

The Infancy Narrative in the Gospel of Matthew

Introduction

Purpose of this study - To attempt to determine the message which the author is trying to convey.

Clarification - Scripture scholars differ on many of the items presented in this study, e.g., author, date of writing, where written, audience, etc. To simplify matters, most of the information contained in this study reflects a majority opinion among present day scholars.

The Synoptic Problem - The first three gospels in the canon, Mt., Mk and Lk are called “the Synoptics”, (seen with one eye; providing a common view), because they are similar in many ways. Another reason that they are grouped together is because they are markedly different from John’s Gospel.

Given the similarities, it is also obvious that they are markedly different from each other in style and content. So the question arises: what is their relationship? There have been a number of solutions proposed, but the modern consensus is that Mk came first (70’s?) and then some ten years later the authors of Mt (80-90) and Lk (85-95) used Mk along with another source called “Q” to construct their gospels.

The so-called “Q” source (quelle in German=source) may have been oral or perhaps written and it is postulated because of the common material shared by Mt. and Lk and not found in Mk. For example, the Sermon on the Mount in Mt and the same “sermon on the plain” in Lk are examples of important Q material not found in Mk. This so-called “Double Tradition” may account for some 220-235 similar verses found in both Mt. and Lk.

There are also passages in Mt. and Lk. that are not found either in Mk or Q. These “independent sources” are labeled “M” for Mt. and “L” for Lk. All of these sources find their origin in the oral tradition that circulated before any written accounts were attempted.

Background of Matthew’s Gospel

Authorship - In the 2nd century, Irenaeus and others held the opinion that the apostle Matthew, a tax collector among the Twelve, first wrote this Gospel in Hebrew and it was later translated into Greek. Modern scholars largely reject this opinion because the Gospel of Matthew includes about 80% of Mark, which raises the question of why an apostle who was an eyewitness would rely so heavily on the Gospel of Mark which the vast majority of scholars agree was not written by an eyewitness.

Most modern scholars agree that because of the language and style of the gospel, the

author was an unknown Greek speaking Jewish Christian who was not an eyewitness to the events about which he wrote. Besides Greek, he also knew Aramaic (the language of Jesus) and/or Hebrew.

Date and Location - The majority of scholars would accept a range of 70-100, but the best estimate is that Mt. was probably written between 80-90 A.D. Because of the language used and the importance of this Gospel had for early Christianity, an urban setting such as Antioch in Syria is most probable.

Audience - The most plausible representation of Mt.'s audience is that of a strongly Jewish Christian church that had, over time, become increasingly Gentile. The interaction of these differing backgrounds explains a great deal about Mt.'s approach to the Infancy Narrative and to the entire Gospel. It is important to note that the Gospel is always "Good News" for someone and this audience was a mixture of Jew and Gentile converts living at the end of the first century and so the current concerns and questions of individuals from both Jewish and Gentile traditions needed to be addressed.

For example, why would a good Jew become a follower of Jesus, whom they called the Christ (Messiah), when Jesus did not seem to fulfill any of Jewish expectations about a Messiah? The kingdom of David had not been reestablished nor had the rule of God been established on earth. Where did Jesus fit into Jewish history?

Also, the Gentiles could point out that their pagan gods had a long history and seemed to have been very powerful in light of the success of the Roman empire. So why follow Jesus who was an upstart, a common Jew from the rural area of Galilee who seemed powerless to escape an ignominious death at the hands of the Romans? What power did he have to protect them and make their lives meaningful.

To help understand Mt.'s critique of the Jews and praise of the Gentiles, scholars have pointed out that it was quite possible that in the 80's the Antioch Christian community was undergoing some persecution from local Jews, who were in the process of expelling Christian Jews from the synagogues. While the early followers of Jesus (few in number) were probably seen as just another sect in Judaism and early on welcomed in the synagogues, the fact that they preached Jesus as the Messiah and the fact that they had also accepted Gentiles into their community became a problem. Furthermore, in the Jewish Revolt of 66-70 the Jewish Christians did not join their fellow Jews in fighting the Romans. Thus, the Gospel of Matthew is often critical of the Jews and, as we shall see, this is reflected in the Infancy Narrative.

Given all of the above, the Antioch Christian community can be described as a mixed bag of Jewish and Gentile Christians. They probably represented a group of Christians who were not quite as liberal as the Jewish-Christian Hellenists, who were rejecting Jewish customs and ritual laws, nor as conservative as those Jewish-Christians that sprung from the Christian community in Jerusalem who held that Gentile converts to Christianity must first become circumcised.

