



**THE INFANCY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AS SEEN IN
THE GOSPELS OF MATTHEW AND LUKE COMPARED
WITH THE INFANCY GOSPELS OF THE APOCRYPHAL
CHRISTIAN LITERATURE.**

By John Gayford.

THE INFANCY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AS SEEN IN THE GOSPELS OF MATTHEW AND LUKE COMPARED WITH THE INFANCY GOSPELS OF THE APOCRYPHAL CHRISTIAN LITERATUR.

INTRODUCTION

The early Christians, before the Canonical Gospels were written, focussed their liturgy around Easter, with Sunday as the weekly remembrance of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the first of the Canonical Gospels appeared, according to Tuckett (2001, p. 886), just after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD¹ it was attributed to Mark but it said nothing of the birth and infancy of Jesus. There is no infancy narrative; Jesus appears suddenly like Melchizedek in Genesis 14: 18. In Mark 1: 9 Jesus is baptised by St. John the Baptist in the River Jordan, the heavens are torn apart by the Holy Spirit and there is a voice from heaven declaring "*You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you*". Then without delay Jesus is whisked into the desert to be tempted by Satan before collecting disciples and starting his ministry.

By the time St. Matthew's Gospel appeared according to Viviano (1990, p. 631), between 80-90 AD² and St Luke's Gospel according to Karris (1990, p. 675 and 676), between 85-90 AD,³ an interest had developed in the Incarnation desiring some account be given of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. St. John's Gospel⁴ deals directly with the doctrine of the incarnation in the Prologue in saying-

¹ Donahue and Harrington (2002, p. 32), claim that St. Mark's Gospel appears to have been written after the death of SS. Peter and Paul and the great fire of Rome in 64 AD.

² Allison (2001, p. 845) draws our attention to the recent tendency to place St. Matthew's Gospel before 70 AD but there is general agreement that it was written in the last quarter of the first century.

³ There appears to be some reluctance to place a date on Luke/Acts. There is a pre-supposition of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD but little evidence of the persecution of Domitian in the later part of his reign that went up to 96 AD, or of the bitterness between the early Church and the Synagogue by the Pharisees from Jamnia 85-90 AD (Karris 1990, 675-676).

⁴ Both Brown (1966, p. LXXX - LXXV) and Barrett(1978, p. 127-128) think that the Fourth Gospel went through much editing before we get our present text. The claim is that the original author was the Beloved Disciple but there were many redactions either by him or by the Johannine School. Thus they

“The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that was from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth”.

Even so there is no infancy Narrative.

Brown (1990, p. 311) defines the infancy narratives in Canonical Gospels as stories about the conception, birth and youth of Jesus but also points out that they have theological motives. This is projected in their explanatory comments, which has led some scholars to call them midrashic.⁵

These accounts neither satisfied curiosity nor supported the theology that was being taught. Thus other infancy narratives appeared which were not included in the Bible for a variety of reasons. These I will call the Infancy Narratives of the Apocryphal Literature.

This essay looks at the Infancy Narrative in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke afresh after study of the Infancy Narrative in the Apocryphal literature. As a guide to the material covered a diagram is included of composite events covered in the Canonical Gospels and the Protevangelium of James and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. (Figure 1, page 27).

THE PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES

This book has been known by a number of different names including *Birth of Mary: Mother of God; The birth of Our Lord and Our lady Mary; Gospel of James* and *Book of James*. It did not receive its present title of *Protevangelium of James* until there was a Latin translation made by the Frenchman Guillaume Postel in 1552 with the title *Protevangelion sive de natalibus Jesu Christi et ipsius Matris virginis Mariae sermo historicus Jacobi minoris* (Elliott, 1993, p. 48). The term *Protevangelium* implies that

give a *terminus post quem* that could even predate the Synoptic Gospels and a *terminus ante quem* that could go into the early part of the 2nd century.

⁵ Alexander (1990, p. 452-459) defines *midrash* as a term coming from Hebrew literature as meaning to inquire, to investigate and to explain the scriptures. It could be applied to a single word, verse or to a whole book. This can include literal interpretation and allegorical interpretation and in that sense is similar to the Greek terms *exegesis* and hermeneutics or explanatory *gloss* (Davies 1990, p. 220-222). In simple terms it is the retelling of a Biblical story with interpretation, commentary, with the addition of details that may be spiritual, historical or even fictional.

the described events occurred before those recorded in the Canonical Gospels. Even so events from the infancy narratives of St. Matthew and St. Luke are harmonised into the story, often using identical wording.

