

The magi come and are disempowered: Matthew's Gospel, ch.1:v 21 to ch.2:v 12, 16-18.

'They shall name him Emmanuel,
which means , 'God with us". Ch 1:v 23)

This startling introduction to the baby at the beginning of Matthew's gospel is a sole repetition from Isaiah's prophetic writings, ch.7. It is preceded in v.21 by, 'You are to name him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins'. I would like to argue that these two words, 'Jesus' and 'Emmanuel' give us the clue for re-reading the next story, of the visit of the magi. Their world was to be turned upside down.

If we take the Magi as typical figures to whom we give authority to warn us what is going on, we ascribe knowledge to them; knowledge that we are enmeshed in. I should like to offer a reading that is the reverse of the magi's recognition and adulation by foreigners. I should like to argue instead that *they are us*; whom we can recognise as speaking with our fearful need for authority. They bring gifts which they now regard as in some way inappropriate. They recognise that 1 Samuel and Micah had seen this already.

The whole visit is significant to Matthew, in ch.2:v.18, as enshrining the longing in Jeremiah,

'For Yahweh is creating something new on earth...'

so that,

'...the woman sets out to find her husband again' (Jer ch. 31: v.22)

Thus the whole passage is an undermining of our systems of violent decision-making. Here, violence is being prepared to adulate this particular baby; to name him, to foreclose him...and, later, to blame him. Instead the baby represents the gaze of the one who holds us in being, (JSHYA) so that we have no need of our blameworthy systems of sign-reading.

In this session I hope to show how dense these passages about the magi are, and how in them Matthew prepares us for Jesus' revelation of God's subversion of sacred cultic practices and other cohesive group strategies. This subversion, as Girard helps us see, can lead us to the slow taking-on of the mind of Christ, for whom Rachel and all of us are honoured. (ch 2.:v18).