

## 10am All Age Communion Sunday 28 December 2025

**Isaiah 63:7-9, Hebrews 2:10-end, Matt 2:13-end – Matthew's gospel shows us Jesus, the man of mystery, revealed by the Old Testament prophets**

Last night *Unforgiven*, one of my all-time favourite films was on tv. Made in 1992, it was selected by the US Library of Congress for preservation as *culturally, historically or aesthetically significant*. It is a great Western but not a classic Western. In the classic Western you have a mysterious stranger who comes to the aid of the townsfolk, and in the course of helping reveals something previously hidden about the people in the town. Think of *High Plains Drifter*, *Pale Rider*, *A fistful of dollars* (all Clint Eastwood), *Bad day at Black Rock* (Spencer Tracy), *Shane*.

They are all stories about a man of mystery, who evokes very different responses from the people he comes to help. You could say the same about the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus. In the gospels we have a collection of the stories and teachings of Jesus, showing us how he provoked very different responses in people and culminating in the dramatic events around his death and resurrection.

In this church year, running up to the beginning of Advent 2026, our lectionary readings are those for Year A, which means we're going to be hearing a lot from Matthew's gospel. We'll discover that Matthew is very good at sharing with us what the Old Testament can tell us about who Jesus is, through the history of the Israelites and through the prophets.

Time and again, 10 times in all, Matthew say of the events in Jesus' life ***This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet***. We heard it in our reading today. Matthew says that Joseph taking Mary and Joseph to Egypt and later bringing them back was to fulfil the prophecy ***Out of Egypt I have called my son***, quoting from the prophet Hosea 11:1 ***When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son***.

Hosea's prophecy had itself harked back the book of Exodus, where God is saying to Moses: ***You shall say to Pharaoh "Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son."***

In leading us back, via the prophet Hosea, to the book of Exodus, Matthew is making a connection for us between God leading Joseph, Mary and Jesus first into, then out of Egypt (to keep them safe), and God leading the people of Israel out of Egypt and to safety across the Red Sea and out of Egypt in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And with that reference to Hosea's prophecy, and to God's instructions to Moses to tell the Pharaoh that Israel is God's son, Matthew wants us to know for ourselves the identity of the mysterious stranger, Jesus, and to know that he is God's Son.

In his second quotation of prophecy Matthew takes us to a very different point in Israel's history to tell us something else about Jesus.

After recording the cruelty of King Herod ordering the killing of all the children in and around Bethlehem two years old or under, Matthew quotes where the prophet Jeremiah imagines Rachel - the wife of Jacob and mother of Joseph of the technicolour dream-coat - weeping for the children of Israel.

Jeremiah prophesied that the children of Israel would go into exile, but his prophecy didn't end with the mothers weeping for their lost children. Just two verses further on in chapter 31, Jeremiah prophesies that ***they shall come back from the land of the enemy; there is hope for your future***. The story won't end with the killing of Bethlehem's toddlers, just as the forced migration of the young people of Israel, like the young Daniel, taken off to serve in the king's palace in Babylon, hadn't been the end of the story for the Israelites. The Israelites would return to Judea and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. In the words of the late theologian Richard B Hays, Matthew wants us to know that violence, and exile, do not have the final word.

Knowing Jeremiah's positive ending helps us to appreciate Matthew's clues as to how Jesus, the man of mystery, is going to change everything. By pointing us to Jeremiah, Matthew wants us to see that Jesus is going to be a blessing to the whole of humanity. For it is in Jeremiah chapter 31 that God promises ***I will make [a new covenant] with Israel [when] I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people***. This is the new covenant that Jesus is talking about when Jesus says to his disciples at the Last Supper, ***this is my blood of the new covenant***, in the words of the communion prayers that we will hear later.

Jesus leads those who put their trust in Jesus into a new way of being faithful to God, and to a reconciliation with God achieved not through our own efforts, but through God's grace.

Although Jesus' birth was the indirect cause of huge heartache for the parents of toddlers in Bethlehem it was part of a much bigger story about our relationship with God that ends in blessing. It is a story of how Jesus' life and death can transport us from death to life.

Seeing the story of God's salvation told through the story of Israel, and then through the life and death of Jesus, will give us a deeper and richer understanding of God's love for us and of how he brings about his purposes. So if you only make one New Year's Resolution this year, why not make it a resolution to dig deeper into God's word, and particularly into the Old Testament, and to learn more about Jesus, the original man of mystery.