The text of the Protevangelium of James did not receive the same protection that was afforded to the Canonical Gospels and as a result of this there are many different versions (possibly over a hundred in Greek alone) but also in other languages. Cullmann (1991, pp. 421-422) lists a number of Greek versions, but also Syriac, Georgian, Armenian, Arabic, Coptic and Ethiopian translations. There are Latin translations but these tend to date from the middle ages and reflect the condemnation made by the *Decretum Gelasianum*⁶ in the sixth century in which The *Gospel of James the younger* (as referred to in St. Mark 15:40) is declared as not Canonical along with many other Apocryphal writings known at the time. Thus the Protevangelium of James was far more popular in the East than in the West, but much of its material was incorporated into the Latin Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew. The Protevangelium of James was important in supporting early Marian theology. Klauck (2003, p. 66) summarises the general intent of the work as being in praise of Mary. It is also projected as an apologetic work to refute Celsus the late second century Platonist who wrote comprehensive anti-Christian works including mocking the lowly social status of Jesus and especially poured scorn on the idea of the virginal conception. Ehrman (2003, p. 209) classifies the work as *a pro-orthodox forgery* with a theological agenda of refuting Marcionite⁷ (Docetism⁸) and Ebonite⁹ beliefs and to champion the cause of Mary's perpetual virginity.

⁶ **Decretum Gelasianum**- this is a Latin document that dates from the sixth century though attributed to Pope Gelasius (492-496) but projected to reflect the views of a synod held in 382. The document contains a list of the canonical books of both the Old and New Testament together with a list of "apocryphal" books and various works that are rejected as heretical. Klauck (2003, p. 2) tells us that in the context of this decree the term "apocryphal" means that the work is heretical and has no authority. Listed in this way is *Gospel under the name of James the younger*.

⁷ **Marcionism**- This takes its name from heresies that derive from a Bishop Marcion who was expelled from the Church in 144 AD. (Attwater, 1997, p. 305). He was accused of holding Docetic and Gnostic views. He had a large number of followers.

⁸ **Docetism**- Hardon (1981, p. 167) defines this as a heretical system of beliefs dating from apostolic time, claiming that Christ only appeared to be a man. Thus he was not born, did not suffer and what is more did not rise from the dead.

⁹ **Ebionite**- A Jewish Christian sect that flourished in the early Church claiming that Christ was the natural son of Joseph and Mary only receiving the Holy Spirit at his Baptism (Cross and Livingstone 1997, p. 523).

Elliott (1993, p. 48) informs us that the Protevangelium of James is the earliest of the non-canonical infancy narratives and the most important. Some authorities have called it a *midrashic exegesis of the infancy narratives of St. Matthew and St. Luke*. The consensus of scholars do not think that the Protevangelium of James can have been written before 150 AD and most favour the end of the second century. It was probably written in Greek with the claim that it was written by James who according to the Protevangelium of James was the son of Joseph by his first marriage and thus the step-brother of Jesus and well placed to give an account of the infancy and pre infancy events. Problems do arise as there is a number of James in the New Testament and there has been confusion¹⁰. Elliott (1993, 49) states that the authorship is unknown or is pseudo-anonymous and Klauck (2003, p. 65) suggests it was also written in an unknown place.

Cullmann (1991, p. 424) suggests that the document was shaped by oral tradition but also possibly expands on early written material. There is also the suggestion that various parts were added at a later date as with the murder of Zechariah the father of St. John the Baptist at the instigation of Herod. Zechariah is projected as high priest and is replaced by the aged Symeon (chapters 22-24). There are sections where the text of St. Matthew and St. Luke are reproduced, we can speculate if the author had the text when writing or that this was added later. Like the canonical Nativity narratives it draws on Old Testament figures.

¹⁰ **James-** Kock (1997, p. 603-605) and Van Voorst (2000, p. 669) agree there are five James in the New Testament a fact that often causes confusion.

1. James the son of Zebedee, one of the inner-circle of Apostles. He is sometimes called “James the Great” and is the only apostle whose martyrdom is recorded in the New Testament (Acts 12:2).
2. James son of Alphaeus another apostle who is often called “James the less”, or “James minor” or “James the younger”
3. James the son of Mary of Clopas, mentioned at the foot of the cross in the Gospels.
4. James the father of Judas (not Iscariot).
5. James the “Brother of the Lord”. He seems to have played no part in the ministry of Jesus. Kock (1997, p.603) tells us he was called “James the just” and was a just man in the same way as Joseph. There are claims that he became Bishop of Jerusalem and other claims that he lead an ascetic life. He had a good reputation among the Jewish Christians as he was said to keep the Jewish law unlike St. Paul. The claim is that he was Joseph’s son by his first marriage. St Jerome preferred to call him a cousin of Jesus. It was to him that the Protevangelium of James is attributed in spite of the fact that the Gelasian Decree speaks of “A Gospel under the name of James the younger”,

