

HOW FAR IF AT ALL DO THE INFANCY NARRATIVES IN THE GOSPELS OF MATTHEW AND LUKE SET THE AGENDA FOR THE REST OF THEIR GOSPELS AND DO THOSE AGENDAS REFLECT COMMON MATTERS OF CONCERN?

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Abstract

The introductory chapter considers whether the Infancy Narratives of Matthew and Luke are no more than a factual retelling of the events of Jesus' birth. It concludes that there are inconsistencies between the accounts precluding such a conclusion. It argues that the narratives contain material that is more concerned with introducing literary and theological themes explored in the rest of the respective Gospels. It then sets out how those themes will be examined and how they relate to the rest of the respective Gospels.

Chapters two and three are concerned with Matthew's Infancy Narrative. Chapter two sets the context in which this Gospel was written, concluding that its purpose was to teach and defend early Christian teaching and to justify the present authority of that teaching by demonstrating continuity with the past. Chapter three considers the literary and theological themes of Matthew's Infancy Narrative, concluding that the Narrative and the main body of the Gospel share many of the same thought patterns.

Chapters four and five are concerned with Luke's Infancy Narrative. Chapter four sets the context in which this Gospel was written, concluding that its purpose was not just to retell the past but to interpret its relevance for the present and future. Chapter five considers the literary and theological themes of Luke's Infancy Narrative. It concludes that Luke's Infancy Narrative seeks to link the past to the present and the future, which he then pursues in the rest of his Gospel

The final chapter shows how both Matthew and Luke introduce a common agenda in their Infancy Narratives, which they then develop in their Gospels. Four key conclusions are drawn, showing how both evangelists seek to address the key issue of Jesus' Messiahship by appealing to the past to affirm the truth of what is happening in the present and its importance for the future.

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Introduction: The Infancy Narratives of Matthew and Luke

Any account of the life of an important or influential person is likely to start by relating the events surrounding his or her birth. That person's family background or the circumstances prevailing either in the community or wider world, or indeed both of these factors, may well have influenced the course of that life in later years. Those factors may well be said to have set the agenda for what is to follow. It is true that Mark's Gospel does not concern itself with Jesus' birth and Paul only makes sporadic allusions to Jesus' origins. It is only at this stage that Matthew and Luke seek to introduce their accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ with information about his birth. The proposition that this dissertation seeks to examine is whether Matthew and Luke are indeed seeking to introduce in their accounts of Jesus' birth the agendas for the rest of their Gospels and in so doing whether those agendas reflect common themes.

Before describing the approach to this task, it is necessary to ask one simple but important question, namely whether the Infancy Narratives in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels are essentially a factual retelling of the circumstances of Jesus' birth. The reader might expect to find some inconsistencies between the two accounts caused by factors such as the use of different sources and the actual passage of time between the events themselves and the recording of them. However if they are merely recounting the facts, it ought to be possible to reconstruct a consistent account from the two narratives.

Both accounts contain common elements that can be outlined as follows:

1. The parents are to be Mary and Joseph who are legally engaged or married but have not yet come to live together or have had sexual relations (Matt 1:18; Lk 1:27, 34).
2. Joseph is of Davidic descent (Matt1:16, 20; Lk1:27,32; 2:4).
- 3 There is an angelic announcement of the forthcoming birth of the child (Matt1:20-23; Lk1:30-35).

4. The conception of the child by Mary is not through intercourse with her husband (Matt1: 20, 23, 25; Lk1:34).
5. The conception is through the Holy Spirit (Matt1:18,20; Lk1:35).
6. There is a directive from the angel that the child is to be named Jesus (Matt1:21; Lk1:31).
7. An angel states that Jesus is to be the Saviour (Matt 1:21; Lk 2:11).
8. The birth takes place after the parents have come to live together (Matt 1:24-25; Lk 2:5-6).
9. The birth takes place at Bethlehem (Matt 2:1; Lk 2:4-6).
10. The birth is potentially chronologically dated to the reign of Herod the Great (Matt 2:1; Lk 1:5).
11. The child is reared at Nazareth (Matt 2:23; Lk 2:39).¹

However the following key differences are relevant:

1. In Matthew the Annunciation is made to Joseph in a dream (Matt1:20-24); in Luke it is made to Mary who is awake and consents (Lk 1: 26-38).. The angel states that his name is Gabriel (Matt1:26-35).
2. In Matthew, Joseph is minded to divorce Mary until he is told that the Holy Spirit is the agent of conception (Matt1:19-20). In Luke the reaction of Joseph to the pregnancy is not mentioned and his name occurs only incidentally (Lk1:27; 2: 4,16).
3. Only Matthew tells of the Magi (Matt 2:1-12); only Luke tells of the shepherds (Lk 2:8-20).
4. Matthew makes no mention of a journey to Bethlehem because of a census.
5. Matthew alone explains the significance of the name Jesus (Matt 1:21-2).
6. John the Baptist is an important feature of Luke's account whereas he has no involvement in Matthew's account.
7. Matthew's genealogy traces the descent of Jesus to David and Abraham while Luke's genealogy traces his descent back to God through Adam. It is also

¹ Brown 1993: 34-35. Brown does not use the word *potentially* in point 10 but to assert this as a definite point of agreement ignores the issue surrounding the dating of the census discussed in §4:6 and §5:8 below. See also Karris 1990: 43:13 where the list is expanded to 12 and Beare 1964: 29 where the list is telescoped into 5.

perhaps significant that Luke's genealogy appears at Lk. 3:23-8, outside of the main Infancy Narrative.

8. In Matthew's account, after the birth the Holy Family flee to Egypt to escape persecution whereas in Luke's account they actually return to Jerusalem for Jesus to be circumcised and Mary to undergo ritual purification, after which they return quietly to Nazareth.²

It is perhaps this last difference that is the most telling. It is sometimes argued that

on close reading the accounts in Matthew and Luke are different both in substance and character. Matthew seems to have derived his account from Joseph ultimately and Luke from Mary. What this suggests is that there are two independent stories of the virgin birth stories; and that increases the probability that they were founded on historical reflections of fact, drawn from two different groups or individuals. The accounts are not contradictory.³

However it seems implausible that Mary would forget the visit of the Magi bearing highly unusual gifts and even more so that she would forget the real deadly threat to her and her new-born child. Although the visit to Jerusalem remembered by the Christian Church in the Festival of Candlemas on February 2nd marks the end of the church's celebration of Christmas, it seems to fall outside the retelling of the Christmas story. Indeed both the 2006 film "The Nativity Story" directed by Catherine Hardwick and the 2008 Channel 4 programme "The Nativity Decoded" presented by Robert Beckford are good examples of that trend. It can be suggested that after Jesus' birth, the Holy Family returned briefly to Nazareth to wind up their affairs and then returned to Bethlehem to live in a house.⁴ However while such a construction can be made from the two narratives, it still does not address why Luke should simply assert that they in fact remained quietly in Nazareth.

However while it is one thing to show clear and potentially irreconcilable differences between the narratives, it does not follow that both are non-historical accounts. Brown states: 'Although both treat the same period of Jesus' life, the respective approaches of the two Infancy Narratives may be different. Both may be historical; one might be

² Beare 1964: 30; Brown 1993: 35.

³ Ward 1987: 3.

⁴ Sammons 2006: 86.

historical, and the other much freer, or both may represent non-historical dramatisations.⁵ Elsewhere he had been more forthright when he wrote:

One must admit the general context of the Infancy narratives in which the virginal conception is preserved does not increase our confidence in historicity. What is clear is that both narratives cannot be right so that what they tell cannot be reduced to a coherent unity. The question that then follows is whether it is possible to identify which account is to be preferred as history.⁶

The majority view prefers Luke because of his own assertions in Lk 1: 3-4 that he has made an orderly account of what he has followed closely so that the reader may know the truth of what he has been instructed. Furthermore it seems that Mary was with the apostles according to Acts 1:14 after Jesus' death and resurrection so that she could have been Luke's source.⁷ However there is a minority support for Matthew because of its 'greater verisimilitude' in that it accords with independently corroborated facts notably Herod's ruthlessness.⁸ However, the problem with these arguments is that they do not address the issue of how far have the evangelists have introduced literary and theological material in order to interpret better the significance of Jesus' birth. This issue will be further addressed in subsequent chapters as the elements of each of the evangelists' account of Jesus' birth are analysed.

Looking at all this material, it is clear that:

1. While there are common elements to both narratives, there are inconsistencies that cannot be reconciled.
2. There is no material that suggests conclusively that either account is to be preferred to the other.
3. Although both narratives allude to historical persons and events, there is no other biblical or extra-biblical material about those persons or events that will assist in demonstrating that either Matthew or Luke were recording a largely historical account of facts and events.

⁵ Brown 1993: 34. See also Küng 1977: 451

⁶ Brown 1973:54

⁷ Brown 1993: 35n25

⁸ Sanders 1993: 87

4. The only thing of which we can be certain is that Jesus' mother was Mary, his putative father was Joseph, and he was raised in Nazareth.⁹

It may be that the common elements reflect an original common source that has undergone interpretative development.¹⁰ However, the conclusion that the differences between the narratives are more drastic than anywhere else in the canonical Gospels, the Synoptics and John included, seems inevitable.¹¹ John Spong's view might be extreme when writing that 'no serious New Testament Scholar Catholic or Protestant would seriously defend the historicity of the narratives'.¹² However he correctly adds 'to assign the birth narratives to mythology is not to dismiss them as untrue. It is rather to force us to see truth in dimensions larger than literal truth'.¹³ It is this proposition that is the impetus for the present dissertation. If the Infancy Narratives are comprised of largely unhistorical material and are concerned with larger theological and literary dimensions and the need to interpret them from a common tradition, then the question has to be asked what those dimensions were and why they were interpreted as they were. Having established so far as is possible what those dimensions are, the next question is how do they relate to the rest of their respective Gospels. Do they indeed set the agenda for the rest of Matthew's and Luke's Gospels? Finally if larger dimensions rather than literal fact is the purpose of the Infancy Narratives, is it those broader literary and theological perspectives that unite these narratives?

It is these questions that provide the impetus for this dissertation. The factual contradictions between the two accounts are obvious. If one or other of the accounts is discarded, the corollary is that the remainder of that evangelist's account is similarly unreliable. The possibility that outside issues surrounding the spread and development of the Christian Gospel may have provided the agenda for Matthew and Luke to find different ways to express the same truths does not largely seem to have been explored in the available literature about the Infancy Narratives. This dissertation seeks to undertake that exploration since it may prove to describe an important harmony

⁹ See Vermès 2001: 4-5 under headings of *personal particulars* and *family background*.

¹⁰ Brown 1993: 665.

¹¹ Stendahl 1960:70.

¹² Spong 1992: 44-5.

¹³ Spong 1992:45.

between the two Infancy Narratives. It may be then that there will be a clearer understanding of the Narratives to determine what is a factual retelling and what is theological teaching. In order to undertake that exploration, the texts of Matthew's and Luke's Gospels have been considered as well as relevant commentaries, books and articles cited in the bibliography.

In order to seek answers to these questions, this dissertation will include four chapters, two devoted to Matthew's Infancy Narrative and two to Luke's Narrative. Each chapter will contain an introduction setting out the specific aims of the chapter. Chapters two and four will address preliminary issues for the respective narratives. The aim of both these chapters is to establish so far as is possible the circumstances and the context of the composition of the two Gospels. The purpose of that exercise is to see how far conclusions about circumstances and context may assist one in gaining a better understanding of the agenda of the respective Gospels. Chapters three and five will analyse the respective Infancy Narratives to explore what theological issues they seek to convey and to establish how far, if at all, they relate to the rest of their respective Gospels. Do they indeed set the agenda for what is to follow? There will then be a final concluding chapter where the general situation of the expanding Christian church will be considered, to see if indeed it is possible to identify common matters of concern to both evangelists. In short while the 'facts' might be inconsistent, is it the truths that needed to be expressed that bind together the two narratives?

Matthew's Infancy Narrative – Preliminary Issues

1. Introduction

No direct information exists positively and precisely to identify who wrote St. Matthew's Gospel, when it was written, for whom it was written, and what were the author's intended objectives in composing the Gospel. Accordingly scholars seek to answer these questions by analysing the text and considering such relevant secondary material that is available. A full discussion of these issues is outside the ambit of this chapter. However in order to consider fully in the next chapter how Matthew uses his Infancy Narrative to set the agenda for the rest of his Gospel, the Gospel needs to be set in the context of who wrote it, what revisions it may have undergone, the date it was composed, and the audience for whom it was intended. Potentially a Gospel composed by a disciple within a few years of Jesus' resurrection might have a context quite different from one composed by a second generation Christian at the end of the first century. Accordingly the questions of authorship, date, the possible existence of a prior Hebrew text, intended audience and purpose will be examined to set the context for the discussion contained in the next chapter.

2. Authorship

The Greek text of the Gospel bears the superscription ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΚΑΤΑ ΜΑΘΘΑΙΟΝ. This however does not provide conclusive evidence of authorship.¹ Furthermore this superscription is not the only one.² Consequently a wide range of opinions has emerged as to the precise identity of the author. The weight of the opinion is that the author is not the disciple Matthew.³ Brown writes: 'Many scholars maintain that the Gospel was written in Syria by an unknown Greek speaking Jewish Christian living in the 80s.'⁴

France⁵ however describes this view as being 'too hastily assumed', noting that the

¹ Davies and Allison 2000: 129.

² Davies and Allison 2000: 129 n90.

³ Davies and Allison 2000: 9.

⁴ Brown 1993: 45.

⁵ France 2007: 15.

attribution of authorship to the apostle, Matthew, is the tradition of the early church.⁶ The breadth of opinion is well tabulated by Davies and Allison⁷ in which they cite six scholars who believe the apostle Matthew to be the author, thirty-eight who believe the author to be an unknown Jewish Christian and eleven who believe him to be a Gentile Christian.⁸ The testimony of the Early Fathers which points to the apostle Matthew's authorship will be considered in section 4 below.

It seems that two relevant points need to be made. Firstly, according to tradition Matthew is the author. No other name is mentioned by the Early Fathers. Secondly, in view of the material that will be reviewed in section four, it seems quite tenable to argue that the text went through some revision either by Matthew or others but still looking to Matthew as its source of inspiration. For example while Mk. 2:14 and Lk.5: 27 refer to the call of Levi, Matt. 9:9 calls the man Matthew, which could well be a deliberate attempt to prove a link between the Gospel and the apostle Matthew. By way of comparison reference might be made to legal textbooks written many years ago but updated by others yet which still bear the name of the original author.⁹ Therefore while it may be that the present text of the Gospel is not solely the work of the apostle Matthew it would be wrong to conclude that none of his influence underpins it. In any event, and for the sake of convenience, Matthew will continue to be named as the author of this Gospel in this chapter and the next.

3. Date of Composition

Given the arguments over authorship it is hardly surprising that there should be similar divergence over the date of composition. It can only be determined within

⁶ Davies and Allison 2000: 12 also note 'nagging questions' over the dismissal of Matthean authorship.

⁷ Davies and Allison 2000: 10-11.

⁸ See also Beare 1981: 7 who describes it as an "anonymous work...not the work of any immediate disciple of Jesus."; Kümmel 1975: 120 similarly describes Matthean authorship as a "groundless assumption". To the contrary Wenham 1991 writes: "All in all the external evidence which makes the apostle Matthew the author of the first Gospel agrees with our estimate of the internal evidence."

⁹ For example Archbold "Criminal Pleading, Evidence and Practice" was first published in 1822 written by John Frederick Archbold and since 1992 after 43 revisions is now published annually. It is still called by Archbold's name. Similar examples are Stone's "Justices Manual" and Paterson's "Licensing Acts".

broad terms.¹⁰ The dates of between AD 40 to post AD 100 are all canvassed¹¹ but the academic weight is given to between AD 70-100 with a preference for AD 80-95.¹² Three arguments support this view, namely that the setting reflects the final period of separation between the synagogue and church indicated by the use of the Greek ἐκκλησία in 16:18 and 18:17, that in 22:7 reflects knowledge of the capture and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and finally Matthew's dependence on Mark.¹³

However these arguments are hardly conclusive. The Acts of the Apostles makes it clear that there were serious tensions between Christians and Jews well before AD 70,¹⁴ for example Acts 17:1-10 which describes the dispute between Paul, Silas and the Jews in Thessalonica. Paul himself relates this opposition at 1 Thess. 2:2 and at 2 Cor. 11:24-25 describes the ways in which the Jews have variously punished him. The knowledge of the events of AD 70 rests solely on Matt 22:7, which reads: 'The King was enraged. He sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burnt their city.'¹⁵ Although it is said that this verse does not demand a date after AD 70 it is suggested that because it reflects the actual events of AD70 it implies one.¹⁶ However, it is difficult to see such a conclusion from a plain reading of this very non-specific verse. There are similar Old Testament verses such as Judges 1:8 where it states: 'Then the people of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it. They put the city to the sword and set the city on fire'. If these points are right it follows that it is not possible to apply a date to the Gospel by reference to 22:7.¹⁷

There is one further point to be made. Acts ends at chapter 28:30 with the words 'He (Paul) lived there (Rome) two whole years...proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.' There is no mention of his martyrdom. Accordingly the natural conclusion is that it had already occurred when these words were written. Thus it can be argued that Acts can be dated to no later than AD 62 and using that as a starting date, the Gospel of Luke

¹⁰ Beare 1981: 7.

¹¹ Davies and Allison 2000: 127-128.

¹² Davies and Allison 2004: xii.

¹³ France 2007: 18.

¹⁴ France 2007:18:.

¹⁵ Biblical texts are quoted from the Revised Standard Version. The translations used of other ancient texts appear in the Bibliography.

¹⁶ Davies and Allison 2000: 132.

¹⁷ Blomberg 2009: 152.

must have been an earlier composition. Consequently if as is generally accepted both Matthew and Luke's Gospels are not thought to be widely separated by date of composition, Matthew's Gospel could have an earlier rather than a later date with composition possibly as early as AD 40.¹⁸

As a result of the material surveyed in this section, it does seem that the weight of academic opinion favours a date of composition of after AD 70. However the issue does remain somewhat inconclusive and the possibility of at least some connection with a date of composition closer to the events recorded and before AD 70 cannot be completely excluded. There is also the question of whether behind the existing Greek text lies a Hebrew original.

4. A Hebrew Original

The canonical Gospel text of Matthew is in Greek and there is no extant Semitic Matthew. The work is unlikely to be the work of a translator.¹⁹ The problem arises because of the amount of patristic testimony that a Hebrew version of Matthew existed.

There is a reference in Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3:39 which firstly needs to be considered. He describes Papias at 3:39:1, 'a hearer of John and a companion of Polycarp'. The John referred to is called 'the elder' or 'the presbyter' at 3:39:6 seeming to suggest that he was the author of the Book of Revelation rather than the apostle John. Eusebius then writes at 3:39:15: 'This also the presbyter said. Mark having become the interpreter of Peter wrote down accurately howbeit though not in order all that he recalled of whatsoever of the things said or done by Christ'.

He later continues at 3:39:16: 'These things are related by Papias concerning Mark. But concerning Matthew he writes as follows; so then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language but everyone interpreted them as he was able'.

¹⁸ Wenham 1991: 300. For a full discussion of the dates of composition of Luke's Gospel, see chapter 4:3 of this dissertation.

¹⁹ Davies and Allison 2000: 9.

A second reference in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* 5:10:3 is made to: 'Bartholomew one of the apostles had preached to them (the Ebionites) and had left behind with them the writing of Matthew in the Hebrew language'.

Furthermore Origen in his commentary on Matthew writes about the

tradition concerning the four Gospels which alone are unquestionable in the church of God under heaven, that first was written that according to Matthew who was once a tax collector but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ who published it for those who from Judaism came to believe, composed as it was in the Hebrew language.²⁰

Despite this apparent weight of evidence, scholars are ready to dismiss it as wrong.²¹ The problem is that arguably all the traditions go back to Papias. Therefore, if he is wrong, that error contaminates all later testimony.²² Papias is also considered by some to be unreliable because of his beliefs but it does not follow that any such error should also render his memory unreliable.²³

According to the The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis 30:13;2-3 there existed of among the Ebionites 'a Gospel according to Matthew, though it is not the entire Gospel but is corrupt and mutilated'. Later at 30:13:6, it states that this Gospel begins with the adult John the Baptist baptising, and so omits any Infancy Narrative. Thus it would seem that whatever this document was, it was not the canonical Matthew²⁴ and thus a different entity.²⁵ However there is no early evidence that contradicts the account of Papias. Accordingly the only two conclusions to be drawn are either there were separate documents that somehow became associated with Matthew, or that there was an earlier version of which the present Greek text, while not a translation, was a revision of the earlier Hebrew version. Furthermore if that earlier version omitted the Infancy Narrative included in the present version, there exists a gap,

²⁰ Wenham 1991: 189.

²¹ Lenski 1943:18 describes the evidence of a Hebrew Gospel as "hearsay....unsupported by a tangible fact and contradicted by all the probabilities involved." Kümmel 1975:121 describes the tradition as "utterly false".

²² Davies and Allison 2000: 12.

²³ Davies and Allison 2000: 13.

²⁴ Hennecke 1959: 119.

²⁵ Hennecke 1959: 126.

which, if filled, might indicate at what point Matthew's Infancy Narrative was composed and the motives that underlay the composition at that time

5. The Intended Audience

The traditional view is that Matthew's Gospel, like the other three canonical Gospels, was composed for a specific community so that it became an 'unargued assumption'.²⁶ Certainly there is within the Gospel, material that reflects a distinctly Jewish flavour.²⁷ For example, Jewish customs apparently do not need to be explained.²⁸ However modern scholars do not necessarily view the intended audience within such a community as wholly Jewish but conclude it was intended for a Christian community consisting of both Jews and Gentiles.²⁹ It is seen as a community that was at first Jewish but to which an increasing number of Gentiles had been added.³⁰ Furthermore it also was considered to be a period of uncomfortable tension which may have been experienced at any point during the middle or late parts of the first century.³¹ Accordingly the Gospel reflects a deep concern with the relations between the church and Judaism, where church and synagogue were in conflict, and where the Jewish influence was sufficiently strong to cause trouble to the Christian community.³² The conclusion is that if a specific community was intended it comprised both Jews and Gentiles.³³

However this assumption, which was the consensus of scholarship, that Matthew and indeed the other evangelists wrote for a specific community, has now been challenged.³⁴ It is certainly clear that as Christianity spread, tensions developed between Jews and Christians. That fact is clear from, for example, Acts 5: 17-42, 12: 1-19 and 21: 27-36. It is also clear from texts such as 1 Tim. 1: 3-4 and Titus 1:10 that there were aggressive exchanges between Christian and Jews and their allies.³⁵

²⁶ Bauckham 1998a: 11.

²⁷ Davies and Allison 2000: 26-27.

²⁸ Beare 1981: 10.

²⁹ Brown 1993: 47.

³⁰ Brown 1993; 47.

³¹ France 2007: 17.

³² Beare 1981: 8.

³³ Schnelle 1998; 222.

³⁴ Esler 1998: 235.

³⁵ Frend 1984: 123.

However the danger is to interpret such texts as conveying the view that the spread of the Gospel in terms of ‘binary opposites’ with Christians at one end of the spectrum and Jews at the other end.³⁶ It would seem, however, that the dividing line between Christians and Jews was fluid not least because Christianity and Judaism themselves were not rigidly defined.³⁷ There were Jewish households that accepted Jesus Christ and were baptised yet still worshipped in the synagogue, celebrated the seventh day Sabbath and kept the Passover, while some Gentile Christians belonged to both a synagogue and a church.³⁸ Jews and Christians rubbed shoulders with each other, sometimes co-operating but also fighting for acceptance and competing for converts.³⁹

The problem at the crux of the debate for whom Matthew intended his Gospel is that there is no clear evidence of where Matthew lived at the time of composing his Gospel. However he can be seen to be identifying certain issues from which it is possible to reconstruct a community to which those issues are relevant. It is then possible to assert that his Gospel was written to address those issues for that community. It is thus a circular proposition that does not actually answer the question whether Matthew was writing for a specific community.

So did Matthew have a wider, more general audience in mind? The arguments to support that position may be summarised as follows:

1. The Gospels do not generally deal with issues that can be related to one specific community.⁴⁰ They are quite different from the Epistles.⁴¹ The Epistles do however address general issues. For example Romans contains much of Paul’s understanding of the Gospel. However at 1:7 it is addressed to a group and concludes at chapter 16 with personal dedications.
2. Matthew seems to have known of Mark’s Gospel. It is not suggested that Matthew and Mark belonged to the same community. Furthermore if Mark’s

³⁶ Runesson 2008: 99..

³⁷ Frend 1984: 124; Ludlow 2009: 21; Saldarini 1994: 8.

³⁸ Ludlow 2009: 21.

³⁹ Frend 1984: 125; Saldarini 1994: 194.

⁴⁰ Bauckham 1998a: 4, 22.

⁴¹ Bauckham 1998a: 22.

Gospel was circulating widely, Matthew could well expect his Gospel to receive a similarly wide circulation.⁴²

3. There was a network of communities in constant touch because, while mobility and communication might not be like modern standards, they still operated at a high level.⁴³ Churches could communicate often, in depth and relatively easily.⁴⁴
4. It is more likely that an evangelist would seek to communicate with those to whom they could not physically preach.⁴⁵ This point will be considered further in the next paragraph.
5. Accordingly it cannot be identified beyond a high level of generality for whom the Gospels were written.⁴⁶

The response to those arguments is the suggestion that while the Gospels may have been written for a specific community, the evangelists had not excluded the possibility that they might prove useful to a wider audience.⁴⁷ The rejoinder to that argument is that if Matthew wrote for his own community but also had a wider audience in mind, that fact effectively concedes the argument that he intended his Gospel to have a general circulation.⁴⁸ To assert that Matthew only had a wider audience in mind seems unnecessarily rigid. Point 4 above suggests that the evangelists would prefer to communicate with those whom they could not physically reach. This assertion denies the fact that both oral and written material would assist the community with which any evangelist dwelt at a particular point. They would have access to the written material, whether or not the author was in their midst at any given time, but to hear the author speak, would provide that community with the opportunity to hear his message at first hand. Accordingly the response mentioned above of a twofold purpose seems better to reflect the fluid situation in which both Jews and Christians lived.

⁴² Bauckham 1998a: 12-13.

⁴³ Bauckham 1998a: 30, 32-34.

⁴⁴ Thompson 1998: 68.

⁴⁵ Bauckham 1998a: 29.

⁴⁶ Barton 1998: 193.

⁴⁷ Esler 1998: 242.

⁴⁸ Bauckham 1998b: 250.

It would seem, then, that while the Gospel was intended to be read by a mixed group, Origen's comment that it was composed for those converted from Judaism might not be too wide of the mark. The great denunciation of the Pharisees in Matt. 23 may well have been an attempt to persuade Pharisees to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah.⁴⁹ It is not suggested that Matthew's Gospel could not help Gentiles with no previous knowledge of Judaism to understand the Christian message but they would need help from their Christian teachers to understand the Jewish context and background into which Christianity fitted. There is also a tension that exists between such verses as Matt.18:17, where the church is taught to regard a recalcitrant member as a Gentile and a tax collector, and the great commission of 28:19 to make disciples of all nations, and that might reflect an attempt to appeal to both Jews and Gentiles. Ultimately Matthew's Gospel was intended to mediate between *old* and *new*.⁵⁰ So what was the purpose of the Gospel for this diverse audience? To understand that purpose, the structure of the narrative must first be examined.

6. Structure

Matthew can be described as 'systematic, a good organiser collecting into topical and thematic units material that was once scattered'.⁵¹ His organisational method, especially with the repetition five times of the statement that Jesus had finished his sayings (7:22,11:1,13:53,19:1 & 26:1) has raised the question whether the Gospel represents a Christian Pentateuch.⁵² The modern proponent of this view, Benjamin Bacon⁵³, concludes that Matthew's system 'is typically Hebraic. Unmistakably he is of Jewish origin and training with unbounded reverence for the law. Consequently he cannot conceive of any arrangement of "commandments to be observed" other than Mosaic'.⁵⁴ Matthew is 'a converted rabbi, a Christian legalist'.⁵⁵ He acknowledges that such a view of the structure of Matthew's Gospel is not a recent discovery.⁵⁶ He

⁴⁹ Runesson 2008:128.

⁵⁰ Schnelle 1998: 220

⁵¹ Brown 1993:47.

⁵² Brown 1993: 48.

⁵³ Brown 1993: 48 n 11.

⁵⁴ Bacon 1930: 81.

⁵⁵ Bacon 1930: 81.

⁵⁶ Bacon 1930: xv.

also proposes that Matthew's Gospel originally consisted of these five discourses and may have been the document identified by Papias.⁵⁷

Consequent upon the publication of Bacon's view there has been academic debate as to whether Matthew's structure was even more intricate. At the other end of the spectrum there are those who would agree with Grundy who states: 'We look in vain for similarities in the contents of Moses' five books and Jesus' five discourses'.⁵⁸ He adds that chapter 11 specifically falls outside Bacon's pattern and that the Gospel is 'structurally mixed'.⁵⁹ Undoubtedly the Gospel is designed to teach but to seek to impose upon it too rigid a structure could detract from that purpose.

Having considered the structure of Matthew's Gospel as a whole, it is now necessary to consider the specific structure of Matthew's Infancy Narrative. It is contained in the first two chapters of his Gospel. Two popular outlines can be identified the first of which is an introduction and five scenes created around the five Old Testament citations used by Matthew, namely:

Introduction: 1:1-17		The Genealogy
Scene One: 1:18-25	(Is 7:14)	First Dream of Joseph
Scene Two: 2:1-12	(Mic 5:1)	Herod, Magi, Bethlehem
Scene Three: 2:13-15	(Hos 11:1)	Second Dream of Joseph
Scene Four: 2:16-18	(Jer 31:15)	Herod, Children, Bethlehem
Scene Five: 2:19-23	(Is 4:3?)	Third Dream of Joseph ⁶⁰

A more popular fourfold version is:

Ch.1 1:1-17	Genealogy
1:18-25	The Conception of Jesus
Ch .2 2:1-12	The Coming of the Magi to Bethlehem
2:13-23	Flight of the Family to Egypt and Return to Nazareth. ⁶¹

⁵⁷ Bacon 1930: xv.

⁵⁸ Grundy 1982: 11.

⁵⁹ Grundy 1982: 11.

⁶⁰ Brown 1993: 51.

⁶¹ Brown 1993: 52.

