

Mary in the Genealogy of Jesus: A Historical-Theological Reading of Matt 1:1-17 in the Light of Martin Ezeogu's Thesis⁴¹

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Abstract

Does it really matter if the Christian Jesus was an African or a Jew? This question may not be conceived as a mere intellectual exercise. It is something more serious, especially at this moment when African Christian identity is theologically and existentially challenged by Africans themselves; when the Christian faith is erroneously credited by many African thinkers to a foreign religion, which is incompatible with African culture. It is on this assumption that the study deployed the tools of historical and social scientific criticisms to highlight the connection of Africa and/or Africans in the salvation history. The Matthean Christian community was very conscious of the dilemma of the social history of Jesus and the riddle of a non-Davidic, even a non-Jewish Messiah of a single parent. This goes a long way to account for some obvious incongruities in the Matthean genealogy and the Matthean appeal to precedents in the Hebrew Scripture and tradition(s) that included four non-Israelite women in the salvation history. The effort is simply to justify how Mary, a non-Jew migrant from African ancestry living among the Gentiles, though married to a Jew, could be the mother of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of the world. This story became a magna carta for the theology of inclusion extending to people of all nations. The reading proves a code to decipher some of the contradictions often encountered in the traditional reading of the Matthean infancy narrative

Keywords: Inclusion, genealogy, Messiah, women, Africa, infancy narrative, Jew, Christian, Matthean Christian community.

⁴¹This is an improved and expanded version of earlier paper read in the 32nd Annual International Conference on The Bible in Africa and African Experience, 2nd -5th July 2019, Babcock University, Ilisan Remo, Ogun State title: "The Matthean Inclusion of Non-Israelite Women in the Genealogy of Jesus and its Theological Implication for African Reader."

Introduction

Scholarship generally traces the Africa's encounter of Christianity back to the end⁴² or even the early half of the second century AD in North Africa,⁴³ or even to the biblical encounter of the Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:10) or the meeting of the Ethiopian eunuch with Philip (Acts 8:26-39). But this study is of a different view. Africa never encountered Christianity. The continent is the womb and home of Christianity. Africa is fully present at the formative stage of Christianity. It is in Africa that Christianity is housed and nurtured, and that without Africa the history of Christianity could have been written differently and probably sadly. This claim is made not without the ancestral connection of Mary of Nazareth, the mother of Jesus, who is called the Christ. The strength of this thesis is drawn from some of the narrative gaps⁴⁴ associated with the infancy narrative in general (Matt 1-2), and above all, the Matthean genealogy (1:1-17).

The thesis the reader is invited to consider is that the ethnicity of Mary of Nazareth is African. This thesis develops from serious rigorous academic efforts to address contextually⁴⁵ the hermeneutical challenges posed by the Matthean narrative of the genealogy of Jesus. The issue on the front burner is, not just for Africa but the entire global scholarship, especially the exegetes, to break the silence on the ethnicity of Mary of Nazareth the mother of Jesus the Christ,⁴⁶ else on Africa's Christian identity and its immeasurable contributions to the development of the Christian faith. And the discovery here is the understanding of the inclusion the Gentile women in the Matthean genealogical list, of whom one is an African, as a good starting point and a new dawn in African biblical exegesis. The stress is not simply on identity struggle as many may prefer to narrow the discussion. It is a matter of deploying historical and social scientific tools in order to put history straight and to come to an informed conviction that Christianity is not just one of the indigenous religions of Africa. In fact, without an undue exaggeration, one may not err to agree with Ezeogu that Christianity is more indigenous than the assumed African Traditional religion.⁴⁷

As earlier indicated, the approach in this study aligns with the historical critical and social scientific methods of the earlier study of Ezeogu. It sees African as an indispensable reference point not simple of the birth of civilisation but also of Christianity. It examines some of the theories and hypotheses on the inclusion of women in the Matthean genealogy. It draws much insight from these theories to establish the ethnicity of Mary of Nazareth the mother of Jesus, and by default the ethnic origin of Jesus the Messiah. This is without making any absolute claim that hinders other ethnic groups or races from interrogating the findings.

The Structure of the Matthean Genealogy

The study is not ignorant of some of the textual problems associated with the pericope, moreover in the case of 1:16, which have dominated most of the discussions on the infancy narrative.⁴⁸ But the challenge that comes along with the narrative itself remains central in all biblical and theological

⁴²Anyia 2011, 25, esp. notes 15 & 16; cf. (Paratt 1987, 1-9); (Gibellini 1994, 1-8). The insightful bibliographical information from Anyia has helped to enrich this work

⁴³Bauer 2006, 19-21.

⁴⁴Ezeogu 2012, 260, 264. Most of the ideas reflected in this work is influenced by the study of Ezeogu.

⁴⁵See Anyia 2011, 19, although he argues on a different theme, the focus still remains on the rediscovery of Africa's identity.

⁴⁶Unfortunately for scholarship, many exegetes, just like (Carter 2007, 58), stop at the marital status of Mary, beyond this lies her ethnicity.

⁴⁷This is one of the aims of the study of (Ezeogu 2012).

⁴⁸Ezeogu 2012, 263. (See also Davies and Allison 1988, 183-84; Brown, Birth of Messiah 1977, 62.

discourses within the Gospel of Matthew. It is now clearer that the Matthean genealogy (1:1-17) is not just a part of the infancy narrative (chap 1-2) it is an important and indispensable part of the entire Gospel of Matthew if one must appreciate the story line of Matthew in its entirety. Even amidst the consensus on the general structure of either the entire Gospel or specifically the infancy narrative,⁴⁹ the genealogy is always seen as the first part of the Matthean Gospel. And within the world of the storyline of the infancy narrative, the genealogy is recognised as an independent pericope, marked off by a chiasmic *inclusio* in vv.1 and 17, and the literary *three groups of fourteen*, underlined with the threefold Greek *geneai dekatessares* (v. 17):⁵⁰

v.1: Christou...David...Abraam

v.17: Abraam...David...Christou

There is within the genealogy itself a literary and cultural ambivalence. Guided by the topic of this discussion, however, the reader's interest would be much restricted to the few passages that bear on the inclusion of women in the Matthean genealogical list. Warren observes in the arrangement here a kind of "ambivalent attitudes to the cultural patterns and structures of patriarchy and primogeniture"⁵¹. According to him, God is both conventionally patriarchal in elevating the male and firstborn, but quite subversive in choosing several younger brothers without explanation.⁵² This is clearly seen in the cultural intrusion by Tamar. The children of Tamar Perez and Zerah are not strictly speaking the first in the line of Judah (Er, Onan, and Shelah) but the choice falls on Perez, who is younger, and strictly speaking, child conceived outside wedlock.⁵³

Again, a closer observation shows a literary pattern of "A was the father of B, B the father of C...." But in all, only the five women identified in the genealogical list that break up the pattern: Tamar (v.3), Rahab (v.5a), and Ruth (v.5b), the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba, v.6b), and Mary of whom Jesus was born who was called Christ (v.16).⁵⁴

Some Shared Features of the Women in Matthean Genealogy

Matthew departs from cultural patterns and structures of patriarchy and primogeniture by including five women in his genealogical list: Tamar (v. 3), Rahab (v. 5), Ruth (v.5), wife of Uriah (Bathsheba, v.6b), and Mary (v.16) (Richards 2002, 14).⁵⁵ It is a rare practice in the normative cultural pattern of the Jews though one can identify few exceptions in the biblical tradition (Gen 11.29; 22.20-4; 35.22-6; I Chr 2.18-21, 24, 34, 46-9; 7.24; cf. Lk 3.23-38). More worrisome is not the two, Tamar and Bathsheba (I Chr 1-3) but the inclusion Rahab and Ruth. Unfortunately for scholarship, Matthew

⁴⁹ Cf. Brown, *Birth of Messiah* 1977, 50-54.

⁵⁰ Hagner 1993, 5. The other five sections of the infancy narrative include: (i) Joseph Becomes Foster Father to Jesus (Matt 1:18-24); (ii) the Visit of the Magi (Matt 2:1-12); (iii) the Holy Family Takes Refuge in Egypt (Matt 2:13-15); (iv) Herod Kills Innocent Children (Matt 2:16-18); (vi) the Holy Family Returns from Egypt and Settles in Nazareth (Matt 2:19-23) cf. Ezeogu 2012, 264.

⁵¹ Carter 2007, 58.

⁵² Carter 2007, 58.

⁵³ The study may further expose other cultural inconsistency in the choice of the women.

⁵⁴ Carter 2007, 58. Note that the literary expansion in v.16 generally indicates that the interest of Matthew is on Jesus through Mary.

⁵⁵ Some scholars discount Mary and speak of the four women of Matthew's genealogy. However, Ezeogu 2012 reminds the reader that Matthew's in the genealogical account is more on Mary, the single parent of Jesus than on the four women of the Old Testament.

never discloses his intention for the cultural deviation. Nevertheless, scholars are up with various theories to explain the reason for the inclusion of the first four women in the genealogical list as a clue to explain the connection of Mary in the genealogy. But before discussing some of the theories, it may be necessary to ask what the first four women have in common.

According to (Ezeogu 2012), the women of the Hebrew Scriptures found in Matthew's genealogy share five common major characteristics: (i) They are all foreigners; (ii) They are all involved in questionable sexual conduct, at least in the eyes of the people; (iii) They are all well-disposed and committed to the land, people and God of Israel; (iv) They are all married to Jewish men; and (v) Each of them gave birth to a male child through whom God continued and advanced the fulfilment of his covenant promises to Abraham and David.⁵⁶ Piecing these together has led to various opinions and theories.

Major Theories of the Inclusion of Women in the Genealogy

The autobiographical hypothesis insists that the women are included in the genealogy as illustrations of the transformative power of God (Ezeogu 2012). It anticipates and defines the mission of Jesus as the saviour of sinners (1:21). By this, sinners are assured of a place in the table of the Lord.

Another explanation linked with the autobiographical hypothesis is the apologetic, which argues that the inclusion of the women is an answer to the claims of some Jews about Mary's irregular marriage and alleged adultery. The allegation casts some doubts on the integrity and authenticity of Jesus' messiahship. By pointing at these women held in contempt by the society, later justified, the narrative offers some answers for the alleged calumny against Mary for the alleged irregular relationship that makes her "a pregnant betrothed virgin." In other words, Matthew's inclusion of the 'four women' prefigures the situation of Mary, who appears distrustful for pregnancy, a subject of suspicion even by Joseph himself before the intervention of the Angel (1:18-25). Matthew's contention, therefore, could be that in spite of the alleged involvement of these women in strange sexual relationships for some economic, political or social cultural advantage, God still used them in the preservation and sustenance of the Davidic lineage.⁵⁷

However, some scholars seem uncomfortable with the argument because it evokes an obvious negative stereotype of womanhood, bearing in mind that sin is not a monopoly of any sex. There are even more prominent male sinners in the list (David, Ahaz, Manasseh).⁵⁸ Thus, the inadequacy of the thesis could have occasioned Johnson's proposal for an intra-Jewish debate hypothesis. This takes the reader back to the autobiographical argument.

In Johnson's proposition, he identifies an intra-Jewish debate and messianic conflict over the ancestry of the Messiah. He argues that the presence of the four women in the Matthean genealogy reflects the polemic between the Pharisees, who look for a Davidic Messiah, and the Sadducees, Essenes, and others, who expected a Levitical (priestly) Messiah. The proponents of the Levitical Messiah probably make a point against their rivals by calling attention to the irregularities of foreign blood and sinful women in the line of the Davidic messianic claim. So, Matthew's deliberate inclusion of the four women thus suggests his Pharisaic bent and his conviction that Jesus had fulfilled the

⁵⁶Ezeogu 2012, 269

⁵⁷ The case of Mary is for universal salvation that transcends the Israel of the Old.

⁵⁸Carter 2007, 59.

Pharisaic expectation in every respect.⁵⁹ However, some scholars may be uncomfortable with the proposal, for it is a tacit acceptance of the Jewish slander against Mary, though for the purpose of argument, it counters any claim that the Messiah must come from the biological lineage of the Davidic dynasty.

At the bottom of all these hypotheses, lies the transformative power and grace of God. This is finely articulated by Josephus with special reference to Ruth:

I was therefore obliged to relate this history of Ruth, because I had a mind to demonstrate the power of God, who, without difficulty, can raise those that are of ordinary parentage to dignity and splendour, to which he advanced David, though he were born of such mean parents.⁶⁰

In other words, the inclusion of women in the genealogy demonstrates God's grace and power: God's purpose for the Davidic line was achieved despite human sin and failure (cf. I Cor 1:27-31). God is the one and only one who can save his people from their sins (cf. Mt 1:21).⁶¹ Even as the case may be, these women are considered in some Jewish and early Christian circles as virtuous. Rahab, for example, is projected as a model of faith and good work⁶² and upon whom, according to the Rabbinic teachings (Ruth Rab. 1:1), the Holy Spirit rests.⁶³ Gen (38:26) and the Greek Jewish writer, Philo, are loud in their proclamation of the righteousness of Tamar, who, according to the Rabbinic tradition, is associated with the Spirit of God (cf. *b. Mak.* 23b; *Gen. Rab.* on 38.15), but it does not eliminate their weakness, especially before the transformation. If the primary reason for the inclusion of these women in the genealogy is to demonstrate the transformative power of God among *sinners*, then the list has already enough prominent *sinful men* (David, Ahaz and Manasseh), who could have served that purpose without involving any woman.

The failure of the autobiographical theory to address properly the objections raised for the inclusion of women in the Matthean genealogical list gives vent to a new thinking: the devotional hypothesis. According to the hypothesis, which may be regarded as an offshoot of the autobiographical theory, the inclusion of the women reflects God's preference for the weak and poor of the society. It is a demonstration of the irregular and indefinable divine providence for human salvation. It underscores the strange and unpredictable ways that God operates, which in return demands human docility and complete self-abandonment to divine providence.⁶⁴ This very hypothesis is also confronted with the same objection as earlier commented. If the emphasis of Matthew is on salvation, the inclusion of women does not given answer to it because sin is not a special reserve of women. They are, at least from human assessment, more sinful men in the list, who could even need more attention than the five women identified in the list.

The ecclesiological theory is built on the universality of the church and the salvation for all humankind. It leads to the argument that the inclusion of the women in the Matthean genealogical list reminds the reader of other unnamed women, who played important roles in Israel's history but are

⁵⁹Davies and Allison 1988, 171.

⁶⁰Josephus 1987, 149 Bk 9, Chap 9.4 (337).

⁶¹Davies and Allison 1988, 170.

⁶²Davies and Allison 1988, 173; cf. M. D. Johnson 1969, 162-65; Daube 1956, 27-51; Hanson 1978, 53-60.

⁶³ cf. Philo, *Deus Imm.* 136-7; *Virt.* 220-2) [SB I, pp. 15-17

⁶⁴Richards 2002, 14.

not mentioned specifically in the genealogy.⁶⁵ If this should serve as a thesis, why must it be women who are not so prominent and can hardly be thought of as matriarch of Israel?

It may be added here that Matthew's concern to announce from the outset of his Gospel the inclusion of non-Jews in the church by tracing the genealogy of Jesus back to Abraham (Jesus as the son of Abraham = 1:1) and the inclusion of the story of the magi represent Matthew's interest on the cooperation and contribution of the Gentiles in the salvific history of humankind. Thus, by including the Gentile women Matthew wants to indicate that the kingdom of God preached by Jesus is for Jews and Gentiles alike. A point is made here on the insider-outsider contributions to the Davidic messiahship. The instances of women of the Matthean genealogy as outsiders present an argument that the elements of insider-outsider may not necessarily be the determining principle of the messianic identity, hence should not be a strong argument to deny the messiahship of Jesus.

It may also be pointed out that in spite of efforts to make Tamar and "the wife of Uriah" more Jews than Gentiles, the overwhelming evidence shows that all the women in the list are linked directly or indirectly to the Gentiles. According to Stegemann, it is the purpose of Matthew to stress the fact that "the Messiah has Gentiles among his ancestors"⁶⁶ [and ancestress] that leads to the inclusion of the women in the genealogical list. Thinking about these women Gentiles, even as proselytes, Brown observes, raises some uncomfortable questions in the mind of Matthew's audience.⁶⁷ This is furthered stressed by Davies & Allison as follows:

There is probably more truth to the proposal, ... Tamar, whether a Canaanite or an Aramean, was certainly a foreigner (cf. Philo, *Virt.* 220-2). Rahab was a Canaanite Ruth a Moabite, and Bathsheba was (originally) the wife of Uriah, a Hittite. It is true that in some sources Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth are regarded as proselytes [SB1, pp. 16, 20-21, 25]" but the knowledge that they were not Jews by birth was not thereby eliminated.⁶⁸

Also, if one subscribes to the thesis that the first four women in the list foreshadow the situation of Mary, then the Gentile ancestry of Mary becomes a subject of interest.⁶⁹ On this point one may review the argument of Davies & Allison as inconclusive. The major challenge of the Matthean community in the bid to hold strong to the messiahship of Jesus, which is nevertheless connected to the status of Mary, is double-loaded: the calumny by outsider and irregular marriage. "So, the Christian story of Mary's pregnancy" involving an extraordinary circumstance and her Gentile ancestral connection⁷⁰ could have "engendered disbelief and ridicule on the part of those outside the church," even some insiders. "But Matthew and his readers could take reassurance from the history of the Davidic line; for those who took offence at Mary would be missing 'the strange righteousness of God'"⁷¹ The "apologetic force"⁷² of the Matthean argument is well represented by Ezeogu where he argues:

⁶⁵ Cf. Carter 2007, 58 only lists this as one of the opinions of scholars.

⁶⁶ As noted by Hagner 1993, 10.

⁶⁷ Brown, *Birth of Messiah* 1977, 89.

⁶⁸ Davies and Allison 1988, 171.

⁶⁹ Many scholars stop at the marital status of Mary without giving adequate time to her ethnicity.

⁷⁰ Contra Carter 2007, 59, who argues that there is no hint of Mary being a Gentile. But one should also add that there is no hint of Mary being Jewish. It is therefore the major thrust of this work to examine the ethnic identity of Mary. So, the women could have included first and foremost because of they were foreigners.

⁷¹ Davies and Allison 1988, 171.

⁷² cf. Schweizer, *Matthew*, p. 25. Cf. Zahn, pp. 63-7

What Matthew is probably saying by including these women in his genealogy is this: in the history of God's dealings with Israel, God has brought some *foreign* women, even when they were of questionable moral integrity, into the covenant community through marriage and, through them and their sons, has gone on to progressively fulfil his covenant with Abraham and the house of David. This is exactly what God is now doing in and through Mary (*italics not original*).⁷³

Ancestral Identity of the Mary of Nazareth

It has been consistently argued that Mary is connected to the other women in the Matthean genealogical list for her Gentile ancestral background and also for the calumny of irregular marital relationship. Ezeogu takes some pages in his work probing the identity of Mary of Nazareth. According to him, the search for the meaning of the name within the Hebrew vocabulary is bound to etymological failure for scholarship because it is far from a Hebrew origin. The insistence on locating the name within the Hebrew world is equally an intellectual and spiritual distress because of its "inexact appropriation" as "rebellion" or "bitterness". If such is the case "for God's most beautiful creature in a culture where names were believed to portray a person's inner character or destiny," Ezeogu argues, "she would have been given a new name that more exactly reflected, her exalted role in the divine plan of salvation."⁷⁴

According to Maas, it is possible that the name is Egyptian origin (*mery*) meaning beloved or cherished. "To claim a Hebrew origin or similar (Hebrew) derivations of the name Mary are philologically inadmissible, and of little use to the theologian ... since in Hebrew the adjective follows its substantive ... and even if the inverse order of words be admitted as possible, we have at best *maryam*, not *miryam*,"⁷⁵ The Egyptian origin of the name is reinforced by the fact that the first and only occurrence of the name in the Hebrew scriptures is linked with 'Miriam', the sister of Moses and Aaron. Incidentally, the three were born in Egypt and were probably given Egyptian names. If it were a Hebrew name, many more women of Hebrew parents would have borne the same name.⁷⁶ How also is it that all the Mary is mentioned in the New Testament are in one way or the other connected to Mary of Nazareth, and the infancy narrative of Matthew is a triadic movement from Bethlehem to Egypt to Nazareth in "Galilee of the Gentiles"⁷⁷ (cf. Matt 4:15; 1 Macc 5:15, 21)? In the attempt to address this chain of queries, Ezeogu's hypothesis would take the centre stage of the discussion.

Ezeogu's Thesis on the NT Mary's

It is interesting to note that outside Rom 16:6, the other places in the NT where the name Mary is found is within the Gospel and Acta traditions. Incidentally, Acts is connected with Luke; and the reference to Mary in Romans is based on a letter addressed to a community outside Palestine, and possibly dominated by Gentiles. Hence the Marys that may be of significance would be those located within the Gospel. This pattern of reasoning is earlier anticipated by Ezeogu when he identifies the four Marys of the Gospels as the centre for the research interest: Mary of Magdala, Mary of Bethany,

⁷³Ezeogu 2012, 269.

⁷⁴Ezeogu 2012, 270: "The approximate Hebrew derivation as a compound of the noun *meri* and the pronominal suffix *am*, meaning "their rebellion" is not a suitable name for a young girl. Less probable still is the assumption that the name derives from two Hebrew words *mar* (bitter) and *yam* (sea), hence "bitter sea:""

⁷⁵Maas 1912.

⁷⁶Ezeogu 2012, 273.

⁷⁷ Cf. (Davies and Allison 1988, 161),

Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary the mother of Jesus.⁷⁸ Mary of Magdala is one of the women apostles who minister to Jesus and accompany in his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. Mary of Bethany is sister to Martha and Lazarus, who appears to enjoy a more sedentary lifestyle. Three of the Marys are identified standing among the women at the foot of the cross: Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary the mother of James and Joseph (the wife of Clopas and the sister of the Mary the mother Jesus) and Mary Magdalene (cf. Matt 27:55-56; John 19:25).

By deploying the tools of social anthropology, Ezeogu comes up with an African insight that does not only explain more plausibly the inclusion of the ‘notorious women’ of the Hebrew scripture in the Matthean genealogy, but also addresses some of the acknowledged narrative gaps within the world of the infancy narrative. He interrogates the Marian density among the die-hard women followers, who could not even surrender at the crucifixion scene and the motive for the projection of another Mary, the sister to Mary the mother of Jesus, when the name is very rare among the Jews of Jesus’ time. He further questions why “the name Mary was rare among the Jews of Jesus’ time but common among the intransigent women followers of Jesus.

Appealing to the shared culture of the Middle East and Africa, Ezeogu argues that in the face of an unimaginable shameful death like the crucifixion, only close blood relations remain behind to claim the body and give it a decent burial. With this cultural peculiarity, he is able to reconstruct the scenario that allows him to identify Mary the mother of Jesus as a woman of Egyptian descent living in a neighbourhood for foreigners in Nazareth (Galilee of the Gentiles). So also, were Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Clopas. He further insists that Mary the wife of Clopas is referred to as sister of Mary the mother of Jesus because they were closely related, probably belonging to the same extended family or clan. Finding themselves in a foreign land increased and strengthened the bond between them.

“This Mary is probably the same Mary that Matthew refers to as “Mary the mother of James and Joseph: If that is so, then this explains why Matthew earlier calls James and Joseph “brothers” of Jesus (Matt 13:55). Their mother and the mother of Jesus were “sisters:” so they are Jesus ‘cousins or close relations on the mother’s side.”⁷⁹

Thus, the density of the women at the crucifixion scene is an African practice of emotional mutual support in the moment of bereavement, when one loses someone, who is very dear and significant in a family. In the context of this discussion, Mary has lost Jesus, “the first and only son”⁸⁰ and receives from her kinswomen the unqualified support of African cultural practice. Consequently, Ezeogu argues “that all the Marys who came from Galilee were Egyptian women, resident in a foreign land who had bound themselves together as a sorority for mutual support.”

Ezeogu further comments that the family of the Mary of Bethany (including Martha and Lazarus) also extends the connection of Mary could be Egyptian immigrants. The claim is buttressed with the missionary trek of Jesus. Here again, a reference is made to the African cultural practice, probably Middle Eastern as well, where a visitor’s privileged place of lodging is with a relation, who lives in the city that one visits.

⁷⁸Ezeogu 2012, 273-74. Further reflection in the section is based on the discussion of Ezeogu.

⁷⁹Ezeogu 2012, 274.

⁸⁰Okoronkwo 2013

Thus, when Jesus of Galilee, who is Egyptian in origin, visits Jerusalem, his first port of inquiry for lodging would be with an Egyptian family living in Jerusalem or its suburb Bethany. The text does not tell us that. But cultural anthropology, which has always been employed, albeit sporadically, in exegesis, suggests this conclusion.⁸¹

If the thesis is accepted that Mary the mother of Jesus is of Gentile, and precisely African origin, then how is she connected with the House of David.

Connection of Mary with the House of David

Ezeogu's ingenuity comes up here with his connection of the Mary of Egypt, the mother of Jesus with the house of David. According to him, the early Gospel (Mark 6:3; Matt 13:55) and the Pauline (Gal 4:4) traditions make no reference to Joseph as the (foster) father of Jesus, thus the suspicion that these traditions could have been ignorant of the fact that Joseph is the foster father of Jesus. Mark knows Jesus only as "the carpenter, the son of Mary" (Mark 6:3), and Paul only "Son of God, born of a woman (Gal 4:4). But by the time Matthew is writing, Jesus is no longer "the carpenter, the son of Mary," "born of a woman" but "the carpenter's son" (Matt 13:55). To be fair to Matthew, one must acknowledge that Matthew is aware and clear that Joseph is only playing the role of a legal father, not biological (Matt 1:25).

Here again, Ezeogu argues that the character of Joseph is introduced into the infancy narrative as a legitimacy to a would-be-illegitimate birth, and to give Jesus a legal claim to Davidic ancestry through adoption.⁸² It is, therefore, through adoption that Jesus becomes a legitimate Jew and the son of David. On the part of Mary of Nazareth, the mother of Jesus, she becomes equally a Jew not by ethnic origin but by betrothal (1:18-23). There is also the possibility that Mary of Nazareth could have been a *Jew by religion* even before the engagement with Joseph or adopted the Jewish religion, and thus becomes a Jew in the process of the engagement. Whatever the outcome appears to be, one thing certain is that by the time of Jesus, being a Jew is strictly reserved to the Judeans, those living around Judah. Even those who worship the same God of Israel but from outside Judean are not strictly speaking regarded as Jews.⁸³ In this sense, believing in the God of the Jews does not necessarily make one a Jew. One becomes a Jew either by ethnic or legal (adoption/marriage) phenomenon. As interesting as it may be for both the African and non-African theologians and biblical exegetes, the Gospels never suggest on any level that Mary is Jewish by ethnicity. The situation is rather rightly captured by Brown when he observes, "...we really do not know that Mary was a Davidic."⁸⁴ In other words, the narrative 'silence' of the Gospels creates a restless historical and narrative vacuum that when properly interrogated tilts towards Egypt, especially, if all the Egyptian connections in the infancy story are objectively weighed.⁸⁵

⁸¹Ezeogu 2012, 274-75.

⁸²Ezeogu 2012, 274-75. Whether the character and role of Joseph are historical or literary, it is beyond the interest of the current study.

⁸³Magness 2007.

⁸⁴Brown, *Birth of Messiah* 1977, 89.

⁸⁵ Cf. the seminar presentation of Olusola Igbari, "Egypt in Matthew 2:13: From the African Perspective" on the 32nd Annual International Conference on The Bible in Africa and African Experience, 2nd -5th July 2019, Babcock University, Ilisan Remo, Ogun State.

Conclusion: A Return to the African Reading of the Matthean Genealogy

This study would call for a revisit of the thesis of Ezeogu on African origin of Jesus of Nazareth.⁸⁶ The buy of the proposal is that the tradition available to Matthew for his Gospel is one in which Mary and her son Jesus, are known to be Africans of Egyptian origin. But the tradition becomes a bad product for the Matthean Christian community since the popular Jewish expectation of Matthew's contemporaries is that the Messiah *must be* a Hebrew of Abrahamic descendant, from Judah and from Davidic lineage (2 Sam 7:11-16; Ps 132:1-18; Isa 16:5; Jer 33:17-26).⁸⁷ But "some contemporaries of Jesus, who supposedly knew his family background, seemed to have the knowledge that Jesus was not of biological Davidic descent, nor was he born in Bethlehem" (cf John 1:46; 7:40-43). It is an unwelcome nuisance for the Johannine and the Matthean communities. The feelings among the communities are tersely captured by Ezeogu as a "perceived discontinuity between the expected origins of the Messiah who is to come and the reality of the origins of the historical Jesus."⁸⁸ It is this disparity between the Jesus they know and the Torah they read, which becomes a stumbling block in the way of Jewish commitment to the messianic faith in Jesus. This will characterise the early apologetic and polemic struggles of the Jesus movement. Neither would it then be an overstatement to add that the feelings could have affected the efficacy of the gospel for the first hearers, who incidentally are Jews and faithful adherents to the teachings and promises of the Laws and Prophets. Hence Matthew must retell the true African story of Jesus by redacting the received tradition in such a way as to portray Jesus as providentially, if not naturally, a son of Abraham of the bloodline of David (Matt 1:1). He undertakes to rewrite the original and authentic African history of the story of Jesus and other "historical traditions of his time,"⁸⁹ to set them forth in such a way as to underline matters of fundamental theological importance for his community. So, the inclusion of the women in the genealogy is an attempt to surmount a perceived impediment to Jesus' messianic title among those who were otherwise positively disposed to accept him as the Messiah. It is an effort to give Jesus a soft messianic landing into the Davidic dynasty that occasioned the inclusion of the five women in the Matthean genealogy.

The Matthean narrative model becomes a challenge not only to African but the global scholarship, especially historians and biblical exegetes, who are now challenged to bring the story of Jesus back to its original setting. The approach is both dialogical approach and apologetic, especially in the contemporary multicultural and multiracial environs that operate as if Africa does not count. It is also the conviction of this study that a critical assessment and reassessment of the thesis of Ezeogu on the African origin of Jesus and its acceptance is a benefit to global biblical scholarship in resolving some of the narrative gaps begging for clarifications. It serves a pragmatic purpose of bringing to light a story once told and forgotten but remains today the shadow of biblical scholarship and under which the Christian African identity suffocates. The study calls for the acceptance and furtherance of the African origin of Jesus. It demands for a radical transformation of the negative way that people of visible African descent are generally perceived around the world as a people who has made no significant contribution either to the history of civilization or to that of human salvation. It may be the *true* beginning of deconstructing the hurting and haunting racial barriers and the reconstructing and regaining of peace and harmony in today's multicultural societies and globalized world.

⁸⁶ The reflection in this section is based on the thesis of Ezeogu 2012.

⁸⁷ Cf. M. D. Johnson 2002, 116.

⁸⁸ Ezeogu 2012, 260.

⁸⁹ Hagner 1993, 2.

Again, acknowledging the African origin of Jesus and the Mary of Nazareth would go a long way to glue the contemporary identity crisis among Africans. It would lead to the logical conclusion that the Christianity of today, at least in its origins, is an African religion. It will reinvigorate the spirit of *authentic* evangelism and resound the new awareness note: Christianity is ‘*our*’, not ‘*your*’ or ‘*their*’ religion. It will make Christianity once again feel at home in its original homeland—Africa. As Ezeogu, one of the great African biblical exegetes of blessed memory puts it in the conclusion of his brief but powerful essay on the African Origin of Jesus:

The African origin of Jesus is an idea that could liberate Africans to see themselves as active agents in the interpretation and transmission of the Jesus tradition and not just as passive consumers of Europeanised and Americanised versions of Christianity. This is the task of inculturation at its best. From this endeavour, an authentic African expression of Christianity and theology would emerge that could be more faithful to the original teachings of Jesus than we have had in the past two thousand years. Authentic African impact would be felt in the areas not only of worship and the visual arts, but also in the deeper and more faithful understanding and articulation of Christian doctrine and morals as we, as a church, move forward to face the enormous challenges of the third Christian millennium.⁹⁰

This study, therefore, an African re-reading of the Matthean genealogy with the lenses of a theology of inclusion that extends to people of all nations, binding together the old and new covenant of God’s saving acts in history. It is an African thinking that reunites the old and scattered divides after the judgment of the flood and the fragmented alienation of the tower of Babel (Gen 6–11). It offers some ideas to settle some of the many contradictions often encountered in the traditional and Western reading of the Matthean infancy narrative.

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⁹⁰Ezeogu 2012, 281.

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