2: 1–16 Bethlehem and Micah 5: 1;
- Scene II Matthew 2: 7–12 Bethlehem, the Holy Family's home and allusions to Psalm 72: 10–11 and Isaiah 60: 6;
- Scene III Matthew 2: 13–15 Egypt and Hosea 11: 1;
- Scene IV Matthew 2: 16–18 Ramah and Jeremiah 31: 15;

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<sup>2</sup> The exegetes usually qualify the Gospel infancy narratives as deriving from a mi-drash. In his analysis of Matthew 1–2, Antoni Paciorek speaks of lectures using the method of Christological or Aggadah midrash – cf. *Ewangelia według świętego Mateusza. Wstęp, przekład z oryginału, komentarz*, vol. 1, Częstochowa 2005, p. 78 (Nowy Komentarz Biblijny Nowy Testament, 1.1). Franciszek Mickiewicz presents a broader spectrum of exegetical interpretations of a literary type in Luke 1–2. The text is understood as a realization of Old Testament prophecies, the symbolism of numbers, historical accounts, typology, apologetics, a profession of faith, an apocalyptic vision, or legend – cf. *Ewangelia według świętego Łukasza. Wstęp, przekład z oryginału, komentarz*, vol. 1, Częstochowa 2011, p. 88 (Nowy Komentarz Biblijny Nowy Testament, 3.1).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, New York 1999, pp. 178–179.

- Scene V Matthew 2: 19–23 Nazareth and Isaiah 11: 1; Judges 16: 17.

This article presents the image of τόποι in the Gospel of Matthew. The analysis will be preceded by a description of the broader historical-archaeological and Biblical context. This text will be an attempt at reaching the concept that illuminated the evangelists and resulted from their theology.

## 1. Bethlehem

The city of Bethlehem's name *Bet Lehem* comes from the name of the god Lahmu or goddess Lahamu, which frequently has been translated as *House of bread* (*lehem* – “bread” in Hebrew)<sup>4</sup>. Bethlehem is located amongst the hills and valleys of the western extremity of the Judean Desert, on average 770 meters above sea level and about 10 kilometers south of Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> The first testimonies about the town come from the fourteenth century before Christ.<sup>6</sup> Bethlehem was initially inhabited by the Canaanites, but after the country's conquest by Joshua the settlement came to belong to the Tribe of Judah. Throughout the centuries, it was also inhabited by the family of Ephrathah (1 Chronicles 2: 1–54, 4), from whom the extended name Bethlehem-Ephrathah derives (Micah 5: 1).

In ancient times, this was a small town, because the nearby sources could provide life-giving water to only a small number of people and animals. For centuries, the earth surrounding Bethlehem has been fertile. Initially, King David's ancestors Ruth and Boaz farmed this land (Ruth). David's sheep grazed on the pastures of his father Jesse; David spent his childhood and youth in this settlement (1 Samuel 16: 11). Bethlehem has been called *City of David* in reference to him.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. S. E. Johnson, *Betlejem*, [in:] *Słownik wiedzy biblijnej*, red. B. M. Metzger, M. D. Coogan, Warszawa 2004<sup>4</sup>, p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. H. Langkammer, *Mały słownik archeologii biblijnej*, Wrocław 2012, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> One of the so-called Amarna letters (fourteenth century BC) mentions an unfaithful Beit-Lahm – cf. M. Bednarz, *Ziemia umiłowana przez Boga. Geografia Ziemi Świętej*, Tarnów 2008, p. 76.

This settlement, located on the peripheries of mighty Jerusalem, was not a particularly important or influential Jewish town; it was the backwater of what was great, renowned, and full of splendor. Bethlehem's social status was described by the prophet Micah: "But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah" (Micah 5:1a),<sup>7</sup> later prophesying that "From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel" (Micah 5:1b).

New Testament authors who mention Bethlehem include: Matthew (who mentions it five times), Luke (who does so twice), and John (who does so once). Each time, "Ephrathah" appears within the context of the Redeemer's birth. When mentioning the city for the first three times, Matthew precisely refers to Bethlehem in the land of Judah (Matthew 2:1, 5, 6), like Micah wanting to preclude any confusion with another Bethlehem in Galilee in the Land of Zebulun.

