

## ***Intertextual Echoes in the Matthean Baptismal Narrative***

DAVID B. CAPES  
HOUSTON BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

*Matthew's story of Jesus' baptism provides evidence of an "Immanuel" ("God with us") Christology. In particular the first evangelist redacts Mark's account and envisages Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet according to the order of Ezekiel. Moreover, the opening of the heavens and descent of the Spirit echo Isaiah 63-64 and portray Jesus as God's answer to the petition longing for his presence and redemption. The dove image appears to have two intertextual functions: (1) to construe Jesus' baptism as the end of judgment and the beginning of new creation through the recollection of Noah's deliverance, and (2) to signal Jesus' role as sufferer through a lesser-known image of the dove as a symbol for God's suffering people.*

*Key Words: intertextuality, Matthew, baptism (of Jesus), Christology, apocalyptic, Holy Spirit*

In *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* Ulrich Luz suggests that the First Gospel should be read as an extended *inclusio* bracketed at the beginning by the "Immanuel" motif, "God with us," and at the end by Jesus' promise, "behold, I am with you always."<sup>1</sup> The Immanuel motif, he notes, demonstrates that Matthew's Christology takes on a coherent, narrative shape that cannot be contained in static titles or concepts; it is worked out through the story itself. In the end, Luz believes, Matthew's Gospel advances a Christology "from above"—namely that, in Jesus, God acts. For Matthew, Luz writes, "Jesus is an occurrence of *God*."<sup>2</sup>

Luz presents a persuasive argument, particularly when interpreting the Gospel canonically. He is able to show how the Immanuel

1. Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (trans. J. Bradford Robinson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 4-5.

2. *Ibid.*, 31-33.

motif influences the pericope and drives Matthew's portrait of Jesus. Yet due to the nature of Luz's book, the author can give only scant attention to any story. His proposal, therefore, begs treatment on the level of individual episodes.

Matthew's story of Jesus' baptism (3:13-17) provides an excellent laboratory to test Luz's proposition. If for Matthew Jesus is an occurrence of God and this Christology is worked out in narrative and not titles, reading Matthew's episode from this perspective may yield rich results. In what follows, this article will analyze Matthew's narrative of Jesus' baptism with a view to its Immanuel Christology. In particular, it will concentrate on the visionary aspects of the passage—namely, the opening of the heavens and the descent of the Spirit like a dove. In recognition of the important role played by scripture in apocalyptic visions and dreams, it will investigate these theophanic symbols as possible "echoes" of OT—and perhaps other—passages and images.<sup>3</sup> Assuming Marcan priority, it will show that the evangelist alters Mark by utilizing an established "symbolic field" codified in Israel's scripture. Through the recollection of Israel's past, its anticipated future, and their linkage with the story of Jesus as "Immanuel," the reader can appreciate more fully the narrative's evocations.

## I

The Synoptic Gospels relate the story of Jesus' baptism at the beginning of his public ministry (Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). While the Fourth Gospel (John 1:29-34) does not contain this account, it nevertheless appears implicitly in the Baptist's witness to Jesus as the one upon whom the Spirit descends from heaven like a dove and remains. The absence of this narrative in John may be deliberate, as Stephen Gero notes, given the author's interest in decreasing the significance of the Baptist.<sup>4</sup> At any rate, for the evangelists, Jesus' baptism marks *the* turning point in his life. Moreover, the opening of the heavens, the descent of the Spirit, and the heavenly voice's declaration of his Sonship proclaim God's election of Jesus as his eschatological emissary of the Kingdom.

The baptismal story has been interpreted in a number of ways. There are variations on these, of course, but discussion here will focus on two. First, some interpret this account as an historical event

3. Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), offers an important model for this study.

