

# LECTIONARY HOMILETICS

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## INSTRUCTIONS: EXEGESIS

### CONTENT

- 1) This material needs to answer the basic exegetical questions involving structure, literary setting, meaning, and purpose but should not be a highly technical treatment. Your readers will be looking for a basic understanding of the text and homiletical “fiber” for their sermons.
- 2) Although there will be a homiletical section, please share analogies, stories, illustrations and ways you might want to preach the lesson (though your main purpose is exegetical material). The majority of readers are preachers preparing sermons.
- 3) You are asked to concentrate on one of the four lessons. It may be helpful to draw connections and parallels (if possible) between the gospel lesson(s) and the non-gospel lessons.
- 4) Remember that you are writing to an **ecumenical** audience. You may certainly reference movements within particular traditions, but be aware that your readership is broad-ranging.
- 5) Please use your unique background; however, avoid professional jargon. Draw on your knowledge of recent trends in scholarship, but make it accessible to the pastor in the pulpit.
- 6) Keep in mind the **liturgical season**.
- 7) Provide **proper documentation** for your sources (author, publisher, year, etc.). Do not submit copyrighted material; when quoting another source, be careful not to quote more than fifty words from any particular source. However, this “fifty-word rule” does not apply to smaller works (such as poems). In that case, only quote a *relatively small portion*. Also remember that *hymns are copyrighted*; quoting verses of hymns requires us to pay the copyright holder (which we are willing to do if a really good point is being made). Be *particularly careful* to provide full URLs (website addresses) when referring to online material.
- 8) Be parsimonious in your use of footnotes and quotations. Readers are interested in your thoughts and analysis.
- 9) Try to use language that reflects the value of all persons. Avoid the awkward constructions him/her, he/she, etc. Instead, consider using single gender examples or illustrations from real life, which include a multi-gendered presentation. If you are using a “clinical example,” please use a fictitious name.
- 10) Use active verbs whenever you can. Active verbs energize the reader and the listener.
- 11) Do not begin sentences with “And” and rarely begin a sentence with “But.”
- 12) Use complete sentences (subject + verb).
- 13) Essay length: 800 to 1000 words.

### FORMAT

- 1) Please send your essays on diskette along with a hard copy, or send as an e-mail attachment. If you cannot send an electronic version, your essays will be scanned which requires a **quality, double-spaced** hard (paper) copy.
- 2) The preferred word processing program is *MSWord* although *WordPerfect* is acceptable.
- 3) Page numbering can be used but do not use headers or footers.
- 4) Use an em-dash — not double hyphens — for emphasis. No space between words and—dash (In *Word* the em-dash is Ctrl [key] + Alt [key] + - [minus sign on numeric keypad]).
- 5) Italicize the titles of books, plays, magazines, etc. Do not underline. Songs, poems, and articles take quotation marks.
- 6) Use **one** space after a period, question mark, and colon.
- 7) Quotation marks go **after** punctuation at the end of a sentence, but inverted commas (single quotation marks) go **before** punctuation. “For instance, when ‘quoting within a quote’.” In notes and between parentheses, use brief abbreviations for books of the Bible with no periods. Example: Mk 2:1-17. In the text of your essay, spell out books of the Bible.
- 8) Use the following format for citing verses within parentheses. For a single verse: v. 18. For multiple verses: vv. 5-11.
- 9) Place all notes at end of each essay and *not* at the bottom of each page. Follow the basic format of these examples for books, plays, and magazines. Note p. for one page and pp. for multiple pages.

### NOTES

1. Annie Dillard, *Holy the Firm* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 45.
2. Thomas War, “Openness to All,” *Weavings*, Vol. XI, No. 4, pp. 21-25.

Please contact the office if you have any further questions.

# SAMPLE ESSAY #1

This piece originally appeared in the  
October-November 2003 issue of *Lectionary Homiletics*  
(October 26, 2003: Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, pp. 25-6).

## Exegesis

### *Job 42:1-6, 10-17*

**Job 42:1-6, 10-17 is best understood in** terms of the theme of the work as a whole, specifically the question of whether disinterested virtue is possible or not (1:6-12). Does humankind pursue goodness in order to gain God's blessing and avoid God's displeasure? Will adversity destroy Job's faith? (The source of this adversity is not the point in this post-exilic story of suffering, as is clearly signaled by the fact that once "the Satan" fulfills the roles of mocking God and Job [1:11] and of dismantling Job's life [1:13-2:8], he plays no further part in the drama. The point is how Job will respond to adversity.)

Catastrophe descends upon "blameless and upright" Job (1:13-2:8). The reader knows Job's afflictions are not Job's fault, but the three friends who arrive to give him counsel do not. In good order they speak from the wisdom tradition, assuring Job that God renders good for good, evil for evil. Their morally tidy answer offers at least the intended comfort of an obvious way out of woe. Job needs to repent.