The evangelist's first reference to the city's name<sup>8</sup> has the characteristics of the noting of an historical fact (Matthew 2:1). Matthew informs

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<sup>7</sup> All the quotes from Sacred Scripture in the English translation come from: *The New American Bible*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/_INDEX.HTM), 2002.

<sup>8</sup> There is no historic certainty that Bethlehem is Jesus' true birthplace. The Jews believed that the Messiah would be born in David's City. These expectations are described in John 7:42, and their source is Micah's prophecy. There is also no basis to question that location and to treat it as an apologetic invention of the early Church in its disputes with Israel's elders. The place of Jesus' birth was not a matter of polemics between Jews and Christians. Raymond E. Brown analyzed this topic in his *The Birth of the Messiah*, op. cit., pp. 513–516. In his text, Matthew clearly emphasizes Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. He casts light on the place where the Redeemer was born twice, first through the question: "Where is the newborn King of the Jews?" (ποῦ ἐστὶν ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων;) asked by the Magic looking for Him (Matthew 2:2). Meanwhile, Herod, the archpriests, and scribes try to ask "where the Messiah was to be born" (Matthew 2:4). In answering these questions, Bethlehem is named twice, first the archpriests and scribes mention its name (Matthew 2:5); it then appears in the texts interpreted by Matthew – Micah 5:1 and 2 Samuel 5:2 (Matthew 2:6). The Greek text of the New Testament comes from: *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. B. and K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, B. M. Metzger, Stuttgart 2013<sup>28</sup>.



“small” (ὀλιγοστός od ὀλίγος – “small,” “insignificant”) among the clans of Judah” to ἐλάχιστος (“the smallest,” “very small”) to the greatest degree, preceded by the negative οὐδαμῶς. This term, which is rarely used, is understood as a strong negation and opposition. In classical Greek, it was most frequently used in conversations and was used for contradiction in one’s answer; it expressed a polarization of statements.<sup>11</sup> The evangelist changes the prophet’s expression describing Bethlehem as the smaller among a thousand similar cities in Judah; by doing so, he enters into dialogue with Micah, contradicting the expression used by him. By the Redeemer’s birth in that town, Bethlehem achieves a completely different status. It is no longer one of a thousand small and weak towns, but one of the most important and leading cities. Matthew introduces the term ἡγεμών and uses it as an adjective. In the remaining uses of ἡγεμών, he refers to the governor, of the person with authority (cf. Matthew 27:2; Luke 20:20). Jesus’ entry into Bethlehem completely changes the city’s status.

The Bethlehem of Matthew’s Gospel is the location of three events: the birth of the predicted Redeemer; the adoration of the Magi from the East, who come to Him and pay Him tribute; and the violation of Herod, who along with all of Jerusalem rejects the Redeemer, wanting to kill Him, and who murders innocent children.<sup>12</sup>

In his text, the evangelist has clearly indicated the opposition of the motivations, choices, and behavior of the Magi and Herod. The visitors from the East see the sign of the star, wanting to pay tribute to the Jewish king, and put effort into attempting to visit Him. They are honest and straightforward in their intention, and they are accompanied by joy in

<sup>11</sup> In the New Testament, οὐδαμῶς is the *hapax legomenon*; in the Old Testament, it appears three times in 2 Maccabees, in texts presenting the boastful and blasphemous attitude of the following persons towards the Lord: Antiochus IV Epiphanes and Lysias (2 Maccabees 9:7, 18; 11:4). Οὐδαμῶς means extremely negative behavior and complete contradiction. This term is translated from the ancient Greek as “not at all, not in the least” and primarily appears in conversations in order to contradict something – cf. *Słownik grecko-polski*, red. Z. Abramowiczówna, vol. 3, Warszawa 1958, p. 336 (οὐδαμῶς).

<sup>12</sup> Up through today, Bethlehem is above the city of God’s birth. Each year, crowds of pilgrims travel there to adore the Baby Jesus as the Magi did years ago.

their search. They achieve their aim and meet the Infant Jesus and His Mother in Jerusalem. Overcome with horror, Herod does not grasp the meaning of Scripture and thus aims to kill Jesus; dishonesty and cunning mark his behavior. He does not kill the Newborn Christ, but he does cause the deaths of children in Bethlehem.<sup>13</sup> When Jesus was in Bethlehem, the town was a place of paying respects to the King. When the Holy Family escapes to Egypt, the city becomes a place of the deaths of innocents because of the persecution of Jesus. The city's increased status described by the evangelist does not consist of the construct of its earthly power, but of particular pertinence to the Redeemer expressed by giving Him respect and suffering because of Him.

