

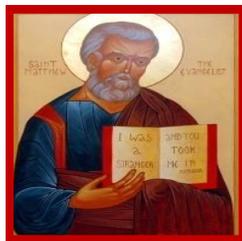
Matthew, therefore, here shows that the name of Nazarene was a glorious one, for as much as it had been spoken of by the prophets, and assigned to Christ many ages previously.

The sense then is as follows—although Christ was born in Bethlehem He was conceived and brought up in Nazareth, a city small and obscure, that He might the better elude Herod and his posterity when they sought to slay Him, and that He might give us an example of humility and contempt of the pomps of the world. Whence He was called a Nazarene from the city of Nazareth, but so that not only the name Nazarene, but what was signified by the name, that is, holiness, should apply to Him. So there was in reality fulfilled what Isaiah and the prophets foretold concerning Christ, that He was *nazir*, holy, and *noseri*, or *Nasaræus*, flourishing with all virtue and grace.

Consequently, the name of Nazarene, which the Jews and others gave to Christ by way of reproach, is most illustrious, yea, a note and mark of the true Messiah; for by this very title the prophets indicated and glorified Messiah.

Tropologically, Christ is a Nazarene, *i.e.*, separated from the world and consecrated to God, flourishing with all virtues, and the origin, father, and prince of the Nazarenes, that is, the religious, who despise the world, and dedicate themselves wholly to God, that they may flourish in virtues, according to those words in Lam. iv. 7. “Her Nazarites were fairer than snow, whiter than milk; they were more ruddy than ancient ivory, brighter than sapphires.” (Vulg.) Where see my Comment.

Salmeron adds, Nazarene is the same as Samaritan, *i.e.*, a keeper (for נצר *natsar*, is to *keep, to guard*) namely of men; according to those words of Job, “What shall I do unto thee, O thou keeper of men?” (Vulg.) And Psalm cxxi., “Behold He shall neither slumber nor sleep, that keepeth Israel.” So, too, Francis Lucas says, Nazarene, that is, keeper, preserver, defender. By Nazareth, therefore, the Blessed Virgin is represented, of whom Christ the Nazarene was born. For she was kept from original sin, from the shame of conception, from the corruption and pain of child-birth, and from turning to dust after death. For the body of the Virgin was not resolved into ashes after her death, as is the lot of other bodies; but it was, together with her soul, taken up into heaven. These things are true, but rather symbolical than literal.



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For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.*

Matthew writes his gospel account to give us the view of Jesus as the King. He records Jesus' authority in calling the disciples: "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), and he also records more than any of the others about Jesus' teaching concerning God's kingdom and heavenly rule.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

Continuation of Matthew 2: 16-

Verse 16- *Then Herod perceiving that he was deluded by the wise men, was exceeding angry: and sending killed all the men and children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof.*

When Herod saw that the wise men did not return, he supposed that they were under a delusion, and had not found Christ, and were therefore ashamed to return. But when he heard of the things which had happened at the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, on the 2nd of February, how holy Simeon and Anna had openly professed Him to be the Messiah—that is, “a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of the people of Israel”—he then saw that he had been mocked by the Magi, and belched forth his burning wrath upon all the children. For, as S. Chrysostom says, “Unquenchable is the anger which jealousy of the rival of a crown enkindles. Like a wounded wild beast, it tears in pieces whatever meets the eye, as if the cause of his wounds.”

preserved in the Basilica of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem, in Rome, *נצרי* *notseri* is written with *tsade*, not *zain*. So says Pagninus, from ocular inspection. So, too, the Syrian and Arabic versions write *Nazarene with tsade*. And the modern Jewish Rabbis call Christians *Notserim*—i.e., *Nazarenes*, writing the word with *tsade*.

I myself have often seen the title of the Cross at Rome and carefully inspected it, but the letters are so worn away that I have never been able to see that the Hebrew inscription has *tsade*. On the contrary, *zain*, not *tsade*, seemed to me to be the letter. Bosius (lib. I *de Cruce triumph.*) has a perfectly exact impression of the superscription of the Cross. Examine it, and you will agree with me. Besides, this title was written by Pilate the Roman governor, or his Roman servants, who had little knowledge of Hebrew, and could not tell whether Nazarene were spelt with a *tsade* or a *zain*, and certainly would not care for the distinction between them. Various commentators, as Rabanus, Salmeron, Jansen, &c., write Nazarene with a *tsade*, and translate it *flourishing*, but most of them seem to have been influenced by Pagninus, who said that he had found *notseri* spelt with a *tsade* on the title of the Cross.

