Rescue, Release and Redemption:

Mary and Exodus Traditions in the Gospel of Matthew and their relevance for today

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Now after they (the wise men from the East) had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." (Matthew 2: 13-15)

WHEN I was asked to offer a paper at Walsingham I was teaching a course on Matthew's gospel and it occurred to me that the Lukan birth narratives, with their emphasis on Mary, have been the subject of much scholarly work and devotional practice and little has been written about the portrayal of Mary in the first gospel. Whilst the Matthaean text, however, has less to say about Mary, what it says, and the context in which it says it, may have particular relevance to today's world.

It is 4 am in Bristol and a mother and a small child are woken from sleep by a loud knocking on the front door. The mother struggles downstairs in her night-clothes and is confronted by men who have arrived to take her and her baby to Yarl's Wood Detention Centre. They do not allow her to dress or go to the toilet, even though she pleads to be allowed to visit the bathroom. In the Black Maria they give her a plastic bag and she has to relieve herself in front of her small daughter. This mother and child have fled to Britain from the Congo and now face deportation and almost certain death.

Current books on homiletics have encouraged the use of story telling and a great deal has been written about narrative preaching and about the ('big story' or) metanarrative of the Bible. This paper will argue that the story of Mary in Matthew's gospel resonates with the experiences of those today who are powerless and especially with the stories of displaced people, many of whom flee from the horror of genocide, and can help them to meet, not only the Herods of today and their henchmen, but also Mary the bearer of the one who is 'Emmanuel', God with them.

The underlying premise of this paper is that the story of the Exodus provides the significant, biblical metanarrative, that shapes, and continues to shape, the identity of Christian people and their relationship with God. Postmodernism rejects the view that the Bible has a metanarrative i.e. a 'big story' or an overarching world-view.[1] Different scholars have suggested a variety of possible biblical metanarratives and, although this paper argues from the perspective of the Exodus, it is evident that the Exodus is not the only contender in the search for **the** biblical metanarrative.[2] Although the contention of the study is that the Exodus story provides **the** biblical world-view, it is important to recognize that the relevance of the argument does not stand or fall on this premise. It is possible to accept that the Exodus provides one interpretive approach and an appropriate 'metanarrative framework', that is one possible world-view from which to read biblical texts.[3]

The Exodus as the Biblical Metanarrative

The Exodus story does offer a coherent biblical worldview in both the Old and New Testaments and can become the *'founding and pivotal event'* [4] for Christian people today who, like Jews and Christians throughout history, recognize that they, too, are part of the Exodus story, enter into this same narrative of liberation and redemption and become partners in the divine enterprise that is nothing less than the transformation of creation! The Exodus story of rescue, release and redemption challenges individuals, communities, institutions and nations as people seek to live in peace with each other, and with the planet, in relationships characterised by the loving kindness, unfailing generosity and faithfulness of the God encountered in the Exodus narrative of which we are a part.

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[1] Postmodernism rejects the view that the bible has a metanarrative i.e. a 'big story' or an overarching world view. Different scholars have suggested a variety of possible biblical metanarratives and, although this paper argues from the perspective of the Exodus, it evident that the Exodus is not the only contender in the search for **the** biblical metanarrative. N. T. Wright suggests that a metanarrative should answer the questions "Who are we?" Where are we?" "What is wrong?" and "What is the solution?" For further reading about biblical metanarrative see e.g. Christopher J. H. Wright's book, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, Nottingham, IVP, 2006

[2] www.postmodernpreaching.net/metanarrative.htm (accessed 24.2.2009) It would be possible, for example, to speak of the Bible in terms of God's self-revelation to the world and to the incarnation as its culmination and therefore 'the central interpretive principle' of the Bible.

[3] *'For those of us who believe in the presence of a biblical metanarrative, the temptation is to think that we can exhaustively or definitively explain it, or to equate our systemic understanding of the metanarrative with the metanarrative itself. That's why it is perhaps best to think in terms of metanarrative frameworks.'* www.postmodernpreaching.net/metanarrative.htm (accessed 24.2.2009)

[4] J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger than It Used to Be*, London, SPCK, 1997, p. 88. Chapter 5, pp. 88-107, offers a concise consideration of the Exodus as transforming metanarrative within the periods of Old and New Testaments and subsequently.

