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 of  
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 by  
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**INTRODUCTION**

Christmas is a lovely time of the year for most people. The emphasis upon peace and upon family are a refreshing shift away from many of the hard, harsh realities of daily life. Of course there is always the commercial push to shove the religious meaning of Christmas to the side and degenerate it into a purely commercial quest for things in an unhealthy manner of greed.

Christmas<sup>1</sup> is by definition a celebration of the birthday of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Down through the centuries this birthday has been celebrated by followers of Christ, although not

<sup>1</sup>“Christmas’ is a compound word originating in the term ‘Christ’s Mass’. It is derived from the Middle English *Cristemasse*, which is from Old English *Crīstesmæsse*, a phrase first recorded in 1038<sup>[7]</sup> followed by the word *Cristes-messe* in 1131.<sup>[27]</sup> *Crīst* (genitive *Crīstes*) is from Greek *Khrīstos* (Χριστός), a translation of Hebrew *Māšīah* (מָשִׁיחַ), ‘Messiah’, meaning ‘annointed’;<sup>[28][29]</sup> and *mæsse* is from Latin *missa*, the celebration of the Eucharist. The form ‘Christenmas’ was also historically used, but is now considered archaic and dialectal;<sup>[30]</sup> it derives from Middle English *Cristenmasse*, literally ‘Christian mass’.<sup>[31]</sup> ‘Xmas’ is an abbreviation of Christmas found particularly in print, based on the initial letter chi (X) in Greek *Khrīstos* (Χριστός), ‘Christ’, though numerous style guides discourage its use;<sup>[32]</sup> it has precedent in Middle English *Xpēs masse* (where ‘Xp’ is an abbreviation for Χριστός).<sup>[31]”</sup> [“Christmas,” wikipedia.org]

<sup>2</sup>Christmas (Old English: *Crīstesmæsse*, meaning ‘Christ’s Mass’) is an annual commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ<sup>[6]</sup> <sup>[7]</sup> and a widely observed holiday, celebrated generally on December 25<sup>[3][4][5]</sup> by millions of people around the world.<sup>[2][8]</sup> A feast central to the Christian liturgical year, it closes the Advent season and initiates the twelve days of Christmastide, which ends after the twelfth night.<sup>[9]</sup> Christmas is a civil holiday in many of the world’s nations,<sup>[10][11][12]</sup> is celebrated by an increasing number of non-Christians,<sup>[1][13][14]</sup> and is an integral part of the Christmas and holiday season.

“While the birth year of Jesus is estimated among modern historians to have been between 7 and 2 BC, the exact month and day of his birth are unknown.<sup>[15][16]</sup> His birth is mentioned in two of the four canonical gospels. By the early-to-mid 4th century, the Western Christian Church had placed Christmas on December 25,<sup>[17]</sup> a date later adopted in the East.<sup>[18][19]</sup> The date of Christmas may have initially been chosen to correspond with the day exactly nine months after early Christians believed Jesus to have been conceived,<sup>[20]</sup> or with one or more ancient polytheistic festivals that occurred near southern solstice (i.e., the Roman winter solstice); a further solar connection has been suggested because of a biblical verse<sup>[a]</sup> identifying Jesus as the “Sun of righteousness”.<sup>[20][21][22][23][24]”</sup>

[“Christmas,” wikipedia.org]

for the first couple of centuries, and not on the same date.<sup>3</sup> But variety comes in another form as well: the way in which Christmas is celebrated.<sup>4</sup> Not only do different Christian traditions have their own distinctive way of celebrating Christ’s birth, but additionally the patterns of celebration are shaped by nationality, ethnicity, and individual family traditions.

This prompts the question: *Is there a biblical way to celebrate Christmas?* The answer -- as I see it -- is both a Yes and a No. *On the Yes side*, the principle would be to make one’s celebration Christ centered. By that is meant to let Christian values guide you during the Christmas season and in your personal and family celebrations. The material side of most modern Christ-

<sup>3</sup>“The original date of the celebration in Eastern Christianity was January 6, in connection with Epiphany, and that is still the date of the celebration for the Armenian Apostolic Church and in Armenia, where it is a public holiday. As of 2013, there is a difference of 13 days between the modern Gregorian calendar and the older Julian calendar. Those who continue to use the Julian calendar or its equivalents thus celebrate December 25 and January 6, which on the Gregorian calendar translate as January 7 and January 19. For this reason, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eriteria, Russia, Georgia, Ukraine, Serbia, the Republic of Macedonia, and the Republic of Moldova celebrate Christmas on what in the Gregorian calendar is January 7. Eastern Orthodox Churches in Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Antioch, Alexandria, Albania, Finland, and the Orthodox Church in America celebrate Christmas on December 25 in the revised Julian calendar, corresponding to December 25 also in the Gregorian calendar.” [“Christmas,” wikipedia.org]

<sup>4</sup>“The celebratory customs associated in various countries with Christmas have a mix of pre-Christian, Christian, and secular themes and origins.<sup>[25]</sup> Popular modern customs of the holiday include gift giving, Christmas music and caroling, an exchange of Christmas cards, church celebrations, a special meal, and the display of various Christmas decorations, including Christmas trees, Christmas lights, nativity scenes, garlands, wreaths, mistletoe, and holly. In addition, several closely related and often interchangeable figures, known as Santa Claus, Father Christmas, Saint Nicholas, and Christkind, are associated with bringing gifts to children during the Christmas season and have their own body of traditions and lore.<sup>[26]</sup> Because gift-giving and many other aspects of the Christmas festival involve heightened economic activity among both Christians and non-Christians, the holiday has become a significant event and a key sales period for retailers and businesses. The economic impact of Christmas is a factor that has grown steadily over the past few centuries in many regions of the world.” [“Christmas,” wikipedia.org]

mas celebrations can easily lure us into a greedy materialism of longing for 'things' above everything else. This is especially true for children. Commercialization of Christmas looms always as a threat to the genuine spiritual experience of Christmas. One very helpful counter action for Christian families is a family emphasis on the celebration of Advent during the month of December.<sup>5</sup> This activity helps set a spiritual tone for the Christmas season, which is especially good for the children.

**On the No side** of the answer, one must acknowledge that Christ's birthday was not celebrated beyond His birth when the shepherds, the wise men, and angels celebrated it. From that time throughout Jesus' childhood and youth, **His birthday** was a normal first century Jewish peasant boy's birthday, what ever that may have been.

Information on just how this celebration among the Jewish people took place is limited mostly to later Jewish traditions that are assumed to have roots reaching as far back as the Old Testament era.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly,

<sup>5</sup>The variety of ways this is celebrated among Christians is almost endless. Plus each family can develop its own distinctive celebration pattern. The celebration can range from a daily family devotions time to a weekly Sunday celebration with the lighting of an Advent candle in family devotions. A multitude of resources are available through the internet and in religious bookstores.

<sup>6</sup>"There are no positive data in the Bible or in rabbinical literature concerning birthday festivals among the ancient Jews. This silence on the subject is, however, no warrant for the conclusion that the Jews altogether abstained from following a custom which was general among the Egyptians (Gen. xl. 20), Persians (Herodotus i. 133), Syrians, and Greeks. Even if not common among the people, yet kings and princes probably practiced it, following the custom of their heathen contemporaries. Birthday festivals were not considered by the Rabbis as 'hukkot ha-goyim' (customs of the heathen; see Maimonides, *Yad ha-Hazakah*, 'Akkum we-Hukotehem, xi. 12), although Lightfoot held a contrary opinion ("Horæ Hebr." on Matt. xiv. 6).

### **Biblical References.**

"A close study of the Biblical text shows that the Bible is not altogether wanting in references to the subject; for, while it lacks positive accounts, it contains passages from which it may be inferred that the custom of remembering birthday anniversaries was not wholly unknown among the Jews. "The day of our king" (Hosea vii. 5), on which the princes made the king sick with bottles of wine, and the king himself "stretched out his hand with scorners," alludes more probably to a birthday festival than to a solemn occasion, such as the anniversary of his installation, which would have been observed with more decorum (see Josephus, "Ant." xv. 9, § 6).

"Birthdays might not have been celebrated by the common people with great solemnity, yet they did not pass wholly unnoticed, and were remembered by congratulations, as in modern times. Jeremiah not only cursed the day of his birth, but wished that it should not be blessed (Jer. xx. 14), as though such had been the custom.

"It is said of Job, 'and he cursed his day' (Job iii. 1). The emphatic and determining expression "his day" implies the idea that he, like everybody else, had a certain day of the year singled out for a certain purpose, which we learn further was the anniversary of his birth.

birthday celebrations in the ancient world are recorded more often of both non-Jewish and non-Christians.<sup>7</sup> And usually they are described with great pomp and pageantry along with excess and raw paganism.<sup>8</sup> Although the very limited available data suggests that some annual acknowledgment of one's day of physical birth did take place, the more important individual Jewish celebration was the anniversary of one's Bar Mizwah that celebrated becoming officially a part of covenant Israel.<sup>9</sup> In the pre-middle ages Judaism, this point

### **Weaning on Second Birthday.**

"The second or third birthday of a child whose coming into the world was very much desired by his parents was usually made the occasion of a feast, because the child was then weaned, and had consequently passed the dangerous and uncertain stage of infancy. Abraham made a great feast on the day Isaac was weaned (Gen. xxi. 8). This occurred, according to Rashi, at the expiration of twenty-four months. Bishop Ely ("Holy Bible Com." l.c. on the passage) says: 'By comparing I Sam. it would seem that this was very probably a religious feast.' Hannah postponed the yearly family feast at Shiloh until she had weaned Samuel, in order to celebrate his birthday at the same time (I Sam. i. 23, 24). According to Rashi and Midr. R. Samuel, l.c., this also occurred at the end of twenty-four months. Yet from II Chron. xxxi. 16 it may be inferred that Samuel was weaned at the end of his third year; for only from that age were children admitted to the service of the Temple."

["Birthday," Jewish Encyclopedia.com]

<sup>7</sup>Only one birthday celebration is described inside the New Testament and it is that of Herod Agrippa I in Matt. 14:6-7, and led to the execution of John the Baptist.

6 Γενεσίσις δὲ γενομένης τοῦ Ἡρώδου ὠρχήσατο ἡ θυγάτηρ τῆς Ἡρωδιάδος ἐν τῷ μέσῳ καὶ ἤρρεσεν τῷ Ἡρώδῃ, 7 ὅθεν μεθ' ὄρκου ὠμολόγησεν αὐτῇ δοῦναι ὃ ἐὰν αἰτήσῃται.

6 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company, and she pleased Herod 7 so much that he promised on oath to grant her whatever she might ask.

Thus a birthday party led to a 'strip tease' dance which in turn resulted in the death of a servant of God. Not a recommendation of birthday parties from the New Testament.

<sup>8</sup>"Two instances of birthday celebrations are mentioned in post-Biblical literature, from which it may be assumed that this was customary in the Herodian family. They used to celebrate birthdays with great pomp, and in the same manner as the Egyptian kings had done more than 2,000 years earlier (Gen. xl. 20), by extensive public entertainments, which were made the occasions of granting favors to friends and pardons to those in disgrace. Agrippa I. solemnized his birthday anniversary by entertaining his subjects with a festival, and decreed the recall of his banished general Silas, which recall, by the way, the latter stubbornly declined (Josephus, "Ant." xix. 7, § 1). Herod the Tetrarch celebrated his birthday with a great feast, at which the daughter of Herodias danced before the guests, the king promising 'to give her whatsoever she would ask' (Matt. xiv. 6)." ["Birthday," Jewish Encyclopedia.com]

<sup>9</sup>"The Jewish people in general may have had reasons to avoid feasting on birthdays in the times of the Tannaim and Amoraim: first, because they had been at one time grievously offended on such festivals (according to II Macc. vi. 7, the Jews were forced, in the time of Antiochus, to eat of the sacrifices which were offered 'in the day of the king's birth every month'); secondly, because no 'Talmid hakam' would attend as a guest at such a feast, since the Rabbis condemn the Talmid hakam who partakes of a meal or

was marked by the Jewish youngster reaching puberty and the first birthday subsequently. From the fifteenth century AD on, this celebration comes on the thirteenth birthday inside Judaism. Every year after that would call for a celebration on the anniversary of that event.



Invitation from Claudia Severa to Sulpicia Lepidina, ref Tab. Vindol. II 291.

In the first century Greco-Roman world birthdays were celebrated among the wealthy and powerful, but not among the peasant segment of society. The Vindolanda tablets, discovered in England during the 1970s, contain on tablet 291<sup>10</sup> a birthday invitation from a Claudia Severa to Sulpicia Lepidina to her birthday party around 100 AD.<sup>11</sup> But the limited data does not reveal much about the content and structure of those celebrations.

Thus just **how Jesus' birthday was celebrated inside his family on an annual basis** is unknown, and it

feast which is not a 'se'udat mizwah' (commendable meal). And to the son of him who frequented feasts were applied opprobrious epithets, such as 'son of an oven-heater,' 'son of a market-dancer,' etc. Since the fifteenth century (Löw, "Lebensalter," p. 210) the thirteenth birthday of a boy has been made the occasion of a family feast because it coincides with his religious majority (Bar Mizwah).<sup>12</sup> ["Birthday," Jewish Encyclopedia.com]

<sup>10</sup>"Claudia Severa to her Lepidina greetings. On 11 September, sister, for the day of the celebration of my birthday, I give you a warm invitation to make sure that you come to us, to make the day more enjoyable for me by your arrival, if you are present (?). Give my greetings to your Cerialis. My Aelius and my little son send him (?) their greetings. (2nd hand) I shall expect you, sister. Farewell, sister, my dearest soul, as I hope to prosper, and hail. (Back, 1st hand) To Sulpicia Lepidina, wife of Cerialis, from Severa."  
["Vindolanda Tablets Online," Oxford University library]

<sup>11</sup>"The best-known document is perhaps Tablet 291, written around AD 100 from Claudia Severa,<sup>110</sup> the wife of the commander of a nearby fort, to Sulpicia Lepidina, inviting her to a birthday party. The invitation is one of the earliest known examples of writing in Latin by a woman.<sup>111</sup> There are two handwriting styles in the tablet, with the majority of the text written in a professional hand (thought to be the household scribe) and with closing greetings personally added by Claudia Severa herself (on the lower right hand side of the tablet).<sup>110</sup>

"The tablets are written in Roman cursive script and throw light on the extent of literacy in Roman Britain. One of the tablets confirms that Roman soldiers wore underpants (subligaria),<sup>112</sup><sup>113</sup> and also testifies to a high degree of literacy in the Roman army."  
["Vindolanda tablets," wikipedia.org]

is not certain that it was even celebrated. The existing date would suggest more that it wasn't celebrated. He comes out of a Jewish peasant family without wealth or fame, living in a tiny village in Galilee called Nazareth. Only wealthy, powerful Jews living in the large cities celebrated birthdays and in mimicking the pattern of wealthy Romans, rather than any established Jewish tradition.

Consequently, no pattern or example on celebrating birthdays emerges within the pages of the New Testament. Therefore **early Christians did not celebrate the birth of Christ**. Not until the 300s was there a Christmas celebration by Christians.<sup>12</sup> In western Christianity the beginnings of Christmas came with the adoption of the Roman holiday of Saturnalia, which was from December 17-25, connected to the winter solstice, and was a week long period of lawlessness and drunkenness.<sup>13</sup> Eastern and Western Christianity have different dates for their respective celebration, due largely to calendar differences.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps it is due in part to this

<sup>12</sup>"In the 4th century CE, Christianity imported the Saturnalia festival hoping to take the pagan masses in with it. Christian leaders succeeded in converting to Christianity large numbers of pagans by promising them that they could continue to celebrate the Saturnalia as Christians.<sup>12</sup>

"The problem was that there was nothing intrinsically Christian about Saturnalia. To remedy this, these Christian leaders named Saturnalia's concluding day, December 25th, to be Jesus' birthday."  
["History of Christmas," Judaism online.com]

<sup>13</sup>"Roman pagans first introduced the holiday of Saturnalia, a week long period of lawlessness celebrated between December 17-25. During this period, Roman courts were closed, and Roman law dictated that no one could be punished for damaging property or injuring people during the week long celebration. The festival began when Roman authorities chose 'an enemy of the Roman people' to represent the 'Lord of Misrule.' Each Roman community selected a victim whom they forced to indulge in food and other physical pleasures throughout the week. At the festival's conclusion, December 25th, Roman authorities believed they were destroying the forces of darkness by brutally murdering this innocent man or woman.

"The ancient Greek writer poet and historian Lucian (in his dialogue entitled *Saturnalia*) describes the festival's observance in his time. In addition to human sacrifice, he mentions these customs: widespread intoxication; going from house to house while singing naked; rape and other sexual license; and consuming human-shaped biscuits (still produced in some English and most German bakeries during the Christmas season)."  
["History of Christmas," Judaism online.com]

<sup>14</sup>"The original date of the celebration in Eastern Christianity was January 6, in connection with Epiphany, and that is still the date of the celebration for the Armenian Apostolic Church and in Armenia, where it is a public holiday. As of 2013, there is a difference of 13 days between the modern Gregorian calendar and the older Julian calendar. Those who continue to use the Julian calendar or its equivalents thus celebrate December 25 and January 6, which on the Gregorian calendar translate as January 7 and January 19. For this reason, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Russia, Georgia, Ukraine, Serbia, the Republic of Macedonia, and the Republic of Moldova celebrate Christmas on what in the Gregorian calendar is January 3

rather unusual origin of the celebration, that the modern counter part contains such a mixture of Christian and secular elements.<sup>15</sup>

**The actual calendar date of Jesus' birth is completely unknown.** The closest that the New Testament comes to providing a date is in Luke 1:5 and Matthew 2:1.

**Luke 1:5a.** Ἐγένετο ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου βασιλέως τῆς Ἰουδαίας, *In the days of King Herod of Judea,*

**Matt. 2:1a.** Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ γεννηθέντος ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἐν ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου τοῦ βασιλέως, *In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea,* Jesus was born during the reign of King Herod over Judea. This was a time period of 73/74 BCE to 4 BCE. From all indication it was toward the end of his reign that Jesus was born.<sup>16</sup>

7. Eastern Orthodox Churches in Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Antioch, Alexandria, Albania, Finland, and the Orthodox Church in America celebrate Christmas on December 25 in the revised Julian calendar, corresponding to December 25 also in the Gregorian calendar.” [“Christmas,” wikipedia.org]

<sup>15</sup>“The celebratory customs associated in various countries with Christmas have a mix of pre-Christian, Christian, and secular themes and origins.<sup>[25]</sup> Popular modern customs of the holiday include gift giving, Christmas music and caroling, an exchange of Christmas cards, church celebrations, a special meal, and the display of various Christmas decorations, including Christmas trees, Christmas lights, nativity scenes, garlands, wreaths, mistletoe, and holly. In addition, several closely related and often interchangeable figures, known as Santa Claus, Father Christmas, Saint Nicholas, and Christkind, are associated with bringing gifts to children during the Christmas season and have their own body of traditions and lore.<sup>[26]</sup> Because gift-giving and many other aspects of the Christmas festival involve heightened economic activity among both Christians and non-Christians, the holiday has become a significant event and a key sales period for retailers and businesses. The economic impact of Christmas is a factor that has grown steadily over the past few centuries in many regions of the world.” [“Christmas,” wikipedia.org]

<sup>16</sup>“In order to reckon the date of Herod the Great’s death, evidence that is primarily literary and numismatic must be considered. Josephus tells us that Herod the Great was proclaimed King of Judea by the Romans when Calvinus and Pollio were proconsuls, or in late 40 B.C. (Ant. 14.381–85; J.W. 1.282–85; Tacitus Hist. 5.9). He then adds that Herod (see Herodian Dynasty) reigned for thirty-seven years from the time of that proclamation (Ant. 17.191; J.W. 1.665.). There is considerable debate as to whether Josephus was reckoning according to solar years, or following the accession-year chronology (Herod did not gain possession of his domain until 37 B.C.). There is also the question of whether or not he was counting inclusively, that is, reckoning partial years as whole years. Most scholars are still persuaded by the work of E. Schürer (cf. Bernegger, Hoehner) that Josephus is correct about the time of Herod’s accession and the length of his reign. This would place the death of Herod at about 3 B.C. However, Josephus also tells us that an eclipse of the moon occurred shortly before Herod’s death (Ant. 17.167), and in view of the fact that this is the only time Josephus mentions this sort of phenomenon, it is improbable that he fabricated this piece of information. There were no such eclipses in 3 B.C., but there was one on March 12/13, 4 B.C. He also informs us that Passover was celebrated shortly after Herod’s death (Ant. 17.213;

Luke in 2:1-7 provides additional dating of the birth:

2 Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐξῆλθεν δόγμα παρὰ Καίσαρος Αὐγούστου ἀπογράφεσθαι πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην. 2 αὕτη ἀπογραφή πρώτη ἐγένετο ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς Συρίας Κυρηνίου. 3 καὶ ἐπορεύοντο πάντες ἀπογράφεσθαι, ἕκαστος εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ πόλιν. 4 Ἀνέβη δὲ καὶ Ἰωσήφ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐκ πόλεως Ναζαρέθ εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν εἰς πόλιν Δαυὶδ ἣτις καλεῖται Βηθλέεμ, διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἐξ οἴκου καὶ πατριᾶς Δαυὶδ, 5 ἀπογράψασθαι σὺν Μαριὰμ τῇ ἐμνηστευμένῃ αὐτῷ, οὖσῃ ἐγκύω. 6 Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἐκεῖ ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτήν, 7 καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον, καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ, διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι.

2 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

This adds to the references the reign of the Roman Emperor Augustus (27 BCE - 14 AD) and the Syrian governorship of Quirinius. The challenge comes from Quirinius who lived 51 BCE to 21 AD, but was made official governor of Syria in 6 AD. This date is too late for Herod the Great’s life and rule over Judea. The so-called Census of Quirinius becomes a challenge for the dating of Jesus’ birth.<sup>17</sup> The dating of Quirinius’ reign comes from J.W. 2.10). In 4 B.C. the first day of Passover would have been April 11. Thus, it is likely Herod died between March 12 and April 11, 4 B.C. and presumably the discrepancy of one year is accounted for by inclusive reckoning of regnal years. This means that Jesus was born some time before March of 4 B.C.” [B. III Witherington, “Birth of Jesus,” ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 67.]

<sup>17</sup>“For those who believe that the Gospels are accurate historical records of Jesus’ life, one of the most difficult problems in the NT is the census Luke presents in 2:1–2. First, there is no evidence for an empire-wide census being taken during the time of Augustus, and we might expect that such a mammoth undertaking would have been mentioned by one or another of the ancient historians who recorded the period.

“Second, Quirinius was sent by Augustus to be governor of Syria (and Judea) in A.D. 6 (not 6 B.C.) and thereafter did take a notable census for the empire. Josephus tells us he visited Judea in 6–7 A.D. to assess the property of the Jews in preparation for the registering and taxing of that property (Ant. 18.1.1–2.). There is no evidence that he was governor of the region twice or that he under-

Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.355; 18.1–2. Perhaps Josephus took a census of the region twice. It has been suggested that Luke may have confused Quirinius with P. Quinctilius Varus who was legate of Syria during the period 6–3 B.C. Against this is the fact that Luke was apparently knowledgeable about Latin names and would have known a cognomen (Quirinius) from a mere nomen (Quintilius).

“Third, a Roman census would not have required Jews to travel to their ancestral home for registration. In any case, is it probable that the Romans would undertake such a census in a client state that already had its own ruler (Herod)?

“In response to these problems various answers have been given. In the first place, if there was a census that affected Judea during the reign of Herod the Great, it would probably proceed along the lines of a Jewish census, not a Roman one. In that case it is plausible that Jews would return to their ancestral homes and that both adults would go (especially if Mary was also of Davidic descent). Second, elsewhere Luke manifests a knowledge of the later census by Quirinius which prompted the revolt of Judas the Galilean in A.D. 6–7 (Acts 5:37). Is it likely that he would have confused this census, which he knew to be a later one, with one during the reign of Herod?

“It is not certain that Luke in 2:1 means that Augustus took one enormous census of the whole empire. The language is general and may mean no more than that the various parts of the empire were subject to various censuses during the time of Augustus. What the Greek in fact says is that Caesar decreed that ‘all of the Roman world be enrolled’ (Thorley). Both the present tense of *apographō* (‘to enroll’) and the use of past (‘all’) suggest that Luke means that Caesar decreed that the enrollment, which had previously been going on in some parts of the empire, should now be extended to all parts, including client states. The Roman historian A. N. Sherwin-White states, ‘A census or taxation-assessment of the whole provincial empire ... was certainly accomplished for the first time in history under Augustus’ (168–69).