Both these structures are adequate in that they both describe the different stages of Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus. However they do not describe the purpose of the coming of Jesus and that is why Stendahl's contribution to the debate is so important for the interpretation of the structure of Matthew's Infancy Narrative. His article '*Quis et Unde*' analyses the 'who' and the 'whence' of Jesus' origins in that narrative. The 'who' is illustrated by the divine name giving.⁶² The genealogy is not separate from the rest of the narrative since it points to what follows.⁶³ God orders the ingrafting of Jesus within the genealogy so that he becomes the Son of David.⁶⁴ The 'whence' is illustrated by the importance of geography. The climax of the narrative is that Jesus is a Nazarene, since Nazareth also becomes the point of departure of Jesus adult ministry as it also does in Lk. 4:16-30.⁶⁵

Brown adopts this analysis and adds his own pattern as follows:

Ch.1:1-17 Jesus' identity (the who or quis) as the son of David, son of Abraham;

Ch.1:18-25 The nature (the how or quomodo) of Jesus as the Son of God;

Ch. 2:1-12 Jesus' birth at Bethlehem (the where or ubi) confirming his identity and his mission to the Gentiles;

Ch. 2:13-23 Jesus' destiny (the whence or unde).⁶⁶

This fourfold pattern would appear to represent an excellent summary, introducing issues that would be addressed in the remainder of the Gospel, teaching Matthew's readers the things they ought to know and answering the questions that they might want to address. With that fact in mind Matthew's intended purpose can now be examined.

7. Matthew's Intended Purpose

Two main purposes can be identified in relation to Mathew's Gospel, the first of which has been identified in the previous paragraph, namely to teach. The Gospel has

⁶² Stendahl 1960: 73.

⁶³ Stendahl 1960:74.

⁶⁴ Stendahl 1960: 75.

⁶⁵ Stendahl 1960: 72.

⁶⁶ Brown 1993: 52-53.

a didactic character suggesting that Matthew was an experienced teacher.⁶⁷ However the structure may be viewed, the teaching is presented thematically.⁶⁸ It is primarily an instruction and exhortation to enlighten a Christian community in their faith.⁶⁹ For example, Matthew groups Jesus' teaching in chapters 5-7 within the context of the Sermon on the Mount. Chapter 13 places together a number of parables of the Kingdom, When Jesus enters Jerusalem, the issues that he raises with the Jewish authorities are discussed between 21:18 and 25:26 again in the context of parables. Therefore, the Gospel is not therefore essentially historical or biographical.⁷⁰

So far as chapters one and two are concerned, the question arises as to whether they fall outside this didactic purpose. The question to be answered is whether such a view is correct or whether it is unsustainable. Do these chapters introduce themes to be explored in those teachings and especially do they present a counterpoint to the passion and resurrection narratives? Those issues will be explored in detail in the next chapter.

The Gospel also has an apologetic character.⁷¹ For example, chapter 23 contains Jesus' denunciation of the Jewish authorities. Only Matthew, at 27:25, relates how the Jews said Jesus' blood was to be on them and their children. Chapter 28:19 contains the commission to take the Gospel to the whole world. All these references justify the fact that Jesus' message is for all people especially as it has been rejected by his own people. Therefore it defends that position against those who might argue that Jesus' message was for the Jews only. However to defend the authority of that purpose of the message, it was necessary to defend the authority of the messenger. Issues had arisen about the events surrounding Jesus' conception and his stay in Egypt and chapters one and two in part seek to answer those allegations. Again those issues will be addressed in detail in the relevant part of the next chapter.

⁶⁷ Davies and Allison 2000: 144; France 2007: 9.

⁶⁸ France 2007: 9.

⁶⁹ Brown 1977: 93; see also 27n8.

⁷⁰ Beare 1981: 13.

⁷¹ Davies and Allison 2000: 145.

8. Conclusions

Any conclusions reached on these preliminary issues will contain some degree of uncertainty but from the matters considered above the following conclusions can be made:

- While it is uncertain who produced the final text, there is no reason entirely to disassociate Matthew and the final product;
- There is a wide range of opinion on the date of composition with the weight of it favouring a later date. However the possibility of an earlier date of composition cannot be entirely excluded;
- It is also possible that the Gospel underwent revision or revisions before reaching the text that now exists;
- The intended audience was more associated with Judaism although it was relevant to Gentiles as well;
- The main purposes were to teach the truth about the life and ministry of Jesus and to rebut false accusations.

On the basis of these conclusions two possibilities exist, namely that there is a link between the final product read by its intended audience and the witness of a disciple of Jesus or that the name of Matthew was added at a later date to give added authority to the Gospel. A link with a disciple of Jesus would provide the Gospel with an added authority, since that disciple had received authority from Jesus and so through that continuity with Jesus would provide the message with that authority. Such authority through continuity would be attractive to both Jewish and Gentile converts. If however that message could demonstrate an authority through continuity not just back to Jesus but back to all the promises of the Old Testament, that type of authority through continuity, while not irrelevant to Gentiles, would be particularly attractive to sympathetic Jews. So the question is: did Matthew's Gospel provide evidence of that authority through continuity and in particular how far do chapters one and two contribute to that purpose? The answers to that question are sought in the next chapter.

Matthew's Infancy Narrative - An Agenda for His Gospel?

1. Introduction

The original author and those who may have subsequently edited Matthew's Gospel have left behind nothing apart from the text itself, from which it might be possible to judge what they were trying to convey. Consequently the first conclusion that might be drawn is that the intention was no more than to record the events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. If that view is correct, Matthew's Infancy Narrative simply records the actual events of his birth. The problem with that approach has already been noted in chapter one. Moreover it has already been asserted in chapter two that Matthew's Gospel had a didactic and apologetic purpose.

It is impossible to determine how much historical material is contained in the first two chapters of Matthew's Gospel. Consequently opinion divides between whether they relate 'actual historical facts of how Jesus was conceived and born...from the angle of Joseph'¹ or 'are variations on actual themes of myth and legend which recur widely in the Near and Middle East'.² Perhaps the most satisfactory conclusion is the middle road that describes them as 'vehicles of truths...not the stuff of history but history's addendum'.³

More importantly there is a consensus that Matthew's infancy narrative describes who Jesus was, where he was from, how he came into the world, why he came into the world and whence he came into the world.⁴ Furthermore this narrative is not an 'alien intrusion into the Gospel since many of the same thought patterns are shared by the Infancy Narrative and the Gospel proper'.⁵

In order to explore how Matthew's Infancy Narrative sets the agenda for the rest of his Gospel, an analysis will be conducted as to Matthew's use of Old Testament citations, the purpose of the genealogy contained in 1:1-17, the concept of Jesus as the

¹ Lenski 1943: 38.

² Beare 1981: 72.

³ Davies and Allison 2000: 152.

⁴ Brown 1993: 53-4; Davies and Allison 2004: xxii-xxiii.

⁵ Brown 1993: 48; See also France 2007: 10.

Son of Abraham and the Son of David, the new Moses, the virginal conception, the visit of the Magi and the Star of Bethlehem. This analysis will seek to identify themes within those mentioned areas that are pursued later in the Gospel but there will be a separate section within this chapter that considers how far the Infancy Narrative anticipates Matthew's Passion narrative. The issue of whether a midrashic element exists within the Infancy narrative will also be addressed. Finally relevant conclusions will be drawn.

2. Matthew's Use of Old Testament Citations

One of the obviously significant features of Matthew's Infancy Narrative is the presence of quotations from the Old Testament. They occur at 1:23; 2:6; 2:15; 2:18; and 2:23. Given that one of the asserted reasons for the production of the Gospel is its didactic purpose, the question to be asked is how these quotations contribute to that purpose.

The possible link between the Gospel and the apostle Matthew was considered in the previous chapter. It would certainly seem that: 'The first evangelist was a Jew whose mind was first of all steeped in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition'.⁶ It seems that he treasured the use of the Old Testament.⁷ It is a Matthean peculiarity to quote from the Old Testament so explicitly and frequently.⁸ However, the way in which Matthew quotes from the Old Testament raises issues over the source or sources from which he quotes, since for example his use of Mic.5:2 in 2:6 reflects neither the standard Hebrew or Greek text.⁹ The question, thus, arises whether these quotations were the product of his own reflection and study, or whether they reflect any kind of earlier tradition.¹⁰ Although the former proposition cannot be completely discounted, it would seem that, given the care with which he selected and used his material, the latter proposition is the more likely.¹¹ They appear to have been integrated to such a great degree, that they reflect the author's purpose,¹² and there is no reason to suppose

⁶ Davies and Allison 2000: 6; see also 96.

⁷ Davies and Allison 2000: 31.

⁸ Brown 1993: 97.

⁹ Brown 1993: 184.

¹⁰ Brown 1993: 101.

¹¹ Menken 2004: 283.

¹² Menken 2004: 279

that they have been revised.¹³ Accordingly it becomes a viable proposition that Matthew's Bible was a revised Septuagint and such revision would explain any peculiar traits in Matthew's use of the citations.¹⁴

While Matthew makes use of the Old Testament throughout his Gospel, the citations are concentrated in the first two chapters, which could suggest that, unlike the Passion narrative, Jesus' infancy remained relatively unexplored, in early Christian teaching, at the time of the Gospel's composition in terms of the Old Testament.¹⁵ The way in which these citations are introduced is also significant because of the way that they commence with a repetitive formula that what is stated in the citation was written or spoken by a prophet. This use of repetition suggests that Matthew had a special affinity with the Old Testament legal and wisdom traditions and also harmonises well with the supposition that Matthew was no stranger to Pharisaic or Rabbinic patterns of interpretation.¹⁶ Such a familiarity will become particularly relevant again in the section that compares Jesus to Moses.

There would appear to be two immediate reasons for the use of these citations. The first relates to fulfilment. The main purpose would appear to be to introduce the reader to a wide variety of aspects of God's revelation in the Old Testament which find their fulfilment in the coming of Jesus.¹⁷ Matthew's theological concern is to portray Jesus as the beginning of the fulfilment of the promises and hopes of scripture.¹⁸ It is an indication of a Christian effort to supply the story of Jesus with Old Testament background and support.¹⁹ Matthew is working through the history of the community and by introducing these quotations and asserting their fulfilment in his narrative he is preparing his readers for the new direction that they will need to take.²⁰ The citations can be interpreted to relate Jesus to the main themes in Israelite history, namely, the Davidic Messiah (1:23, 2:6 & 2:23)), which will be explored in the section on that topic, the exodus (2:15), which will be explored in the section on

¹³ Menken 2004: 131

¹⁴ Doble 2006: 306.

¹⁵ Brown 1993: 99.

¹⁶ Davies and Allison 2000: 88 n43.

¹⁷ Blomberg 2009: 148; France 2007: 10; Kümmel:1975: 112; Schnelle 1998: 232.

¹⁸ Hasiktscha 2008: 91.

¹⁹ Brown 1993: 97.

²⁰ Luz 2005: 14.

Moses, and the Babylonian exile (2:18), which will be explored in the sections that refer to the Matthean genealogy and also to the Son of David.²¹ Above all they fit the general theology of the oneness of God's plan which was already implicitly recognised by the appeal to the Old Testament in early Christian preaching.²²

The purpose of fulfilment leads into the second main purpose of Matthew's apologetic.²³ This consideration becomes particularly relevant in relation to Matt.2:23: 'He will be called a Nazorean.' This is the most difficult formula citation since it is not indisputably related to an identifiable Old Testament prophet.²⁴ The reputation that Nazareth enjoyed is well reflected in Jn. 1:46 where Nathaniel says: 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' The town also was of little account and because it had no traditional connection with Messianic events, the pressure on Jewish Christians to find a proof text for Jesus' residence in Nazareth must have been considerable.²⁵ Matthew may well have seen the applicability of certain Old Testament texts to particular incidents in Jesus' career.²⁶

If, however, this eternal plan of God is to be fulfilled, it requires the obedience of those to whom it is entrusted. The prophets had been obedient to the call of God and now that obedience was required of those involved in the life and ministry of Jesus. Joseph's response in 1:24 is a prime example of this obedience. A similar later example is found in the disciples' response to find the donkey and colt in 21:5-6. The suicide of Judas in 27:9-10 at the recognition of his disobedience provides a vivid contrast.²⁷ The citations can be seen as setting the scene for Jesus' later ministry,²⁸ so that the wanderings described in the Infancy Narrative become a prelude to his ministry, for example as described at 8:20 where Jesus says: 'The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'

²¹ Brown 1993: 104.

²² Brown 1993: 104.

²³ Brown 1993: 97.

²⁴ Brown 1993: 223.

²⁵ Davies and Allison 2000: 274.

²⁶ Brown 1993: 104.

²⁷ Brown 1993: 208.

²⁸ Schweizer 1975: 28.

Matthew continues to use Old Testament citations during his account of the actual ministry of Jesus, and when they are used they display the same purpose of fulfilment.²⁹ Thus, for example, when Jesus moves to Capernaum as described in 4:13-16, it is to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah. The use of these citations in the Infancy Narrative reflects the structure identifiable in the rest of the Gospel in which the ministry of Jesus is understood to fulfil what was foretold in the Old Testament. The Infancy Narrative is part of the whole plan and so the use of these citations underlines some of Matthew's 'most prominent and distinctive theological concerns'.³⁰

In a key verse Matthew writes: 'The chief priest and elders came to him as he was teaching and asked; "By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?"' (21:23) Undoubtedly this was a question that challenged the early Christian church and by finding authority in the Old Testament that Jesus' life and ministry was foreordained by God from the beginning, they could adopt a position of greater strength. That is why it is important that Matthew makes his argument clear from the start that what was foretold from old was fully and completely attained in the birth of Jesus. Furthermore to understand better this emphasis and how completely it was taken back into the Old Testament, attention must now be paid to the first seventeen verses of the Gospel.

3. The Genealogy of Jesus in Matthew

The opening words of the Gospel βίβλος γένεσεως have been variously translated as 'a book of the generation' in the King James Version, 'a book of the genealogy' in the Revised Standard Version, 'a table of descent' in the New English Bible, 'a genealogy' in the Jerusalem Bible and an 'account of the genealogy' in the New Revised Standard Version.

If these and similar translations are correct, then the implication is that the function of the first seventeen verses of the Gospel is solely to introduce a table of Jesus' ancestors. However it is also possible to interpret those words as a title for the whole

²⁹ See Brown 1993: 98, Table V.

³⁰ Stanton 1992: 346.

Gospel.³¹ Similar formulas exist in Gen. 2:4a; 5:1, and 6:9, of which 5:1 is the closest.³² Indeed it seems possible that Matthew's use of the word *γένεσις* was intended to evoke the first book of the Bible.³³ In Hebrew *γένεσις* was known as 'in the beginning' and Jn. 1:1 plays on this title.³⁴ Furthermore, a comparison can be drawn with Paul's description of 'a new creation' in 2 Cor. 5:17 and Gal. 6:15 and Jesus as the last Adam in Rom. 5:12-21 and 1 Cor. 15:42-50.³⁵ Davies and Allison argue that there is a formidable case for rendering 1:1 as a general title: 'Book of the New Genesis wrought by Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham' and while they concede that the first two words are connected with a genealogy, they argue that there is no reason to confine simply one meaning to those words.³⁶ Matthew is identifying the theme of fulfilment at the very start and in order to bring the history of God's people to its climax, the creative act of God will result in Jesus' birth.³⁷

It is clear that the genealogy is both artificial and incomplete. Matt. 1:17 notes the three times fourteen structure. There is academic discussion as to how this list precisely was created and, in any event, unless Jesus is included in the last section it only amounts to thirteen.³⁸ What is perhaps more important to note is where the breaks in the sections occur. In v17 Matthew breaks the first section at the time of King David and the second at the time of the exile. In v6 David is called 'the King' and the only other mention of a title is in v16 where Matthew describes Jesus as "who is called the Christ". It was at this point that the history of Israel was supposed to have attained one of its high points. Jesus is described as the 'Son of David' and the purpose of this title will be explored in §5 below. The second section breaks at verses 11 and 12 with 'the deportation to Babylon', the lowest point in Israel's history. The inference would seem to be that the Kingdom inaugurated with David and lost at the deportation is restored with the coming of Jesus, the Davidic Messiah.³⁹

³¹ France 2007: 10.

³² Davies and Allison 2000: 149; Luz 2005: 78.

³³ Davies and Allison 2000: 150.

³⁴ Brown 1993 :66 n7; 69; Davies and Allison 2000: 150.

³⁵ Davies and Allison 2000: 150.

³⁶ Davies and Allison 2000: 153-154; Luz 2005: 19 adopts this argument.

³⁷ France 2007: 28. See however Stanton 1992: 13 who 'sees no evidence' that Matthew had such an approach in mind and considers it 'over subtle'.

³⁸ Brown 1993: 69-70 proposes the existence of two reliable pre-Matthean lists while Davies and Allison 2000: 165-6 regard the pattern as more artificial.

³⁹ Davies and Allison 2000: 180.

One aspect of Matt.1: 1-17 that attracts special interest is the presence of four women, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. Three reasons are advanced for the presence of their names.⁴⁰ The first reason is that all four were sinners. If that proposition were correct, then the point would be that God is still able to achieve his purpose despite human sin and wickedness. Although this argument is superficially attractive, it does not acknowledge that both Jewish and early Christian tradition minimised their sinfulness. For example 2 Chron. 14-5 states that David is the father of Solomon but omits any reference to Bathsheba. In any event David's adultery with Bathsheba did not leave him beyond reproach. Secondly, the women were foreigners and so Matthew is already asserting the proposition that the church is for non-Jews. Thirdly, Matthew is trying to prefigure the account of Mary's pregnancy in the irregular situation of these four women's unions. Accordingly familiar women like Sarah, Rebecca and Leah are omitted and these four minor women are singled out to reveal 'something of the strange righteousness of God, which does not choose what is great in the eyes of men'.⁴¹ Brown prefers this last option but does not exclude the second as a subordinate motif.⁴² The unions of the four women are quite different from that of Mary and that Jewish and Christian tradition minimised their sinfulness makes both these options unlikely reasons for the inclusion of these women in the genealogy. Joseph and Mary were 'not great in the eyes of men' and there is a universalistic purpose to the Gospel and so these two purposes are the most likely reasons why Matthew included these women in his genealogy.

So what then can be the purpose of this genealogy? A genealogy might be described as 'the standard premium of propaganda, a way of demonstrating the true status or character of some individual or group.'⁴³ Matthew's genealogy is a 'theologically highly charged document providing comfort for the Jewish Christian community for which it was intended'.⁴⁴ Firstly it provides a link with Israel's past providing continuity with the Patriarchs and Kings.⁴⁵ Secondly it provides a bridge from the Old Testament, with Jesus fulfilling the hopes, prophecies and history of Israel.⁴⁶ It does

⁴⁰ Brown 1993: 71-4; Davies and Allison 2000: 170-2.

⁴¹ Schweizer 1975: 24-5.

⁴² Brown 1993: 74.

⁴³ Nineham 1976: 424.

⁴⁴ Nineham 1976: 429.

⁴⁵ Brown 1993: 596.

⁴⁶ Foulkes 2001: 3.

so by linking Jesus to creation itself through the Davidic line, showing how all people, not just Jews, were to be included. It prepared the way for his miraculous birth. It was all these features that were to give him the authority he later exercised as the Son of David which will be further considered in section 5.⁴⁷ Especially important for the Jewish members of Matthew's audience was the fact that Matthew describes Jesus as 'the Son of David' and linked Jesus' ancestry directly to Abraham. These features of Matthew's Infancy Narrative now fall to be considered.

4. Jesus as 'Son of Abraham'

Why should Matthew consider it important to describe Jesus as the 'Son of Abraham'? In order to find an answer to that question, it is first necessary to consider five verses from the Book of Genesis. The first is Gen.12:2 where God promises Abraham: 'I will make of you a great nation.' This is God's foundational covenant with Abraham and descent from him was the basis for membership in the people of God.⁴⁸ Thus the significance for Matthew is that Jesus himself is a true Israelite and the culmination of the line begun in Abraham.⁴⁹

However it is now necessary to refer to Gen. 15:7 where God says to Abraham: 'I am the Lord who bought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess'. In other words Abraham was a Gentile by birth and so this verse introduces the proposition of Matthew's interest in the salvation to the Gentiles.⁵⁰ The universal significance of Abraham to all nations is attested by three references to God's promises namely:

- Gen. 17:4-5: 'As for me this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations...Your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations';
- Gen. 18:18: 'Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him'; and

⁴⁷ Brown 1993 596.

⁴⁸ Davies and Allison 2000: 158.

⁴⁹ Davies and Allison 2000: 158.

⁵⁰ Davies and Allison 2000: 158.

- Gen. 22:17-18: ‘Your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves’.

The question of the ministry to the Gentiles was one that vexed the early church. In Acts 11:2-3 Peter is criticised for his visit to Cornelius but explains that he has so acted as a result of a vision from God. In Rom. 3:29 Paul asks; ‘Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also?’ and answers ‘Yes, of Gentiles also’. Clearly if, as is suggested in the previous chapter, Matthew was writing to a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles, this question would assume practical importance since Jews would need to know that it was acceptable to welcome Gentiles, and Gentiles would need to know that they would be welcomed. Abraham provides the continuity with the dawn of Jewish history but also the authority for a universal mission. It announces Matthew’s interest in the salvation to the Gentiles.⁵¹

Matthew uses the picture of Abraham to show Jewish critics of Christianity how they risk rejection by God. Firstly, at Matt. 3:9 John the Baptist rebukes the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for Baptism saying; ‘Do not presume to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our ancestor”, for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham’. This rejection is emphasised at Matt.21:43 where Jesus declares: ‘I tell you the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom’. Matthew’s point was that Jesus had the greater right to appeal to Abraham as his father and being Abraham’s true son was the saviour of Israel entrusted to further God’s mission to the Jews and all nations. Jesus’ appeal to Abraham is as founder of the mission that he now pursues.⁵²

Mention must also be made of how Matthew uses the motif of Abraham as a universal figure. He advocates a sustained defence of the full and open acceptance of Gentiles.⁵³ In Matt.8:11-12 Jesus states: ‘I tell you many will come from east and west and eat with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness’. The context of this verse is Jesus’ admiration of the faith of the centurion who said that Jesus need only say the word

⁵¹ Brown 1993: 67; Davies and Allison 2000: 158.

⁵² Hanitschka 2008 88.

⁵³ Stanton 1992: 379.

and his servant would be healed. For Matthew the faith of this Gentile was something to be marvelled and it demonstrated how it is possible for Gentiles to respond to Jesus. For that reason they should not be denied the message.

This universalist nature of Matthew's view of Jesus' message is perhaps best seen in the great commission of Matt. 28:19: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations'. As the Gospel starts by stating that Jesus is the Son of Abraham so it finishes with the command which, if observed, will mean that what was promised to Abraham is now fulfilled in Jesus.⁵⁴ That which appears in the beginning, is balanced by that which is said at the end, and all that falls in between is to be used to teach in the words of verse 20 'everything that I have commanded you'. For Matthew's readers the teaching of Jesus lies at the heart of the missionary proclamation.⁵⁵

It is worth noting two other aspects of the motif of Abraham. The righteousness of Abraham was associated with his obedience to God's command and so Paul states at Rom. 4:3: 'Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'.⁵⁶ Within the Infancy Narrative such obedience could be seen as reflected in the actions of Joseph in obeying the divine command to take Mary as his wife and later fleeing to Egypt. Furthermore there is also the fact that Abraham did find sanctuary in Egypt just as Joseph and his family were later to do.⁵⁷ However could not such obedience foretell Jesus' response to his own destiny? Phil. 2:8 describes how Jesus 'became obedient to the point of death - death even death on a cross' and it is only Matthew who at 26:42 includes the prayer: 'If this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done'. Just as the first Abraham obeyed God and received the promise that he would become the father of nations, so Jesus, the second Abraham, also obeyed God and fulfils that promise by his death and resurrection.

⁵⁴ Davies and Allison 2004: 3.

⁵⁵ Stanton 1989: 60.

⁵⁶ Brown 1993: 131.

⁵⁷ Brown 1993: 53 n31.

5. Jesus as the Son of David

Matthew describes Jesus as the Son of David (1:1).. This raises an immediate problem. The virginal conception of Jesus will be fully considered below. However if Joseph is not Jesus' physical father and there is no evidence that Mary herself is descended from David, the question then has to be answered as to how Matthew can ascribe Davidic descent to Jesus through Joseph. One possible answer is that since Joseph names him and acknowledges him as his son, he can therefore be recognised as having a Davidic descent.⁵⁸ This view has been challenged on the basis that in relation to adoption 'Jewish law both in antiquity and the modern era has no such legal institution'⁵⁹ and 'the very idea of adoption is foreign to Jewish law.'⁶⁰ This is a surprising statement so far as the modern era is concerned, since in Israel adoption is governed by the Adoption Act 1981, supervised by the Family Court but jurisdiction can be exercised in the religious Court. In antiquity, adoption was well known in the Roman world, for example the adoption of the first Emperor, Augustus, by the family of Julius Caesar. Paul uses the metaphor of adoption in his letters, for example at Rom. 8:15 & 23 and 9:4 and Gal. 4:5. However, specific Jewish examples of adoption in the Bible are rare. The most famous example is that of Moses in Ex. 2:10 but his adoption was by an Egyptian so that is not the best example, since it involved a move outside the Hebrew community. The only other biblical instance is Esther's adoption by Mordecai, (Esther 2:7), but since that is wholly within the Jewish community, it provides a good example. It is not clear whether that arrangement was formal or informal, but at least it demonstrates that Joseph's actions in accepting responsibility for the infant Jesus is not without precedent. Accordingly in this way Jesus could have become Joseph's adopted son.

Matthew's description of Jesus as the Son of David is the first christological title that he uses.⁶¹ He places it alongside the name of Son of Abraham. This placement is quite deliberate. Son of Abraham locates David and his successors within the fuller history of Israel but it is possible that, in including this title, Matthew also had in mind the

⁵⁸ Brown 1993: 135, 137, 139; Schaberg 1995: 61.

⁵⁹ Levin 2006: 423.

⁶⁰ Levin 2006: 431.

⁶¹ Stanton 1992: 181.

promises mentioned above from Gen. 17:4-5, 18:18 and 22:17-18.⁶² However it also seems that Matthew has a particular interest in the title ‘Son of David’ since it is used ten times in Matthew, whereas Mark and Luke use it only four times between them and John does not use it at all.⁶³ So what was his purpose in so doing? The answer is that Matthew is seeking to introduce Messianic imagery.⁶⁴ Matthew’s argument is that just as David was divinely appointed and anointed as a king, so Jesus becomes the divinely chosen and prepared Messiah, the Son of David and thus King.⁶⁵

The history of Messianism is complex but in summary, in pre-exilic Israelite history, when there was an anointed King of the house of David reigning in Jerusalem that monarch was the hope for deliverance from enemies or catastrophe. If under his rule those hopes failed, they moved to his successor. With the exile and the end of the monarchy those hopes moved to an anointed king in the indefinite future.

Consequently the hope eventually arose in the Messiah, the supreme anointed one who would finally deliver Israel.⁶⁶ This God-given commission is underlined by the fact that ‘Jesus’ is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew, Joshua, which is related to the words ‘to save’ and ‘salvation’ which Matt.1:21 explains.⁶⁷ Also 1:23 states: ‘they shall name him Emmanuel which means “God is with us”’ thus describing who Jesus is.⁶⁸ However since according to 1:23 to save from sins is the Messiah’s first task it means that the Kingdom that Jesus proclaims has nothing to do with the restoration of national sovereignty nor political good fortune.⁶⁹

Messianism is also relevant to the place of Jesus’ birth. Bethlehem was where David was raised as King, so it became called the city of David and thus the place where the Messiah was to be born.⁷⁰ However a real question mark lay over whether this view

⁶² France 2007: 35. See also Davies and Allison 2000: 159 and the equation ‘seed’ of Abraham = ‘seed’ of David = the Messiah.

⁶³ Brown 1993: 134. France 2007: 35. The list in Davies and Allison 2000: 156-7 omits Matt: 27:42.

⁶⁴ France 2007: 35.

⁶⁵ Saldarini 1994: 170.

⁶⁶ Brown 1993: 67 n9.

⁶⁷ Davies and Allison 2000: 209. Names in the Bible sometimes denote a future task or calling such as Abraham in Gen 17:5 or Peter in Matt 16: 17-18.

⁶⁸ Davies and Allison 2000: 213.

⁶⁹ Davies and Allison 2000: 174.

⁷⁰ Davies and Allison 2000: 226.

represents actual fact or is in effect a ‘geographic apologetic’.⁷¹ If, indeed, Matthew’s purpose in introducing the title of Son of David is theological and apologetic rather than a simple description of an actual birthplace, it has to be asked how Matthew develops those purposes in his Gospel so that the introduction of that title fulfils what he is seeking to achieve.

While Matthew saw the importance of portraying Jesus as the Son of David, it would appear that it had its roots in the earliest teaching of the church, for example in Rom 1:3-4, and 2 Tim. 2:8. According to Luke’s account of Peter’s speech on the first day of Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter states at v 30 that ‘since he (David) was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants upon his throne. Foreseeing this David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah.’ In other words Peter is asserting that Jesus of Nazareth, whom he has previously identified at v 22 as the subject of this prophecy, is the descendant of David and also the Messiah. Later Peter at 2:34-35 cites Ps. 110 v 1 as David’s words and then adds at 2:36: ‘Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah this Jesus whom you crucified’. Then when asked by the people what they should do, Peter replies at 2:37: ‘Repent and be baptised, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven’. Matthew has expanded on this juxtaposition between the saving work of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins as the Messiah, as the Son of David and the introduction to Jesus’ adult ministry contained in his baptism in chapter 3. In his Infancy Narrative, Matthew has stated why Jesus has come; from chapter 3 onwards he sets out how God as Jesus undertakes that task.

John the Baptist introduces the message ‘Repent for the kingdom of God is has come near’ and Jesus adopts this message at Matt.4:7. It later appears in the Sermon on the Mount at Matt.5:3, 10, 19, 20 and 7:21 where Jesus teaches the qualities that he as king would expect from those who seek to enter his kingdom and the authority to be attached to that teaching. Later between Matt.13:1-52 and also in chapter 25, there are a number of parables where again Jesus teaches about the nature of the Messianic kingdom and those who can enter it. Finally, there is the parable of the sheep and the

⁷¹ France 2007: 61; Davies and Allison 2000: 220. Brown 1993: 166 detects a ‘theological intent’; Lachs 1987: 8 asserts that Jesus was ‘most likely’ born in Nazareth.

goats where the King is described as acting like a shepherd in 25:32, recalling Old Testament promises like Ezek. 37:24 where it is stated: ‘My servant David shall be king over them, they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes’. Since Matthew seeks to portray Jesus as the Davidic Messiah coming to install God’s kingdom through the people’s repentance for their sins, he has laid the foundation of this teaching in his Infancy Narrative.