The Exodus as the defining story for the people of God.

The Exodus story tells of God's rescue of dispossessed and oppressed people. These disparate folk from Aramaic tribes grew in numbers and became a threat to Pharoah who, when all else failed, gave the order that male babies should be drowned at birth (Exodus 1: 22).[5] The story, therefore, begins with genocide and the untold misery of countless mothers. It is also the story of 'the great escape' as God, through Moses, rescues his people, enables them to cross the sea—and remember that in scripture the sea often stands for the waters of chaos, all that threatens to overwhelm and destroy people[6] —and to survive in the wilderness until they arrive at the mountain of God. Only at Sinai, with the giving of the law, do the people from various tribes become united in their new identity, the people of God, as the covenant is sealed and a nation is born.

The covenant relationship remains at the heart of the nation's identity. Those who belong to 'the people of God' are those who, then and now, in response to the God who promises to remain faithful, commit themselves to keep his law and live righteously i.e. in right relationship with God and with each other (and indeed with all creation).

For both Old and New Testament writers, Abraham is 'the Father of the Nation'. He epitomised the covenant relationship before the law was given because he trusted in God's promises and obeyed God's command to leave his home and travel to a new land.[7] (The significance of Abraham in Matthew's portrayal of Mary will be explored later in this discussion.)

It is not surprising, therefore, that, throughout the history of Israel, the Exodus became the defining story. In the Old Testament the Exodus story not only reminded people of their identity but also helped them to put their trust in God in times of trouble and turbulence, especially when neighbouring nations threatened national security.

During the time of the Exile, following the Babylonian invasions of 598 and 597 BCE, it was the retelling of the Exodus traditions that gave a divided nation hope that the exiles would return and also enabled a new generation, born in a foreign land, to discover that this was their story and that they, too, were Israelites, God's holy people (Deuteronomy 6: 20-24a).

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[5] J. Phillip Hyatt, *Exodus*, The New Century Bible Commentary, Grand Rapids, London: Wm B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980, p.61: *'This is the third stratagem of the Egyptian king, the first being forced labour, the second a command to the midwives to kill the males. This implies a more rigorous campaign to exterminate the Hebrews'*.

[6] Genesis 1: 2

Following the Christ event, Israel was redefined as, through the ministry of Paul, gentiles received the Spirit and were accepted into the *ecclesia*, the Church of Christ, along with Jews who had also accepted Jesus as Lord and entered into a new covenant relationship through his death and resurrection. The New Testament writers continue to tell the story of the Exodus and invite Christians from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds to make this their own story.[8]

Mary and Exodus Traditions in Matthew 1-2

Matthew's gospel became the most quoted gospel in the early church; this was the gospel people were actually reading. Those of us who read the Bible regularly will usually find that some pages are more thumbed and worn than others. We all have what John Barton describes as 'functional canons', in other words, the parts that are most read. For the early church Matthew's gospel was part of the 'functional canon', the gospel to which people turned most, presumably because it had most relevance for them.[9]

Scholars are divided about whether Matthew was written by a Jewish Christian, for Jewish Christians, or by a gentile Christian, for gentile Christians. The intensity of the debate serves to emphasise that the first gospel spoke clearly to both Jewish and gentile Christians and helped to forge the mixed Christian converts into one people, the people of God. It is no surprise, therefore, that the Exodus traditions played their part in this.

Two methodological tools will be used to enable the study of Mary, as portrayed in Matthew 1-2. Firstly, typology will be used to explore the Matthaean portrayal of the main characters: Mary, Joseph and Herod, that is, how they are modelled on Old Testament figures who played their part in the Exodus story.[10] Secondly, reader-response theories argue that the reader is an active participant in the creation of the meaning of the text and this paper explores how the story of the Matthaean Mary invites the reader to use imagination to engage with the Exodus theme and respond in the light of those

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[7] See especially Genesis 15: 12-14 and note that the primeval history includes material that forms a prelude to the Exodus narratives; also cf. Galatians 3: 6-28.

[8] cf. John 6: 31f.; Acts 7, Hebrews 3: 16,8.9; Jude 5.