4. Stephen Gero, "The Spirit as a Dove at the Baptism of Jesus," *NovT* 18 (1976) 17-35.

which the church embellished with mythological details (e.g., the opening of the heavens, the descent of the dove, the divine voice). These symbols serve to infuse the account with power, mystery and transcendence, magnifying the significance of Jesus to its implied audience.<sup>5</sup> To my mind there are few serious objections to the conclusion that John did baptize Jesus and that this event did propel him into public, itinerant ministry.<sup>6</sup> This is all the more likely given the apparent embarrassment that a lesser, John, baptizes one greater, Jesus. The absence of Jesus' baptism by John in the Fourth Gospel as well as John's initial statement forbidding it (Matt 3:13-14) appear to testify to this uneasiness. Second, others interpret this account as an historical event in which Jesus had an apocalyptic vision.<sup>7</sup> Following his immersion, he saw the heavens opened and God's Spirit descend in dove-like fashion on him and he heard a heavenly voice. James Dunn suggests that Jesus' baptism occasioned an experience of God which, for Jesus, had immense import, the most striking of which was the Nazarene's experience of the Spirit and cognizance of his unique Sonship.<sup>8</sup>

There appears to be no route through the impasse. Either you have an ecclesiastical invention designed to enlarge the stature of Jesus or you have an apocalyptic Jesus, a seer and transmitter of visions.<sup>9</sup> Both conclusions offer significant discomfort for reading communities, be they conservative Christians or the Jesus Seminar. But discomfort has never stopped the academy before, and it is not likely to stop it now.

The present investigation is not so much addressed to the Jesus of history or the Jesus of the nondescript early church; it is intended rather, to reflect on the account as narrated in the Matthean Gospel. In Matthew these fabulous, attendant phenomena arise as divine manifestations within an apocalyptic vision. It is this reading which provides the most satisfying and coherent narrative. This is not to say that Jesus himself was a thoroughgoing apocalypticist or that the early church wished to portray him as such. But it is to say that the

5. F. W. Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981) 99, remarks that these elements derive from the "realm of myth" and reflect a naive cosmology.

6. James Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 62.

7. Ben Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 148-49.

8. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 65.

9. Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus*, 151-52. If this is the content of an apocalyptic vision, it must go back to Jesus himself.

NT documents "suggest that on certain occasions Jesus did receive visions which resemble the visions of apocalyptic."<sup>10</sup>

As is well known, the apocalyptic literary genre eludes adequate definition or illustration. To address this issue, in 1979 John J. Collins edited volume 14 of *Semeia* entitled, *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*. Therein Collins and a number of others grappled with the elusive nature of apocalyptic thought en route to a useful definition. Collins offered the following comprehensive definition:

*'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.*<sup>11</sup>

This definition appears well suited to the present study and suggests that one should see Matthew's baptismal narrative as a piece of apocalyptic literature. First, the account is clearly mediated through a narrative framework both within and without the pericope. Second, it provides revelation to Jesus of Nazareth and those who witnessed his baptism. Third, otherworldly entities—that is, the Spirit and the heavenly voice—convey the revelation. Fourth, the baptism and vision occur within a narrative framework which from first to last envisages God's actions in Jesus to offer eschatological salvation. Fifth, it portrays the above–below spatial dichotomy via the descent of the Spirit and the voice from above. Since the Gospel baptismal narrative contains these elements, one may reasonably classify this story as one example of early Christian apocalypses.

Visions provide the landscape of apocalyptic literature. Among the fifteen Jewish apocalypses studied in *Semeia* 14, fourteen contain visions.<sup>12</sup> In the NT, Revelation, the only thoroughgoing apocalyptic book, contains numerous visions leading up to God's final visitation. But within these visions, what is seen, how it is understood, and how it is conveyed often originate from the pages of the Hebrew Bible. Although apocalyptic literature contains few explicit quotations, it

10. Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 358. On another occasion (Luke 10:17–20) Jesus sees a vision in which Satan falls from heaven. On apocalyptic beliefs, practices, and literature in Jewish, Greek, and Roman contexts during the hellenistic era, see David Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987) 226–40.

11. John J. Collins, *Apocalypse: Morphology of a Genre* (*Semeia* 14; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979) 9, italics theirs.

12. *Ibid.*, 28.

abounds in symbols and imagery drawn from the OT and reinvested with significance for the present.<sup>13</sup> As Rowland writes:

This shows how a mind saturated in the scriptures can utilize the imagery to express the character of the vision. There is no conscious attempt to quote Scripture. It is just the case that the many facets of the Bible, especially those with a visionary content, tend to determine the way in which the visionary expresses his experience verbally.<sup>14</sup>

Since Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism represents an apocalyptic vision and since apocalyptic accounts mine the OT for imagery and symbols to express the vision's content, what Jesus saw, how he understood it, and how he conveyed it must be interpreted in light of its intertextual relationships.