Brown notes that Jesus never claims the title Son of David for himself and because of passages such as Ps. 110:1 suggests that this title is inadequate as compared with the title of Son of God.⁷² Perhaps what is most significant is that Matthew places the title in the mouths of those seeking healing. The exceptions to this rule are Matt.22:42 where it is used as a response to Jesus’ question to the Pharisees and perhaps Matt.21:9 where the crowds shout it upon Jesus’ into Jerusalem although many may have seen his healings. With one exception, Son of David in the Old Testament refers to Solomon. Solomon was renowned as a mighty healer, exorcist and magician and specifically appears in Matthew’s genealogy. Consequently Matthew may have seen Jesus as the Son of David to be a healer like Solomon.⁷³

So Matthew introduces Jesus as the Son of David in his Infancy Narrative to enable his readers to understand the authority that he would bring as king and how it is firmly rooted in God’s promises in the Old Testament. However, having introduced Jesus as the Son of Abraham and the Son of David, it is now necessary to consider another great Old Testament figure, Moses, to see how, if at all, Jesus might be seen as the new Moses.

6. Jesus – the New Moses?

While Matthew introduces Jesus as the ‘Son of David’ and ‘Son of Abraham’, nowhere does he call him ‘Son of Moses’. However, commentators have seen a clear Moses typology reflected in Matthew’s Infancy Narrative and Dale Allison has devoted an entire book to Jesus as the New Moses. In that book Allison asserts that:

⁷² Brown 1993: 134-135.

⁷³ Blomberg 2009: 146-147; Brown 1993: 184 n17; Davies and Allison 2000: 157; Jones 1994: 2.

the existence of a Moses typology in Matthew 1-2 has been affirmed by many modern commentators and rightly so. Certain events in the Gospel strikingly represent certain traditions about Moses. Language from Exodus is plainly borrowed (as in 2:19 cf. Exodus 4:19-20) and a biblical text having to do with the deliverance from Egypt is expressly quoted. The inference appears inevitable.⁷⁴

To understand if such an inference is indeed inevitable, it is necessary to consider both biblical and extra-biblical material.

The biblical material in Matt. 2:13-22 in which the flight to Egypt and subsequent return is described, contains events that appear to have a strong echo with the birth and early life of Moses. So Matthew records at 2:13: ‘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”’. This verse is a parallel to Ex. 2:15 where it is recorded that Pharaoh ‘sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh.’ The slaughter of the Innocents in 2:16 parallels the slaughter of the male children in Ex. 1:22. Matthew also writes at 2:19-20: ‘When Herod died behold an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said; “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”’. This verse reflects Ex. 4:19 where it is recorded: ‘The Lord said to Moses in Midian; “Go back to Egypt for all those who were seeking your life are dead”’. Accordingly both Moses and Jesus and his parents return.⁷⁵

There are undoubtedly striking parallels, especially in the reference to ‘those seeking – have died’ as well as the parallel killing of male infants.⁷⁶ However it has to be conceded that the parallels are not exact. Moses escaped from Egypt and not to it and later returns there, and while his life is under threat as an infant, the events leading to his escape occur in his adult life. Allison argues that the parallel that is relevant is the fact of exile, until those who have threatened the lives of Moses and Jesus died and that both returned upon the command of God.⁷⁷ However, in order to determine how

⁷⁴ Allison 1993: 140; Brown 1993: 600 similarly regards the account of Moses as a major influence on Matthew’s account.

⁷⁵ Allison 1993: 142-3; Brown 1993: 113.

⁷⁶ Allison 1993: 143.

⁷⁷ Allison 1993: 143-4.

far it is right to draw a parallel between Moses and Jesus it is necessary to consider the extra-biblical material.

The extra-biblical material would appear to emphasise the parallel that can be drawn between the birth of Moses and the birth of Jesus.⁷⁸ The sources of the traditions surrounding Moses' birth cover the period from the first century AD to the Middle Ages.⁷⁹ Accordingly only those that can be dated to the first century AD are considered since they are the ones with which Matthew and his readers would possibly have been familiar. The first source comes from Josephus' *Antiquities* where Amran, Moses' father, is aware of Pharaoh's edict that all the Hebrew children shall be cast into the Nile and so he prays to God for deliverance. At 2:9:3 Josephus continues: 'And God had compassion on him and moved by his supplication appeared to him in his sleep and exhorted him not to despair of the future'. He reminds Amran of how he has delivered Israel until now and then states: 'The child whose birth has filled the Egyptians with such dread that they have condemned to destruction all the offspring of the Israelites...shall deliver the Hebrew race from their bondage in Egypt and be remembered so long as the world shall endure and not by Hebrews alone but even by alien nations'.

It is also relevant to mention Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 9.10,⁸⁰ which also attributes a dream to Moses' sister Miriam, called Maria in the text. She is recorded as telling her parents: 'I saw this night and behold a man in a linen garment stood and said to me; "Go and tell thy parents behold that which is born of you shall be cast into the water and by him water shall be dried up and by him will I do signs and I will save my people and he shall have the captaincy thereof always"'

Having noted these two passages it would seem possible to draw the following parallels between them and what is set out in Matthew's Infancy Narrative, namely:

- The use of a dream to convey a divine message. The first passage provides a more exact parallel with Joseph's dream in Matt. 1:20-23 because in both cases the

⁷⁸ Brown 1993: 114; Davies and Allison 2000: 192.

⁷⁹ Brown 1993: 114.

⁸⁰ Davies and Allison 2000: 192.

message is given in a dream to the father of the child. In the second passage the message is given in a dream to a woman called Maria, but this does not provide a parallel to Luke's account since in that account the message is given to the child's mother while she is awake.

- In the first passage Amran is reminded of the fear of the Egyptians as they anticipate the birth of his child echoing the fear of which Matthew writes in 2:3.
- The first passage records that the purpose of Moses is to deliver the Hebrew nation from their distress; in Matt. 1:21 the angel tells Joseph to call his son Jesus since he will save his people from their sins. There is thus a clear similarity in the mission of both.
- Amran is told that Moses will be famous while the world lasts, including with foreigners. This provides an echo of Matt. 28:19-20 to make disciples of all nations which theme was considered in the previous section about Jesus as the Son of Abraham. The Moses to whom Jews looked had a place in the affairs of the whole world and Jesus was to follow in that mould.⁸¹

A further passage in Josephus' *Antiquities* 2:9:2 is to be noted. There Josephus writes: 'One of these sacred scribes, persons with considerable skill in accurately predicting the future announced to the king that there would be born to the Israelites at that time one who would abase the sovereignty of the Egyptians and exult the Israelites were he reared to manhood'. This is a more specific account of the killing of the Hebrew children than is contained in Ex. 1:9-10. It provides a parallel with Herod's fear upon the arrival of the Magi who could also be described as possessing 'considerable skill in accurately predicting the future', and also his enquiry of his own chief priests and scribes, and the consequent slaughter of the innocents.⁸²

So having looked at this material, is the inference of a Moses typology inevitable? There are certainly obvious parallels as set out above. There are also certain objections that can be made which demonstrate that these parallels are not always precise and sometimes inconsistent. Furthermore parallels between these two stories are not necessarily unique to them, so that for example God reveals to the patriarch

⁸¹ Allison 1993: 142-145; Davies and Allison 2000: 192-193.

⁸² Allison 1993: 145-146; Davies and Allison 2000: 193. Some of the same points are also identified by France 2007: 63

Joseph his future in a dream as described in Gen. 37:5-11 and Solomon receives the gift of wisdom from God as described in 1 Ki. 3:5. However, given the cumulative nature of the parallels, the result would seem to be that, even if the conclusion about a Moses typology is not inevitable, it is very strong. However since this typology is not the only one that Matthew is intending to portray, not all these parallels are going to be exact. More importantly Matthew is not simply looking back to the past; he is seeking to tell a new story that has its roots in the past but is going to be unfolded in that is which to follow, showing that the hand of God must be at work with Jesus.⁸³

So why does Matthew develop the concept of Jesus as the new Moses? There seem to have been three purposes. Firstly, in early Christian writing there was a marked contrast between the Old Testament Law as represented by the law of Moses and the new state of affairs that now existed following the death and resurrection of Jesus. For example there is the statement at Jn. 1:17: 'The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ'. The author of Heb. 10:1 describes the law as 'a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities' and adds at v 9 that Christ abolished the law in order to establish the will of God. This provides a marked contrast with Matt. 5:17, where Jesus teaches that: 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil'. However at v 20 Matthew adds that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees. Matthew also records at 13:52 that Jesus teaches: 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the Kingdom of Heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old'. From such passages it would seem that for Matthew the Old Testament law is fully valid but it needs to be taken beyond outward display and taken to heart. Thus at Matt. 15: 8 Jesus quotes Isaiah by saying that 'this people honours me with their lips but their hearts are far from me'. By portraying Jesus as the new Moses Matthew is enabling Jesus to be the authority to reinterpret the law rather than abolishing it. Such continuity would reassure Jewish converts in particular, since it represents the development of the law rather than the introduction of a new teaching.

⁸³ Luz 1995: 25.

The second purpose of the Moses typology was to provide authority for the miracles of Jesus. Allison writes: ‘The common abutment in early Christian literature of the wonders of Jesus and Moses can be no surprise, for the lawgiver was remembered as an especially great miracle worker’.⁸⁴ He continues by noting the parallels between miracles attributed to Moses and those attributed to Jesus, such as the ten plagues in Ex. 7-17 and the ten miracles in Matt. 8-9; the healing of Miriam’s leprosy in Num. 12:10-16 and Jesus healing the leper, including the command at 8:14 that the cleansed leper should show himself to the priest as Moses commanded; and Moses parting the Red Sea with Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee.⁸⁵ Again by applying the Moses typology to Jesus’ healing activity, Matthew gives Jesus an authority and a continuity that would appeal to Jewish converts.

The third purpose arises out of this activity, namely an apologetic one. Opponents of Christianity sought to discredit Jesus’ origins. One such attack is described by Origen at *Contra Celsum* 1:28 as follows: ‘Because he (sic Jesus) 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.’ If such an allegation were true, it would offer a simple explanation for his miracles.⁸⁶ By asserting that his connection with Egypt occurred in childhood only, it would provide a complete answer to that accusation. Another serious accusation, however, was that of illegitimacy and that leads into a consideration of perhaps the most difficult aspect of the Infancy Narrative, namely Jesus’ virginal conception.

7. The Virginal Conception of Jesus

The virginal conception of Jesus is possibly the most difficult part of the narrative to untangle. On the one hand if it is true, it means that it is necessary to accept that in this one instance the laws of nature were suspended. Furthermore there is no biblical knowledge of such an event outside the Infancy Narratives. Mark’s Gospel starts at Jesus’ baptism and while John’s prologue tells the reader who Jesus is, he only states

⁸⁴ Allison 1993: 207-208.

⁸⁵ Allison 1993: 208-209. See also Ecclus. 45:3: ‘By his words he performed swift miracles’

⁸⁶ Brown 1993: 536..

at 1:14 that ‘the Word became flesh’. There are similar hints in the epistles such as Rom. 1:3 where Jesus is described as ‘descended from David according to the flesh’ or Heb. 1:5 where the writer states: ‘For to which angel did God ever say; “You are my son, today I have begotten you”’. Perhaps the closest verse in the Epistles to the Infancy Narratives is Gal. 4:4 where it is written that: ‘God sent his son, born of a woman’ but even this verse only identifies how Jesus was born like any other human. On the other hand however, despite the other significant differences between the accounts of Matthew and Luke, the principle of the virginal conception of Jesus is one of the matters on which they are both agreed. So is it possible to identify whence the belief emerged and why Matthew describes it in the way he chooses to do so?

The starting point in much academic discussion is the view that the idea is non-Jewish. Bultmann asserts that Matt. 1:18-25 takes over ideas from a Hellenistic environment.⁸⁷ Lachs maintains that this account was intended for the Graeco-Roman world familiar with virgin birth stories and tales of divine impregnation of mortal women.⁸⁸ Beare states that the virgin birth of the Messiah is not found in Judaism and indeed there is no trace of the notion of a virgin birth in the stories of the miraculous births following upon a divine promise in any of the Old Testament stories.⁸⁹ However he then rightly points out that the Greek stories, such as those that relate to Zeus, are not of virgin births but involve physical intercourse and sometimes rape.⁹⁰ Moreover, Gen. 6:1-4 would suggest that sexual interaction between ‘the sons of God’ and human beings would be the pinnacle of sacrilege.⁹¹ Since Matthew wishes to teach that Jesus’ authority is promised in the Old Testament, what help can the Old Testament give to find some direction to his purpose?

Any discussion of the Old Testament influence on the virginal conception in Matthew must start at 1:23: ‘Look the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name

⁸⁷ Bultmann 1972: 304.

⁸⁸ Lachs 1987: 5-6.

⁸⁹ Beare 1981: 70.

⁹⁰ Beare 1981: 70.

⁹¹ Luz 1995: 30. Davies and Allison 2000: 21 also suggest that the Virgin Birth is different from pagan parallels. Further Brown 1993: 127 points out that the ‘Holy Spirit’ is feminine in Hebrew and neuter in Greek making it even less likely that in Christian thought the Spirit assumed the male role in the birth of Jesus

him Emmanuel'. This at first sight seems a direct use of Is. 7:14. However this has given rise to some of the most famous debates in the history of exegesis.⁹² While the Septuagint uses the word *παρθένο*s which translates as 'virgin', the Masoretic text uses the word *alma* which translates as 'young girl'.⁹³ If that is right, the prophecy concerns a young girl of marriageable age and so a virgin, whose identity may already be known since in the Hebrew the definite article is used.⁹⁴ Furthermore, Old Testament prophets were primarily concerned with the challenges of their own time rather than the distant future⁹⁵ and Isaiah 7:14 seems to be directly concerned with the Syro-Ephraimite war of 734 BC.⁹⁶ The child to be born was not the Messiah⁹⁷ and so Isaiah's prophecy does not of itself explain the Christian story of Jesus' origin.⁹⁸

Before considering why Matthew chose this particular verse for his narrative, the phrase in 1:20, 'for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit', ought to be considered. It has already been suggested that Matt. 1:1 could properly read 'Book of the new genesis wrought in Jesus Christ' and so it could be suggested, if not proved, that Matthew had in mind a parallel between the creative Spirit in Gen. 1:1 and the Spirit's role as expressed in Matt. 1:18-20.⁹⁹ Other Old Testament references showing how the Spirit gives life are Ps. 104:30 which reads: 'When you send forth your Spirit, they are created', and the story of the dry bones in Ez. 37:1:14.¹⁰⁰ The Spirit also has an eschatological role in Is. 11:2: 'The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him' (the shoot from the stump of Jesse); 42:1: 'I have put my Spirit upon him' (the Lord's chosen one) and 61:1: 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me.'¹⁰¹

If the virginal conception can find no precise parallel in the Old Testament there are nevertheless Old Testament parallels where miraculous births occur of those vital to the history of Israel. In Gen. 18:13-14 it states: 'The Lord said to Abraham; "Why did

⁹² Brown 1993: 145.

⁹³ Brown 1993: 145.

⁹⁴ Brown 1993: 146-7.

⁹⁵ Brown 1993: 146.

⁹⁶ Brown 1993: 147.

⁹⁷ Brown 1993: 147; Davies and Allison 2000: 213.

⁹⁸ Davies and Allison 2000: 214. See also Beare 1981: 71-2.

⁹⁹ Davies and Allison 2000: 198.

¹⁰⁰ France 2007: 50-51.

¹⁰¹ France 2007: 51.

Sarah laugh and say shall I indeed bear a child now that I am old?” Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you in due season and Sarah shall have a son.’ At Gen. 21:1 it states: “The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised.’ Of course this is not a virginal conception but it illustrates well how God could suspend the laws of nature to achieve his purpose. The conception of Samuel described in 1 Sam. 1, while clearly from v19 not virginal, was a similarly miraculous event.¹⁰² The point here is that the Old Testament demonstrates that God can intervene in the creation of an important life and such intervention sits far more comfortably with the virginal conception of Jesus than the more lurid Hellenistic accounts of the gods having intercourse with humans.

Virginal conceptions and births are well known outside the Bible. It has been suggested that Moses’ conception was virginal¹⁰³ though how that is intended to equate with other stories surrounding his birth is not clear.¹⁰⁴ There are parallels with world religions, Graeco-Roman mythology, Egyptian and classical history, and among famous philosophers and religious leaders.¹⁰⁵ Such parallels could have influenced first century Christians.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps these parallels suggest that modern scholars find difficulties with the idea of a virginal conception in a way that an ancient mind would not.¹⁰⁷

However contra Schweizer¹⁰⁸ the virgin birth is not peripheral to Matthew’s purpose. Historical considerations limit a final verdict on what actually happened so that if the traditional belief in the virginal conception is to be maintained it can only be on the basis of strictly theological considerations.¹⁰⁹ The material used by Matthew has been created to teach that having established the Davidic ancestry of Jesus he is now establishing Jesus’ divine sonship.¹¹⁰ Matthew represents an important step in the development of christological understanding from Jesus being God’s son not at

¹⁰² Other instances of similar miraculous births are to Rebecca in Gen. 25: 21 and Leah in Gen. 29:31-32: Schweizer 1975: 33-34.

¹⁰³ Davies and Allison 2004: 17.

¹⁰⁴ Davies and Allison 2000: 216 rightly note that Moses had two elder siblings!

¹⁰⁵ Brown 1993: 527.

¹⁰⁶ Brown 1993: 523.

¹⁰⁷ Schweizer 1975: 34.

¹⁰⁸ Schweizer 1975: 34.

¹⁰⁹ Davies and Allison 2000: 216.

¹¹⁰ Brown 1993: 155; Davies and Allison 2000: 219-20.

resurrection nor baptism but conception, and it was from here that there was to be further development to the final formulation of Christ's pre-existence.¹¹¹ Subordinate to this purpose might also be an anti docetic aim, although such a purpose cannot be detected in the rest of Matthew's Gospel. The ultimate teaching purpose is to show that Jesus is fully divine and fully human, not half of each, and so by saying that he is Emmanuel, God's solidarity with humanity is demonstrated.¹¹²

No consideration of Matthew's purpose in 1:18-25 is complete without noting recent discussion whether what might be called the 'traditional reading'¹¹³ is intended to convey that Jesus was conceived without the intervention of a human father. Does the phrase in Matt 1:20, 'child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit', exclude the possibility that Jesus had a biological father? It is argued that 1:18 and 20 can mean that the Holy Spirit empowers Jesus' birth in the same way as all births are empowered.¹¹⁴ Divine begetting does not exclude human begetting.¹¹⁵ Old Testament examples of barren¹¹⁶ women becoming pregnant provide a strong example of this idea.¹¹⁷ It is further argued that by 'reading the silence'¹¹⁸ Matthew hands down the tradition that Jesus was illegitimate.¹¹⁹ If that argument is right, it raises the question as to whether Joseph or another was Jesus' biological father and whether that conception was through seduction, adultery or rape.¹²⁰

The problem with this analysis is that the Gospel descriptions of Jesus' adult life do not reflect such a situation. Such a child would be classed as a *mamzer* and regarded as 'the excrement of society'.¹²¹ The adoption by a husband of such a child into his family would have been kind and humane but also rare and unexpected.¹²² In

¹¹¹ Brown 1993: 141

¹¹² Blomberg 2009: 215

¹¹³ The terms 'traditional reading' and 'revised reading' reflect those defined by Lincoln 2012: 212.

¹¹⁴ Schaberg 1995: 67.

¹¹⁵ Schaberg 1995:39.

¹¹⁶ The term 'barren' throughout this dissertation simply reflects Biblical usage which assumed that it was the woman who was infertile: Seim 1994: 199.

¹¹⁷ Lincoln 2012: 224-225.

¹¹⁸ Schaberg 1995: 75.

¹¹⁹ Schaberg 1995: 74.

¹²⁰ Schaberg 1995: 19. Schaberg 1995: 44 seems to accept Matthew's account that Joseph had not had sexual relations with Mary prior to receiving news of Mary's pregnancy and so excludes the possibility that conception might have occurred as a result of a consensual relationship between Mary and Joseph.

¹²¹ Schaberg 1995: 56-57; McGrath 2007: 84.

¹²² Schaberg 1995: 58.

particular, *mamzarim* were not allowed to study the Torah.¹²³ However all three Synoptic Gospels describe how Jesus had access to the synagogue pulpit but his disciples did not.¹²⁴ Jesus seems to have come from a respected background¹²⁵ and that is the reason why his behaviour towards the disadvantaged of society attracted comment.¹²⁶ There is discussion over the use of the phrase ‘Son of Mary’ in Mk. 6:3 and Matthew’s rephrasing in Matt. 13:55 as to whether that reflects Jesus’ illegitimacy but it is difficult to see how those words on their own support such a view.¹²⁷ The other relevant verse is Jn. 8:41 which may more plausibly suggest illegitimacy¹²⁸ but it is significant that it is Jesus who initiates this debate which he is unlikely to do were he vulnerable to the accusation that he was illegitimate.¹²⁹

The charge of Jesus’ illegitimacy only really emerges in the second century AD.¹³⁰ It would seem that the ‘revised reading’ should be regarded as a ‘minority report’.¹³¹ Matthew’s account of the virginal conception of Jesus appears to be more than a response to later accusations but the ‘revised reading’ raises serious issues that may yet command further study in the light of further material and interpretation.

One final point needs to be made. The role of the Spirit in the Infancy Narrative is a crucial one and this explains why for Matthew, the Spirit’s relationship to Jesus is important to Matthew’s Christology. For example Matthew adds a gloss at Matt. 12:32 about speaking against the Holy Spirit adding to the account of that saying that appears in all the Synoptic Gospels.¹³²

So that is how Matthew views Jesus’ conception. The birth itself is simply mentioned in a phrase that opens chapter 2. He quickly moves on to the events of the Epiphany, the Magi and the Star and these two elements of Matthew’s narrative now require consideration.

¹²³ McGrath 2007: 85.

¹²⁴ McGrath 2007: 86.

¹²⁵ McGrath 2007: 100.

¹²⁶ McGrath 2007: 94-95.

¹²⁷ Brown 1993: 541; McGrath 2007: 91.

¹²⁸ Brown 1993: 541

¹²⁹ McGrath 2007: 91

¹³⁰ Brown 1993: 542; McGrath 2007: 91-94.

¹³¹ Lincoln 2012: 229.

¹³² Stanton 1992:180

8. The Visit of the Magi

Matthew has now introduced his readers to the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus. Now in twelve verses he introduces the mysterious group of Magi of whom he tells his readers so little and consequently Christian fancy has proceeded to fill in the gaps.¹³³ The debate rages as to whether this account represents authentic history, pure legend or a combination of the two.¹³⁴ Nevertheless those who see the events as historical face ‘nigh insuperable difficulties’¹³⁵ because of the fact that the account cannot be reconciled with that of Luke and also the question of whether there was an actual Star of Bethlehem. The issue of the Star of Bethlehem will be addressed in the next section and so now the question to be asked is what is known about the Magi and given Matthew’s teaching agenda, what message is he trying to convey?

So who were the Magi? The term ‘Magi’ refers to those engaged in occult arts and covers a wide range of astronomers, fortune-tellers, priestly augurers and magicians of varying plausibility.¹³⁶ For that reason English transliterates ‘Magi’ from the Greek μάγοι rather than use terms such as kings or wise men which are inadequate or inaccurate. However these Magi obviously had an interest in astrology since they had observed a star and had attached to it a significant event.¹³⁷ The Magi were Gentiles from the east¹³⁸ who because they were not Jewish still needed to seek information on where the Messiah was to be born.¹³⁹ Moreover in Jewish tradition the arts they practised were normally seen as inferior to and contrary to the will of God as, for example, in Gen. 41:8 where the magicians and wise men of Egypt could not interpret Pharaoh’s dream, or the battle between Moses and Aaron and the magicians of Egypt

¹³³ For a full discussion about this process see Brown 1993: 197-200.

¹³⁴ See Willoughby 2000:14; ‘The main outline of the story of the Magi is in many respects noteworthy for its historical probability. Only the star is legendary’. See also Bultmann 1972: 304: ‘The story of the Magi and the slaughter of the Innocents are probably of Hellenistic origin.’ Cf Brown 1993: 188 ‘I refuse to dismiss such an explanation (factual accuracy) simply on the grounds that the events described are supernatural.’ Later at 613 however he describes the claims for historicity as ‘exaggerated’.

¹³⁵ Brown 1993: 188.

¹³⁶ Brown 1993: 167.

¹³⁷ Brown 1993: 167.

¹³⁸ Brown 1993: 168; France 2007: 66.

¹³⁹ Davies and Allison 2000: 230 & 239.

described in Ex. 7:8-12.¹⁴⁰ There are similar New Testament parallels in Acts 8:9-13 concerning Simon and in Acts 13:6-12 concerning Elymas.¹⁴¹ The scorn for such arts is best described in Is. 8:19-20 where it is written: ‘And when they say to you; “Consult the ghosts and familiar spirits that chirp and mutter” ...surely those who speak like this will have no dawn?’

The idea of the Magi coming from the east to pay homage to a king and bring gifts would not have surprised Matthew’s readers.¹⁴² King Herod himself received a visit in 10-9 BC and Queen Helen of Adiabene visited Jerusalem in AD 44 bringing gifts to relieve the ongoing famine.¹⁴³ The one visit that attracts the most academic interest is the visit of Magi to Nero in AD 66 since there is a reference to the Magi returning ‘to their country by another way’ which reflects Matt. 2:12.¹⁴⁴ Such an attraction is understandable if a post 70 AD composition of the Gospel is proposed¹⁴⁵ and Matthew would need to explain how the Magi did not alert Herod on the whereabouts of the Infant Jesus.

What then is Matthew’s purpose in introducing the Magi into his narrative? The Magi represented the Gentile world and yet they were the first to worship the Jewish Messiah. The account represents a sharp contrast between the Jewish elite, namely the chief priests and the scribes and all of Jerusalem on the one hand, and the Magi who represented the Gentile world on the other.¹⁴⁶ Therein lies the paradox that the Jews who have the Scriptures fear the Messiah and do not worship him whereas the Magi must learn and having learnt come to worship.¹⁴⁷ It is this kind of paradox that appears again in Jesus’ teaching¹⁴⁸ for example Matt. 8:12 where Jesus teaches: ‘Many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, while the heirs of the Kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness’; or 21:43 where Matthew records Jesus as saying: ‘Therefore I tell you the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the

¹⁴⁰ Davies and Allison 2000: 239.

¹⁴¹ Davies and Allison 2000: 229.

¹⁴² Brown 1993: 174.

¹⁴³ Brown 1993: 174.

¹⁴⁴ Beare 1981: 74; Brown 1993: 174; France 2007: 64.

¹⁴⁵ Beare 1981: 74.

¹⁴⁶ Davies and Allison 2000: 229.

¹⁴⁷ Brown 1993: 182.

¹⁴⁸ France 2007: 67.

fruits of the kingdom'.¹⁴⁹ At v 44 Matthew states that the chief priests and the scribes perceived that Jesus was speaking about them. All these sayings were leading up to the great commission of Matt. 28:18 to go to make disciples of all nations.¹⁵⁰

Matthew's first point therefore is that since at the first the infant Jesus was worshipped and protected by Gentiles against the Jews who rejected him so there will continue to be those within Judaism who will reject him while Gentiles come to worship him. The validity of a Gentile mission is presented right at the outset within the Infancy Narrative.

Traditionally, as shown earlier in this section those who practised the arts of the Magi were shown in a poor light. However, while the Magi need to seek help from the Jews to locate the Messiah, and so implicitly acknowledge their superiority, thereafter matters are reversed.¹⁵¹ Whereas before they had been seen as opposing the will of God, now the Magi oppose those who seek in effect to destroy God. This role reversal introduces a theme that runs through the Gospel of 'many who are first will be last and the last will be first' (19:30 and 20:16). The parable of the two sons in Matt. 21:28-32 is a good example of this role reversal in which Jesus teaches that tax collectors and harlots will enter the kingdom of Heaven before the Pharisees because of their belief as opposed to the Pharisees' unbelief. The reason that this was so was because they heeded Jesus message 'to repent'. The Greek for 'to repent' is μετανοέω which involves a turning around. The worship of the Magi was to show that the status quo had ceased to be.¹⁵²

Having drawn an unfavourable comparison with the Magi in the Old Testament, it is now necessary to consider one notable exception, that of the story of Balaam recounted in Num. 22-24. It is a story set in the Exodus in which king Balak of Moab, fearful of the Israelites, hires Balaam to put a curse on Israel. He is a curious figure, obviously a non-Israelite, an occult visionary and a practitioner of enchantments, as evidenced by Numbers 23:23 and called a μάγος by Philo in his work *On the life of Moses* I:50:276. The Septuagint of Num: 23:7 gives his origins as ἀπ' ἀνατολή, from

¹⁴⁹ Brown 1993: 182.

¹⁵⁰ Davies and Allison 2000: 229; Brown 1993: 187; France 2007: 67.

¹⁵¹ Davies and Allison 2000: 229.

¹⁵² See also Mt 18:1 and 20:8; France 2007: 75.

the east, the same phrase used in Matt. 2:1.¹⁵³ He comes accompanied by two servants making a party of three so that it may seem to resemble the Christian tradition of three Magi,¹⁵⁴ even though two, four and even twelve have featured down through the ages.¹⁵⁵ Thus a clear parallel emerges with the events of Matt. 2:1:12.¹⁵⁶

The story of Balaam ends with his oracle in which he predicts the future greatness of Israel including Num. 24:17 namely ‘a star shall come out of Jacob’.¹⁵⁷ More will be said about the precise symbolism of the star in the next section since it could be argued that the prediction is not precise and Matthew does not cite Num. 24:17.¹⁵⁸ The point here is that Matthew addresses the worries of those who might be concerned that Christianity breaks with the Jewish past by asserting that there is at least one Old Testament parallel, which may allay those worries.

The Magi brought gifts. Although since the time of Irenaeus the gifts have the traditional symbolism of gold for royalty, frankincense for divinity and myrrh for death and burial¹⁵⁹ it is unlikely that this reflects Matthew’s purpose.¹⁶⁰ They are luxury items for a king recalling the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon in 1 Ki. 10:1-10 and also the words from Ps. 72:10-11 where it is said: ‘May the Kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts and may all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service’ as well as Isaiah 60:6 with the specific reference to ‘all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense’.¹⁶¹ Indeed Matthew’s purpose may well have been to introduce a Jesus/Solomon typology. The age of the Messiah was sometimes conceived as a return to or surpassing of the days of Solomon and so Matthew seems to be seeking to portray Jesus as one like Solomon, the son of David.¹⁶²

¹⁵³ Brown 1993: 193; France 2007: 42.

¹⁵⁴ Brown 1993: 193.

¹⁵⁵ Brown 1993: 198.

¹⁵⁶ Brown 1993: 194.

¹⁵⁷ Brown 1993: 195.

¹⁵⁸ Brown 1993: 196.

¹⁵⁹ France 2007: 76.

¹⁶⁰ Davies and Allison 2000: 251.

¹⁶¹ Brown 1993: 198; Davies and Allison 2000: 180; France 2007: 76; Luz 1995: 27.

¹⁶² Davies and Allison 2000: 250-251.