Both opinions may be conjoined and reconciled with each other by saying that if you look strictly to the letters you will find *נצר* *nezzer* with *zain*—that is to say, *holiness, consecration, crown*; yet that there is an allusion *tonetser* with *tsade*—i.e., *a shoot, a flower*—for these two letters are somewhat akin both in form and sound, and are occasionally interchanged both with one another and with some other Hebrew letters, as appears in the conjugation *Hispael*. (See Bellarmine's Hebrew Grammar.) Wherefore the Psalmist conjoins the two (Ps. cxxxi. 18), saying: “My sanctification (*nazer*) shall flourish (*nazarene*) upon him.” (Vulg.) So also S. Jerome says, “*Nazaræus* is interpreted *holy*.” All Scripture testifies that the Lord shall be holy. We are able also to use, in another sense, what is written in the same words in the Prophet Isaiah according to the Hebrew verity, “Behold a rod shall come forth from the root of Jesse, and a Nazarene shall arise out of his root.” Lastly, as in their letters, so also in their significations these two words are closely connected; for He who is *Nazarene*—i.e., separated from earthly pleasures—is likewise *Nasaræus*—i.e., flourishing with virtues. Hence some derive the Greek *ἅγιος*, *holy* from *ἄ*, *not* and *γή* the earth; for he who is separated from the earth, cultivates heavenly things, and is holy.

Matthew adds this, because Nazareth was a small and despised town. Hence the name of Nazarene seemed both to Jews and Gentiles vile and mean, so that on account of it many were kept back from Christ, and from acknowledging Him as Messiah. Whence Nathanael said to Philip, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” And Julian the Apostate was wont, in contempt, to call Christ “the Galilæan,” and “the Nazarene.” When he was struck by a dart from heaven, and was about to die, he cried, “Thou hast conquered, O Galilæan, thou hast conquered.”

Symmachus, *untouched*. From these, therefore, the name Nazaraeus signifies either holy, or separate, or untouched. But some of the ancient priests, who were anointed with the prepared oil, which was called by Moses nazer, were named Nazarites from this word *nazer*. But our Saviour and Lord, by His own nature possessing in Himself holiness and separation, neither having need of any human anointing, still obtained the title of a Nazarite among men; not as though He were so called from any oil named *nazer*, but from the city Nazareth, where He was brought up among His own relations, forasmuch as He was a man. Christ, therefore, was a Nazarite, *i.e.*, separated from other men, sanctified, consecrated, and crowned High Priest, Legislator, Teacher, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of the Universe.

The letter which is employed favours this opinion. The Evangelists always wrote *Nazaræus*, or *Nazareus*, with the letter z, which is the one which occurs in the Hebrew *nezer* and *nazir*. For if Nazarene is derived from נֶזֶר *nezer*, with *tsade*, so as to signify flourishing, it ought to be written *Nasarene* with an s. In all other names the Hebrew letter *tsade* is represented by an s (in the Vulg.), as in Bosra, Asor (see Joshua, chaps. xii. and xv., where some suppose Asor to be Nazareth), Melchisedech, Sabaoth, &c. On the other hand the Hebrew *zain* is translated by our z, as appears from Zabulon, Zacharias, Beelzebub, &c.

Let us add, it is more worthy the dignity of Christ that He should be called *Nazarene*, with the letter *zain*, *i.e.*, *holy*, than *Nasarene*, with *tsade*, that is, *flourishing*. For נֶזֶר *nazer*, *i.e.*, *holiness*, the consecration and crown of Christ, *quà* man, was the hypostatic union, or rather the actual Godhead of the **WORD**, which crowned, sanctified, separated to Itself, united, and consecrated the whole Humanity of Christ. Lastly, it is in favour of this opinion that S. Matthew says, “which was spoken by the *prophets*,” not by the *prophet*; “by which he shows,” says S. Jerome, “that he was not quoting the words of one passage of Scripture, but the sense of several.”

2. It is the opinion of others that Christ is called a Nasarene from נֶזֶר *neser*, with *tsade*—*i.e.*, *flourishing*, from *flower*—or, rather, *germinating*, from *germ*. For both Aquila and Theodotion, according to S. Jerome, render *neser* in Isaiah xi. 2 by *germen*. In Isaiah xi. 1, the Vulg. has, “A flower shall rise up out of his root,” translating the Hebrew *neser* by *flower*. Nazarene, therefore, is the same as flourishing or germinating, growing into a great and glorious tree, and producing abundant fruit.

The first reason is that Christ is elsewhere called צֶמַח *tsemach*—*i.e.*, *germen*, which the Vulg. renders *Oriens*, *the dawn*, or *daystar*, as though arising out of the earth. (See Zech. vi. 12; iii. 8.) For Christ sprung from the Virgin as an undefiled *germen*, or plant, and pure from every stain of sin. So He flourished with every virtue, and scattered the odour of His sweetness far and wide. Whence S. Ambrose (*lib. de Spirit. Sanct.*, c. 5) says, “When a flower is plucked, it does not lose its smell; when it is bruised, it increases it.” So, when Christ was bruised in His Passion, He the more manifested the power of His Divinity and His grace.