As we shall see, in the Infancy Narrative, Mt. addresses this increasingly Gentile Christian audience, under attack by some traditional Jews, by criticizing the traditional Jews who were rejecting the Christian Jews and praising the Gentiles for recognizing Jesus for who he was

Four Major Themes in the Infancy Narrative

Matthew's Infancy Narrative is a major link between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The author of Mt. had read and accepted the Gospel of Mark, but he did not start his gospel with the baptism of Jesus as did Mk. Rather, he used an Infancy Narrative as an additional bridge to the OT, so that the story of Jesus could be understood as a fulfillment of the OT with Jesus as the Davidic Messiah and a new Moses.

That Jesus was the fulfillment of the OT would address a major concern of the Jews and the Jewish Christians and this linkage with the ancient religion of the OT would also address the concern of Gentile Christians and prospective Gentile converts that Christianity was an upstart religion.

Mt. makes clear, for Jew and Gentile alike, that Jesus can be fully understood only within the long history of God's people going back to Abraham. Therefore, in the Matthean Infancy Narrative, many OT themes are recalled and some OT passages are reinterpreted and are said to be fulfilled in Jesus. For Mt., the entire OT reveals God's providential presence in the history of the people in order to prepare the way for Jesus, the Christ.

The message of Matthew's Infancy Narrative contains four major themes that are interwoven throughout the narrative:

- 1) Jesus is the Davidic Messiah
- 2) Jews reject Jesus
- 3) Gentiles accept Jesus.
- 4) Jesus is the new Moses

The following analysis will attempt to point out these themes as they occur.

Chapter One

In Chapter One, Mt. tries in several ways to convince the reader that Jesus is the Davidic Messiah. He provides a Davidic genealogy for Jesus, describes the unique circumstances of divine intervention in the birth of Jesus and reinterprets a prophecy of Isaiah to help prove his case. He also points to the special role of Gentiles in the genealogy of Jesus and that God can work with saints and sinners alike to accomplish his plans.

1:1 -- The opening line points out to the reader that is Jesus the Messiah (Christ) in the line of David and thus fulfills the hopes of the Jewish people. Jesus is also portrayed as the "son of Abraham" through whom God promises that all the nations are to be blessed (Gen. 22:18). Thus Mt. links Jesus to an ancient religious tradition (1700 BC?), more

ancient that any of the Greek and Roman gods, and declares that from the time of Abraham, God announced that his blessings were for all the nations, Gentiles and Jews.

Later in Mt., Jesus is the key link in extending God's blessings to all nations, because of his command to his disciples to take the Gospel to all the nations, Mt.28:16-20. And Paul in Romans 4:11 also mentions that Abraham is the "father of all who believe", which includes the Gentiles.

1:2 -- In Deuteronomy 21:17, the importance and the rights of the firstborn are acknowledged. The firstborn is to receive a double portion of his father's inheritance. However, in 1:2 the genealogy of Abraham starts with Isaac, but Ishmael was the firstborn of Abraham and received no share of his father's property (Gen. 21:10). Next, Isaac is the father of Jacob (known as a liar), but Esau was the firstborn of Jacob and finally Jacob is the father of Juda who would give the name of "the Jews" to his people. Juda, however, had sold his noble brother Joseph into slavery in Egypt.

What is the message here? This message is probably to point to divine providence in the history of Jesus, in other words, God had a specific plan in establishing the line of David that would end with Jesus as the Davidic Messiah. God accomplished his purposes in a unique way that defied traditional customs. God left nothing to chance and worked in unexpected ways.

It may also imply that God can accomplish his work through sinners as well as saints. St. Paul always wondered why he, who persecuted the Church of Christ, was selected to be an apostle and perhaps the most important one at that. Jesus was also criticized for his association with tax collectors, prostitutes and other sinners. As many of his parables indicate, the special focus of God's love and mercy is on sinners.

1:3-6 -- These lines are unusual in a number of ways, but especially in the introduction of the names of four women. First, it is unusual in biblical genealogical patterns to replace the typical genealogy of father/son by mentioning women; second, three of the women are not Israelites and the fourth is not married to an Israelite, third, each of the women had a dubious past, which included incest, prostitution, membership in an impure people and adultery. Let us examine them separately:

Tamar - 1:3 - a Canaanite - Given by Judah as a wife to his son Er, who was killed by God for his wickedness, then, in accordance with the Levirate law, she was given to Onan a second son of Judah, who was also killed by God for failing to live up to the Levirate law. When Judah then withheld his third son to save him from possible death, Tamar disguised herself as a temple prostitute and seduced Judah. She bore Judah twin sons - Perez and Zerah. Tamar did this to protect her rights as a widow. She was admired in the Jewish tradition because she helped perpetuate the family line of Judah through his son Perez, from whose lineage David was born.

