



*"Adoration of the Shepherds" from The Life of Christ by
Carl Heinrich Bloch (1834-90)*

3. "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . ." (Mark 1:1)

*CHRISTOLOGY AND GOSPEL BEGINNINGS.
NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE INFANCY
NARRATIVES. THE MATTHEAN INFANCY
NARRATIVE*

"What Shall We Give to the Babe in the Manger?"

Traditional Catalanian Carol, arr. Mack Wilberg (from *A Mormon Tabernacle Choir Christmas*)

- "What shall we give to the Babe in the manger, what shall we offer the child in the stall? Incense and spices and gold we've got plenty, are these the gifts for the King of us all?"
- "What shall we give to the boy in the temple, what shall we offer the Man by the sea? Palms at his feet and hosannas uprising, are gifts for Him who will carry the Tree."
- "What shall we give to the Lamb who was offered, rising the third day and shedding His blood? Tears for his mercy we'll weep at the manger, bathing the infant come down from above."

Christmas and Easter

- Infancy and Passion/Resurrection Narratives frame the gospels
- President Hinckley (“The Wondrous and True Story of Christmas,” *Ensign*, Dec. 2000, 2)
 - “This is the wondrous and true story of Christmas. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem of Judea is preface. The three-year ministry of the Master is prologue. **The magnificent substance of the story is His sacrifice, the totally selfless act of dying in pain on the cross of Calvary to atone for the sins of all of us.**”
 - “**The epilogue is the miracle of the Resurrection**, bringing the assurance that ‘as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive’ (1 Cor. 15:22).”
 - “**There would be no Christmas if there had not been Easter.** The babe Jesus of Bethlehem would be but another baby without **the redeeming Christ of Gethsemane and Calvary, and the triumphant fact of the Resurrection.**”

Gospel Beginnings

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HOW DOES EACH OF THE FOUR GOSPELS BEGIN? WHY DO THEY START AT DIFFERENT POINTS AND HAVE SUCH DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES?

Four Gospels

- **Points of Departure**
 - Mark: baptism and the beginning of the ministry
 - Matthew and Luke: conception and birth in so-called **infancy narratives**
 - John: premortality
- **Why the differences?**
- Some scholars maintain evolving **Christology** (the **person** and **work of Jesus**)
 - Mark: Christ as Son of God seemingly by **appointment at baptism** (low Christology; cf. kings of Judah as “anointed sons of God”)
 - Matthew and Luke: Christ the Son of God **at conception**
 - John: **Divine Word from premortality**, incarnation theology (high Christology)
- **Differing perspectives and times of writing can account for some of these observations**
 - Mark: **what Christ did for us** (i.e., his deeds, suffering, death, and resurrection)
 - Matthew: Christ as **Son of David**: Savior *and* rightful King
 - Luke: Christ as **Son of God**, his place in “salvation history”
 - John: **Christ’s divinity stressed**

Infancy Narratives

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ACCOUNTS OF JESUS’ DIVINE CONCEPTION AND MIRACULOUS BIRTH, THE MATTHEAN AND LUCAN INFANCY NARRATIVES ARE VERY DIFFERENT YET SHARE IMPORTANT FEATURES

Infancy Narratives, Characteristics

Matthew 1–2, Luke 1–2

- Not just the Nativity but, in Luke, also the only “childhood” stories preserved in canonical writings
 - Later, non-canonical infancy stories in apocryphal gospels added numerous fanciful details and stories to Jesus’ early life
- **Style and composition differ from the rest of these gospels**
 - reworked earlier material?
 - self-contained, can stand alone
 - **Aware of later material in the gospels but the gospels do not betray awareness of them . . .**
 - later additions?
 - “gospel overtures”
- With the **Passion** and **Resurrection Narratives** at the end of the gospels, the **Infancy Narratives** form a frame for the body of each gospel
 - They teach who Jesus is before the body of each gospel relates what he did (the issues of **Christology**)

3. Beginnings and the Matthean Infancy Narrative

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Infancy Narratives, Initial Exegetical Questions

More detailed discussions of Matthew and Luke will precede our study of each evangelist

- **Historical**
 - Event: Mary became pregnant during her engagement but before her marriage; after her marriage she gave birth to a son under unusual circumstances
 - Sources: How did Matthew and Luke learn of the event?
 - Matthew, presumably the apostle, may have heard the story from Jesus himself or his family members
 - Luke did not know Jesus during his mortal ministry; he must have heard stories from other disciples and, very possibly, from family members he interviewed
- **Literary**
 - Both evangelists wrote narrative accounts of the conception and birth of Jesus known as **infancy narratives**
 - Placed them at the beginning to answer the first part of the Christological question: **who Jesus was**
 - Matthew referred to prophecies from the Jewish scriptures to show that the events of Jesus’ birth fulfilled prophecy (**formula quotations**, more below); portrayed the events largely from the perspective of Joseph to show that **Jesus was the Son of David**
 - Luke included poetic passages or songs to personalize the characters of his infancy narrative (**canticles**, more below); **much from Mary’s point of view**
- **Theological**
 - Demonstrated that Jesus conception was divine and that his birth was miraculous
 - **Jesus was the Son of God, the promised Messiah**

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Infancy Narratives, Differences