[9] John Barton, *Making the Christian Bible,* London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997 p.80 suggests that books are not simply 'in' or 'out' – there are some books whose status is unclear. The 'functional' canon i.e. the books people actually read or use may be different from the actual canon. Some books may be accepted in principle but rarely read or used e.g. Acts is hardly ever cited, while Luke is often cited. The Shepherd of Hermes was widely read and even appears in Biblical manuscripts, e.g. Codex Sinaiticus (mid fourth century CE) which is divided into sections for public reading.

[10] Typological interpretation is the practice of reading certain persons (although this can also extend to objects and places) in the Hebrew Bible as 'symbols' or 'types' of persons in the New Testament.

allusions that resonate with today's world.[11] This reading of Matthew 1-2, therefore, assumes that 'meaning is a productive, creative process set in motion by the text but involving the imagination and perception of a reader'.[12]

The Exodus theme begins not with Mary, but with Joseph – and standing behind Joseph is the memory of another Joseph who – sold into slavery by his brothers – became the dreamer of dreams and the patriarch who both nourished and forgave those same brothers, giving them life when they had sought death for him.[13] This Joseph was the eldest son of Jacob and Rachel to whom Jacob gave the 'coat of many colours' who, in the Genesis cycle, is portrayed as the archetypal wise man. Matthew's Joseph, his namesake, is also wise, he is the one who recognises that the baby Mary carries is God-given and indeed will be named Emmanuel, God with us (Matthew 2: 23). His wisdom is evident in the designation 'just' or 'righteous' (*dikaios*) v.19. To be just was to observe the law and, in this case, the law that an engaged woman who, if found not to be a virgin, should be returned to her father's house and stoned to death by the men of the city in order to restore family honour.[14] If Joseph became betrothed to Mary he was risking dishonour and disgrace that would have affected both his own reputation and that of his family, yet he acts with the generosity of his predecessor as he too becomes a dreamer of dreams, accepts the word of the angel, obeys the divine command, takes Mary as his wife and names Mary's son Jesus because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1: 18-21).[15] The first Joseph saved the brothers who sinned against him. Like him, Matthew's Joseph, to whom God speaks through an angel, is also portrayed as an archetypical wise man, the one who epitomizes God's wisdom. Mary does not stand in need of forgiveness, nevertheless Joseph's resolve to marry her, despite the shame that might ensue, echoes the divine generosity that offers forgiveness and calls people back into familial relationship.

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[11] Paul Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority,* Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrikson Publishers, Inc., 1999 p.304 notes that reader response criticism also assumes that there will be common ground shared by the text and the reader i.e. the symbolic world presupposed by the text, in this case the Exodus traditions, and shared emotional responses.

[12] Paul Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority,* p.305 reiterating the words of Iser.

[13] Genesis 50: 15-21

[14] Daniel Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew,* Collegeville, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1991 p.34 and Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew,* Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge, Wm.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002, p.19.

[15] Donald Hagner *Matthew 1-13,* Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1993 p.34 considers that 'the resemblance between the two Josephs is not particularly convincing, nor is it important to Matthew, although he acknowledges that 'both Josephs were concerned with dreams and kings, and for a time both lived in Egypt out of necessity.'

The decision was Joseph's. Mary was in no position to make a choice and would have to accept whatever decision he made. What she thought or felt was immaterial.[16] At that time, in that culture, as in many cultures today, the honour of the man was paramount. Even if a woman were the victim of rape she would be thought of as the transgressor.