## II

It is likely that Mark contains the earliest, original story of Jesus' baptism which the other Gospel writers know and use with slight alterations. While Matthew's and Mark's version agree significantly, there are a few differences worthy of notation including: (1) Matthew adds ἰδοῦ ("Behold!") to the visionary aspects of the story; (2) he changes Mark's σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς ("the heavens were split") to ἠνεώχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί ("the heavens were opened"); (3) he writes that Jesus saw the "Spirit of God" while Mark simply has the "Spirit"; (4) he alters Mark's phrase, the Spirit comes down "into him" (εἰς αὐτόν), to say that the Spirit comes upon him (ἐπ' αὐτόν); and (5) he changes the heavenly voice to say, "This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased" from Mark's more personal "You are my Son, the beloved, in you I am well pleased." This latter change, probably the most well known, functions within the story to direct the voice to spectators in attendance at Jesus' baptism. In effect, God declares to them that Jesus is his beloved Son. But for Matthew's readers and hearers in the first century and beyond, it functions as a declaration of the ongoing significance of Jesus as Immanuel, "God with us," the one who promised to be "with you always, even to the end of the age."

The Matthean alterations noted above were not stylistic matters. The evangelist was not merely attempting to smooth out Mark's brash

13. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991) 280-81. Krister Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968; reprint, Ramsey, N.J.: Sigler, 1991) 158.

14. Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 361.

and exaggerated approach; rather they carried significant intertextual import. Matthew, it seems, deliberately changes Mark's statement, σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς ("the heavens were split"), to read ἠνεώχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί ("the heavens were opened"). The reason for this: Matthew envisages Jesus' experience as an apocalyptic seer against the record of another prophet and seer, Ezekiel.<sup>15</sup> Numerous verbal and conceptual links draw these accounts together so they can be read against the other. First, both apocalyptic moments take place beside a river (Ezek 1:1: ἐπὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ τοῦ Χοβαρ; Matt 3:13: ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰορδάνην). Second, both take place against the backdrop of exile (Babylonian for Ezekiel; Roman for Jesus). Third, both visionary accounts begin similarly:

Ezekiel:	ἠνοιχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ εἶδον ὀράσεις θεοῦ
Matthew:	ἠνεώχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ εἶδεν πνεῦμα θεοῦ

Fourth, in both accounts the seers receive the revelatory word of God (Ezekiel 1: ἐγένετο λόγος κυρίου; Matt 3:17: φωνὴ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν). Therein, Ezekiel is addressed as "the Son of man" (2:1); Jesus is introduced as "the Son of God." Fifth, the Spirit comes upon both men (Ezek 2:1: ἐπ' ἐμέ πνεῦμα; Matt 3:16: πνεῦμα θεοῦ . . . ἐπ' αὐτόν). Finally, for both men this experience alters the directions of their lives; hereafter both will preach and perform through prophetic actions God's message to Israel (Ezek 2:3: "the house of Israel"; Matt 10:6: "the lost sheep of the house of Israel"). Matthew, it seems, desires to relate the inauguration of Jesus into public life via reflection on the record of Ezekiel.

This perspective accounts for another change; Matthew adds the interjection "Behold!" (ἰδοῦ) to the visionary account twice to accord with its frequent occurrence in Ezekiel's vision (e.g., Ezek 1:4, 15, 25). In addition to its intertextual significance, the word serves to enliven the narrative and underscore this new and extraordinary moment for the Nazarene.