In analyzing the theology of Bethlehem in the Gospel of Matthew, we have to notice that for the evangelist it is the place where the Messiah was born, as previously predicted by the prophet. This birth changes the status quo and overturns the hierarchy. One of the signs of this change is the exaltation of a provincial Judean town by the fact that the Redeemer was born there. The born Jesus is the center of the world, and from the beginning people take one of two attitudes towards Him: they either strive for His glory or try to destroy him. Bethlehem is the location where this diversity of human choices and behaviors is inaugurated.

## 2. Jerusalem

The holy city of Jerusalem is located 760 meters above sea level and is about 25 kilometers to the west of the Dead Sea and about 60 kilometers to the east of the Mediterranean Sea; it is in the vicinity of the Judean Desert.<sup>14</sup> Jerusalem is a city of hills (including Zion, the range includ-

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<sup>13</sup> The first Biblical reference to Bethlehem is information about the burial of the deceased Rachel on the road to the city (Genesis 35:19). Matthew refers to this tradition by quoting Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:15), who describes the tears of Jacob's second wife (Matthew 2:18). Rachel suffered greatly due to a lack of children, as do mothers upon losing their children.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. M. Bednarz, *Ziemia umiłowana przez Boga. Geografia Ziemi Świętej*, op. cit., p. 74.

ing the Mount of Olives, and the Temple Mount) and valleys (Hinnom, Kidron, and the Tyropoeon Valley). In the pre-Israelite era, it was the Canaanite city Urushalim.<sup>15</sup> David conquered it for the Chosen People by defeating the Jebusites (2 Samuel 5:6) and made it both the political and religious capital of the country. In the hill identified with Mount Moriah (2 Chronicles 3:1), David's son Salomon built a temple for the Lord (1 Chronicles 6). The basic water source for the city that allowed for a comfortable life was Gihon Spring. Under the rule of King Hezekiah, a tunnel was built to transport water from Gihon to the Pool of Siloam, thus ensuring the inhabitants access to water in the event of a siege by hostile armies. A tragic date in the city's history is 586 BC, when Jerusalem along with the Temple were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and its inhabitants were deported to Babylon. Upon his return from Assyria, the Temple and city were rebuilt; the former was consecrated in 515 BC. In 167 BC, the Syrian King Antioch IV Epiphanes of the Seleucid dynasty transformed the Temple into a place of the worship of Zeus. Along with Antioch's overall religious-social policies, this event led to an uprising and struggle led by the Maccabees. During the rule of Herod the Great (37–4 BC), the city, especially the Temple, the heart of Jerusalem, greatly developed architecturally.<sup>16</sup>

For centuries, Jerusalem was the center of life for Jews faithful to the Lord (Daniel 6:11). Pilgrims visited the city in order to meet with the Lord. Worship constantly went on in the Temple (Psalm 122). At the same time, this was an unfaithful city that rejected the Lord and the Covenant with Him (Isaiah 1:21). The prophets warned the idolatrous people, predicting a punishment for the city and destruction of the Temple (Jeremiah 7:14). In his visions, Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord leaving the Temple Mount (Ezekiel 10:18, 11, 22).

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<sup>15</sup> The document from el-Amarna (fourteenth century BC mentions this); previously, the city called Shalem appears in Egyptian texts from the twentieth century BC – cf. H. Langkammer, *Mały słownik archeologii biblijnej*, op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>16</sup> More on the history of Jerusalem – cf. *Starożytny Izrael. Od Abrahama do zburzenia świątyni jerozolimskiej przez Rzymian*, ed. H. Shanks, trans. W. Chrostowski, Warszawa 2009<sup>2</sup>.

In Biblical typology, the Jerusalem of the Old Testament is an image of the New Jerusalem, and the Temple is one of the New Arrival (Hebrews 8:5). In the New Testament, all the promises that the holy city had received are transferred to the new Bride, the Church (Revelation 21, 1n).