Rahab - 1:5 - a Canaanite and a prostitute - she hid the spies of Joshua in her home in Jericho. She married Salmon and gave him a son, Boaz, who continued the Davidic line.

Ruth - 1:5 - a Moabite - Moabites are portrayed as having their origins in incest (Gen. 19:30-37) and were said to be impure to the 10th generation. Ruth married Boaz who was the grandfather of David. Thus, she too was involved in the Davidic line.

Bathsheba - 1:6 - an Israelite, not mentioned by name, but described as the wife of a Gentile, Uriah the Hittite. She committed adultery with King David, who sent her husband off to his death. However, she gave birth to Solomon through David and continued the royal Davidic line.

What do these women have in common and what do these commonalities imply?

First, they were foreigners or married to a foreigner - Gentiles or married to a Gentile and yet they played significant roles in the perpetuation of the Davidic line and thus in the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah. Therefore, the Gentiles had played an important part in God's divine plan to send Jesus.

Second, they were women with irregular backgrounds - seducer of a father-in-law, a prostitute, a member of an impure people and an adulteress. Given that their irregular relationships were well known in their societies, they are still candidates for selection in God's plan for preparing the way for the Messiah.

Many authors judge that Mt. used these women, chosen by God even with their unusual marital backgrounds, to prepare for the unusual marital situation of Joseph and Mary. Questions about the unusual way Mary became the mother of Jesus will be answered by the same message: it was the intervention of God, part of a divine plan.

Some eighty years after the event, Mary's pregnancy may have been viewed, by some, as a scandal. How did she get pregnant if not through Joseph? Why did Joseph plan to divorce her? Did she have an illicit affair? Was she raped by Roman soldiers? Some of these stories were circulating in the later part of the first century by non-Christian critics of the Christian claim of a virgin birth, grounded in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Actually, several of these stories had some grounds for plausibility. For example, the claim that Mary's pregnancy may have been the result of a rape by Roman soldiers could be supported by the fact that around the time of Mary's pregnancy, there were rather large numbers of Roman soldiers in the area of Nazareth. This was so because right after the death of Herod in 4 BC, the Roman legions destroyed the large town of Sepphoris which was only four miles from Nazareth. The legions would have likely swept through Nazareth at that time and stories of their violence were probably the stuff of a continuing legend well into the time of the writing of Mt.'s Gospel some 80 to 90 years later.

However, Mt.'s answer to these speculations, as we shall see, is that the child was "born of a virgin", which accomplished by the intervention of God's "Holy Spirit".

1:7-16 These lines continue the genealogy of the Davidic line that ends with Joseph.

However, the normal genealogical pattern is broken because Joseph is referred to not as the father of Jesus, but as the husband of Mary “of whom Jesus is born, who is called the Christ”. This prepares the way for the extraordinary manner of Jesus’ conception. Still Jesus is of the lineage of David because Joseph acknowledges Jesus as his son by the act of taking Mary for his wife and giving Jesus his name. Given this Davidic lineage, Jesus can truly be called the Messiah.

1:17 -- In this line Mt. declares that there are three stages in the genealogy of Jesus each with fourteen generations. However, the number of generations are not accurate and thus are seen by most scholars as symbolic. For example, in the first generation (vss.2-6) there are fourteen names, but only thirteen generations, in the second generation (vss.7-11) three kings are omitted after Joram in verse 8 and one after Josiah in verse 11, in the final generation (vss.12-16) there are only 13 names. This is not to say that the author of Mt. could not count, but that this artificial series was designed by Mt. to fit a 14-14-14 pattern.

Why this pattern of 14? The best guess is that these numbers symbolically represent the consonants in the Hebrew of the name of David -- *dwd* -- $d=4, w=6, d=4$, totaling 14. This would symbolize the lineage of David going back to Abraham with David, the anointed one (messiah), as a central figure and Jesus as his messianic descendent..

The first generation, from Abraham to David, is composed of some of the patriarchs. This tells Jews that Jesus is part of the entire history of the people of Israel. It also tells Gentiles that Jesus is part of a very ancient religious tradition planned by God

The second generation is composed of the kings and ends with the Babylonian captivity, which spelled the end of the kings of Israel. The message here is that whatever the ups and downs of history, God is there. Jewish history seemed to end when Babylon conquered the last Jewish kingdom in 586. The northern kingdom has fallen to the Assyrians in 722 and now with the Temple destroyed and many of the people taken into captivity, all seemed lost. Many wondered if they had been abandoned by God.