The second reason is that in the inscription placed on the Cross of Christ, which is

Herod’s inordinate ambition for retaining and augmenting the kingdom of Judæa drove him to this horrible infanticide. He knew from the Scribes that the time of Messiah was near at hand, because the sceptre of Judah was transferred to himself, an alien. And he himself was ambitious of the title, and told the Jews that he was their promised Messiah. And he built them that magnificent Temple, rivalling Solomon’s, of which the Jews said to Christ, *Six and forty years was this temple in building, and wilt thou raise it up in three days?* But vainly did he covet the name of Messiah; for Messias was to spring out of Judah, and was the promised son and heir of David. But Herod was sprung from the Idumæans, who were the Jews’ constant enemies. Herod then, becoming aware that the true Messiah was born, and had been indicated to the Magi by a star, destined Him to death. And when he learnt from the Scribes that He was born in Bethlehem, but knew not in what family, or house, he slew all the infants of Bethlehem. But see here the just judgment of God, by which it came to pass that Herod, by that very act, confirmed the kingdom to Christ, and took it away from himself. For, as a punishment of his wickedness, Herod slew his own sons, who would have succeeded him in his kingdom, and in the same year, shortly after this massacre of the infants and his son Antipater, he himself was eaten of worms, and died just before the Passover. Again, Christ escaped the massacre of the infants by flying into Egypt; and from thence, by degrees, His name, and kingdom, and glory increased. Yea, the infants slain by Herod out of hatred of the Messiah, by their very death attested that Christ was born.

Tropologically, Herod is the devil, who strives to cut off infants—that is, those who are weak in faith and virtue, also the first inspirations from God, and good thoughts, before they have become strong and increased. “Whence if he slay the little ones,” says S. Leo (*Serm. 2 de Epiph.*), “he appears to himself to kill Jesus, which indeed he strives to do without ceasing, whilst he endeavours to deprive those newly born again of the Holy Spirit, and to kill, as it were, the infancy of tender faith.”

From two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. The Greek is, ἀπὸ διετίας—*i.e.*, *from two years*. The Syriac and Arabic give this turn to it, *from the son of two years*. The Egyptian, *from two years and under*. Thus, also, the Persian version. For, *diligently inquired*, the Greek has ῥκριβωσε, *accurately searched out*.

You will ask why he slew all the children under two years old, especially since many are of opinion that Herod slew them immediately after the departure of the Magi—as soon, that is, as he had heard of Christ’s Presentation in the Temple. And this was before the Passover, when Christ was three months old? Jansen, Maldonatus, Baronius, and others reply, that he did it out of his intense fear of losing his kingdom through Messiah, and so extended the three months from Christ’s birth to two years. If you

object that Matthew says this slaughter was made from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the Magi, they answer that the expression, *according to the time*, &c., must be referred, not to the words, *from two years old*, but to, *from under*, so as to signify that Herod made, not a beginning, but only a termination of slaughtering the children, *according to the time which he had inquired of the Magi*, that, indeed, he should not further kill infants who were born subsequent to those thirteen days which had elapsed after the appearance of the star which indicated the birth of Christ; meaning that Herod slew all the infants from two years old because he was very sagacious and cruel; and below two years old, according to the time which he had carefully inquired of the Magi, because he excepted only those from slaughter who were born after the time at which the star had declared the birth of Christ; for he felt secure that none of those who were born after the star could be Messiah, and give him cause of apprehension.

But it seems scarcely credible that one so ambitious and fearful as Herod should have wished to kill infants born two years before the appearing of the star, and yet have spared those who were born a few days after its appearance, when there would be an equal or greater reason for suspecting that Christ might be amongst these last, especially in the case of such a very suspicious person as Herod. Whence Bede, the Gloss, Dionysius, and Barradi think that he killed the little infants who were born after as well as before the appearing of the star. But why did he slay infants born almost two years before the star appeared? for there could be no suspicion that Christ was born amongst them. So that to kill them would have been not merely inhuman, but altogether foolish and brutish, and could have had no other effect than to expose him to universal infamy and execration—yea, to raise up every one in arms against him as an intolerable tyrant, and more like a wild beast than a human being.

I maintain, therefore, that not immediately, nor even in the same year in which the Magi came, did Herod put the infants to death; but in the following, or second year from the birth of Christ. And so the meaning is, that Herod slew the children *from two years old*, that is, *who were two years old and under*,—that is, those who had not yet reached that age; but who were a year, or so many months, or days old. That is, he slew all who had been born within two years from the rising of the star, *according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men*. Again, the expression, according to the time &c., might more strictly and precisely be taken thus: Herod did not take the whole time of the two years, but drew his conclusions from when the star appeared, which was the period whence the rising of the star began, but which was not completed. For Herod slew the children in the second year from the rising of the star, about the time of the Passover, or when Christ was about a year and three months old. Wherefore, he did not slay those who were born much before the fifteen months since which the star appeared. This is the force of the expression, *he diligently inquired*, in order that he might slay only those who had been born about the time when the star appeared, and not those who were born much before or much after, that he might not, with uselessly barbarous cruelty, slay more than might be necessary to secure the death of Christ.