Mary is the recipient of God's generosity, chosen by God to further his salvific purposes. Like Joseph, Mary is identified with figures from Hebrew scripture. In the genealogy the line of male ancestry is interrupted by the inclusion of five women: Tamar (1: 3), Rahab (1: 5), Ruth (1: 5), the wife of Uriah (1: 6) and Mary (1: 16). It is helpful to look briefly at the four women who precede mention of Mary commencing with Tamar whose story is told in Genesis 38. Judah's legitimate sons were born by his wife, the daughter of Shua,[17] yet the line of David comes through the illegitimate son of Tamar who seduced him and conceived by trickery. The second woman listed is Rahab, the prostitute who saved the life of Joshua's spies (Joshua 2: 1-21).[18] Next comes Ruth, who lay with Boaz (Ruth 3: 14), and whom he married and, finally, 'the wife of Uriah', who is identified in 2 Samuel 11: 2-5 as Bathsheba who committed adultery with David and who, after David ensured Uriah's death in battle, became his queen and the mother of Solomon. It has been argued that the four women have been included because the irregularity of their sexual history prepares Matthew's readers for the inclusion of Mary and the circumstances of Mary's pregnancy.[19] It has also been argued that the four women are included to demonstrate that non-Israelites have played their part in the salvation history that has led to the birth of the Messiah and that their inclusion encourages other gentiles, such as the Magi (Matthew 2: 1-11), to follow Jesus.[20,21] More interesting, for the purposes of this discussion, is the suggestion that the link between these four women and Mary is that they, like her, 'were all relatively powerless, marginalized and in need of help'.[22] Here is the link with the Exodus story:

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[16] Trevor Dennis, *The Christmas Stories,* London, SPCK, 2007, p.26.

[17] The sons of the daughter of Shua are listed before those of Tamar in 1 Chronicles 2: 3.

[18] In the genealogy Rahab is said to be the mother of Boaz. This has been disputed by scholars who argue that Matthew is referring to Rahab of Jericho e.g. R E Brown, *Bib* 63, 1982, pp. 79-80.

[19] This may, however, be to read back a present day preoccupation with irregular sexual relationships into the biblical text—a position argued by e.g. E D Freed, *JSNT* 29, 1987, pp.3-19.

[20] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p.37

[21] It is generally accepted that Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites, Ruth a Moabite and Bathsheba a Hittite although Richard Bauckham, *NovT 37*, 1995 pp.314-18 argues that she was not, strictly speaking, a gentile.

[22] Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew,* p.17 considers that the inclusion of the four women is to introduce an irregular element into the genealogy in order to prepare the reader for the extraordinary event that is about to take place through Mary.

> *These women in Matthew's list both unnerve us and give us hope. Their inclusion hints that danger lurks ……… and that Mary is going to find herself at great risk. At the same time it suggests what God is about to do.*[23]

In Luke's gospel Mary's 'yes' to God is 'writ large'. This is not part of the Matthaean portrayal of Mary who is moved, like a pawn in a game of chess, by other characters. It is Joseph who is the chessmaster and decides, in accordance with the divine guidance he receives in his dreams, what the moves will be. Mary's personal circumstances, combined with the dangerous political climate, leave her with little choice; she is not the one taking the initiative. For Mary, like those who were brought safely out of Egypt, and for countless powerless people throughout human history, the story of the Exodus is her own story. Many women today are the passive recipients of men's decisions, like those trafficked into the sex trade for Eastern Europe. Mary, therefore, seems to play a minor role in Matthew's gospel but it is in her powerlessness that Mary becomes a representative figure for many people as she plays her part in the Exodus narrative.

Egypt for the enslaved Israelites was a place of enforced, hard labour. It was also the place where the firstborn were slaughtered by Pharaoh. Egypt in Matthew's gospel, conversely, becomes the place of safety for Mary and the family as they escape the hell of infanticide perpetuated by Herod. Mary and the mother of Moses are inextricably linked in the minds of the reader; the danger for both women was real and imminent as the lives of their firstborn sons were imperilled.

Herod is compared with Pharaoh and, by implication, with all those leaders who will stop at nothing to protect their own power-base and prevent uprisings. This view leads to the assertion that Mary becomes a representative figure for all mothers whose children's lives are in danger; for all who find ways to thwart the will of tyrants; for all who flee from danger; for all those who, having escaped from danger, find themselves living in a foreign land.

Now think of Mary who, like Moses' mother of old, sought to protect her baby from being slaughtered by Herod's men. The journey she faced was more than 150 miles, both long and arduous, and would take all her strength. Mary and her family fled 'by night' (Matthew 2: 14), a more dangerous time to travel but necessary because of the immediacy of the threat to the baby's life.[24] Like Joseph, and like Abraham, Mary trusts the divine messenger and is ready to face uncertainty and hardship in order to protect

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[23] Dennis, *The Christmas Stories,* p.23
[24] R T France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007, p.79

her son.   Mary, therefore, becomes a representative figure for all mothers whose children's lives are in danger.