Job protests. He rejects his friends' orthodox counsel. He has not caused his own suffering. The moral code of his community, *though* respectfully portrayed in the text and *though* it contains a considerable measure of truth (Ps 1; 2:11), fails to comprehend innocent suffering. The outrageous and lonely truth in *which* Job lives is that in fact horrific things do happen to the "blameless and upright," not just to the reprobate and debased (9:22-24). For much loss there is no reason. Can faith survive such loss (and the salt-in-the-wound solutions of the wisdom tradition)?

God addresses Job in chapters 40 and 41. Job's repentance follows immediately in the first section of chapter 42. The poetry of the Masoretic Text presents these two movements, God's address and Job's repentance, together as a single literary unit (40:6-42:6). In so doing, the Hebrew text

underscores the point that it is God's address that has provoked Job's change of heart. It is also significant that God's word to Job contains no mention whatsoever of relief or restoration. The divine initiative and revelation of God's sovereignty offered in the address of chapters 40 and 41, rather than the proverbial "patience" of Job or the presence or promise of restitution, constitutes the narrative's turning point and serves as the gracious source of Job's repentance quite without resolution of the question of his loss and suffering. The uncharacteristic brevity of Job's response in chapter 42 and the abruptness of his changed perspective further emphasize that his words, his new understanding, are dependent upon divine initiative.

Job's address in 42:1-6 is also his last statement in the narrative. The matter in the end has come to focus not on Job's vindication within his community or even on a resolution of the inner struggle between Job and his profound sense of wronged integrity. What matters most is the relationship between Job the blameless sufferer and God the sovereign of all creation. Human understandings and moral systems are dispossessed of any claim to ultimate horizon within the biblical text. The divine address has revealed that just as the morality of Job's friends has failed to fathom God's governance, so too has Job's honest lament failed to comprehend God's providence: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (38:4). Job, on behalf of countless others, has held out for nothing less than a word from the divine heart, and that, though it does not fit his expectations, is exactly what he has received.

The changed Job of chapter 42 is made possible by the theophany of chapters 38-41. The range of translations used for the initial verb of verse 42:6 may obscure this point. The nature or depth of Job's self-examination or recrimination ("I abhor my words" or "I despise myself") is not here in view. What is in view is the recreated relationship between God and Job created out of God's address. The Hebrew verb root used is best understood as meaning "melting" or "being undone," ("I am melted" or "I am undone"), and signals Job's

profoundly new relationship with the sovereign God rather than a declaration of self-abasement. Protestations of innocence and demands for vindication have been displaced. They were honest, and they played an indispensable role. Yet, they now give way to healing humility, revealed by Job's reflection (v. 3-6) upon earlier warnings (cf. 38:2-3). This reflection continues with his declaration that what he had once known as (mere) received information (v. 5a), he now knows as personally transforming truth (v. 5b), and in his repentance (v. 6). The location of Job's repentance in the text suggests that he turns not from moral failure, for there has been none, but from failure to trust, in every circumstance, solely in God's wise and good governance of the cosmos, which trust is the first commandment.

The account of Job's intercession for his friends (vv. 7-8) immediately follows Job's repentance and comes *before* he is restored. This order—repentance, intercession, restoration—reveals who this new Job is. He is more than who he was. His concern beyond himself despite his affliction mirrors God's providential care for all creation. God now responds to Job's concern without delay (v. 9). Job, re-created by the revelation that his life even in suffering belongs to God's sovereign and good purposes for all of life, is blessed: "...the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends...." (v. 10a). But Job's restoration is anticlimactic. It is no longer the point. Job's recreation is the point. What counts for infinitely more than revived fortunes is that the temptation of blessing (1:9), that God's favor can be misshapen into a faith constructed upon the shifting sands of reward and punishment, has yielded to an eternal word. Sorrow, to be sure, is not to be welcomed or sought or facilitated. Blessing, rather, is God's desire. But blessing is neither faith's goal nor the sure measure of God's pleasure. Beyond terrible sorrow and every joy, and beyond any boundary, blessing is faith's vocation (42:15b; cf. Gen 12:1-3).

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# SAMPLE ESSAY #2

This piece originally appeared in the December 2001 issue of  
*Lectioary Homiletics* (December 30, 2001: First Sunday after Christmas, pp. 30-1).

## Exegesis

### Matthew 2:13-23

**This dramatic conclusion to the infancy** narrative combines elements of historical reminiscence, folklore, biblical typology, and prophetic foreshadowing. Herod the Great died in 4 B.C.E. The last decade of his reign was marked by extreme paranoia over threats to his power. Herod accused and later executed three of his own sons and one of his wives. Even though the massacre of young children in the Bethlehem region (vv. 16-18) treats Herod as a type of the Egyptian Pharaoh (Ex 1:22; 2:15), the king acts true to character. This threat to the infant Jesus reminds Christian readers that he will die on the cross as “king of the Jews.” Today’s second reading (Heb 2:10-18) depicts Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross as the origin of a new covenant people, “brothers and sisters of Jesus.” More distant parallels are found in folklore. Famous kings and heroes are rescued from deadly threats at birth. Some of them, like the Persian king, Cyrus, and the Roman emperor, Augustus, had been marked by omens as future kings.<sup>1</sup>