Thus, with the visit of the Magi Matthew introduces Jesus as a royal figure who harks back to the golden age of Solomon but whose mission rooted in the past will turn things upside down for the whole world. It sets the context for the teaching that is to follow. It is now necessary to consider the Star of Bethlehem, which, Matthew states, guided the Magi to their destination.

9. The Star of Bethlehem

The Star of Bethlehem offers its own fascination in the study of Matthew's Infancy Narrative. The reason for this fascination is that with the current state of humanity's knowledge of astronomy it ought to be possible to identify that star if one indeed had existed. If such a star is then identified, then the date and time of Jesus' birth could be more precisely identified and the place and origin of the Magi and the route they took confirmed. However such a positive identification is not easy. Brown considers the question of the identity of the star and proposes three candidates, namely a new star or supernova, a comet, or a planetary conjunction.¹⁶³ There is no evidence for a supernova within the time-scales suggested for the time of Jesus' birth.¹⁶⁴ Halley's comet appeared in 12-11 BC but that date is also outside the relevant times and in any case a comet is not a star¹⁶⁵. There was a planetary conjunction between Jupiter, Saturn and Mars in 7-6 BC, which would fit the time-scales especially as Herod died in 4 BC.¹⁶⁶ Thus of the three candidates, the planetary conjunction is generally the preferred one.

However while there may be some historical basis for the Star of Bethlehem,¹⁶⁷ there are three objections to Matthew's account being one of fact. Firstly, according to Matt. 2:3-4 the appearance of the Magi and the Star troubled everyone. If the star had been one of the three proposed candidates, it ought to have been obvious. However it would appear that it was not an obvious phenomenon since it was the account of the Magi that troubled Herod and all Jerusalem who until then seem to have been oblivious to any star. Secondly the Magi were able to follow the star but Herod

¹⁶³ Brown 1993: 170-173: See also Davies and Allison 2000: 235 and France 2007: 68-69.

¹⁶⁴ Brown 1993: 171.

¹⁶⁵ Brown 1993: 171-172.

¹⁶⁶ Brown 1993: 172.

¹⁶⁷ Davies and Allison 2000: 215.

apparently could not since at v 8 he asks to be told where the child is to be found. In answer to those two points it could be suggested that the Magi were following a star obvious to them in their wisdom but not to the uninitiated. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly there is a real issue as to whether a celestial light could stand over a precise location.¹⁶⁸

Despite such difficulties the concept of the heavens identifying a particular location is not unknown to literature. Davies and Allison refer to a cloud identifying the place where Abraham should sacrifice Isaac.¹⁶⁹ There are similar instances in non-biblical literature¹⁷⁰. In the Aeneid it is written: ‘With sudden crash there was thunder in the sky and a star shot from heaven gliding through the darkness and drawing a fiery trail amid a flood of light. We watched it glide over the palace roof and bury in Ida’s forest the splendour that marked its path’ showing the way of escape to Aeneas.¹⁷¹ This model of deliverance can also be seen in the Exodus story. Sometimes the Star of Bethlehem is identified as an angel.¹⁷² At Ex. 14:19-20 it is written: ‘Then the angel of the Lord who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel’. Just as the angel protected Moses and the Israelites to deliver them from the Egyptians, so the Star of Bethlehem both protected and showed the way to the new Moses who was to deliver all nations.

Beyond the Bible the idea that a star accompanies the birth of a hero is commonplace, for example with Alexander the Great.¹⁷³ Similarly in Jewish sources there is reference to ‘when our father Abraham was born, one star from the east came and swallowed up four stars of the four corners of the heavens’.¹⁷⁴ There is also reference

¹⁶⁸ Davies and Allison 2000: 246.

¹⁶⁹ Davies and Allison 2000: 246; Brown 1993: 600 considers such claims ‘exaggerated’.

¹⁷⁰ Davies and Allison 2000: 246. See also France 2007 74 n56.

¹⁷¹ Aeneid 2.693-697.

¹⁷² Davies and Allison 2000: 246.

¹⁷³ Lachs 1987: 9.

¹⁷⁴ Lachs 1987: 9.

to light accompanying the birth of Moses¹⁷⁵ although it could be argued that such light is not the same as a universal star.¹⁷⁶ The classic passage in the Bible is Num. 24:17, discussed in the previous section, in which it is stated that ‘a star shall come out of Jacob, a sceptre shall rise out of Israel’.¹⁷⁷ The star symbolises the Messiah¹⁷⁸ but since in Matthew’s narrative the star is not the Messiah but the guide to the Messiah, it could be argued that the parallels are not exact.¹⁷⁹ It is however significant, as noted in the previous section, that of the various Old Testament citations used, they do not include Num. 24:17. The answer may lie in the fact that this verse served no geographical purpose.¹⁸⁰ Accordingly it would seem that Matthew was not seeking to describe an historical phenomenon but was attempting to convey how Jesus’ birth was an auspicious event similar to the birth of a great leader.

So what in the motif of the star is Matthew trying to say? It would appear to be an attempt to draw together strands that already arise in his narrative. The star shows that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David by combining the Jewish Messianic expectation with the promise of Num. 24:17. It also recalls the Exodus and the guiding pillar of fire recorded in Ex. 13:21-22 and 14:19-20 and thus implies that Jesus the new Moses would again deliver his people. However the star led not Jews but the Magi who were Gentiles to remind Matthew’s readers that Jesus was the son of Abraham who was to make disciples of all nations. Such was the purpose of his ministry and its climax was in the events of his passion, death and resurrection.

¹⁷⁵ Lachs 1987: 9.

¹⁷⁶ Davies and Allison 2000: 235.

¹⁷⁷ Brown 1993: 194-196; Davies and Allison 2000: 234- 235; France 2007: 62; Lachs 1987: 9.

¹⁷⁸ Brown 1993: 195; Lachs 1987: 9.

¹⁷⁹ Brown 1993: 196.

¹⁸⁰ Davies and Allison 2000: 236.

10. The Relevance of Matthew's Infancy Narrative to the Easter Story and Beyond

‘The entire Gospel (of Matthew) is bracketed by the fundamental christological motif of God with us (Immanuel) in 1:23 and 28:20’.¹⁸¹ The interpretation of Jesus’ name is programmatic for his entire earthly ministry.¹⁸² The promise first made to Joseph that Jesus is ‘God with us’ is now adopted by the risen Jesus in his assurance that he would be with his followers ‘to the end of the age’. ‘The prologue anticipates the whole story and Matthew seeks to prepare his readers for what the whole story is about.’¹⁸³ If there is such unity between the beginning and the end of the Gospel, then it might be reasonable to suppose that Matthew’s Infancy Narrative would be identifying material that would help the reader to understand the full significance of the Easter story and beyond.

The first point of unity to note is the ‘oft observed parallels between the beginning of Matthew and its conclusion’.¹⁸⁴ The list cited by Davies and Allison is a good example:¹⁸⁵

1:23	The divine presence or will	28:20
1:2ff; 2:1ff	Gentiles	28:19
2:2, 8 and 11	See + worship	28:17
1:2	Kingship/authority	28:18
1:20, 24; 2:13, 19	Angelic appearance	28:5
2:3	Troubled	28:17
2:1, 9, 13, 19	and behold	28:20
1: 2-17	Genealogy	28:20
2	Father, Son and Holy Spirit	28:19

Commentators note a key connection between 1:23: ‘His name shall be called Emmanuel (which means God with us)’ and 28:20: ‘And remember, I am with you

¹⁸¹ Luz 1995: 4; Luz 2005: 21.

¹⁸² Hasitschka 2008: 92.

¹⁸³ Luz 2005: 21.

¹⁸⁴ Davies and Allison 2000: 60.

¹⁸⁵ Davies and Allison 2000: 60

always to the end of the age'.¹⁸⁶ It is true of course that Matthew has made an interpretation of Emmanuel as 'God with us' to link it to Jesus final promise. Matthew's main concern is to supply his readers with the divine element in the identity of Jesus.¹⁸⁷ By identifying a connection between the two verses Matthew introduces the concept that what was promised in the beginning has now reached its ultimate fulfilment in the end.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore it comes close to the doctrine of the Incarnation contained in Jn. 1:14¹⁸⁹ and by referencing it back to the promise contained in Is. 7:14 Matthew demonstrates that such was the pre-ordained plan of God. By making this reference Matthew is introducing an apologetic element into his teaching in the continuing debate with the Jews.¹⁹⁰ In bracketing these two verses in his Gospel, Matthew has moved his readers to the whole goal of what he seeks to teach.¹⁹¹

The visit of the Magi as a motif signifying that the Gospel is not for the Jews alone has already been examined in that section, but it also prefigures how while Gentiles worship Jesus as king, Israel will reject him.¹⁹² Throughout his Gospel Matthew portrays Jerusalem as the place of opposition and rejection of the true Messiah. Therefore just as all Jerusalem was troubled at the arrival of the Magi, it was troubled upon his entry into Jerusalem described in 21:10 and it was ultimately there that 'all the people' accepted responsibility for Jesus' death as described in 27:24-25.¹⁹³ In a sense too, Jesus himself was an outsider having been reared in Galilee and he is only described as a Galilean by Matthew, as for example in 26:69.¹⁹⁴ Thus at his birth the Jewish Messiah was worshipped by outsiders and was destined to be an outsider himself. Consequently Matt. 28:16-20 forms 'a poignant contrast between the desperate cover up by the narrowness of the defeated priests in Jerusalem and the

¹⁸⁶ Blomberg 2009: 154; Brown 1993: 144; Davies and Allison 2000: 213; Luz 1995: 4.; Stanton 1992: 217. France 2007:49 describes the two verses as a 'counterpoint'.

¹⁸⁷ Brown 1977: 144 See also note 32

¹⁸⁸ Davies and Allison 2000: 213.

¹⁸⁹ France 2007: 49.

¹⁹⁰ Davies and Allison 2000: 153.

¹⁹¹ Schnelle 1998: 230.

¹⁹² Schweizer 1975: 40.

¹⁹³ France: 2007: 70.

¹⁹⁴ France 2007: 7.

triumphant touch of the messianic mission in Galilee'.¹⁹⁵ By contrast the presence of the chief priests at the beginning foreshadows their role at the end.¹⁹⁶

Matthew describes the Magi being led by a star and this is not the only use of astronomical phenomena.¹⁹⁷ Matt. 24:29 alone records that 'after the suffering of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven and the powers from heaven will be shaken' and at 27:45 he writes, as do the other evangelists, that there was darkness for three hours at the time of the crucifixion.¹⁹⁸ There is a contrast here between light and dark, which is again identified at the moment of resurrection with the angel of the Lord whose 'appearance was like lightening and his raiment was white as snow'.¹⁹⁹

The reference to 'an angel of the Lord' in 28:2 is the only reference to such a being outside the Infancy Narrative. In all these cases the angel is a messenger rather than God himself.²⁰⁰ The angel of the Lord is portrayed as God's messenger whose tasks include the foretelling of the births of significant sons such as Ishmael in Gen.16:11 and Samson in Judg. 13:3.²⁰¹ The angel of the Lord is also the messenger who conveys the promise of God, such as the promise to Abraham 'that all the nations on earth shall gain blessing for themselves' contained in Gen. 22:18 and the promise in Judg. 2:1, 'I will never break my covenant with you'. Jesus at Matt. 26:26 describes his blood as 'the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' and his mission at 1:21 that 'he will save his people from their sins' is announced by an angel who then proceeds to guide Joseph in all that he should do. Now that Jesus has fulfilled his mission, it is an angel that announces its fulfilment.

In the section on the genealogy, its use to show that Jesus' birth was part of an eternal plan has already been noted and so that fact links well to God's promise in Matt. 28:20 to be with the disciples always. However the fact that Matthew uses a Trinitarian formula in v 19 is unique to the Gospel and only otherwise appears in the

¹⁹⁵ France 2007:7; Stanton 1989: 62.

¹⁹⁶ Davies and Allison 2004: 24.

¹⁹⁷ Davies and Allison 2000: 235.

¹⁹⁸ Davies and Allison 2000: 235.

¹⁹⁹ Davies and Allison 2000: 235.

²⁰⁰ Davies and Allison 2000: 206.

²⁰¹ Davies and Allison 2000: 206-207.

apostolic benediction of 2 Cor. 13:14. However this should not surprise Matthew's readers since it is implicit in the genealogy that events foreordained by God are achieved by the 'Son of David, Son of Abraham' who was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian formula may not appear in the Infancy narrative but Matthew makes it very clear that all the elements are there. However, the theology is not fully developed.²⁰²

Matthew's use of particular words in the Infancy Narrative and the same words in the Passion narrative adds parallelism between the initial persecution of Jesus and the last days in Jerusalem.²⁰³ Two words attract particular attention. The first is ἀπολλύω which means 'destroy'. 'Destroy' appears in both 2:13, reflecting Herod's intentions towards the infant Jesus, and, 27:20, where it again appears as the intent of the chief priests and elders towards the adult Jesus now under arrest.²⁰⁴ The second word is ἐμπαίζω which in 2:16 is translated as 'tricked' but in 27:29 and 31 as 'mocked'. Apart from a parable in Lk. 14:29 and Matt.2:16, this word is only used in connection with Jesus' passion. While the word does connote the meaning of 'duped' or 'deceived' there is even there an implication of ridicule. It provides a further point of contact between the Infancy and the Passion narratives.

Thus just as the Infancy Narrative sees the fulfilment of God's plan in the person of Jesus and identifies the conflict between those ready to acknowledge him and those wanting to destroy him, so this conflict continues into Jesus' life and mission and culminates in the events of his passion, death and resurrection.²⁰⁵ As Luz puts it: 'The final passage of Matthew is like a large terminal railway station in which many lines converge'.²⁰⁶ The conflicting reactions of those who hear of Jesus' birth gives Matthew's Infancy Narrative its status as a Gospel in miniature, for while the Gospel is good news it must have passion and rejection as well as success.²⁰⁷ In a way Matthew's Infancy Narrative foreshadows the whole story of the Gospel to which it

²⁰² Brown 1993: 126.

²⁰³ Davies and Allison 2000:260.

²⁰⁴ Brown 1993: 203; Davies and Allison 2000: 260.

²⁰⁵ Stanton 1989: 235.

²⁰⁶ Luz 1995: 5.

²⁰⁷ Brown 1993: 183.

relates, which the reader will immediately realise or realise it after the fact having read the entire Gospel.²⁰⁸

11. Matthew's Literary Genre

The difficulties in concluding that Matthew's Infancy Narrative is a pure retelling of actual events have already been noted. If those difficulties are correct then the question has to be asked why Matthew writes as he does. It has sometimes been suggested that the narrative is in some way a midrash. It is said that: 'He (Matthew) introduces materials of a midrashic nature such as we find in abundance in rabbinical documents'.²⁰⁹ It is suggested that the genealogy in 1:2-17 displays a midrashic quality because Matthew is employing it to show that Jesus' ancestry and birth represents an eschatological fulfilment.²¹⁰ Perhaps the most interesting question is whether Matthew created his account as a midrash on his fulfilment texts or added them to an already existing narrative.²¹¹ The question therefore needs to be asked: what is midrash and can it be applied to Matthew's Infancy Narrative?

The problem with the term 'midrash' is that it is one with a variety of meanings.²¹² Brown cites two definitions of midrash but the salient point would seem to be that it is a reflection upon a given text or piece of scripture intended to make it more understandable and relevant to those who want to read it.²¹³ It is not as such an interpretation of an event. Midrash is a literary genre, namely a writing commenting upon scripture which is quite different from a midrashic technique of interpretation which may be found in works not themselves able to be called midrashim.²¹⁴ If indeed the Old Testament texts in Matt. 1 & 2 came first, to which the other material is appended, then to assert that Matthew's Infancy Narrative is midrash would be an attractive argument. However given that it is difficult to see how 2:12-23 could be composed from the citation contained therein, the citations themselves have an air of

²⁰⁸ Luz 1995:29-30.

²⁰⁹ Beare 1981: 9.

²¹⁰ Nineham 1976: 432.

²¹¹ Brown 1993: 560.

²¹² Brown 1993: 557.

²¹³ Brown 1993: 558-9.

²¹⁴ France 1979: 100-101.

being appended.²¹⁵ There are other examples later in the Gospel of Matthew of citations being appended to events already described in Mark's gospel, for example Matt 4:12-16 which comments on Mk 1:14. Consequently such a midrashic process within Matthew's Infancy Narrative appears unlikely.²¹⁶ Moreover Matthew introduces into his Infancy Narrative a 'bewildering variety of texts and motifs brought in as the occasion demands'.²¹⁷

However that does not mean that there are no midrashic elements within the narrative.²¹⁸ Matthew himself draws on midrashic material such as that surrounding the birth of Moses, as is set out in the section that considers Jesus as the new Moses. However the purpose there does not appear to be to make the birth of Moses more intelligible.²¹⁹ The Infancy Narrative becomes a 'mélange of items of history or verisimilitude, of images drawn from the Old Testament as Jewish tradition, of images anticipated from the Gospel account of his ministry all woven together to dramatise the conception and birth of the Messiah who was God's son'.²²⁰ Thus Matthew appears not so much concerned with the mere events surrounding the birth of Jesus but wished to teach his readers the meaning of the events that he was relating. The problem with this approach is that it could then create the impression that his account was pure fiction with no factual basis whatsoever. However, the reader should not conclude that such is the case.²²¹

Was there a kerygmatic element within the narrative? This question would suggest that there was a preaching element within the narrative. However it would seem that the numbered genealogy and the systematic inclusion of the formula citations that introduce the Old Testament references are less indicative of a proclamation to arouse belief, but more the mark of a teaching technique designed to offer background to those who already believe.²²²

²¹⁵ Davies and Allison 200: 195.

²¹⁶ Brown 1993: 100-101.

²¹⁷ France 1979: 100-101.

²¹⁸ Brown 1993: 561; France 1979: 100.

²¹⁹ Brown 1993: 560.

²²⁰ Brown 1993: 561.

²²¹ Brown 1993: 562.

²²² Brown 1993: 144 n30.

So having assembled all this material, what conclusions can be drawn and especially has Matthew established in his Infancy Narrative an agenda for the rest of his Gospel?

12. Conclusions

At the end of the previous chapter it was suggested that Matthew's Gospel potentially contained a link back to a disciple of Jesus and thus an authority back to Jesus whose own authority could be traced back to Old Testament promises. It was further suggested that such kind of an authority through continuity would be especially attractive to Jewish converts. It would be an important tool in refuting Jewish charges that would seek to undermine the Gospel and so represent an apologetic document against those charges. It would also teach those who converted to Christianity. If these intentions constitute Matthew's agenda in writing his Gospel, the question of how far Matthew's Infancy Narrative sets that agenda now has to be answered, using the various conclusions reached at the end of each section.

The conclusions reached may be summarised as follows:-

- Matthew makes considerable appeal to the Old Testament, citing passages which he believes, shows how the birth and ministry of Jesus were foreshadowed in Old Testament scripture. He does so especially in the Infancy Narrative but his usage elsewhere shows that the passages were appended to an existing narrative not the other way around. While undoubtedly useful to Gentile converts it would be especially useful for Jews, both converts and opponents, to be taught that although Jesus might seem to be a break with the past, it was all part of God's eternal plan as revealed to their ancestors.
- Matthew presents a genealogy that is clearly artificial. It has a theological purpose that links Jesus to the history of the Jewish people, their hopes and aspirations and provides the bridge between what is past and what is to come. Again it provides that continuity which would be especially important to Jewish readers.
- In his account of Jesus' ministry, Matthew refers to how the Pharisees appeal to Abraham as their Father. By showing that Jesus is the 'Son of Abraham', Matthew directly links Jesus not only as a blood descendant of Abraham but also as a direct descendant of the promises received by Abraham. In particular the promise to

Abraham was not just for the Jews but for all nations, justifying the final commission to make disciples of all nations. Abraham also represented righteousness, suggesting the righteousness of the message to be preached and also obedience that was to be seen not only in Jesus' ministry, but in his submission to death on the cross.

- Jesus is also the Son of David and so embraces the Messianic hopes of the Jewish nation. Also like Solomon, the literal son of David, the title 'Son of David' was an indication of his powers to heal and also of being the restoration of what was felt to be the highpoint of Jewish history. Although the kingdom of which Jesus was to preach was very different from the expectations of his hearers, Matthew is describing the kingdom that God always intended for his people. The message had always been part of God's plan even if his people had not understood it in that way.
- Matthew depicts Jesus as the new Moses. He uses stories with which Jews would have been especially familiar. Just as Jesus is the true Messiah whom God always intended for his people, so the law he gives is not a break with the past but is the fulfilment of what has gone before. It also justifies why he should be seen as a true healer and not as a fraud.
- The virginal conception of Jesus may perplex Matthew's readers but he is more concerned to see it as God's direct intervention with humanity rather than his interaction with one individual. God suspends the laws of nature at the beginning in the same way that he will do at the climax of the events that Matthew will relate.
- With the introduction of the Magi, Matthew foretells how those who might be expected to accept Jesus kingship will reject him while those who will accept him will come from the most unlikely places. He will be accepted by those initially outside the establishment, and ultimately, outside the nation, but that is all part of God's plan. It will reach its climax in the parts played by the key players in the story of Jesus' passion.
- The Star of Bethlehem may have been some kind of literal navigation aid; however for Matthew it draws together Messianic expectations and the prophecy of Num. 24:17, Jesus as the new Moses seeking to free his people, and the fact that the Messiah has come for Gentiles as well as Jews.

- The climax of the story is the resurrection of Jesus and his subsequent commission to his followers. However, it is deliberately foreshadowed in the way that Matthew has crafted his Infancy Narrative.
- Matthew has related the events of Jesus' conception and birth using style and imagery with which Jewish readers would have been especially familiar.

From these conclusions it would seem right to conclude that 'many of the same thought patterns are shared by the Infancy Narrative and the Gospel proper'.²²³ The theological motifs of chapters one and two anticipate the theology of the rest of the Gospel.²²⁴ Thus, just as John starts his Gospel with a prologue that introduces the ministry of Jesus around the 'I am' sayings and climaxes in the Passion narrative with the purpose that people 'may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God that believing this you may have life in his name', so Matthew also starts his Gospel with a prologue in the form of his Infancy Narrative that introduces the ministry of Jesus around the structure of his teaching about the kingdom that also climaxes in the Passion narrative and finally the charge to make disciples of all nations. Brown says of Matthew's Infancy Narrative that in it 'we have the Gospel and its destiny in miniature'.²²⁵ On the evidence above it is difficult to argue with such a view; Matthew has set out his agenda for all to read.

²²³ Davies and Allison 2000: 152.

²²⁴ Brown 1993: 585.

²²⁵ Brown 1993: 232.

Luke's Infancy Narrative – Preliminary Issues

1. Introduction

The circumstances that led to the composition of the third Gospel and its intended purpose are a combination of the certain and the uncertain. Unlike the other three canonical Gospels, Luke's Gospel opens with a four-verse prologue in which the author makes it clear that he is a reporter and not an eyewitness and the intended audience was a certain Theophilus. However the author does not specifically identify himself nor does he further identify any written or oral sources that he has consulted. In any event, the Gospel became so widely circulated that it eventually was included in the New Testament canon, and therefore the author may well have intended the document to be read by a wider audience. A full discussion of all of these issues is outside the ambit of this chapter. However in order to consider how Luke might have used his Infancy Narrative to set the agenda for the rest of his Gospel, issues of relevance will be considered to set the context for the discussion contained in the next chapter. Those issues are the questions of authorship, date of composition, intended audience, structure and purpose.

2. Authorship

The author never identifies himself.¹ However at the end of the oldest surviving copy of Luke, Papyrus Bodmer XIV P⁷⁵ dating from about 175AD, are found the words ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΚΑΤΑ ΛΟΥΚΑΝ.² The next reference to Lucan authorship comes in the fragment of Muratori dating from around 190AD³ in which it is written:

The third Gospel that according to Luke was compiled in his own name in order by Luke the physician, when after Christ's ascension, Paul had taken him to be with him like a student of law. Yet neither did he see the Lord in the flesh; and he too as he was able to ascertain events so sets them down. So he began his story with the birth of John.⁴

¹ Brown 1993: 235.

² Bovon 2002: v; Nolland 1989: xxxiv; Tannehill 1996: 20.

³ Frend 1987: 123; Johnson 1991: 2.

⁴ Gwatkin 1897: 83.

Later Irenaeus writes of the Gospel ‘according to Luke taking up his priestly character commenced with Zacharias the priest offering sacrifice to God’.⁵

From the above information Luke is identified as the companion of Paul mentioned in Col. 2:14, 2 Tim. 4:11 and Philmn. 24.⁶ Further support is added to this assertion by reference to the ‘we’ passages in Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18 and 27:1–28:16.⁷ However this identification is now challenged because of divergences between Paul’s career as recorded in Gal. 1:16-17 and Acts 9:19-29⁸ and the apostolic council in Gal 2:1-10 and Acts 15.⁹ Attempts to see the distinctive style of a physician have also been refuted.¹⁰ Nevertheless, just because differences with Paul exist does not mean that the author was not a companion of Paul. It could simply be that he was an independent thinker,¹¹ he was writing in a post Pauline era¹² or writing before Paul’s letters were collected into the canon.¹³

Is anything known of Luke’s origins? Attempts to identify his ethnicity have proved inconclusive. He could have been a Gentile proselyte to Judaism before he became a Christian, which might account for some of his inaccuracies in his description of Jewish religious practices.¹⁴ He could have been a Jewish Christian¹⁵ or came to Christianity as a ‘raw Gentile’.¹⁶ Efforts to identify a place of composition of the Gospel have similarly proved inconclusive.¹⁷

Despite all this uncertainty, no other candidate for authorship has emerged. In particular since the author has never been asserted to have been an eyewitness it is difficult to disagree with the contention that ‘the identity of the author is not critical to

⁵ *Adv. Haer.* 111.11.11.

⁶ Green 1997: 21; Johnson 1991: 2; Lieu 1997: 14; Nolland 1989: xxxv; Schweizer 1986 6.

⁷ Brown 1993: 236; Johnson 1991: 2; Tannehill 1996: 21.

⁸ Brown 1993: 236.

⁹ Marshall 1970: 75; Tannehill 1996: 22.

¹⁰ Johnson 1991: 3; Green 1997: 21.

¹¹ Tannehill 1996: 23.

¹² Marshall 1978: 34.

¹³ Johnson 1991: 2.

¹⁴ Brown 1993: 449 n14.

¹⁵ Schnelle 1998: 243.

¹⁶ Evans 2008: 42.

¹⁷ Johnson 1991: 3; Marshall 1978: 35.

our reading of Luke'.¹⁸ Nevertheless for the sake of convenience Luke will continue to be identified as the author of this Gospel in this chapter and the next.

3. Date of Composition

The question of the relationship between Luke's Gospel and Acts will be further considered under the heading 'structure'. However given the accepted view that they are written by the same author and Acts ends with Paul's imprisonment in Rome, the fact of his imprisonment gives the starting point from which to examine possible dates of composition. The date of composition of the Gospel is a guess¹⁹ since it does rely on reference to the work in subsequent documents, the dating of which can also be uncertain.²⁰ There are however two serious possibilities, namely a date in the early sixties or a date in the later decades of the first century.²¹ The former proposition has already been canvassed in connection with the dating of Matthew's Gospel and follows the assumption that since the narrative in Acts takes the reader to about AD 62, Luke's Gospel must have an earlier date.²² The question is then whether Luke had known of Paul's death, would it in any event have suited his editorial scheme.²³ There is also the issue that had Luke been with Paul at the time of the latter's death how he failed to be part of the 'vast numbers' whom Tacitus describes in *Annals* 15.44 who were convicted and put to death during the persecution of AD 64.

The later dating is the commonly held view.²⁴ The analysis centres on the reading of Luke 19:41-44 and 21:20-24 that predict the destruction of Jerusalem which event actually occurred in AD 70. The issue is whether these verses are simply a prophetic prediction, a reflection on a past event or possibly a combination of the two.²⁵

Tannehill suggests that Luke gives more emphasis to this event than the other Gospels and sees a reference to that event in the Benedictus.²⁶ Certainly given the importance

¹⁸ Green 1997: 21.

¹⁹ Evans 2008: 13.

²⁰ Evans 2008: 13.

²¹ Marshall 1978: 34.

²² Nolland 1989: xxxviii.

²³ Nolland 1989: xxxviii.

²⁴ Marshall 1978: 34.

²⁵ Nolland 1989: xxxviii.

²⁶ Tannehill 1996: 27.

of the Temple in the Infancy Narrative, which will be examined in the next chapter, it could be that Luke wished to show Christian sympathy for a Jewish tragedy.²⁷

The diverse conclusions drawn from these considerations are that Luke's Gospel was written between 75 AD to 130 AD,²⁸ a decade or two after 70 AD,²⁹ 80 AD as 'a round figure'³⁰ or 'give or take ten years',³¹ between the late sixties and the late seventies of the first century,³² or 'a date not far off AD 70' which 'would appear to satisfy all requirements'.³³ If Luke's Gospel was composed after the events of AD 62-64, it remains a matter of conjecture why he did not record those events. However the above analysis does show that a later date is to be preferred, though certainly not beyond AD 100 and probably in the period of AD 70-80. Such disparity and imprecision is not helpful. However despite the uncertainty of the date of composition, it does not undermine the Gospel being anything other than the 'orderly account' which the Prologue asserts it to be.

4. The Intended Audience

In Luke 1:4, the author dedicates his Gospel to 'most excellent Theophilus' and so if nothing else is clear, the Gospel was at least intended for Theophilus. However there is no precise information as to the identity of Theophilus. His whereabouts are as obscure as those of Luke himself, which is unfortunate since if more about Theophilus were known it might reveal more about Luke and what motives lay behind the composition of his Gospel.³⁴ Such a dedication indicates that he is Luke's literary patron.³⁵ Theophilus is a Greek name frequent from the third century BC onwards³⁶ and means 'dear to God', 'lover of God'³⁷ or 'a friend of God'.³⁸ The balance of

²⁷ Marshall 1978: 39.

²⁸ Evans 2008: 14.

²⁹ Tannehill 1996: 26.

³⁰ Marshall 1978: 34.

³¹ Brown 1993: 236.

³² Nolland 1989:xxxix.

³³ Marsdhall 1978: 35.

³⁴ Marshall 1978: 35.

³⁵ Johnson 1991: 1; Marshall 1978: 39.

³⁶ Evans 2008: 134; Green 1997: 44; Nolland 1989: 10.

³⁷ Green 1997: 44; Johnson 1991: 28.