> *A voice was heard in Ramah,*
> *wailing and loud lamentation,*
> *Rachel weeping for her children;*
> *she refused to be consoled,*
> *because they are no more.* (Matt.2: 18)[25]

Here in Matthew's gospel Rachel, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, stands for Israel. Matthew is citing Jeremiah 31: 15[26] in which Rachel weeps for the Israelites being taken into captivity in Babylon.   Yet her weeping expresses solidarity with all generations who suffer at the hands of cruel regimes.[27] Mary, like Rachel before her, knew what it was to weep for those whose children were killed.   In such anguish the end of the story and the crucifixion are prefigured, although Mary is not mentioned in Matthew's crucifixion scene, instead she weeps at the start of the story. While Old Testament commentators debate the context of the quotation[28] McKeating comments:

> 'Famine, military conquest, and other disasters, brought about their refugee problems in ancient times as they do today. Genocidal war was as regrettably familiar then as now. A man of Benjamin, reflecting on Benjamin's violent history, could have identified occasions in almost any generation when Rachel had cause to weep for her children.'[29]

Mary, like Rachel, knew what it was to be uprooted and make a home in a foreign land and Mary, like Rachel, is also the mother of the nation, a representative figure, as the new Israel is inaugurated through the Christ event.

The Visit of the Magi

The 'Magi from the East' are introduced in Matthew 2: 2.   The term 'Magi' is variously translated as 'astrologers', 'wise men' – and in popular tradition, 'kings'. 'Magi' was the word used to describe a caste of Persian priests who interpreted dreams[30] and, in Matthew, they are astrologers who use their knowledge of the stars to interpret events on

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[25] France *The Gospel of Matthew* p.94 notes that this quotation from Jeremiah 31: 15 functions as a commentary on the tradition of the slaughter of the innocents rather than its source. Its relevance is to develop further the Matthaean presentation of Jesus as the fulfillment of scripture.

[26] Jeremiah 38: 15 in the LXX

[27] Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew* p.26

[28] Henry McKeating, *The Book of Jeremiah,* Peterborough, Epworth, 1999, pp.149-150, comments that opinion is divided about whether Jeremiah 31: 15 refers to the exile of the Northern tribes in 722 BC or, as in 40: 1, to Ramah as the staging post for people being taken into exile in Babylon in 586.

[29] McKeating, *The Book of Jeremiah,* p.150

[30] Schnackenberg, *The Gospel of Matthew,* p.42

earth. It is not surprising, therefore, that they were considered to be wise.[31] The theme of 'wisdom' runs through the Matthaean birth narrative. Joseph, like his predecessor, is the recipient of God's wisdom as he hears the angelic messages through the medium of dreams and also demonstrates this wisdom in his obedient response. To hear the divine word, in scripture, is to obey, and hearing and obeying God is the beginning of both true wisdom and true worship. The Magi, often designated wise men, come into the story seeking the child *'who has been born King of the Jews'* and they come *'to pay him homage'* (2: 2). (It is interesting to note that the only other place in Matthew's gospel where Jesus is given the title 'the King of the Jews' is in the passion narrative where the words are insults invested with mockery (27: 11, 29, 37) and, as such, are the antithesis of true worship.)[32]

The child posed a threat to Herod's power that he could not ignore. Herod and *'all Jerusalem with him'*, presumably all those whose interests lay in keeping him in power, were filled with fear, hence Herod's command to the Magi, *'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.'* (2: 3)

The first readers of the gospel would have been under no illusion that Herod lied when he spoke of paying homage to the child and, like readers today, would have made the connection between true and false worship. It was the Magi, so often described as wise men, who offered true homage to the baby which, according to Eastern custom, would have involved full prostration,[33] a physical expression of their acceptance of the royal sovereignty of the child. On their arrival they saw Jesus *'with Mary his mother'* (2: 11). That Mary is placed in apposition to the 'wise men' enables the reader to recognise that Mary is the one who, as mother, offers 'true homage' and therefore she too is portrayed as wise.