- Beware of the tendency to overly harmonize the accounts of Matthew and Luke
 - Our Christmas stories tend to combine the two: for instance, putting both Magi (Matt) and shepherds (Luke) at the stable (Luke) and not in a house (Matt)
- **Matthew's is largely from Joseph's perspective, Luke's from Mary's**
 - This does not mean, however, that Joseph and Mary were necessarily the sources—rather that the evangelists focused on them and what they represented
 - Luke adds the stories about John the Baptist as literary foils to compare and contrast with the story of Jesus
- **Matthew does not mention Nazareth until the *end* of his account, presenting the possibility that Joseph was from Bethlehem and Mary was from Nazareth**
 - Was it an arranged marriage and Joseph went to Nazareth to retrieve his new bride?
 - The problem of the “census” is treated below on “Misconceptions Quicklist (Luke)” below
 - Joseph and Mary had a “house” in Bethlehem and intended to return to there from Egypt (Matt 2:11, 22)
- **While Matthew and Luke differ, and even conflict, on some details, *the important facts are all confirmed by the Book of Mormon***
 - Mary was a virgin from Nazareth, where she divinely conceived Jesus (1 Nephi 11:13–20)
 - Jesus was the son of God and his mother was named “Mary” (Mosiah 3:8)
 - Jesus was born near Jerusalem (Alma 7:10; Bethlehem is 9 km south of Jerusalem, hence “at,” or in the region, of Jerusalem)
 - Mary was a precious and chosen vessel, who conceived by the **power** of the Holy Ghost (Alma 7:10; not of the Holy Ghost as in Matt 1:18, 21)

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Guido Reni, *St. Joseph with the Infant Jesus* (Wikimedia Commons)

The Matthean Infancy Narrative

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 STRESSING THE ROLE OF JOSEPH AND DEMONSTRATING THE FULFILMENT OF HEBREW PROPHECY, THE MATTHEAN INFANCY NARRATIVE SHOWS HOW JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH AND PROMISED SON OF DAVID

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Structure of Matthew's Infancy Narrative

Formula quotations cite Jewish scriptures (usually from the LXX or Greek translation); they give authority to Matthew's account and demonstrate that Jesus is fulfilling prophecy



Right: Geertgen tot Sint Jans The Tree of Jesse

- **Genealogy** (1:1–17)
- **Conception and birth** (1:18–25)
 - **first formula quotation**, 1:23 = Isaiah 7:14 LXX
- **Visit of the Wise Men** (Epiphany; 2:1–12)
 - **second formula quotation**, 2:6 = Micah 5:2, 2 Samuel 5:2
- **Escape into Egypt** (2:13–15)
 - **third formula quotation**, 2:15b = Hosea 11:1
- **Massacre of the Innocents** (2:16–18)
 - **fourth formula quotation**, 2:18 = Jeremiah 31:15
- **“Return” to Nazareth** (2:19–23)
 - **fifth formula quotation**, 2:23b = ?

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Matthew's Genealogy

- **“An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (NRSV)**
 - Israelite kings and priests were anointed (“messiahs” with a lowercase “m”)
- **Descending genealogy**, list divided into **three sets of 14 generations**
 - “. . . So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.” (Matt 1:1–17)
 - Abraham to David
 - David to exile
 - Exile to Christ
 - **Unequal divisions**: 750, 400, and 600 years
 - **14 is the Hebrew numerical equivalent of David's name**
 - Matthew was probably selective in choosing who to list—and that is okay!
- **Presence of four women**: Tamar (Gen. 38), Rahab (Josh. 2), Ruth (Ruth 2–4), Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–12)
 - irregular unions and conceptions—precedents for Mary?
 - actors, not acted upon
 - “sinners” too have a part in Christ
 - **Gentiles have a part in Christ**
 - **Women important for God's plan**

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Matthean Themes and Images



James Tissot, *The Betrothal of the Holy Virgin and St. Joseph* (Wikimedia Commons)

3. Beginnings and the Matthean Infancy Narrative

- **Jesus the true king**
 - Joseph's legal heir, emphasis on Joseph's role
 - *Kingship was always traced in the male line*
 - Son of David
- **Jesus as Immanuel**
 - "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 'Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name **Emmanuel**, which being interpreted is, **God with us.**'" (Matt 1:22-23 = Isaiah 7:14 LXX)
- **Jesus the new Moses**
 - Massacre of the Innocents = Pharaoh's massacre of Israelite boys
- **Joseph in Egypt and Joseph the Carpenter**
 - role of revelatory dreams
 - escape to Egypt

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Misconceptions Quicklist

(Matthew)



Jean-Baptiste Jouvenet, *Adoration of the Magi*

3. Beginnings and the Matthean Infancy Narrative

- Supposition: Matthew's genealogy is that of Joseph, Luke's of Mary
 - Matthews is **probably legal descent** and is more interested in illustrating theological and historical points
- Supposition: There were *three* wise men, that they were perhaps *kings*, and they came to the *manger*
 - Number unknown, they were **probably Persian magi**, they arrived anytime within the first two years, and they found the family in a house
- Supposition: Herod killed thousands
 - Incident did not make Josephus's record of Herodian atrocities, there would only a few dozen males under two in a town of Bethlehem's size
- Supposition: Because Joseph brought Mary from Nazereth in Luke, he was from Nazereth, not Bethlehem
 - No ancient examples of going to ancestral homelands to be taxed; **one was taxed where he lived and owned property**
 - **After Egypt he intended to go back to Bethlehem** (perhaps his home town) but found that Archelaus was worse than Herod
 - "made his home in a town called Nazareth" (NRSV; probably Mary's home town)

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