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jerusalem is a city hostile to Jesus. Although inhabitants of the capital also follow the Teacher from Nazareth (Matthew 4:25), the city is most frequently represented by the Pharisees and scribes, who are insidious, hostile, and desire Jesus' death (Matthew 15:1, 16, 21). In Jerusalem, the Redeemer gives His life, and the city is above all present in this context. The evangelist emphasizes that Jesus goes to Jerusalem to die (Matthew 16:20, 21:18).

Matthew most frequently uses the Hellenic form of the name Ἱεροσόλυμα; only twice in the Gospel does he use the Hebrew name (Matthew 23, 37). Use of the term Ἱερουσαλήμ can broaden the number of people He can reach: in this case, Ἱεροσόλυμα would refer to the city and the nation's leaders, the Pharisees and scribes, but Ἱερουσαλήμ would encompass the entire Jewish people.<sup>17</sup>

In the infancy narratives, Matthew mentions the city twice. In Matthew 2:1, he informs about the arrival of the Magi of the East in Jerusalem. In Matthew 2:3, the evangelist describes the fear and fright that had overwhelmed Herod and all of Jerusalem (πᾶσα Ἱεροσόλυμα) upon hearing about the birth of the King of the Jews.<sup>18</sup> The attitude of the inhabitants of Jerusalem is similar to the behavior of King Herod. In the opposition in the attitude towards learning about the birth of the Messiah between the Magi and Herod described by the evangelist, Jerusalem is with the

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<sup>17</sup> Donald A. Hagner presents a similar suggestion in *Matthew*, Dallas Texas 1995, CD (Word Biblical Commentary, 33b). However this is only a hypothesis. The image that both Ἱεροσόλυμα and Ἱερουσαλήμ evoke in the Gospel of Matthew is consistent; the semantic traits of both terms are analogous.

<sup>18</sup> From the point of view of history, it is unlikely that the prophesied King of the Jews, whose appearance gave the Jews the hope for liberation from their oppressors and from Herod, would arouse fear in the nation. The evangelist presents Jerusalem as one of the elements of his Christological conception.

bloody monarch. From the very first pages of the Gospel, Matthew presents Jerusalem as a city “with blood on its hands.”

Upon learning about the birth from the Magi, Jerusalem reacts with horror and fear. The evangelist uses the term *ταράσσω*: “to move, disturb, agitate, experience anxiety, fear, become frightened”<sup>19</sup> in the tense *aoristum*, which emphasizes that something had happened both passively and actively. One can say that the inhabitants of Jerusalem were frightened and overcome with fear. Matthew uses the same verb to describe the behavior of the disciples frightened by the sight of Jesus walking on the lake (Matthew 14:26).

The evangelist presents the inhabitants being moved again when he describes Jesus’ ceremonial entry into the holy city (Matthew 21:10). However, Matthew uses the term *σειώ*, meaning to be moved or to shake, in this case. The evangelist uses *Σείω* once more to describe the fear of the guardians of Jesus’ tomb before His resurrection (Matthew 28:4). Thus this is a stronger feeling than that described by *ταράσσω*. The resistance of the inhabitants of Jerusalem initiated with the first mention of the King of the Jews grows over time.

In the infancy narratives, Matthew presents the image of Jerusalem as a city of death that will appear repeatedly throughout his work. Just as Herod’s fear led to the death of infants and later only his death is mentioned. Jerusalem similarly begins with fear of Jesus and ends with the killing of the Redeemer. In Matthew’s infancy narratives, just as in the entire Gospel, Jerusalem – the holy city, powerful capital, and heart of Israel – loses its unique status, personifies Jesus’ enemies, and is the place of His death. While the small and provincial Bethlehem is exalted because of the Redeemer’s birth, Jerusalem by contrast acquires a negative dimension and loses its status in Matthew’s account.

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<sup>19</sup> R. Popowski, *Wielki słownik grecko-polski Nowego Testamentu. Wydanie z pełną lokalizacją greckich haseł, kluczem polsko-greckim oraz indeksem form czasownikowych*, Warszawa 2006<sup>4</sup>, pp. 594–595 (*ταράσσω*) (Prymasowska Seria Biblijna, 3).