Matthew supplies prophetic quotations to prove that the flight to Egypt (v. 15; Hos 11:1) and slaughter of the children (v. 18; Jer 31:15) were anticipated in God’s plan. The infant Jesus will repeat the experience of his own people. Prophetic references mark the conclusion to sections within the narrative: (a) Warned in a dream, Joseph takes his family into Egypt (vv. 13-15; compare Joseph’s family in Gen 46:2-4); (b) Herod’s attempt to wipe out a perceived threat to his throne by killing the children (vv. 16-18; cf. Pharaoh, Ex 1:22); (c) Pharaoh’s death enables the family to return (vv. 19-21; cf. Ex 4:19-20), but they settle in Galilee (vv. 22-23). Matthew appears to add the transition to Nazareth onto a tradition that concluded with the return from Egypt. He does not have a prophetic text that can be attached to Nazareth directly. Instead, the evangelist opens with a modified citation formula, “thus what was

said through the prophets,” a generic statement. Instead of the quotation marker “saying,” which echoes Hebrew syntax, Matthew uses the word “that.” What follows is not a citation but a claim that the move to Nazareth fulfils the prophets.

The exegetical basis for this claim can be traced to various word plays on the word *nazôraios* (“person from Nazareth”). The most obvious word association connects the place name with the *nazîr*, “nazarite”, a person consecrated to God by vows not to cut his hair or consume wine (Num 6; Judg 13:5-7; 16:17; Amos 2:11-12; 1 Macc 3:49-52). Slightly more distant, some scholars propose a link to the prophetic word in Isaiah 11:1, the branch (Heb *neser*) which is to spring from the stump of Jesse. This association has a more direct link to Jesus as messianic Son of David than *nazîr*, though the sounds of the words are dissimilar. Since the connection with the prophets is indirect at best, either or both connections could serve to make the evangelist’s point. Matthew is well aware that Jesus’ hometown, an insignificant village in Galilee, could be used against the Christian belief that Jesus is the messiah predicted by the prophets (see Jn 1:45-46). The story of Jesus’ birth in Matthew 1:18-25 established his claim to Davidic rule. Matthew wishes to show that the move to Nazareth is not a human decision made by Joseph. It too belongs to the carefully orchestrated divine plan, which governs Jesus’ life.

The notes of suffering, flight and danger which run through this section of the gospel form a sharp contrast to messianic hopes for salvation as in today’s first reading (Is 63:7-9) and the rich gifts of the magi (Mt 2:1-12). At the same time, the Exodus story demonstrates God’s power to rescue the people from a powerful and dangerous tyrant. Joseph’s faithfulness to God’s instructions protects the infant Jesus. Joseph always heeds the instructions that he receives from the Lord immediately and without question. Jesus will show similar faithfulness as an adult when he must accept suffering rather than flee. The verb “destroy” or “kill” in verse 13 returns in Matthew 27:20, “to have Jesus killed.” Egypt often served as a place of refuge for Jews

in time of famine or persecution (Gen 46:2-4; 1 Kgs 11:40; 2 Kgs 25:26; Jer 41:16-18). The family’s nighttime flight recalls Israel’s exodus from Egypt according to the Passover haggadah. By locating the prophecy of Hosea 11:1 in this section rather than after verse 21, Matthew highlights the Exodus traditions in this narrative. The story of Jesus’ testing in the wilderness (Mt 4:1-11) will pick up this Exodus typology again.

Shifting focus from the people of Israel to their leader, Moses, provides another rich source of parallels between the story of Jesus and Exodus. Both survive despite a king’s attempt to kill them (v. 16; Ex 1:22 and 2:15). Both must flee and remain among foreigners until the murderous tyrant dies (vv. 15, 19a, 20b; Ex 4:19b). Just as Joseph obeys the command to return with his wife and child, so Moses takes his wife and children back into Egypt (v. 21; Ex 4:20). These echoes prepare Matthew’s readers for another important christological motif in the gospel, Jesus as the new Moses.

Congregations often find this gospel a painful set of images for the Sunday after Christmas. Ancient readers would have been less offended by the reminders of conflict, suffering and death. They knew Herod’s reputation for malicious violence. Rumor had it that the dying king gave orders to execute prominent people to ensure that the land would be in mourning when he died.<sup>2</sup> Readers also expected biographers to show how an individual’s adult life was prefigured in childhood. Matthew meets that requirement in this narrative. Jesus—the royal Son of David, Son of God and new Moses—will establish a new covenant between God and humanity. The prophets pictured messianic salvation as a new Exodus (Is 40:3; 52:3-6). The blood of that new covenant sacrifice is Jesus’ own death for us (Heb 2:10-18).

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## NOTES

1. Herodotus, *Histories* 1.108-13; Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 94.
2. Josephus, *Antiquities* xvii secs. 174-76.

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