Naturally there would have been curiosity about the hidden years of Jesus before he started his ministry at about the age of 30 and this would be extended to his parents.. Further to this there were theological questions to be answered. Lapham (2003, p. 63) summarises these in relation to the dual nature of Christ as both the Son of God and the son of Mary. Distasteful as it might seem the virginal status of Mary needed to be verified: though this raises more questions than it solves. The answers given suggest that Jesus was not born in a natural way. Unfortunately they raise the question of Mary's role in the birth of Jesus and even the possibility that she had a phantom pregnancy. The Protevangelium of James tells us more about the miraculous birth of Mary than it does about the birth of Jesus. We are told that Mary was a child late in life for Joachim and Anna with considerable resemblance to the story of Hannah and the birth of Samuel (I Samuel 1:4- 2:11) or the birth of Samson to the wife of Manoah (Judges 13). Joachim (Ioakin) appears in the Appendix of the Book of Daniel called in the Vulgate *Historia Susannae*¹¹ where he is the husband of Susanna. Protevangelium of James projects Joachim as a very rich man (1:1)

The author of the Protevangelium of James reveals his ignorance of Jewish custom in projecting that Joachim was not permitted to make offerings in the temple because he was childless (1:2) but is allowed to make his offering when Anna is pregnant (5:1) and that Mary was allowed to live in the temple from the age of three until she was 12 years old. There was no way a female child would be allowed to live in the temple. Also the "waters of conviction, of jealousy or suspicion" (Numbers 5:11-31) were only taken by women not by husband and wife. (see below).

Cullmann (1991, p.424) praises the Protevangelium of James as having literary merit compared with later infancy narratives as *it gives a graphic proclamation with evidence of a sober, poetic, sincere mind.*

Summary

We are introduced to Joachim and Anna who are presented as rich but childless and would appear to be modelled on and take their names from Daniel 13:1-4 but also

¹¹ This story is not in the Hebrew text but is in the LXX. Jerome deleted this on the grounds that it was not in the Hebrew text.

there is an element of Hanna in I Samuel 1. An angel appears to Anna, in much the same way as to Mary at the annunciation in St. Luke's Gospel, telling her she is to have a child. Klauch (2003, p. 67) tells us in some texts this is made to sound even more miraculous as there is conception without male involvement; he links this with freedom from original sin but stops short of the doctrine of the immaculate conception. If we take St. Augustine's view of original sin it would be easy to move to that doctrine. Anna promises, whether male or female, that the child will be presented to the temple in the same way as Samuel. Most texts state that Anna gave birth to Mary at seven months. Mary's bedroom is made into a sanctuary and she is only allowed to mix with "undefiled daughters of Hebrews" (6:1). On Mary's first birthday Joachim gives a feast and Anna sings her version of the Magnificat.

I will sing to the praise of the Lord my God, for he has visited me and rescued me from the reproach of my enemies. And the Lord gave me the fruits of his righteousness, unique yet manifest before him.

Eventually at the age of three Mary is led to the temple by a torchlight procession of Hebrew virgins, perhaps reminiscent of the wise virgins at the wedding feast in St. Matthew 25:1-12. The priest greets Mary, and she dances on the steps of the altar. Mary lives in the temple and is fed by angels (8:1). At the age of twelve it is decided that Mary must leave the temple and a guardian has to be found for her from the widowers. This is to be decided by oracle of the rods of Aaron (drawing lots) as in Numbers 17: 16-28. The high priest is Zechariah and he is identified with the father of St John the Baptist. Joseph the carpenter a widower lays down his tools and takes part in the drawing of lots. He is chosen in spite of his protesting that he is elderly and already has children. In chapter 10 we are assured that Mary is still a virgin. She is part of a group of seven virgins of the tribe of David who are given the task of weaving the veil of the temple (Exodus 35:23-26). At the age of 16 she is told by the angel that she will become pregnant as in St. Luke 1:26-28 by the power of the Lord. There is an account of her visit to Elizabeth as in Luke 1:39-56. Joseph only finds out about her pregnancy when she reaches the sixth month. The temple authorities find she is pregnant and she and Joseph are subjected to the waters of conviction already mentioned but they survive the ordeal and are proven innocent. The census of Augustus is used as in Luke as a way of getting them to Bethlehem but before they can get there she goes into labour. She is taken into a cave to shelter while Joseph

goes to find a midwife. We are told in some manuscripts that Jesus is born after seven months of pregnancy. There is one very dramatic account with Joseph introduced as the narrator of how nature stood still at the birth of Christ (18:2)

I looked up to the vaults of heaven, and saw there in amazement that the birds of heaven remained motionless. The account then goes on to say how people and animals stopped chewing and looked upwards, sheep being driven did not move and their shepherds stopped in their movement of driving them. And then all a once everything went on its course again. This is a scene that is developed in the *Arundel 404 text*.

The midwife and Salome who may be a daughter of Joseph declare that Mary is still a virgin. The story of the Magi, the slaughter of the innocents and the flight to Egypt are reported as in St. Matthew chapter 2. Jesus is hid in the manger and John is taken by his mother into the desert. Herod has Zechariah interrogated about John's whereabouts and when he refuses to divulge the secret he is murdered in the temple. Simeon is said to be a priest and is appointed to succeed him. The text concludes with James claiming he is the author and wrote the document after the death of Herod.