Ezekiel, of course, had already become the prototype seer and the phrase "the heavens opened" had become well entrenched in visionary texts (Isa 64:1; Acts 7:56; 10:11; Rev 4:1; 19:11; 3 Macc 6:18; *T. Levi* 18:6-7; *T. Jud.* 24:2). This perspective was no doubt available for Matthew to use in his rendering of Jesus' experience to his community. It appears, in fact, that this formula had developed into a *topos* and contained the following elements: (1) a passive verb or verbal of ἀνοίγω with no agency expressed, certainly divine agency implied;

15. Robert Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994) 52.

(2) a reference to heaven or the gates of heaven in singular or plural form; and (3) a verb form of seeing, εἶδον or θεωρέω), representing the seer's experience. Attendant with this basic description might also have been reference to a heavenly voice and/or the word ἰδοῦ, marking this as a significant moment in the narrative. So it appears that these elements became a formula used customarily to convey a vision. It originated—in Greek at least—with Ezekiel's initial vision. If this is so, Matthew, cognizant of this ongoing practice, renarrates Mark's account to accord with this (Ezekielian) tradition.<sup>16</sup>

Ezekiel does not appear to be the only textual influence upon Matthew's account. Isa 63:7-64:12 with its pleading for God to "open heaven," come down, and restore Israel in hope of a new exodus may also resonate in Matthew's scriptural memory. This psalm of praise and intercession begins (63:7-14) with a recollection of God's gracious deeds and acts of steadfast love, especially Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Isa 63:9 reads (NRSV):

It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them;  
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;  
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.<sup>17</sup>

The poem records that it had been God's presence that saved them and nothing else. Yet God's presence is no longer with them due to their sins. It asks (63:11b-13a):

Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea with the  
shepherds of his flock?  
Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit  
Who caused his glorious arm to march at the right hand of Moses,  
Who divided the waters before them to make for himself an  
everlasting name,  
Who led them through the depths?

Clearly, for the poet God is no longer with his people. He is distant, nowhere to be found. In 63:15-19 the intercessor pleads with God to look down from heaven, be a father again to his people, and turn back to redeem Israel from the afflictions of its enemies. Central to this petition is Isa 64:1 (LXX 63:19) which begs God to open heaven (εἰς ἀνοίξις τὸν οὐρανόν) and cause the mountains to tremble as they did at Mt. Sinai. The presence of God would guarantee the safety

16. The Greek OT contains only two references to the opening of heaven in this way (Ezek 1:1ff.; Isa 64:1). The translation of Isa 64:1 into a similar formula may result from this influence. Since other NT and noncanonical texts utilize this pattern, I conclude it originates with the translation of Ezekiel's account.

17. The Greek text reads similarly: "In their afflictions, no messenger, no angel saved them, but the Lord himself through his love and compassion for them." John F. A. Sawyer, *Isaiah: Volume 2* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) 199-20.

and security of God's people and Jerusalem once again. Yet the intercessor recognizes God's righteous anger and surrenders again to the will of the Lord, "our Father." He writes (64:8): "we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand." The prayer ends, wondering if God will continue to be silent and thereby punish his people.

For Matthew and his church, the prayer for God's visitation is satisfied by Jesus, the Immanuel presence of God, the one who promises to be with them until the end of the age. Therefore, in the opening of the heavens and the descent of the Spirit Matthew envisions Jesus' baptism as God's answer to the prayer of Isaiah 63-64, a prayer pleading for God's intervention to bring about marvelous deeds like he did of old. Through Jesus this hope, left unsatisfied for so long, had become God's "Yes" to the prayer of deliverance.

This "new exodus" perspective accords well with Matthew's interest in displaying Jesus as a new Moses. Already in the birth narratives the evangelist recorded that like Moses the infant Jesus is imperiled by the decree of a king. Already Matthew had chronicled the family's journey into Egypt and return as the fulfillment of Hos 11:1, "out of Egypt have I called my Son" (cf. Exod 4:22). Later in the Gospel, Jesus, like Moses, will ascend the mountain to deliver his teaching on the will of God for his disciples. Yet, as Ulrich Luz points out, Matthew's story of Jesus not only overlaps, it also subverts the story of Moses:

Egypt, formerly the land of suppression and persecution, is now a land of refuge. It is the King of Israel who now takes on the role of Pharaoh. The pagan magi, formerly members of Pharaoh's retinue, are given new roles and now pay homage to the infant Jesus as the King of Israel. In any event, readers note that Matthew is not simply retelling the Moses story in a new variant. Instead, the story of Jesus really is a new story; Jesus is at once new Moses and the inverse of Moses.<sup>18</sup>

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus represents the Immanuel presence of God. He is more than Moses; he is more akin to the one who opened the heavens, came down on Mt. Sinai, and caused the earth to quake. For Matthew, Jesus' baptism answers the prayer of Isaiah 63-64 and becomes that moment when God's presence again visited his people.