“Fourth, there is some evidence of a census of Judea under Saturninus between 9–6 B.C. (cf. Tertullian Adv. Marc. 4.19). We also know that Quirinius undertook more than one census during his governorship, and that he did not scruple to enroll a basically autonomous group such as the Apameans.

“Fifth, Luke’s precise wording in 2:2 is curious, and could mean either that he is referring to the first or former census that was taken under Quirinius’ rule of Syria (which would perhaps imply that this was an earlier census than the one mentioned in Acts 5:37), or it is grammatically possible that *prōte* means something like ‘prior to’ or ‘before’ in which case Luke is speaking of a census undertaken by someone else prior to the [more famous or infamous] census under Quirinius which led to Jewish revolt. Such a comparative use of *prōte* is not unprecedented, but grammatically there are problems with such a view.

“Thus it is more probable that Luke is referring to a census under Quirinius that took place prior to the famous one in A.D. 6–7. If so, we have no clear record outside Luke of such an action by Quirinius, though it is not impossible that it took place. Herod’s power was on the wane at the time of Jesus’ birth, and a census in preparation for the change of power could well have been forced on Herod since he had fallen into some disfavor with Augustus near the end of his life. We know also that Quirinius had been made consul in 12 B.C. and a person of his rank serving in the East frequently had far-reaching authority and duties. It is thus not improbable that, acting as Caesar’s agent, he had Herod take a census. It is also possible he was governor more than once in Syria, though the possibility also remains that Luke may be identifying him by his later and, to his audience, more familiar office. It is less likely that

Josephus had incorrect dates, or more likely Luke is referring to something different than the empire wide census than what shows up in the Roman history sources. A wide variety of proposals surface over the interpretive history of the dating of Jesus’ birth.<sup>18</sup> The simple truth is that we really don’t know how these references should be correctly synchronized together.

Further, the likelihood from the depictions of Matthew and Luke is that Jesus was born either in late spring time or early summer, and not in December.

What is clear, however, is that Jesus was not born

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Luke means that Quirinius started a census in 6 B.C. and finished it in 6–7 A.D., for he says that this was the first census the governor took (distinguishing it from some later one). The upshot of all this is that Luke’s reference to the census does not suggest a different date for Jesus’ birth than does the Matthean evidence.”

[B. III Witherington, “Birth of Jesus,” ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 67–68.]

<sup>18</sup>“Traditionally, biblical scholars tried to suggest ways of reconciling the two accounts, many of which involve making assumptions about the historical evidence: that Josephus was incorrect, or the text had been corrupted, and the census was actually conducted by one of the governors of Herod’s time, such as Gaius Sentius Saturninus or Publius Quinctilius Varus;<sup>[21][22]</sup> that there were two separate events, either a decree followed by a census ten years later, or a census followed by an imposition of tax ten years later;<sup>[23][24]</sup> that the words of Luke could be interpreted to mean that the census had been carried out before Quirinius was governor;<sup>[25][26]</sup> or that he had carried out an earlier census, either as governor or in a subordinate role.<sup>[27][28][29][30]</sup>

“In 1886, however, the theologian Emil Schürer, in his monumental study, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volks im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* (*A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*), closely criticised the traditional view. He raised five points which showed, he believed, that the Luke account could not be historically accurate: (1) nothing is known in history of a general census by Augustus; (2) in a Roman census Joseph would not have had to travel to Bethlehem, and Mary would not have had to travel at all; (3) no Roman census would have been made in Judea during the reign of Herod; (4) Josephus records no such census, and it would have been a notable innovation; (5) Quirinius was not governor of Syria until long after the reign of Herod.<sup>[31]</sup> The suggested alternative translations have been described as ‘implausible’<sup>[32]</sup> and ‘almost impossible’.<sup>[33]</sup>

“Most modern scholars explain the disparity as an error on the part of the author of the Gospel,<sup>[34][35]</sup> concluding that he was more concerned with creating a symbolic narrative than a historical account,<sup>[36]</sup> and was either unaware of, or indifferent to,<sup>[37]</sup> the chronological difficulty. In *The Birth of the Messiah* (1977), a detailed study of the infancy narratives of Jesus, the American scholar Raymond E. Brown concluded that ‘this information is dubious on almost every score, despite the elaborate attempts by scholars to defend Lucan accuracy.’<sup>[38]</sup> W. D. Davies and E. P. Sanders ascribe this to simple error: ‘on many points, especially about Jesus’ early life, the evangelists were ignorant ... they simply did not know, and, guided by rumour, hope or supposition, did the best they could’.<sup>[39]</sup> Fergus Millar suggests that Luke’s narrative was a construct designed to connect Jesus with the house of David.<sup>[40]”</sup> [“Census of Quirinius,” wikipedia.org]

during the year AD 1.<sup>19</sup> How did this happen? Essentially the reason is a miscalculation made by Dionysius, a Scythian monk, who was asked by Pope John I in 525 AD to develop a new calendar system that began with Christ's birth. With Jesus having been born sometime prior to Herod's death in 4-3 BCE, the starting point of the new calendar is off some four to six years.

Our study will survey briefly the pericopes of these four chapters, but primary attention will be given to the two narratives containing a referent to the actual birth of Christ. The birth of Christ is at the center of our study. My goal for this study is to help you first understand the biblical story in its context in Matthew and Mark. Supplementing this will be some reference to background narratives stressing both the supernatural birth of important individuals in the first century world, and then how that led to a serious distorting of the story of Jesus' beginnings by the Gnostic writers of the second and third Christian centuries. We have many lessons to learn from this.

## I. PRIOR EVENTS in

The Bible describes the birth of Christ in but two places: Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 2:1-7.<sup>20</sup> But even these two texts provide no detailed description of the actual birth of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup>“The reckoning of time in antiquity went through a variety of changes until Julius Caesar, on the basis of the Egyptian solar calendar, standardized a 365-day year with an extra day inserted on leap years. Both the church and the Western world followed this method of reckoning time until the reforms of Pope Gregory XIII promulgated on February 24, 1582. Since that time the Gregorian calendar has been followed.

“In A.D. 525, when Pope John I asked a Scythian monk named Dionysius to prepare a standard calendar for the Western Church that would be reckoned from the birth date of Christ, Dionysius relied both on the Julian calendar and on available information about the date of the founding of the city of Rome to compute the birth date of Christ. In Dionysius' calendar, A.D. 1 was set at 754 A.U.C. (anno urbis conditae, i.e., from the founding of the city of Rome), with Jesus' birthday being set as 25 December 753 A.U.C. Unfortunately, Dionysius miscalculated the birth of Jesus, for the Gospels state that Jesus was born during the reign of Herod the Great, who died before the turn of the era (estimates range from about 4 to 1 B.C.). Thus, historically, we come up with the anomaly of Jesus being born several years B.C.”

[B. III Witherington, “Birth of Jesus,” ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 66.]

<sup>20</sup>The reasons why Mark and John do not include any Infancy Narratives in their accounts of the life of Jesus lie hidden in their distinctive goals for the writing of their gospel narrative.

<sup>21</sup>Modern questions connected to the birth of a child are not mentioned. These include questions such as: How long was Mary in labor? Was it an easy labor or a difficult one? How much did Jesus weigh at birth? How long was he? What was Joseph's response?

Such questions as these, although considered both normal and appropriate in our day, were not considered important in the ancient world, and especially a Jewish world. This would be particularly

**Mt. 1:25.** ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν, [until she had borne a son.](#)

**Lk. 2:7.** καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον, καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ, διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι.

[And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.](#)

Instead, these two gospel writers provide us with a variety of circumstances connected to the physical birth of Christ. To be sure, the first two chapters in both Matthew and Luke function as a theological ‘birth announcement.’ But these go much beyond a family style announcement of the birth of a new child in the family. In particular, Luke's announcement takes on the challenge of asserting the birth of Jesus in a manner superior to the public announcement and subsequent celebration of the birth of Emperor Augustus.<sup>22</sup> This reli-

true for public announcements of a birth. Consequently, the gospel writers do not bother to mention such details in their accounts of Jesus' birth. But the Infancy Narratives in the first two chapters in both Matthew and Luke serve this role of ‘birth announcement’ but for a religious purpose rather than just a family announcement.

<sup>22</sup>“Luke's birth narrative is perhaps the text that is most blatantly related to the Roman Empire. Caesar Augustus had issued a decree that the whole world would be counted. This was so that the emperor would be able to tax the people with greater accuracy. Emperor Augustus would have used the money to fund his military, for building expansion projects, and for overall imperial control. As was discussed earlier, taxation was part of a system designed to maintain the security of Pax Romana. The more revenue the Empire could take in through taxation, the more Augustus was able to make life for the citizens of Rome pleasant and thus ensuring his favorable status among the Senate. We need not say more about how this system caused those in Judea and surrounding areas to find themselves either as part of the aristocracy or in poverty. This is the world in which Jesus is born.<sup>[37]</sup>

“It has already been established that Caesar Augustus was called the ‘son of god’ who was the great ‘savior’ of the whole earth through bringing ‘peace’ to Rome. The announcement of this was heralded as ‘good news.’ The four above themes are examples of the propaganda that was spread via the media of the imperial religion. What is quite interesting is that these are the same four themes that permeate the birth narrative in Luke's gospel. When the angel Gabriel comes and visits Mary to tell her that she will give birth to Jesus, the child is proclaimed as the ‘son of God’ (Luke 1.35). Is not that a title that Augustus has claimed of himself?<sup>[38]</sup> Or consider the announcement of Caesar's birth that was quoted earlier in this study:

All the cities unanimously adopt the birthday of the divine Caesar as the new beginning of the year...the birthday of the god [Augustus] has been for the whole world the beginning of good news (euangelion) concerning him [therefore let a new era begin from his birth].

“The birth of Augustus is correlated with the beginning of a new era. His birth and continual birthdays are ‘good news’ for the whole world. Caesar is depicted as obviously having a birth, and therefore as human, but he is also considered to be in some mysterious way simultaneously divine. When other sections of this imperial quote are considered, we find out even more in relation to the

gious motive in describing Jesus' birth guides these two gospel writers in determining what to include and what to omit.

One important point to note in the arrangement of the two sets of narratives about the beginnings of Jesus: absolutely no overlapping of narratives occurs between the two gospels. Each writer develops his own individual story of events, even though most scholars would contend that Luke had access to a copy of Matthew when he wrote his gospel in the late 70s to middle 80s. Clearly both writers, who also had a copy of Mark's gospel in front of them as one of their sources (cf. Lk. 1:1-4), did not hesitate to copy directly from one of their sources. Some 90% of Mark is copied almost verbatim in both Matthew and Luke, as is illustrated in the chart below.

Relationships between the Synoptic Gospels



above four themes.

...who being sent to us and our descendants as Savior, has put an end to war and has set all things in order; and [whereas,] having become [god] manifest (phaneis), Caesar has fulfilled all the hopes of earlier times...

“In this section of the quotation, Augustus is also referred to as the long awaited ‘Savior.’ He is the great source of peace because he is the one who ‘put an end to war’ and who ‘set all things in order.’ Notice the way in which the birth announcement about Jesus by the angels has similarities to the birth proclamation of Caesar:

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace...” Luke 2.10-11, 13-14 (NRSV)

“What Augustus claimed about himself (or at least allowed others to claim for him), is turned upside down by a baby that was born into the system of oppression created by the Romans. What was supposed to be true of Caesar, it turns out is actually true of Jesus! Jesus is the true Savior and the qualities that were given to the Roman emperor have turned out to be a cheap imitation. Luke having used this language to describe the birth of Jesus puts him ‘in religio-political opposition to the emperor.’<sup>39]</sup>”

[“Behind Luke’s Gospel: The Roman Empire during the Time of Jesus,” patheos.com]

For us as readers, this non-duplication of material is a positive benefit since it provides us with greater insights into this period of Jesus’ life.<sup>23</sup> In order to understand better, note the listing of pericopes by both gospel writers:

MATTHEW	LUKE
1. Genealogy: Abraham to David 1:2-6	1. Prologue 1:1-4
2. Genealogy: David to Joseph 1:7-16	2. Announcement of John’s birth 1:5-25
3. Genealogy: Summary Comment 1:17	3. Announcement of Jesus’ birth 1:26-38
4. <b>Angelical announcement to Joseph 1:18-23</b>	4. Mary’s visit to Elizabeth 1:39-56
5. <b>Joseph’s obedience 1:24-25</b>	5. John’s birth 1:57-80
6. Visit by wise men. 2:1-12	6. <b>Jesus’ birth 2:1-21</b>
7. Flight to Egypt 2:13-15	7. Jesus’ presentation in the temple 2:22-40
8. Slaying of children in Bethlehem 2:6-18	8. Jesus’ visit to the temple 2:41-52
9. Return from Egypt 2:19-23	

As becomes clear from the above listing, the uniqueness of each gospel writer is prominent.

Matthew moves along a more Jewish pattern with a standard Jewish genealogy, followed by narratives stressing Jesus as the long awaited Jewish Messiah.

Luke sets up his gospel with a formal Prologue and then moves to parallel the events connected to both John the Baptist and Jesus. His sequence is announcement and birth of both. The center piece is Mary’s visit to Elizabeth. Then he carries the story forward with two separate events about Jesus as an infant and then as a boy, both connected to the Jerusalem temple. Prominent in Luke’s narratives are the worshipful praises of Mary (1:46-55); Zechariah (1:67-79); angels (2:14); and Simeon (2:29-32). This emphasis has more non-Jewish contours in celebrating the birth of an important dignitary in a typical Roman manner.

Because each gospel writer had an individual target audience that was completely different from the other one, the materials are used and shaped in the most appropriate manner to meet the spiritual needs of the

<sup>23</sup>Another set of documents that are a part of the non-canonical gospel tradition are the Infancy Gospels: Syriac Infancy Gospel; Gospel of James; History of Joseph the Carpenter; Libellus de Nativitate Sanctae Mariae; Midwife Salome; Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew; Infancy Gospel of Thomas.

These documents portray the baby Jesus within the framework of the Greco-Roman ‘God man’ tradition and from the heretical Gnostic Christian perspective. Thus, for example, an infant Jesus moments after birth can orally deliver a complete theological treatise to his mother, ‘the Virgin Mary.’ These stories have no historical value for understanding the early years of Jesus of Nazareth. But they do provide insight into the twisted thinking of those groups on the fringe of Christianity by the middle of the second century AD.

initial readers.

### A. Matthew 1

The opening of Matthew's gospel is with the standard Jewish genealogy that traces the descendancy of Jesus from Abraham to Joseph.<sup>24</sup> This is concluded with a summarizing statement in verse seventeen. Then Matthew introduces the birth narrative with Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἡ γένεσις οὕτως ἦν. [Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.](#) Since his genealogy has brought Jesus' ancestry forward to Joseph, Matthew begins his birth narrative with the angelic announcement of the birth of Jesus to Joseph in v. 18. The actual birth of Jesus becomes almost incidental with only the brief phrase ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν, [until she gave birth to a son](#), in verse 25 referencing it.

The introductory genealogy is -- according to verse 17 -- split up into three sections of fourteen generations each that move from Abraham to Joseph.

The header for the entire genealogy is given in the first verse:

Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ.

[An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.](#)

[Libro de la genealogía de Jesu Cristo, hijo de David, hijo de Abraham.](#)

Although in the interpretive history of this gospel writing, this heading has been understood to refer to either a) the entire gospel, b) 1:1-4:16; c) 1:1-2:23, the most likely designation intended by Matthew is of 1:1-17.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup>“Genealogies are records of a person's or a group's descent from an ancestor or ancestors. Outside of Israel, genealogies appear only rarely in ancient Near Eastern literature and are attested primarily in Mesopotamian king lists and in 2d-millennium texts dealing with the political organization and history of the Amorites. However, the OT contains about 25 genealogies of varying complexity, a fact which suggests that genealogy played an important role in Israelite life and thought.” [Robert R. Wilson, “Genealogy, Genealogies,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 929–930.]

<sup>25</sup>“βίβλο γενέσεως may be taken as referring to (1) the entire Gospel, hence functioning as a title for the entire book (Zahn, Klostermann, Lindblom, Davies-Allison); (2) 1:1–4:16, that is, up to the formula of 4:17, ‘From that time on, Jesus began to preach’ (Krentz; Kingsbury, Structure; D. Bauer, Structure, 73–77); (3) the first two chapters (Allen, Carson; chap. 1 only: Luz); or (4) only vv 1–17 (McNeile; Brown, Birth; Gundry, Matthew).

“Although it is clear that vv 1–17 are closely related to 18–25, that there is a sense in which chaps. 1 and 2 belong together (as distinct from the following chapters), and that the first two chapters are also related to 3:1–4:16, and indeed the remainder of the Gospel, it is nevertheless arguable that the words refer only to vv 1–17. Although unquestionably related to what immediately follows, these verses constitute a recognizably independent unit as can readily be seen from the chiasmic inclusio in v 17:

v 1 Χριστοῦ ... Δαυίδ ... Ἀβραάμ  
v 17 Ἀβραάμ ... Δαυίδ ... Χριστοῦ.”

The phrase Βίβλος γενέσεως is rather standard Old Testament labeling of genealogies<sup>26</sup> via the LXX, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.<sup>27</sup>

Significant is the specification υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ, [Son of David, Son of Abraham](#).<sup>28</sup> With the Mes-

[Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 5.]

<sup>26</sup>“**Genealogy**, a history of the descent of a person or group (family, tribe, or nation) from an ancestor. The term appears in both the OT and the NT (1 Chron. 5:1, 7, 17; 2 Chron. 31:16; Ezra 2:62; Neh. 7:5, 64; 1 Tim. 1:4; Titus 3:9; also Matt. 1:1 RSV [KJV: ‘origins’]).

“The OT contains about two dozen genealogical lists. The first is at Gen. 4:17–22 (from Cain through seven generations). Other prominent lists are the generations from Adam to Noah (Gen. 5:1–32), the descendants of Noah (Gen. 10:1–32), the generations from Shem to Abraham (Gen. 11:10–26), the descendants of Jacob (Gen. 46:8–27) and Levi (Exod. 6:16–25), and the list of persons and families of the postexilic community who continue the line from pre-exilic times (Ezra 2:2b–61). The most extensive genealogy is in 1 Chron. 1:1–9:44 (Adam to the descendants of Saul).”

[Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, Harper's Bible Dictionary (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 335.]

<sup>27</sup>“βίβλος γενέσεως, lit. ‘book of the origin,’ or ‘genealogical scroll,’ is deliberately an allusion to the formulaic title used in the LXX (Gen 2:4; 5:1; the Heb. word underlying γενέσεως is *tōlēdōt*, ‘generations’), which can be used to introduce both genealogies and historical narratives. The words reflect the Heb. *הַלְלֵךְ סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדוֹת* *sēper tōlēdōt*, which in Gen 5:1 means ‘genealogical register’ (BDB, 707a). Although here the expression refers, as argued above, only to Matt 1:1–17, it is obvious that by this beginning Matthew wishes to call attention to the momentous, even sacred, character of the genealogy and therefore also of the narrative to follow. Even as the story of creation began with the use of this formula in referring to ‘the generations of the heavens and the earth’ or ‘the book of the generations of Adam,’ so now we are at the fulfillment of God's plan in matters of corresponding importance. In this sense the opening words of Matthew are similar in impact to Mark's ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ‘beginning of the gospel’.” [Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 9.]

<sup>28</sup>“The names υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ, ‘son of David, son of Abraham,’ signify much more than simply pointing to two of the most important persons in the history of Israel who were among the ancestors of Jesus. ‘Son of David’ had become, by the first century, a title for the messianic deliverer who would assume the throne of David in accordance with the promise of 2 Sam 7:4–17 (the Davidic covenant), thereby inaugurating a kingdom of perfection and righteousness that would last forever. Jesus is that promised Son of David, and already Matthew's great stress on fulfillment is anticipated (see Nolan, Royal Son of God, 224–34). This title is a favorite of Matthew's, occurring ten times, compared to four times each in Mark and Luke. On the title, see Comment on 9:27.

“‘Son of Abraham’ also carries a note of promise and fulfillment. Although David, rather than Jesus, could be referred to here as ‘the son of Abraham,’ the focus of this opening sentence and passage is clearly on Jesus himself. The Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1–3, etc.) speaks of blessing through Abraham for ‘all the families of the earth.’ In Jesus, through the line of Abraham, that promise is fulfilled. Only anticipated in the Gospel, narrative itself (e.g., 8:11; 21:43), it comes to full expression in the climactic passage at the end of the Gospel, where Jesus commands *μαθητεῦσατε πάντα*

sianic tones of the gospel story, both David and Abraham play significant roles in God's realization of His covenant promise to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham.

What should be noted especially against this OT usage is that genealogies served to set up the narratives that followed the genealogical listing. Thus Matthew's structure here that begins with a genealogy and follows with narratives is very much in line with the pattern found commonly in the Old Testament. Thus his initial targeted readers of Jewish Christians in the province of Syria in the late 60s to early 70s would have quickly recognized this and sensed that the subsequent narratives were going to deal with a hugely important person in the plan of God for His people, a Moses like leader.

The summarizing statement in verse seventeen signals that Matthew has intentionally re-arranged the listing of ancestors for his own distinctive purpose. Although many explanations of Matthew's 3x14 = 42 structuring of the genealogy have been given down through the centuries, no decisively clear explanation can be given due to Matthew's non statement of intention behind this.<sup>29</sup>

The probable primary source behind the listing of names is First Chronicles:<sup>30</sup>

MATTHEW	LXX
I. (vv 2–6a) 14 names	1 Chr 1:28, 34: Abraham, Isaac 1 Chr 2:1–15: Israel (Jacob) → David, 14 names (cf. Ruth 4:18–22: Perez → David)
II. (vv 6b–11) 14 names (not counting the repeated David)	1 Chr 3:10–15: Solomon → Jehioakim, 17 names

These first two groups correspond rather closely to the prior listings in First Chronicles and Ruth.<sup>31</sup> But with

τὰ ἔθνη ('make disciples of all nations,' 28:19)." [Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 9–10.]

<sup>29</sup>"We are unable conclusively to discern Matthew's intent in the 3 x 14 structure. It seems likely that there is significance in the veiled notion of multiple sevens. The fact that Matthew uses three 'fourteens,' rather than six 'sevens,' is possibly the result of the form of the genealogical list he used or (if Matthew composed the list) because the two key turning points of David and the Babylonian exile facilitated such a division. (For parallel configurations, see 1 Enoch 91:12–17; 93:1–10.) More certainly, however, Matthew intends to convey the providential design behind the history of Israel, which has structured the periods between pivotal eras (Abraham, David, the Exile) in more or less equal segments of time (Matthew surely knew they were not exactly equal), leading now appropriately, and in due course, to the goal of all that preceded, the coming of the promised Messiah." [Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 7.]

<sup>30</sup>Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 7.

<sup>31</sup>"Matthew's first group coincides exactly with 1 Chronicles and the partial list in Ruth. Matthew's second group is also in exact

the third group we possess no known listing of these names apart from the first three names that are found in 1 Chron. 3:17–19. Thus from these first three names down to Joseph and Jesus the other names came from some listing that Matthew used but about which we have no information.

### 1. Genealogy: Abraham to David 1:2-6

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
2 Ἀβραάμ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰσαάκ, Ἰσαάκ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰακώβ, Ἰακώβ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰούδαν καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς αὐτοῦ, 3 Ἰούδας δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Φάρες καὶ τὸν Ζάρα ἐκ τῆς Θαμάρ, Φάρες δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἑσρώμ, Ἑσρώμ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἀράμ, 4 Ἀράμ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἀμιναδάβ, Ἀμιναδάβ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ναασσών, Ναασσών δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Σαλμών, 5 Σαλμών δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Βόες ἐκ τῆς Ῥαχάβ, Βόες δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωβὴδ ἐκ τῆς Ῥούθ, Ἰωβὴδ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰεσσαί, 6 Ἰεσσαί δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Δαυὶδ τὸν βασιλέα.	2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, 3 and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, 4 and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, 5 and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of King David.	2 Abraham engendró a Isaac, Isaac a Jacob, y Jacob a Judá y a sus hermanos; 3 Judá engendró, de Tamar, a Fares y a Zara, Fares engendró a Esrom, y Esrom a Aram; 4 Aram engendró a Aminadab, Aminadab a Naasón, y Naasón a Salmón; 5 Salmón engendró, de Rahab, a Booz, Booz engendró, de Rut, a Obed, y Obed engendró a Isaí; 6 Isaí engendró al rey David. Y David engendró a Salomón de la que había sido mujer de Urías.

agreement, except for the omission of three kings. This involves a skip from Joram to Uzziah, which may have been caused by a confusion of Ahaziah (Ὁχοζίας or Ὁχείας according to Codex B) with Uzziah (Ὀζίας), although the main LXX tradition employs Uzziah's birth name Azariah (Ἀζαρία[ς]) rather than the regnal name (except for the Lucianic recension, which reads Ὀζίας). An alternate explanation of the omission of the three kings, Ahaziah, Jehoash, and Amaziah, is that a curse was upon them through Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, who became the wife of Joram and the mother of Ahaziah; if the curse lasted to the fourth generation (as it seems from the narrative in 2 Chr 22–25), it would have included the three kings missing from Matthew's list." [Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 7–8.]

In this first group of 'fourteen' the genealogical listing of names can be compared to those listed in 1 Chron. 1:28, 34 (Abraham, Isaac); 2:1-15 (Israel [Jacob] to David with 14 names. These correspond rather closely to Ruth 4:18-22 listing from Perez to David.

## 2. Genealogy: David to Joseph 1:6b-16

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
<p>6b Δαυίδ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Σολομῶνα ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Οὐρίου, 7 Σολομῶν δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ῥοβοάμ, Ῥοβοάμ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἀβιά, Ἀβιά δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἀσάφ, 8 Ἀσάφ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωσαφάτ, Ἰωσαφάτ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωράμ, Ἰωράμ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ὀζιαν, 9 Ὀζίας δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωθαθάμ, Ἰωθαθάμ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἀχάζ, Ἀχάζ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἑζεκιάν, 10 Ἑζεκιάν δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Μανασσῆ, Μανασσῆ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἀμώς, Ἀμώς δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωσίαν, 11 Ἰωσίας δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰεχονίαν καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς μετοικεσίας Βαβυλώνος.</p> <p>12 Μετὰ δὲ τὴν μετοικεσίαν Βαβυλώνος Ἰεχονίας ἐγέννησεν τὸν Σαλαθιήλ, Σαλαθιήλ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ζοροβαβέλ, 13 Ζοροβαβέλ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἀβιούδ, Ἀβιούδ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἐλιακίμ, Ἐλιακίμ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἀζώρ, 14 Ἀζώρ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Σαδώκ, Σαδώκ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἀχίμ, Ἀχίμ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἐλιούδ, 15 Ἐλιούδ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἐλεάζαρ, Ἐλεάζαρ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ματθάν, Ματθάν δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰακώβ, 16 Ἰακώβ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας, ἐξ ἧς ἐγεννήθη Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος Χριστός.</p>	<p>6b And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, 7 and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, 8 and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, 9 and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, 10 and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, 11 and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.</p> <p>12 And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, 13 and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, 14 and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, 15 and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, 16 and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.</p>	<p>6b Y David engendró a Salomón de la que había sido mujer de Uriás. 7 Salomón engendró a Roboam, Roboam a Abías, y Abías a Asa; 8 Asa engendró a Josafat, Josafat a Joram, y Joram a Uzías; 9 Uzías engendró a Jotam, Jotam a Acáz, y Acáz a Ezequías; 10 Ezequías engendró a Manasés, Manasés a Amón, y Amón a Josías; 11 Josías engendró a Jeconías y a sus hermanos durante la deportación a Babilonia.</p> <p>12 Después de la deportación a Babilonia, Jeconías engendró a Salatiel, y Salatiel a Zorobabel; 13 Zorobabel engendró a Abiud, Abiud a Eliaquim, y Eliaquim a Azor; 14 Azor engendró a Sadoc, Sadoc a Aquim, y Aquim a Eliud; 15 Eliud engendró a Eleazar, Eleazar a Matán, y Matán a Jacob; 16 Jacob engendró a José, el marido de María, de la cual nació Jesús, llamado el Cristo.</p>

In this second group of 14 names by Matthew in

1:6b-11, one finds a listing of 17 names covering the same genealogical space in 1 Chronicles 3:10-15 where the listing is from Solomon to Jehioakim, rather than the 14 listed names in Matthew.

And also there are gaps and substitutions in Matthew that are different from either this earlier listing in First Chronicles and supplemented by isolated references elsewhere in the Old Testament. For example, one would expect in such a listing of kings to find Asa rather than Asaph (v. 7) who is only known to us in the OT as a psalmist. Also Amon rather than Amos, which most likely is a reference to the prophet Amos (v. 10). Also, Matthew's lists omits references to three kings of Judah between Joram and Uzziah: Ahaziah, Jehoash, and Amaziah.

Matthew's third listing is introduced in v. 12 with Μετὰ δὲ τὴν μετοικεσίαν Βαβυλώνος..., and after the deportation to Babylon... The list of names here begins with the era at the beginning of the exile -- not at the end of it as the words of the Greek text naturally suggest -- and carries forward the listing to Christ at the end in v. 16.<sup>32</sup> Additionally the names from Abiud to Jacob are not known to us elsewhere in any other listing either in the Old Testament or intertestamental Jewish writings. That Matthew was utilizing a source for this listing is self-evident. But we have no idea what that source may have been.

The 'surprise' ending in verse sixteen is one of the surprises in Matthew's list: Ἰακώβ δὲ ἐγέννησεν τὸν Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας, ἐξ ἧς ἐγεννήθη Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος Χριστός, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. At the very end with Joseph normally he would have been expected to be listed as the father of Jesus, in a pattern consistent with all the previous listings. But instead, Joseph is listed as τὸν ἄνδρα Μαρίας, the husband of Mary. Such a sudden shift from the father to the mother of a son represents a significant departure from the standard structure of traditional Jewish genealogies. But Matthew makes this shift and then pushes it further with the relative clause attached to Mary's name: ἐξ ἧς ἐγεννήθη Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος Χριστός, from whom Jesus was born who is called the Messiah. Very clearly Matthew is setting up his readers to grasp the supernatural conception and birth of Christ that immediately follows his genealogy listing.

<sup>32c</sup> Ἰεχονίας, 'Jechoniah' (= Jehoiachin of 2 Kgs 24:15), was the first king to be deported to Babylon and hence receives the title 'the captive' in 1 Chr 3:17. Ἰεχονίας, Σαλαθιήλ, Ζοροβαβέλ, 'Jechoniah, Salathiel, Zerubbabel,' follows the LXX of 1 Chr 3:19, rather than the MT, where Zerubbabel is the son of Pediah (cf. Ezra 3:2).'' [Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 11-12.]

### 3. Genealogy: Summary Comment 1:17

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
17 Πᾶσαι οὖν αἱ γενεαὶ ἀπὸ Ἀβραὰμ ἕως Δαυὶδ γενεαὶ δεκατέσσαρες, καὶ ἀπὸ Δαυὶδ ἕως τῆς μετοικεσίας Βαβυλῶνος γενεαὶ δεκατέσσαρες, καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς μετοικεσίας Βαβυλῶνος ἕως τοῦ Χριστοῦ γενεαὶ δεκατέσσαρες.	17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.	17 De manera que todas las generaciones desde Abraham hasta David son catorce generaciones; y desde David hasta la deportación a Babilonia, catorce generaciones; y desde la deportación a Babilonia hasta Cristo, catorce generaciones.

Verse seventeen brings to a climax Matthew's listing of the Jewish origins of Jesus in a summarizing manner. But Matthew here indicates his superimposed structure in the previous listing of three groups of fourteen. Although his precise intent in structuring the listing around a 3 x 14 structure is unclear, what is clear is that he had some objective in mind by doing it. The problem is that he does state this objective directly, and this opens the door for endless speculation by later commentators. But somehow the symbolical meaning of the number 14 repeated three times is at the heart of his objective.

One very important point about the listing of these names must always be kept in mind, as Donald Hagner observes:<sup>33</sup>

In these genealogies we must not expect accuracy by our modern standards. Omissions, variant spellings, and even variant names (i.e., some persons with two names) may be expected in genealogies, with many of these alterations motivated theologically. But to admit the theological interest in and impact upon these genealogies need not lead to the conclusion that they are not in any sense meant to be taken as factual. Both Matthew and Luke are concerned to represent the facts contained in their sources; they are hardly creating lists out of thin air. These genealogies, like much of the content of the Gospels, are to be taken as interpreted history — i.e., factual and not fictional data, conceived and set forth with theological goals, these in turn informed by the eschatological fullness now inescapably present to these writers.

When trying to work one's way through the details of the genealogical listing in Matthew and then comparing the names etc. to background lists of these people in the Old Testament, we will come up against an impossible dilemma if we impose some modern scientifically

based method of accuracy demands onto what Matthew is doing. Matthew's statement in verse seventeen strongly suggests that his core intention lay in some unexplained symbolical representation of Jesus' ancestry among the Jews going back to Abraham. Clearly from comparison to existing OT lists for the first two groups of fourteen in Matthew, he did not artificially create the list out of thin air. Whether he depended on some existing genealogical listing available in his time or went back to the OT lists and intentionally modified them guiding by his number fourteen structure, we cannot say with certainty. In either case what he produced was intended to introduce his story of Jesus of Nazareth to his Jewish Christian readers in Syria during the early part of the second half of the first century. And he was convinced that doing it this way would best persuade and convince these readers and possibly their Jewish synagogue opponents of the legitimacy of Jesus as the legitimate fulfillment of the OT prophecies of the coming Messiah.

And although we may have lingering questions about the details of his listing, we must let Matthew do what he considered best in the interests of his first and targeted readers. The core lesson from this is that Matthew utilized acceptable conventions of argumentation in his day to make the critically important theological point that in Jesus of Nazareth God was fulfilling His promise to Abraham to bless the entire world through him. And this was going to be achieved in the coming of the promised descendant of King David in Jesus Christ as that Messiah. Whether we can agree with how Matthew set this up or not, his theological point remains valid and central. This gospel story is going to demonstrate legitimately to a first century skeptical Jewish audience that indeed Jesus of Nazareth is truly the promised Messiah of the Hebrew Bible and that demands faith surrender to Him as one's Lord and Savior.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup>“The ‘book of the origin of Jesus Christ,’ far from being simply the recitation of historical data for their own sake, is above all an artistically devised theological statement. The data are important in providing the vehicle for the initial presentation of Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and David. Indeed, the responsibilities and hopes of Israel, bound up as they are with the preparation of the past, receive their realization in the one who is the subject of Matthew's narrative. There is, moreover, a certain appropriateness about the timing of this fulfillment, coming as it does at the end of three segments of time that can be expressed as 3 x 14, segments marked by Abraham, David, and the Babylonian captivity. Behind these events, the highest and lowest points in the history of Israel, stands the sovereignty of God, who works out all things in accordance with his purpose and timing. Further evidence of that remarkable sovereignty and its salvific intent can be seen in the surprising inclusion of irregular and sometimes scandalous events, as reflected in the four women of the genealogy, which prepare for the actual circumstances of Jesus' birth. Matthew has in this opening pericope anticipated the fulfillment theme that is so

<sup>33</sup>Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 8–9.

## B. Luke 1<sup>35</sup>

Whereas Matthew sets up his gospel narrative in a hugely ancient Jewish style for his intended Jewish Christian readers, Luke, on the other hand, follows a very conventional Greco-Roman style of setting up his gospel narrative about Jesus of Nazareth for a largely non-Jewish Christian targeted readership.

His highly formalized Prologue in the form of a single Greek sentence in vv. 1-4 represents classical Greek expression at its finest. And incidentally, this style does not continue past this introductory sentence. The remainder of the gospel shifts over to a relatively high quality Koine Greek style with heavy indebtedness to the terminology and grammar patterns found in the major text traditions of the LXX. Whoever this fellow we call Luke was, it is clear from inside these two documents of Luke and Acts that he knew well the classical Greek literature and conventions of idea expression and at the same time was deeply indebted to the LXX translation of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>36</sup> This twin source of both linguistic skills and ways of thinking about life and religion came together in the longest of the four gospels and in the only legitimate 'volume two' text that extends the story of Jesus for the following thirty years after His

prominent in the Gospel. And concluding this skillful presentation of the genealogy of Jesus, he turns to events surrounding the birth itself." [Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 12.]

<sup>35c</sup> The Lukan birth narratives are more complex for several reasons. There is more narrative material and significant characters in the narration. There is also considerably more interest in presenting a connected narrative reflecting on the human drama, in particular the joys and anxieties wrapped up in childbearing. There are two major paeans of praise (1:46-55, 67-79; see Mary's Song; Zechariah's Song) and also the shorter Nunc Dimittis (2:29-32; see Simeon's Song) which help to structure this material. Note that there is no genealogy in the birth or infancy Narratives proper.

"Luke's birth narratives are in many respects the feminine counterpart to those found in Matthew 1-2, which is not surprising since a full one-third of the uniquely Lukan material in this Gospel is about women (Witherington, 1988). In Luke 1-2 it is Elizabeth and Mary, not Zechariah and Joseph, who are the first to hear of Christ's coming. It is these women who are praised and blessed, and they first sing and prophesy about the Christ child (see Women)."

[B. III Witherington, "Birth of Jesus," ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 62.]

<sup>36</sup>Although traditionally Luke has been long viewed as a non-Jew, more recent Lucan scholarship is inclined to challenge that assumption with the arguments that his heavy dependency on the LXX signal a deeper connection to Diaspora Judaism than has traditionally been granted. Many of these arguments are rather persuasive when closely examined. When these linguistic arguments are linked to Luke's 'temple theology' point of view in both the gospel and Acts, contentions of Luke's close links to Judaism must be given serious consideration. But the obviously Gentile Christian overarching thrust of the gospel account adds further complexity to the challenge of identifying the background of this gospel writer.

ascension into Heaven.

The way that Luke puts together the first two chapters labeled the "infancy narratives" is quite distinct from the approach of Matthew. After the very formal Prologue in 1:1-4, we encounter the birth and childhood years of Jesus in Luke's presentation.

1. Prologue 1:1-4
2. **Announcement of John's birth 1:5-25**
3. **Announcement of Jesus' birth 1:26-38**
4. **Mary's visit to Elizabeth 1:39-56**
5. **John's birth 1:57-80**
6. **Jesus' birth 2:1-21**
7. Jesus' presentation in the temple 2:22-40
8. Jesus' visit to the temple 2:41-52

But the arrangement of material by Luke is to parallel the narratives on John the Baptist and on Jesus with announcement and birth descriptions. This creates a chiasmic structure of 2, 3 -4- 5 6 with Mary's visit to Elizabeth as the center piece pericope. Then pericopes 7 and 8 touch on the childhood of Jesus up to puberty at twelve years when Jesus enters into youth out of childhood.

Another set of Christian writings, known as the "Infancy Gospels" (in distinction to the "Infancy Narratives" of Matthew and Luke), claim to tell the story of Jesus' birth, childhood, and youth as well.<sup>37</sup> But the story line in the documents coming out of the second through seventh centuries depicts an entirely different picture than what Matthew and Luke set forth.<sup>38</sup> Foundational to the later documents tend to be the *Infancy Gospel of James*<sup>39</sup> and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. Most

<sup>37</sup>These writings are a part of the New Testament Apocrypha documents that although claiming to be authoritative were soundly rejected and condemned as heresy in early Christianity.

Although some of the Infancy Gospels were later incorporated into larger documents, the category includes the following documents: the Infancy Gospel of James (= Protoevangelium of James), the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, the Syriac Infancy Gospel, the History of Joseph the Carpenter, and the Life of John the Baptist.

<sup>38c</sup>Though later apocryphal documents like the Infancy Gospel of Thomas have a good deal to say about the so-called hidden years of Jesus, these documents amount to little more than pious fiction and are generally recognized to be of little or no historical worth (see Gospels [Apocryphal]). In the Gospels themselves there is only one story about what Jesus was like between infancy and adulthood—Luke 2:41-52." [B. III Witherington, "Birth of Jesus," ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 73.]

<sup>39c</sup>The *Gospel of James*, also known as the *Infancy Gospel of James* or the *Protoevangelium of James*, is an apocryphal Gospel probably written about AD 145, which expands backward in time the infancy stories contained in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and presents a narrative concerning the birth and upbringing of Mary herself. It is the oldest source to assert the virginity of Mary not only prior to but during (and after) the birth of Jesus.<sup>[1]</sup>

of this material was subsequently incorporated into the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*.

A major emphasis in the *Infancy Gospel of James* is to assert the virginity of Mary both before, during, and after the birth of Jesus. Although driven by Gnostic concerns, this document helped foster the later Roman Catholic doctrine on this topic, in clear contradiction to the clear teaching in the New Testament on the brothers and sisters of Jesus, whose birth father was Joseph.

In the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (different from the Gospel of Thomas), Jesus is a trickster and often arrogant youngster with supernatural powers that he sometimes uses to punish people who differed from him.<sup>40</sup> Although no birth narrative is included, the document contains stories of supposed miracles performed from five years through twelve years of age. These are obviously fantasy without any anchoring in historical occurrence.

The *Syriac Infancy Gospel* is later, dated from the sixth century, and represents largely a compilation of the stories from the above two earlier documents.

It consists of three parts:

- The birth of Jesus - based on the Protoevangelium of James
- Miracles during the Flight into Egypt - seemingly based on nothing more than local traditions
- The miracles of Jesus as a boy - based on the Infancy Gospel of Thomas

It contains a number of embellishments on the earlier text, however, including a diaper (of Jesus) that heals people, sweat (of Jesus) that turns into balm, curing leprosy, and dyeing cloth varied colours using only indigo dye. It also claims earlier encounters for Jesus with Judas Iscariot, and with the thieves whom he is later crucified with, as well as being one of the earliest documents.<sup>41</sup>

The *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* represents another extension of materials from the James and Thomas writings coming in the early 600s.<sup>42</sup> But these texts

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The ancient manuscripts that preserve the book have different titles, including 'The Birth of Mary', 'The Story of the Birth of Saint Mary, Mother of God,' and 'The Birth of Mary; The Revelation of James'." ["Gospel of James," wikipedia.org]

<sup>40</sup>"The Infancy Gospel of Thomas is a pseudepigraphical gospel about the childhood of Jesus that is believed to date to the 2nd century. It was part of a popular genre of biblical work, written to satisfy a hunger among early Christians for more miraculous and anecdotal stories of the childhood of Jesus than the Gospel of Luke provided. Later references by Hippolytus of Rome and Origen of Alexandria to a Gospel of Thomas are more likely to be referring to this Infancy Gospel than to the wholly different Gospel of Thomas with which it is sometimes confused. It would appear to be unrelated to the Canonical Gospels." ["Infancy Gospel of Thomas," wikipedia.org]

<sup>41</sup>"Syriac Infancy Gospel," wikipedia.org

<sup>42</sup>"The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew is a part of the New Testament apocrypha, and sometimes goes by the name of The Infancy

are woven into a narrative story that also incorporates bits and pieces of both Matthew and Luke. The label of "Pseudo-Matthew" is derived from a phony claim that this is the original Hebrew version of the Gospel of Matthew that the later author has translated into Greek. This claim is made in a letter falsely attributed to the church father Jerome.

The *History of Joseph the Carpenter* comes out of the late 500s to early 600s from Byzantine Egypt. A major point of this text is to affirm the perpetual virginity of Mary doctrine. This is done through a vicious speech of Jesus on the Mount of Olives in which he names four brothers (Judas, Justus, James, & Simon) and two sisters (Assia & Lydia) as children of Joseph by a previous marriage before Mary. Joseph supposedly lives to be 111 years old and marries the fourteen year old Mary when he is 90 years old.<sup>43</sup> It is heavily dependent on the Gospel of James for much of its material.

The *Life of John the Baptist* was composed sometime during 385 to 395 in Greek, although the surviving manuscripts are in Arabic, by a Bishop Serapion. It takes the material in Luke about John and expands them into a more detailed narrative by the use of legends and myths in order to create a more Greek oriented βίος type of story about John. The interaction of Eliz-

Gospel of Matthew, but the actual name of the text in antiquity was The Book About the Origin of the Blessed Mary and the Childhood of the Savior.<sup>[1]</sup> Pseudo-Matthew is one of a genre of 'Infancy gospels' that seek to fill out the details of the life of Jesus of Nazareth up to the age of 12, which are briefly given in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In the West, it was the dominant source for pictorial cycles of the Life of Mary, especially before the late Middle Ages.<sup>[2]</sup> According to the research of J. Gijssels / R. Beyers (1997) it was probably written between 600 and 625 AD." ["Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew," wikipedia.org]

<sup>43</sup>"The text is framed as an explanation by Jesus on the Mount of Olives concerning the life of Joseph, his stepfather. Agreeing with Mary's continued virginity, the text proclaims that Joseph had four sons (Judas, Justus, James, and Simon) and two daughters (Assia and Lydia) by a previous marriage. At age 90, after the death of his first wife, Joseph is given charge of the twelve year old virgin Mary. She lives in his household raising his youngest son James 'the less' along with Judas, until the time she is to be married at age 14½.

"After this basic background, the text proceeds to paraphrase the Gospel of James, stopping at the point of Jesus' birth. The text states that Joseph was miraculously blessed with mental and physical youth, dying at the age of 111. His oldest sons (Justus and Simon) get married and have children, and likewise his two daughters get married and live in their own houses.

"Joseph's death takes up a substantial portion of the text. He first lets out a significant prayer, including in his last words a series of lamentations about his carnal sins. Approximately 50% of the work is an extension of the death scene, in which the angel of death, as well as the archangels Michael and Gabriel, appear to him. At the conclusion of the text, Jesus affirms that Mary remained a virgin throughout her days by addressing her as 'my mother, virgin undefiled'."

["History of Joseph the Carpenter," wikipedia.org]

abeth and John with Mary and Jesus while both boys were still infants (but able to converse as highly trained Jewish scribes even though less than five years of age) occupies much of the text.<sup>44</sup>

These documents are fictitious stories drawn up by writers with the agenda of the virginity of Mary and recreate the life of Jesus within the framework of the Greco-Roman tradition of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ (god-man) popular in Roman society at that time.<sup>45</sup> Among the Greeks and Romans of the first century every man who accomplished something extraordinary had to have had some kind of spectacular birth and childhood in his background in order to be able to accomplish the unusual. Thus supernatural birth stories for most all of the Roman emperors et als. were rather commonplace in first century society. The Infancy Gospels graphically illustrate the disastrous consequences of allowing the culture around one to dictate how the texts of sacred scripture must be understood. A picture of Jesus emerges that is completely contradictory to the Bible.

### 1. Prologue 1:1-4

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
<p>1.1 Ἐπειδὴ περ πολλοὶ ἐπεχείρησαν ἀνατάξασθαι διήγησιν περὶ τῶν ἐπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων, 2 καθὼς παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν οἱ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου, 3 ἔδοξεν κάμοι παρηκολουθηκῶτι ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς σοι γράψαι, κράτιστε Θεόφιλε, 4 ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν.</p>	<p>1.1 Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and servants of the word, 3 I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, a to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.</p>	<p>1.1 Por cuanto muchos han tratado de compilar una historia de las cosas que entre nosotros son muy ciertas, 2 tal como nos las han transmitido los que desde el principio fueron testigos oculares y ministros de la palabra, 3 también a mí me ha parecido conveniente, después de haberlo investigado todo con diligencia desde el principio, escribírtelas ordenadamente, excelentísimo Teófilo, 4 para que sepas la verdad precisa acerca de las cosas que te han sido enseñadas.</p>

<sup>44</sup>For an English translation of much of the text published in 1927 by Cambridge University Press, see “The Life of John the Baptist by Serapion,” tonyburke.ca.

<sup>45</sup>For a helpful online critique of study in this area of the History of Religions, see Walter L. Liefeld, “The Hellenistic ‘Divine Man’ and the Figure of Jesus in the Gospels,” at etsjets.org.

The single sentence that makes up verses one through four stand dramatically apart grammatically and stylistically from everything else after verse four in the entire gospel. This is a well crafted, highly polished classical Greek sentence written in the framework of the long standing pattern of Prologues to important Greek documents. The block diagram of a literal translation of the Greek text illustrates the balance of the sentence:

1 Ἐπειδὴ περ πολλοὶ ἐπεχείρησαν ἀνατάξασθαι διήγησιν περὶ τῶν ἐπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων, 2 καθὼς παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν οἱ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου, 3 ἔδοξεν κάμοι παρηκολουθηκῶτι ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς σοι γράψαι, κράτιστε Θεόφιλε, 4 ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν.

(Cause) Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account

/-----/  
of the events  
| that have been fulfilled  
| among us,  
just as they were handed on to us  
by witnesses  
and  
servants  
of the word

I too decided

(Time) after investigating everything carefully from the very first,

to write an orderly account for you,

most excellent Theophilus,

(Purpose) so that you may know the truth

concerning the things

/-----|  
about which you have been instructed.

Theophilus as a wealthy Roman patron is the one who underwrote the cost of producing Luke and Acts, especially the making of copies of these two documents for widespread distribution of them as a tool of Christian witness.<sup>46</sup> Most likely a new convert, and perhaps the one who owned the slave Luke, he came into Christianity with an enthusiastic desire to advance the Gospel message to others outside of Christ.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup>The nature of the Prologue to the gospel, and its abbreviated version at the beginning of Acts establishes clearly the role of Theophilus as a patron underwriting the production costs of these two documents. The stated purpose in verse four to provide “catechism” type instruction to Theophilus further signals a relatively new convert status of Theophilus.

<sup>47</sup>The older tradition of Theophilus as a high level Roman governmental officer somehow involved in the prosecution of Paul before the emperor Nero at Rome has been largely abandoned in modern scholarship due to the many problems connected to it. Much more likely is a Macedonian location for Theophilus either in Philippi or one of the other cities of the province. After Paul’s execution in Rome in the mid sixties by Nero, Luke returned back home to Theophilus and spends the next several years finishing the work on composing his gospel account of Jesus and the expansion

This Prologue provides invaluable insight into the manner of composition of Luke and Acts, and by extension to the other documents of the New Testament. Luke clearly utilized sources -- both written and oral -- with extensive note taking as he gathered the information for the writing of these documents. He carefully sifted through the data in those sources in order to utilize the best of the information. His aim was, in his words, ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς σοι γράψαι, *to write for you an orderly account*. The adverb ἀκριβῶς does not imply a chronological account, but rather a 'sensible' narrative that could be understood.

Luke then produces a εὐαγγέλιον, a *gospel*, as it came to be called by the middle of the second century.<sup>48</sup> This literary form has marks of the ancient Greek βίος which was something like a biography and also some contours of an ἱστορία, a *history*, but it does not naturally fit either of these ancient categories. One should remember that inside the New Testament itself the term εὐαγγέλιον refers to the orally proclaimed message of salvation in Jesus Christ. It does not refer to any written document.

The second document covered by Luke's Prologue is the Acts of the Apostles. This document comes closer to following an ancient ἱστορία, a *history*, genre. But it is very limited in aim and scope. Only the first three decades of the history of early Christianity are covered from approximately AD 30 to 61. Plus it centers on the movement of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome, and only two characters take center stage in Luke's narrative: Peter as the leader of Jewish Christianity and Paul as the leader of Gentile Christianity. Luke wrote Acts within the framework of first century history writing, not

of Christianity for the first three decades after Jesus' ascension in the Acts of the Apostles. As the estate physician slave for Theophilus he enjoyed the blessing of his master in completing this work with the assistance of Theophilus while fulfilling his duties as the doctor to the household of Theophilus. From the time of the second missionary journey when Paul passed through this region, Luke had been "on loan" from Theophilus to Paul in order to see after the ongoing health problems that Paul had.

<sup>48</sup> In the NT period the noun 'gospel' did not refer to a genre of written literature as it does today. Instead it denoted the oral message that encapsulates God's salvific activity in Jesus Christ on behalf of humankind. It was only in the middle of the second century that the plural form 'Gospels' was employed. Thus Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165) writes that the 'memoirs composed by the apostles' are called 'Gospels' (First Apology 66). Yet even in this period it was recognized that there is only one gospel as can be seen from the titles applied to these works, 'The Gospel According to Matthew,' 'The Gospel According to Mark,' etc." [Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 355.]

"For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them." [Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 66, at earlychristian-writings.com]

modern western history writing.

## 2. Announcement of John's birth 1:5-25

The lengthy narrative on the announcement of the impending birth of John to Zechariah and Elizabeth follows the formal Prologue. It divides itself out into several subunits of text that can be set up in translation with paragraphs to signal the shift from one emphasis to the next. In the text listing below, these are set off by listing in different tables for convenience sake. Most of the text revolves around a dialogue between Zechariah and the angel.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
5 Ἐγένετο ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου βασιλέως τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἱερεύς τις ὀνόματι Ζαχαρίας ἐξ ἐφημερίας Ἀβιά, καὶ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν θυγατέρων Ἀαρὼν καὶ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῆς Ἑλισάβετ. 6 Ἦσαν δὲ δίκαιοι ἀμφότεροι ἐναντίον τοῦ θεοῦ, πορευόμενοι ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐντολαῖς καὶ δικαιώμασιν τοῦ κυρίου ἀμεμπτοί. 7 καὶ οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τέκνον, καθότι ἦν ἡ Ἑλισάβετ στειρὰ, καὶ ἀμφότεροι προβεβηκότες ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις αὐτῶν ἦσαν.	5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. 7 But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.	5 Hubo en los días de Herodes, rey de Judea, cierto sacerdote llamado Zacarías, del grupo de Abías, que tenía por mujer una de las hijas de Aarón que se llamaba Elisabet. 6 Ambos eran justos delante de Dios, y se conducían intachablemente en todos los mandamientos y preceptos del Señor. 7 No tenían hijos, porque Elisabet era estéril, y ambos eran de edad avanzada.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
8 Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ ἱερατεύειν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ τάξει τῆς ἐφημερίας αὐτοῦ ἔναντι τοῦ θεοῦ, 9 κατὰ τὸ ἔθος τῆς ἱερατείας ἔλαχεν τοῦ θυμιάσαι εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὸν ναὸν τοῦ κυρίου, 10 καὶ πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος ἦν τοῦ λαοῦ προσευχόμενον ἕξω τῇ ὥρᾳ τοῦ θυμιάματος. 11 ὤφθη δὲ αὐτῷ ἄγγελος κυρίου ἑστὼς ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θυσασηρίου τοῦ θυμιάματος. 12 καὶ ἐταράχθη Ζαχαρίας ἰδὼν καὶ φόβος ἐπέπεσεν ἐπ' αὐτόν. αὐτοῦ.	8 Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. 10 Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. 11 Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him.	8 Pero aconteció que mientras Zacarías ejercía su ministerio sacerdotal delante de Dios según el orden indicado a su grupo, 9 conforme a la costumbre del sacerdocio, fue escogido por sorteo para entrar al templo del Señor y quemar incienso. 10 Y toda la multitud del pueblo estaba fuera orando a la hora de la ofrenda de incienso. 11 Y se le apareció un ángel del Señor, de pie, a la derecha del altar del incienso. 12 Al verlo, Zacarías se turbó, y el temor se apoderó de él.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
13 εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτόν ὁ ἄγγελος· μὴ φοβοῦ, Ζαχαρίας, διότι εἰσηκούσθη ἡ δέησίς σου, καὶ ἡ γυνὴ σου Ἐλισάβετ γεννήσει υἷόν σοι καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννην. 14 καὶ ἔσται χαρὰ σοι καὶ ἀγαλλίασις καὶ πολλοὶ ἐπὶ τῇ γενέσει αὐτοῦ χαρήσονται. 15 ἔσται γὰρ μέγας ἐνώπιον [τοῦ] κυρίου, καὶ οἶνον καὶ σίκερα οὐ μὴ πῖνῃ, καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου πλησθήσεται ἔτι ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, 16 καὶ πολλοὺς τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ ἐπιστρέψει ἐπὶ κύριον τὸν θεὸν αὐτῶν. 17 καὶ αὐτὸς προελεύσεται ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν πνεύματι καὶ δυνάμει Ἥλιου, ἐπιστρέψαι καρδίας πατέρων ἐπὶ τέκνα καὶ ἀπειθεῖς ἐν φρονήσει δικαίων, ἑτοιμάσαι κυρίῳ λαὸν κατεσκευασμένον.	13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. 14 You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. 16 He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."	13 Pero el ángel le dijo: No temas, Zacarías, porque tu petición ha sido oída, y tu mujer Elisabet te dará a luz un hijo, y lo llamarás Juan. 14 Y tendrás gozo y alegría, y muchos se regocijarán por su nacimiento. 15 Porque él será grande delante del Señor; no beberá ni vino ni licor, y será lleno del Espíritu Santo aun desde el vientre de su madre. 16 Y él hará volver a muchos de los hijos de Israel al Señor su Dios. 17 E irá delante de El en el espíritu y poder de Elías PARA HACER VOLVER LOS CORAZONES DE LOS PADRES A LOS HIJOS, y a los desobedientes a la actitud de los justos, a fin de preparar para el Señor un pueblo bien dispuesto.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
18 καὶ εἶπεν Ζαχαρίας πρὸς τὸν ἄγγελον· κατὰ τί γνώσομαι τοῦτο; ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι πρεσβύτης καὶ ἡ γυνὴ μου προβεβηκυῖα ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις αὐτῆς. 19 καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ ἄγγελος εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ἐγὼ εἰμι Γαβριὴλ ὁ παρεστῆκώς ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἀπεστάλην λαλῆσαι πρὸς σὲ καὶ εὐαγγελισασθαί σοι ταῦτα. 20 καὶ ἰδοὺ ἔση σιωπῶν καὶ μὴ δυνάμενος λαλῆσαι ἄχρι ἥς ἡμέρας γένηται ταῦτα, ἀνθ' ὧν οὐκ ἐπίστευσας τοῖς λόγοις μου, οἵτινες πληρωθήσονται εἰς τὸν καιρὸν αὐτῶν.	18 Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." 19 The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day that these things occur."	18 Entonces Zacarías dijo al ángel: ¿Cómo podré saber esto? Porque yo soy anciano y mi mujer es de edad avanzada. 19 Respondiendo el ángel, le dijo: Yo soy Gabriel, que estoy en la presencia de Dios, y he sido enviado para hablarte y anunciarte estas buenas nuevas. 20 Y he aquí, te quedarás mudo, y no podrás hablar hasta el día en que todo esto acontezca, por cuanto no creíste mis palabras, las cuales se cumplirán a su debido tiempo.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
21 Καὶ ἦν ὁ λαὸς προσδοκῶν τὸν Ζαχαρίαν καὶ ἐθαύμαζον ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ αὐτόν. 22 ἐξελθὼν δὲ οὐκ ἐδύνατο λαλῆσαι αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐπέγνωσαν ὅτι ὄπτασιαν ἐώρακεν ἐν τῷ ναῷ· καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν διανεύων αὐτοῖς καὶ διέμενεν κωφός. 23 καὶ ἐγένετο ὡς ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τῆς λειτουργίας αὐτοῦ, ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ. 24 Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτας τὰς ἡμέρας συνέλαβεν Ἐλισάβετ ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ περιέκρυβεν ἑαυτὴν μῆνας πέντε λέγουσα 25 ὅτι οὕτως μοι πεποίηκεν κύριος ἐν ἡμέραις αἷς ἐπέϊδεν ἀφελεῖν ὄνειδός μου ἐν ἀνθρώποις.	21 Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. 22 When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. 23 When his time of service was ended, he went to his home. 24 After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, 25 "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."	21 Y el pueblo estaba esperando a Zacarías, y se extrañaba de su tardanza en el templo. 22 Pero cuando salió, no podía hablarles, y se dieron cuenta de que había visto una visión en el templo; y él les hablaba por señas, y permanecía mudo. 23 Y cuando se cumplieron los días de su servicio sacerdotal, regresó a su casa. 24 Y después de estos días, Elisabet su mujer concibió, y se recluyó por cinco meses, diciendo: 25 Así ha obrado el Señor conmigo en los días en que se dignó mirarme para quitar mi afrenta entre los hombres.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
24 Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτας τὰς ἡμέρας συνέλαβεν Ἐλισάβετ ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ περιέκρυβεν ἑαυτὴν μῆνας πέντε λέγουσα 25 ὅτι οὕτως μοι πεποίηκεν κύριος ἐν ἡμέραις αἷς ἐπέϊδεν ἀφελεῖν ὄνειδός μου ἐν ἀνθρώποις.	24 After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, 25 "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."	24 Y después de estos días, Elisabet su mujer concibió, y se recluyó por cinco meses, diciendo: 25 Así ha obrado el Señor conmigo en los días en que se dignó mirarme para quitar mi afrenta entre los hombres.

The narrative begins with something of an introduction in vv. 5-7 that sets up the scene by introducing Zechariah.<sup>49</sup> He served as a priest in the Jerusalem temple in the order of Abijah (one of the 24 organizations of priests who served temple duties).<sup>50</sup> As a descendant

<sup>49</sup>“*In the days*: This is the first of many Semitisms in this section by which Luke deliberately imitates the Septuagint; cf. also “it happened that” (1:8); “and behold” (1:20), and many others; this sort of shift in style between prologue and narration is disapproved by Lucian, *How to Write History*, 16.” [Daniel J. Harrington, “Editor’s Preface,” in *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, vol. 3, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 32.]

<sup>50</sup>“The priests were divided into twenty-four courses, each of which provided in turn priestly service in the temple for one week, twice in the year. The earlier preexilic divisions (1 Chr 24:7-18)

of Aaron, Elizabeth was his wife and they were without child in their old age. Both being righteous before the Lord in faithful service, God decided to honor them with a son.<sup>51</sup>

It was in the Jerusalem temple that the heavenly angel made his appearance to Zechariah in order to announce to him the good news of the birth of a son (vv. 8-12). The Lord picked the timing of the appearance when as a priest Zechariah was functioning in one of the inner sanctuaries of the temple.<sup>52</sup> The name of the angel is not given simply because it wasn't considered important to the narrative at this point, although the name Gabriel<sup>53</sup> is given in v. 19 and also in connec-

were apparently reconstituted out of the four divisions that returned from exile (Ezra 2:36-39; 10:18-22). The word Luke uses for these courses (ἐφημερία) is found in the LXX of 1 Chr 23:6 and is also found in a first-century-B.C. inscription (BAGD, 330). The division of Abijah is the eighth of the courses (special dignities were attached to the first of the courses [Zahn, 63 n. 52], but there is no reason to think beyond that of a ranking of the courses)." [John Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20*, vol. 35A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 26.]

<sup>51</sup>"The account of the infancy of John the Baptist is presented in three major sections: the annunciation, 1:5-25; birth, circumcision, and naming, 1:57-66; and Zechariah's rejoicing and prophetic greeting of his infant son, 1:67-80. To these can be added the exultant movement of the unborn John at the approach of the pregnant Mary in 1:44 and the account of the adult ministry in 3:1-20. Further discussion of John is to be found at 5:33; 7:18-35; 9:7, 9; 11:1; 16:16; 20:4, 6." [John Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20*, vol. 35A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 23.]

<sup>52</sup>"The particular temple duties were allocated by lot (m. Tamid 5:2-6:3). Given the large number of priests available, the privilege of offering incense before the Lord would normally be expected only once or twice in a lifetime (Jeremias [*Jerusalem*, 200] estimates the number of priests in Palestine at about eight thousand). Incense was offered morning and evening (Exod 30:7-8) in connection with the daily sacrifice (Str-B, 2:71-75). It was offered at the table of incense, which stood in the holy place before the curtain separating the holy place from the most holy place (Exod 30:1-6; cf. 1 Macc 1:21-22), and was as near as an ordinary priest would ever get to the most holy place, ναός, "temple," used here covers only these two places. The broader word ἱερόν, normally used by Luke, covers the whole temple complex." [John Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20*, vol. 35A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 27-28.]

<sup>53</sup>"Gabriel (whose name means 'God is my warrior') is one of two angels named in the Hebrew Bible (Dan 8:16; 9:21), the other being Michael (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1). Along with Michael, Gabriel regularly figures as one of the 4 archangels (see 1 En. 9:1; 40:9; 54:6; 71:8; Apoc. Mos. 40:2; 1QM 9:14-16; Num. Rab. 2:10; etc.). In the book of Daniel, Gabriel is preeminently an angel of eschatological revelation. He is sent to Daniel to explain a vision of "the time appointed for the end" (8:15-26) and again to reveal the hidden meaning of the words of Jeremiah that Daniel is reading (9:20-27). Gabriel is implicitly the angel who appears to Daniel in Daniel 10-12.

"Gabriel's functions are more varied in 1 Enoch. In the Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36) he is listed as 'the one of the holy angels who is in charge of paradise and the dragons and the cherubim' (20:2). He is commissioned to destroy the offspring of the rebellious angels and human women (10:9-10). The fruitless petition addressed to Gabriel by the rebels in 10:10 complements the

reference to the visit with Mary in v. 16. The phrase ἄγγελος κυρίου, angel of the Lord, is clearly dependent on the LXX, but the OT ἄγγελος κυρίου is but another way of describing the presence of God Himself, rather than of a separate being. Named angels begin showing up in the Jewish literature in the postexilic writings, and particularly in the Jewish apocalyptic documents.<sup>54</sup> The

reference (40:6, 9) to Gabriel's association with petition and prayer in the Similitudes (1 Enoch 37-71).

"In the War Scroll from Qumran (1QM) the names of the 4 archangels, Michael, Gabriel, Sariel, and Raphael, are written on the shields of the 4 towers of the army. The positioning of the 4 archangels around the throne of God or other sacred space has a long subsequent history in both Jewish and Christian tradition (see Milik 1976: 173; Yadin 1962: 239-40).

"The gospel according to Luke identifies Gabriel with 'the angel of the Lord' (Luke 1:11, 19, 26; cf. Luke 2:9; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 12:7). Gabriel's announcements to Zechariah and to Mary of the births of John and Jesus draws on an ancient tradition (cf. the announcement of the birth of Samson in Judges 13). In the Hebrew Bible, however, the angel of the Lord (Heb *mal'ak YHWH*) is never named and in general is not conceived of as a distinct, personal being, but is rather the manifestation of God's presence."

[Carol A. Newsom, "Gabriel (Angel)," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 863.]

<sup>54</sup>"Although no single term corresponding precisely to the English word 'angels' occurs in the Hebrew Bible, there is a rich vocabulary for such beings. Some of the expressions either denote their divine status (e.g., *bēnē (hā) 'ēlōhīm*, lit., 'sons of God' [such grammatical constructions identify generic categories (divine beings), not genealogical relationships], Gen 6:2, 4; Job 1:6, 2:1; 38:7; *bēnē 'ēlīm*, 'sons of gods, divine beings,' Ps 29:1; 89:7—Eng 89:6; *'ēlōhīm*, 'gods,' Ps 82:1) or denote their special sanctity (*qēdōšīm*, 'holy ones,' Ps 89:6, 8—Eng 89:5, 7). Other terms refer to their functions (*mēšārētīm*, 'ministers,' Ps 103:21; *sār*, 'commander,' Josh 5:14; *sēbā'ōt*, 'hosts, army,' Ps 89:9—Eng 89:8; 103:21). The most common of these functional terms is *mal'āk*, 'messenger, envoy.' It is from the translation of *mal'āk* in the LXX (Gk *aggelos*) that the English word 'angel' derives. As terms denoting functions, both *aggelos* and *mal'āk* can refer equally to human or angelic beings. Consequently, there are occasionally passages in which it remains disputed whether the reference is to a heavenly being or a human one (see Judg 2:1; Mal 3:1). It was only with the Vulgate that a systematic distinction was made between angelic emissaries (Lat *angelus*) and human ones (Lat *nuntius*). Nevertheless, there are indications that already in the LXX *aggelos* was beginning to take on the quasi-technical meaning of heavenly being. In several instances *aggelos* is used for terms such as *bēnē (hā) 'ēlōhīm* (Gen 6:2; Deut 32:8; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7), *'ēlōhīm* (Ps 8:6; 97:7; 138:1), and *sār* (Dan 10:21; 12:1), and in one case *mal'āk* is translated as *theos* (Qoh 5:5—Eng 5:6). There is even one instance in the Hebrew Bible (Judg 13:6) in which a character implies a distinction between a 'man of God' (*'iš 'ēlōhīm*) and a 'messenger/angel of Yahweh' (*mal'āk yhwē*).

"Extrabiblical literature from the late Second Temple period (3d century B.C.E.—1st century C.E.) reflects many additional terms for angels. These include 'watchers' (Aram *irīn*, Dan 4:10, 14, 20; Jub. 4:15, 22; 1 En. 1:5); 'spirits' (Heb *rūhōt*, 1QH 1:11; 1QM 12:9; Jub. 15:31; 1 En. 15:4; cf. 1 Kgs 22:21); 'glorious ones' (Heb *nīkbēdīm*, 1QH 10:8; 2 En. 21:1, 3; 'thrones' (Gk *thronoi*, T. Levi 3:8; 2 En. 20:1); 'authorities' (Gk *exousiai*, 1 En. 61:10; Page 17

influence of the Babylonian religious traditions seems to have played an important role in the expansion of Jewish interest.<sup>55</sup>

When Zechariah sees the angel, terror strikes him (v. 12). But the angel reassures him of an answer to his prayers for children (vv. 13-17). This baby will have “the spirit and power of Elijah” going before him in ministry. Zechariah hesitates because of his advanced age (v. 18) but the angel reaffirms the promise with a rebuke of the priest for hesitating (vv. 19-20).

The delay of Zechariah in returning to the outer court of the temple where the people were gathered caused concern that something might have happened to him (v. 21). This concern was heightened when he could not speak upon coming out of the inner court (v.22). But it was concluded that he had seen a vision while in the inner court. V. 23 simply indicates that a some point afterwards he completed his term of service in the temple and returned home to Bethlehem.

Afterward Elizabeth became pregnant in a natural manner and spent the first five months in seclusion (vv. 24-25). The narrative closes with Elizabeth’s expression of gratefulness for the pregnancy.<sup>56</sup>

The narrative of vv. 5-25 set in motion the events that will center in the birth of Christ. The heavy ancient Hebrew tone and orientation of these events serve to link them to the Jewish tradition of the anticipation of the

T. Levi 3:8); ‘powers’ (Gk *dynameis*, En. 20:1); and many other descriptive and functional terms.”

[Carol A. Newsom, “Angels: Old Testament,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 248–249.]

<sup>55</sup>“Although references to angels occur in the oldest strata of the OT (in pentateuchal narratives and in early poetry), there is a clear increase in speculation about the heavenly world in prophetic writings from the exilic and early postexilic periods. It is in the late Second Temple period, however, that the most developed speculations occur. Why there should have been such a development in lore about heavenly beings is not fully understood. Increasing contact with Babylonian and Persian religious traditions may be one element (Russell 1964: 257–62), though most of the features of the developed angelology have clear antecedents in preexilic Israelite tradition. Perhaps much of the speculation on the heavenly world was not really new but represents old Israelite popular religion which only finds its way into literary sources in the postexilic writings (Collins 1977: 101–4). Be that as it may, the increase in discourse about angels in the later sources indicates that those authors found the speculation on the heavenly world a useful way to explore serious religious and theological issues—the weakness of Israel in a world of empires, the difficulty of understanding cosmos and history, the existence of evil, the failure of human religious institutions, the hope and experience of transformation, and so on.” [Carol A. Newsom, “Angels: Old Testament,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 249.]

<sup>56</sup>“Elizabeth expresses her wonderment at God’s graciousness to her in terms reminiscent of the experience of Sarah (Gen 21:1) and Rachel (Gen 30:23). (On the disgrace of childlessness see Gen 16:4, 11; 29:32; 30:1; 1 Sam 1:5–6, 11; 2:5, 7–8.)” [John Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20*, vol. 35A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 34.]

Messiah as deliverer of God’s people. Luke’s non-Jewish readers would gain new appreciation for the Jewish heritage of Christ, their Savior.<sup>57</sup>

### 3. Announcement of Jesus’ birth 1:26-38

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
26 Ἐν δὲ τῷ μηνὶ τῷ ἕκτῳ ἀπεστάλη ὁ ἄγγελος Γαβριήλ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς πόλιν τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἣ ὄνομα Ναζαρέθ 27 πρὸς παρθένον ἐμνηστευμένην ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὄνομα Ἰωσήφ ἐξ οἴκου Δαυὶδ καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς παρθένου Μαριάμ.	26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.	26 Y al sexto mes, el ángel Gabriel fue enviado por Dios a una ciudad de Galilea llamada Nazaret, 27 a una virgen desposada con un hombre que se llamaba José, de los descendientes de David; y el nombre de la virgen era María.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
28 καὶ εἰσελθὼν πρὸς αὐτὴν εἶπεν· χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ὁ κύριος μετὰ σοῦ. 29 ἡ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ διεταράχθη καὶ διελογίζετο ποταπὸς εἶη ὁ ἀσπασμὸς οὗτος. 30 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ ἄγγελος αὐτῇ· μὴ φοβοῦ, Μαριάμ, εὖρες γὰρ χάριν παρὰ τῷ θεῷ. 31 καὶ ἰδοὺ συλλήμψῃ ἐν γαστρὶ καὶ τέξῃ υἱὸν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν. 32 οὗτος ἔσται μέγας καὶ υἱὸς ὑψίστου κληθήσεται καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸν θρόνον Δαυὶδ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ, 33 καὶ βασιλεύσει ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰακώβ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔσται τέλος.	28 And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”	28 Y entrando el ángel, le dijo: ¡Salve, muy favorecida! El Señor está contigo; bendita eres tú entre las mujeres. 29 Pero ella se turbó mucho por estas palabras, y se preguntaba qué clase de saludo sería éste. 30 Y el ángel le dijo: No temas, María, porque has hallado gracia delante de Dios. 31 Y he aquí, concebirás en tu seno y darás a luz un hijo, y le pondrás por nombre Jesús. 32 Este será grande y será llamado Hijo del Altísimo; y el Señor Dios le dará el trono de su padre David; 33 y reinará sobre la casa de Jacob para siempre, y su reino no tendrá fin.

<sup>57</sup>“The facts that Mark’s Gospel lacks an infancy account and that between them, Matthew and Luke share no specific stories but only some bare information (the names of Mary, Joseph and Jesus, the place-names Nazareth and Bethlehem), and that each takes quite a different tack in his infancy narrative, all support the conclusion that in this part of his Gospel, Luke was largely free to shape the narrative according to his own perceptions. These chapters are, therefore, like Acts, of particular importance in showing the reader how Luke intended his story to be understood.” [Daniel J. Harrington, “Editor’s Preface,” in *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, vol. 3, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 34.]

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
<p>34 εἶπεν δὲ Μαριάμ πρὸς τὸν ἄγγελον· πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο, ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω; 35 καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ ἄγγελος εἶπεν αὐτῇ· πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι· διὸ καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς Θεοῦ. 36 καὶ ἰδοὺ Ἐλισάβετ ἡ συγγενίς σου καὶ αὐτὴ συνείληφεν υἱὸν ἐν γήρῃ αὐτῆς καὶ οὗτος μὴν ἕκτος ἐστὶν αὐτῇ τῇ καλουμένῃ στειρᾷ. 37 ὅτι οὐκ ἄδυνατήσεται παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ πάν ῥήμα. 38 εἶπεν δὲ Μαριάμ· ἰδοὺ ἡ δούλη κυρίου· γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥήμά σου. καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ἀπ' αὐτῆς ὁ ἄγγελος.</p>	<p>34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. 36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.</p>	<p>34 Entonces María dijo al ángel: ¿Cómo será esto, puesto que soy virgen? 35 Respondiendo el ángel, le dijo: El Espíritu Santo vendrá sobre ti, y el poder del Altísimo te cubrirá con su sombra; por eso lo santo que nacerá será llamado Hijo de Dios. 36 Y he aquí, tu parienta Elisabet en su vejez también ha concebido un hijo; y este es el sexto mes para ella, la que llamaban estéril. 37 Porque ninguna cosa será imposible para Dios. 38 Entonces María dijo: He aquí la sierva del Señor; hágase conmigo conforme a tu palabra. Y el ángel se fue de su presencia.</p>

During the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel makes another visit, but this time in Galilee rather than Judea. This time it is to a teenager named Μαριάμ. Because Mary was named after Moses' sister Mariam (מַרְיָם, Ex 15:20f.), the New Testament writers follow the Septuagint (LXX) pattern of using both the Hebrew loanword transliterated into Greek as Μαριάμ and the more normal Greek Μαρία to refer to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Luke freely uses both spellings; for example Μαριάμ in 1:27 and Μαρία in 1:41, both of which clearly reference Mary.<sup>58</sup>

Mary is described as a παρθένος, which literally refers to a young girl who has reached puberty and is thus eligible to be married to whom ever her father arranges for. That she would not have engaged in sexual activity prior to marriage was the standard assumption in the Jewish culture.<sup>59</sup> Her virginity is emphasized here to

<sup>58</sup>Interestingly Matthew also uses both spellings -- Μαρία and Μαριάμ -- to refer to Mary Magdalene, while Luke only uses Μαρία for her.

<sup>59</sup>"The virginity of Mary functions, in parallel with Elizabeth's barrenness, as an obstacle to the production of the promised child. It is exalted neither as of value in itself (as commonly assumed in Catholic study) nor as a mark of spiritual humility (as Legrand, NRT 84 [1962] 792–93). Her virginity is repeatedly stressed (twice here and in v 34) to underline the magnitude of the miracle (and cf. the similar function of vv 36, 37). In the present text the betrothal to Joseph serves to provide (legal) Davidic ancestry for the child. In Jewish tradition a girl was normally betrothed in the thirteenth year and for legal but not domestic purposes was from that point on considered to be married. Around a year later the girl was taken to the bridegroom's home for normal married life to begin. Sexual rela-

heighten the nature of the miraculous birth of Jesus and to help parallel her pregnancy with that of Elizabeth.

It was not until the late second century until some circles in Christianity began promoting the idea of a "perpetual virginity" as a signal of special divine character of Mary herself. The apocryphal *Gospel of James* is one of the first writings to advocate this concept. The dynamic driving this thinking came out of the pagan Greco-Roman background that Christianity began turning toward increasingly in the second century as it became more and more anti-Semitic. Most all of these religions had a male-female deity structure with the female deity usually functioning as the mother of the male deity. The status of Mary gradually became elevated to a quasi divine role in order to match the contemporary non-Christian religions. The contention that she remained a virgin all of her life was one of the emphases justifying this divine status for her. But interestingly Mary as a παρθένος in only mention by Matthew 1:23 in quoting Isaiah and Luke 1:27. Elsewhere παρθένος refers to unmarried girls in 13 of the 15 uses in the NT.<sup>60</sup> Careful assessment of these texts in both gospel accounts would have to conclude that Mary's virginity is assumed by these writers, but they absolutely do not make a 'big deal' out of it. And it is never mentioned again elsewhere in the New Testament. It becomes a 'big deal' only due to the distortion of Roman Catholic teaching about Mary that is in clear contradiction to the New Testament.

In the dialogue between the angel and Mary (vv. 28-38) Mary responds more openly to the news of an impending pregnancy than did Zechariah. The climax of this conversation comes in v. 38 with Mary's acceptance of Gabriel's news:

εἶπεν δὲ Μαριάμ· ἰδοὺ ἡ δούλη κυρίου· γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥήμά σου.

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

A thirteen year old peasant Jewish girl opens herself up to God's will in acceptance of news that will dramatically and forever change her life. Her religious sensitivity speaks well of her upbringing by her parents.<sup>61</sup>

tions prior to this 'taking home' would be considered a violation of marriage customs (cf. Str-B, 1:45–47; 2:393–98; Gaechter, Maria, 79–92)." [John Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20*, vol. 35A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 49.]

<sup>60</sup>In Rev. 14:4, however, παρθένος refers to a male who has not gone into whores.

<sup>61</sup>The gap about Mary's parents and background prompted the creation of the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, which contains extensive fictional stories about a Joachim and Anne who were supposedly Mary's parents, and about a period of having served as a 'temple virgin' in the Jerusalem temple prior to being betrothed to Joseph, supposedly at 90 years of age when she was fourteen years old. This sixth century document is another of those crusading for the perpetual virginity of Mary.

#### 4. Mary's visit to Elizabeth 1:39-56

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
39 Ἀναστᾶσα δὲ Μαριάμ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις ἐπορεύθη εἰς τὴν ὄρεινὴν μετὰ σπουδῆς εἰς πόλιν Ἰούδα, 40 καὶ εἰσήλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον Ζαχαρίου καὶ ἠσπάσατο τὴν Ἐλισάβετ. 41 καὶ ἐγένετο ὡς ἤκουσεν τὸν ἄσπασμόν τῆς Μαρίας ἡ Ἐλισάβετ, ἐσκίρτησεν τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐπλήσθη πνεύματος ἁγίου ἡ Ἐλισάβετ, 42 καὶ ἀνεφώνησεν κραυγῇ μεγάλη καὶ εἶπεν· εὐλογημένη σὺ ἐν γυναιξὶν καὶ εὐλογημένος ὁ καρπὸς τῆς κοιλίας σου. 43 καὶ πόθεν μοι τοῦτο ἵνα ἔλθῃ ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ κυρίου μου πρὸς ἐμέ; 44 ἰδοὺ γὰρ ὡς ἐγένετο ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ ἄσπασμοῦ σου εἰς τὰ ὦτά μου, ἐσκίρτησεν ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ μου. 45 καὶ μακαρία ἡ πιστεύσασα ὅτι ἔσται τελείωσις τοῖς λελαλημένοις αὐτῇ παρὰ κυρίου.	39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."	39 En esos días María se levantó y fue apresuradamente a la región montañosa, a una ciudad de Judá; 40 y entró en casa de Zacarías y saludó a Elisabet. 41 Y aconteció que cuando Elisabet oyó el saludo de María, la criatura saltó en su vientre; y Elisabet fue llena del Espíritu Santo, 42 y exclamó a gran voz y dijo: ¡Bendita tú entre las mujeres, y bendito el fruto de tu vientre! 43 ¿Por qué me ha acontecido esto a mí, que la madre de mi Señor venga a mí? 44 Porque he aquí, apenas la voz de tu saludo llegó a mis oídos, la criatura saltó de gozo en mi vientre. 45 Y bienaventurada la que creyó que tendrá cumplimiento lo que le fue dicho de parte del Señor.

The visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth centers on liturgical celebration of Mary's pregnancy first with a word of praise by Elizabeth (vv. 41-45) and then by Mary (vv. 46-55). It involved a trip by this young teenage pregnant girl from her home in Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea which was a several day journey -- perhaps up to four days -- and one that required escort for this young mother to be. Given the topography of the route she 'climbed' at least a couple of thousand feet in elevation as well in making this journey. But she made the trip μετὰ σπουδῆς (v. 39), that is, eagerly and joyfully.

Upon greeting the six month pregnant Elizabeth, the τὸ βρέφος, the 'baby,' moved in a normal manner (cf. Gen. 25:22-28) which signaled to Elizabeth a divine affirmation of the special pregnancy by her much younger cousin Mary. At this point through the presence of the Holy Spirit Elizabeth bursts forth in a praise of Mary and her pregnancy (vv. 41b-42). This is not a 'song' but a

shout of praise (ἀνεφώνησεν κραυγῇ μεγάλη καὶ εἶπεν) contained in metrical lines following Hebrew poetic form, even though preserved by Luke in Greek.

εὐλογημένη σὺ ἐν γυναιξὶν

καὶ εὐλογημένος ὁ καρπὸς τῆς κοιλίας σου.

Blessed are you among women

and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

The remainder in vv. 43-45 is normal conversational expressions of gratefulness to God for Mary's visit. In that moment the earlier angelic message to Zechariah about the role of their son to the Messiah 'clicked' with Elizabeth, and she recognized this baby of Mary as him.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
46 Καὶ εἶπεν Μαριάμ· Μεγαλύνει ἡ ψυχὴ μου τὸν κύριον, 47 καὶ ἠγαλλίασεν τὸ πνευμά μου ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ σωτήρῳ μου, 48 ὅτι ἐπέβλεψεν ἐπὶ τὴν ταπεινωσὶν τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ. ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μακαριοῦσίν με πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί, 49 ὅτι ἐποίησέν μοι μεγάλα ὁ δυνατός, καὶ ἅγιον τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, 50 καὶ τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ εἰς γενεάς καὶ γενεάς τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτόν. 51 Ἐποίησεν κράτος ἐν βραχίονι αὐτοῦ, διεσκόρπισεν ὑπερηφάνους διανοίᾳ καρδίας αὐτῶν· 52 καθεῖλεν δυνάστας ἀπὸ θρόνων καὶ ὕψωσεν ταπεινοὺς, 53 πεινῶντας ἐνέπλησεν ἀγαθῶν καὶ πλουτοῦντας ἐξαπέστειλεν κενούς. 54 ἀντελάβετο Ἰσραὴλ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ, μνησθῆναι ἐλέους, 55 καθὼς ἐλάλησεν πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν, τῷ Ἀβραάμ καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. 56 Ἐμείνει δὲ Μαριάμ σὺν αὐτῇ ὡς μῆνας τρεῖς, καὶ ὑπέστρεψεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτῆς.	46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. 52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." 56 And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.	46 Entonces María dijo: Mi alma engrandece al Señor, 47 y mi espíritu se regocija en Dios mi Salvador. 48 Porque ha mirado la humilde condición de esta su sierva; pues he aquí, desde ahora en adelante todas las generaciones me tendrán por bienaventurada. 49 Porque grandes cosas me ha hecho el Poderoso; y santo es su nombre. 50 Y DE GENERACION EN GENERACION ES SU MISERICORDIA PARA LOS QUE LE TEMEN. 51 Ha hecho proezas con su brazo; ha espardido a los soberbios en el pensamiento de sus corazones. 52 Ha quitado a los poderosos de sus tronos; y ha exaltado a los humildes; 53 A LOS HAMBRIENTOS HA COLMADO DE BIENES y ha despedido a los ricos con las manos vacías. 54 Ha ayudado a Israel, su siervo, para recuerdo de su misericordia 55 tal como dijo a nuestros padres, a Abraham y a su descendencia para siempre. 56 Y María se quedó con Elisabet como tres meses, y después regresó a su casa.

Mary's response to Elizabeth's praise is a praise

expression come to be known as the Magnificat. It is a beautifully composed expression of Hebrew poetry preserved in Greek. This praise stands parallel to the *Benedictus* (1:67-79); the Angel's Song (2:13-14); and the *Nunc Dimittis* (2:28-32). The source of it is debated among modern scholars.<sup>62</sup>

But it stands in the text as the praise of the pregnant teenager Mary in eloquent adoration of God. Its heavy dependency on Old Testament imagery and terminology comes through the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew Bible.<sup>63</sup> The Song of Hannah in 1 Sam. 2:1-10 is a primary model for this praise.

The pericope closes in v. 56 with Mary remaining with Elizabeth for the remainder of her pregnancy with John (three months: ὡς μῆνας τρεῖς) before returning home to Nazareth in Galilee.

In Luke's parallelism, the visit of Mary stands as the center piece of his narrative:

- a Announcement of John's birth
- b Announcement of Jesus' birth
- c Visit of Mary with Elizabeth
- d Birth of John
- e Birth of Jesus

Here is where the liturgical praise of God bursts forth in Luke's presentation. It is here that we see the deep connection between John and Jesus with echoes of Elijah and the coming Messiah. The deep rooting of this experience in the rich heritage of the Old Testament shines forth here especially. It is even structured in traditional Hebrew poetry, even though expressed in Greek. But it comes through the Greek translation of the Old Testament for the benefit of Luke's non-Jewish readers. These early readers, beginning with Theophilus, gained a profound sense of the rich heritage of Christ as the promised Jewish Messiah. Out of insignificant Israel could come then a world wide Savior.

<sup>62</sup>“Did the Magnificat come to Luke as a separate tradition? Did he compose it himself?. Or did he adapt to some extent an existing psalm? Each view is strongly supported. Least likely is the view that Luke freely composed the hymn. The Comment section below identifies a sufficient quantity of non-Lukan diction and non-Septuagintal Semitisms to make free Lukan composition improbable. However, a significant Septuagintal influence is also apparent and shows that the text is more than a simple translation of an underlying Hebrew document. Also, there is enough Lukan diction to suggest some Lukan role in the final form of the Magnificat.” [John Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20*, vol. 35A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 63.]

<sup>63</sup>“In the Magnificat the introduction is found in vv. 46b–47; and the rest of the verses may either be regarded as the body of the hymn with three strophes (vv. 48–50, 51–53, 54–55) or as a two-strophe body (vv. 48–50, 51–53) with a conclusion (vv. 54–55). The latter seems to be preferable, because vv. 54–55 repeat, in effect, what vv. 51–53 set forth as Yahweh's great deeds, making them specific in relating them to Israel, ‘our fathers,’ and Abraham.” [Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 28, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 360.]

## 5. John's birth 1:57-80

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
57 Τῇ δὲ Ἐλισάβετ ἐπλήσθη ὁ χρόνος τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτὴν καὶ ἐγέννησεν υἱόν. 58 καὶ ἤκουσαν οἱ περίοικοι καὶ οἱ συγγενεῖς αὐτῆς ὅτι ἐμεγάλυνεν κύριος τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ μετ' αὐτῆς καὶ συνέχαιρον αὐτῇ.	57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.	57 Cuando a Elisabet se le cumplió el tiempo de su alumbramiento, dio a luz un hijo. 58 Y sus vecinos y parientes oyeron que el Señor había demostrado su gran misericordia hacia ella; y se regocijaban con ella.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
59 Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ὀγδόῃ ἦλθον περιτεμεῖν τὸ παιδίον καὶ ἐκάλουον αὐτὸ ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ Ζαχαρίαν. 60 καὶ ἀποκριθεῖσα ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ εἶπεν· οὐχί, ἀλλὰ κληθήσεται Ἰωάννης. 61 καὶ εἶπαν πρὸς αὐτὴν ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν ἐκ τῆς συγγενείας σου ὃς καλεῖται τῷ ὀνόματι τούτῳ. 62 ἐνένευον δὲ τῷ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ τὸ τί ἂν θέλοι καλεῖσθαι αὐτό. 63 καὶ αἰτήσας πινακίδιον ἔγραψεν λέγων· Ἰωάννης ἐστὶν ὄνομα αὐτοῦ. καὶ ἐθαύμασαν πάντες. 64 ἀνέωχθη δὲ τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ παραχρῆμα καὶ ἡ γλῶσσα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔλαλει εὐλογῶν τὸν θεόν.	59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. 60 But his mother said, “No; he is to be called John.” 61 They said to her, “None of your relatives has this name.” 62 Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. 63 He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And all of them were amazed. 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God.	59 Y al octavo día vinieron para circuncidar al niño, y lo iban a llamar Zacarías según el nombre de su padre. 60 Pero la madre respondió, y dijo: No, sino que se llamará Juan. 61 Y le dijeron: No hay nadie en tu familia que tenga ese nombre. 62 Entonces preguntaban por señas al padre, cómo lo quería llamar. 63 Y él pidió una tablilla y escribió lo siguiente: Su nombre es Juan. Y todos se maravillaron. 64 Al instante le fue abierta su boca y suelta su lengua, y comenzó a hablar dando alabanza a Dios.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
65 Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐπὶ πάντας φόβος αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ὄρεινῃ τῆς Ἰουδαίας διελαλεῖτο πάντα τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα, 66 καὶ ἔθεντο πάντες οἱ ἀκούσαντες ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῶν λέγοντες· τί ἄρα τὸ παιδίον τοῦτο ἔσται; καὶ γὰρ χεὶρ κυρίου ἦν μετ' αὐτοῦ.	65 Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. 66 All who heard them pondered them and said, “What then will this child become?” For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.	65 Y vino temor sobre todos los que vivían a su alrededor; y todas estas cosas se comentaban en toda la región montañosa de Judea. 66 Y todos los que las oían las guardaban en su corazón, diciendo: ¿Qué, pues, llegará a ser este niño? Porque la mano del Señor ciertamente estaba con él.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
67 Καὶ Ζαχαρίας ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ ἐπλήσθη πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ ἐπροφήτευσεν λέγων· 68 Εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, ὅτι ἐπεσκέψατο καὶ ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ, 69 καὶ ἤγειρεν κέρασ σωτηρίας ἡμῖν ἐν οἴκῳ Δαυὶδ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ, 70 καθὼς ἐλάλησεν διὰ στόματος τῶν ἁγίων ἀπ’ αἰῶνος προφητῶν αὐτοῦ, 71 σωτηρίαν ἐξ ἐχθρῶν ἡμῶν καὶ ἐκ χειρῶν πάντων τῶν μισούντων ἡμᾶς, 72 ποιῆσαι ἔλεος μετὰ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν καὶ μνησθῆναι διαθήκης ἁγίας αὐτοῦ, 73 ὄρκον ὃν ὤμοσεν πρὸς Ἀβραάμ τὸν πατέρα ἡμῶν, τοῦ δοῦναι ἡμῖν 74 ἀφόβως ἐκ χειρῶς ἐχθρῶν ῥυσθέντας λατρεῦειν αὐτῷ 75 ἐν ὁσιότητι καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ πάσαις ταῖς ἡμέραις ἡμῶν.	67 Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: 68 “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. 69 He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. 72 Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.	67 Y su padre Zacarías fue lleno del Espíritu Santo, y profetizó diciendo: 68 Bendito sea el Señor, Dios de Israel, porque nos ha visitado y ha efectuado redención para su pueblo, 69 y nos ha levantado un cuerno de salvación en la casa de David su siervo, 70 tal como lo anunció por boca de sus santos profetas desde los tiempos antiguos, 71 salvación DE NUESTROS ENEMIGOS y DE LA MANO DE TODOS LOS QUE NOS ABORRECEN; 72 para mostrar misericordia a nuestros padres, y para recordar su santo pacto, 73 el juramento que hizo a nuestro padre Abraham: 74 concedernos que, librados de la mano de nuestros enemigos, le sirvamos sin temor 75 en santidad y justicia delante de El, todos nuestros días.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
76 Καὶ σὺ δέ, παιδίον, προφήτης ὑψίστου κληθήσῃ· προπορεύσῃ γὰρ ἐνώπιον κυρίου ἐτοιμάσαι ὁδοὺς αὐτοῦ, 77 τοῦ δοῦναι γνῶσιν σωτηρίας τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀφέσει ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν, 78 διὰ σπλάγχχνα ἐλέους θεοῦ ἡμῶν, ἐν οἷς ἐπισκέπεται ἡμᾶς ἀνατολή ἐξ ὕψους, 79 ἐπιφάνει τοῖς ἐν σκότει καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου καθημένοις, τοῦ κατευθῆναι τοὺς πόδας ἡμῶν εἰς ὁδὸν εἰρήνης.	76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. 78 By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”	76 Y tú, niño, serás llamado profeta del Altísimo; porque irás DELANTE DEL SEÑOR PARA PREPARAR SUS CAMINOS; 77 para dar a su pueblo el conocimiento de la salvación por el perdón de sus pecados, 78 por la entrañable misericordia de nuestro Dios, con que la Aurora nos visitará desde lo alto, 79 PARA DAR LUZ A LOS QUE HABITAN EN TINIEBLAS Y EN SOMBRA DE MUERTE, para guiar nuestros pies en el camino de paz.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
80 Τὸ δὲ παιδίον ἠύξανεν καὶ ἐκραταιοῦτο πνεύματι, καὶ ἦν ἐν ταῖς ἐρήμοις ἕως ἡμέρας ἀναδείξωσ αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸν Ἰσραὴλ.	80 The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.	80 Y el niño crecía y se fortalecía en espíritu; y vivió en lugares desiertos hasta el día en que apareció en público a Israel.

In the next sequence after the visit of Mary to Elizabeth, there comes the birth of John.<sup>64</sup> The actual birth of John is only described in vv. 57-58 and is almost incidental to the larger text. What comes to the forefront of emphasis is the miracle that takes place in the Jerusalem temple eight days later in connection to John’s circumcision (vv. 59-79).<sup>65</sup> Here Zechariah recovers his ability to speak upon the naming of the baby as John (vv. 59-64). Their friends recognize this as a miracle from God (vv. 65-66). This prompts an outburst of praise to God by Zechariah (vv. 67-79). The praise is subdivided into two parts with the first speaking of God’s raising up of a Deliverer (vv. 67-75) and a person address to the infant John (vv. 76-79). Verse 80 concludes the pericope with a summarizing affirmation of the childhood and youth of John. Interestingly nothing particularly supernatural takes place during John’s growing up years, according to Luke. Also, John does not receive attention in the Infancy Gospels that are focused exclusively on Jesus and His parents.

Zechariah’s praise in vv. 68-79 is introduced in v. 67 **as ἐπροφήτευσεν λέγων, he prophesied saying.**<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup>“The stage is now fully set for John’s role as a child of destiny. Where the angel Gabriel’s words have attributed a preliminary eschatological role as preparer to John (vv 15–17) and the Magnificat has hymned the coming of Jesus as the fulfillment of all eschatological hopes (vv 46–55), it is left to the Benedictus to speak of both together and to establish the nature of their partnership in the bringing of salvation.” [John Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20*, vol. 35A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 85.]

<sup>65</sup>“According to the injunction given to Abraham (Gen 17:12; cf. 21:4), taken up and formalized in the Mosaic Law (Lev 12:3), the newborn boy was to be circumcised on the eighth day. Even the sanctity of the Sabbath yielded to the regulation of circumcision on the eighth day according to John 7:22–23 and the rabbis of a later date: ‘They may perform on the Sabbath all things that are needful for circumcision’ (m. Šabbat 18:3; 19:1–4). See Str-B, 4/1. 23–40 for details.” [Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 28, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 380.]

<sup>66</sup>“Zechariah’s canticle, the Benedictus, is an expression of his praise of God (eulogōn ton theon, 1:64), introduced as a Spirit-filled prophetic utterance (1:67). Verses 76–77 give an answer to the question posed by the neighbors and relatives in v. 66b. Like the Magnificat, the canticle is separable from its present context, and v. 80 could follow smoothly on v. 66b (or 66c). Like the Magnificat and the speeches in Acts, it expresses the ideal sentiments of Zechariah, now that the day has come when ‘all these things’ were ‘to take place’ (1:20). As in the case of the Magnificat, the Benedictus

## II. BIRTH NARRATIVES

The actual birth of Jesus is narrated by both Matthew and Luke as somewhat incidental to events taking place in thematic connection to Jesus' birth. Unlike contemporary western cultural patterns where camcorders and smart phones are turned on in the delivery room to catch every small detail of a child's birth, the ancient world was not so interested in such details. What was important was that women have children who survived infancy to grow into adulthood. Not producing children was a major stigma against married women across virtually all cultures at the beginning of the Christian era.<sup>67</sup>

For both Matthew and Luke, the specifics of how Jesus was born were unimportant. Instead, the accompanying events that signaled the birth of a miraculous child were the important details to narrate.

For Matthew, the actual birth of Jesus comes in passing at the end of the pericope (1:18-25) describing the angel's appearance to Joseph urging him to accept Mary's special pregnancy: ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν, *until which time she birthed a son* (v. 25c). The statement is a dependent clause in the larger statement that Joseph did not have sexual relations with Mary until after Jesus was born. Interestingly, however, the pericope is introduced with the following heading: Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἡ γένεσις οὕτως ἦν, *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was this way* (v. 18).

For Luke, a little more detail is provided in 2:6-7:

6 Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἐκεῖ ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτήν, 7 καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον, καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ, διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι.

6 *While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.* 7 *And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

But again not much more detail is provided about the actual birth than καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον, *and she gave birth to her firstborn son*. Luke also is not interested in specific details. Even in the apocryphal Infancy Gospels not much interest is shown in the actual birth of Jesus, although the Gospel of James does provide an alternative account depicting Joseph and a mid-wife who observe a strange thing from outside the cave where Mary gave birth to her baby.<sup>68</sup>

### A. Mt. 1:18-25

In Matthew's sequence of pericopes the genealogy of Jesus (1:1-17) introduces Christ to his readers in proper Jewish fashion. To be sure the initial heading in verse one, Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυιδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ, *a book of the ??? of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham*, can be seen either as a heading just for the genealogy or alternatively as a heading for the first two chapters of Matthew's gospel. It depends on how γενέσεως from γένεσις is taken. Literally γένεσις meanings 'beginning' and the combination Βίβλος γενέσεως could mean the *record of beginning*. But this same phrase Βίβλος γενέσεως can just as easily mean the *record of lineage*, which is the way most scholars understand it here in Matthew. The use of this phrase, rather than γενεαλογία, *genealogy*, that is used in 1 Tim. 1:4 and Titus 3:9 and connotes a negative speculation with such records which Paul condemns, reflects the positive nature of what Matthew introduces in vv. 2-17.

is a cento-like composition, built up like a mosaic from numerous phrases drawn from the Greek OT. For a comparison of the Greek text of the canticle with its OT parallels, see A. Plummer, *Gospel*, 39; J. M. Creed, *The Gospel*, 305–306. My translation of the *Benedictus* has italicized phrases that show clear dependence on such OT parallels; the NOTES will call attention to less clear allusions." [Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 28, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 376–377.]

<sup>67</sup>“Large families were not the norm among the elite even by the Late Republic; the family of Clodius Pulcher, who had at least three sisters and two brothers, was considered unusual.<sup>[84]</sup> The birth rate among the aristocracy declined to such an extent that the first Roman emperor Augustus (reigned 27 BC–14 AD) passed a series of laws intended to increase it, including special honors for women who bore at least three children (the *ius trium liberorum*).<sup>[85]</sup> Those who were unmarried, divorced, widowed, or barren were prohibited from inheriting property unless named in a will.<sup>[86]</sup>

“Roman women were not only valued for the number of children that they produced, but also for their part in raising and educating children to become good citizens. To rear children for successful lives, an exemplary Roman mother needed to be well-educated herself.<sup>[87]</sup>

“One of the Roman women most famous for their strength and influence as a mother was Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi. Julius Caesar, whose father died when he was only a young teen, had a close relationship with his mother, Aurelia, whose political clout was essential in preventing the execution of her 18-year-old son during the proscriptions of Sulla.”

[“Women in Ancient Rome,” wikipedia.org]

<sup>68</sup>**Gospel of James 29.2.** *And they stood in the place of the cave: and behold a bright cloud overshadowing the cave. And the mid-wife said: My soul is magnified this day, because mine eyes have seen marvelous things: for salvation is born unto Israel. And immediately the cloud withdrew itself out of the cave, and a great light appeared in the cave so that our eyes could not endure it. And by little and little that light withdrew itself until the young child appeared: and it went and took the breast of its mother Mary. And the midwife cried aloud and said: Great unto me today is this day, in that I have seen this new sight.*

Matthew sets up the birth narrative in vv. 18-25 with his genealogical listing that brings Christ's ancestry down to Joseph. In verse 16, he makes the uncustomary switch from a listing of males to Mary, mother of Jesus. This in turn sets up the Joseph narrative in vv. 18-25 that contains the reference to Christ's birth.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
<p>18 Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἡ γένεσις οὕτως ἦν. μνηστευθείσης τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ Μαρίας τῷ Ἰωσήφ, πρὶν ἢ συνελθεῖν αὐτοὺς εὐρέθη ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου. 19 Ἰωσήφ δὲ ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς, δίκαιος ὢν καὶ μὴ θέλων αὐτὴν δειγματίσαι, ἐβουλήθη λάθρα ἀπολῦσαι αὐτήν. 20 ταῦτα δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐνθυμηθέντος ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου κατ' ὄναρ ἐφάνη αὐτῷ λέγων· Ἰωσήφ υἱὸς Δαυὶδ, μὴ φοβηθῆς παραλαβεῖν Μαρίαν τὴν γυναῖκά σου· τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου. 21 τέξεται δὲ υἱόν, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν· αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαόν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν. 22 τοῦτο δὲ ὅλον γέγονεν ἵνα πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος· 23 ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνεύμενον μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ θεός. 24 ἐγερθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰωσήφ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕπνου ἐποίησεν ὡς προσέταξεν αὐτῷ ὁ ἄγγελος κυρίου καὶ παρέλαβεν τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, 25 καὶ οὐκ ἐγένωσκεν αὐτὴν ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν· καὶ ἐκάλεσεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν.</p>	<p>18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 20 But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." 24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, 25 but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.</p>	<p>18 Y el nacimiento de Jesucristo fue como sigue. Estando su madre María desposada con José, antes de que se consumara el matrimonio, se halló que había concebido por obra del Espíritu Santo. 19 Y José su marido, siendo un hombre justo y no queriendo difamarla, quiso abandonarla en secreto. 20 Pero mientras pensaba en esto, he aquí que se le apareció en sueños un ángel del Señor, diciendo: José, hijo de David, no temas recibir a María tu mujer, porque lo que se ha engendrado en ella es del Espíritu Santo. 21 Y dará a luz un hijo, y le pondrás por nombre Jesús, porque El salvará a su pueblo de sus pecados. 22 Todo esto sucedió para que se cumpliera lo que el Señor había hablado por medio del profeta, diciendo: 23 HE AQUÍ, LA VIRGEN CONCEBIRÁ Y DARÁ A LUZ UN HIJO, Y LE PONDRÁN POR NOMBRE EMMANUEL, que traducido significa: DIOS CON NOSOTROS. 24 Y cuando despertó José del sueño, hizo como el ángel del Señor le había mandado, y tomó consigo a su mujer; 25 y la conservó virgen hasta que dio a luz un hijo; y le puso por nombre Jesús.</p>

Matthew's narrative explains the supernatural birth of Jesus through the perspective of Joseph who was the 'husband to be' of this pregnant young girl who was discovered expecting prior to the consummation of their 'engagement' period as husband and wife.

The narrative flow moves from a title heading in v. 18a to Joseph's dilemma upon finding Mary pregnant (vv. 18b-19) to the appearance of an angel to reassure him that this pregnancy was legitimate (vv. 20-23) to a narrative conclusion describing Joseph's response (vv. 24-25).

### 1. The Heading, v. 18a.

Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἡ γένεσις οὕτως ἦν.

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.

The introduction given here as a header to vv. 18-25 confirms the limited reference of Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ to vv. 2-17.<sup>69</sup> Now we are to understand why Matthew made

<sup>69</sup> Vv. 1-17 provided an account of the origin of Jesus which was concerned with relating him, via genealogy, to the course of God's dealings with his people from Abraham to his own generation. Now in vv. 19-25 the wide-angle-lens view of vv. 1-17 gives way to close-up camera work. Attention is focussed on the immediate circumstances of Jesus' birth; here Matthew begins his con-

the unexpected shift from Joseph to Mary in verse sixteen. The encounter of Joseph with the angel compares favorably with Mary's encounter in Luke 1:26-28. Both texts are shaped literarily by the Old Testament oracle genre form (cf. Gen. 16:7-14; 17-18; Jdg. 13:2-23), and also by the OT call-narrative form (cf. Ex. 3; Jdg. 6:11-24; Je. 1:4-10), with the latter pattern more dominant. Additionally Matthew's shaping of this pericope may owe influence to the Jewish haggadic tradition about Moses' infancy as a way to heighten contrast between Jesus and Moses. But distinctive vocabulary and writing styles for both Matthew and Luke surface in their accounts.<sup>70</sup>

nected narrative. Vv. 19-25 provide an explanation for the formal anomaly in v. 16<sup>1</sup> by providing the first narrative unit of Matthew's story.<sup>2</sup> Matthew's Infancy Narrative will run from 1:19 to 2:23." [Nolland John, "Preface," in *The Gospel of Matthew: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 90-91.]

<sup>70</sup> While not strictly midrash, the genre of the passage is best labeled 'midrashic haggadah' — i.e. midrashic in the sense that the OT quotation [in v. 23] is of key importance and phrases of it are utilized in the surrounding narrative; haggadah in the sense that the story is not told for the sake of facts alone, but in order to illustrate their deeper meaning, that is, the theological significance of Jesus

The use of the double name Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *Jesus Christ*, picks up from verse one where it first appears, but is not so used afterwards. Later it is *Jesus who is called Christ* (1:16; 27:17, 22); *Jesus as the Christ* (16:13); *Jesus is the Christ* (22:41; cf. 26:63). Here at the beginning identity is clearly established by Matthew.

## 2. Joseph's dilemma, vv. 18b-19

18b μνηστευθείσης τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ Μαρίας τῷ Ἰωσήφ, πρὶν ἢ συνελθεῖν αὐτοὺς εὐρέθη ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου. 19 Ἰωσήφ δὲ ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς, δίκαιος ὢν καὶ μὴ θέλων αὐτὴν δειγματίσαι, ἐβουλήθη λάθρα ἀπολῦσαι αὐτήν.

18b When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

Matthew quickly begins this pericope by posing the dilemma that Joseph found himself in upon discovering that Mary was pregnant. The time frame for this discovery is twofold: μνηστευθείσης τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ Μαρίας τῷ Ἰωσήφ, πρὶν ἢ συνελθεῖν αὐτοὺς. First is the period of betrothal defined as μνηστευθείσης τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ Μαρίας τῷ Ἰωσήφ. In ancient Jewish custom, this normally was a period of a year prior to the formal beginning of marriage. It meant Mary's father had pledged her in marriage to Joseph at the end of the period of probation. Legally in Jewish custom it was as though they were married, but the marriage could not be consummated until the end of the period. In most circumstances this was during the thirteenth year of the girl and consummation could take place after she reached puberty. If impurity of some kind were discovered during that probationary period, a full process of divorce had to be followed in order to terminate it. This in the Jewish custom of that time was the sole option of the Jewish man, and not of his wife to be. Divorce on the grounds of adultery -- this was Joseph's option -- would have had a devastating impact on Mary and her future. But this was the common interpretation of the Law of Moses at that time, and for most Jews it was a requirement of the Torah rather than just an option.

That Joseph was looking at adultery by Mary is heightened by the second temporal affirmation πρὶν ἢ συνελθεῖν αὐτοὺς meaning prior to the consummation of the marriage in sexual intercourse. Joseph knew that he could not have been the father of her child, and that left but one possibility open, adultery on Mary's part.

as the fulfillment of OT promises. The point is that Matthew's approach in the pericope is highly stylized and has very evident theological purposes." [Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 16.]

To be sure, Matthew depicts the pregnancy from his readers' perspective rather than from Joseph's: εὐρέθη ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου, *she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit*. At this point Joseph did not know the source of the pregnancy, but we as readers are so informed.

But Joseph was a deeply religious Jew with genuine compassion for others, as verse nineteen affirms. His religious commitment to principles of the Torah are defined as δίκαιος ὢν, *being righteous*. His character and status are defined as ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς, *her man*, in the sense of husband, and μὴ θέλων αὐτὴν δειγματίσαι, *not being willing to disgrace her publicly*. Typically this meant having one's hair shaved off and being paraded around publicly as an adulteress. This was the 'mild' punishment, while the other extreme was death by stoning. Thus Joseph was torn between these alternatives.<sup>71</sup>

What he resolved to do in his own mind was ἐβουλήθη λάθρα ἀπολῦσαι αὐτήν, *he determined to release her λάθρα*. The adverb λάθρα literally means "without others being aware." Numerous implications are present here, and are reflected by the variety of translations: secretly, privately, quietly etc. She would simply be left under her father's care and the marriage never consummated. They had not begun to live together as συνελθεῖν αὐτοὺς clearly states in the usual Jewish custom.

Joseph's struggle was between being true to God when it seemed like this demanded being harsh to someone he cared for deeply. The revelation of the angel allowed him to be true both to God and to Mary at the same time. He did not compromise either commitment. This will be the same for followers of Christ today.

## 3. Angel's reassurance, vv. 20-23

20 ταῦτα δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐνθυμηθέντος ἰδοῦ ἄγγελος κυρίου κατ' ὄναρ ἐφάνη αὐτῷ λέγων· Ἰωσήφ υἱὸς Δαυὶδ, μὴ φοβηθῆς παραλαβεῖν Μαρίαν τὴν γυναῖκά σου· τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου. 21 τέξεται δὲ υἱόν, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ

<sup>71</sup>The *Gospel of James*, however, presents the dilemma completely differently. See 24.1-2:

I And Joseph was sore afraid and ceased from speaking unto her (or left her alone), and pondered what he should do with her. And Joseph said: If I hide her sin, I shall be found fighting against the law of the Lord: and if I manifest her unto the children of Israel, I fear lest that which is in her be the seed of an angel, and I shall be found delivering up innocent blood to the judgement of death. What then shall I do? I will let her go from me privily. And the night came upon him. 2 And behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying: Fear not this child, for that which is in her is of the Holy Ghost, and she shall bear a son and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. And Joseph arose from sleep and glorified the God of Israel which had shown this favour unto her: and he watched over her.

ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν· αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν. 22 τοῦτο δὲ ὄλον γέγονεν ἵνα πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος· 23 ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ θεός.

20 But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”

Matthew highlights Joseph’s struggle with ταῦτα δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐνθυμηθέντος at the front of the sentence in verse 20. His decision had not been made rashly, but as ἐνθυμηθέντος from ἐνθυμέομαι stresses, it was after giving extensive consideration to his options when the angel appeared to him.

Matthew typically (some 62 times in his gospel) uses ἰδοὺ to signal to his readers that something extraordinary is about to happen.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>72</sup>What is interesting is to compare this event with the legends circulating among the Jews of the first century about a special angelic appearance to Amram, Moses’ father, regarding the birth and infancy of Moses. Josephus in *Antiquities* 2.210–17 and *Pseudo-Philo* 9 depict these. Note below paragraphs 210–217 from Josephus:

(210) A man, whose name was Amram, one of the nobler sort of the Hebrews, was afraid for his whole nation, lest it should fail, by the want of young men to be brought up hereafter, and was very uneasy at it, his wife being then with child, and he knew not what to do. (211) Hereupon he betook himself to prayer to God; and entreated him to have compassion on those men who had nowise transgressed the laws of his worship, and to afford them deliverance from the miseries they at that time endured, and to render abortive their enemies’ hopes of the destruction of their nation. (212) Accordingly God had mercy on him, and was moved by his supplication. He stood by him in his sleep, and exhorted him not to despair of his future favorites. He said further, that he did not forget their piety towards him, and would always reward them for it, as he had formerly granted his favor to their forefathers, and made them increase from a few, to so great a multitude. (213) He put him in mind, that when Abraham was come alone out of Mesopotamia into Canaan, he had been made happy, not only in other respects, but that when his wife was at first barren, she was afterwards by him enabled to conceive seed, and bear him sons. That he left to Ismael and to his posterity the country of Arabia; as also to his sons by Keturah, Troglodytis: and to Isaac, Canaan. (214) That by my assistance, said he, he did great exploits in war, which, unless you be yourselves impious, you must still remember. As for Jacob, he became well known to strangers also, by the greatness of that prosperity in which he lived, and left to his sons, who came into Egypt with no more than seventy souls, while you are now become above six hundred thousand. (215) Know, therefore, that I shall provide for you all in common what is for your good, and particularly for

The angel comes to Joseph in a dream while he is sleeping: ἄγγελος κυρίου κατ’ ὄναρ ἐφάνη αὐτῷ. His instructions are simple: take Mary as your wife: μὴ φοβηθῆς παραλαβεῖν Μαρίαν τὴν γυναῖκά σου. That is, enter into normal marital relations with Mary. The basis of this is simply: τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἁγίου, for what has been fathered in her is from the Holy Spirit.

A second instruction comes in v. 21 about naming the child to be born. The name of this child is to be Ἰησοῦν, Jesus, and the reason for this name is αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν, for he will deliver his people from their sins. The name Ἰησοῦς is the Greek equivalent form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which etymologically meant savior.<sup>73</sup> His future role is the basis for his name.

In verses 22–23, Matthew inserts the first personal commentary of many into the narrative: 2:5–6, 15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9.<sup>74</sup> This angelic revelation stands as a realization of Isaiah 7:14, which is then quoted from the LXX text. Then he adds his own explanatory statement ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον μεθ’ ἡμῶν ὁ θεός, which is translated as ‘God with us.’ This goes back to the name Ἐμμανουήλ, Emmanuel, in Isa. 7:14.<sup>75</sup> This anticipated the presence

thyself what shall make thee famous; for that child, out of dread of whose nativity the Egyptians have doomed the Israelite children to destruction, shall be this child of thine, and shall be concealed from those who watch to destroy him: (216) and when he is brought up in a surprising way, he shall deliver the Hebrew nation from the distress they are under from the Egyptians. His memory shall be famous while the world lasts; and this not only among the Hebrews, but foreigners also:—all which shall be the effect of my favor to thee, and to thy posterity. He shall also have such a brother, that he shall himself obtain my priesthood, and his posterity shall have it after him to the end of the world.

(217) When the vision had informed him of these things, Amram awaked and told it to Jochebed, who was his wife. And now the fear increased upon them on account of the prediction in Amram’s dream; for they were under concern, not only for the child, but on account of the great happiness that was to come to him also.

[Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987).]

<sup>73</sup>יְהוֹשֻׁעַ *Jeshua*, later form for יהושֻׁעַ *Joshua*.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 471.]

<sup>74</sup>W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 211.

<sup>75</sup>“Matthew’s interpretation has been taken in two different ways. Either the evangelist is calling Jesus ‘God’ (cf. Jn 1:1–5; 20:28), or he is bringing out his significance as one in whom God’s active presence, that is, the divine favour and blessing and aid, have manifested themselves.” [W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary (London: New

of God with His people Israel in the close manner described in the prophets. For Matthew the birth of Jesus would signify the return of the presence of God to Israel.

The use of Isa. 7:14 as a Messianic prophecy had been around for some time prior to Matthew, but not in Jewish tradition. The ἡ παρθένος, young girl, in Isaiah corresponds to Mary's status as a ἡ παρθένος, even though Matthew does not use the term specifically of Mary, in contrast to Luke (1:27) who then defines Mary's status as ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω, I have not known a man (1:34). Thus Mary can be labeled a virgin, even though the term ἡ παρθένος normally means only a young girl. But virginity was normally assumed for young girls around the time of puberty. One exception to a παρθένος being a virgin is Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, in Gen. 34:3 where the LXX calls her a παρθένος after Shechem had had sexual relations with her.

The prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 assumed the birth of a Davidic king following Ahaz.<sup>76</sup> The assigning of a Messianic prophecy role to the passage seems to have been uniquely Christian, and reflects the understanding of prophecy containing multiple fulfillments.

#### 4. Joseph's response, vv. 24-25

York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 217.]

<sup>76</sup>Isa 7:14 was originally addressed to King Ahaz and perhaps prophesied the future coming of a Davidic king. Yet it is not certain that a royal person is in view. The force of the OT text could lie entirely with the name: 'Emmanuel' will be named because Yahweh will soon intervene for salvation and be with his people (cf. the naming of Hosea's children). However that may be, later Judaism apparently did not understand Isa 7:14 messianically; at least we have no positive evidence that it did. What Jewish traditions we do have connect the verse with Hezekiah (Justin, Dial. 43; Exod. Rab. on 12:29; Num. Rab. on 7:48). Thus the application of Isa 7:14 to the Messiah is evidently peculiarly Christian. (Although one should perhaps not forget that Hezekiah is, in some rabbinic texts, regarded as the Messiah; see on 1:9.)" [W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew, International Critical Commentary* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 213.]

#### B. Lk. 2:1-7

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
2.1 Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκεῖναις ἐξῆλθεν δόγμα παρὰ Καίσαρος Αὐγούστου ἀπογράφεσθαι πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην. 2 αὕτη ἀπογραφή πρώτη ἐγένετο ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς Συρίας Κυρηνίου. 3 καὶ ἐπορεύοντο πάντες ἀπογράφεσθαι, ἕκαστος εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ πόλιν.	2.1 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered.	2.1 Y aconteció en aquellos días que salió un edicto de César Augusto, para que se hiciera un censo de todo el mundo habitado . 2 Este fue el primer censo que se levantó cuando Cirenio era gobernador de Siria. 3 Y todos se dirigían a inscribirse en el censo, cada uno a su ciudad.

24 ἐγερθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰωσήφ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕπνου ἐποίησεν ὡς προσέταξεν αὐτῷ ὁ ἄγγελος κυρίου καὶ παρέλαβεν τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, 25 καὶ οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν αὐτὴν ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν· καὶ ἐκάλεσεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν.

24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, 25 but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

The climax of Matthew's narrative comes in Joseph's response to the angelic appearance in his dream. His righteous character affirmed already in v. 19 is now validated by his obedience to the angel's commands: ἐποίησεν ὡς προσέταξεν αὐτῷ ὁ ἄγγελος κυρίου, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him. This revelation from God was all that Joseph needed in order to move forward with his marriage to Mary: καὶ παρέλαβεν τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, and he received her as his wife. The language underscores Mary as a "gift" from her father at the wedding ceremony when they began living together.

The qualification of the relationship is stated by Matthew as καὶ οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν αὐτὴν ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν, and he did not know her until after she gave birth to a son. The language of Matthew signals that after Jesus was born a normal husband / wife relationship took place. This would be affirmed elsewhere in the New Testament by the mentioning of brothers and sisters of Jesus born to Mary and Joseph after his birth (cf. Mt. 21:46-49; 13:55; Mk. 3:32; Lk. 8:19-20; Jn. 2:12; 7:3-10).

Also in obedience to the angel's instructions, Joseph gave the name Jesus to the baby: καὶ ἐκάλεσεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν. Thus the righteous character of Joseph is validated by his actions of obedience to the instructions of the angel.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup>The legends about Joseph subsequently are contained in the apocryphal *History of Joseph the Carpenter*, coming out of Egypt in the late 500s to early 600s. According to this document Joseph was 90 years old when he took in Mary and he lived to be 111 years of age. But it contradicts the canonical gospels by contending that the other children were older than Jesus and came from his first wife before Mary.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
<p>4 Ἀνέβη δὲ καὶ Ἰωσήφ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐκ πόλεως Ναζαρέθ εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν εἰς πόλιν Δαυὶδ ἧτις καλεῖται Βηθλέεμ, διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἐξ οἴκου καὶ πατριᾶς Δαυὶδ, 5 ἀπογράψασθαι σὺν Μαριάμ τῇ ἐμνηστευμένῃ αὐτῷ, οὓση ἐγκύω. 6 Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτοῦς ἐκεῖ ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτήν, 7 καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον, καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ, διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι.</p>	<p>4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.</p>	<p>4 Y también José subió de Galilea, de la ciudad de Nazaret, a Judea, a la ciudad de David que se llama Belén, por ser él de la casa y de la familia de David, 5 para inscribirse junto con María, desposada con él, la cual estaba encinta. 6 Y sucedió que mientras estaban ellos allí, se cumplieron los días de su alumbramiento. 7 Y dio a luz a su hijo primogénito; le envolvió en pañales y le acostó en un pesebre, porque no había lugar para ellos en el mesón.</p>

Luke's account of the birth of Jesus provides a little more focus on the birth itself than does Matthew. Contextually it comes after the birth of John pericope. Also it sets up the visit of the temple shepherds to the baby soon after the birth (2:8-20).

Internally the passage naturally divides into two sub-units: vv. 1-3 setting the time of the birth, and vv. 4-7 describing the circumstances surrounding the birth.

### 1. The time of Jesus' birth, vv. 1-3

2.1 Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐξῆλθεν δόγμα παρὰ Καίσαρος Αὐγούστου ἀπογράφεσθαι πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην. 2 αὕτη ἀπογραφή πρώτη ἐγένετο ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς Συρίας Κυρηνίου. 3 καὶ ἐπορεύοντο πάντες ἀπογράφεσθαι, ἕκαστος εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ πόλιν.

2.1 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered.

In a manner typical in the ancient world Luke locates the birth of Jesus in a defined time frame. To be sure, it is very different from a modern time reference, and consequently poses a fist full of challenges when attempting to convert Luke's time references over on to a modern calendar.

Already Luke has signaled a localized time frame in the earlier visit of Mary with Elizabeth. Mary arrived in Bethlehem when Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John and stayed with her for three months (cf. 1:39-56). Mary was already pregnant with Jesus but in the early stages of her pregnancy. Thus when she returned home to Nazareth at the end of the visit with Elizabeth, she was close to half way through her pregnancy if not further along. It appears then that Jesus was born about six months after John was.<sup>78</sup>

The real challenge, however, comes with Luke's

<sup>78</sup>“The chronological connection here is vague, but 1:39–56 (see there) assumes that Mary is already pregnant and thus allows us to identify Jesus' birth date as approximately six months later than that of John.” [John Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20*, vol. 35A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 103.]

framing of the birth of Jesus within the larger chronology of the Roman empire.<sup>79</sup>

I will not repeat the earlier discussion on pages four through six of this study, but simply summarize the nature of the problem.

- 1) Reign of Roman emperor Caesar Augustus: 27 BCE - 14 AD
- 2) Reign of Quirinius, governor of Syria: Lived 51 BCE to 21 AD, but was made official governor of Syria in 6 AD.
- 3) Reign of Herod the Great (Lk. 1:5a; Mt. 2:1a) 73/74 BCE to 4 BCE

One of the major problems here is the official governorship of Quirinius which began a decade after Herod's death. The solution is to understand Luke here to refer to an enrollment of a more localized nature when he was functioning as Roman official operating in Syria in behalf of the current governor at the time. This understanding also resolves another major issue in that no where in any Roman records is there indication that an empire wide census was ever undertaken while Augustus was emperor. However, abundant indication exists suggesting periodic localized enrollments for taxation purposes that were relatively frequent. The bottom line to this chronology issue is that we cannot be absolutely certain of the exact time of Jesus' birth. It did occur pri-

<sup>79</sup>“Luke's statements concerning the Augustan census raise a series of important historical questions, which have generated a great deal of scholarly controversy. The starting point for the modern discussion of these issues is conveniently provided by the critical objections to Luke's account raised by D. F. Strauss in his 1835 study *Das Leben Jesu* (see *Life of Jesus*, 152–56). According to Strauss, (i) there was no general census ordered by Augustus; (ii) in any case, such a census is improbable in a client kingdom such as that of Herod the Great; (iii) furthermore, Quirinius governed Syria not during the reign of Herod but only later (beginning in A.D. 6–7); (iv) as well, the account, in requiring Joseph to report to Bethlehem, goes contrary to Roman census practice, (v) and is wrong in implying that Mary, too, needed to be present for the registration. (The same objections have been recently repeated in Schürer [ed. Vermes and Millar], *Jewish People*, 1:399–427.)” [John Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20*, vol. 35A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 99.]

or to Herod's death in 4 BCE, but uncertainty abounds beyond that point.

Probably the more important question about 2:1-3 is why did Luke set up the chronology this way? What appears to be the answer is implied from the Prologue in 1:1-4. Luke's audience beginning with his patron Theophilus has Roman connections and orientation. Thus quite naturally Luke would frame the birth of Christ inside a traditional Roman chronological framework. How well he did this may be another issue, but he did it for the sake of his initial readers.

## 2. The circumstances of Jesus' birth, vv. 4-7

4 Ἀνέβη δὲ καὶ Ἰωσήφ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐκ πόλεως Ναζαρέθ εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν εἰς πόλιν Δαυὶδ ἧτις καλεῖται Βηθλέεμ, διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἐξ οἴκου καὶ πατριᾶς Δαυὶδ, 5 ἀπογράψασθαι σὺν Μαριὰμ τῇ ἐμνηστευμένῃ αὐτῷ, οὕσῃ ἐγκύω.

6 Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτοὺς ἐκεῖ ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτήν, 7 καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον, καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ, διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι.

4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The second subunit in this pericope itself divides further into two subunits: vv. 4-5, the trip to Bethlehem and vv. 6-7, the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

Why did Joseph need to make this rather long trip from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea? The key lies in the designation of the town Bethlehem as πόλιν Δαυὶδ ἧτις καλεῖται Βηθλέεμ, a city of David which is called Bethlehem.<sup>80</sup> As the place where David was born centuries before, it was evidently the place of Joseph's birth as well: διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἐξ οἴκου καὶ πατριᾶς Δαυὶδ. The regulations of the tax census mandated registration at one's place of birth. Failure to do so could

<sup>80</sup>“Bethlehem is not πόλις Δαυὶδ, ‘city of David,’ in OT usage: Jerusalem is (2 Sam 5:7, 9; 6:10, 12, 16; 2 Kgs 9:28; 12:22). But Bethlehem is the city of David's origin (1 Sam 16; 17:12, 58), and 1 Sam 20:6 is close to the idiom here. More importantly, Bethlehem is connected in Mic 5:2 to the messianic fulfillment of God's covenant with David's royal line (texts at 1:32): the messiah is to come forth from Bethlehem. Bethlehem is about five miles from Jerusalem and about eighty-five miles from Nazareth.” [John Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20*, vol. 35A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 104.]

result in severe loss of recognition as a Jew with legal credentials establishing one's birth place.<sup>81</sup>

Both he and Mary traveled to Bethlehem to be registered. Again note Luke's careful avoidance of husband and wife terminology with σὺν Μαριὰμ τῇ ἐμνηστευμένῃ αὐτῷ, οὕσῃ ἐγκύω. Yet, to all observing them they appeared as husband and wife in traveling together. The infinitive ἀπογράψασθαι, to be registered, implies contextually a registration for taxation, rather than a general census.

During their time in Bethlehem Luke says in v. 6 that ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ τεκεῖν αὐτήν, the days for her to give birth came about. This introduces the next series of statements: καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον, καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ, and she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger. Contrary to the usual custom even for Jewish peasants, no mid-wife was present to assist in the birth. None of the normal patterns of giving birth were available to Mary. Joseph alone was there to help her during the birth.<sup>82</sup> The sparse conditions happened according to Luke διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι, because there was no place for them in the inn. The precise meaning of the κατάλυμα is unclear. It is not the primary word for ‘inn,’ πανδοχεῖον, which Luke uses in 10:34. Thus a κατάλυμα could refer here to a guest room in a peasant's home, as it clearly does in Lk. 22:11 and Mk. 14:14. Here it stands in contrast to the φάτνῃ which clearly specifies either a feeding trough or stall for animals that was attached to the house.<sup>83</sup> The Lukan text clearly contradicts most of the early church traditions about the circumstances of Jesus' birth in a cave with the presence of animals such as oxen and donkeys

<sup>81</sup>As a sidenote, if you as a expat living in Costa Rica have gone through the enormous complexity of establishing your place of origin in order to gain legal residency in Costa Rica, you can appreciate full well the challenges before Joseph.

<sup>82</sup>This is in contradiction to the apocryphal stories that have Joseph out searching for a mid-wife and thus missing the birth of Jesus.

<sup>83</sup>“There is no mention of the presence of the animals which normally used the manger; these found their way into the Christmas story from Is. 1:3; Hab. 3:2 LXX. The point is rather that at his birth Jesus had to be content with the habitation of animals because there was no room for him in human society (9:58). κατάλυμα, ‘lodging’, can be used of a guest-room (22:11; Mk. 14:14), so that the reference may be to a room rather than to an inn (πανδοχεῖον, 10:34), and to a room in a private house rather than to a room in an inn (Findlay, 1034; P. Benoit, ‘“Non erat eis locus in diversorio” (Lc 2,7)’, in Descamps, 173–186). It has even been suggested that Bethlehem may not have had an inn for travellers. In any case no private room was available for the birth (Harvey, 231), and Mary and her child were deprived of normal comfort (see Schürmann, I, 105f.)” [I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 106–107.]

nearby.<sup>84</sup>

The clear point of Luke is to stress the humble beginnings of Jesus from a Jewish peasant family. But more importantly, this humble beginning had clear ancestral links to King David and thus Jesus stood clearly as a descendant of this ruler over ancient Israel. Plus God utilized the providential circumstance of a Roman taxation registration in order to locate Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, the city of Old Testament prophecy about the birth of the Messiah. For Luke's non-Jewish readers the fact that God used even the Romans to situate the birth of Christ would have been quite encouraging.

### III. SUBSEQUENT EVENTS

Both Matthew and Luke record events subsequent to Jesus' birth that continue to signal His extraordinary birth and beginning.

#### A. In Matthew 2

For Matthew, the visit by the wise men sometime within the next year or so signals the hand of God involved in Christ's birth (vv. 1-12). This is followed by Joseph escaping with his family to Egypt in order to avoid the execution of the baby (vv. 13-15), even though the residents of Bethlehem pay a horrible price in the slaughter of all two year and under male babies in their midst (vv. 16-18). The subsequent death of Herod allows Joseph to bring his family out of Egypt and to resettle back in Nazareth where they had lived earlier (vv. 19-23).

In each of these narratives, Matthew underscores the individual events as fulfillments of various prophecies in the Old Testament: 2:15, 18, 23. Through this Matthew seeks to make clear to his Jewish Christian readers the profound connection of the events in Jesus'

<sup>84</sup>A tradition which can be traced back to the second century located the birth of Jesus in a cave (Protev. Jac. 18f.; Justin, *Trypho*, 78:4; Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1:15). Constantine erected a basilica at Bethlehem over a cave, and this has been excavated under the present Church of the Nativity. Jerome and Paulinus of Nola both mention the desecration of a cave in Bethlehem by the erection of a shrine for Adonis during the reign of either Hadrian or Decius; this probably implies desecration of a site sacred to Christians in the second or third century. Hence Jeremias (ibid.) and Finegan, 22f., claim that the identification of a cave at Bethlehem with the birthplace of Jesus is early. This tradition is not dependent on the NT, which knows nothing of a cave. Hengel, however, claims that it was originally separate from the manger story, since in Protev. Jac. the manger appears only later in the story as a hiding place for the young child from Herod. But caves were sometimes used to provide accommodation for animals, and houses were built near them, so that they might be used for this purpose. It is thus possible that the two traditions are complementary (Grundmann, 80f.), and hence that the tradition of the manger has a historical basis rather than a midrashic one; one cannot claim more than possibility for this suggestion (Dalman, Sites, 38-45), but it is a tempting one." [I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 107.]

beginnings to the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah.

#### 1. Visit by wise men. 2:1-12

The first event of conformation of Jesus takes place some time after Jesus' birth and involves an affirmation of Christ coming out of the eastern Fertile Crescent region of ancient Babylon. Two chronological markers set up the narrative: Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ γεννηθέντος ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἐν ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου τοῦ βασιλέως... After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king... Curiously these come following the depiction of Jesus' birth in 1:25, rather than before it. This will set up the prophecy from Micah 5:1 in verse five, as well as establish the city of David tradition for his birth place.

The μάγοι ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν, magi from the east, have been variously identified over time, but Matthew depicts them as astrologers/astronomers who looked to the movement of stars for major events.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
2.1 Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ γεννηθέντος ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἐν ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου τοῦ βασιλέως, ἰδοὺ μάγοι ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν παρεγένοντο εἰς Ἱερουσόλυμα 2 λέγοντες· ποῦ ἐστὶν ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων; εἶδομεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστὲρα ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ καὶ ἤλθομεν προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ. 3 ἀκούσας δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἡρώδης ἐταράχθη καὶ πᾶσα Ἱερουσόλυμα μετ' αὐτοῦ, 4 καὶ συναγαγὼν πάντας τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ γραμματεῖς τοῦ λαοῦ ἐπυνθάνετο παρ' αὐτῶν ποῦ ὁ χριστὸς γεννᾶται. 5 οἱ δὲ εἶπαν αὐτῷ· ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας· οὕτως γὰρ γέγραπται διὰ τοῦ προφήτου· 6 καὶ σύ Βηθλέεμ, γῆ Ἰούδα, οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη εἶ ἐν τοῖς ἡγεμόσιν Ἰούδα· ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ ἐξελεύσεται ἡγούμενος, ὅστις ποιμανεῖ τὸν λαὸν μου τὸν Ἰσραὴλ.	2.1 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise mena from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising,b and have come to pay him homage." 3 When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 6 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.' "	2.1 Después de nacer Jesús en Belén de Judea, en tiempos del rey Herodes, he aquí, unos magos del oriente llegaron a Jerusalén, diciendo: 2 ¿Dónde está el Rey de los judíos que ha nacido? Porque vimos su estrella en el oriente y hemos venido a adorarle. 3 Cuando lo oyó el rey Herodes, se turbó, y toda Jerusalén con él. 4 Entonces, reuniendo a todos los principales sacerdotes y escribas del pueblo, indagó de ellos dónde había de nacer el Cristo. 5 Y ellos le dijeron: En Belén de Judea, porque así está escrito por el profeta: 6 "Y TU, BELEN, TIERRA DE JUDA, DE NINGUN MODO ERES LA MAS PEQUEÑA ENTRE LOS PRINCIPIES DE JUDA; PORQUE DE TI SALDRA UN GOBERNANTE QUE PASTOREARA A MI PUEBLO ISRAEL."

The presence of these strangers in Jerusalem ask- Page 30

ing questions about the birth of the ‘King of the Jews,’ a title that Herod himself held from the Romans, created quite a stir in the city. Neither these men nor Herod knew where this place was. Thus the religious leaders were asked to indicate from scripture where such a birth place would be. Their answer was Bethlehem in Judea, located only a few miles from Jerusalem and the birthplace of King David. The scripture quote comes from Micah 5:1 with the relative clause, ὅστις ποιμανεῖ τὸν λαόν μου τὸν Ἰσραήλ, [who will shepherd my people Israel](#), added from 2 Sam. 5:2. Now they have their answer about the location. And Herod also knows now where the ‘king of Israel’ is to be born, and with their arrival he evidently has a rival king on his hands.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
<p>7 Τότε Ἡρώδης λάθρα καλέσας τοὺς μάγους ἠκρίβωσεν παρ’ αὐτῶν τὸν χρόνον τοῦ φαινομένου ἀστέρως, 8 καὶ πέμψας αὐτοὺς εἰς Βηθλέεμ εἶπεν· πορευθέντες ἐξετάσατε ἀκριβῶς περὶ τοῦ παιδίου· ἐπὶ δὲ εὗρητε, ἀπαγγείλατέ μοι, ὅπως κἀγὼ ἐλθὼν προσκυνήσω αὐτῷ. 9 οἱ δὲ ἀκούσαντες τοῦ βασιλέως ἐπορεύθησαν καὶ ἰδοὺ ὁ ἀστήρ, ὃν εἶδον ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ, προῆγεν αὐτοὺς, ἕως ἐλθῶν ἐστάθη ἐπάνω οὗ ἦν τὸ παιδίον. 10 ἰδόντες δὲ τὸν ἀστέρα ἐχάρησαν χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα. 11 καὶ ἐλθόντες εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν εἶδον τὸ παιδίον μετὰ Μαρίας τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ πεσόντες προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ καὶ ἀνοίξαντες τοὺς θησαυροὺς αὐτῶν προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ δῶρα, χρυσὸν καὶ λίβανον καὶ σμύρναν. 12 καὶ χρηματισθέντες κατ’ ὄναρ μὴ ἀνακάμψαι πρὸς Ἡρώδη, δι’ ἄλλης ὁδοῦ ἀνεχώρησαν εἰς τὴν χώραν αὐτῶν.</p>	<p>7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” 9 When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. 11 On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.</p>	<p>7 Entonces Herodes llamó a los magos en secreto y se cercioró con ellos del tiempo en que había aparecido la estrella. 8 Y enviándolos a Belén, dijo: Id y buscad con diligencia al niño; y cuando le encontréis, avisadme para que yo también vaya y le adore. 9 Y habiendo oído al rey, se fueron; y he aquí, la estrella que habían visto en el oriente iba delante de ellos, hasta que llegó y se detuvo sobre el lugar donde estaba el niño. 10 Cuando vieron la estrella, se regocijaron sobremanera con gran alegría. 11 Y entrando en la casa, vieron al niño con su madre María, y postrándose le adoraron; y abriendo sus tesoros le presentaron obsequios de oro, incienso y mirra. 12 Y habiendo sido advertidos por Dios en sueños que no volvieran a Herodes, partieron para su tierra por otro camino.</p>

In a manner typical of the depictions of his reign in Josephus and others in the first century, Herod resorts to deception in a private meeting with these magi before they leave Jerusalem for Bethlehem. He dared not accompany these wise men to Bethlehem given his intention to kill this potential rival to his throne. That can wait for a later time, after these magi have validated the birth of this king and have reported back to him in Jerusalem.

But God intervenes, as often is the case, in order to counterman the human intentions that conflict with His plans. The magi are divinely guided by a star to the exact location of Christ, now described as τὸ παιδίον, [a child](#), rather than as βρέφος, an infant (Lk. 2:12). For sometime after Jesus’ birth Mary and Joseph have remained in Bethlehem, which was the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Notice that Mary and Joseph are now living in a house, τὴν οἰκίαν, which was perhaps theirs or more likely that of a family member. These men present the child Jesus with three kinds of gifts. This does not signal, however, that there were only three wise men -- something derived from tradition rather than scripture.

But warned in a dream not to go back to Jerusalem, they take a detour around the city as they head back home.

## 2. Flight to Egypt 2:13-15

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
<p>13 Ἀναχωρησάντων δὲ αὐτῶν ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ’ ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ λέγων· ἐγερθεὶς παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ φεῦγε εἰς Αἴγυπτον καὶ ἴσθι ἐκεῖ ἕως ἂν εἴπω σοι· μέλλει γὰρ Ἡρώδης ζητεῖν τὸ παιδίον τοῦ ἀπολέσαι αὐτό. 14 ὁ δὲ ἐγερθεὶς παρέλαβεν τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ νυκτὸς καὶ ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς Αἴγυπτον, 15 καὶ ἦν ἐκεῖ ἕως τῆς τελευτῆς Ἡρώδου· ἵνα πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος· ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐκάλεσα τὸν υἱόν μου.</p>	<p>13 Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” 14 Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”</p>	<p>13 Después de haberse marchado ellos, un ángel del Señor se le apareció a José en sueños, diciendo: Levántate, toma al niño y a su madre y huye a Egipto, y quédate allí hasta que yo te diga; porque Herodes va a buscar al niño para matarle. 14 Y él, levantándose, tomó de noche al niño y a su madre, y se trasladó a Egipto; 15 y estuvo allí hasta la muerte de Herodes, para que se cumpliera lo que el Señor habló por medio del profeta, diciendo: DE EGIPTO LLAME A MI HIJO.</p>

The next event in the series triggered by the arrival of the wise men is the escape to Egypt by Joseph and his family. This happened immediately after the de-

parture of the wise men, where Joseph is told to leave Bethlehem and escape to Egypt where Herod has no authority. The reason is that Herod is going to try to find Jesus and kill him.

Obediently Joseph gathers up Mary and Jesus and hastily leaves during the night for a location in Egypt. Egypt had been a place of refuge for Jews both in biblical times and during the Maccabean era, so this was not unusual. But a deeper plan is at work here. Matthew will use Hosea 11:1 to affirm God’s intention of bringing His Messiah out of Egypt. Interestingly, Matthew seems to be quoting from the Hebrew text than from the LXX Greek text of Hosea.

Joseph and his family will take refuge in Egypt until after the death of Herod which took place in March-April of 4 BCE. Evidently Jesus’ birth then occurs sometime toward the end of Herod’s reign.

### 3. Slaying of children in Bethlehem 2:16-18

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
16 Τότε Ἡρώδης ἰδὼν ὅτι ἐνεπαίχθη ὑπὸ τῶν μάγων ἐθυμώθη λίαν, καὶ ἀποστείλας ἀνεΐλεν πάντας τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς ἐν Βηθλέεμ καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς ὀρίοις αὐτῆς ἀπὸ διετοῦς καὶ κατωτέρω, κατὰ τὸν χρόνον ὃν ἠκρίβωσεν παρὰ τῶν μάγων. 17 τότε ἐπληρώθη τὸ ῥήθην διὰ Ἰερεμίου τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος· 18 φωνὴ ἐν Ῥαμὰ ἠκούσθη, κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὄδυρμός πολὺς· Ῥαχὴλ κλαίουσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, καὶ οὐκ ἤθελεν παρακληθῆναι, ὅτι οὐκ εἰσίν.	16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: 18 “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”	16 Entonces Herodes, al verse burlado por los magos, se enfureció en gran manera, y mandó matar a todos los niños que había en Belén y en todos sus alrededores, de dos años para abajo, según el tiempo que había averiguado de los magos. 17 Entonces se cumplió lo que fue dicho por medio del profeta Jeremías, cuando dijo: 18 SE OYO UNA VOZ EN RAMA, LLANTO Y GRAN LAMENTACION; RAQUEL QUE LLORA A SUS HIJOS, Y QUE NO QUISO SER CONSOLADA PORQUE YA NO EXISTEN.

The third narrative of the wise men’s visit depicts Herod’s rage at being deceived, rather than him being able to deceive. His reaction was to impose a general slaughter on πάντας τοὺς παῖδας, **all the children**, who lived in and around Bethlehem and were less than two years old. By this he aimed to eliminate this potential rival to his throne, even without knowing who he was. Although a hugely brutal action by Herod, it was not atypical of his behavior during his long reign. Many potential rivals were executed by him, including members of his own family.

For Matthew this brutal action is seen in conjunction with Jeremiah 31:15 where according to Gen. 35:19 Rachel had died on the way to Ephrath, or Bethlehem. The

weeping of Rachel over her children was heard again in the weeping of the parents of these slain children.