The magi are not the only people who embark on a journey, whether physical or metaphorical, to worship the child. *'The astrologers are symbols of a journey now being undertaken by the nations, the floods of Gentiles entering the church of Christ'* (Matthew 28: 19). [34] True worship, therefore, acknowledges the sovereignty of God in Christ and true worshippers are ready both to hear and obey the God whom the magi encountered, in his helplessness, with Mary his mother. It is Mary, not Joseph, who, with the child,

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[31] Although notice that Dennis, **The** *Christmas Stories,* p.38 argues against the designation 'wise men'.
[32] Hagner, *Matthew 1-13,* p.27
[33] Schnackenberg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p.24
[34] Schnackenberg, *The Gospel of Matthew,* p.24

takes the central place in the story as she does at the end of the genealogy (1: 16).[35,36] It is through Mary that this child comes into the world and in the narrative that follows mother and child are always referred to 'in the same breath' and are not separated (2: 11 c.f. 2: 13, 14, 20, 21).[37]

The Slaughter of the Innocents, the Flight to Egypt and the Return

Both the Magi and Joseph once again experience dreams that, on the one hand, help to build the narrative tension of impending danger, intensified by the necessity of starting their journey *'by night'* (2: 14), and, on the other hand, reinforce the connection between Joseph and the Magi, as 'wise'. They receive God's message and have the wisdom to hear and obey. The Magi return home by another route (2: 12) and Joseph responds immediately by 'getting up' (2: 13) and fleeing with his family to Egypt. Egypt, in Exodus traditions, was the place where Moses was saved despite Pharoah ordering the midwives to slaughter all newborn Hebrew boys at birth (Exodus 1: 16) or, as noted above, after the midwives thwarted his plan (Exodus 1: 17), to have them drowned in the Nile (Exodus 2: 22).

Genocide has always been a shameful part of human existence and continues to blight the lives of individuals, communities and nations.[38,39] Whenever and wherever tyrants seek the destruction of those who stand in their way brave women and men have been ready to put their own lives at risk on behalf of their victims. Mary's story begins this narrative in which both John the Baptist and Jesus suffer and die at the hands of an occupying force.

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[35] Hagner, *Matthew1-13*, p.30

[36] France, *The Gospel of Matthew* p.75 notes that in 2.13, 14, 20 and 21'the child and his mother' are the object of Joseph's actions. Also, note Nolland's view that the focus on Mary reflects the source of this material rather than reflecting the writer's concern to shine the spotlight on Mary: John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew,* Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005, p.116

[37] John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew,* p.121

[38] www.ushmm.org/conscience/history (accessed 30.12.08) Genocide is defined in Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG) as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life, calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.'

[39] www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/genocide/index.html (accessed 30.12.08*)* In the 20th century statistics showing deaths by genocide include: 'Armenians in Turkey: 1915-1918 - 1,500,000 deaths; Stalin's Forced Famine: 1915-1918 – 7,000,000 deaths: Rape of Nanking: 1937-1938 – 300,000 deaths; Nazi Holocaust: 1938-1945 – 6,000,000 deaths; Pol Pot in Cambodia: 1975-1979 – 200,000 deaths; Rwanda: 1994 – 800,000 deaths; Bosnia-Herzegovenia: 1992-1995 – 200,000 deaths.' In the 21st century genocide continues in places such as Darfur.

Egypt was also the place from which Moses fled, as an adult, to escape Pharaoh's wrath (Exodus 2: 11-15) and to which he returned when 'those who sought his life had died' (Exodus 4: 9), a phrase echoed in Matthew 2: 20. Here is a reminder that neither Pharaoh nor Herod acted alone; others were also prepared to condone murder for their own advantage.

These days it is not unusual to hear the Holy Family described as 'a refugee family'. Now, as then, many people flee from danger encountered in their own countries. The story of the mother and child, with which this discussion was introduced, is one such story. Yet, these days, there is, on the one hand, public outrage at the resources that are being spent on asylum seekers and refugees at the expense of the taxpayer, while, on the other hand, others speak out for those whose lives are in danger and who seem to be 'criminalised' by the present system. Admittedly, the waters are muddied by those who are seeking a better quality of life than they have in their own countries and whose lives are not obviously in danger, yet the rich/poor divide between wealthier and poorer countries cannot be denied and has contributed to the present situation. The journeys undertaken by many asylum seekers are beyond imagining.