So that, *from two years old and under*, &c., means the same thing as *those who were*

“Moreover,” says Rabanus, “Galilee is interpreted *migration*, Nazareth a *flower*, because the more earnestly the Church passes over to heavenly things, the more she abounds in the flowers of virtues.

That it might be fulfilled—a Nazarene. The name of Nazareth does not once occur in the Old Testament. Hence we are unable to tell whether it were written in Hebrew with *zain* or *tsade*. If with the former, Nazareth means *sanctified, separate, consecrated*; if with *tsade*, *full of flowers, or guarded*. The question arises, by what prophet, when, and wherefore was Christ called a Nazarene? There are several opinions; two are most probable:?

1. Christ was called a Nazarene, in Hebrew *nazir*, or *nozeri*, written with *zain*, meaning *separate, holy, consecrate, crowned, religious*, because Christ, as man, being separated from every other thing, was hypostatically and wholly united to the **WORD**. For the word *nazar* signifies to *separate, to consecrate, to crown*. Wherefore the religious, under the old law, who separated themselves from wine and from the world, and consecrated themselves to God, were called Nazarites. (See Numb. vi. 2, seq.) But that Christ would be holy, and consecrated to God, all the prophets foretold, especially Daniel (ix. 24): “The Holy of Holies—*i.e.*, Christ—shall be anointed.” (Vulg.) Thus, too, Samson, who was a type of Christ, was a Nazarite. (Judg. xiii. 7.) So, too, was Joseph. (Gen. xlix. 2.) And as Joseph, after his imprisonment, was made lord of Egypt, so Christ, after His death, was made lord of the universe. So S. Ambrose and Ruperti.

These Nazarites, however, are called in Greek *Ναζαραῖοι*, written with *alpha* (*Nazaræi*); but Christ is always called *Ναζωραῖος*, (Nazoraëus), written with *omega*, to distinguish him from the Nazarites, because he was not a Nazarite by vow, like them, but was called *Nazaræus*, from his country, Nazareth. Christ drank wine, which was forbidden to the Nazarites by their vow. The above is the explanation of S. Jerome on this passage, and of Eusebius (lib. 7, *de Demonstrat.* c. 2, *Dem.* 5), where he cites Levit. xxi. 12, concerning the Aaronic priest, who was a type of Christ: “Neither shall he go forth out of the holy place, because the oil of the holy anointing of his God is upon him.” Instead of *holy*, as qualifying *anointing*, the Hebrew has *nezar, i.e., consecration, or sanctification* with the oil of the anointing of his God. The index of Hebrew words usually found at the end of our Bibles, and Paul of Burgos, think that the passage which is here cited is Psalm cxxxi. 18: “Upon him shall my sanctification flourish.” (Vulg. Heb. nizri, which S. Jerome translates *his diadem*.) Whence also the golden plate affixed to the pontifical tiara, on which was inscribed, *Holiness to the Lord*, is called *nezor, i.e., a crown or diadem of holiness*. (Ex. xxix. 6.) It was a type, yea, an index of Christ of Nazareth, holy and crowned. To this the Apostle alludes (Heb. ii. 9): “We see Jesus, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour.” On which see my comment.

Eusebius says, the LXX translate *nazer* by *holy*; Aquila has *separation*;

together for the possession of his kingdom. Augustus entrusted the settlement of the dispute to Caius Cæsar his grandson by his daughter Julia, who decided as follows—that neither disputant should succeed to the kingdom, but that it should be divided into four tetrarchies, whose rulers should be tetrarchs, not kings. In pursuance of this he assigned Judæa to Archelaus, Galilee to Antipas, Trachonitis to their third brother, Philip, Abilene to Lysanias. This is clear from Luke iii. 1. When, therefore, S. Matthew says, *Archelaus reigned*, you must not understand that he was a king, or had the title of a king, but of a tetrarch, or toparch, but yet with the hope of the kingdom and the kingly name, if he conducted himself well, according to the promise of Augustus Cæsar.

After Archelaus had reigned as tetrarch for nine years, he was sent into exile for his bad government, thirty-seven years after the battle of Actium, and seven before the death of Augustus. So Josephus, Eusebius, Scaliger, &c.

After Archelaus was exiled, Augustus appointed governors of Judæa, who ruled it in his name. There were three of those who presided over Judæa during the seven years which elapsed before the death of Augustus. The first was Coponius, who, together with Quirinus, prefect of Syria, confiscated the riches of Archelaus; the second was M. Ambinius; the third was Annius Rufus.

From these facts much light is thrown upon the narratives of Ss. Matthew and Luke. And, in the first place, it is clear why Matthew says that Joseph turned aside into Galilee from fear of Archelaus, reigning in Judæa. It was lest he, following in the steps of his father Herod, should seek to slay Christ, as the King of the Jews. In the second place, we see why Christ only went up to the temple in Judæa when He was twelve years old: Archelaus had been then deprived of the tetrarchy, and driven into exile. In Archelaus the race of Herod ceased to rule in Judæa, and were succeeded by Roman governors, from whom Christ had nothing to fear, for they knew Him not, and had not heard even His name.