### 3. Egypt

Israel's neighbor Egypt, whose civilization reaches back to 3,000 BC,<sup>20</sup> frequently appears in the Old Testament. For the Israelites, the land of the pharaohs is a relief from famine (Genesis 12:10, 42), a refuge from their persecutors (Jeremiah 26:21), and a shelter for the defeated (Jeremiah 42). This is why a large diaspora of Greek-speaking Jews appeared in Egypt. In the country's capital Alexandria, the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, was written for Greek-speaking Jews living in Egypt.

Egypt is also the country of the oppressors, from whom, as is written in the Book of Exodus, the Lord led the Israelites under the leadership of Moses. The enslavement and miracle-filled journey across the desert was one of the key moments in the history of the Chosen People. When editing his Gospel, Matthew presents the history of Jesus as analogous to that of Moses. Moses, who liberates his compatriots from Egyptian slavery, is similar to Jesus, who liberates humanity from sin.<sup>21</sup>

The authors of the New Testament wrote little about Egypt; among the evangelists, only Matthew mentions the country. The author of the first Gospel in the canon mentions Egypt four times: only in Matthew 2 and in the context of the flight from Herod.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. H. Langkammer, *Mały słownik archeologii biblijnej*, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> In his description of Jesus' birth, Matthew shows that someone greater than Moses was born. One can find many parallels to the Book of Exodus in the entire Gospel. Antoni Paciorek mentions the following analogies: Exodus 5–15 is analogous Matthew 1:21; Exodus 16–17 is concurrent with Matthew 14:13–21 and 15:32–39; Exodus 19–20 is analogous to Matthew 5–7; and Exodus 24 is analogous to Matthew 27:45–56 – cf. *Ewangelia według świętego Mateusza*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 131.

<sup>22</sup> Because of the literary genre that the infancy narratives are, the historical accuracy of the Holy Family's stay in Egypt is of secondary importance and difficult to prove or to put into doubt. What is most important is the theological depth that Matthew has contained in his Gospel. For example, Origen writes about the Egyptian episode in Jesus' earthly life: *Przeciw Celsusowi (Against Celsus)* 1, 28; 66, tłum. S. Kalinkowski, Warszawa 1977, CD.

The name Egypt appears for the first time in Matthew 2: 13 in the context of Herod's search for Jesus in order to kill him (ἀπόλλυμι). Matthew uses this term two more times with regards to Jesus: in Matthew 12: 14 the Pharisees advise each other on how to kill Jesus, and in Matthew 27: 20 the archpriests and elders influence the crowd in order to cause Jesus' death. Matthew refers to the Redeemer's death as recently as the infancy narratives. Each time, those responsible for activities leading to Jesus' death are Israel's rulers.

In the infancy narratives of the Gospel, the topic of Jesus' persecution is noted only because God intervened in the fate of the Holy Family through His messenger. Matthew edited the information about the flight to Egypt and return from that country in an identical way (Matthew 2: 13 and Matthew 2: 19–20). An angel appears to Joseph in his sleep and commands him several times by using the imperative mood, to return to Egypt, speaking of the necessity of returning. Joseph immediately reacts to the angel's message and along with the whole Holy Family obediently begins the travel. The evangelist introduces a pattern – God's order and the Holy Family's reaction of unconditional obedience expressed by Joseph's taking action. However, Matthew devotes no attention to Egypt itself and the road to that country. One can see similarities, but also differences in the analogous Egyptian history of the Chosen People. Both Egypt and the Holy Family, led by the Lord, traveled between Egypt and Canaan. However, in light of the disobedience and lack of faith to the Lord on behalf of the Chosen People one can clearly see the Holy Family's obedience.

In Matthew's Gospel, Egypt has an objective function; the country is not significant to the evangelist, but rather the point to which the protagonists of the narrative flee to and return from. The important thing is the travelers' attitude and the realization of the prophecy. Matthew quotes Hosea's words accusing Israel of infidelity (Hosea 11: 1–6) and applies them to Jesus, the faithful and obedient Son of Israel. The Redeemer undertakes the same journey as Israel; he also has an exodus, but it is different, because it is perfect.