This reading of Matthew is confirmed by the episodes which follow, episodes which both parallel and subvert Israel's story. Israel leaves Sinai to spend forty years wandering in the wilderness where God provides bread from heaven to sustain them. Jesus enters the wilderness, where for forty days and nights he fasts and experiences temptation (4:1-2). Though famished, unlike Israel he refuses to eat

18. Luz, *Theology of Matthew*, 24-25.

the bread of miracle in preference for the true food of God's Word (4:3-4; quoting Deut 8:3). In the wilderness Israel consistently tested God and refused to follow him. In contrast Jesus refused to put God to the test (4:7; quoting Deut 6:16). Israel went after other gods in their wanderings (e.g., Exodus 32). Jesus, on the other hand, repudiates the worship of any except the true, living God (4:10; quoting Deut 6:13). It is not coincidental that, in responding to the tempter, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy, a text based on the exodus, Sinai, and wilderness experiences. These quotations suggest that Jesus' temptation report continues the new exodus motif and should be read against the narrative of Israel's exodus and wilderness experience. Jesus, as both a new Moses and one greater than Moses, seems to provide an antithetical reading of Israel's period in the wilderness and concurrently subverts its story. As God's Son, he is more than Israel; he transcends Israel as the one truly obedient Son of God.

This motif appears to continue in the Sermon on the Mount, the first extended discourse by Jesus. Therein he teaches his disciples to address God in prayer as "our Father" (πάτερ ἡμῶν). This address of course is not new; it is contained in the new exodus petition and prayer of Isaiah 63-64. Note Isa 63:17 (NRSV):

For you are our father (LXX [63:16]: ἡμῶν εἰ πατήρ),  
 though Abraham does not know us  
 and Israel does not acknowledge us;  
 you, O LORD, are our father (LXX: πατήρ ἡμῶν)  
 our Redeemer from of old is your name.

Again, the prayer continues (Isa 64:8):

Yet, O LORD, you are our Father (LXX [64:7]: πατήρ ἡμῶν),  
 we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
 we are all the work of your hand.

It must be remembered that the Hebrew Bible seldom addresses God as "father."<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the "our Father" address in the prayer of Isaiah 63-64 may have influenced the model prayer offered by Jesus (Matt 6:9), for in Luke's parallel account, God is addressed simply as "Father" not "our Father." One may well conclude that in the model prayer Matthew's Gospel continues to echo the Isaianic plea, by addressing God as "our Father."

19. Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 393, believes the reason that preexilic texts do not call God "father" has to do with the fact that in ancient mythology gods often father children via humans. The OT offers an alternative reality wherein mankind is creature not a child. The Isaianic prayer (chaps. 63-64) evidences the apparent lifting of such a theological barrier.

## III

For all its ubiquity in Christian iconography and modern Christian art, the dove continues to evade interpreters. Throughout church history the dove represents the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus and the church, yet the only reference to a dove in the NT occurs at Jesus' baptism. In the vision Jesus "saw the Spirit of God descending as if it were a dove and it comes upon him" (Matt 3:16).<sup>20</sup> Many interpreters have offered possible sources for this imagery, but consensus has not been achieved. John Moorhead proposes that the descent of the Spirit as a dove recalls Sinai where in the LXX the same word καταβάνω describes God's descent on the mountain (Exod 19:11ff.).<sup>21</sup> Moorhead, however, does not answer the question, why a dove? Rowland interprets the dove image in light of new creation imagery. He points to the Babylonian Talmud and Simeon b. Zoma's meditation on Gen 1:2 (*b. Hag.* 15a) in which the rabbi describes the hovering of the Spirit over the waters as a dove. For Rowland, the new creation motif satisfies the eschatological framework of John, Jesus and the early church; it also appears to explain the dove's presence in Jesus' baptism, since this event inaugurates the new creation.<sup>22</sup> Rowland's proposal is attractive, but the late date of the sources poses a critical problem to this explanation. Stephen Gero, noting extra-biblical traditions, argues that two sources come together in the Gospel baptismal record. First, there existed a pre-Markan baptismal story eventually codified in the Gospel of Hebrews, which makes no reference to a dove. Second, there also existed another account which included the dove but with no connection to the Spirit (*Odes Sol.* 24). The Marcan redactor, Gero argues, had both at his disposal when composing his Gospel and, wanting to retain all the details, merged them into one story. The dove image, he believes, can be explained by the recognition that Near Eastern legend and folklore often contain accounts of the descent of birds. Gero, however, never answers the question, why a dove?<sup>23</sup> Robert Gundry provides another explanation. Observing that there lacks any accepted interpretation, he favors understanding the dove image as "historical tradition over ecclesiastical invention."<sup>24</sup> Again, however, unless Jesus saw a dove