But God was still among his people. This presence of God and the working out of God’s plan in good times and in bad, was probably a message needed by Matthew’s Jewish Christian converts near the end of the first century. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but Jesus had been killed by the Romans. If he was the awaited Messiah why was it that nothing seemed to have changed. They were still under the power of Rome and the Temple had again been demolished in 70 A.D. They had been promised a second coming of Jesus by Paul and others, but that was a long time ago. What was happening?

Matthew’s message was that God is still with us as he always has been in good times and in bad. He has a plan and we must be faithful in living and preaching the Christian gospel until he does indeed come again.

1:18 -- This is the opening line of the birth narrative and will explain the odd genealogical twist found in verse 16 above. First of all, Jesus is again referred to as “the

Christ” (Messiah) to remind the Jewish Christians of the Antioch community that Jesus did not become the Messiah at some point in his life (baptism), but was the Messiah from the beginning. For the Gentile Christians of the community, this repeats the claim that Jesus was part of an ancient plan of God.

The story continues with the significant revelation that while Mary and Joseph were betrothed, but before they came together, Mary was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. This is perhaps one of the most important statements in the entire narrative. It would be problematic for some -- how *did* she get pregnant? For others it would be revelatory -- God’s divine intervention.

The betrothal consisted in two steps:

1) A formal exchange of consent before witnesses. After this exchange, the man now had “rights” over the woman and any infringement of these marital rights could be punished as adultery. Thus, this first step amounted to a legally ratified marriage, even though the wife continued to live with and be supported by her own family for about a year. This generally took place when the girl was between twelve and thirteen years of age.

2) The transfer of the wife to the husband’s home and his assumption of her support.

Since Mary is depicted as between step 1 and step 2, (“before they came together”) her pregnancy could appear to be the result of some kind of irregular behavior, e.g., adultery or rape. (Later critics would claim that this was the case.) This irregularity and hint of scandal gives Mary something in common with Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba who for all their “irregularities” were to play an important role in God’s divine plan.

However, Mt. informs his community that Mary actually conceived by the Holy Spirit. “Holy Spirit” is a Greek rendition of the Aramaic term “the Spirit of Holiness”. Unlike the Greek, Aramaic has no adjectives. The Spirit of Holiness is another way of speaking of the presence and the power of the God of Israel. The doctrine of the Trinity did not emerge until the fourth century and it is not specifically revealed in either the OT or the NT. Mt. is trying to communicate that divine intervention is the source of Mary’s pregnancy and therefore the child to be born is very special, the child is of God.

Mary’s virginity, as such, is not Mt.’s focus, but it provides the arena or backdrop for the planned necessity of divine intervention in the birth of Jesus. Given Mary’s virginity, only the power of God can be the cause the birth of Jesus and thus Jesus is the main focus. The account of the virgin birth is meant to indicate to Christians who Jesus is -- he is truly God’s son. Given all the circumstances, the conception and birth of the child Jesus can only be explained as a unique and unexpected divine intervention in history. No human effort or causality can explain Jesus. His will be the story of the divine directly entering human history. To the question: who is Jesus? The answer will be: Son of God.

Interestingly, there was already a tradition in Israel’s faith of divine intervention in the birth of important people. Without God’s providential intervention a number of

important people would never have been born. For example, in Gen. 18:11-14, Abraham and Sarah are too old to have children, but three visitors (from God) informed her that she would indeed have a child. Sarah laughed at them because she was too old, but the laugh was one her for Isaac was born. (Isaac is a form of the Hebrew word for laugh).

In Genesis 25:21, Isaac's wife Rebecca was barren, but Isaac prayed to the Lord and she conceived of twins - Esau and Jacob. Jacob is mentioned in Mt. genealogy as an important role player in ancestral line of Jesus since he was the father of Judah after whom the Jews were named. These same divine interventions also took place in the birth of Samuel (1Sam. 1:-20) and in the case of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:5-24). None of these are virgin births, but all require divine intervention. The case of Jesus will overshadow all of these.

1:19-20 -- Note that Mt. speaks of "her husband Joseph" with is consistent with the first step of betrothal as mentioned above. The readers of Mt. already know how Jesus was conceived, but in the story, Joseph is still in the dark. Therefore, it is understandable that Mt. portrays Joseph also having problems with Mary being pregnant. After all they were in the first stage of betrothal and she was still living with her family. They had not yet come to live together, nevertheless, he had specific marital rights and she had the obligation to remain a virgin. So, how could she be pregnant, unless there was some illicit behavior?