³⁸ Nolland 1989: 10.

opinion favours the fact that he was a real person³⁹ although a symbolic meaning for the name cannot be entirely eliminated.⁴⁰ He may⁴¹ or may not⁴² have been a Roman official but he may have a superior social status.⁴³

Assuming Theophilus to be a real person, the next question to be addressed is why he should be prepared to be Luke's patron. An answer to that question might reveal something of the wider situation in which Luke found himself and so illuminate issues that he was trying to address. However there appears to be no definitive answer to that question. He might have already have been a Christian,⁴⁴ perhaps loosely attached to a Jewish synagogue⁴⁵ but equally perhaps a sympathetic and influential outsider.⁴⁶ Perhaps he had been informed about the Christian movement, even attaching himself to it, but the terms in verse four are not used by Luke in a catechetical sense.⁴⁷ If a date of 62AD or thereabouts is eliminated as a date of composition, any connection between Theophilus and the use of the Gospel in connection with Paul's trial must similarly be eliminated.

It seems clear that the Gospel was not intended for Theophilus' eyes alone. Convention of the time and place would signify publication although there is no indication that Theophilus himself was expected to do so.⁴⁸ So for whom was the work intended? Bovon⁴⁹ contends that there were three target groups, namely educated Gentiles, Hellenistic Jews and Christians unsettled by rumours, which is why Theophilus needs to know the truth.⁵⁰ The situation in which Luke wrote would appear to be one in which the Jew-Gentile question was a live issue and therefore the readers would be found primarily among proselytes and 'God-fearers'.⁵¹ There is a

³⁹ Alexander 1993: 188; Bovon 2002: 23; Evans 2008: 134; Green 1997: 44; Marshall 1978: 43.

⁴⁰ Nolland 1989: 10.

⁴¹ Nolland 1989: 10.

⁴² Schwiezer 1986: 13.

⁴³ Alexander 1993: 190; Marshall 1978: 43.

⁴⁴ Bovon 2002: 23; Evans 2008: 136.

⁴⁵ Stanton 1989: 83.

⁴⁶ Evans 2002: 136.

⁴⁷ Green 1987: 46; Nolland 1989: 11. Alexander 1993: 192 suggests that 1:4 implies that Theophilus had already received instruction.

⁴⁸ Alexander 1993: 193; Stanton 1989: 86.

⁴⁹ Bovon 2002: 9.

⁵⁰ Stanton 1989: 86 notes that the readership must include intelligent Gentiles since Theophilus would be regarded as one.

⁵¹ Marshall 1970: 219 n1.

lack of Hebrew words, local Palestine colour, and direct Old Testament citations which would suggest a predominantly Gentile readership.⁵² However it must not be forgotten that such features as motifs from the Old Testament, the importance of the Temple, and how Christianity was rooted in Judaism are present in the Infancy Narrative. Such features suggest that the Gospel would be relevant to both Jewish readers and others familiar with Jewish customs as well. Luke's use of the Septuagint would also suggest that readers would be Jewish since the language is 'bulky, expansive and inaccessible except if one frequented the synagogues and wrote polemic against the Christians'.⁵³ These features will be further examined in the next chapter.

In §2.5 the whole issue of whether the Gospels were written for a specific group or community was addressed. Those arguments will not be repeated here but with the material used in the previous paragraph it would seem that those arguments support the fact that Luke intended both an immediate and wider audience to read his Gospel. Luke does describe the Christians at Ephesus at Acts 20:17 as a 'flock' which could suggest that they were special in some way to him.⁵⁴ However Luke like Matthew is thought to have known Mark's Gospel and there is no suggestion that the authors of the three Synoptic Gospels belonged to the same community. Furthermore if Luke did journey with Paul, as Col. 4:14 and 2 Tim. 4:11 suggest, it is feasible that he would write his Gospel for more than one community. For all these reasons, it would seem that Luke was writing for a wide audience in the context of the evolving relationship between Jews and Christians to demonstrate that Christianity had legitimate roots in Judaism.

It must not be forgotten however that Luke has a concern for the disadvantaged, a concern that will also be further examined in the next chapter. The first followers of Jesus were subject to repression, the Jerusalem Christians experienced real poverty which, as Christianity spread, frequently attracted the underprivileged.⁵⁵ Hence

⁵² Brown 1993: 235.

⁵³ Esler 1987: 25.

⁵⁴ Esler 1987: 26.

⁵⁵ Brown 1993: 363.

Luke's peculiar emphatic castigation of wealth may well have been addressed to the poor in the communities to be served by Luke's Gospel.⁵⁶

None of these comments are intended to suggest that Luke's intended audience was only one group. Again as will be further illustrated in the next chapter, Luke viewed the Gospel as having a universal application. Consequently he could be addressing the challenges that faced the churches to which he ministered; equally he may be seeking to commend to outsiders a movement based in Judaism but relevant to the outside world.⁵⁷

5. Structure

Luke's Gospel is generally regarded as the first volume of a two-part work, the second being Acts.⁵⁸ Both works contain a dedication to Theophilus and the dedication in Acts refers to a previous work, which would only seem able to be identified as Luke's Gospel. There are some differences in vocabulary, idiom and theological focus, plus an overlap in the account of the Ascension. However since there is much more that unites than divides, the interrelation between the two works seems clear.⁵⁹ 'There is a unified plot because there is a unifying purpose of God behind the events being narrated and the mission of Jesus and his witnesses represents that purpose being carried out through human action.'⁶⁰ While the focus of this chapter and the next is on whether the Infancy Narrative sets the agenda for the rest of Luke's Gospel, reference will also be made to Acts should that further aid appropriate conclusions to be drawn.

The Gospel starts in chapters one and two with parallel descriptions of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus, which will be considered further in the next chapter. Chapter two ends with an additional account relating to the boyhood of Jesus. Chapters three and four introduce the adult John and Jesus and thereafter the Gospel

⁵⁶ Brown 1993: 364.

⁵⁷ Evans 2008: 93.

⁵⁸ Bovon 2002: 2; Brown 1993: 235; Green 1987: 6-7; Johnson 1991: 1; Nolland 1989: xxxiii; Evans 2008: 4 but see footnote 'd' for a dissenting view.

⁵⁹ Nolland 1989: xxxiii.

⁶⁰ Tannehill 1986: 2.

adopts a travel motif.⁶¹ Between 5:1 and 9:50 Jesus journeys around Galilee before journeying to Jerusalem arriving in the Temple at 19:45. Journey as fulfilment is key to Luke's theology. Consequently, it is not surprising that key events in the Infancy Narrative, namely Mary's visit to Elizabeth, the birth of Jesus, the purification and Jesus' boyhood visit to the Temple all occur within the context of a journey.⁶² The theme of fulfilment in the Infancy Narrative will be further considered in the next chapter. Upon Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, the Gospel then relates the events of his passion, death, resurrection, and briefly, ascension. The Infancy Narrative itself contains basically seven episodes, namely the annunciation about John the Baptist, the annunciation about Jesus, the Visitation, the birth, circumcision and naming of John the Baptist, the birth, circumcision and naming of Jesus, the presentation in the Temple and the finding in the Temple.⁶³

The real contentious issue on structure relates to the unity of the first two chapters with the rest of the Gospel. At one end of the spectrum is Conzelmann who writes: 'The introductory chapters of the Gospel present a special problem. It is strange that the characteristic features they contain do not occur again either in the Gospel or Acts.' He then cites as examples, the differences between the descriptions of the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus, the virginal conception, and the lack of a view of pre-existence.⁶⁴ He also describes the authenticity of these first two chapters as 'questionable'.⁶⁵ These chapters are otherwise described as 'self-contained' and possibly of 'distinct origin'.⁶⁶ Even chapters one and two are thought to have been originally distinct from each other.⁶⁷ Obviously chapters one and two are separated in time from the rest of the Gospel and such features as the Canticles do give these chapters a distinct feel. It may well be that the actual reporting starts at chapter three,⁶⁸ but even if chapters one and two were added at a later date they still would have been prefixed by Luke.⁶⁹ So if those first two chapters had been lost,

⁶¹ Green 1987: 93.

⁶² Green 1987: 95.

⁶³ Brown 1993: 250.

⁶⁴ Conzelmann 1960: 177.

⁶⁵ Conzelmann 1960: 118.

⁶⁶ Evans 2008: 28.

⁶⁷ Marshall 1978: 96.

⁶⁸ Kümmel 1975: 135.

⁶⁹ Brown 1993: 241.

would their existence be suspected?⁷⁰ Perhaps not, but that seems to be the wrong question. Green writes: ‘We are thus reminded that Luke 1-2 as a unit is incomplete in itself, it prepares for and in important ways requires the rest of Luke/Acts.’⁷¹ This argument is developed by Oliver who argues that ‘the Lucan birth stories are integral to the purpose of Luke/Acts and not irrelevant’.⁷² He notes such themes as the importance of Jerusalem⁷³, the use of Patriarchal figures⁷⁴, the importance of Jesus as a Jew⁷⁵ and Jesus as a universal figure.⁷⁶ Thus he concludes ‘the birth stories were included intentionally and that intention is discovered by examining the theological purpose of Luke/Acts.’⁷⁷ If that assertion is correct, it should then be possible to show connections between the Infancy Narrative and the rest of the Gospel. The next chapter will show whether such connections can be made.

There is, however, one question that still remains, namely how far do chapters 1-2 represent a complete prologue. Could the prologue continue to 4:15 or does the ‘solemn beginning of the ministry in 3:1-2’ provide ‘an almost insurmountable obstacle to such a joining?’⁷⁸ Or could it continue to 4:30?⁷⁹ The next chapter will explore how chapters one and two might lead to chapters three and four.

6. Luke’s Intended Purpose

Luke’s prologue to his Gospel states that ‘after investigating everything carefully from the very first’, he writes an ‘orderly account’ so that Theophilus might ‘know the truth concerning the things’ of which he has been informed. Given that statement, the reader might expect that Luke is retelling events as they happened as accurately as possible. Accordingly the assumption would then be that chapters one and two of the Gospel record actual events. The characters are historical figures, saying and doing the actual words and actions, which Luke records. However a further examination of

⁷⁰ Brown 1993: 240.

⁷¹ Green 1987: 121.

⁷² Oliver 1964: 202.

⁷³ Oliver 1964: 203.

⁷⁴ Oliver 1964: 215.

⁷⁵ Oliver 1964: 220.

⁷⁶ Oliver 1964: 221.

⁷⁷ Oliver 1964: 226. See also Minear 1968: 11: ‘There exists a massive body of evidence supporting the homogeneity of these chapters (one and two) within Luke/Acts’.

⁷⁸ Brown 1993: 240.

⁷⁹ Minear 1968: 123.

the available material compels a reassessment of that position. What is especially significant about Luke's prologue is its brevity.⁸⁰ This fact along with other affinities would suggest that the prologue was not designed to follow the historical but scientific literary tradition.⁸¹ This tradition would include material on such subjects as philosophy⁸² and so would presumably include religion. The function of such works would appear to be to teach. Thus, in relation to Luke's Gospel, if that analysis is correct he is more concerned with interpreting the current teaching of Christianity rather than simply recounting past events.

Whatever is the correct position, Luke is recognised as having shortcomings as a historian.⁸³ For example Luke records in Acts 5:36 that Gamaliel in the mid thirties refers to the revolt of Theudas as if it were a past event. In fact it occurred in the forties. He then suggests that the revolt of Judas the Galilean in 6AD actually follows the revolt of Theudas.⁸⁴ Brown also asserts that: 'There is every reason that Luke himself composed many or all of the speeches he has placed on the lips of Peter and Paul in Acts'.⁸⁵ However, Luke ought better to be compared by the standards of contemporary history,⁸⁶ since such speeches composed by the author in appropriate style were a characteristic of ancient history.⁸⁷ However, there are two matters in the Infancy Narrative that require further examination, namely the timings involved in chapters one and two, and the use of canticles.

Luke opens his account of the birth of John the Baptist and the Annunciation to Mary in the reign of King Herod. He then relates the birth of Jesus within the ordering of a census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Although it is possible that Herod died in either 5BC or 1BC, the best evidence is that he died in March/April 4BC.⁸⁸ However according to the available evidence Quirinius did not take office in Syria until 6AD.⁸⁹ Accordingly there is an unexplained gap of ten years between chapters

⁸⁰ Alexander 1993: 102.

⁸¹ Alexander 1993: 102-103.

⁸² Alexander 1993:21.

⁸³ Brown 1993: 239.

⁸⁴ Brown 1993: 239.

⁸⁵ Brown 1993 239.

⁸⁶ Marshall 1970: 54.

⁸⁷ Marshall 1970: 54.

⁸⁸ Brown 1993: 166; Evans 2008: 145; Johnson 1991: 49; Marshall 1978: 51.

⁸⁹ Brown 1993: 395; Evans 2008: 194; Johnson 1991: 49; Marshall:1978: 99; Nolland 1989: 100.

one and two. Since by the time of Mary's visit to Elizabeth the text presumes that she is already pregnant and since there is no suggestion of an unusual period of gestation, there is an apparent inconsistent gap in the narrative that requires explanation.

The obvious explanation is that 'Luke simply has the facts wrong',⁹⁰ or that he was mistaken.⁹¹ That explanation might be tenable if it was simply a case of Luke placing events in the wrong reign. However following the death of Herod and the deposing of his son, Archelaus, Quirinius was entrusted with the restructuring of Judea as a Roman province which must have been a significant event.⁹² This significance makes it more difficult to conceive of a mistake by Luke, even accepting that he may not always have been accurate in his historical recollection. Accordingly other explanations are propounded.

Although Luke uses the phrase 'the world', in practice he means the Roman Empire.⁹³ However since there is no record of a single census of the whole Empire, it could be a more local event.⁹⁴ It is also suggested that this local event was part of a series of censuses occurring throughout the Empire and so Luke's phrase 'the world' is a generalisation.⁹⁵ However this conclusion does not resolve the issue of dates. The most attractive answer to this conundrum is to suggest that the word *πρωτος* should allow a translation that the census occurred before Quirinius was governor of Syria.⁹⁶ Quirinius' census is usually identified as the same census mentioned in Acts 5:37 and so it is argued that Luke is seeking to distinguish the two censuses.⁹⁷ The problem is that a writer would normally use either *πρότερος* meaning 'earlier than' or *πρότερον* or *πρό* for 'before'.⁹⁸ Furthermore while *πρωτος* can mean 'before' it only does so when followed by a noun not a genitive absolute.⁹⁹ It is an ingenious suggestion¹⁰⁰ but it does also appear to require a translation that the Greek does not support.

⁹⁰ Johnson 1991: 40.

⁹¹ Evans 2008: 195.

⁹² Nolland 1989: 101.

⁹³ Brown 1993: 395.

⁹⁴ Brown 1993: 395; Evans 2008: 192; Marshall 1978: 101; Nolland 1989: 99.

⁹⁵ Brown 1993: 666.

⁹⁶ Nolland 1989: 101.

⁹⁷ Nolland 1989: 101-102.

⁹⁸ Brown 1993: 395; Marshall 1978: 99.

⁹⁹ Evans 2008: 194.

¹⁰⁰ Lieu 1997: 15.

Another explanation proffered is to seek to find a connection between Quirinius and Judea prior to 6AD. However the career of Quirinius is well documented by Tacitus¹⁰¹ so as not to permit such an association. Attempts to find a gap in the legates to Syria that Quirinius might fill are improbable¹⁰² and an ‘unlikely hypothesis’.¹⁰³ Thus it would seem that this conundrum cannot acquire a factual resolution and there must be some other explanation. Such an explanation will be sought in the next chapter.

In chapters one and two Luke includes three canticles, the Magnificat, the Benedictus and the Nunc Dimittis, all so named after their opening in Latin, in the mouths of three of his characters. Brown notes four different theories surrounding their composition.¹⁰⁴ Firstly they were spoken as they are recorded to have been spoken but there is no serious support for that view. Secondly Luke composed them while writing the rest of the narrative but they do interrupt the flow of the narrative. Thirdly Luke composed them and added them to an existing narrative. Finally they pre-existed Luke who then added them to his own narrative. It is the last two that command the greatest scholarly support.¹⁰⁵ They can be seen to resemble the speeches in Acts¹⁰⁶ or the technique of speech writing by Hellenistic historians.¹⁰⁷ Again the significance of the canticles will be considered in greater detail in the next chapter but for now it is important to note that they involve more than a past event.

So if Luke’s Gospel and especially chapters one and two cannot be taken literally, the question arises as to how they are to be read. The answer is that Luke considered himself both a historian and a theologian.¹⁰⁸ As a historian he selected and arranged the traditions he needed to tell, and as a theologian he moulded and presented those traditions to indicate their uniqueness and divine significance.¹⁰⁹ He uses history to preach¹¹⁰ and also to reassure by showing how Jesus is rooted in the history of

¹⁰¹ Marshall 1978: 99.

¹⁰² Evans 2008: 194-195.

¹⁰³ Brown 1993: 395.

¹⁰⁴ Brown 1993: 346-347.

¹⁰⁵ Brown 1993: 397.

¹⁰⁶ Brown 1993: 397.

¹⁰⁷ Johnson 1991: 93.

¹⁰⁸ Bovon 2002: 25; Green 1987: 3.

¹⁰⁹ Evans 2008: 51.

¹¹⁰ Green 1987: 38.

Israel.¹¹¹ He could be described as an apologetic historian.¹¹² However it is also true that ‘faith cannot be indifferent to historical facts’ since ‘if historical evidence were against the facts, then faith would be reduced to obstinate and irrational fantasy’.¹¹³ Luke may be justified in his purpose of writing theology as well as history. However, by mixing factual and non-factual material, without making clear which is fact and which is interpretation, Luke deprives his readers of examining critically his interpretation and reaching their own conclusions. Nevertheless by giving his readers his interpretation of the significance of the birth of Jesus, the connection with the rest of his Gospel may be better understood.

7. Conclusions

As in the case of Matthew’s Infancy Narrative, some of the conclusions to be reached on these preliminary issues are uncertain but from the matters considered above it would seem that the following conclusions can be drawn:

- While the identity of the author remains not entirely clear, there is no compelling reason to depart from the generally accepted view that the author was Luke, the companion of Paul;
- Because of the relationship between Luke and Acts, a date of composition towards the end of the first century AD is preferred. An earlier date cannot be entirely excluded but since Luke is neither an eyewitness nor his Gospel an eyewitness account it becomes less important to identify a precise date of composition;
- The Gospel was dedicated to Theophilus but a wider audience of Jew and Gentile, though probably more of the latter, was intended. The Gospel was also intended for all strata of society;
- A really contentious issue is whether a unity exists between chapters one and two and the rest of the Gospel;
- Luke sets out his purpose of writing in his prologue. However he seeks not only to tell the past but interpret its meaning and relevance for the present and the future.

¹¹¹ Johnson 1991: 10; Marshall 1970: 56.

¹¹² Johnson 1991: 10.

¹¹³ Marshall 1970: 46.

To achieve that end he does not seem to be averse to reshaping the narrative to reinforce his interpretation.

It is probably the last two matters that are the most contentious in a consideration as to whether Luke is setting out his agenda for his Gospel in his Infancy Narrative. The real question would thus seem to be whether chapters one and two were in effect added as an afterthought as if attempting to complete the story in some way, or were an integral part of the Gospel introducing the reader to matters that would be developed in the subsequent narrative. The answer to that question is sought in the next chapter.

Luke's Infancy Narrative – An Agenda for His Gospel?

1. Introduction

Having posed the question in the last chapter of the connection between Luke's Infancy Narrative and how it set the agenda for the rest of his Gospel, it is now necessary to answer it. The initial problem is the devising of an appropriate method to do so. The difficulty comes in the fact that chapters one and two are not a regiment of distinct ideas marching towards the same objective but a tapestry of interwoven patterns that produce the final picture.¹ However this analysis of Luke's agenda will examine the parallelism between the two births, the character of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the character of Mary and Joseph, the issue of the virginal conception, the importance of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the motif of the shepherds. The analysis will then examine more general Lukan issues namely role reversal within society, universalism, salvation and fulfilment and the role of the Holy Spirit. Finally the Canticles will be considered. At first sight it may seem odd to leave their consideration to the end but the issue of who spoke the Magnificat will become relevant to the final scheme that will be proposed suggesting an ultimate focus of Luke's Infancy Narrative upon Lk. 4:21.

Because of the complexity of pattern mentioned above, the suggested programme might not be the only one that could be adopted. There will be overlaps, notably between salvation and fulfilment. There may seem to be omissions. For example no special section is devoted to Simeon and Anna because it is difficult to separate them from a consideration of the importance of the Temple. Despite these issues, the programme set out above would appear to be the best one to identify how far Luke's Infancy Narrative will establish the agenda for his Gospel and so that is the one which will be followed.

¹ See Bovon 2002: 3: 'It is not without reason that Luke has been imagined for centuries to have been a painter.'

2. The Parallelism Between the Births of John the Baptist and Jesus

An examination of chapters one and two of Luke's Gospel reveals that in many ways the events surrounding the births of John the Baptist and Jesus seem to be portrayed as parallels.² This parallelism is most strongly seen in the annunciation scenes in chapter one rather than in the birth stories themselves.³ The annunciation stories include at least the following elements:

- 1 The introduction of key figures (Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary);
- 2 The mention of a special condition precluding normal conception (old age, virginity);
- 3 An encounter with the angel Gabriel;
- 4 A troubled response (Zechariah to the angelic visitation, Mary to the greeting);
- 5 A call not to fear with an address by name;
- 6 The birth announcement including the giving of the child's name, proclamation of future greatness, the role of the Spirit in what is to happen (with Mary this motif is delayed until v.35) and the future role of the child;
- 7 A question that finds a problem with the angelic proclamation;
- 8 An angelic answer that includes a sign;
- 9 A departure statement.⁴

However impressive this list may be, it was not Luke's intention that John and Jesus should be seen as equals. 'The parallelism in structure between the two accounts shows that John and Jesus were not regarded as rivals but each had his proper place in the unfolding of the divine scheme of salvation. They are placed side by side but in such a way that the superior role of Jesus is evident'.⁵ This fact can be seen in the way

² Bovon 2002: 2; Brown 1993: 264; Evans 2008: 64; Green 1997: 50; Marshall 1978: 49; Nolland 1989 40.

³ Brown 1993: 408.

⁴ Nolland 1989: 40. See also Brown 1993: 294-5 with Table X producing the relevant sections side by side.

⁵ Marshall 1978: 45. See also Bovon 2002: 29; Green 1997: 51: 'The balance is in favour of Jesus'; Tannehill 1996 38: 'The references reserve the more important role to Jesus.'

that the second annunciation surpasses the first:

- 1 The first is in response to prayer, the second is entirely by the initiative of God;
- 2 Conception by the barren and aged is a wonder of God but has Old Testament precedents, but conception by a virgin is an unheard of wonder;
- 3 Zechariah is greeted by name but Mary is greeted with the words ‘Greetings favoured one! The Lord is with you’;
- 4 John will be great before the Lord but Jesus’ greatness knows no qualification;
- 5 John is consecrated into Nazarite abstinence but Jesus’ holiness extends to the very basis of his existence;
- 6 John will be the preparer but Jesus will be Son and King forever;
- 7 John will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in the womb but Jesus’ human existence is due entirely to the activity of the Holy Spirit;
- 8 Zechariah could not believe the angelic pronouncement but Mary made herself ready for God’s declared purpose.⁶

That superiority becomes even more evident in chapter two, when, after the eventual birth of John in its family and community setting, Jesus’ birth is accompanied by an angelic annunciation and the events surrounding the presentation in the Temple.⁷ That superiority is further emphasised by the events described in 2:41-52.⁸ Indeed the words of Zechariah in 1:76 that John ‘will go before the Lord to prepare his ways’ are taken forward into chapter 3.

The superiority of Jesus over John is also reflected in the way in which Mary is portrayed in relation to Zechariah and Elizabeth.⁹ The different response of Zechariah and Mary to the angelic announcement has already been noted above. The superiority of Mary is further emphasised in her visit to Elizabeth,¹⁰ for example in the nature of Elizabeth’s greeting.¹¹ It can be seen as the beginning of John’s witness to Jesus, which is again a theme that is pursued in chapter 3.

⁶ Nolland 1989: 40-41; Lieu 1997: 5. See also Brown 1993 297 with Table XI again producing the relevant sections.

⁷ Brown 1993: 408-9.

⁸ Bovon 2002: 111.

⁹ Lieu 1997: 9.

¹⁰ Marshall 1978 77.

¹¹ Green 1997: 94.

Luke's style of parallelism in the Infancy Narrative reflects the parallelism he uses in the rest of his writings. Thus just as Mary was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit so were the disciples at Pentecost; Peter and Paul performed similar miracles to the adult Jesus and Stephen's trial reflected that of Jesus.¹² Johnson also asks if the threefold deliberate phrasing in the Greek of 'wrapped him in cloth strips, placed him in a manger, because there was no place' could anticipate the same threefold rhythm of 'wrapped him in a linen cloth, placed him in a rock hewn tomb, where no-one had yet been laid' (23:53), so that the birth and burial mirror each other.¹³ Certainly there is a parallel between the first two elements, but it is difficult to see a parallel in the third element. There was presumably no place for Jesus in the inn because it was full, whereas the tomb had thus far remained empty.

There would appear to be two reasons why it would be important for Luke to show right at the outset that Jesus was superior to John. Firstly when John was asked if he was the Christ, he is recorded at 3:6 as replying: 'I baptise you with water but he who is mightier than I is coming the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.' The parallel structure which Luke has used, showing the superiority of Jesus over John in the Infancy Narrative, demonstrates that this superiority was part of God's plan. In his birth the credentials for Jesus' adult ministry over John have been established and continue into chapter 3. Accordingly there is continuity between these three chapters.¹⁴

The second reason arises from two instances recorded in Acts 18:24-19:7 that refer to firstly a certain Apollos and secondly twelve individuals, all of whom knew only of John's baptism. This event would appear to suggest that John's influence had spread further than might have been appreciated and that the relationship between this group and the Christians required resolution. In order to achieve that resolution it was necessary for Jesus' superiority to be established and the best way to reflect that fact was to demonstrate it from the very beginning.

¹² Johnson 1991: 14.

¹³ Johnson 1991: 53.

¹⁴ Minear 1968: 115.

Thus Luke uses his Infancy Narrative to prepare the way for what he was to teach later in his Gospel about the relationship between John and Jesus. It is now necessary to consider what else Luke teaches about John and his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth.

3. Zechariah, Elizabeth and the Birth of John the Baptist

The first characters whom Luke introduces in his Infancy Narrative are Zechariah and Elizabeth. Both are described in 1:6 as ‘righteous before God, walking in all the commandments of God, blameless’. The description of ‘righteous’ is unusual and is used by Luke of Simeon in 2:25 and significantly in 23:30 of Joseph of Arimathea¹⁵ perhaps again suggesting a link between the Infancy Narrative and Jesus’ Passion. Zechariah is a priest (1:5) who gains the ‘once in a lifetime privilege’¹⁶ to offer incense in the Temple (1:10). His wife Elizabeth is described as a daughter of Aaron (1:5) and so she was descended from a priestly family. Indeed the only Elizabeth who appears in the Old Testament is in Ex. 6:23 where Elisheba the wife of Aaron is mentioned.¹⁷

It is clear that the narrative is ‘steeped in the Old Testament’, moulding the story in the light of it.¹⁸ Luke is using the Old Testament to identify the theological significance of the birth of John.¹⁹ Zechariah and Elizabeth, like the other main characters in the Infancy Narrative, are noted for their piety,²⁰ representing the piety of Israel in the period of Second Temple Judaism.²¹ They are ‘punctilious’ in observing the law.²² The whole purpose of these and indeed other Old Testament allusions is to affirm from the outset that the Christian story is rooted in a traditional Jewish religious atmosphere.²³

¹⁵ Conzelman 1960: 89 n2; Nolland 1989: 118.

¹⁶ Brown 1993: 259; Marshall 1978: 54; Nolland 1989: 27.

¹⁷ Brown 1993: 258.

¹⁸ Marshall 1978: 46.

¹⁹ Marshall 1978: 51.

²⁰ Lieu 1997: 4; Marshall 1970: 180.

²¹ Green 1997: 61.

²² Johnson 1991: 48.

²³ Nolland 1989: 25.

Chapter 1:7 introduces the problem that Zechariah and Elizabeth faced, namely childlessness. Since Elizabeth is regarded as ‘blameless before God, ‘her reproach’ would appear to be the judgement of people.²⁴ The granting of a child to a barren woman is a common Old Testament motif,²⁵ such as in the cases of Rebekah and Rachel and the unnamed mother of Samson,²⁶ but it would seem that the two most relevant examples are Abraham and Sarah and Elkanah and Hannah.²⁷

The narratives involving Abraham and Sarah and Elkanah and Hannah share ‘a common repertoire of elements’.²⁸ Elizabeth through age is now incapable of conception and of all the Old Testament examples the only person similarly incapacitated is Sarah.²⁹ Childlessness and righteousness appear in juxtaposition.³⁰ Just as Abraham rather than Sarah received the annunciation of the birth of Isaac, so Zechariah rather than Elizabeth receives similar information³¹ through the appearance of an angel.³² Zechariah’s objection at Lk 1:18 quotes verbatim Abraham’s reaction to divine revelation at Gen.15:8.³³ Lk 1:6 describes how Zechariah followed God’s commandments which echoes how Abraham is described in Gen 26:5.³⁴ During the annunciation to Mary she is told of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, which concludes with Gabriel’s statement: ‘For with God nothing will be impossible’ which reflects the words to Abraham in Gen.18:14.³⁵ When Elizabeth gives birth her ‘neighbours and kinsfolk’ rejoice with her, which again reflects the rejoicing of Sarah in Gen.21:6.³⁶ These parallels show how deliberately Zechariah and Elizabeth are portrayed as Abraham and Sarah.³⁷

The theological significance of this parallel between Zechariah and Elizabeth and Abraham and Sarah lies in the importance attached in the Old Testament to God’s

²⁴ Bovon 2002: 40; Brown 1993: 258; Lieu 1997: 6.

²⁵ Bovon 2002: 34; Brown 1993: 268.

²⁶ Nolland 1989: 25, 27.

²⁷ Brown 1993: 268; Johnson 1991: 32; Marshall 1978: 49; Tannehill 1986: 18; Tannehill 1996: 46.

²⁸ Green 1997: 58.

²⁹ Brown 1993: 269, 272, 280.

³⁰ Green 1997: 63.

³¹ Brown 1993: 269, 281.

³² Nolland 1989: 28.

³³ Brown 1993: 279.

³⁴ Brown 1993: 626.

³⁵ Brown 1993: 319; Tannehill 1996: 50.

³⁶ Brown 1993: 375; Nolland 1989: 34.