The Exodus typology, in the first gospel, enables the reader to recognise that Jesus is part of the great biblical metanarrative of the Exodus that culminates in the quotation formula from Hosea, *'Out of Egypt I have called my Son'* (Hosea 11: 1, Matthew 2: 15). In Hosea, the quotation introduces a section in which God agonizes about his relationship with his rebellious son: Israel/Ephraim. The allusion is to the wandering and disobedience of the wilderness years before the entry into the land of promise. Here, there is a contrast between the Matthaean passage which is about Jesus, God's obedient Son, and the passage from Hosea about the nation, Israel, God's disobedient son. The nature of such typology is not to press its inconsistencies but rather to allow the resonances of the past to inform present understanding.[40] Here, Mary and her child, like those who struggled to survive the dangers of the wilderness before entering the promised land, are also the recipients of God's promise and, on the death of Herod,[41] will be brought safely out of Egypt by God.[42] That the journey will eventually lead not to Bethlehem – Joseph is afraid of Archelaus—but Nazareth, in the gentile area of Galilee with its Graeco-Roman decapolis cities, is a reminder of the significance that Mary's child will have for all people.

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[40] Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, p.36 argues that Matthew recognises the similarity that exists between two moments of redemptive history in which the earlier foreshadows or anticipates the latter. The fulfilment motif shows how God's son, Israel, and God's Son, Jesus, are both in Egypt of necessity and are both delivered by divine provision. Jesus, therefore, participates in Israel's sufferings and anticipates her liberation.
[41] Herod died in 4 BC.
[42] France, *The Gospel of Matthew,* pp.80-81

Mary as a representative figure today

Matthew's gospel commences with a genealogy that goes back not, as in Luke, to Adam, but to Abraham, the father of the nation. Mary, therefore, is identified not with Eve but with Abraham who obeyed God's call for him to leave his familiar land to journey to a foreign destination. For Matthew, Mary is identified with the new Israel, the nation of God's people – those who, like the Magi, recognise the identity of the child and become disciples of Jesus. In this way Mary is also identified as the mother of the Church of Christ and, as such, is the representative figure for all God's people.

Mary's story is part of the great biblical metanarrative of the Exodus, the story of God's liberation of those in bondage under Pharaoh in Egypt, and Mary becomes a representative figure for all people, in all times and places who long for liberation. Hers is the story of a mother whose child's life is endangered, of a long and hard journey to a foreign land where she has to remain until it is safe to return. Even the return is not to Bethlehem but to Nazareth, a different region, where she has to pick up the threads of her life. There are many people today whose personal stories resonate with the story of Mary: those who have experienced the horror of genocide, those who are displaced people and refugees and those who have to make their home in a foreign land. Many who return to their own countries are unable to return to the same location or find that 'home' has changed out of all recognition. To recapitulate: Mary, therefore, becomes a representative figure for all who suffer under the hands of tyrants and for all who seek to thwart their will; for all those mothers whose children's lives are imperilled and for all who flee from danger; for all who find themselves strangers in a foreign land and for all, who on their return, struggle to belong.

In conclusion, Matthew's gospel portrays Mary as a representative figure who becomes the mother of the new Israel, the Church of Christ, just as Abraham was the father of the nation. Mary's story, as recounted in the prologue in Matthew's gospel, resonates with the great biblical metanarrative of the Exodus which becomes her own story and the story of the Church.

This paper began with the account of a mother and child being taken to Yarl's Wood Detention Centre by night. It was both night in a literal sense and also night in a metaphorical sense, for night is a time when darkness cloaks the actions of abusers who generate, in their victims, the intense terror felt by those who are powerless. Mary too travelled *'by night'* (Matthew 2: 14) and she travels with those today who are also 'Exodus people'.

It is time for the Matthaean Mary, who is often eclipsed by the Lukan Mary, to step out of the shadows and into the limelight; for it is Matthew's Mary, who, in her helplessness, becomes a representative of all those who suffer under cruel regimes today and she challenges God's people actively to oppose the might of all those who inflict suffering upon any, who like Mary and her child, are vulnerable, in danger, in need of nurture and a place to call home.

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All Biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV