

CHRISTMAS UNWRAPPED

What do the Birth Narratives of Matthew and Luke Mean?

Nativity Quiz

Can you put these events surrounding Jesus' birth in the correct order and indicate which Gospel/s (cf Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) record each one?

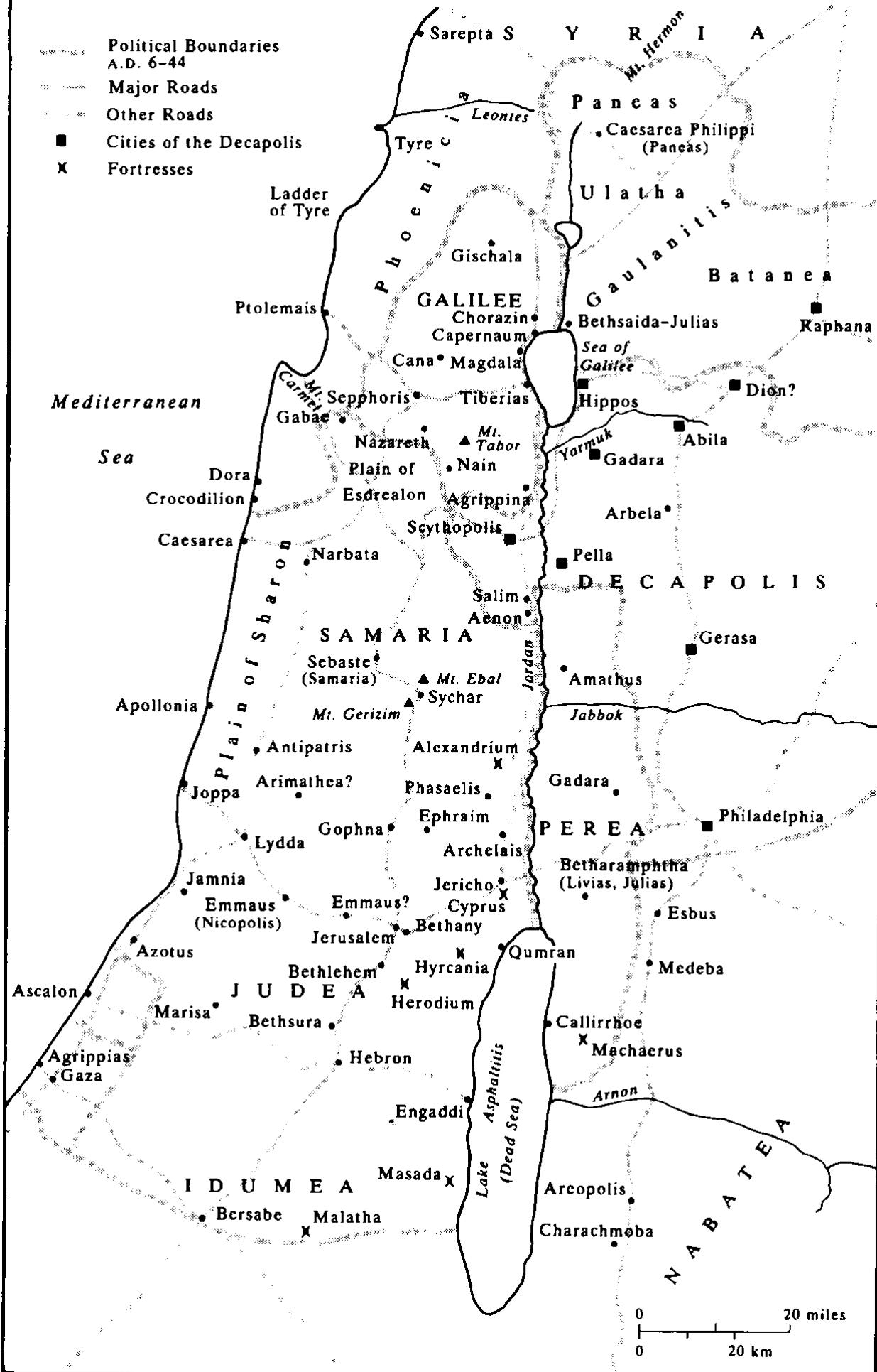
Event	Order of Events	Which Gospel/s?
Wise Men visit Jesus		
Shepherds visit Jesus		
Massacre of the Infants		
Magnificat (Mary's song)		
Jesus presented in the Temple		
Escape to Egypt		
Birth of John the Baptist		
Birth of Jesus		
Benedictus (Zechariah's song)		