20. Matthew changes Mark's ὡς ("as") to ὡσεὶ ("as if"). This change suggests that the dove refers adverbially to the manner of descent and not to the visible appearance of the Spirit. See Gundry, *Matthew*, 52.

21. John Moorhead, "The Spirit and the World," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* (Spring-Summer 1983) 114.

22. Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 361. See also Dale Allison, "The Baptism of Jesus and a New Dead Sea Scroll," *BARev* 18 (March—April 1992) 58-60.

23. Gero, "Spirit As a Dove," 18-19.

24. Gundry, *Matthew*, 52.

in his vision, why did he refer to the Spirit's descent "as a dove" and not some other bird?

Since the dove remark appears in a report of an apocalyptic vision and since the source of imagery for a vision originated often within the symbolic world of scripture, the OT itself provides the most favorable answer to the question, why a dove?

Within the biblical record the first mention of a dove occurs in the flood story (Genesis 8).<sup>25</sup> Over fourteen days Noah sends out a dove three times to determine if the waters had subsided. The first time the dove returns, finding no place to land. God's judgment still had not ended. The second time the dove returns with a freshly plucked olive leaf, heralding the nearness of their deliverance. The third time the dove fails to return, announcing to Noah and his family that their exile from earth had ended. This story continues to resound in the memories of early Jewish Christians, for in 1 Pet 3:20-21 the author finds in Noah's deliverance from the water a prefiguration (ἀντίτυπον) of Christian baptism. Furthermore, since God's address to Noah (Gen 9:1, 7) resembles his commands to the first humans at creation (Gen 1:28), the flood narrative could be construed as a new creation account. As a result, Christians late in the first century interpreted their salvation, actualized in baptism, in light of Noah's story of deliverance and new creation. Perhaps Jesus, the evangelists, and the early church utilized the dove, resonating within the denouement of Noah's story, to construe Jesus' baptism as the end of judgment, the reversal of exile, the new creation, and the opportunity to herald the good news of God's presence and Kingdom.

Another possibility exists to explain the presence of the dove in Jesus' apocalyptic vision. Yet it does not arise from a coherent story. It arises from various suggestive texts in Jewish tradition regarding the dove. The locus for one such example is Psalm 74, a communal lament pleading with God to remember his congregation. A foe had vanquished them and razed the temple to the ground. Now the congregation begs God to regard the covenant and reverse the shame of his people. The key verse for consideration here is 74:19:

Do not deliver the soul of your dove to the wild animals;  
Do not forget the life of your poor forever.

In this poignant passage God's harassed people are called "your dove" and "your poor." Enemies had overpowered them, subjugating and humiliating them in the face of the nations. Now rather than suffer

25. Jehuda Feliks, "Dove," *EncJud* 6.184-85, mentions other scriptural significance including: (1) the law permits the eating of doves, (2) the law prescribes the dove as the offering of the poor and the Nazirites (Lev 5:7; Num 6:10), and (3) the dove symbolizes beauty, innocence, and purity (e.g., Cant 1:15; 2:14; 5:2).

any longer, God's dove, God's poor cry out to him: "Have regard for your covenant" (Ps 74:20).