Mt. describes Joseph as a "just", also translated "upright", man. This most likely means to indicate that a key factor in Joseph's justice or uprightness would be his respect for the law. The point of law in this case is found in Deut. 22:20-12 where a woman caught in adultery is stoned to death. In good conscience before the Law, Joseph's response was to be compassionate and so he resolved to divorce her quietly, without invoking the full penalty of the law or creating public scandal. However, no divorce could be completely secret, because a writ of divorce had to be presented before two witnesses. In any event, Mt. portrays Joseph as one who thought that there was some real problem.

Joseph's problem is solved by Mt.'s insertion of an appearance of an angel of the Lord in a dream. In the OT literature before Babylonian Exile in 436 BC, the term "angel of the Lord" did not imply a personal, spiritual being acting as an intermediary between God and man. Rather, the term implied some kind of perceptible presence of God to human beings. After the time of the Exile, angels took on a more personal nature and were given names. This angelic appearance will occur again in vs. 13 and 19.

In any event, the angel tells Joseph what the reader already knows, that Mary is not an adulteress, but that her conception is of the Holy Spirit and thus Joseph can take her for his wife and complete the betrothal process.

1:21 -- Joseph is addressed as "son of David" to establish him in the Davidic line and because he is commanded name to Jesus, this means Jesus is part of Joseph's family and this places Jesus in the Davidic line so that he can be called the Messiah. The name Jesus is the Greek form of the name Joshua, which can be translated as "God saves" or

“savior”, thus Mt. says “he will save his people from their sins”. This is another Messianic statement, because oppression, exile and foreign domination were often regarded as punishment for sins and separation from God. The Messiah will save his people from these sins and bring righteousness, i.e., right relationship with God. By the time of Mt. “his people” would have included both Jew and Gentile converts.

1:22 -- This verse is the first of ten so-called “fulfillment formulas” that appear in Mt.’s Gospel. The purpose of these formulas is to like Jesus with the OT by reinterpreting certain OT passages to indicate that they were speaking of Jesus. In order to accept Jesus as “the Christ” (Messiah), early Jewish converts to Christianity had to see the Messiah in a new way, because it seemed that Jesus fulfilled none of the traditional expectations of what the Messiah would accomplish.

1:23 -- Here Mt. reinterprets Isaiah 7:15 which states that “a virgin shall conceive and bear a son”. Mt. uses the Greek translation of the OT which uses the word for virgin, *parthenos*, instead of using the Hebrew OT which uses the word *alma*, which means young woman. In neither case had the Jews ever understood Isaiah 7:15 as a messianic promise or the prediction of a virgin birth. There was nothing unusual for a young girl to be a virgin when giving birth. So Mt. attempts to reinterpret this statement to make it a messianic prophesy that is fulfilled in Jesus. Again, for Mt. and his Jewish Christian audience Jesus is to be understood as the Messiah now seen as proclaimed by the prophets.

Isaiah is quoted as saying that the son will be called Emmanuel - God with us. This is a short form the ancient covenant agreement in which God said “I will be your God and you will be my people.” Here Jesus is identified with Moses as he introduces a new covenant and Jesus can now be seen as God with us. In addition, “God with us” also implies that Christians late in the first century had a growing awareness, based on the resurrection, that Jesus is more than the Davidic messiah he is also “son of God” in the sense of “God with us”. Others besides Jesus had been called “sons of God”, but this new Christian awareness of Jesus would result in a later creedal statement that Jesus was truly God, present in history as true God and true man - one person and two natures.

1:24-25 -- Joseph is obedient, however, he names him Jesus and not Emmanuel as in the prophesy he quoted. The phrase that he did not know Mary “until” she had born a son, is a Greek idiom that neither affirms nor denies the perpetual virginity of Mary. Mary’s perpetual virginity is a matter of post-biblical theology.

Chapter Two

2:1 -- This is a loaded verse. It contains three important elements that are related to major themes in Mt.’s Gospel: Bethlehem, Herod and wise men from the East.

1) Bethlehem -- Bethlehem is five miles south of Jerusalem. It was the home of David’s

ancestor Ruth mentioned in the genealogy and was the birthplace and home of David. It was there that David was anointed king (messiah) by the prophet Samuel. Having Jesus born in Bethlehem is another way to help identify Jesus as the Davidic messiah. This will be seen in vss. 5-6 as a second “fulfillment formula” based on another reinterpretation of a prophetic OT text. Mt. does not say explicitly, but the text seems to take for granted that Jesus was born in a house in Bethlehem, not in an inn as in Luke.

2) Herod is identified as the King of Judea. He was a vassal king appointed by the Romans and he ruled from 37 BC until his death in 4 BC. In Mt. account, Herod will officially represent the Jews and their reaction to the birth of Jesus - one of rejection.