³⁷ Brown 1993: 349.

covenant with Abraham described in Gen.18. In Lk. 1:73 Zechariah describes ‘the oath sworn to Abraham’ and this is usually understood to mean the above-described covenant.³⁸ Later in 3:9 John himself is recorded as rebuking those who appealed to Abraham as their Father. The writer of Genesis has portrayed the foundation of Israel in the covenant, which is now the subject of that rebuke. However, by portraying Zechariah and Elizabeth as Abraham and Sarah, Luke seems to be asserting that the covenant will start anew in John, in the task which God has prepared for him. The strong Abraham and Sarah motif connects Luke’s Infancy Narrative with Israel’s patriarchal beginnings. Ultimately Jesus’ coming, while rooted in Israel, requires a new creation or renewal of the covenant made with the patriarchs.³⁹

The other important Old Testament parallel is that with Elkanah and Hannah. In Lk.1:15 the angel is recorded as telling Zechariah that his promised son ‘shall drink no wine nor strong drink’. He is thus being described as a Nazirite and one of the most famous Old Testament Nazirites was Samuel.⁴⁰ Luke appears to be drawing a parallel in the way that the introduction of Elkanah in 1 Sam. 1:1 reflects the introduction of Zechariah in Lk. 1:5. Moreover the way in which the revelation is made to Hannah by the priest Eli during the annual visit to offer sacrifice at the sanctuary of Shiloh is replicated in what Zechariah heard in the sanctuary of the Temple at Jerusalem.⁴¹ The conclusion of the story of John’s birth in Lk. 1:80 also mirrors the growth of Samuel in 1 Sam. 2:21.⁴² There is a clear parallel here and the Samuel motif continues to be present throughout Luke’s Infancy Narrative.⁴³ This portrayal of John as following in the mould of Samuel will be further considered at the end of this chapter since it will become relevant in the assessment of Luke’s agenda between his Infancy Narrative and the rest of his Gospel.

In Lk. 1:17 John is foretold to possess ‘the Spirit and power of Elijah’ and this would seem to suggest a role as a second Elijah.⁴⁴ Such a reference would appear to reflect the promise of Mal. 4:5 that God would send ‘Elijah the prophet before the great and

³⁸ Bovon 2002: 74; Evans 2008: 184.

³⁹ Brown 1993: 269.

⁴⁰ Brown 1993: 268.

⁴¹ Brown 1993: 268-269.

⁴² Brown 1993: 377; Marshall 1978: 95.

⁴³ Brown 1993: 269.

⁴⁴ Marshall 1978: 49.

terrible day of the Lord comes'. However the Gospels are somewhat contradictory as to whether John actually fulfils that role. Both Matt. 17:11-13 and Mk. 9:11-13 end their account of the Transfiguration with Jesus saying that Elijah has come before him but only Matthew adds that the disciples understood that Jesus meant John the Baptist. Matthew also adds a reference to John as Elijah at 11:13-14. However Jn. 1:21 contains a specific denial that John the Baptist is Elijah, the prophet who was to come.⁴⁵ Neither account of the Transfiguration specifically suits the conversation recorded by Matthew and Mark. It is suggested that such an omission exposes a disunity between the Infancy Narrative and the rest of the gospel in that Jesus is claiming the Elijah motif for himself and Lk. 4:25-26 and 9:54 are cited in support of that proposition.⁴⁶ However these verses do not provide strong support for that proposition. In 4:24, Jesus is using not only Elijah but also Elisha as examples of instances where 'no prophet is acceptable in his own country'. Jesus is not saying he is Elijah or indeed Elisha. The reference to 9:54 relies on the addition of the explanatory 'as Elijah did', the evidence for the omission of which is strong and suggests that it is an explanatory gloss.⁴⁷ More importantly Jesus' reaction is to repudiate the disciples' suggestion, not to adopt it.⁴⁸ The simplest explanation would appear to be that Luke has stated with reference to the Malachi prophecy the role of John the Baptist and the way that role is described in chapter 3 requires no further explanation than the reference to Is. 40 in Lk.3:5, where John prepares the way.

Before concluding this section, one question remains, namely what is the place of John the Baptist? Certainly he arrives at the junction of an old and new age standing on the 'dividing line',⁴⁹ but there is debate whether he remains in the old era⁵⁰ or the new.⁵¹ Here Lk. 3:7-14 assist because they reflect what Jesus was later to teach, for example the reference to good fruit in 3:9 and 6:43-44. In Lk. 4:18 & 21 Jesus appeals to the prophecy of Isaiah that he has been 'anointed to preach good news', which prophecy he now fulfils and as will be seen in the section on 'fulfilment' below, the rest of the Gospel describes how Jesus does indeed fulfil that prophecy. However it

⁴⁵ Brown 1993: 276.

⁴⁶ Brown 1993: 276.

⁴⁷ Marshall 1978 407.

⁴⁸ Evans 2008: 438; Green 1997: 406.

⁴⁹ Conzelmann 1960: 22.

⁵⁰ Conzelmann 1960: 23.

⁵¹ Lieu 1997: 6; Marshall 1970: 146.

cannot be an accident that in Lk. 3:18 John also is said to have preached ‘good news’. Accordingly, John can be rightly regarded as ‘the first preacher of the Gospel’.⁵²

So Zechariah and Elizabeth can be seen most clearly as new representations of Abraham and Sarah and Elkanah and Hannah, with John as both Samuel and Elijah. It is now necessary to consider the other family in the narrative, namely Mary and Joseph and the depiction of the virginal conception.

4. Mary, Joseph and the Virginal Conception of Jesus

Mary, the mother of Jesus, occupies a central position in Luke’s Infancy Narrative. Unlike Matthew’s account where Joseph receives the news that Mary is already pregnant, Luke narrates the moment when Mary receives the angelic message. Indeed throughout the Narrative Joseph remains very much in the background, and even in the incident in the Temple recorded in Lk. 2:41-52, it is Mary who assumes the active role in questioning Jesus. Her role in this incident may well be theological perhaps as the first fulfilment of Simeon’s prophecy of sorrow.⁵³ The nature of Luke as a historian has already been considered in the previous chapter and since the virginal conception seems to play no part in the rest of the Gospel or Acts it is difficult to determine what historical basis exists in Luke’s account and the sources he used.⁵⁴ Furthermore since in the previous chapter the conclusion was reached that Luke writes as a theologian, a more productive inquiry would seem to be to consider what theological motifs Luke is seeking to employ.

With the possible exception of Is. 7:14 as discussed in §3:5 above, there is no Old Testament parallel for a virginal conception.⁵⁵ However, the details of the annunciation story are expressed in Old Testament, Jewish terms, since such is the only way in which what Luke is seeking to express could be understood.⁵⁶ The promise of a child possesses a particular structure within the Hebrew Bible

⁵² Marshall 1970: 146.

⁵³ Marshall 1978: 148.

⁵⁴ Evans 2008: 154.

⁵⁵ Marshall 1978: 73.

⁵⁶ Bovon 2002: 47; Johnson 1991: 12; Lieu 1997: 5; Marshall 1978: 76; Nolland 1989: 51.

- a) The appearance of a divine messenger;
- b) The bewilderment of the person addressed;
- c) The angel's message;
- d) The addressed person's objection;
- e) Confirmation through a sign.⁵⁷

Noted Old Testament precedents include Hagar in Gen. 16:11, Leah in Gen. 30:31, the mother of Samson in Judg. 13:24, and Hannah in 1 Sam. 1:20.⁵⁸ There are also allusions to Abraham and Sarah especially in the angelic response of Lk 1:37.⁵⁹ These examples would be important, perhaps more so for Jewish readers, as proof that while Luke is narrating an unparalleled event, namely a virginal conception, he places it firmly in the context of similar past annunciations. Thus he reassures his readers that this event can be understood in the context of God's continuing plan for humanity.

In §3:5 above there was a discussion on the origins of the idea of a virginal conception. The conclusion made in that chapter that the idea, while without Old Testament precedent, is more compatible with the way in which God chooses miraculously to intervene in human affairs rather than the more lurid Hellenistic parallels, is also taken to be the correct approach in analysing Luke's use of the idea.⁶⁰ Furthermore like Matthew, Luke introduces the virginal conception as a way to instruct his readers about the true nature of Jesus. 'The whole context, with its clear teaching that Mary was a virgin, implies that something more than the birth of a man destined to be Messiah and therefore adopted by God as his son is meant. It is through his conception by the Spirit that Jesus is born as the Son of God.'⁶¹ The virginal conception is thus 'for Mary the beginning of her confrontation with the mysterious plan of God embodied in the person of her son'.⁶²

In that same chapter there was also a discussion on the possibility of Jesus being illegitimate. It is certainly true that Mary's question in 1:35 does not actually imply a

⁵⁷ Bovon 2002: 43.

⁵⁸ Brown 1993: 289.

⁵⁹ Bovon 2002: 93; Green 1997: 53-55; Johnson 1997 38; Nolland 1989: 56.

⁶⁰ Marshall 1978: 75; Nolland 1989: 46.

⁶¹ Marshall 1970: 168. See also Evans 2008: 83; Tannehill 1996: 51.⁶¹

⁶² Brown 1993: 318.

virginal conception, since she was about to be married and therefore might expect to conceive in the usual way⁶³. Moreover in the parallel scheme in relation to John the Baptist and Jesus it could be argued that Luke needs Jesus' conception and birth to surpass the already miraculous events surrounding those of John, and the virginal conception met that aim.⁶⁴ Lk. 4:22 also seeks to redact Mk. 6:3 so to suggest that he, like Matthew, is aware of the question of Jesus illegitimacy.⁶⁵ However none of these matters can really advance an argument that Luke, any more than Matthew, was aware of the suggestion that Jesus was illegitimate. However as with the Matthean discussion it should remain an issue to be considered in the light of further material and interpretation.

Although a number of Old Testament precedents can be identified for the character of Mary, one that is often emphasised is that of Hannah as described in 1 Sam. 1 & 2.⁶⁶ The parallels between Hannah's song and the Magnificat will be considered later. The other significant parallels are the connection between the angelic greeting to Mary, which virtually translates the name, Hannah, and the *κατάλυμα* where both Jesus was born and where Elkanah and Hannah stayed while visiting Shiloh where her prayers were answered.⁶⁷ However it is also important to note that:

- a) The Hannah motif is only one of a number of motifs;
- b) Hannah was already married but Mary was only betrothed;
- c) Hannah was barren but Mary was not;
- d) Hannah prayed for a child whereas Mary's pregnancy was solely at the initiative of God.

Jesus, too, is sometimes compared to Samuel especially through the presentation in the Temple, but again there are two objections to a too rigid application of that parallel. Firstly, Mary and Joseph were simply following the religious custom of the time. Secondly, whereas Samuel was a mere human, Lk 1:35 asserts that Jesus is the

⁶³ Brown 1993: 299.

⁶⁴ Schaberg 1995:102.

⁶⁵ Brown 1993:538.

⁶⁶ Brown 1993: 328 & 400; Davies 1964: 307-308; Green 1997: 142 & 149; Lieu 1997: 7 &17; Nolland 1989: 50, 121 & 129.

⁶⁷ Brown 1993: 328; Nolland 1989: 50.

Son of God.⁶⁸ Putting aside the question whether pre-existence is involved,⁶⁹ it still begs the question whether Jesus ‘who has an origin different from other men’⁷⁰ really requires a dedication like other men.

Two other verses, namely Lk.2:41 & 52, do reflect a description of Samuel in 1 Sam. 2:26. However in 1:80 Luke has already made a similar description of John the Baptist and the importance of the Elkanah and Hannah motif in relation to Zechariah and Elizabeth has already been noted. Lk. 1:80 also reflects Isaac and Samson.⁷¹ It may be that the double emphasis of Lk.2:41 & 52 is to illustrate the previously discussed superiority of Jesus over John and perhaps also to reflect the contemporary literary descriptions of popular heroes.⁷² The point is that while a Samuel motif can be seen to be portrayed in Mary and in the boy Jesus, an over-emphasis on that motif could lead one to miss an important matter that Luke wishes to introduce. Again this matter will be further considered at the end of this chapter since it will also become relevant in the assessment of Luke’s agenda between his Infancy Narrative and the rest of his Gospel.

A key verse in the Infancy Narrative is 1:38. It does not form part of the stereotypical annunciation pattern.⁷³ In contrast to Zechariah’s words of ‘culpable unbelief’ in 1:20, these words of Mary express ‘questioning belief’⁷⁴ and so gain legitimacy. She is seen as a model believer like Abraham.⁷⁵ The favour, which God chooses to bestow on her, reflects the favour that God has bestowed on Israel.⁷⁶ However in 2:35 the anguish that Mary is warned to expect can be seen as the other side of God’s relationship with Israel in the way that Jesus will divide Israel.⁷⁷ Consequently the picture of Mary is of a woman not only rooted in the past but who ‘alone bridges in her person the infancy Gospel, the ministry of Jesus (8:19-21) and the early life of the post-resurrection church (Acts 1:14)’⁷⁸. Her obedience can enable her to be seen as the first true

⁶⁸ Brown 1993: 316.

⁶⁹ Brown 1993: 316 n 56.

⁷⁰ Brown 1993: 316 n 56.

⁷¹ Brown 1993: 376.

⁷² Green 1997: 154.

⁷³ Brown 1993: 316.

⁷⁴ Bovon 2002: 51.

⁷⁵ Bovon 2002: 93; Nolland 1989: 57.

⁷⁶ Johnson 1997: 37.

⁷⁷ Johnson 1997: 57.

⁷⁸ Nolland 1989: 113.

Christian disciple⁷⁹, the archetypal believer.⁸⁰ The way in which she is ‘overshadowed by the Holy Spirit’ can be seen as anticipating the Transfiguration event in the cloud described in Lk. 9:34 and the Pentecost event described in Acts 2:8. Just as Lk. 2:35 could anticipate the experience of Israel so it could anticipate not only the blessings of individual disciples but also their sufferings as well.⁸¹ Luke is thus warning his readers that the experiences they will enjoy and may endure were announced at the very beginning.

From what has been considered so far, it is clear that Luke in part is making an appeal in his Infancy Narrative to the characters and events related in the Old Testament. At the centre of Jewish religious history is the Temple and Jerusalem, both of which play an important part in Luke’s account.

5. The Temple and Jerusalem

Of the seven basic episodes that constitute Luke’s Infancy Narrative⁸² noted in the previous chapter, three of them, namely the annunciation about John the Baptist, the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, and the finding of Jesus in the Temple, are centred on Jerusalem and the Temple. Such emphasis would appear to be no accident. The Narrative contains ‘a notable concentration on Jerusalem and the Temple’.⁸³ Luke is using ‘geography to structure his story and to advance his literary and theological goals’.⁸⁴ Jerusalem and the Temple enjoyed an historic importance both for Judaism and as the place where Christianity started, but for Luke they are symbols of the people of Israel.⁸⁵ Jerusalem becomes the pivotal place in Luke’s account.⁸⁶

The importance of the Temple to the Narrative rests firstly in that it is the centre of Jewish piety,⁸⁷ and the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist occurs in the most

⁷⁹ Brown 1993: 318-319, 349 & 357.

⁸⁰ Evans 2008: 90.

⁸¹ Marshall 1970: 210.

⁸² Brown 1993: 250.

⁸³ Minear 1968: 116 & 125. See also Esler 1987: 131.

⁸⁴ Johnson 1997: 14. See also Brown 1993: 237; Conzelmann 1960: 154 n.1 and Nolland 1989: 40&49.

⁸⁵ Johnson 1997: 15.

⁸⁶ Johnson 1997: 15.

⁸⁷ Nolland 1989: 33.

holy place where God speaks through an angel.⁸⁸ Subsequently God speaks to Simeon in the Temple under the inspiration of the Spirit.⁸⁹ It was a place to which, according to Lk. 1:9, all the people came to pray.⁹⁰ It was a place where according to, for example, Ps. 18:7 and Ps. 27:4, it would be possible for God to hear and respond to prayer, and consequently it was somewhere where a revelation of God might be expected.⁹¹ Loyalty to the Temple was part of the Jewish faith and the way in which Luke seeks to portray the Christian assessment of this loyalty in a positive light represents a sympathetic understanding of this loyalty.⁹² It is all part of Luke's attempts to assert that Christianity does not depart from Judaism but identifies legitimate roots within it.

It is not just the place and institution of the Temple and Jerusalem that is important for Luke's narrative; it is the people whom he introduces in the context of that part of the narrative. They are important not just for their own sake but enable the present to be reflected in the past and so further cement the legitimate roots of Christianity within Judaism. All the principal figures in chapters 1 & 2 are regarded as pious Jews⁹³ and represent the wisdom of Israel.⁹⁴ The appearance of the angel to Zechariah occurs within the Temple and so reflects continuity with the Old Testament.⁹⁵ Zechariah's righteousness before God has already been noted. The story of Simeon occurs against the backdrop of the Law of Moses, which Luke mentions three times in 2:22-24⁹⁶ and together with Anna they represent the best of devout Old Testament Jewish faith.⁹⁷ Furthermore Anna, who never leaves the Temple worshipping day and night in fasting and prayer, can also be seen as the forerunner of the Jerusalem Christian community described in Acts 2:42 & 46 and also the community in Antioch in Acts 13:2.⁹⁸ It might also be that in the combination of Simeon and Anna, Luke is reminding his

⁸⁸ Green 1997: 71.

⁸⁹ Green 1997: 71.

⁹⁰ Johnson 1997: 30.

⁹¹ Green 1997: 71.

⁹² Nolland 1989: xxxviii.

⁹³ Bovon 2002: 97; Evans 2008: 98; Green 1997: 144; Marshall 1978: 118.

⁹⁴ Tannehill 1996: 74.

⁹⁵ Brown 1993: 314.

⁹⁶ Brown 1993: 452.

⁹⁷ Green 1997: 145; Nolland 1989: 116.

⁹⁸ Brown 1993: 453.

readers that Jesus will fulfil the Law and the Prophets. Simeon is portrayed as a devout Jew observing the law and Anna is a prophetess.⁹⁹

It is possible to see within the description of Jesus' presentation in the Temple the vision to Daniel in Dan. 9 21-24.¹⁰⁰ In the previous section the question of the Samuel motif was considered in relation to the presentation and certainly that motif does exist in that account.¹⁰¹ However the number of Old Testament allusions that can be seen in Luke's portrayal of the Temple and Jerusalem further support the assertion that caution needs to be applied in not over-emphasising one aspect to the detriment of the others.

However Luke's narrative was not only considering the past; Luke was also pointing his readers towards the future as well. At the beginning of his life Jesus submitted to the Law of Moses to show 'that the future Lord of Israel is from the beginning a member of Israel'.¹⁰² Jesus embodies all things that are associated with the Temple.¹⁰³ The first recorded words are uttered in the Temple and whereas then his words were received with astonishment according to Lk. 2:47, they were later (according to 19:47) to be met with rejection. Jerusalem and the Temple provide both the beginning and the end of Jesus' earthly career.¹⁰⁴ It is sometimes asserted that the 'three days' in 2:46 is an allusion to the resurrection¹⁰⁵ but in that verse Luke uses the phrase ἡμέρας τρεῖς rather than the phrase τρίτε ἡμέρα in his passion prediction.¹⁰⁶ Thus the words of 2:46 would seem to suggest no more than the passage of time since that is how Luke uses the same phrase in Acts.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless Jerusalem is the site for the beginning and end scenes of Jesus' career where 'cult and law find meaning in the Messiah'.¹⁰⁸ Luke 'shows a consistently favourable picture of Jews who almost instinctively recognise the Infant Jesus as the fulfilment of the law, the prophets and

⁹⁹ Brown 1993: 688.

¹⁰⁰ Brown 1993: 455-456.

¹⁰¹ Bovon 2002: 98; Brown 1993: 446; Lieu 1997: 17; Nolland 1989: 116.

¹⁰² Evans 2008: 221.

¹⁰³ Brown 1993: 453..

¹⁰⁴ Brown 1993: 485; Conzelmann 1960: 76 n 4 and 154 n 1; Marshall 1970 154; Nolland 1989: 57; Tannehill 1996: 76.

¹⁰⁵ Johnson 1997: 59 & 61-62.

¹⁰⁶ Johnson 1997: 59.

¹⁰⁷ Brown 1993: 487; Marshall 1978: 127; Nolland 1989: 130.

¹⁰⁸ Brown 1993: 498.

the cult'.¹⁰⁹ The customs of the Temple too are presented without criticism.¹¹⁰ Thus the promise of the future is legitimately rooted in the past.

Amongst this assembly of people there remains one anonymous group that remain to be considered, namely the shepherds who according to Luke were the first to hear the news of Jesus' birth. They provide another dimension to Luke's Infancy Narrative, which must now be considered.

6. The Shepherds

Although the previous section rightly recognises the importance of Jerusalem and the Temple, the setting of the birth of Jesus and its subsequent announcement moves the narrative as far away from that traditional environment as it is possible to be. It is sometimes thought that shepherds represented sinners whom Jesus came to save, and later rabbinic literature does suggest that they were disreputable characters. For example, 'herdsmen', which included shepherds, were excluded from being judges and witnesses because in relation to their flocks 'it was observed that they drove them there intentionally', that is to say onto other people's land which was a dishonest practice.¹¹¹ However, there is no evidence of such an attribution within Luke's narrative.¹¹² Furthermore Luke portrays shepherds in the parable of the lost sheep in a favourable light in 15:3-7,¹¹³ and Jn. 10:1-18 portrays Jesus favourably as the Good Shepherd. These facts are not surprising since the Old Testament gives a favourable portrayal of shepherds, which Luke is applying in his Infancy Narrative.

There are a number of significant verses that emphasise the positive nature of shepherds since they form a picture of God's caring role for Israel. Is. 40:11 states that God 'will feed his flock like a shepherd'. Jer. 31:10 states God will keep Israel 'as shepherd keeps his flock'. Ezek. 34:12 states 'as a shepherd seeks out his flock--- so will I seek out my sheep'. Ps. 23:1 states 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not

¹⁰⁹ Brown 1993: 488-489.

¹¹⁰ Bovon 2002: 32.

¹¹¹ Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Sanhedrin Folio 25a. Brown 1993:420.

¹¹² Bovon 2002: 87; Brown 1993: 423; Evans 2008; 203; Johnson 1997: 52; Lieu 1997: 16; Tannehill 1996: 65.

¹¹³ Marshall 1970: 139; Marshall 1978: 108.

want'. While God is portrayed as a shepherd, the shepherds in Luke's narrative are lowly ordinary people.¹¹⁴ This portrayal emphasises the fact that Jesus has come for such people such as in the incident of the centurion described in 7:1-10, the widow of Nain in 7:11-17, the emphasis on the service of women in 8:1-3, and his appeal to 'tax collectors and sinners' in 15:1.¹¹⁵ However the episode of the shepherds ends with them praising God, a feature which reappears in Luke, especially 24:53 where the disciples are described as praising God following Jesus' ascension.¹¹⁶

It is not surprising that Luke should employ this shepherd imagery since Israel regarded itself as a nation of shepherds and so used this image of the shepherd both for their God and for their King as Messiah.¹¹⁷ The shepherds in the narrative are closely linked with Bethlehem, and Bethlehem according to 1 Sam. 17:18 is the setting of David's origins.¹¹⁸ Bethlehem is associated with Messianic expectations as a consequence of the prophecy in Mic. 5:2, and Lk. 2:4 calls Bethlehem the 'city of David', a designation more usually given to Jerusalem.¹¹⁹ Brown further seeks to extend the shepherds watching over a flock with the Tower of Eder mentioned in Gen. 35:21 and the Tower of the Flock in Mic. 4:8.¹²⁰ Nolland notes that the key word of 'tower' is missing and it is not dominion that comes to the shepherds' lookout point; moreover keeping watch is the natural night activity of shepherds.¹²¹ What this argument does illustrate is the danger of trying to force a motif too far.

One obvious objection to the above portrayal is that Jesus should be the shepherd if the Davidic allusion is to be valid.¹²² However that again illustrates the danger of forcing a motif too far. If Luke wishes to teach theological truths, no motif should be discarded simply because it does not fit exactly. However while the narrative may contain elements that reflect Greek and Roman stories,¹²³ the whole motif suggests that the story is essentially Jewish.¹²⁴

¹¹⁴ Green 1997: 131.

¹¹⁵ Marshall 1978: 108.

¹¹⁶ Marshall 1978: 114.

¹¹⁷ Bovon 2002: 86.

¹¹⁸ Nolland 1989: 106.

¹¹⁹ Brown 1993: 423.

¹²⁰ Brown 1993: 421-423.

¹²¹ Nolland 1989: 106.

¹²² Marshall 1978: 108.

¹²³ Bovon 2002: 87.

¹²⁴ Brown 1993: 421; Evans 2009: 203; Marshall 1978: 108.

Thus Luke in his narrative is further emphasising - by reference to shepherds, Bethlehem and the Davidic connection - how the birth of Jesus and his subsequent message is rooted in themes that were part of the Jewish religious tradition. They also represent in part how role reversal in society and the universal nature of the Gospel were important themes for Luke. Accordingly role reversal in society will firstly be considered.

7. Role Reversal in Society

The use of the term ‘role reversal in society’ requires definition and explanation. It implies in the current context that, at the time of the composition of the Gospel, there existed within society a structure where some were favoured over others. So for example the rich were to be preferred to the poor and men enjoyed a superior social status to women but there is a danger of creating a stereotype. In the Old Testament, the poor were the concern of both God and the nation so that for example in Ex. 23:6 the people were warned not to ‘pervert the justice due to your poor’ and at both Ex. 23:11 and Lev. 19:10 the people were instructed how to make crops available to the poor. Moreover, Ps. 147:6 states; ‘The Lord lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground’. Prov. 31:10-31 extols the good wife and the credit she brings to the household. However Luke’s inclusion in his Gospel of passages, not found in the other Gospels such as 6:24-26, 12:19-20 and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in 16:19-31, would suggest that he had a particular concern about oppression by the rich.¹²⁵ Accordingly while Luke’s appeal is that the Christian message demands a review of social structure, the reversal sought was to what God had always intended for his people, albeit now undergoing a strong re-emphasis, rather than the introduction of something completely new and radical. Luke is ‘seeking to extract from Judaism a broad and humane ethic’.¹²⁶

The clearest message of reversal is contained in the Magnificat¹²⁷. God has scattered the proud and mighty and exalted those of low degree, filling the hungry with good

¹²⁵ Brown 1993: 364; Marshall 1970: 143.

¹²⁶ Evans 2008: 97 & 175.

¹²⁷ A full discussion of the Magnificat is to be found in §5:12-13 below.

things and sending the rich away empty. The Magnificat ‘anticipates the Lucan Jesus preaching that wealth and poverty are not real values at all since they have no standing in God’s sight’.¹²⁸ It expresses how God intervenes in both a negative and positive way,¹²⁹ putting down those whose arrogance God opposes and exalting the lowly of which Mary becomes the prime example.¹³⁰ Because of what has happened to Mary, all the poor can anticipate that God will intervene on their behalf.¹³¹

The respective outcomes of the rich and poor are matters that dominate Luke’s Gospel, both in the way in which he uses material found in other Gospels and in the material he introduces as unique to his Gospel. For example, whereas in Matt. 13:53-58 and Mk. 6:1-6, Jesus’ sermon at the synagogue at Nazareth appears in the midst of their Gospels and they do not record the message, Lk. 4:18-19 not only states the message but also introduces it as the first message that he preaches. It almost represents a manifesto for his entire earthly ministry. In Matthew’s account of the Sermon on the Mount in his Gospel (5:3-12), the teaching is more concerned with spiritual values and rewards, but in Luke’s counterpart, the Sermon on the Plain in 6:20-26, the emphasis is more on material values.¹³² Other similar examples in Luke are the parable of the rich fool in 12:13-21 with the promise that God will care for his disciples in vv 22-34, and the parable about the reversal of places at a banquet in 14:7-11.¹³³ Perhaps the most striking example is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, with the words of Abraham at 16:25: ‘Son remember that you in your lifetime received your good things and Lazarus in like manner evil things, but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish’.¹³⁴ However the point needs to be made that it is not riches in themselves that are evil but the failure to use them wisely. Consequently the rich man in the parable who did not repent was in torment but Zaccheus who did repent was saved.¹³⁵ It is evident from Acts 17:4 & 12 that the Gospel appealed to influential people.

¹²⁸ Brown 1993: 364.

¹²⁹ Nolland 1989: 65.

¹³⁰ Johnson 1997: 42 & 44. Mary becomes the prime example of this exultation irrespective of whether Luke is portraying her as the speaker of the Magnificat

¹³¹ Tannehill 1996: 11.

¹³² Evans 2008: 97; Marshall 1970: 141.

¹³³ Evans 2008: 98; Marshall 1970: 141.

¹³⁴ Evans 2008: 98; Marshall 1970: 141.

¹³⁵ Evans 2008: 100; Marshall 1970: 142.

Luke's Infancy Narrative brings to the fore his understanding of the important role of women in those events. The most important example is Mary, who not only as a woman but also because of social status represents the reversal of social expectations.¹³⁶ She has no official position, her righteousness is not in observing the Torah and the annunciation does not occur in a 'cultic setting'.¹³⁷ 'She is among the most powerless in society; she is young in a world that values age; female in a world ruled by men; poor in a stratified economy'.¹³⁸ Her character represents a marked contrast to Zechariah, who is not only a man but also a priest, yet by virtue of the annunciation she now enjoys a new status.¹³⁹ It becomes an example of how 'Luke retains a masculine dimension in the presentation of his Gospel, yet is able to attribute a positive function to women.'¹⁴⁰ The fact that the events of the birth of Jesus focus on her presents a marked contrast to Matthew's narrative which centres on Joseph. Even in the events described in Lk. 2:41-52, it is Mary not Joseph who speaks.¹⁴¹

However it is not just upon Mary that Luke focuses in depicting the role of women. In 1:6, Luke also emphasises the righteousness of Elizabeth and her acceptance of God's intervention on her behalf. It stands in marked contrast to Zechariah's response to the message that he receives so that 'hardly for the first time in Luke/Acts a woman is put forward as a recipient of God's favour and a model of faithfulness to God's purpose'.¹⁴² Both Mary and Elizabeth have active roles as prophetic interpreters of what is happening to them.¹⁴³ The other woman who features in the narrative is Anna, a prophetess, again indicating the importance Luke attaches to women including such special service as a prophet.¹⁴⁴ Only five other women, namely Miriam, (Ex. 15:20), Deborah, (Judg. 4:4), Huldah, (2 Ki. 22:14), Noadiah, (Neh. 6:14), and Isaiah's wife, (Is. 8:3) are called prophetesses.¹⁴⁵ In particular Anna's presence along with Simeon represents the way in which it was important for Luke to balance male and female

¹³⁶ Johnson 1997: 39.

¹³⁷ Johnson 1997: 39

¹³⁸ Johnson 1997: 39; See also Tannehill 1996: 48.

¹³⁹ Marshall 1978: 83.

¹⁴⁰ Seim 1994: 259.

¹⁴¹ Bovon 2002: 113.

¹⁴² Green 1997: 81.

¹⁴³ Seim 1994: 176.

¹⁴⁴ Tannehill 1996: 74.