In Hosea's referenced prophecy in the context of the challenge in Egypt, only one Christological title appears in the Gospel infancy narrative:

υἱός, or “Son.” Jesus being the Son of God is one of the basic themes of Matthew's Gospel; it is prophesied in light of the flight from Egypt.<sup>23</sup>

In Matthew's Gospel, Israel's neighbor Egypt has an objective role; it is the background for Biblical typology. In the context of the history of the Chosen People, the evangelist presents the Son of Israel, who above all is the Son of God who participates in His nation's history and experiences similar situations, albeit in a perfect, faithful, and obedient way.

## 4. Ramah

Biblical archaeology locates four Biblical Ramahs: in the land of Benjamin nine kilometers from Jerusalem, in Asher in Galilee, in Gilead near the Jabbok River, and, for the last time, in Mount Ephraim.<sup>24</sup> The Bible mentions Ramah thirty-one times; however, it is often difficult to allocate a specific event to the right place.

Samuel came from Ramah (1 Samuel 2 : 11); it was there that he judged (1 Samuel 7 : 17) and there that David visited him (1 Samuel 19 : 18). According to one of the traditions, Rachel was buried there (1 Samuel 10 : 2). Jeremiah, quoted by Matthew, also refers to this thought (Jeremiah 31 : 15; Matthew 2 : 18).

Rachel was the mother of Joseph and Benjamin as well as three generations of Jacob: Manasseh, Ephraim, and Benjamin. She cries for the enslaved Israelites in Jeremiah's prophecy, but her lament also appears in the context of the *Book of Consolation*,<sup>25</sup> which is full of Messianic joy and a prediction of the New Covenant. A similar context appears

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. U. Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, trad. J. B. Robinson, Cambridge 1995, p. 35.

<sup>24</sup> There may have been one more Biblical Ramah in the land of Nephthalim, presently frequently associated with Ramah on the territory of Aser – cf. H. Langkammer, *Mały słownik archeologii biblijnej*, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>25</sup> Jeremiah 30–31 is the *Book of Consolation*. The prophet pours Messianic hope into the hearts of the people, promising a return and ensuring of God's eternal love (Jeremiah 31 : 3) and the promise of the New Covenant.

in Matthew's Gospel. Rachel's crying is actually referenced when small children from Bethlehem are killed, but in the context of the Messiah's birth and the fulfillment of the New Covenant. Joy, not sorrow emanates from the Gospel.

Matthew changes the object of Rachel's weeping. In Jeremiah (LXX), she laments over her sons (υἱός), while the evangelist writes of her crying over her children (τέκνον). In this way, the number of recipients is extended. Rachel's tears are sorrow over Israel, which had rejected the incarnate Messiah.<sup>26</sup>

In Matthew's infancy narrative, Ramah refers to Rachel, the mother of Israel, and her crying over the Chosen People and their attitude. This is the exposition of the stance taken by the Jews concentration on their own images and restricting God to human predictions and patterns. However, the mother of Israel's sorrow is not dominant; it is overcome by joy resulting from the Messiah's birth.

## 5. Nazareth

Located in a trough between the hills of Lower Galilee, Nazareth was a small and insignificant settlement in Jesus' time; it is not mentioned even once in the Old Testament, and it never was fortified.<sup>27</sup> John the Evangelist expresses the marginal status and dubious reputation of the town in Nathaniel's doubtful yell: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (John 1:46). The settlement was based around springs that allowed for a calm everyday life. Just as the small Bethlehem, located on the periphery of mighty Jerusalem, became Jesus' birthplace, the provincial Nazareth,

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<sup>26</sup> Raymond E. Brown suggests that the mention of τόποι and its mental associations with Bethlehem as the city of David, Egypt as the land of exile, and Ramah as the synonym of exodus are the history of Israel on a smaller scale presented by Matthew in his infancy narrative – cf. *The Birth of the Messiah*, op. cit., p. 217.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. M. Bednarz, *Ziemia umiłowana przez Boga. Geografia Ziemi Świętej*, op. cit., pp. 47–48.

located in the vicinity of the wonderful and noisy Sepphoris, was witness to about thirty years of the Redeemer's life.

Nazareth appears twelve times in the New Testament, always within the context of Jesus and the Holy Family. Matthew uses the town's name three times: to inform of the Holy Family's having moved to Nazareth (Matthew 2:23) and Jesus' having left the settlement (Matthew 4:13) and giving an account of His entry into Jerusalem, when He is titled "the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee" (Matthew 21:11). In his description of the Nazarenes' lack of faith (Matthew 13:53–58), the evangelist does not mention the town's name, thus separating Jesus' countrymen's attitude from the town's name. The name "Nazareth" unambiguously describes Jesus.