Ver. 23.—*And he came and dwelt*, &c. S. Mark (i. 24), following the Latins, has *Ναζαρηνός*; the other Evangelists write *Ναζαράιος*. Adrichomius (*Descr. Terræ Sanctæ*, p. 241, num. 73) gives the following account of Nazareth, which he has collected out of S. Jerome, Eusebius, Brochard, and others:—“Nazareth, which is interpreted a *flower*, is a fair and flourishing city of Galilee, not far from Capharnaum. It is built upon a mountain, which it girds like a crown. It is two leagues from Mount Tabor, and three days’ journey from Jerusalem. Here Blessed Mary, the Flower of Virgins, was born; here Christ, our Lord and Saviour, our glory and our crown, like a flower of the field, as Jerome says, was conceived and brought up in all virtues, and lived for four-and-twenty years. Hence this was His own and His father’s city; hence, also, He was called *Nazarenus*, or *Nazaræus*, and a *Galilæan*; hence, too, we who now are called Christians were anciently called Nazarenes and Galilæans, as terms of reproach.”

fifteen months old. That was the time of the appearance of the star, and it continued for thirteen days, during which it went before the Magi to Bethlehem. Herod, therefore, would only seem to have slain the infants who were about fifteen months of age. For he believed the wise men, that Christ had been born at the time when his birth had been indicated by the star, and neither much before nor yet much after. So that he did not desire that any should be slain except such as were born about the time of the star’s appearance. And hence we may gather that the expression, *from two years old and under*, should be taken, not disjunctively, but unitedly, as when we say, “Two and three are five;” “All the planets are seven,” &c.

That this murder of the Innocents took place, not in the third month, but after the commencement of the second year, or about fifteen months from the birth of Christ, is the common opinion of Eusebius (in his *Chronicle*), Epiphanius (*Hæres.* 30), S. Augustine (*Serm. de Epiph.*), Encherius, Cedrinus, S. Anselm, Haymo, Hugo Victor, S. Thomas, &c. But some of these have not correctly distinguished either the rising of the star from the birth of Christ (for they say that it appeared to the Magi two years before Christ’s birth, as Ss. Augustine and Chrysostom); or the birth of Christ and the appearance of the star from the adoration of the Magi; for they say that on account of the length of the journey, they arrived at Bethlehem, and worshipped Christ there, two years after His birth. So S. Epiphanius (lib. 2, *Hæres.* 30, *contra Ebionæos*), and the Imperfect Author; for it is far more probable that the star arose at the same time that Christ was born, that it might be, as it were, an indicator and standard-bearer of that event, and that the Magi came to Bethlehem in the same year in which the birth of Christ took place,—indeed thirteen days afterwards; and that Herod put off the infanticide, which he had already planned in his mind, until the year following, for reasons which I shall assign presently. The obvious meaning of S. Matthew’s narrative, and especially the expression, *from two years old*, require this meaning. Also the number of events which happened after the Adoration, and before the Flight into Egypt, require the same sense; for after the departure of the Magi, Christ was presented in the Temple on the 2nd of February. After that He went and dwelt in Nazareth, and from that place fled into Egypt, as is clear from S. Luke (ii. 22-39). And all this would occupy many weeks, or rather months.

What Nicephorus (lib. I, C. 14) and Cedrinus say is in favour of this opinion. They say that S. John Baptist, on account of this persecution, fled into the wilderness when he was in his second year, that is,—when he was not quite two years old. For the Baptist was born six months before Christ; so that, at the time of the Infanticide, he was a year and nine months old. Whence Nicephorus relates: “When John was a year and a half old, he was preserved in safety, with his mother Elizabeth, in a cave in the mountains, probably to escape the bloody hand of Herod.”

Again, Macrobius says, not from two years old, but under two years, the

infants were slain by Herod. Those who were fifteen months would be under two years old. In addition to this, Lucius Dexter says, in his Chronicle: "In the third year of Christ (**U.R.C.** 754) Herod slays all the male children in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood." It was the third year from the birth of Christ by beginning the year with the 1st of January.

You may ask why Herod put off the Infanticide until the second year from the rising of the star and the birth of Christ. It is answered:—

1. That he might the better, by degrees, inform himself of the birth, person, parentage, and dwelling of Christ. So the Gloss. Again, because he sought by all means to avoid the imputation of such hateful cruelty, by finding and killing Christ alone. S. Matthew appears to intimate this (ver. 13). so S. Augustine (*lib. de Consens. Evang. 2, c. 12*).

2. Because, as Euthymius, S. Thomas, and Lyra show, Herod, towards the close of his life, being accused by the Arabians before Augustus Cæsar, that emperor three times refused even to speak to his ambassadors, although at length with wonderful art he appeased Cæsar, as Josephus relates, *Ant. lib. 17, c. 7, &c.* And then he sought and obtained permission from Augustus, as it would seem, to slay the children; in which Augustus deserves no small blame for giving this permission. So Ruperti, *lib. 2 de Vict., c. 2*.