¹⁴⁵ Brown 1993: 441; Nolland 1989: 122; Seim 1994: 168 notes that in rabbinic literature, Noadiah is omitted, and Sarah, Hannah, Abigail and Esther are added.

figures.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore the court of women has been identified as one of the two places where Simeon and Anna encountered the Holy Family.¹⁴⁷

In introducing the reader to three important women, Luke is setting the scene for women and their role later in the Gospel. In his Gospel, of the forty-three passages, which are concerned with women or female matters, twenty-three are specifically Lukan.¹⁴⁸ For example, in 8:2, Luke uniquely introduces three women, particularly Mary Magdalene, as working in parallel with the apostles, a parallel reflected in Simeon and Anna described in the previous paragraph.¹⁴⁹ Such female company would be unusual, but for Luke is important since it underlines the place of women in his narrative.¹⁵⁰ At 10:38-42, Mary and Martha are further similar examples. Such service continues through to the burial of Jesus for it is only in Luke's Gospel that the women are portrayed as active participants in the embalming. These and other examples such as the widow of Nain would resonate with Luke's readers that women were important to the community,¹⁵¹ since for example in 1 Tim. 5:5 Anna's example is recalled in the teachings to the early church.¹⁵² Thus Luke reminds his readers of the proper place that women enjoyed in the sight of God. He emphasises this teaching in the way that he portrays women in the Infancy Narrative. He then reinforces it within the earthly ministry of Jesus, as for example described in Lk. 8:1-3. Thereafter he takes this message forward into the life of the early church as, for example, can be seen from Acts 17: 4 & 12.

In 1:18, Luke writes that John will prepare Jesus' way 'to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of sins'. Luke's view of salvation is to be considered later but here it is necessary to mention how forgiveness can reverse a social situation. The idea of forgiveness of sins, while apparent in the Old Testament, is a very Lukan phrase since Luke uses it in eight out of the eleven times that the phrase appears in the New Testament.¹⁵³ For Luke no one is beyond God's forgiveness and the reversal that

¹⁴⁶ Johnson: 1997 56; Nolland 1989: 122; Seim 1994: 116.

¹⁴⁷ Brown 1993: 439.

¹⁴⁸ Seim 1994: 3

¹⁴⁹ Nolland 1989: 365. Seim 1994: 13 lists thirteen parallels in Luke/Acts.

¹⁵⁰ Evans 2008: 366.

¹⁵¹ Rothschild 2010: 35; Tannehill 1996: 74;

¹⁵² Brown 1993: 467; Marshall 1978: 124

¹⁵³ Brown 1993: 373; Evans 2008: 2008: 186; Green 1997: 118; Johnson 1997: 46; Nolland 1989: 89

can occur is perhaps best illustrated by the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Lk. 18:9-14. Other prime examples of this especially Lucan theme are the parable of the Good Samaritan in Lk. 10:25-37 and the three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the Prodigal Son related in chapter 15. Such teaching would also contribute to the universal nature of Luke's Gospel message, which will also be considered later.

Although the importance of the Temple and Jerusalem were considered above, it is perhaps in the actual birth of Jesus that Luke is warning his readers that things will never be the same. Whereas before the Holy of Holies in the Temple was the place where God and humanity met, the shepherds receive the good news in a field and see its fulfilment in the most everyday, ordinary place. In this way 'Luke puts us on notice that the new world coming is of a radically different shape than the former one, that questions of holiness must be asked and addressed in different ways and that status and issues of values must be re-examined afresh'.¹⁵⁴ Such a re-examination requires a consideration of some general themes important to Luke, the first of which is the universal nature of the message he proclaimed.

8. Universalism

Just as the term 'role reversal' required definition in the previous section, the same applies to the term of universalism. In the context of the present study the term is understood to mean that while the message and purpose of God had been revealed to the Jewish people through their religious history, practice and customs, it was never intended for them alone, but is relevant and applicable for all nations.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore just as in the previous section it was clear that Luke was seeking to re-emphasise teaching that was already present, so it was the case that the universal purpose of the Christian message represented not a radical departure from the past but a re-affirmation of a principle that was already present.

In the previous chapter on Matthew's agenda in the section on Jesus as Son of Abraham, the various verses in Genesis indicating the universal nature of the

¹⁵⁴ Green 1997: 131.

¹⁵⁵ Evans 2008: 46.

covenant with Abraham were highlighted. Their content and message are also relevant to this section since Luke ‘regards his opening chapters as though they were the continuation of the story rooted in the Abrahamic covenant’.¹⁵⁶ Lk. 1:55 & 73 both refer to Abraham as the source of the promise now being revealed.¹⁵⁷ The parallel of Zechariah and Elizabeth with Abraham and Sarah was noted in that section and there is a ‘common repertoire of elements’ between Lk. 1:5–2:52 and Gen. 11-21. Those elements include notably the birth of a son to devout parents, where the woman is past the age to bear a child, and where the son is to fulfil a divine purpose.¹⁵⁸ To emphasise the relevance of the story of Abraham, Luke has drawn upon passages such as Dan. 7-10, Gen. 27-43 and 2 Sam. 7:12-16 so that they can all come together to show that what is now happening is rooted firmly in the past but is also being given a fresh interpretation in what is to be narrated.¹⁵⁹ Accordingly

The story of Jesus is written into the story of Israel’s scriptures, particularly the story of Abraham. In Luke’s birth narrative multiple and rotund echoes of the Abraham tradition can be heard. Luke’s narrative then is a self-conscious continuation of the redemptive story in which divine promises to Abraham are shown not to have escaped God’s memory but indeed to be in the process of actualisation in the present.¹⁶⁰

There is a marked contrast between the introduction to the birth of John the Baptist in 1:5 and the birth of Jesus in 2:1. Chapter 1:5 firmly roots those events in the Judea of King Herod; although Augustus was the Emperor at the time he is not introduced until 2:1. These verses reflect Luke’s particular interest in dates, times and places.¹⁶¹ Luke seems to have wanted to draw specific attention to the fact that not only was Jesus a saviour, he was a peaceful saviour like the Emperor and yet also quite different to him. When Augustus had established himself as the sole ruler of the Roman world, he established a time of peace¹⁶² and there exists an inscription at Halicarnassus describing Augustus as the ‘saviour of the whole world’¹⁶³ and one at Priene celebrating Augustus’ birth as ‘the beginning of good news for the whole world’.¹⁶⁴ In

¹⁵⁶ Green 1997: 57.

¹⁵⁷ Green 1997: 56.

¹⁵⁸ Green 1997: 55.

¹⁵⁹ Green 1997: 57.

¹⁶⁰ Green 2010: 83.

¹⁶¹ Minear 1968: 116

¹⁶² Brown 1993: 415.

¹⁶³ Brown 1993: 415.

¹⁶⁴ Evans 2008: 203; see also Green 1997: 58, Marshall 1978: 209 and Tannehill 1996: 66.

one sense there was a marked contrast between Jesus and Augustus¹⁶⁵ but while this imagery might represent Luke's 'gentle counter-propaganda'¹⁶⁶ that Jesus not Augustus was the saviour of the world, it also proved that Christians were not antagonists denying an allegation that was to reappear in Lk. 23:2.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore these inscriptions that celebrated Augustus and a reign of peace may well have been evoked in the minds of Luke's readers as they considered the very similar content of the angelic message to the shepherds.¹⁶⁸ There is now good news 'for all the people' (2:10) and peace has come 'on earth' (2:14).¹⁶⁹ It also reflects the later Palm Sunday praise that Jesus was to receive upon his entry into Jerusalem.¹⁷⁰

The problem of the dates in relation to the census was considered in the previous chapter, with the conclusion that the conundrum could not be resolved on a purely factual basis. It would seem that by placing Jesus' birth in the context of the census Luke achieves three aims. Firstly, it shows that even the greatest ruler of the time could, albeit unwittingly, be subject to the will of God and so emphasises that God is not just the God of Israel but of the whole world.¹⁷¹ Secondly, Bethlehem may now be understood as the promised birthplace for God's Messiah, representing a final stage of Davidic sonship back to his earthly life.¹⁷² However, since Mary and Joseph dwell in Nazareth, Luke needs to find a literary device to move Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem at the appropriate time.¹⁷³ Thirdly, according to Acts 5:37 the census was a time of revolt by some. However, by contrast Mary and Joseph were obedient to the Imperial decree and thus by extension their obedience represented further evidence that Christianity did not present a threat to Imperial law and order.¹⁷⁴ There is a fourth possible explanation in that the census could be seen as a Midrash on Ps. 87:6, of which a variant reading is 'in the census of the people this one will be born there'.¹⁷⁵ Such a reading suggests the birth of a Messianic King occurs in a census of the

¹⁶⁵ Lieu 1997: 13.

¹⁶⁶ Brown 1993: 424.

¹⁶⁷ Nolland 1989: 107.

¹⁶⁸ Lieu 1997: 16.

¹⁶⁹ Green 1997: 131; Marshall 1978: 109.

¹⁷⁰ Lieu 1997: 16.

¹⁷¹ Marshall 1978: 98; Nolland 1989: 103.

¹⁷² Evans 2008: 190.

¹⁷³ Bovon 2002: 83 & 84; Brown 1993: 414 & 555; Johnson 1997: 52.

¹⁷⁴ Brown 1993: 416-417; Tannehill 1966: 64.

¹⁷⁵ Bovon 2002: 83; Brown 1993: 417.

peoples.¹⁷⁶ Although attractive the problem is how Luke would have known of the variant reading.¹⁷⁷ Even on Brown's evidence the case for Lucan knowledge of this variant reading seems thin and consequently there is little to commend it.¹⁷⁸ However despite this criticism it is difficult, in the light of the other facts above, to disagree with Brown's overall conclusion that the census 'served admirably the interests of Lucan theology giving the Nativity the backdrop of world and Israelite history'.¹⁷⁹

The focus above on chapter 2 could suggest that it is only in that chapter that Luke starts to introduce the universal nature of his message. However it is possible that there might be 'inklings of a specific embracing of Jew and Gentile'¹⁸⁰ present already in the Magnificat at Lk. 1:55¹⁸¹ and the Benedictus at Lk. 1:73 & 78-79.¹⁸² Certainly, given what has been said about the universal nature of the motif of Abraham, such a conclusion is tenable. However what is also clear is that in the Nunc Dimittis in Lk. 2:32, with the reference back to Gentiles and Israel, the matter is put beyond any doubt. The Gentiles are to be 'attracted by the light of God's son'.¹⁸³ There are variant readings for this verse.¹⁸⁴ However it would seem that none of them detract from the universal nature of the message. At first sight it might seem that the idea to include the Gentiles is new¹⁸⁵ but it is also clear that the Nunc Dimittis echoes the universalism of Isaiah especially 42:6, 49:6, 52:10 and 60:1 & 2.¹⁸⁶ It is perhaps also significant that the Gentiles are mentioned first.¹⁸⁷

Given all this material it is perhaps surprising that Luke records Jesus as only rarely interacting with Gentiles. The two best examples are the parable of the Good Samaritan in 10:25-37,¹⁸⁸ and the healed Samaritan leper in 17:11-19.¹⁸⁹ The

¹⁷⁶ Brown 1993: 417-418.

¹⁷⁷ Brown 1993: 418.

¹⁷⁸ Nolland 1989: 103.

¹⁷⁹ Brown 1993: 555.

¹⁸⁰ Green 1997: 131.

¹⁸¹ Evans 2008: 174; Green 1997: 101.

¹⁸² Green 1997: 131.

¹⁸³ Brown 1993: 459.

¹⁸⁴ Evans 2008: 217; Nolland 1989: 120.

¹⁸⁵ Tannehill 1996: 51.

¹⁸⁶ Brown 1993: 458-459; Nolland 1989: 121.

¹⁸⁷ Bovon 2002: 103.

¹⁸⁸ Evans 2008: 467; Marshall 1978: 446.

¹⁸⁹ Evans 2008: 623; Marshall 1978: 649.

universalistic message in these texts¹⁹⁰ is ‘forced and muted’.¹⁹¹ In the healing of the centurion’s servant in Lk. 7:2-10, Jesus is astonished at the faith of a Gentile.¹⁹² The Gospel however does end like Matthew’s with a commission at 24:47 to preach the Gospel to all nations.¹⁹³ The best that therefore can be said about Luke’s Infancy Narrative is that it seeks to establish the proposition that the Gospel is for both Jews and Gentiles. However that agenda of a message to the whole world is not fully established in the rest of the Gospel. Nevertheless Luke’s Infancy Narrative provides sufficient evidence to justify taking the message to the Gentiles when Luke relates the missionary activity of the church in Acts. What that message included must now be considered.

9. Salvation

Salvation is a key concept in the theology of Luke.¹⁹⁴ It is:

a wide term. As employed by Luke it refers to the content of the good news preached by Jesus, a message which brought men and women deliverance from their sin and the joy of the Kingdom of God...Salvation was thus a present possession whose reality was known by those who repented and believed in Jesus Christ but at the same time it was a foretaste of the future blessings associated with the parousia.¹⁹⁵

Salvation previously associated with the death and resurrection of Jesus is now associated with his birth¹⁹⁶ and is the definitive act by which God has kept his covenant with Israel.¹⁹⁷ Salvation is not a feature unique to Lucan theology but it is a central motif more fully developed than in the other Synoptic Gospels.¹⁹⁸ Luke seeks to develop the motif of salvation through the characters he portrays, through their words that God inspires them to speak, and those words spoken by divine messengers.

¹⁹⁰ Johnson 1997: 82.

¹⁹¹ Evans 2008: 275; Marshall 1978: 189.

¹⁹² Evans 2008: 341.

¹⁹³ Green 1997: 10.

¹⁹⁴ Marshall 1970: 9.

¹⁹⁵ Marshall 1970: 9: See also Bovon 2002: 74.

¹⁹⁶ Brown 1993: 360

¹⁹⁷ Brown 1993: 364; Green 1997: 117

¹⁹⁸ Marshall 1970: 93. Nolland 1989: 92 suggests that ‘Luke’s whole story is the coming of salvation to mankind’ but that perhaps is an overstatement since that might seem to deny the other relevant matters considered in this chapter

Although the role of John the Baptist to prepare the people to turn to God is described to Zechariah in Lk. 1:14-17, there is no mention of salvation since Luke does not introduce that concept until the Magnificat.¹⁹⁹ However Luke refers to John's role in the Benedictus when he uses such phrases as the 'horn of salvation' in v 69, knowledge of salvation in v 75, and the fact of 'saving from our enemies' in v 71. God as Saviour and salvation are Old Testament terms²⁰⁰ but the expression 'knowledge of salvation' is unparalleled and appears to be Lucan and Christian.²⁰¹ The salvation expressed here reflects the salvation expressed in Deutero-Isaiah such as 49:6 and the Psalms such as Ps. 106:10 and Ps. 18:17.²⁰² However while it might seem that salvation could be social and political on the one hand and spiritual on the other, one vision does not exclude the other since all are present in the time of peace.²⁰³ The reference to a 'horn of salvation' is intended to convey the fact that the bringer of salvation will be mighty and strong.²⁰⁴ It is also significant that the bringer of salvation should come from the 'House of David' since it becomes an expression of Davidic Messianism.²⁰⁵ It is perhaps also significant that the opening line of the Benedictus, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel' is recorded at 1 Ki. 1:48 as spoken by David when Solomon ascended to the throne.²⁰⁶

The above terms describe salvation in general but the Benedictus also describes John's task in particular. He is to bring knowledge of salvation by means of the forgiveness of sins.²⁰⁷ It is interesting that the Benedictus makes no reference to John's primary activity, that of Baptism.²⁰⁸ However it is clear that baptism, repentance, forgiveness of sins, and salvation are all linked.²⁰⁹ So right at the beginning of his ministry John appears to be 'preaching a baptism of repentance for

¹⁹⁹ Marshall 1970: 97

²⁰⁰ Marshall 1970: 99

²⁰¹ Brown 1993: 373 & 390; Evans 2008: 186

²⁰² Brown 1993: 385 & 386-387.

²⁰³ Green 1997: 114-115; Tannehill 1996: 62.

²⁰⁴ Bovon 2002: 72; Brown 1993: 371; Evans 2008: 183; Johnson 1997: 46; Marshall 1970: 99; Marshall 1978: 91; Nolland 1989: 86; Tannehill 1996: 59.

²⁰⁵ Brown 1993: 371; Evans 2008: 183; Johnson 1997: 46; Marshall 1970: 99; Marshall 1978: 91; Nolland 1989: 86; Tannehill 1996: 59.

²⁰⁶ Brown 1993: 384.

²⁰⁷ Green 1997: 118; Johnson 1997: 46; Marshall 1970: 99.

²⁰⁸ Bovon 2002: 75; Marshall 1978: 93.

²⁰⁹ Marshall 1970: 99; Marshall 1978: 93.

the forgiveness of sins' as Luke states in 3:3 so that 'all flesh shall see the salvation of God'.²¹⁰ The historical actuality of John's ministry has been foretold.²¹¹

The first reference to God as 'Saviour' in Luke's narrative appears at 1:47. Therefore it is necessary to think of God as Saviour²¹² and then see how Luke applies it to the birth of Jesus. It is God who has the principal role in salvation.²¹³ In the Old Testament, God appears as the instrument of salvation, for example at 1 Sam. 2:1, Ps. 25, Hab. 3:18 and Zeph. 3:17 where salvation is seen as deliverance from enemies, oppression and affliction.²¹⁴ It is the thought of God as a warrior who gives victory in battle that is picked up by Zechariah when he speaks about deliverance from our enemies.²¹⁵ However, in the words of the Magnificat salvation is also to be seen in the reversal of the social role model where the hungry are fed and the proud scattered.²¹⁶ What makes the position different is that 'salvation has come in Jesus of Nazareth' as 'the definitive act by which God has kept his covenant with Israel'.²¹⁷

Although Zechariah in the Benedictus has described the role of John the Baptist as 'to give knowledge of salvation' the precise role of Jesus in God's plan of salvation is made clear in the annunciation to Mary, the angels' message to the shepherds, and the words of Simeon that are stated in the Nunc Dimittis. In Lk. 1:31, Mary is told that her son is to be called Jesus, which means 'Yahweh saves'. Unlike Matthew Luke does not offer an explanation of the name. Generally the themes already considered in Luke's Infancy Narrative seem implied rather than directly expressed, so Luke's failure to alert the reader to the significance of the name is perhaps not surprising.²¹⁸ However, given Luke's apparent knowledge on other Jewish matters, it would be

²¹⁰ Johnson 1997: 46.

²¹¹ Marshall 1970: 99.

²¹² Marshall 1970: 98.

²¹³ Brown 1993: 365.

²¹⁴ Brown 1993: 361; Evans 2008: 174.

²¹⁵ Marshall 1970: 99.

²¹⁶ Marshall 1970: 98.

²¹⁷ Brown 1993: 364; Marshall 1970: 102.

²¹⁸ Evans 2008: 161.

surprising if he were not aware of the importance of the name.²¹⁹ Heaven-given names always have etymological significance.²²⁰

In Lk. 2:11 the shepherds are told that a Saviour has been born in the city of David who is Christ the Lord.²²¹ There is a problem with the phrase Χριστός κύριος, which is translated as ‘Christ the Lord’ since there is some evidence for reading the phrase as Χριστός κυρίου, ‘the Lord’s Christ’.²²² The phrase Χριστός κύριος, occurs nowhere else in the New Testament²²³ and it is possible that Luke was seeking to explain the term ‘Messiah’ to his non-Jewish readers.²²⁴ The meaning of ‘Messiah’ in this context is clearly understood to be that of a Davidic deliverer.²²⁵ The mention of the city of David reinforces the picture of Jesus as the Davidic Messiah.²²⁶ So while Luke is portraying Jesus as Saviour, the Davidic Messiah, it still remains unclear for whom this salvation is intended. In the angelic song the phrase ‘and on earth peace among those whom he favours’ is used and there is no racial or religious qualification attached to that phrase. However, despite the apparently clear meaning of the words, it is argued that in this context the phrase refers to Israel and is not intended to imply a more universalistic concept.²²⁷

The final key reference to the saving work of Jesus is in the Nunc Dimittis. Here for the first time is a clear and unambiguous reference to salvation including the Gentiles.²²⁸ In addition, the Gentiles are mentioned before Israel.²²⁹ Thus Luke through the words of Simeon is declaring that God is the ultimate source of salvation. Furthermore it is through God’s son, Jesus, that God saves. Luke then adds that salvation, although foretold in the Old Testament, is for Gentiles as well as Israel and that John the Baptist is to be its herald.²³⁰ Simeon’s words then become obscure in

²¹⁹ Marshall 1978: 67 seemingly contradicting Marshall 1970: 98; ‘It is on the whole unlikely that we should lay too much stress on the concept of Saviourhood at this point’.

²²⁰ Marshall 1970: 100; Nolland 1989: 51. Green 1997: 88 however places emphasis on God’s role rather than etymology.

²²¹ Bovon 2002: 89; Johnson 1997: 50; Marshall 1970: 100.

²²² Brown 1993: 403; Evans 2008: 204; Marshall 1978: 110; Nolland 1989: 107.

²²³ Brown 1993: 403; Nolland 1989: 107.

²²⁴ Marshall 1978:110.

²²⁵ Green 1997:13

²²⁶ Marshall 1978: 110; Nolland 1989: 107; Tannehill 1996: 66.

²²⁷ Brown 1993: 402; Marshall 1970: 101.

²²⁸ Brown 1993: 459; Johnson 1997: 55; Marshall 1970: 101; Marshall 1978: 220; Nolland 1989: 120.

²²⁹ Bovon 2002: 103; Evans 2008: 217.

²³⁰ Green 1997: 148; Marshall 1970: 102..

2:34 & 35²³¹ and it is difficult to find a meaning beyond the anguish that Mary might feel in the future and also the division that Jesus' ministry might cause. It may be that Luke has left it deliberately vague as a ploy to engage his readers to continue with his story.²³²

How far then does this theme of salvation continue in the rest of Luke's Gospel? The answer is that it is a central theme in the Gospel.²³³ That is not to say that the theme of salvation is unique to Luke, since in broad terms all four Gospels are concerned with salvation, but what Luke stresses are the blessings of salvation.²³⁴ These blessings are first indicated in 3:6 in which the adult John the Baptist is introduced so 'all flesh shall see the salvation of God'²³⁵ and climaxes in 19:9-10 where Jesus is recorded as saying 'Today salvation has come to this house since he [Zaccheus] is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost'.²³⁶ Jesus' first sermon at Nazareth at 4:18-19 adopting Is. 61:1-2 shows that he too is concerned with the blessings of salvation.²³⁷ It is further emphasised by the Sermon on the Plain.²³⁸ The blessings are not only reflected in the works Jesus performed but also in the blessings received by the rich and poor, women and outcasts in the passages that were mentioned in that section on role reversal in society. Salvation lies at the core of God's covenant with Israel. Luke therefore pays attention to individuals as reminders of those in the Old Testament of whom God approves. He also pays similar attention to institutions such as the Temple and Jerusalem. The purpose of all these allusions is to illustrate how salvation begins to draw together other concepts important to Luke in his Infancy Narrative. Above everything else is the stress upon Jesus as the Davidic Messiah who brings salvation in fulfilment of the covenant. It is thus the importance of fulfilment in Luke's narrative that must now be considered.

²³¹ Evans 2008: 219.

²³² Green 1997: 150.

²³³ Evans 2008: 140; Lieu 1997: xiii; Marshall 1970 116.

²³⁴ Marshall 1970: 117.

²³⁵ Evans 2008: 140.

²³⁶ Marshall 1970: 116.

²³⁷ Marshall 1970: 118.

²³⁸ Marshall 1970: 141.

10. Fulfilment

Luke's Gospel and Acts have been called the 'two books of fulfilment'.²³⁹ The Gospel 'is primarily focused on God and the fulfilment of God's ancient purpose'.²⁴⁰ Fulfilment may be defined as 'events promised and performed by God'.²⁴¹ However 'they are not mere events but form part of a series planned and carried into effect by God'.²⁴² Thus in his prologue at 1:1 Luke writes about 'things which have been accomplished among us', using the perfect tense to stress the idea of fulfilment.²⁴³ If such statements are to be sustainable it ought to be possible to see how firstly Luke develops this argument through his Infancy Narrative and then subsequently applies it in the rest of his Gospel.

Unlike Matthew, Luke does not specifically use Old Testament passages at relevant points in support of his narrative.²⁴⁴ Consequently just as it was necessary to take care when applying Old Testament motifs to the characters in the Infancy Narrative so must care be taken in the application of Old Testament verses to the current narrative. Perhaps the prime example of the need for that care is to see Luke's annunciation scene in 1:31 as adopting Is. 7:14.²⁴⁵ The difficulties surrounding the precise translation of this verse, as well as that there is no evidence to support the assertion that the Messiah was to be born of a virgin suggest that Luke did not have the verse from Isaiah in mind.²⁴⁶

In the Magnificat at 1:55 and the Benedictus at 1:73, reference is made to God's promise to Abraham. The nature of the covenant with Abraham in Gen. 22:15ff was considered earlier in the section on universalism. It was also a covenant in which God showed mercy to Israel such as in the slavery in Egypt in Ex. 2:24 and 32:13, and when Moses appealed to God in Deut. 9:27 to pardon the stubbornness of the

²³⁹ Bovon 2002: 3.

²⁴⁰ Green 1997: 5.

²⁴¹ Marshall 1970: 41.

²⁴² Marshall 1970: 41; Lieu 1997: xiv.

²⁴³ Johnson 1997: 9; Marshall 1970: 41; Minnear 1968: 117.

²⁴⁴ Evans 2008: 138.

²⁴⁵ Marshall 1978: 66; Tannehill 1996: 48.

²⁴⁶ Brown 1993: 305; Green 1997: 88; Lieu 1997: 8; Nolland 1989: 51.

Israelites.²⁴⁷ The eternal nature of this covenant is emphasised in Ps. 105:8-11.²⁴⁸ Now by including in these two canticles reference to God remembering his promise to Abraham and the covenant with Abraham, Luke is clearly stating that what was promised to Abraham is now being fulfilled in the events that are about to unfold.²⁴⁹ God will show his steadfast love in accordance with a past oath.²⁵⁰ The words are not especially universalistic,²⁵¹ but it is nevertheless the essential message to Luke's Gentile Christian readers that God does fulfil the promises that he spoke long ago.²⁵²

If the promises made to Abraham are important then the promises made to David by God through the prophet Nathan in 2 Sam. 8:8-16 are absolutely vital if Jesus is to be understood as the Davidic Messiah.²⁵³ The connections between David, Jesus and Bethlehem have already been noted. The idea of the annunciation in Lk. 1:32-33 presents a strong affirmation of Davidic Messianism, and although the language is not close to major messianic texts it is closer to the promise by Nathan especially in 2 Sam 8:9, 13, 14 and 16.²⁵⁴ The language used expresses Israel's national hope that God intended to give Jesus the rule of David.²⁵⁵ Lk. 1:32-33 are clearly connected with the expectation of a restored Davidic monarchy with a single ruler reigning forever, reflecting the everlasting rule of God.²⁵⁶ The importance of Davidic ancestry would appear to be the only reason for the mention of Joseph in Lk. 1:17 since he is otherwise scarcely mentioned.²⁵⁷ The focus of praise in the Magnificat is the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant through the birth of the Messiah²⁵⁸ and in that fulfilment salvation has come to the people of Israel as the definitive act by which God has kept his covenant.²⁵⁹ What God has begun to do is expressed in terms of what God has done in the Old Testament and is regarded now as being fulfilled.²⁶⁰ The Benedictus, too, expresses the same sentiment of salvation and fulfilment through

²⁴⁷ Green 1997: 117; Nolland 1989: 73.

²⁴⁸ Green 1997: 117; Nolland 1989: 73.

²⁴⁹ Brown 1977: 383; Green 1997: 108.

²⁵⁰ Evans 2008: 177.

²⁵¹ Marshall 1978: 85.

²⁵² Johnson 1997: 42-43.

²⁵³ Brown 1993: 310.

²⁵⁴ Bovon 2002: 51; Brown 1993: 310; Johnson 1997: 37; Nolland 1989: 53.

²⁵⁵ Evans 2008: 74.

²⁵⁶ Green 1997: 88.

²⁵⁷ Green 1997: 84 – 85.

²⁵⁸ Brown 1993: 360.

²⁵⁹ Brown 1993: 366.

²⁶⁰ Marshall 1978: 84.

the covenant with David in 1:69-71, and the mention of Abraham after David represents an interesting comparison with Matt. 1:1.²⁶¹ It is possible to see a difference between the two canticles in that the Magnificat sees fulfilment at least in principle as having occurred, whereas the Benedictus sees fulfilment, while promised, as something still to be fulfilled. Such a contrast would appear to be artistic rather than theological²⁶² since Luke regards present events as important, which will be considered later in this section.

The sentiments of fulfilment in these two canticles are taken to a new level in the Nunc Dimittis. Simeon is described in Lk. 2:30-31 as seeing the salvation that God has promised. That which is promised is now fulfilled. What is prepared is not just an item of salvation but the whole of salvation itself which is the whole purpose of divine activity in and through Israel.²⁶³ Simeon expresses a clear sense of fulfilment in the context of the coming of the Messiah.²⁶⁴ However the emphasis now lies on the conviction that what is now being fulfilled is God's plan for all people not just Israel²⁶⁵ a fact that should not surprise given the covenant with Abraham but would nevertheless appear to need to be stressed. There are some issues over the precise translation of 2:32²⁶⁶ but none of the various translations would appear to undermine the assertion that, however salvation is to be described, it is now fulfilled in the person of Jesus and is a salvation for the whole world.

As indicated above it is possible to see Luke's interest in fulfilment illustrated in more immediate events, such as Zechariah's inability to speak until he affirms the name 'John'²⁶⁷ and the sign to the shepherds through which they will identify the Saviour.²⁶⁸ The use of the word 'today' in the promise to the shepherds emphasises present fulfilment, and 'today' is an important word for Luke in that it is used later at 4:21, 5:26, 19:9 and 23:43.²⁶⁹ John's role as fulfilling the prophecy of Mal. 4:5 has

²⁶¹ Bovon 2002: 73; Brown 1997: 383; Tannehill 1996: 58.

²⁶² Nolland 1989: 84.

²⁶³ Evans 2008: 217.

²⁶⁴ Brown 1993: 457; Marshall 1978: 119; Nolland 1989: 119.

²⁶⁵ Brown 1993: 459; Green 1997: 148; Johnson 1997: 57; Marshall 1978: 120; Nolland 1989: 120; Tannehill: 1996: 72.

²⁶⁶ Brown 1993: 440; Evans 2008: 217.

²⁶⁷ Brown 1993: 375; Evans 2008: 152; Green 1997: 107; Marshall 1978: 60.