Cullmann (1991, p. 424) suggests that the Protevangelium of James is made up of a number of separate documents that were combined in the fourth century.

1. 1-16 The birth of Mary and the conception of Jesus
2. 17-20 The birth of Jesus.
3. The story of the midwife and Salome may have been added later as also possible the speech of Joseph. (21)
4. The murder of Zechariah (22-24)

Klauck (2003, p. 66) says the best way of summarising the work is to say it was written in praise of Mary.

THE INFANCY GOSPEL OF THOMAS

The Infancy Gospel of Thomas (not to be confused with the Gospel of Thomas) appears to be an attempt to satisfy curiosity in the embryo church for information

about the childhood of Christ. It fills the gap in the canonical Gospels (see Figure 1) with a series of snapshots or pericopies before Jesus visits the temple aged twelve in St Luke's account. In fact 19: 1-12 of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas corresponds with St. Luke 2: 41-52.

Cullmann (1991, p. 441) tells us that various titles have been used as *Infancy of the Lord Jesus*, in the Syriac version, *An account of the Infancy of the Lord, by Thomas the Israelite philosopher* for the Greek A, and *Book of the holy apostle Thomas concerning the life of the Lord in his Infancy* in the Greek B.

Elliott (1993, p.68) suggests that there was a series of legends transmitted by oral tradition before they were eventually written down. He goes on to propose that even from the start there were many versions of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. Irenaeus (c130-c200) saw the work as a Gnostic forgery with a false wicked story (*Adversus omnes Haereses 1:20,1*). This would imply that the work was about in the second century. There still remains considerable argument whether the various Greek versions that are only preserved in 14th to 16th century copies, or the Syriac version that is sixth century, came first. Cullmann (1991, p.439-441) describes a Greek text referred to as *Greek Recension A*, made up of various 15th and 16th century fragments. He also describes *Greek Recension B*, which is a shorter document edited from a manuscript of the 14th or 15th century found in the monastery on Sinai. In addition to these there are Syriac, Latin, Old Georgian, Church Slavonic and Ethiopic versions. This has all led to great difficulty dating the work or even knowing if there was a single original work. Thus estimates vary from the first to seventh centuries. It is assumed that it is later than the composition of St. Luke's Gospel but has a lot of the marks of a second century work.

Jesus is not projected in a favourable way: a child prodigy, who could work miracles, and these were in some way to foretell the miracles he would work later; but he was seen as a danger to the community where he lived. They do not fit the profile of the Jesus we know from the canonical Gospels. He is projected as a sort of juvenile "Harry Potter" who sometimes gets it wrong. Cullmann (1991, p. 422) claims there was a parallel with legends of the like for Krishna and Buddha.

The work claims to have been composed by Thomas the Israelite but as Lapham (2003, p.130) points out there is nothing in the collection of stories to suggest that the author was of a Jewish background. He goes on to suggest the association with

Thomas, but notes that proclaiming him as the author is in favour of the work originating in Syria where the Thomasine tradition was strong.

The theological content of the work addresses docetic issues. In spite of his knowledge and miraculous powers possibly from birth Jesus has human failings and feeling and thus very much human. There is an element of pre-existence as in St. John's Gospel. The allegoric interpolations of the mystery of alpha have a Gnostic flavour. Ehrman (2003, p.206) sees the Infancy Gospel of Thomas as a forgery that has no theological agenda. It is a series of stories that excited the imagination of early Christians about the childhood of Jesus - perhaps purely a fictional account to satisfy curiosity.

The work opens with –

I Thomas the Israelite, announce and make known to you all, brothers from among the Gentiles, the mighty deeds of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which he did when he was born in our land (1:1).

We first see Jesus at the age of five playing by a brook on the Sabbath making twelve clay sparrows. When Jesus is rebuked for this on the Sabbath he claps his hands and the sparrows fly away. Klauck (2003, p. 74) suggest that this could be interpreted as sending out of the 12 Apostles. Annas the scribe disperses water Jesus had collected: he is made to wither, possible reminiscent of the fig tree that withers in St. Mark 11: 12-25. When a boy bumps into Jesus he is “zapped dead” and some copies state that those who complain about this are blinded (later to be brought back to life or healed). The villagers ask Joseph to take his son away. Joseph takes Jesus by the ear and admonishes him. Jesus is taken to Zacchaeus to be taught but they get no further than the first letter alpha of the Greek alphabet before Jesus is making allegorical interpretations and his teacher asks to be relieved of his task.

This child is not earth-born; he can even subdue fire. Perhaps he was begotten even before the creation of the world.

When a child falls from an upper window and is killed he is brought back to life with the magic word “Zeno”. Klauck (2003, p. 75) reminds us of the story of Eutychus who is restored to life in similar circumstances at Troas by St. Paul (Acts 20: 7-12).