### 4. Return from Egypt 2:19-23

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
19 Τελευτήσαντος δὲ τοῦ Ἡρώδου ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ’ ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ 20 λέγων· ἐγερθεὶς παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ πορεύου εἰς γῆν Ἰσραὴλ· τεθνήκασιν γὰρ οἱ ζητοῦντες τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ παιδίου. 21 ὁ δὲ ἐγερθεὶς παρέλαβεν τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰσήλθεν εἰς γῆν Ἰσραὴλ. 22 Ἀκούσας δὲ ὅτι Ἀρχέλαος βασιλεύει τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἀντὶ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ Ἡρώδου ἐφοβήθη ἐκεῖ ἀπελθεῖν· χρηματισθεὶς δὲ κατ’ ὄναρ ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τὰ μέρη τῆς Γαλιλαίας, 23 καὶ ἐλθὼν κατώκησεν εἰς πόλιν λεγομένην Ναζαρέτ· ὅπως πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥήθην διὰ τῶν προφητῶν ὅτι Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται.	19 When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 20 “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.” 21 Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. 23 There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazorean.”	19 Pero cuando murió Herodes, he aquí, un ángel del Señor se apareció<***> en sueños a José en Egipto, diciendo: 20 Levántate, toma al niño y a su madre y vete a la tierra de Israel, porque los que atentaban contra la vida del niño han muerto. 21 Y él, levantándose, tomó al niño y a su madre, y vino a la tierra de Israel. 22 Pero cuando oyó que Arquelaos reinaba sobre Judea en lugar de su padre Herodes, tuvo miedo de ir allá; y advertido por Dios en sueños, partió para la región de Galilea; 23 y llegó y habitó en una ciudad llamada Nazaret, para que se cumpliera lo que fue dicho por medio de los profetas: Será llamado Nazareno.

Matthew closes out the series of events triggered by the arrival of the wise men with the description of Joseph once more moving his family back home to the Promised Land. But this time he ends up back in Nazareth rather than Bethlehem, due to fear of Herod’s son, Archelaus now ruling over Judea.

Again God’s use of an angel speaking to Joseph in a dream while sleeping at night is the vehicle of communication. Intending to return to Bethlehem in Judea, he was again directed by the angel in a dream to return

instead to Nazareth where he had lived earlier. Once more Matthew sees this as a part of the divine plan indicated by some unknown authoritative text not found anywhere in the Hebrew Bible (v. 23c). In Matthew's depiction it came διὰ τῶν προφητῶν, through the prophets (plural), which may explain the difficulty of tracking it down inside the Old Testament.

Thus Matthew brings to a close his narration of the events surrounding the birth of Christ. His picture is clearly for a Jewish Christian audience with deep concern that Jesus as the Messiah have clearly established connections to the Jewish traditions embedded inside the Hebrew Bible.

## B. In Luke 2

Luke in contrast to Matthew begins with an event closer to Jesus' birth but extends the presentation to Jesus' twelfth birthday visit in the temple. These events are not so interlaced together as was the series in Matthew 2.

### 1. Shepherds' visit 2:8-21

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
8 Καὶ ποιμένες ἦσαν ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τῇ αὐτῇ ἀγραυλοῦντες καὶ φυλάσσοντες φυλακὰς τῆς νυκτὸς ἐπὶ τὴν ποιμνὴν αὐτῶν. 9 καὶ ἄγγελος κυρίου ἐπέστη αὐτοῖς καὶ δόξα κυρίου περιέλαμψεν αὐτούς, καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν. 10 καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ ἄγγελος· μὴ φοβεῖσθε, ἰδοὺ γὰρ εὐαγγελίζομαι ὑμῖν χαρὰν μεγάλην ἣτις ἔσται παντὶ τῷ λαῷ, 11 ὅτι ἐτέχθη ὑμῖν σήμερον σωτὴρ ὃς ἐστὶν χριστὸς κύριος ἐν πόλει Δαυὶδ. 12 καὶ τοῦτο ὑμῖν τὸ σημεῖον, εὐρήσατε βρέφος ἐσπαργανωμένον καὶ κείμενον ἐν φάτνῃ. 13 καὶ ἐξαίφνης ἐγένετο σὺν τῷ ἀγγέλῳ πλῆθος στρατιᾶς οὐρανοῦ αἰνούντων τὸν θεὸν καὶ λεγόντων· 14 δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις θεῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας.	8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, <sup>b</sup> praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"	8 En la misma región había pastores que estaban en el campo, cuidando sus rebaños durante las vigiliass de la noche. 9 Y un ángel del Señor se les presentó, y la gloria del Señor los rodeó de resplandor, y tuvieron gran temor. 10 Mas el ángel les dijo: No temáis, porque he aquí, os traigo buenas nuevas de gran gozo que serán para todo el pueblo; 11 porque os ha nacido hoy, en la ciudad de David, un Salvador, que es Cristo el Señor. 12 Y esto os servirá de señal: hallaréis a un niño envuelto en pañales y acostado en un pesebre. 13 Y de repente apareció con el ángel una multitud de los ejércitos celestiales, alabando a Dios y diciendo: 14 Gloria a Dios en las alturas, y en la tierra paz entre los hombres en quienes El se complace .

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
15 Καὶ ἐγένετο ὡς ἀπῆλθον ἀπ' αὐτῶν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν οἱ ἄγγελοι, οἱ ποιμένες ἐλάλουν πρὸς ἀλλήλους· διέλθωμεν δὴ ἕως Βηθλέεμ καὶ ἴδωμεν τὸ ρῆμα τοῦτο τὸ γεγονός· ὃ ὁ κύριος ἐγνώρισεν ἡμῖν. 16 καὶ ἦλθαν σπεύσαντες καὶ ἀνεῦραν τὴν τε Μαριάμ καὶ τὸν Ἰωσήφ καὶ τὸ βρέφος κείμενον ἐν τῇ φάτνῃ· 17 ἰδόντες δὲ ἐγνώρισαν περὶ τοῦ ρήματος τοῦ λαληθέντος αὐτοῖς περὶ τοῦ παιδίου τούτου. 18 καὶ πάντες οἱ ἀκούσαντες ἐθαύμασαν περὶ τῶν λαληθέντων ὑπὸ τῶν ποιμένων πρὸς αὐτούς· 19 ἡ δὲ Μαριάμ πάντα συνετήρει τὰ ρήματα ταῦτα συμβάλλουσα ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς. 20 καὶ ὑπέστρεψαν οἱ ποιμένες δοξάζοντες καὶ αἰνοῦντες τὸν θεὸν ἐπὶ πᾶσιν οἷς ἤκουσαν καὶ εἶδον καθὼς ἐλαλήθη πρὸς αὐτούς. 21 Καὶ ὅτε ἐπλήσθησαν ἡμέραι ὀκτῶ τοῦ περιτεμεῖν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐκλήθη τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦς, τὸ κληθὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγγέλου πρὸ τοῦ συλλημφθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ.	15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. 21 After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.	15 Y aconteció que cuando los ángeles se fueron al cielo, los pastores se decían unos a otros: Vayamos, pues, hasta Belén y veamos esto que ha sucedido, que el Señor nos ha dado a saber. 16 Fueron a toda prisa, y hallaron a María y a José, y al niño acostado en el pesebre. 17 Y cuando lo vieron, dieron a saber lo que se les había dicho acerca de este niño. 18 Y todos los que lo oyeron se maravillaron de las cosas que les fueron dichas por los pastores. 19 Pero María atesoraba todas estas cosas, reflexionando sobre ellas en su corazón. 20 Y los pastores se volvieron, glorificando y alabando a Dios por todo lo que habían oído y visto, tal como se les había dicho. 21 Cuando se cumplieron los ocho días para circuncidarle, le pusieron por nombre Jesús, el nombre dado por el ángel antes de que El fuera concebido en el seno materno.

The first event in Luke comes right on the heels of Jesus' birth with the revelation of God to the shepherds that prompts their visit to the newly born babe in Bethlehem. These shepherds were employees of the Jerusalem temple who were taking care of sheep to be used as sacrificial animals in the temple. Thus some symbolism is taking place here. It is not just that they represent Jewish peasantry who receive special blessing from God.

The sudden appearance of the angel terrifies these shepherds: ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν. But fear soon turns into joy with the announcement of the birth of the long awaited Messiah in Bethlehem. The shepherds

are given the sign on how to identify this new baby, who will be wrapped in the tight cloth to limit his movement and laying in a stable attached to a private home in the town. The first scene closes with the sky lite up by thousands of angels lifting their voices to God in praise.

The second scene in the narrative, vv. 15-20, centers on the trip of the shepherds to Bethlehem to see the baby. Their trip was successful in discovering the location of Jesus as τὸ βρέφος κείμενον ἐν τῇ φάτνῃ, **the newly born baby laying in the manger**. Their joy is overwhelming and was to be shared with the residents of the region around Bethlehem. This was astounding news to everyone hearing it. Mary carefully took all of these into her minds and thoughts for reflection on the possible meaning. Then the shepherds returned -- perhaps the same night -- to their flocks out in the nearby countryside.

In verse 21, Luke signals the passing of eight days after Jesus' birth as the scheduled time for his circumcision. This parallels the circumcision of John in 1:59. Although typically these rituals took place in the Jerusalem temple, it is not certain whether either circumcision occurred in Jerusalem or at Bethlehem where both boys were born. In either event, the presence of a special priest from the temple with authorization to perform properly rituals of circumcision was required. While prophecies about John came spontaneously at John's circumcision, with Jesus they wait awhile until his appearance in the temple.

## 2. Jesus' presentation in the temple 2:22-40

The appearance of Jesus in the Jerusalem takes place some 40 days after his birth. The ritual of purification was based on the formula of 7 days (mother unclean after giving birth) plus 33 days (required waiting time at home prior to presenting an offering in the temple). The sacrifice offered by Mary and Joseph represented the requirement for peasants.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
22 Καὶ ὅτε ἐπλήσθησαν αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ καθαρισμοῦ αὐτῶν κατὰ τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως, ἀνήγαγον αὐτὸν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα παραστήσαι τῷ κυρίῳ, 23 καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν νόμῳ κυρίου ὅτι πᾶν ἄρσεν διανοίγον μήτραν ἅγιον τῷ κυρίῳ κληθήσεται, 24 καὶ τοῦ δοῦναι θυσίαν κατὰ τὸ εἰρημένον ἐν τῷ νόμῳ κυρίου, ζευγὸς τρυγόνων ἢ δύο νοσοῦς περιστερῶν.	22 When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), 24 and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."	22 Cuando se cumplieron los días para la purificación de ellos, según la ley de Moisés, le trajeron a Jerusalén para presentarle al Señor 23 (como está escrito en la Ley del Señor: TODO VARON QUE ABRA LA MATRIZ SERA LLAMADO SANTO PARA EL SEÑOR), 24 y para ofrecer un sacrificio conforme a lo dicho en la Ley del Señor: UN PAR DE TORTOLAS O DOS PICHONES.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
25 Καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνθρωπος ἦν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ ᾧ ὄνομα Συμεὼν καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος δίκαιος καὶ εὐλαβὴς προσδεχόμενος παράκλησιν τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ πνεῦμα ἦν ἅγιον ἐπ' αὐτόν· 26 καὶ ἦν αὐτῷ κεχρηματισμένον ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου μὴ ἰδεῖν θάνατον πρὶν [ἦ] ἂν ἴδῃ τὸν χριστὸν κυρίου. 27 καὶ ἦλθεν ἐν τῷ πνεύματι εἰς τὸ ἱερόν· καὶ ἐν τῷ εἰσαγαγεῖν τοὺς γονεῖς τὸ παιδίον Ἰησοῦν τοῦ ποιήσαι αὐτοὺς κατὰ τὸ εἰθισμένον τοῦ νόμου περὶ αὐτοῦ 28 καὶ αὐτὸς ἐδέξατο αὐτὸ εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας καὶ εὐλόγησεν τὸν θεὸν καὶ εἶπεν· 29 ὡς ἀπολύεις τὸν δοῦλόν σου, δέσποτα, κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου ἐν εἰρήνῃ· 30 ὅτι εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου τὸ σωτήριόν σου, 31 ὃ ἠτοίμασας κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν, 32 φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἐθνῶν καὶ δόξαν λαοῦ σου Ἰσραὴλ.	25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27 Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 29 "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."	25 Y había en Jerusalén un hombre que se llamaba Simeón; y este hombre, justo y piadoso, esperaba la consolución de Israel; y el Espíritu Santo estaba sobre él. 26 Y por el Espíritu Santo se le había revelado que no vería la muerte sin antes ver al Cristo del Señor. 27 Movido por el Espíritu fue al templo. Y cuando los padres del niño Jesús le trajeron para cumplir por El el rito de la ley, 28 él tomó al niño en sus brazos, y bendijo a Dios y dijo: 29 Ahora, Señor, permite que tu siervo se vaya en paz, conforme a tu palabra; 30 porque han visto mis ojos tu salvación 31 la cual has preparado en presencia de todos los pueblos; 32 LUZ DE REVELACION A LOS GENTILES, y gloria de tu pueblo Israel.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
33 καὶ ἦν ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ θαυμάζοντες ἐπὶ τοῖς λαλουμένοις περὶ αὐτοῦ. 34 καὶ εὐλόγησεν αὐτοὺς Συμεὼν καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς Μαριὰμ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ· ἰδοὺ οὗτος κεῖται εἰς πτώσιν καὶ ἀνάστασιν πολλῶν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ εἰς σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον - 35 καὶ σοῦ [δέ] αὐτῆς τὴν ψυχὴν διελεύσεται ῥομφαία - ὅπως ἂν ἀποκαλυφθῶσιν ἐκ πολλῶν καρδιῶν διαλογισμοί.	33 And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed 35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."	33 Y los padres del niño estaban asombrados de las cosas que de El se decían. 34 Simeón los bendijo, y dijo a su madre María: He aquí, este niño ha sido puesto para la caída y el levantamiento de muchos en Israel, y para ser señal de contradicción 35 (y una espada traspasará aun tu propia alma) a fin de que sean revelados los pensamientos de muchos corazones.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
<p>36 Καὶ ἦν Ἄννα προφήτις, θυγάτηρ Φανουήλ, ἐκ φυλῆς Ἀσήρ· αὕτη προβεβηκυῖα ἐν ἡμέραις πολλαῖς, ζήσασα μετὰ ἀνδρός ἔτη ἑπτὰ ἀπὸ τῆς παρθενίας αὐτῆς 37 καὶ αὕτη χήρα ἕως ἐτῶν ὀγδοήκοντα τεσσάρων, ἣ οὐκ ἀφίστατο τοῦ ἱεροῦ νηστειαῖς καὶ δεήσεων λατρεύουσα νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν. 38 καὶ αὕτῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἐπιτάσσα ἀνθρωμολογεῖτο τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐλάλει περὶ αὐτοῦ πᾶσιν τοῖς προσδεχομένοις λύτρωσιν Ἰερουσαλήμ. 39 Καὶ ὡς ἐτέλεσαν πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὸν νόμον κυρίου, ἐπέστρεψαν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν εἰς πόλιν ἑαυτῶν Ναζαρέθ. 40 Τὸ δὲ παιδίον ἠύξανεν καὶ ἐκραταιοῦτο πληρούμενον σοφίᾳ, καὶ χάρις θεοῦ ἦν ἐπ' αὐτό.</p>	<p>36 There was also a prophet, Annaj the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.</p>	<p>3 36 Y había una profetisa, Ana, hija de Fanuel, de la tribu de Aser. Ella era de edad muy avanzada, y había vivido con su marido siete años después de su matrimonio, 37 y después de viuda, hasta los ochenta y cuatro años. Nunca se alejaba del templo, sirviendo noche y día con ayunos y oraciones. 38 Y llegando ella en ese preciso momento, daba gracias a Dios, y hablaba de El a todos los que esperaban la redención de Jerusalén. 39 Habiendo ellos cumplido con todo conforme a la Ley del Señor, se volvieron a Galilea, a su ciudad de Nazaret. 40 Y el niño crecía y se fortalecía, llenándose de sabiduría; y la gracia de Dios estaba sobre El.</p>

This temple visit is occasioned by the Torah's demand for purification of the mother after birth of a child (vv. 22-24).

But while completing this ritual in the temple, the family encounters a Simeon whose devotion to the Lord was blessed with the opportunity to see Jesus and to recognize in him the promised Messiah of Israel (vv. 25-35). His blessing of the infant baby astonished Mary and Joseph with promises of helping all peoples and also of having to suffer.

Also in the temple that day was a prophetess by the name of Anna (vv. 36-38). She in her advanced age as a widow devoted herself constantly to worshiping in the temple. Upon spotting the infant Jesus she gave testimony to those around them of him being the long awaited deliverer of the people of Israel.

The trip home to Galilee, where Luke now has them living, must have been an interesting trip after completing the requirements of the Torah (v. 39). The next twelve years of Jesus' childhood is summarized in the short statement of v. 40, and indicates a very normal childhood. This parallels the earlier statement in 1:80 and is followed by the one in 2:52. This perspective is

unlike the apocryphal infancy gospels that have the infant and child Jesus functioning like an ancient "super boy" that dazzles everyone around him.

### 3. Jesus' visit to the temple 2:41-52

Luke finishes off his presentation of the birth and childhood of Jesus with the narrative of Jesus' Bar Mitzvah at age twelve. Luke highlights the devotion of Mary and Joseph with their annual trip to the Jerusalem temple for the celebration of Passover. The two combined feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread took up a total of seven days. When Jesus was twelve he accompanied them, but this was not his first trip. This was significant because Jewish tradition required the Jewish boy on or after his twelfth birthday to complete the ritual of acceptance into covenant Israel. At this point he became obligated to study the Torah and to obey it as a member of the covenant people of God.

Although no details of the completion of the ritual are given by Luke, the highly unusual thing that happens is that they begin the trip home to Nazareth while Jesus is still in the temple. But they don't realize it until a day's journey on the trip north up the east bank of the Jordan River toward Galilee. Upon realizing that Jesus is not in the crowd of pilgrims returning home, they return to Jerusalem to search for him. There was nothing improper about their actions here within the cultural standards of a day when young boys assumed some level of independent activity and being in crowds of fellow pilgrims would have been considered completely safe.

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
<p>41 Καὶ ἐπορεύοντο οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ κατ' ἔτος εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ τῇ ἑορτῇ τοῦ πάσχα. 42 Καὶ ὅτε ἐγένετο ἐτῶν δώδεκα, ἀναβαινόντων αὐτῶν κατὰ τὸ ἔθος τῆς ἑορτῆς 43 καὶ τελειωσάντων τὰς ἡμέρας, ἐν τῷ ὑποστρέφειν αὐτοῦς ὑπέμεινεν Ἰησοῦς ὁ παῖς ἐν Ἰερουσαλήμ, καὶ οὐκ ἔγνωσαν οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ. 44 νομίσαντες δὲ αὐτὸν εἶναι ἐν τῇ συνοδίᾳ ἦλθον ἡμέρας ὁδὸν καὶ ἀνεζήτησαν αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς συγγενεῦσιν καὶ τοῖς γνωστοῖς, 45 καὶ μὴ εὐρόντες ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ ἀναζητοῦντες αὐτόν.</p>	<p>41 Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. 43 When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 44 Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.</p>	<p>41 Sus padres acostumbraban ir a Jerusalén todos los años a la fiesta de la Pascua. 42 Y cuando cumplió doce años, subieron allá conforme a la costumbre de la fiesta; 43 y al regresar ellos, después de haber pasado todos los días de la fiesta, el niño Jesús se quedó en Jerusalén sin que lo supieran sus padres, 44 y suponiendo que iba en la caravana, anduvieron camino de un día, y comenzaron a buscarle entre los familiares y conocidos. 45 Al no hallarle, volvieron a Jerusalén buscándole.</p>

Greek NT	NRSV	La Biblia
<p>46 και ἐγένετο μετὰ ἡμέρας τρεῖς εὗρον αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ καθεζόμενον ἐν μέσῳ τῶν διδασκάλων και ἀκούοντα αὐτῶν και ἐπερωτῶντα αὐτοῦ· 47 ἐξίσταντο δὲ πάντες οἱ ἀκούοντες αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῇ συνέσει και ταῖς ἀποκρίσεσιν αὐτοῦ. 48 και ἰδόντες αὐτὸν ἐξεπλάγησαν, * και εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ· τέκνον, τί ἐποίησας ἡμῖν οὕτως; ἰδοὺ ὁ πατήρ σου κάγω ὁδυνώμενοι ἐζητοῦμέν σε. 49 και εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· τί ὅτι ἐζητεῖτέ με; οὐκ ᾔδειτε ὅτι ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου δεῖ εἶναι με; 50 και αὐτοὶ οὐ συνῆκαν τὸ ῥῆμα ὃ ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς. 51 και κατέβη μετ' αὐτῶν και ἦλθεν εἰς Ναζαρεθ και ἦν ὑποτασσόμενος αὐτοῖς. και ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ διετήρει πάντα τὰ ῥήματα ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς.</p> <p>52 Καὶ Ἰησοῦς προέκοπτεν [ἐν τῇ] σοφίᾳ και ἡλικίᾳ και χάριτι παρά θεῶ και ἀνθρώπων.</p>	<p>46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." 49 He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand what he said to them. 51 Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.</p> <p>52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.</p>	<p>46 Y aconteció que después de tres días le hallaron en el templo, sentado en medio de los maestros, escuchándolos y haciéndoles preguntas. 47 Y todos los que le oían estaban asombrados de su entendimiento y de sus respuestas. 48 Cuando sus padres le vieron, se quedaron maravillados; y su madre le dijo: Hijo, ¿por qué nos has tratado de esta manera? Mira, tu padre y yo te hemos estado buscando llenos de angustia. 49 Entonces El les dijo: ¿Por qué me buscabais? ¿Acaso no sabíais que me era necesario estar en la casa de mi Padre? 50 Pero ellos no entendieron las palabras que El les había dicho. 51 Y descendió con ellos y vino a Nazaret, y continuó sujeto a ellos. Y su madre atesoraba todas estas cosas en su corazón.</p> <p>52 Y Jesús crecía en sabiduría, en estatura y en gracia para con Dios y los hombres.</p>

Upon arriving back in Jerusalem, it took Mary and Joseph three days of searching to find Jesus. Where they found him was in the outer court of the temple listening and interacting with the scribes who were instructing listeners in the meaning of the Torah.

What is important here is Jesus unusual knowledge of the Torah and the interpretive issues connected to it (vv. 46-47). Verses 48-50 focus on a disciplinary rebuke of Jesus by Mary speaking for both parents. Jesus was puzzled by their lack of understanding of why he would be in the temple discussing issues with the scribal teachers. And his parents were equally puzzled by his explanation of why he had stayed behind when they left to go back home. But as v. 51 indicates, Jesus was an obedient boy who honored his father and mother throughout his childhood.

Just as 1:80 summarized John's childhood and youth, and 2:40 summarized Jesus' birth through

twelve years, now 2:52 summarizes his youth from age twelve to age thirty when he begins ministry as an adult (3:23) in Jewish tradition. Everything about the growing up years of both John and Jesus is normal and typical. This again stands in sharp contradiction to the depiction in the Infancy Gospels which want a small spectacular Greek wonder boy dazzling folks with supernatural powers while in a Jewish body.

### CONCLUSION

Some folks in the Christian tradition take a look at the history of Christmas and conclude that the best option is to not celebrate Christmas at all. I suspect that most of these are not aware of the beginning pattern of non-celebration during the first couple of Christian centuries. But is this the correct approach? Or, put another way, Is it wrong to celebrate Christmas?

Given the festive nature of the narratives in both Matthew and Luke, I don't conclude that celebrating Christmas is wrong. To be sure, the examples of those individuals around Jesus in these biblical narratives sets the standard for our celebration. It should center on thanksgiving and praise to God for providing for our sins and our eternal destiny through the coming of Jesus Christ as Savior and Messiah.

Our celebration on December 25 is done in the full realization that this is most likely not the day of the year in which Jesus was historically born. But getting the date exactly right is beyond the point of the celebration. Rather getting the focus on Jesus correct is the point no matter what day we celebrate on.

The celebration is made richer with the presence of family who share our joy about the coming of Christ. But our celebration is not dependent on the presence of family. Either alone or with a few friends we can relive the joy of the angels, the praise of Zechariah, Simeon, and Anna. Or maybe even the eloquence of Mary in her adoration of God for His blessings upon her.

So then, let's celebrate the birth of our Savior! With joy and happiness that God is with us and has taken control over our destiny through the redemption won for us by Jesus Christ.