²⁶⁸ Brown 1993: 428; Evans 2008: 208; Johnson 1997: 50; Marshall 1978: 110

²⁶⁹ Green 1997: 192.

already been considered. The manger can be seen as a fulfilment of Is. 1:3.²⁷⁰ The naming of Jesus in Lk. 2:21 specifically fulfils the angelic message of 1:31.²⁷¹ Fulfilment can also be seen in the presentation in the Temple to show that Jesus comes in fulfilment of the law of God.²⁷² The fact that Zechariah had a vision in the Temple and that Simeon and Anna were associated with the Temple indicates that true Temple worship centres on prayers for fulfilment of God's promises to Israel.²⁷³ Later in 2:49 the young Jesus himself recognises that he has come to fulfil a specific purpose. The precise translation of this verse is unclear but it includes the Greek δέι meaning 'it is necessary', reflecting a similar sense of obligation that appears at 9:22, 17:25, 22:37 and 24:7 & 26.²⁷⁴

It is these last verses that illustrate the importance of fulfilment to Luke in his Gospel. It could be argued that fulfilment brackets the adult earthly ministry of Jesus. His first sermon refers at 4:18 to his fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy, and his last recorded teaching at 24:49 to his disciples is in the context that he has fulfilled that which was written about him in 'the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms'. Jesus sees his time as the fulfilment of the era of salvation.²⁷⁵ The works he performs and his teaching about such matters as role reversal in society and the universal nature of his message illustrate the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy.²⁷⁶ This concept of fulfilment was important for the early church since it established the divine origins of the Christian movement as a whole.²⁷⁷ The appeal to the Old Testament in particular showed that what Luke was about to relate was consistent with God's earlier promises and dealings with his people.²⁷⁸ However in Luke's narrative these matters now reach their culmination in the shape of Jesus and his ministry and so enables Luke to shape the Christian mission in Acts.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁰ Brown 1993: 419; Green 1997: 136.

²⁷¹ Nolland 1989: 110.

²⁷² Lieu 1997: 17; Nolland 1989: 110.

²⁷³ Tannehill 1996: 45.

²⁷⁴ Brown 1993: 491; Evans 2008: 226; Green 1997: 156; Johnson 1997: 61; Lieu 1997: 20; Marshall 1978: 128; Nolland 1989: 131; Tannehill 1996: 75.

²⁷⁵ Marshall 1970: 121.

²⁷⁶ Marshall 1970: 122.

²⁷⁷ Evans 2008: 140.

²⁷⁸ Marshall 1978: 45.

²⁷⁹ Green 1997: 39.

It is in Acts that the work of the Holy Spirit in the church finally comes to the fore. However the Holy Spirit is important to Luke's Infancy Narrative and that importance must now be examined.

11. The Holy Spirit

Probably the best known description of the work of the Holy Spirit is Luke's account in Acts 2 of the first Pentecost. Similarly in Luke's Gospel there is a concentration of references to the Holy Spirit within the opening two chapters that might suggest a parallelism between Luke 1-2 and Acts 102.²⁸⁰ Direct references can be found to the Holy Spirit at 1:15, 41 & 67 and 2:25, 26 & 27, whereas within the main body of the Gospel the only references to the activity of the Spirit in connection with Jesus are 4:1, 14 & 18²⁸¹ where Jesus is still being introduced. The only other reference that connects Jesus and the Spirit is 10:21²⁸² and the Spirit is only otherwise mentioned at 11:13 and 12:10 & 12. Accordingly within the main ministry of Jesus the Spirit figures little and so the question arises as to why Luke felt the work of the Holy Spirit to be important in his Infancy Narrative.

In the first two chapters of Luke the work of the Spirit might best be defined by stating that 'the Holy Spirit is the agent of the destiny of John and the conception of Jesus and is the author of prophetic comment on both.'²⁸³ The Spirit is the power that realises the divine plan by putting it into effect.²⁸⁴ This is most importantly demonstrated by the role of the Spirit in the conception of Jesus. It has already been stressed in the two sections dealing with the virginal conception that the action of the Spirit does not replace the male role in conception. The creative role of the Spirit resembles the role of the Spirit in creation itself as described in Gen. 1:2.²⁸⁵ The Spirit's activity in the conception is described as 'overshadowing' reminiscent of God's presence in the tabernacle in Ex. 40:35.²⁸⁶ It is also reminiscent of the cloud

²⁸⁰ Brown 1993: 243.

²⁸¹ Brown 1993: 243 Marshall 1970: 91; Marshall 1978: 58.

²⁸² Marshall 1970: 91.

²⁸³ Evans 2008: 140.

²⁸⁴ Green 1997: 22.

²⁸⁵ Brown 1993: 315.

²⁸⁶ Marshall 1978: 70.

that overshadowed Jesus as the time of his transfiguration.²⁸⁷ Perhaps significantly all that Mary is told about the role of the Holy Spirit is confirmed in the events of the Baptism of Jesus in Lk. 3:21 & 22,²⁸⁸ and so will become part of the message of fulfilment that Jesus preached at 4:21.

The other role of the Holy Spirit in the Infancy Narrative is that of prophetic comment. Elizabeth is described as being filled with the Holy Spirit and so is used as an agent to give a prophetic interpretation of events and their significance.²⁸⁹ So, too, is Zechariah to whom Luke ascribes the Benedictus, which might be described as ‘programmatically prophetic’, namely what is to follow is foretold.²⁹⁰ Simeon has also received a revelation from the Spirit about his own future and when Jesus is brought to the Temple he first acts and then speaks at the behest of the Spirit.²⁹¹ In total the expression ‘filled with’ occurs 22 times in Luke/Acts as compared with once in Matthew and Mark.²⁹² What is a notable exception is that if Mary is to be ascribed as the speaker of the Magnificat she does not speak under the influence of the Spirit. That point will be developed in a later section.

If the Holy Spirit is important in Luke’s theology, the question then arises as to why there is so little mention of the Spirit in the main body of the Gospel that narrates Jesus’ earthly ministry. The only direct reference to the Holy Spirit in Luke’s Gospel outside Lk.1:1–4:18 is at 12:10&12. Two answers to this question seem possible. Firstly the Holy Spirit is active right up to 4:18 where Jesus opens his public ministry.²⁹³ From the moment of his conception to his return from the wilderness to Galilee, Luke portrays the events of Jesus’ life in which he prepares for his earthly ministry as being under the power and at the behest of the Spirit. Thereafter the Spirit only becomes active in the events of Pentecost. There is little point in adding an unseen voice of God until the visible one has returned to his Father. Secondly ‘the allusions to the Spirit are concerned primarily with the witness which is borne to

²⁸⁷ Brown 1993: 315; Johnson 1997: 38; Nolland 1989: 54.

²⁸⁸ Green 1997: 91.

²⁸⁹ Evans 2008: 169, 170; Green 1997: 96; Johnson 1997: 41; Nolland 1989: 96.

²⁹⁰ Brown 1993: 370; Johnson 1997: 45; Lieu 1997: 12; Marshall 1978: 90.

²⁹¹ Brown 1993: 438; Evans 2008: 214; Green 1997: 145.

²⁹² Brown 1993: 261.

²⁹³ See Lk 1:15, 35, 41, & 67; 2: 25, 26; 3:16, 22; 4:1.

Jesus'.²⁹⁴ What Luke is asserting is that all these matters considered in the earlier sections of this chapter, and which are developed in his Gospel through the activity of the Spirit, receive their ultimate affirmation from God as being in accordance with his divine purpose. It seeks to put beyond dispute the claim that Jesus and Christianity are properly founded in the hopes expressed in Old Testament Judaism. Thus in the Nunc Dimittis Simeon not only places the Law and the Spirit in juxtaposition but intertwines them as well.²⁹⁵

The connection between the work of the Spirit and the utterance of the canticles has already been noted above and so the Canticles themselves require further attention.

12. The Canticles

The first two chapters of Luke contain three canticles or songs, namely the Magnificat, the Benedictus and the Nunc Dimittis, and in the previous chapter there was discussion as to how they came to be composed. It is now necessary to consider what was their actual purpose. The Magnificat has been described as being 'like an aria in opera, the action stops so that the situation may be savoured more deeply'.²⁹⁶ The same could be said of the other two canticles and yet there is no other example in the rest of the Gospel.²⁹⁷ For example might not the two disciples returning from Emmaus in Lk. 24 have sung a song of praise? However there is no apparent explanation for Luke's non-use of canticles elsewhere and so the only profitable line of enquiry is to examine how Luke uses these three songs.

It has often been suggested that through the canticles many of the themes considered in this chapter have been developed. The purpose of these three canticles has been seen to be to interpret the events in which they are set.²⁹⁸ They express 'the significance of the moment in appropriate language'.²⁹⁹ Whatever may have been the

²⁹⁴ Marshall 1970: 91.

²⁹⁵ Bovon 2002: 96-97.

²⁹⁶ Tannehill 1986: 31.

²⁹⁷ Brown 1993: 346, 646. Evans 2008: 141 also mentions the Gloria in excelsis as a canticle but also acknowledges its shortness and that the speaker, the heavenly host have not previously been introduced.

²⁹⁸ Bovon 2002: 29; Johnson 1997: 34

²⁹⁹ Marshall 1978: 46..

source of these canticles, whether Maccabean war hymns or from the prayers of Jewish Christian *Anawim*,³⁰⁰ the sentiments seem to be well versed in the Old Testament³⁰¹. The aorist tenses in the Canticles stress that the activity of Jesus had already achieved its purpose,³⁰² but certainly the Benedictus³⁰³ and the Nunc Dimittis³⁰⁴ prepare for what is to emerge. Again all three canticles become vehicles through which not only is Luke's message of what is to follow to be understood but also this message is set firmly in continuity with what is promised in the Old Testament.

One of the most contentious issues which surrounds the Magnificat is whom Luke intended to be the speaker. It is not just a point of detail because if the purpose of this canticle as interpretation is to be understood, the identity of the speaker could prove important to that interpretation.

13. Who Spoke the Magnificat?

Since it is most unlikely that the Magnificat represents a contemporaneous record of a moment of praise during the course of the Visitation the question should perhaps more accurately be phrased as who did Luke intend to be the speaker of the Magnificat. The overwhelming textual evidence is that it is Mary but there is a variant reading for Elizabeth in the following texts:

- a) Three Latin manuscripts from the fourth to the eighth centuries – mss a.b.1*;
- b) One manuscript of Irenaeus *Against the Heretics* 4.7.1. The other manuscript of that passage reads Mary as does 3.10.2;
- c) Jerome's Latin translation of Origen's *In Lucam Homiliae* 7 in which instance the reference to Elizabeth may have come from Jerome rather than Origen;

³⁰⁰ Benko 1967: 272; Brown 1993: 350 – 355.

³⁰¹ See Brown 1993 358-360 Table XII and 386-389 Table XIII 458; Green 1997: 101; Lieu 1997:10; Marshall 1970: 97; Marshall 1978: 79; Nolland 1989: 62 & 84.

³⁰² Evans 2008: 98.

³⁰³ Green 1997: 111.

³⁰⁴ Johnson 1997: 56

d) Nicetas of Remesiana *De psalmodiae bono* or *De utilitate hymnorum* 9:11. Nicetas lived about 400 and so may be the earliest witness to this reading. His diocese was in the Balkans and so his evidence joins that of the Latin manuscripts of that area and also Italy.³⁰⁵

These four areas may not be sufficient to assert that the overwhelming reading is wrong, but it has been sufficient to generate debate amongst both Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars since the work of Loisy in 1893.³⁰⁶ The inconclusive nature of the debate is reflected by the number of scholars who have championed either one reading or the other³⁰⁷ and has now reached the stage where conclusions are adopted largely on the basis of ‘doctrinal basis or personal preference’.³⁰⁸ A full analysis of these arguments is outside the scope of this chapter but certain points need to be made in order to see the place of the Magnificat within the Infancy Narrative and how it might be relevant to the rest of Luke’s Gospel.

The first question to be addressed is whether there is any material that might identify why there are these variant readings in the manuscripts. The most attractive suggestion originally proposed by Loisy and championed by Harnack is that in Luke’s original text he included no name.³⁰⁹ The Greek text simply read *καὶ εἶπεν* leaving an ambiguity. If the Magnificat becomes an extension of the greeting in 1:41-45, Elizabeth speaks it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.³¹⁰ It would then make the Magnificat consistent with the other canticles in that all would now be understood as inspired by the Spirit. Furthermore v 56 would then make more sense since to have Mary as the speaker of the Magnificat and then the phrase ‘and Mary stayed with her’ is awkward.³¹¹ The Magnificat could be regarded as a song sung by Elizabeth in honour of Mary,³¹² although that might require a reinterpretation of vv 48- 49.

³⁰⁵ Benko 1967: 263-264; Bovon 2002: 60; Brown 1993: 334; Evans 2008: 171; Green 1997: 97 n13; Johnson 1997: 41; Marshall 1978: 77; Nolland 1989: 68.

³⁰⁶ Benko 1967: 264.

³⁰⁷ Brown 1993: 334.

³⁰⁸ Benko 1967: 271.

³⁰⁹ Benko 1967: 265; Brown 1993: 334; Evans 2008: 171.

³¹⁰ Benko 1967: 265.

³¹¹ Benko 1967: 265.

³¹² Benko 1967 268-269.

Moreover if Mary was a genuine reading of v 46 the insertion of Elizabeth is odd whereas the reverse could represent a christological development.³¹³

A comparison of the Magnificat and Hannah's song in 1 Sam. 2:1-10 reveals similarities, so it seems that the latter could have inspired the former.³¹⁴ Hannah's song is that of a barren woman now pregnant rather than a pregnant virgin who had not prayed for a child. The obvious meaning of verse 48a would refer to childlessness although a wider definition of ταπεινώσις is possible³¹⁵ and it could also be a reference to the afflicted state of Israel.³¹⁶ It is also true that Hannah's and Elizabeth's situations are not totally the same. For example Hannah, unlike Elizabeth, had already been delivered of her child.³¹⁷ Moreover the phrase 'the barren has borne seven children and she who has many children is forlorn' from 1 Sam. 2:5 is not repeated in the Magnificat. Nevertheless it still seems odd that Luke should attribute to Mary a canticle that seems more readily to suit the situation of Elizabeth.

There can be little argument that the words of the Magnificat are also wholly appropriate for Mary. She is lowly and yet has been chosen for her unique task and so will be called blessed for the mighty things that God has done for her. However Elizabeth was also of 'low estate' through her barrenness, and yet God has achieved a mighty work in overcoming that state. Elizabeth could be regarded as blessed for her change of fortune, the important role determined for her own baby or the fact that she was the first to be told of the birth of the Messiah. Thus although the words of the Magnificat are quite applicable to and appropriate for Mary, there is nothing in them that makes them uniquely applicable to and appropriate for Mary. Furthermore the devotion due to Mary comes from the annunciation and her response to the divine task and it does not become less were she shown not to have been the speaker of the Magnificat. Accordingly there is nothing in the canticle that proves the identity of the speaker beyond reasonable doubt.

³¹³ Benko 1867: 275.

³¹⁴ Bovon 2002: 60; Brown 1993: 357; Green 1997: 101; Marshall 1978: 98; Nolland 1989: 68. Benko 1967: 266 rightly makes the point that Hannah's song is not the sole inspiration. See also Brown 1993 Table XII pp. 358-360.

³¹⁵ Brown 1993: 336; Evans 2008: 174; Green 1997: 103; Nolland 1989: 69.

³¹⁶ Nolland 1989: 69.

³¹⁷ Benko 1967: 271.

The results of this brief survey are inevitably inconclusive and in the absence of further evidence will remain so. The purpose of the survey was to see whether the speaker could be identified so that the place of the canticle within the Gospel could be established. However in the section on Zechariah, Elizabeth and John the Baptist certain Old Testament motifs were noted and if Luke had attributed the Magnificat to Elizabeth that would have further emphasised a connection between John the Baptist and Samuel. That idea will now be taken forward to assess how it assists in seeing how Luke's Infancy Narrative sets the agenda for the rest of his Gospel.

14. The Infancy Narrative and the Rest of the Gospel

At the start of this chapter the parallelism between the two births was noted. Chapter 1 is primarily concerned with the birth of John the Baptist. Inevitably the annunciation to Mary is included but such inclusion is necessary to give the birth of John its context. The emphasis on John is made even clearer by identifying Elizabeth as the speaker of the Magnificat since it continues the focus on her and Zechariah. This contrasts sharply with chapter 2 where the focus is solely upon Jesus. In summary Jesus is portrayed as the promised Messiah, the Son of David. Zechariah and Elizabeth can be seen as a motif for Abraham and Sarah and John himself as Elijah, prophesied in Mal. 4:5, but perhaps the motif that comes to the fore is that of Samuel since it unites both John and his mother.

To understand the importance of Samuel in this context it is necessary to consider two key moments in Samuel's adult life. In 1 Sam. 5:3 it is recorded that Samuel's sons 'took bribes and perverted justice', and so at v 5 the elders of Israel demanded the appointment of a king. Consequently it is recorded at 1 Sam. 10:1 that Samuel anoints Saul to be prince over Israel, thus paving the way for Israel to become a kingdom. Later when Saul disobeyed God, God provided a king from the sons of Jesse namely David whom Samuel anointed according to 1 Sam. 16:13. It is true that David was again anointed as king at 2 Sam. 2:4 but such anointing was only possible because of the previous action of Samuel. To see how John replicates this motif it is necessary to consider the events surrounding the baptism of Jesus.

Luke starts chapter 3 of his Gospel by introducing his readers to John's message of repentance, culminating in John emphasising the superiority of Jesus, which can be deduced from chapters 1-2. John then baptises Jesus and just as the Spirit of God descended upon Saul according to 1 Sam. 10:10, and David according to 1 Sam 16:13, so the Spirit is recorded at Lk. 3:22 descending upon Jesus. Just as Samuel anointed Saul to usher in the Kingdom and David to be its king, so in effect the Son of Samuel anoints the Son of David to usher in God's Kingdom. It might be argued that this baptism is not anointing and indeed whether baptism included anointing is a much disputed point.³¹⁸ Kelly argues that, except for certain Gnostic sects, anointing was unknown in the early church.³¹⁹ Christians were said to be saved by 'partaking in his (Christ's) unction', meaning the descent of the Spirit at his baptism and the anointing of Christians consisted of similarly receiving the Spirit in baptism.³²⁰ However given that verses such as 2 Cor. 1:21-22, Eph. 1: 13 & 4:30 emphasise Christ sealing his followers through the Spirit rather than water and that those verses might not necessarily be metaphorical, it is possible that anointing might have been the point of the total baptismal event.³²¹ Whatever may have been the actual practice, it would seem even just from the cited verses that there is sufficient evidence to justify the proposition that the early church would have understood the baptism of Jesus to be like the anointing of David. Luke then affirms Jesus literally as the Son of God through his genealogy and then in the temptations which reprise the Garden of Eden but this time Satan is defeated. Having achieved all these things, Jesus is now able to tell the congregation at Nazareth that he fulfils scripture. Thus Lk. 4.:21 becomes the focus to which all the previous events have been leading. The rest of the Gospel discloses how that fulfilment is achieved through the themes considered in this chapter, until at 24:25 he teaches how all has been fulfilled in his resurrection. On this analysis Luke's Infancy Narrative provides a vital introduction to the rest of the Gospel to set out what is to follow and in it are drawn a variety of strands that provide a marvellous tapestry of biography and theology.

³¹⁸ Noakes 1992: 118.

³¹⁹ Kelly 2000:195.

³²⁰ Kelly 2000: 195.

³²¹ Noakes 1992:118.

15. Conclusions

At the end of the previous chapter, two contentious issues were noted about the nature of Luke's Infancy Narrative, namely whether a unity existed between that narrative and the rest of the Gospel, and whether Luke is not only seeking to retell the past but interpret its meaning and relevance for the present and the future. If such was Luke's agenda using the conclusions noted in the sections above, the question of how far Luke's Infancy Narrative sets the agenda for his Gospel now has to be considered.

The conclusions reached can be summarised as follows:

- Chapters 1 & 2 relate parallel accounts of the births of John and Jesus. They demonstrate the superiority of Jesus and prepare for his baptism and his subsequent ministry. The credentials for Jesus' adult ministry are established and provide continuity into chapters 3 & 4. It also provides a basis for Luke's argument, described in Acts, that Jesus is superior to John when the apostles are confronted by those who know only of the baptism of John.
- The characters of Zechariah and Elizabeth remind the reader of several devout followers of God in the Old Testament, principally Abraham and Sarah and Elkanah and Hannah. John represents Samuel and Elijah. The Old Testament is central to understanding the purpose of John's ministry. While the birth of John the Baptist may be at the junction of the old and the new, Luke uses these parallels to show that the events that he is about to relate do not represent a departure from the past. Without that past, the present and the future have no validity.
- Luke recognises the unique position of Mary but justifies it once again by an appeal to the Old Testament. She, together with Joseph, is portrayed as a devout Jew again showing that, without the past, the present and future have no validity. Her example as the archetypal believer is also recognised in that Luke is warning his readers that they can anticipate suffering as well as blessing.

- The position of the Temple and Jerusalem is not removed by Christianity but they become places where Jewish expectations are ultimately realised in Jesus' birth. It is true that at the beginning of the Gospel, Jesus' words in the Temple are met with astonishment, whereas later they are met with rejection. However Luke's Gospel portrays a favourable picture of the Temple and its customs again emphasising the point that without the past, the present and the future have no validity.
- The shepherds remind the reader that the baby whom they visit is the Davidic Messiah, the King who also was once a shepherd. The concept of *shepherd* has important echoes in the Old Testament and yet again emphasises how important the past is to the present and future. The concept of *shepherd* also anticipates the care that Jesus will show for all people in his ministry.
- Despite all this connection with the past, the future will not be quite the same. The exultation of the humble reflects the reversal of some traditional roles in society that Jesus and the apostles will teach to be God's way. Luke introduces this programme right at the start of Jesus' adult ministry in the events of Lk. 4:18-22. The relationship between rich and poor and the role of women are dominant themes in Luke's Gospel.
- Although Jesus comes in the context of Jewish history, the Christian message like the Jewish message before it is for all people. This theme is not fully developed in the Gospel itself but comes to the fore to justify taking the Gospel to the Gentiles as described in Acts.
- The saving work that Jesus will undertake in his adult ministry is introduced in the Infancy Narrative. Salvation is a central theme in Luke's Gospel (from Lk. 3:6 to 19: 9-10). It also becomes the focus through which Luke describes the concepts mentioned above which are important to his Gospel.
- Jesus' birth fulfils Jewish Messianic hope and the message of fulfilment brackets the events of Jesus' adult life from baptism to beyond resurrection (Lk. 4:18 and 24:49).
- Fulfilment represented the promise of the Old Testament, reached its culmination in Jesus and so shapes the mission of the early church.
- The Holy Spirit is the ultimate affirmation that all that is taking place is in accordance with God's divine purpose. The Holy Spirit may appear little

outside the Infancy Narrative but the importance of the Spirit is shown in that it directs everything that occurs right up to the moment when Jesus embarks on his public ministry. It is the Spirit that becomes the witness to Jesus.

- The canticles become the means not only to explain the message for the future but also set that message in continuity with the promises of the Old Testament. Their message is not that what Luke is about to relate has yet to be achieved, but that it has already been achieved.
- There is some evidence to favour Elizabeth as the speaker of the Magnificat but the weight of the evidence favours Mary. However were Elizabeth the speaker that would further emphasise the motif of John as Samuel.
- By reference to two key incidents recorded in Samuel's adult life, it is possible to see that Luke is seeking to portray John as the successor to Samuel and Jesus as the successor to David. Just as Samuel introduced the Kingdom of Israel and anointed David to be king, so chapters 1 & 2 lead naturally into chapter 3 in which the son of Samuel anoints the Son of David to be King of God's new Kingdom. Thus Jesus is the true Davidic Messiah. What that entails is fulfilled in what follows.

All these conclusions demonstrate how Luke saw the connection between the past, present and the future. Christianity as a new movement would be viewed by Jewish opponents as being a departure from the traditional religion of Israel and so if Luke could assert in his Gospel that Christianity was the proper fulfilment of Jewish expectations then its legitimacy could be established. It is in his Infancy Narrative that the past, present and future meet. It must always be a matter of speculation whether Luke ever drafted a Gospel without the present chapters 1 & 2. What is clear is that those chapters are not alien to the Gospel but represent an integral part of the Gospel in which Luke introduces his agenda of what is to follow.³²²

³²² Brown 1993: 620.

Conclusions.

At the conclusion of the section that concerns Matthew's agenda for his Gospel (see §3:12 above) ten points were summarised. Those conclusions supported the assertion that the Infancy Narrative and the main Gospel shared many of the same thought patterns. The narrative represented the Gospel and its destiny in miniature.

Importantly too, especially for Jewish converts, Matthew sought to establish the authority of Jesus by demonstrating how that authority was a legitimate continuation with the Jewish past.

The similar conclusion to the section on Luke (§5:15) summarised thirteen points. The key concern of Luke was how Jesus represented the fulfilment of Jewish hopes and expectations, and in his Infancy Narrative he, too, appeals to the past to establish the legitimacy of the authority that Christians claim for Jesus. While such issues would not be irrelevant to Gentiles, they would be especially relevant to Jews. Both Matthew (§3:9 above) and Luke (§3:8) note the appeal that the Jews made to Abraham showing how important the appeal to the past is to them. Thus it is possible to see the emergence of a common concern of both Matthew and Luke.

It is clear from §2:5 and §4:4 above that the relations between Jews and Christians were fluid. Accordingly if the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were written within the primary context of such relations between Jews and Christians and the main issue was whether Jesus was the Messiah,¹ it is hardly surprising that both evangelists should introduce this issue right at the outset. Both §2:7 and §4:6 show that each Gospel had the purpose both to teach and also be an apologia, that is to say a reasoned defence of the Gospel message. The past was vital to understanding the present but it was to set the agenda for the future as well. Matthew and Luke share four key areas to make that point clear as their agenda and introduce it as such in their Infancy Narratives in the following ways.

The first point to be made is that Jesus is the promised Messiah who brings salvation to his people. In §3:5 Matthew's use of the title for Jesus as the Son of David was

¹ Frend 1984: 124.

considered especially in relation to the interpretation of the name Jesus and the term Immanuel. While Luke does not offer the same specific interpretation of the name, it is clear from §5:9 that Jesus' role as saviour is also vital to Luke. The references cited in that section in the Benedictus, the angels' message and the Nunc Dimittis make that clear. The way that both evangelists use the significance of Bethlehem as described in §3:5 and §5:6 is also important in showing how Jesus, the son of David, originated from David's birthplace. Both genealogies also define Jesus as being in the Davidic line.² Luke, unlike Matthew, does not call Jesus specifically the Son of David but the thrust of the argument in §5:14 is that, according to Luke, God is clearly declaring Jesus to be the Son of David. Matthew and Luke may be using different approaches to express that Jesus is the Son of David, but while those approaches may differ, the role of Jesus as the Son of David which both describe is clearly the same.

The second point to be made is that the birth of Jesus does not represent some kind of break with the past but is firmly based in the history of Israel as related in the Old Testament. Matthew achieves this objective by the use of the Old Testament citations discussed in §3:2 above, Jesus as Son of Abraham in §3:4, as Son of David in §3:5 and as the new Moses in §3:6. Matthew's specific use of the Old Testament can sometimes lead to the assertion that Matthew treasured the Old Testament in a way that Luke did not.³ That conclusion is unfair. §5:3 shows how Zechariah and Elizabeth as pious Jews represented the piety of Israel and §5:4 shows that the same applies to Mary and Joseph. There is also the emphasis on the Temple and Jerusalem discussed in §5:5. Role reversal discussed in §5:7 was a reminder of the ideal to which God had called his people. Both evangelists seek to emphasise that what they are relating represents a revelation of God's continuing purpose for his people rooted in its history.

² While Luke's genealogy may not come within his account of the birth of Jesus in the way that Matthew's is placed, the pattern described in §5:14 that Luke's prologue continues to 4:21 justifies this point.

³ Davies and Allison 2000: 31.

The third point flows from the above. The birth of Jesus represents not only continuity with the past; it also represents its fulfilment. The importance of fulfilment in Luke's account was considered in §5:10 and the repetition of Matthew's use of Old Testament texts as fulfilment was considered in §3:2. As the conclusions in §3:12 and §5:14 show, both evangelists wished to demonstrate that God had an eternal plan in the whole ministry of Jesus and that fact of the fulfilment of that plan needed to be introduced right at the outset. In order to effect that plan two things were required. Firstly, all things were achieved through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Luke emphasises this point more than Matthew but the key fact that both narratives share is that the Spirit is the agency through which Mary's conception is achieved. Secondly, God's plan requires the obedience of those whom he chooses. Matthew portrays the obedience of Joseph through the way that firstly he accepts what he is told about Mary's pregnancy and thereafter how he responds to the danger from Herod, all of which is noted in §3:4. In §5:4 Mary's example as the model believer is noted. This obedience was subsequently to be shown in the obedience that Jesus showed in going to the Cross.

The final point to be made is that, despite the Jewish background that the evangelists sought to portray, things are never going to be the same in the future. God's message through the whole ministry of Jesus was for all people. Both Matthew in his appeal to Abraham in §3:4 and Luke's similar use of that appeal described in §5:8 emphasised that this message was not a departure from the past but in Jesus was a fulfilment of God's intended purpose. §5:8 describes the various ways in which Luke seeks to introduce this message in his Infancy Narrative. Matthew uses the imagery of the Magi described in §3:8 and the Star in §3:9. Mt. 28:19 and Lk. 24:47 express Jesus' command to take the Gospel to all nations. Thus what is introduced in both Infancy Narratives about the universal nature of the Gospel, also by being placed at the end of both Gospels in Mt. 28: 19 and Lk. 24:47, becomes the climax and ultimate purpose of the entire message. Furthermore it was a Gospel from which no one was excluded. §5:7 shows how Luke portrayed how all people were important to God and Matthew's imagery of the Magi shows how outsiders were able to appreciate and embrace what the Jewish establishment could not understand but only saw as a threat.

These four points would seem to constitute the basis of the debates between Jews and those associated with Judaism, and Christians. If indeed the main issue between them was whether Jesus was the Messiah,⁴ proof texts derived from the Old Testament were pivotal in that debate.⁵ Christians had to relate to the followers of Judaism who had read the Old Testament.⁶ Thus both evangelists sought to portray the present firmly rooted in the past and now fulfilled in the present but with a future that lay beyond the boundaries considered by the Jews but always intended by God. The Infancy Narratives sought to introduce this agenda, and as the conclusions in §3:12 and §5:14 demonstrate, linked them to the rest of the respective Gospels. The above analysis also shows how they reflected a common agenda. The abiding conundrum still remains though, namely how was it that these two quite distinct accounts of the birth of Jesus emerged. How much was known about the actual facts surrounding the birth of Jesus and why did the minimal shared knowledge receive such elaboration? Furthermore, if, in the future, some discovery were to reveal that those facts were far less miraculous than the evangelists have recorded them to be, what would be the impact on the church's understanding of the nature of the person whom it believes to be the Son of God? Without further information, those questions cannot be answered.

⁴ Frend 1984: 124.

⁵ Frend 1994: 125; Ludlow 2009: 52.

⁶ Saldarini 1994: 195.

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