At the age of six Jesus is reported to have carried water in his outer garments when his pitcher broke. When he is eight there is the reported miracle of him sowing wheat that yields 100 fold and feeds the whole village. Also when Joseph cut wood too short it is miraculously made the right length and we are introduced to the second and third teachers who have the same fate as the first. When his half-brother James is bitten by a viper he comes to no harm as when St. Paul is bitten in the same way (Acts 28:3-6). We also have the story of a man brought back to life.

Finally there is the account of Jesus in the temple at the age of 12 as in Luke 2:31-52. It is of interest that the words used by Elizabeth in Luke 1:42 are given to the Scribes and Pharisees in the temple.

Blessed are you among women, because God has blessed the fruit of your womb (but adding the words) For such glory and such excellence and wisdom we have never seen or heard (19:4).

THE LATER INFANCY GOSPELS

The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew

This work was better known in the West replacing the Protevangelium of James and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. In fact it is made up from the beginning of the former and an edited version of the latter, Jesus as a child is projected in a less malevolent way. It has some material of its own and differences from the above works. In one edition we are told that Joseph had grandchildren who were older than Mary and that Mary stayed in the temple until she was 14.

The work became popular in the Middle Ages and greatly influenced art. At the birth of Jesus the ox and the ass are said to be present and this has passed into modern nativity scenes and old carols. Elliott (1993, p. 84-85) tells us that it was most likely written in Latin possible in the eight or ninth centuries but the oldest manuscripts are not before the 14th century. It was also known as *Liber de Infantia* or *Nativitate Mariae et de Infantia Salvatoris*. There are slight differences in various versions. It has only been known as *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* since it received that title by Constantin Tischendorf gave it that name about 150 years ago. He took this from a document called *the Hebrew or Aramaic Ur Matthew* that came complete with forged

letters between Bishops Chromatius and Heliodorus with St Jerome who is incorrectly said to have made the Latin translation. No doubt the letters were invented to give the work authority and promote its official acceptance. There are versions of the work like the Arabic Infancy Gospel containing much supernatural embellishment, mostly appertaining to the flight into Egypt where Jesus tames wild beasts and even dragons. Elliott (1993, p. 95) seems to think that the work was written for the further glorification of Mary. This is substantiated by part of Pseudo-Matthew being incorporated into *Legenda Aurea* by the Dominican James of Varagine (c1230-98) that like many of his works were in the praise of Mary and became part of mediaeval piety.

Summary (Only of additional material that does not appear in the Protevangelium of James or the Infancy Gospel of Thomas)

The Angel goes further than in the Protevangelium of James by telling Joachim that his wife is to conceive a daughter by him (*Ex semine tuo concepisse filiam*). Klauch (2003, p.79) draws attention to the influence of monastic life specifically the Rule of St. Benedict in the life of Mary, where virginity is stressed. Old Testament examples of virginity such as Abel and Elijah are cited.

The ox and the ass who are said to venerate Jesus in the crib makes use of- *the ox knows its owner and the donkey its master in the crib*. (Isaiah 1:3a). In the flight into Egypt the infant Jesus is said to tame dragons and been served by wild beasts, suggesting a fulfilment of Isaiah 11:6-7. A palm tree bends over to give its fruit and water springs from its roots. When the journey is beyond endurance Jesus shortens it by 30 days. On entering an Egyptian city all the idols crash to the ground, this is seen as fulfilment of Isaiah 19:1-

Behold the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and coming to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt within them.

In one version on the way back to Jordan when Jesus is eight he is said to have entered a den of lions who are reported to have worshipped him and the cubs played at his feet; this has been linked with Daniel 14:31-42. They all come to the river Jordan and the waters are parted; this has been likened to Elijah crossing the water with 50 prophets in II Kings 2: 7-8.

History of Joseph the Carpenter

This is said to have been written by the Syrian Father Isho'dad of Merv (Elliott, 1993, p100) and that there are Arabic and Coptic versions (p.111). In this we are told that Joseph was aged 90 when he married the 12 year old Mary after the death of his first wife. He is said to have four sons and two daughters by his first marriage. There is a claim that he lived to 111 and there is dramatic account of his death with the archangels Michael and Gabriel taking his soul to heaven. This seems to have been written to foster the cult of Joseph but there are claims that it could be as old as the fourth century.

The Arabic Infancy Gospel

According to Elliott (1993, p.100) this is another infancy narrative that draws on the Protevangelium of James and the infancy Gospel of Thomas. It is thought to have originated in Egypt and seems to have as its purpose the exultation of Mary with miracles attributed to her while the Holy Family were in Egypt. It contains the so-called miracle of the nappy of Jesus that was given to the Magi which withstands fire when they return to Persia. A woman (a bride) is healed from her leprosy by bathing in the bath water of the infant Christ. We note that Mary is usually addressed as Lady Mary. Chapter 35 is worth quoting-

Judas, a child possessed by the devil, smites Jesus, and the devil leaves him in the form of a dog.