3. He delayed the massacre in order to find out a sure way of killing all the infants, that none might be hidden by their mothers and so escape. Hence Abulensis thinks that Herod, in the first place, ordered the little boys to be enrolled with the name and age of each; and, when he had gathered them together, slew them all; but that he gathered them, not in one place, but in the various villages or districts, to each of which he sent executioners to seek out, gather together, and slay. Such a thing might be easily done amongst the Jews, because they kept very exact records of their genealogies, that it might be known that Messiah was born, according to Jacob's prophecy of the tribe of Judah. Hence, when any child was circumcised, his name and parents, and the date of his birth, were set down, just as parish priests register the children who are baptized.

S. Antoninus thinks that Herod instituted a feast for boys, and ordered all the mothers to bring all their children who were about two years of age, as though they were to receive a reward.

Moreover Herod obtained leave from Augustus to put his own three sons, Alexander, Aristobulus, and Antipater to death. Whence he slew the first two named some time previously, and Antipater about five days before his own death, which happened, says Josephus, at the Passover, in the thirty-seventh year of his reign. (*Ant. lib. 17, cc. 10 & II.*) And it was then he slew the young children. This we learn from Macrobius who, amongst other anecdotes of Augustus, relates this (*Saturnal. lib. 2, c. 10*):

Epiph.), "To this end God permitted Herod to slay the infants, that He might cause them to triumph over Herod." Lastly, S. Cyprian (*lib. 4, Epist. 6 ad Thibarit.*) says, "An age not suitable for battle was made fit for a crown. The Son of God suffered that He might make us sons of God; and the Son of Man wills not to suffer, that He may continue to be the Son of God."

Verse 19- *Now when Herod was dead, &c.* (verses 19, 20). Herod died a few days after the slaughter of Antipater, as Josephus says, and so but a few days after the murder of the Innocents, as is clear from Macrobius. Hence Christ does not appear to have remained in Egypt more than two years. For He did not go there more than one year before Herod's death; and after Herod's death, when Archelaus his son had been to Rome and returned, Christ came back from Egypt, as the Gospel here states. Thus Onuphrius Pavinus, (in his *Fasti*), and before him S. Epiphanius (*Hæres. 78*); although Baronius thinks that Christ returned from Egypt in the ninth year of His age.

They are dead, &c. They, viz., Herod and his sons Aristobulus, Alexander, and Antipater, who, it would appear, entered into a conspiracy with the Scribes and Pharisees against their father, and by consequence against Messiah, and were by Herod put to death.

Verses 21, 22. *Who arose, and took the child &c.* Observe, Archelaus reigned as tetrarch, not as king. The angel had said to Joseph, *Go into the land of Israel.* Joseph understood Judæa, because that was the most important part of the land of Israel, and therein was the temple. Thither, therefore, he thought of going to render God thanks for his happy return, especially because, by God's command, all the Hebrew males were commanded to go up to the temple thrice a year. Whence St. Augustine (*lib. 2 de Consensu. Evang. c. 9*): "The angel does not express into what part, that he may return to him again, when he is in doubt; but because he had not told him expressly, Joseph understood Judæa, the more worthy part of the kingdom: for he thought that with such a boy he might only dwell at Jerusalem. But the angel meant Galilee."

Moreover, Joseph turned aside into Galilee, although he knew that Herod Antipas, the brother of Archelaus, ruled there. He did so, both because Archelaus was more ambitious and cruel than Antipas, as because the infant slaughter of Herod of Ascalon, the father of Archelaus and Antipas, had taken place in Judæa, namely, in Bethlehem. Wherefore Archelaus would remember it, and would easily perceive that when Christ came back to Judæa He had escaped the slaughter, and would therefore again seek to put Him to death.

Fully to enter into this history *ab ovo*, as they say, consult Josephus, *Ant. Lib. 10, c. 10, et seq.* When Herod died, in the thirty-seventh year of his reign, two of his surviving sons—Archelaus, and Herod Antipas, who clothed Christ in His Passion with a white robe, to mock Him—contended

in mind and body. Christ loveth infancy, the mistress of humility, the rule of innocence, the pattern of meekness. Christ loves infancy, which guides the manners of elders; unto which He directs the years of old men, and inclines to His own example those whom He would lift on high to the eternal kingdom." And previously: "The whole victory of the Saviour, which overcame both the devil and the world, was conceived and completed by humility."

Verses 17, 18.—*Then was fulfilled, &c. They are not, because indeed, as far as the body was concerned they perished, in that they were slain by Herod; but as to their souls, they were carried into eternity, says S. Hilary.*

I have explained this passage in my Commentary on Jeremiah xxxi. 15, which see. S. Augustine graphically portrays this weeping of the mothers (*Serm. I de Innocent.*), and thus concludes: "The lamentation of the mothers was mingled with the oblation of the little ones, as they passed into heaven."