3) Mt. uses “wise men from the East” to represent religious Gentiles who have used their skills as astronomers to perceive a revelation of God in nature and followed the “star” that leads them to Jesus.

2:2 - Again, unlike the Jews, these Gentiles have had the wisdom to come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah - king of the Jews - and they have come to worship him. The word “worship” does not indicate that the wise men saw Jesus as divine, but the Greek word used here means to prostrate oneself as a sign of homage to a person of dignity.

It was widely accepted in ancient times that births and deaths of great men were marked by heavenly signs. Virgil in the Aeneid (694) reports that a star guided Aeneas to the place where Rome should be founded. The Roman writer Pliny speaks of a popular opinion that each person has a star which begins to give light when he is born and fades out when he dies. Therefore, the story of a star guiding the wise men would not seem unusual to Mt. contemporaries. This is probably another attempt by Mt. link the OT to Jesus for the instruction of Jews and Gentiles alike. There are echoes here of the story of Balaam, a soothsayer or prophet. King Balak of Moab called on him to place a curse on Israel who was invading Moab. Balaam seeks wisdom from God and rather than curse Israel, he makes this prophesy:

a star shall come forth out of Jacob,
and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;
it shall crush the forehead of Moab,
and break down all the sons of Sheth.
Edom shall be dispossessed. Numbers 24:17

Throughout history, many of those who assume that this birth narrative of Mt. is historical have spent a great time investigating whether there was indeed a supernova, a comet, or a planetary conjunction of some sort to explain the “star”. Most scholars do not see this as a historical event, but as a literary device used by Mt. to make his point about Jesus to his Jewish audience and of his acceptance by the Gentiles.

2:3 - Herod and “all Jerusalem” represent the Jews who have had and read the Scriptures, but instead of understanding the birth of Jesus as the Messiah and rejoicing in his birth, they are “troubled”.

2:4 - The phrase “all the chief priests and scribes” represents the Sanhedrin which was the Jewish court of justice which tried Jesus in Mt. passion account.

Herod then asks where the Christ - Messiah - was to be born. The Gentiles understood the notion of king and the Jews understood the notion of Messiah.

2:5-6 - Again Mt. reinterprets the OT to show that Jesus is its fulfillment in the line of David. Here he uses a combination of two citations: Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2 (see also I Chronicles 11:2)

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathat, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel (Mt. changes “clans” to “rulers”.) Micah 5:2

You shall be shepherd of my people Israel (2 Sam 5:2). (govern=shepherd) (no prophet is cited for this verse)

2:7-8 Herod is seen here (representing the Jews) as having been reminded that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem and pretending to desire the opportunity to pay him homage. In reality we will see later that Herod is actually trying to determine the exact time (when the star appeared) of the birth of Jesus so that later he might kill him.(see v. 16).

Mt.’s message is that God has revealed the birth of the Messiah to Herod, representing the Jews, and this revelation has been rejected, as it was being rejected during the time when Mt.’s Gospel was being written. Meanwhile the Gentile wise men have now heard from the Jewish Scriptures that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem and they are depicted as going out to Bethlehem searching for Jesus to pay him royal homage, as Gentiles were now seeking him out in Antioch in the late first century after they had heard the message that Jesus was the Davidic Messiah from Christian missionaries.

2:9-10 - The wise men continue their journey in a joyful spirit, unlike the troubled spirit of Herod and “all of Jerusalem.”

2:11 - There is no indication by Mt. concerning when Jesus was born, but according to Mt. it seems he was born in a house in Bethlehem, where presumably Joseph and Mary lived (contrary to Luke’s Gospel).

The gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh are royal gifts as mentioned in Isaiah 60:6. Later in the 5th century, it was assumed that because there were three gifts, there were three wise men, although Mt. does not give their number. By the 8th century the “three” wise men were given the names of Kaspar, Balthasar and Melchior and by the 14 century Kaspar was depicted as a black Moor.

2:12 - Again the Gentile wise men heed a divine warning and do not return to Herod with information about the location of Jesus.

2:13 - An angel again appears to Joseph with a warning about Herod's intent to kill Jesus. Joseph is to flee to Egypt, which was not under the control of Herod. This begins the last major theme of the Infancy Narrative - Jesus is the new Moses. Just as Herod is depicted seeking to kill Jesus, Jewish people will remember that the Egyptian Pharaoh is depicted as wanting to kill all male Hebrew children (Ex. 2ff.). The baby Moses is therefore put into a "basket made of bulrushes, and daubed ..with bitumen and pitch and ...placed ..among the reeds at the rivers's brink." He is saved by the daughter of the Pharaoh and we know the rest of the story. Here God intervenes in times of crisis to save those who will play a major role in his divine plan.

There is a similar account of the gods saving the great king Sargon of Akkad (c. 2,300 BC). In an inscription, Sargon says that his mother gave birth to him in secret, placed him in a basket of rushes sealed with bitumen and cast the basket adrift on the river. Akki, the drawer of water, lifted him out of the water and reared him as his son. From these humble beginnings, by the will of the gods, Sargon rose to be the mighty king of the city of Agade, from which the Akkadians took their name.

Mt. will continue the "new Moses" motif later in his Gospel with the Sermon on the Mount - like Moses give the law from the mountain - and Mt. will divide his Gospel into five distinct sections which may be intended to imitate Moses who Jewish tradition said wrote the five books of the Torah - the Law.

2:14-15 - These verses contain another OT "fulfillment formula". The quote is from Hosea 11:1 and referred to Israel: "When Israel was a child, I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son. Israel's moment of salvation was the Exodus. They were delivered from oppression in Egypt by the hand of God and led by Moses to the promised land. Now Jesus will, like Israel and Moses, come out of Egypt and be the salvation and the restoration of his people.

2:16 - Again we have the comparison of Moses and Jesus. Like the Pharaoh (Ex. 1:16), Herod intends to kill all the male children. Since Herod died in 4 BC and he is depicted as killing all children two years and younger. Therefore, if there is any historicity to this account, the birth of Jesus is estimated to be about 6 BC.

Whether this is a historical event or not, the fact that Herod was cruel enough to do such a deed is not questioned. However, there is no mention of this event in the writings of Josephus, who does note many of Herod's atrocities.

2:17 - This quotation is from Jeremiah 31:15 is difficult for scholars to interpret. In Jeremiah, Rachel weeps for the exile of her sons Joseph and Benjamin. One tradition has Rachel buried in Bethel about five miles from Ramah. In any event, Mt. is trying again to link up with the OT and to portray the grief of the parents of the children killed by Herod.

2:19-21 - Mt. is using the words of Exodus 4:19 in which Moses is instructed by the Lord

to “go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead”. So now Jesus returns to his homeland because Herod is dead. Again, like Moses, he leaves Egypt for the land of Israel.

Mt. now needs a way to get Jesus to Nazareth. The reason he poses is a good one. When Herod died in 4 B.C., his kingdom was split into three parts and given to his sons, Archelaus, Herod Antipas and Philip. Archelaus got Judea, Samaria and Idumea, Herod Antipas got Galilee and Perea and Philip got the regions east and north of the Lake of Galilee.

Archelaus was reported to be a dictator and Jewish deputies had even gone to Rome protesting that he had massacred three thousand people when he took over the territory. He was deposed by Rome in 6 A.D. So it makes sense to have Joseph, Mary and Jesus go to the more peaceful Galilee. They took up residence in Nazareth

Nazareth was a small town but only a few miles from the large city of Sepphoris which Herod Antipas was rebuilding as his capital after its destruction by the Romans shortly after Herod’s death in 4BC.

2:22-23 - We saw above that Joseph was directed in a dream (by God) to go to the land of Israel, thus a Jewish connection, and now Joseph is again directed in a dream (by God) to go to Galilee, a Gentile connection (see Mt. 4:15 “Galilee of the Gentiles”). Again Mt. is reminding his mixed community that they are both important parts of God’s plan for the Messiah. It is also interesting that if Joseph was indeed a carpenter, settling in Nazareth would make sense because he could find work close by with the rebuilding of the city of Sepphoris.

We know of no prophesy that indicated the Messiah would be called a Nazarene. The debate among scholars is much too long to recount, but a possible insight into Mt.’s use of the word “Nazarene” is best summarized by Raymond Brown in his important book “The Birth of the Messiah” p. 223

‘Nazorean’ is primarily applicable to Jesus because he has dwelt at Nazareth; and therefore the formula citation contains a place name, as do all the other formula citations in this chapter. ‘Nazorean’ is secondarily applicable to Jesus because he is the messianic *Branch* of the House of David (the *neser*) and because his is a Nazirite (*Nazir*), the Holy One, dedicated to God’s service from birth. It is this last derivation that Matthew has in mind when he says ‘that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He will be called a Nazorean’. He is citing known Scripture and has two definite prophetic passages in mind. The passages are Isa 4:3 (*‘He who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy’*) and Judg 17:17 (*‘I have been a Nazirite of God from my mother’s womb’*)

- 2) 1: 18-21 -- God intervenes for his people, Jesus born of the virgin, by the H. Spirit
- 3) 1:23 -- Fulfilled prophesy of Isaiah (7:14) - a virgin shall conceive
- 4) 2:1-2 -- Magi seek the king of the Jews - has seen star.
- 5) 2:1, 5-6 -- Born in Bethlehem - birthplace of David -- from which will come a ruler -- quoting Micah 5: 1-2

2) Jesus is the new Moses

3) The Jews reject Jesus

- 1) Ch 2 -- Herod, representing the Jews, rejects Jesus and tries to kill him.