Matthew describes the circumstances surrounding the Holy Family's arrival in Nazareth in great detail. The initiator of the return from Egypt is the angel who communicated with Joseph in his dream (Matthew 2:19).<sup>28</sup> Jesus' guardian is as always obedient and thus leaves for Israel with his family. Although it is a return to the homeland, Matthew does not write of a return in his description of the journey, but rather uses the term εἰσερχομαι ("to arrive," "to come"), which is a reference to the rich Old Testament phrase "entering the land" (cf. Exodus 12:25, Leviticus 19:23). Like the Chosen People, Jesus enters Canaan. Because the cruelest of Herod's successors, his son Herod Archelaus, ruled Judea at the time, Joseph – directed by revelation in his dream – goes to Galilee. Thus settling specifically in Nazareth appears to be a decision undertaken by Joseph without the angel's suggestion.

By using the conjunction ὅπως, Matthew creates a clause of purpose. Jesus settles in Nazareth in order to fulfill the prophets' words. The Redeemer fulfills the Old Testament prophecy by moving into the Galilean town; from that point on, He is Jesus of Nazareth. In Matthew 2:22–23, the evangelist describes Jesus' geographic pertinence in detail;

<sup>28</sup> In situation analogous to the Egyptians' desire to kill Moses, Herod tries to kill Jesus, the terminology and grammatical form τεθνήκασιν has been used– "they died" *perfectum* in the plural form (Exodus 4:19; Matthew 2:20). Matthew again clearly emphasizes the parallelism between Moses, the intermediary in the Old Testament Covenant with the Lord, and Jesus as the intermediary and fulfillment of the New Testament Covenant with God.

first he gives a broad description of Galilee, and then Nazareth specifically. Upon entering Jerusalem (Matthew 2:11), the order is reversed: Jesus is presented to the entire city as the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.

In order to emphasize the realization of the prophecy, the evangelist uses the expression: ὅπως πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν ὅτι Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται (Matthew 2:23). Jesus moves into Nazareth so that what the prophets had predicted is fulfilled. Previously, Matthew had used the expression: διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος (“said through the prophet”) and quoted the specific prophesy, often in his own interpretation (cf. Matthew 1:22; 2:15; 2:17). In Matthew 2:23, however, he does not refer to a particular prophet, but to the prophets in general<sup>29</sup> and replaces λέγοντος with the particle ὅτι (“that”), explaining that he would be called the Nazorean (Ναζωραῖος). The evangelist puts this same noun into the mouth of the woman who identifies Peter in Caiaphas’ palace (Matthew 26:71). It then is also mentioned within the context of Galilee. During Peter’s denial, the woman calls the Redeemer “Jesus the Galilean” (Matthew 26:29); the second one uses the expression “Jesus the Nazorean.”

Calling Jesus Ναζωραῖος or Ναζαρηνός (for example, in Mark 1:24) is a tradition common to all the evangelists and originating in Jesus’ time and oral communication. Matthew only uses the term Ναζωραῖος in the two aforementioned examples, both times within a geographic context. The first layer of meaning of Ναζωραῖος is a geographical connotation connected with the Redeemer’s name: Jesus the Nazarene. Matthew 2 is encircled by an inclusion that creates the child’s name (the verb καλέω – “to call,” to name”). In Matthew 1:25, Joseph gives the name “Jesus,” while in Matthew 2:23 the second part of the name, Ναζωραῖος, is added, a reference to the Old Testament, but καλέω is used in the future tense (“he will be called the Nazorean”). Looking at the tenses used by Matthew, Jesus the Nazorean is the one who was prophesied in the past in the Old Testament; this becomes a specific present time and will always remain in the future.

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<sup>29</sup> For the Jews, referring to the prophets has greater significance, because these are not only Biblical books of the prophets but historical ones as well.