Tropologically, Rachel, the sheep, as the word signifies in Hebrew, bewails the death of her lambs; but the angels rejoice, yea, even the little ones, because their souls passed to the society of the angels.

Whence S. Augustine (*Serm. 3 de Innocent.*): "Behold, the profane enemy could never have benefited the little ones by kindness as much as he did by hatred. And wherefore? Because they received the dignity of eternal life before they received the use of time present." Therefore, in being born, they died unto the world; and by dying, they began to live in heaven. To these infants are most appropriate those words of S. Paul: "We are made a spectacle (Gr. *θεατρὸν, a theatre*) to the world, and to angels, and to men." (1 Cor. iv. 9.) That is to say, in the circus, in the amphitheater, we are seen of all. We are *βιοθάνατοι*,—i.e. we are exposed to gladiators and to wild beasts.

Wherefore consider: by this infanticide God would teach us, as by a scenic representation, that the whole of a Christian's life, from childhood unto death, is perpetual persecution, the cross and death; and that the fortitude and courage of a Christian consist rather in enduring hardness than in doing hard things; in constant patience than in fighting: for it is more difficult to suffer than to act and fight. "To act bravely," saith one, "is the part of a Roman; to suffer bravely is the part of a Christian." When Christ suffered for us, He said, "I have given my body to the strikers, and my cheeks to them that plucked them. I have not turned away my face from them that rebuked me, and spit upon me." (Isaiah i. 6.)

These little ones in their turn, for Christ's sake, gave their limbs to be mangled by the executioners. A Christian may do the same, and for God's sake give his body for a prey, give it unto death, unto labours, unto torments of every kind. Thus did S. Eusebius, Bishop of Vercelli, who writes to his flock, "I have given my body to the Arians for a prey." By them he was tormented, and became a glorious martyr of Christ, and a defender of His Godhead, even unto death. Truly saith S. Fulgentius (*de*

"When he heard that the king of the Jews had ordered the boys in Syria under two years old to be slain, and that his own son had been killed, he said, 'It were better to be Herod's pig than his son, because the Jews do not eat pork.'"

From what has been said, it may be gathered that the infants were slain about the time of the Passover, or about fifteen months from the birth of Christ. The Church, however, celebrates their festival at Christmas, because they were killed for Christ's sake, that she may thus, as it were, magnify and decorate the Festival of the Nativity. Barradi, however, and Emmanuel Sa., think that they were slain on the anniversary of the very day on which the Church keeps their festival. They were slain when Christ was in the second year of His age, in spring and in the month of March, when their ancestress, Rachel, had died (Gen. xxxv. 16). It was about the same time that he ordered his own son Antipater to be put to death. He also cut off the Sanhedrim, as the great Council of the Jews is called, together with many of the Pharisees, because they would not acknowledge him to be king. The rest were compelled to take an oath of allegiance. In doing these things, he was aided by his father-in-law, Simon the son of Boethus, whom he had made high priest. And all was with the connivance of Quintilius Varro, the governor of Syria, a friend of Herod's. Whence he was not afraid to shut up all the chief of the Jews in prison, and would have put them to death if he had lived. For just before his own death, he ordered his sister Salome, and her husband, Alexas, to kill them, in order, as he said, "that the Jews may wail at my death, whether they like it or not, since they must weep for their own friends." But Salome, who was of a milder disposition, set them all at liberty as soon as Herod was dead. So Josephus, &c.

Some think from the Apocalypse (xiv. 1) that the infants who were slain by Herod were 144,000, But S. John is speaking of the Virgins who shall resist the lust and persecution of Antichrist, even unto death and martyrdom. Neither is it credible that in so small a district as that of Bethlehem there were 144,000 boys under two years old. What the Abyssinians have in their Canon of the Mass, that the number was 14,000 is rather more probable; of this opinion are the Jesuit Salmeron, Franc. Lucas, and Gerebrard (lib. 2, *Chronolog. A.C. III.*). This last adds, that the Greeks give the same number in their Kalendar. And yet it is hard to suppose that there could be 14,000 infants in so small a place, more than are to be found in Rome, or Naples, or Milan, or other large cities.

Note, in the first place, that the infants who were slain by Herod, through hatred of Christ, were true martyrs, and as such are honoured by the Church, and their Festival kept. And the same may be said of all infants who are killed out of hatred to the Faith, through the unmerited and bountiful disposition of God.

Whence it follows that martyrdom justifies *ex opere operato*, for by it these

little ones who had not yet been circumcised were cleansed from original sin and justified; and the same thing was wrought which baptism worketh. So the Fathers and Doctors, *passim*, and indeed the whole Church. (See S. Bernard, *Serm. de Innocent.*) Hence Doctors teach that there are three classes of martyrs. To the first belong those who, in deed as well as will, are martyrs. Such are adults who voluntarily accept death from a tyrant for the sake of Christ. The second class are those who are martyrs only in deed; such as infants who are slain for Christ. The third are those who are martyrs only in will—who desire martyrdom as S. Francis desired it. With this object in view he sent to the sultan of Egypt; but he, seeing him to be a holy man, would not kill him. Thus he missed the laurel crown of actual martyrdom.