Second Esdras uses the dove image in similar fashion. In the second vision (5:21-6:34), the seer complains that God has delivered Israel over into the hands of its enemies. He characterizes Israel using symbols derived from the OT. He likens Israel to a tree, a lily, a river, a city. Then he writes (5:26): "from all birds that have been created you have named for yourself one dove, and from all the flocks that have been made you have provided for yourself one sheep." He continues (5:28): "And now, O Lord, why have you handed the one over to the many, and dishonored the one root beyond the others, and scattered your only one among the many?" Here the seer refers to Israel as the one dove, the one handed over to the many, and asks, "Why, Lord?" In both Psalms and 2 Esdras, the dove becomes a symbol of God's injured, desperate people, handed over to its enemies. The dove, though pure and innocent, cannot withstand the power of its adversaries. Interestingly, another, later Jewish text echoes the same view: "There is none among the birds more persecuted than doves" (*b. B. Qam.* 93a).

The dove therefore came to symbolize Israel in all its sufferings at the hands of its enemies. If Jesus and the evangelists are aware of this representation, the dove's presence in the baptismal story signals for Jesus his role as sufferer. Only he sees the Spirit's flight as a dove. While the crowds in Matthew hear the heavenly voice declaring him God's Son, Jesus alone sees the vision. Jesus alone catches its significance; He will suffer at the hands of his enemies, the one will be handed over to the many. If Jesus personifies Israel—as Matthew apparently signals in 2:15, "Out of Egypt I have called my Son"—he must then live his life in congruity with Israel, God's suffering people. For Jesus to fulfill Israel's story, there can be no other path except suffering. As the Gospel record will show, he will suffer and be rejected by his enemies, yet also in the plan of God.

This reading makes perfect sense of all that follows. The Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness for fasting and the adversary tempts him to bypass his appointed task. Yet Jesus refuses to veer off course and abandon the road of suffering lying ahead. He addresses his disciples warning them of persecutions and mistreatments like Israel's prophets had faced. At the high watermark of the Gospel, when the disciples confess him to be "Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16), Jesus remarks that this is not theirs; it is the Father's revelation. As the human voice of the disciples echoes the heavenly voice at baptism, Jesus remembers his vision, sees again the Spirit descend like a dove, and recalls his appointed path of suffering. Consequently, Jesus begins to declare to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, be rejected and

mistreated at the hands of elders, chief priests, and scribes. As the story unfolds, Jesus travels willingly toward Jerusalem and the suffering that awaits him.

#### IV

For Matthew the life of Jesus represents a new work of God in recent history. Yet the evangelist sees it as part of a continuum of divine activity, indeed the fulfillment of Israel's hopes and aspirations. The opening of the heavens and the Spirit's descent as a dove in Matthew's baptismal story are best understood as elements of an apocalyptic vision which reoriented Jesus' life. These images belonged originally to the symbolic world of Israel's sacred texts. Matthew intentionally alters Mark's account, thereby amplifying his own prophetic voice via linkage with the OT story. Utilizing a recognized vision formula, the evangelist portrays Jesus as the end-time, apocalyptic prophet according to the order of Ezekiel. He sees visions, preaches and acts out his message to a rebellious people. At the same time he understands the Nazarene to be God's answer to the petition of Isaiah 63-64, a prayer yearning for the heavens to open and God's presence to once again visit Israel as in the days of Moses. For Matthew Jesus is "Immanuel," "God with us," the divine "Yes" to human longings. Furthermore, because the hope for a new exodus permeates the prayer in Isaiah 63-64, Jesus not only represents Israel and Moses, he transcends them by his righteous obedience. This new exodus perspective carries through the Gospel in other accounts and sayings of Jesus, particularly the "Our Father" of the Sermon on the Mount. The Spirit's descent as a dove continues to echo OT and extracanonical passages. The dove appears to recall the final episode of Noah's deliverance, announcing the end of God-imposed exile and ushering in the new creation. For the evangelist, the arrival of Jesus sounded the final chords of judgment and heralded the beginning of God's new creation. Accordingly, the story of Noah's ark became inextricably linked with Christian baptism. Moreover, biblical and extrabiblical sources reveal that the dove could symbolize God's suffering people and likely signaled to Jesus his role as sufferer. In the final analysis this investigation supports Luz's contention that the Immanuel motif governs the First Gospel and that the evangelist expresses his Christology "from above" through a story embedded with scripture and not merely through titles.