In chapter 23 a party of robbers are met two: of them are named as Titus and Dumachus. Titus is generous to the Holy Family but Jesus predicts that he will be crucified with Titus on side and Dumachus on the other with the prediction that “ on that day Titus shall go before me into paradise”. Cullmann (1991, p.456) claims that this text was known to Mohammed so that the legends became known among Muslims with some of them being incorporated into the Koran.

The English manuscripts.

There are two English manuscripts; *Arundel 404* (in the British Library and attributed to James) and *Codex Hereford* (in the Chapter Library of Hereford Cathedral and attributed to Matthew) both in Latin and possibly date from the seventh to ninth centuries (Elliott, 1993, p. 108 and Klauch 2003, p. 80). It is difficult to trace the source of these texts from their origins and they have the appearance being combinations of both Protevangelium of James and Pseudo-Matthew. Both the above authors draw our attention to the strong docetic traits that were around in the second century. There is a beautiful and dramatic description of the entry of Jesus into the world in chapters 72-74 of the Arundel 404 text with the midwife narrating that can be interpreted as docetic if it was not for the phrase-

When the light had come forth, Mary worshipped him to whom she had given birth (chapter 73).

Otherwise there is little evidence of a normal birth but more the appearance of a Divine manifestation with Mary playing little part.

Gnostic Legends

Cullmann (1991, p. 453-455) discusses the possibility that Gnostics made their versions of the infancy narrative at quite an early date putting their Docetic skew on the legend to fit in with their Gnostic ideas. He cites the Gnostic *Prehistory of (Genna) Mary* in which the material in Protevangelium of James is projected as capable of Gnostic interpretations and thus fit in with Gnostic theology. Other examples are quoted from the *Pista Sophia* that is thought to be from the third century. The Gnostic writings do not produce a real infancy narrative but more a challenge to Canonic versions with a Gnostic interpretation on the incarnation that is dramatically opposed to the Creeds of the Church. The so called *Gospel of Philip* discovered at Nag Hammadi contains the following-

Some say that Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit, but they do not know what they say. How can the Female impregnate the feminine? Mary is the

virgin silence (parthonos) which no evil power defiles or distracts, she abides as the immaculate silence. (Gospel of Philip 17. [Leloup, 2003, p. 51])

THE INFANCY NARRATIVE OF ST. MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

If the author of St. Matthew's Gospel had Mark's gospel in front of him when writing his Gospel he clearly added the Infancy Narrative from another source. There is no evidence he was influenced by the apocryphal literature but the reverse is true. A tradition exists that Matthew's Infancy Narrative came from Joseph unfortunately there is no direct evidence that supports this legend but Matthew's account seems to reflect observations that might have been made by Joseph.

The Gospel opens by calling Jesus the Messiah (1:1) and the infancy Narrative follows the Genealogy and is an account of the miraculous birth of Jesus the Messiah, (1:18) who was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The Gospel has the traditional Jewish Messianic expectations but does not compromise the divinity of Christ. The appearance of an angel in a dream to Joseph is a standard Biblical way of God speaking. Brown (1997, p. 228) and Johnson (1999, p. 192) point out that the infancy Narratives of St. Matthew and St. Luke have little in common except they involve the same basic characters of Jesus, Mary and Joseph and places like Bethlehem and Nazareth: Karris (1992, p.679) clearly disagrees with his senior editor and gives a list of the 12 points the narratives have in common and these are summarised in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1.

Points of agreement between the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke

		Matthew	Luke
1	Jesus born in the days of Herod the Great	2:1	1:5
2	Mary is a virgin espoused to Joseph	1:18	1:27,24 & 2:5
3	Joseph is from the house of David	1:16 & 20	1:27 & 2:4
4	An angel proclaims the coming birth of Jesus	1: 20-21	1:28-23
5	Jesus is said to be a son of David	1:1	1:32
6	The conception of Jesus is through the Holy Spirit	1:18& 20	1:35
7	Joseph not involved with conception of Jesus	1:18—25	1:34
8	Jesus is named from heaven before his birth	1:21	1:31
9	Jesus is declared saviour by the angel	1:21	2:11
10	Mary and Joseph are living together before the birth of Jesus	1:24-25	2:4-7
11	Jesus is born in Bethlehem	2:1	2:4-7
12	Jesus, Mary and Joseph go to live in Nazareth	2:22-23	2:39 & 51

Allison (2001, p. 849) raises the possibility that St. Matthew's Infancy Narrative could be modelled on old birth stories of Ishmael (Genesis 16) and Samson (Judges 13). Matthew goes further and replaces the male role with the Holy Spirit. The genealogy of Joseph, who adopts Jesus making him his legal son, identifies Jesus as the son of David and son of Abraham. Yes, Matthew is predicting Jesus as the Messiah; but also as the Son of God, perhaps as a new creation in the Old Testament sense of Genesis chapter 1. The claim is that Jesus has his origin in God and that his birth is supernatural. Although Matthew establishes the virginity of Mary he does not claim her perpetual virginity. Viviano (1990, p. 635) claims that *the virginal conception may be regarded as an outward and visible sign of an invisible reality, the birth of the Son of God*. It is possible that Matthew was refuting a Jewish accusation

that Jesus was the illegitimate son of Mary by a Roman soldier, where they even named the soldier as Panthera.

Brown (1997, p. 176) states that Matthew chapter 1 deals with the “who and how” of the identity of Jesus while chapter 2 deals with the “where and when” of his birth. This prepares the reader for the appearance of the Kingly Messiah of the line of David and the unique Son of God who will even come from Galilee to be baptised by John the Baptist. It does not address any of the Docetic vagaries that could have been present at the time (Enslin 1940, p.320).

The Visit of the Magi. This needs some further discussion as they are referred to as wise men in the Protevangelium of James (21 and 22) where they bring the gifts of gold frankincense and myrrh as in Matthew’s account, not the two gifts as in Isaiah 60:6 -

They shall bring gold and frankincense

Isaiah 60:3 predicts-

... nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Matthew and the Protevangelium keep them as wise men or magi, but by late infancy narratives and in mediaeval Christian tradition they have become kings and so they appear in most Christmas scenes (influenced by Psalm 72:10 and Isaiah 49: 7). So who were these strange figures, what do they represent and can we find them in the Old Testament? The sages, scorers and magicians of Egypt come off badly in their contest with Moses and Aaron in Exodus 7 and 8. The magi of Balaam (Numbers 22 and 23) are projected by Allison (2001, p.849) as the origin of Matthew’s magi. At least they represent the *best wisdom of the Gentile world and its spiritual elite*.

Harrington (1991, p. 42) claims that the magi referred to a cast of Persian priests who had special powers in interpreting dreams but also seem to be a sort of mixture between astrologers and astronomers seeing the prediction of major events in the movement of the stars. Viviano (1990, p.635) calls them a cast of wise Zoroastrian priests but agrees they were associated with astrology, astronomy and the interpretation of dreams. Perhaps it was only in later Christian tradition that they became kings. Gradually they acquire names differing from region to region. One becomes old, one becomes black and the other young; and some legends say they even become converts to the Christian faith, saints and even martyrs.

Matthew shows that he has a good knowledge of Old Testament both in the Hebrew and the Greek (LXX) and that he switches from one to the other as best suits his purpose. We have to remember the Canon of the Old Testament was more fluid at Matthew's time and he could be quoting from text that we no longer have. His quotations are more specific than Luke. The reference to Isaiah 7: 14; in Hebrew says a young woman (*alama*) will conceive, while the LXX text says a virgin (*parthenos*) will conceive. Harrington (1991, p. 35) believes this referred to the imminent birth of a Davidic prince by a young woman of the Royal Court. This was seen as a sign of hope for Judah at the time of King Ahaz (circa 735-715 BC). Both refer to a natural means of conception and not a virginal conception as in the case of Jesus. This text has been seized on by many Christians, especially in the Early Church, to be a prophecy of the birth of Christ. By contrast, the Protevangelium of James and other Apocryphal narratives have little in the way of references.

The infancy narratives of the Apocrypha stand accused of being midrashic interpretations of the Canonical Gospels. Even so, St Matthew has to be defended against claims that his account of the birth of Jesus is not a midrash of the birth of Moses (Exodus 1 & 2) with Jesus following a Moses typology later in the Gospel. Hahn and Mictch (2000, p. 20) put the question in terms "was Matthew's infancy narrative written as historical document or a pious reflection". They see the birth of Jesus as incompletely predicted in the Old Testament as is show by Matthew's quotations. Unless the events in Matthew were historical his exegesis on the Old Testament would only be an exercise in delusional fiction. The conclusion is that Matthew's account makes little attempt to be historically accurate it does attempt to present accurate theological that would be acceptable to Jewish Christian converts.

THE INFANCY NARRATIVE OF ST. LUKE'S GOSPEL

Most scholars admire St. Luke's Infancy Narrative (Luke 1:5- 2:52) as a masterful literary work, although Karris (1991, p. 671) claims that only 2:1- 2:52 is true Infancy Narrative. He prefers the title *The Dawn of God's fulfilment of promise*. The source of Luke's Gospel has been much discussed although he may have had Mark and Q as a basis for Our Lord's ministry; but the sayings of Jesus would have been unlikely to

help him with the Infancy Narrative. Tradition has it that Mary was his source and it is an enchanting story that among Luke's many talents he was an artist who painted a portrait of Our Lady and as she sat she told him the story from her perspective. Regretfully we have no proof of this story. Even so, Luke paints a miniature word picture of Mary in his infancy narrative. Thus the source of Luke's narrative has to remain a mystery but it would appear that Luke believed that his account was based on real history even if in light of modern research some of the dates do not fit. Luke (like the authors of most of the apocryphal infancy narratives) shows that he is not totally familiar with Jewish ceremonies of the time. Franklin (2001, p.928) draws our attention to Luke's account of the presentation in the Temple where three ceremonies are implied.