Note, secondly, the wonderful providence of God, whereby, first, He punished the Bethlehemites by the slaughter of their children, because they themselves would not receive the Blessed Virgin, and her Son Jesus with hospitality, but compelled her to go into a stable, and there bring forth. Secondly, because by means of this massacre, He decorated the boys themselves, who were slain, with the laurel of martyrdom. Thirdly, because He brought about that Christ should escape by flight into Egypt, and should through this slaughter become better known to the world. By this “it was prophetically declared that the Church of God should increase by the cruel fury of her persecutors; since by the punishments and deaths of the blessed martyrs, whilst Christians were supposed to be diminished in numbers, they were augmented by example.” (S. Leo, *Serm. de Epiph.*) “And the blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians,” as Tertullian observes in the end of his *Apology*.

Moreover, Christ as He was man, although an infant, had the use of reason. And when the WORD, which was united to Him, revealed to Him this slaughter of the little children for His sake, He grieved, because of the deep sympathy of His tenderness, and suffered with them and their parents. But in spirit He exulted over their glory and martyrdom. And thus He offered them to God the Father, as the first-fruits of His Advent, and the earliest oblations of His grace.

Note, thirdly, God’s just vengeance upon Herod for his murder of the infants, and as far as in him lay of Christ Himself. For, five days after the masacre, he himself breathed out his cruel soul; being smitten with fever, a cough, dysentery, dropsy, gout, consumption, the lousy disease, putrefaction, asthma, and such an intolerable stench, that he endeavoured to lay violent hands upon himself. His sons were not allowed to reign as kings, but were only tetrarchs, and perished miserably. Also his entire posterity, most numerous as it was, became, with few exceptions, entirely extinct within a hundred years, as Josephus relates (*Ant. lib 17, c. 8, &c.*), who adds that all men were of opinion that it was the effect of the just vengeance of God.

Allegorically, the infants slain by Herod at the Passover, as it were Paschal lambs, were a type of Christ, who, thirty-two years afterwards, was mocked by Herod, a descendant of this Herod the infanticide, and crucified by Pilate at the season of the Passover, and who offered Himself to God the Father, as it were a Lamb and a Paschal Victim, for the salvation of the world. Hear S. Augustine (*Serm. 8 de Sanctis*): “When Christ was born, grief began, not in heaven, but on earth. To mothers is proclaimed

lamentation, to angels exultation, to infants translation. He is God who is born. To Him innocents are due as victims, for He came to condemn the wickedness of the world. Angels ought to be immolated, because the Lamb, who taketh away the sins of the world is about to be crucified. But the mother-sheep lament, because they lose their lambs bleating without speech: a glorious martyrdom, though a cruel spectacle.”

And Prudentius, in his hymn. says:—

“You, tender flock of lambs, we sing, First victims slain for Christ your King: Before the Altar’s heavenly ray, With martyr palms and crowns ye play.”

Symbolically, the children who were slain by Herod in the springtime were like vernal flowers put forth in the country of Bethlehem by the warmth of the rays of the Sun of righteousness, and offered to Jesus of Nazareth as the Flourishing One. Whence Prudentius in his Epiphany hymn, and the Church in her office, sings:—

“All hail ye infant martyr flowers, Cut off in life’s first dawning hours; As rosebuds snapt in tempest strife, When Herod sought your Saviour’s life.”

And S. Augustine (*Serm. 2 de Innocent.*): “How happily born were they whom eternal life met on the threshold of existence.” And (*Serm. 3*): “Rightly are these Innocents called the flowers of the Martyrs, whom, in the mid-winter of unbelief, a hoar frost as it were of persecution caused to bloom like the primal buds of the Church.”

And S. Chrysostom (*Serm. 4*) says: “Infancy, unconscious of suffering, bore away the palms and crowns of martyrdom. True martyrs of grace! they confess without voice; knowing it not they fight; ignorant of it, they conquer; unconscious, they die, they bear away the palms, they seize the crowns.”

We see that God made these little ones first to triumph, then to live. He adorns them with crowns before He bestows upon them perfect members.

Tropologically, Christ loves infants, that is, the little ones and the lowly; and raises such to the perfection of grace, that is, to martyrdom. Hence He Himself says, “Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Hear S. Leo (*Serm. 7, in Epiph.*): “Wherefore my beloved brethren, the whole discipline of Christian wisdom consisteth, not in a copious flow of words, nor in cunning disputation, nor in the desire of praise and glory, but in true and voluntary humility, which the Lord Jesus Christ, from His mother’s womb even unto the death of the Cross, both chose and taught instead of every kind of strength.” And shortly afterwards: “He loveth infancy, which at the first He assumed, both