Gaining Perspective

- The Gospels are not written from a neutral stance. They are composed by those who believe Jesus is 'good news' and who wish to commend him to different audiences, Jewish and non-Jewish.
- The earliest Gospel was probably written around 40 years after Jesus' death by a 2nd generation Christian.
- Truth is not exhausted by factuality and all history involves interpretation.
- Different genres and types of communication contain different types of truth (eg Hansard records what was said in House of Commons debates, a scientific paper analyses some aspect of the physical world, a novel communicates insight into human nature; myths express the meaning of existence).
- To take the bible seriously requires us to understand the world of the biblical authors – their politico-socio-economic situation as well as their presuppositions, beliefs and hopes – and to recognise that it may will seem unfamiliar and strange.
- Giving a voice to the biblical authors and allowing them speak into our situation can be challenging and faith-stretching!

'We propose that the Christmas stories ... are primarily ... parabolic overtures ... based on biblical tradition rather than on historical fact. Each is its gospel in miniature. When, therefore, Matthew 1–2 and Luke 1–2 are combined into a single Christmas story ... that story is the entire Christian gospel in miniature. Get it, and you get everything; miss it, and you miss all. (The First Christmas, Borg & Crossan, pp 52-53).

PALESTINE IN THE TIME OF JESUS



THE BIRTH OF JESUS ACCORDING TO MATTHEW (1.18 – 2.23)

5 dreams/visions – 5 prophecies fulfilled (cf 5 teaching discourses: 5-7, 10-11, 13, 18-19, 24-25)

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 fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 ‘Look, the virgin (*parthenos*) shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us.’ (Isaiah 7.14) 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.

2:1 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men (wise men/astrologers) 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, 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.’’ (cf Micah 5.2)

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.

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 fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I have called my son.’ (cf Hosea 11.1)

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.’ (cf Jeremiah 31.15)

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.’ (cf Isaiah 11.1; Zechariah 3.8)

Where and when was Jesus born?

- Was Jesus born in Bethlehem (Matthew – Mary & Joseph live there; Luke – they visit for the census) or in Nazareth (Mark 6.1,4; John 1.46; 7.41)?
- Was Jesus born in a house (Matthew 2.11) or a stable (Luke 2.7)?
- David grew up and was anointed king at Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16.1-13; cf Bethlehem in Galilee, near Nazareth, Joshua 19.15)
- One strain of Jewish hope expected a Davidic messiah who would be a military and political leader (cf Psalms of Solomon; John 7.42; Mark 10.47-48).
- When was Jesus born? Herod the Great ruled 37-4 BC. Caesar Augustus (Gaius Octavius) died AD 14 having carried out no world-wide census, but a number of censuses of Roman Citizenship and provincial inhabitants. Quirinius was Governor of Syria from AD 6 and carried out a census of his province in AD 6-7.
- Meaning: Jesus is God's promised messiah, a greater ruler than King Herod and Caesar Augustus.

Luke 2.1-7 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.

Micah 5.2-5 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

Psalms of Solomon 17.4, 21-23 (1st century BC) Lord, you chose David to be king over Israel, and swore to him about his descendants forever, that his kingdom should not fail you (cf 2 Samuel 7.8-13) ... See, Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel in the time known to you, O God. Undergird him with the strength to destroy unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem from gentiles who trample her to destruction; in wisdom and righteousness to drive out the sinners from the inheritance.

Mark 1.9, 24; 6.1,4 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan ... and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God' ... Jesus left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him ... Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.'

John 1.46; 7.41-42 Nathanael said to Philip, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' ... Others said, 'This is the Messiah.' But some asked, 'Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?'

Who are the Magi?

- Who were they - wise men or astrologers 'from the East' (Arabia, Babylon, Persia)? There is no mention in the Matthew of them being kings or three in number.
- What about their gifts – gold, frankincense and myrrh? Jesus is a king (gold) who is to be worshipped (frankincense) and who is destined to die (myrrh?).
- Moses takes on Pharaoh's magicians when liberating the Hebrews from captivity in Egypt (cf Exodus 7).
- A strong theme running through Jewish literature is that Israel would fulfil its destiny to be a light to the Gentiles and for Gentiles to respond in worship and obedience (Numbers 24; Isaiah 2, 60; Psalms of Solomon).
- Meaning: Jesus fulfils Israel's destiny ('a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel', Luke 2.32; cf Genesis 12.1-3) to bless all people and is worshipped by Gentiles.

Exodus 7:20-22 Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and of his officials he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the river, and all the water in the river was turned into blood, and the fish in the river died. The river stank so that the Egyptians could not drink its water, and there was blood throughout the whole land of Egypt. But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts; so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the LORD had said.

Numbers 24.1,7,15-17 (LXX, 3rd-2nd centuries BC) And when Balaam saw that it pleased God to bless Israel, he did not go according to his custom to meet the omens, but turned his face toward the wilderness ... There shall come a man out of his (Jacob's) seed, and he shall rule over many nations; and the kingdom of Gog shall be exalted, and his kingdom shall be increased. God led him out of Egypt; he has as it were the glory of a unicorn: he shall consume the nations of his enemies, and he shall drain their marrow, and with his darts he shall shoot through the enemy ... Balaam the son of Beor says, the man who sees truly says, 16 hearing the oracles of God, receiving knowledge from the Most High, and having seen a vision of God in sleep; his eyes were opened. I will point to him, but not now; I bless him, but he draws not near: a star shall rise out of Jacob, a man shall spring out of Israel; and shall crush the princes of Moab, and shall spoil all the sons of Seth.

Isaiah 2.2-3 In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'

Isaiah 60.1-6 Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. 2 For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. 3 Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 4 Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. 5 Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. 6 A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Psalms of Solomon 17.31 And he (the messiah) will purge Jerusalem and make it holy as it was even from the beginning, for nations to come, from the ends of the earth to see his glory, to bring as gifts her children who had been driven out, and to see the glory of the Lord with which God has glorified her.

What about the Star?

- Was it an actual phenomenon (eg supernova [new stars ‘appear’ regularly], comet [Halley’s, 11-12 BC] or planetary conjunction [Jupiter, Saturn & Mars, 7-6 BC] or a mythical interpretation?
- In the ancient world, heavenly activity often heralded important events, including the arrival or departure of great leaders. Stars and the like were divine ‘messengers’.
- Meaning: Jesus is god-given and destined to be a great ruler – cosmic news!

Numbers 24.15-17 *The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is clear, the oracle of one who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down, but with his eyes uncovered: I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near - a star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the borderlands of Moab, and the territory of all the Shethites.*

Justinus, Epitome from Pompeius Trogus, 37.2 (3rd cent AD?) His (Mithridates VI, king of Pontus, 132-63 BC) future greatness was even proclaimed in advance by miraculous heavenly signs. In the year in which he was born and also in the year in which he first began to reign, during the twofold period a comet shone for seventy days, so brightly that it seemed to make the whole heaven glow. For not only did it occupy the fourth part of the heavens with its magnitude, but the gleam which flashed forth from it even surpassed the splendour of the sun; and it occupied the period of four hours each time it rose and set'

Suetonius, Caesar, 88 (75-150 AD) (Julius) Caesar (100-44 BC) died in the fifty-sixth year of his age and was numbered among the gods, not only by a formal decree but also in the conviction of the common people. For at the first of the games which his heir Augustus gave in honour of his apotheosis, a comet shone for seven successive days, rising about the eleventh hour, and was believed to be the soul of Caesar, who had been taken up into heaven.

What of the infanticide (slaughter of the innocents)?

- ‘Prophesied new born leader perceived as a threat’ was a recognized theme in ancient literature.
- Isn’t it rather too coincidental that both Moses and Jesus find themselves in danger of their lives as babies in Egypt?
- Message: Jesus is the new Moses, mightier than his forebear, who will lead with God’s power and authority, surpassing all other rulers.

Exodus 1.15-16 *The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ‘When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.’*

Josephus, Jewish Antiquities II.205-23 (37-100 AD?) While the affairs of the Hebrews were in this condition, there was this occasion offered itself to the Egyptians, which made them more solicitous for the extinction of our nation. One of those sacred scribes, who are very sagacious in foretelling future events truly, told the king, that about this time there would a child be born to the Israelites, who, if he were reared, would bring the Egyptian dominion low, and would raise the Israelites; that he would excel all men in virtue, and obtain a glory that would be remembered through all ages. Which thing was so feared by the king, that, according to this man’s opinion, he commanded that they should cast every male child, which was born to the Israelites, into the river, and destroy it.

Suetonius, Augustus, 94 According to Julius Marathus, a few months before Augustus was born a portent was generally observed at Rome, which gave warning that nature was pregnant with a king for the Roman people; thereupon the senate in consternation decreed that no male child born that year should be reared; but those whose wives were with child saw to it that the decree was not filed in the treasury (i.e. did not assume the force of law).

Did Jesus have an earthly father?

- What do the evangelists say?

Matthew 1.18-25 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 fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ ‘**Look, the virgin (parthenos) shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us.**’ (Isaiah 7.14) 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.

Luke 1.26-38 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a **virgin (parthenon)** engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The **virgin's (parthenou)** name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favoured 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 favour 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.’ ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, ‘**How can this be, since I am a virgin?**’ (Greek, ‘since I do not know a man’, evpei. a;ndra ouv ginw,skw) 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.

Isaiah 7.14 (MT) Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman (*almâ*) is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

Isaiah 7.14 (LXX) Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin (*parthenos*) shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Emmanuel.

Hebrew ‘*almâ* – ‘young woman’

Greek *parthenos* – ‘virgin’

not *pais* ‘girl’ or *paidiskê* ‘young girl’ or even *gynê* ‘woman’

- What about the genealogies (Matthew 1.1-17; Luke 3.23-38)?
- What do other early Christian writers think? Son of Mary (Mark 6.3), born of a woman (Galatians 4.4), descendent of David (Romans 1.3), , born of God (John 1.14; Protoevangelium of James 19-20), son of God (Matthew 14.33; Mark 1.1; Luke 1.35; John 1.34; Acts 9.20; Romans 1.4; 2 Corinthians 1.19; Galatians 2.20; Ephesians 4.13; Hebrews 4.14; 1 John 3.8; Revelation 2.18) illegitimate (John 8.41?; Gospel of Thomas 105?).
- In the Graeco-Roman World, heroes, divine men and rulers described as ‘sons of God’ -> fathered by God (eg Achilles, Alexander the Great, Apollonius, Emperor Augustus, Heracles, Pythagoras, Plato, Pharaohs).
- Meaning: Jesus is Lord and Saviour, the embodiment of God.

Mark 6.1-3 Jesus left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, ‘Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary [or son of the carpenter and of Mary] and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offence at him.

John 1.14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

John 8.39-41 The Pharisees answered Jesus, ‘Abraham is our father.’ He said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father does.’ They said to him, ‘We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.’

Romans 1.1-4 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

Galatians 4.4-5 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.

Gospel of Thomas 105 (1st century AD) Jesus said: He who will know the father and the mother will be called the son of a harlot.

Protoevangelium of James (2nd century AD) 19.1, 3; 20.1-3 And behold, a woman came down from the hill-country and said to me [Joseph], ‘Man, where are you going?’ And I said, ‘I seek a Hebrew midwife.’ And she answered me, ‘Are you from Israel?’ And I said to her, ‘Yes.’ And she said, ‘And who is she who brings forth in the cave?’ And I said, ‘My betrothed.’ And she said to me, ‘Is she not your wife?’ And I said to her, ‘She is Mary, who was brought up in the temple of the Lord, and I received her by lot as my wife, and she is not my wife, but she has conceived by the Holy Spirit.’ And the midwife said to him, ‘Is this true?’ And Joseph said to her, ‘Come and see.’ ... And the midwife came out of the cave [where Jesus was born], and Salome met her. And she said to her, ‘Salome, Salome, I have a new sight to tell you about; a virgin has brought forth, a thing which her condition does not allow.’ And Salome said, ‘As the Lord my God lives, unless I insert my finger and test her condition, I will not believe that a virgin has given birth.’ And the midwife went in and said to Mary, ‘Make yourself ready, for there is no small contention concerning you’. And Salome inserted her finger to test her condition. And she cried out, saying, ‘Woe for my wickedness and my unbelief; for I have tempted the living God; and behold, my hand falls away from me, consumed by fire!’ And she bowed her knees before the Lord saying, ‘O God of my fathers, remember me; for I am the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; do not make me pilloried for the children of Israel, but restore me to the poor. For you know, Lord, that in your name I perform my duties and from you I have received my hire’. And behold, an angel of the Lord appeared and said to her, ‘Salome, Salome, the Lord God has heard your prayer. Bring your hand to the child and touch him and salvation and joy will be yours.’ And Salome came near and touched him, saying, ‘I will worship him, for a great king has been born to Israel.’ And Salome was healed as she had requested, and she went out of the cave.

Origen, Against Celsus (2nd century AD) 1.28, 32, 33, 34 After this Celsus represents a Jew as having a conversation with Jesus himself and refuting him on many charges, as he thinks: first, because he fabricated the story of his birth from a virgin; and he reproaches him because he came from a Jewish village and from a poor country woman who earned her living by spinning. He says that she was driven out by her husband, who was a carpenter by trade, as she was convicted of adultery. Then he says that after she had been driven out by her husband and while she was wandering about in a disgraceful way she secretly gave birth to Jesus. And he says that because he was poor he hired himself out as a workman in Egypt, and there tried his hand at certain magical powers on which the Egyptians pride themselves; he returned full of conceit because of these powers, and on account of them gave himself the title of God.

Origen, Against Celsus (2nd century AD) I.28, 32, 33, 34 (continued) Let us, return, however, to the words put into the mouth of the Jew, where the mother of Jesus is described as having been turned out by the carpenter who was betrothed to her, as she had been convicted of adultery and had a child by a certain soldier named Panthera. Let us consider whether those who fabricated the myth that the virgin and Panthera committed adultery and that the carpenter turned her out, were not blind when they concocted all this to get rid of the miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit.

For the offspring of such impure intercourse must rather have been some stupid man who would harm men by teaching licentiousness, unrighteousness and other evils, and not a teacher of self-control, righteousness and the other virtues, but, as the prophets foretold, the offspring of a virgin who according to the promised sign should give birth to a child whose name was significant of his work, showing that at his birth God would be with men.

Exodus 4.22-3 & Hosea 11.1 (God's people = God's son) Then you [Moses] shall say to Pharaoh, Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son. I said to you, 'Let my son go that he may worship me' ... When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

2 Samuel 7.14 & Psalm 2.7 (Davidic king = God's son) I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human being ... I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you'.

Aramaic Apocalypse 4Q246 (messiah = God's son) The son of God he will be proclaimed and the son of the Most High they will call him ... He will wage war for them. He will give peoples into their hands and all of the peoples he will cast before the people of God.

John 1.14 (Jesus becomes God's son at birth) And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Mark 1.9-11 (Jesus becomes God's son at baptism) In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Romans 1.3-4 (Jesus becomes God's son at the resurrection) The gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Virgil (70-19 BC), Eclogue 4

Now comes the last age of the Cumæan song;
the great order of the ages arises anew.
Now the Virgin returns (*Iam reddit et Virgo*), and Saturn's reign returns;
now a new generation is sent down from high heaven.
Only, chaste Lucina, favour the child at his birth,
by whom, first of all, the iron age will end
and a golden race arise in all the world;
now your Apollo reigns.

Suetonius (c 120 AD), Lives of the Caesars 94.3

A few months before Augustus was born a portent was generally observed at Rome, which gave warning that nature was pregnant with a king for the Roman people; thereupon the senate in consternation decreed that no male child born that year should be reared; but those whose wives were with child saw to it that the decree was not filed in the treasury, since each one appropriated the prediction to this own family.

Genealogies as Pedigree

Matthew 1.1-17

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac,
and Isaac the father of Jacob,
and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar,
and Perez the father of Hezron,
and Hezron the father of Aram,
and Aram the father of Aminadab,
and Aminadab the father of Nahshon,
and Nahshon the father of Salmon,
and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab,
and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth,
and Obed the father of Jesse,
and Jesse the father of King David.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah (*Bathsheba*),
and Solomon the father of Rehoboam,
and Rehoboam the father of Abijah,
and Abijah the father of Asaph,
and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat,
and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram,
and Joram the father of Uzziah,
and Uzziah the father of Jotham,
and Jotham the father of Ahaz,
and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,
and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,
and Manasseh the father of Amos,
and Amos the father of Josiah,
and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers,
at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

And after the deportation to Babylon:
Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel,
and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel,
and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud,
and Abiud the father of Eliakim,
and Eliakim the father of Azor,
and Azor the father of Zadok,
and Zadok the father of Achim,
and Achim the father of Eliud,
and Eliud the father of Eleazar,
and Eleazar the father of Matthan,
and Matthan the father of Jacob,
and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary,
of whom Jesus was born, who is called the
Messiah.

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.

Luke 3.23-38

Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work.