Referring to Jesus as Ναζωραῖος does not only have geographic connotations – Matthew refers to the prophets. In Isaiah 11 : 1, the verb *nēšer* is used, meaning a shoot sprouting from the stump of Jesse, or from David's lineage, as Jesse was David's descendent. Isaiah 11 : 1 was used as a Messianic text both in Judaism and in the early Church. For Matthew, Isaiah is a Messianic prophet. The interpretation of Ναζωραῖος as an indication of the prophesied Messiah coming from the line of David is consistent with Matthew's theology. Another attempt at interpretation is Ναζωραῖος as indicating *nāzîr* – the person who through his vows is completely devoted to God. LXX of the expression "Holy God" and "the Nazarene God" are used interchangeably (cf. Judges 13 : 7; 16 : 7). Matthew could have used Ναζωραῖος to describe Jesus as the Holy God; this would have been a reference to the Masoretic text Isaiah 4 : 3. Such an interpretation has been accepted both by Raymond E. Brown and Antoni Paciorek.<sup>30</sup>

By settling in Nazareth, Jesus became a Nazorean and the inhabitant of the Galilean town with which He would be identified. However, the evangelist indicates the Redeemer's Messianic mission and His devotion to God by using this name. Although Nazareth is mentioned rarely in Matthew's Gospel, it plays the most important function in the infancy narratives, because it describes Jesus.

## Conclusion

When analyzing the development of the Gospel narrative with regards to the abovementioned places, one sees that Matthew begins his account with Bethlehem and the birth of the promised Messiah in the city. The narrative moves from that Judean town to Jerusalem, and it is here that it is divided. One thread is positive and concerns people open to Jesus and moves to Bethlehem, from where the Holy Family is led to Egypt and to Nazareth by an angel. The second thread, a negative one, remains in

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, op. cit., p. 223–225; A. Paciorek, *Ewangelia według świętego Mateusza*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 137–138.

Jerusalem, where people are closed off from Jesus because of their fear; it leads to the murder in Bethlehem and lament in Ramah.

The exegetes analyzing Matthew's infancy narratives compare these two chapters to two rooms containing images of Christ.<sup>31</sup> By dividing the two images between different rooms, the evangelist used a key chosen by him. The images related to the specific τόπος were kept in the other room. In order to be comprehensible, each image needed good illumination. Τόποι in Matthew's infancy narratives has the function of lamps illuminating images from Christ's life.

Bethlehem shows the foretold Messiah, born in accordance with the prophecies, the King Who chooses what is small and weak in the eyes of the world so that upon accepting and becoming open to Him He could transform that imperfection and fragility, raising it up, exalting it, and bringing it to glory, albeit in God's categories, not in human ones.

Jerusalem presents the Jewish King Who under the influence of human fear and selfishness is rejected and persecuted. He is the Messiah Whom the people had closed themselves off to and Whom they did not accept but decided to kill. Similarly, Ramah casts light on the Messiah rejected by His own people.

Egypt presents the new Moses, the Son of God and Son of Israel Who is both the Son of God and Son of Man in a perfect way. Meanwhile, Nazareth presents a Man who lives in a small town in Galilee but at the same time is a King from the line of David, the Messianic Offspring, and the Holy God devoted to the Lord.

## Abstract

### Christological τόποι (places) in Matthew's Infancy Narrative

In the infancy narrative, Matthew the evangelist describes specific places associated with the earthly life of Jesus: Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Egypt, Ramah, and Nazareth. These places show Jesus and allow for deeper and more accurate descriptions of the Christology of the Gospel. Bethlehem is the place of the birth and worship of the Messiah. For this

<sup>31</sup> Cf. A. Paciorek, *Ewangelia według świętego Mateusza*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 140.

reason, the small place is exalted, in opposition to Jerusalem, the place of death of the Messiah, which is deprived of its respect and rank in the Old Testament. The latter town embodies people who are reserved and hostile to Jesus. Meanwhile, Egypt and Ramah act as subjects: Egypt is the point to which Holy Family arrives and later leaves, repeating the journey of Israel, albeit in a perfect way. Ramah refers to the matriarch Rachel and her weeping over the Chosen People, who have rejected the Messiah. The primary city in Matthew's infancy narrative is Nazareth, which describes Jesus and points to his messianic dignity and dedication to God.

## Keywords

Gospel of St. Matthew; infancy narrative; Messiah; τόπος; place; Bethlehem; Jerusalem; Egypt; Ramah; Nazareth

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