4) The Gentiles accept Jesus

- 1) 2:1-12 **The Magi**, gentiles, recognize Jesus as “king of the Jews” and bring him gifts and worshipped him.

1:17 -- We skip forward now for a brief look at verse 17. This verse indicates that the genealogical history of Jesus can be divided into three sections: Abraham to David (age of the patriarchs); David to the Babylonian Captivity (age of the kings) and from the Babylonian Captivity to Joseph/Mary (age of the unknowns).

Verse 17 also says that this grouping each consisted in 14 generations. This identical numbering is probably meant to show that history reflects the plan of God and that God made mathematically precise preparations for the coming of the Messiah. In any event, it is not simply historical, because the names of five kings have been omitted in the second listing and there are only 13 names in the third listing.

The number 14 could possibly have other implications. The numbers may be symbolic of David because they could involve the numerical value of the consonants in the Hebrew name David: $d=4$, $w=6$, $d=4$ for a total of 14. Thus another identification of Jesus with the Davidic line from which many believed that the Messiah would come.

WHO IS JESUS?

Messiah -

-- From the house of David

Genealogy

Born in Bethlehem - birthplace of David

- Birth by direct intervention of God for his people - virgin birth.
- Fulfillment of prophecies of Isaiah and Micah
- Recognized even by gentiles (Magi) as king

New Moses - passing from old covenant to new covenant - central figure in OT

Herod seek to child to destroy him, so Joseph takes the family away
Pharaoh sought to destroy Moses, so Moses went away.

Herod massacred all boys of two years of age
Pharaoh commanded that every male born to the Hebrews be cast into the Nile.

Herod, the king died, and an angel of the Lord said to Joseph in Egypt “go back to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead”.
The Pharaoh dies and the Lord said to Moses in Midian “return to Egypt, for all those who were seeking your life are dead.”

Joseph took the child and his mother and went back to the land of Israel.
Moses took along his wife and his children and returned to Egypt.

Sermon on the Mount

Moses receives the 10 commandments on the mountain. Five books of Pentateuch attributed to Moses

Christmas Cycle:

No Christmas decorations during Advent.

First Sunday of Advent - Sunday closest to Nov. 30

Second Sunday of Advent -

Third Sunday of Advent - Gaudete

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Christmas

Feast of Holy Family - Sunday after Christmas

Epiphany (manifestation) - Sunday between Jan 2 and Jan. 8. Prior to the fourth century may have been an older celebration of the birth of Jesus. Now in the East it is the commemoration of the baptism of Jesus and in the West the adoration by the wise men.

Christmas

By the early 4th century the Church in Rome celebrated the nativity on Dec. 25. One reason may have been to offset the feast of the invincible sun god. The emperor Aelian established this pagan feast in 274 in honor of the Syrian sun god.

The X in Christmas??? X is ch in Greek - thus it stands for Christ

Date of Nativity

4-6 BC. Herod died in 4 BC. Error in the calendar by Denis the Short in 533 AD, who sought to date the calendar not from the founding of Rome, but from the birth of Jesus. He placed the birth of Jesus at 754 in the Roman calendar, but Herod died in 750.

Magi or Wise Men

Magi show up in ancient literature as those engaged in occult arts, astronomers, magicians and fortune tellers with the power of interpreting dreams and visionary messages. Mt. considers them learner (wise) astronomers. They are gentiles who have

found Jesus revealed in nature.

The Star

Liturgy of Christmas

Vigil Mass - Saturday - Mt. Infancy narrative

Midnight Mass - First part of Lucan Infancy Narrative 2:1- 14

Mass at Dawn - Second part of Lucan Infancy Narrative 2:14-20

Mass of Christmas Day - Prologue of John

These are different stories. Why? What do they have in common?

Common Elements in the Infancy Narratives

The stories are obviously very different, but what do they have in common??

These 11 points.

Mary and Joseph are engaged or married, but are not yet living together.

Joseph is of the house of David

An angelic announcement of a child to be born

Mary does not conceive the child through Joseph

The conception of the child is through the H. Spirit

The angel says that the child is to be named Jesus

An angel states that Jesus is to be a Savior.

Birth takes place after the parents come to live together

Birth takes place in Bethlehem

Birth is during the days of Herod the Great d. 4BC

The child is reared in Nazareth.