He was the son (as was thought) of Joseph

son of Heli,
son of Matthat,
son of Levi,
son of Melchi,
son of Jannai,
son of Joseph,
son of Mattathias,
son of Amos,
son of Nahum,
son of Esli,
son of Naggai,
son of Maath,
son of Mattathias,
son of Semein,
son of Josech,
son of Joda,
son of Joanan,
son of Rhesa,
son of Zerubbabel,
son of Shealtiel,
son of Neri,
son of Melchi,
son of Addi,
son of Cosam,
son of Elmadam,
son of Er,
son of Joshua,
son of Eliezer,
son of Jorim,
son of Matthat,
son of Levi,
son of Simeon,
son of Judah,
son of Joseph,
son of Jonam,
son of Eliakim,
son of Melea,
son of Menna,
son of Mattatha,
son of Nathan,
son of David,
son of Jesse,
son of Obed,
son of Boaz,
son of Sala,
son of Nahshon,
son of Amminadab,
son of Admin,
son of Arni,

Points to Ponder

- If Jesus has no earthly father, why do the evangelists trace his descendants through Joseph's line?
- What are the evangelists trying to tell us about Jesus through these genealogies?
- There is agreement in the generations from Abraham to David, but not elsewhere. Matthew records 42 generations between Jesus and Abraham, Luke records 57.
- Why four women in Matthew's genealogy?

Tamar, wife of Er, Judah's eldest son. Er and his brothers produced no heir, so Tamar, a Canaanite or Aramean, deceived Judah and conceive twins (Genesis 38)

Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute in Jericho, aided the escape of Joshua's spies (Joshua 2 + 6) and generally enjoyed a positive reputation in Jewish and Christian literature.

Ruth, a Moabite proselyte, seduced Boaz to secure her future (Ruth 3).

Bathsheba, wife of Uriah and of Hittite extract, participated in an adulterous relationship with king David (2 Samuel 11)

Were they sinners or non-Jews embraced with God's saving purposes? Or do they demonstrate how questionable unions can be 'redeemed' by God's providence?

God's 'Anointed One' 'Messiah' would be of Davidic Line

2 Samuel 7.8-13 Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Psalms of Solomon 17.21-32 (1st century BC) See, Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel in the time known to you, O God. Undergird him with the strength to destroy the unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem from gentiles who trample her to destruction; in wisdom and in righteousness to drive out the sinners from the inheritance; to smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter's jar; to shatter all their substance with an iron rod; to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth; at his warning the nations will flee from his presence; and he will condemn sinners by the thoughts of their hearts. He will gather a holy people, whom he will lead in righteousness; and he will judge the tribes of the people that have been made holy by the Lord their God. He will not tolerate unrighteousness even to pause among them, and any person who knows wickedness shall not live with them. For he shall know them that they are all children of their God. He will distribute them upon the land according to their tribes; the alien and the foreigner will no longer live near them. He will judge peoples and nations in the wisdom of his righteousness. And he will have gentle nations serving him under his yoke, and he will glorify the Lord in a place prominent above the whole earth. And he will purge Jerusalem and make it holy as it was even from the beginning, for nations to come, from the ends of the earth to see his glory, to bring as gifts her children who had been driven out, and to see the glory of the Lord with which God has glorified her. And he will be a righteous king over them, taught by God. There will be no unrighteousness among them in his days, for all shall be holy, and their king shall be the Lord Messiah.

APPENDIX: JESUS' BIRTH – WHERE MATTHEW AND LUKE AGREE

- 1 Jesus' birth is related to the reign of Herod (Luke 1.5; Matt 2.1).
- 2 Mary, his mother to be, is a virgin engaged to Joseph, but they have not yet come to live together (Luke 1.27,34; 2.5; Matt 1.18).
- 3 Joseph is of the house of David (Luke 1.27; 2.4; Matt 1. 16, 20).
- 4 An angel from heaven announces the coming birth of Jesus (Luke 1.28-30; Matt 1.20-21).
- 5 Jesus is recognized himself to be a son of David (Luke 1.32; Matt 1.1).
- 6 His conception is to take place through the holy Spirit (Luke 1.35; Matt 1.18,20).
- 7 Joseph is not involved in the conception (Luke 1.34; Matt 1.18-25).
- 8 The name 'Jesus' is imposed by heaven prior to his birth (Luke 1.31; Matt 1.21).
- 9 The angel identifies Jesus as 'Saviour' (Luke 2. 11; Matt 1. 21).
- 10 Jesus is born after Mary and Joseph come to live together (Luke 2.4-7; Matt 1.24-25).
- 11 Jesus is born at Bethlehem (Luke 2.4-7; Matt 2.1).
- 12 Jesus settles, with Mary and Joseph, in Nazareth in Galilee (Luke 2.39,51; Matt 2.22-23).