1. The purification of a mother as described in Leviticus 12:6-8. In her case the offering of the poor is made, *a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons* (Luke 2:22).
2. The redemption of a first born son (Exodus 13:2 and 12-13) This was a separate ceremony.
3. The dedication of a son to God.

We may well ask the question, was Luke a Jew?

Franklin (2001, p.928) also points out that the infancy narrative in Luke is at variance with some other aspects of the rest of his Gospel.

1. Jesus is treated with a dignity that he does not receive later.
2. The Holy Spirit is active in people, a manifestation not usually seen until after Pentecost.
3. Jesus and John are brought closer together than is seen later.

This leads him to suggest that the infancy narrative was written later and inserted as a sort of preface after the introduction. Is this possibly because historical and doctrinal questions were being asked? There was a possibility that Docetic ideas were creeping in (Enslin, 1940, p.320). Even so Luke's account of the birth of Jesus is just simply recorded as-

And she (Mary) gave birth to her first born son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger because there was no place in the inn.

(St. Luke 2:7)

Johnson (1991, p. 34-35) comments how Luke changes style after his preface (1:-4) to the plodding style of the Greek LXX. Using this Biblical style he tells his story in a way that can be found in Ruth, Judges and Samuel with what Franklin (2001, p. 926) calls a pastiche of Old Testament words, senses and images; but he points out that by contrast the Gospel infancy narrative exudes the spirit of joy wonder and worship. Johnson (1991, p. 34) informs us that in Greek dramatic literature it was a common practice to change the style to reflect the content. But this could also be interpreted that it was written at a later date. We enter the world of the Temple and the Torah, but unlike Matthew he does not refer to specific examples but only alludes to them, so that as it were we get echoes of the Biblical past as with the Protevangelium of James but in Luke's case they are linked to the future. Prophecy and fulfilment enter the narrative; thus a speech is followed by fulfilment. This is very different to the Infancy Gospel of Thomas where the best we can say of the primitive miracles of the Infant Jesus is that they can be linked with miracles from the adult ministry.

Luke gives clear Christology: Our Lord's final redemptive work is to be brought about through his life, death and resurrection. Even in Luke's Infancy Narrative this is inferred. At the Annunciation Gabriel declares that Jesus is God's Son (Luke 1: 35). At the age of 12 Jesus is recorded in Luke's Gospel as speaking for the first time to claim that God is his Father (Luke 2: 49). When at the age of 30 Jesus begins his public ministry God's own voice declares from heaven, *You are my Son, the Beloved: with you I am well pleased* (Luke 3: 22).

The Canticles (Magnificat, 1: 46- 55, Benedictus, 1: 67-78, Nunc Dimittis, 2: 28-32 and Gloria in excelsis Deo¹² have been extensively analysed especially the Magnificat. Many examples can be found of hymns of praise in the Old Testament sung in response to God's grace, usually for battles won. Hannah's song in praise for conceiving her son Samuel (I Samuel 2: 1-10) is usually picked out as a model for the Magnificat. Brown (1997, p. 232) claims all Luke's canticles reflect the style of contemporary Jewish hymns with examples in the LXX version of I Maccabees but also seen in the Qumran thanksgiving psalms in Hebrew. Any claim that the Lukeian canticles are Jewish and not Christian can be dismissed by the use, in the original Greek text of Luke, of the aorist tense suggesting that God's decisive action has taken place, while Jews would use the future tense. Green (1997, p.101) sees the Magnificat

¹² Brown (1997, p. 232) includes this as a canticle making four in number.

as a collage of biblical texts and Franklin (2001, p. 928) points out that there are some manuscripts that attribute the speech to Elizabeth. All the canticles fit awkwardly into the narrative and in fact hold it up. Claims can be made that they were fitted into the text later, most likely by Luke himself as he edited his work (Brown 1997, 232). Nevertheless they appear like a beautiful aria in an opera telling of the past, present and future, projecting emotional feeling with an outpouring of the soul leaving the listener with a deeper understanding of the plot. There is what Green (1997, p. 49) calls leaving the reader waiting for fulfilment. Prediction becomes a possibility merging into a probability and finally a fulfilment. The way the Church has incorporated these canticles into the Divine Office shows how highly they are regarded. Their value can also be appreciated more after reading Anna's lament (Protevangelium 3: 2-4) and Joseph's speech at the moment of the incarnation (Protevangelium of James 18:2).

Luke uses the Greek literary technique of parallel lives, where the major character is compared with a great but lesser person. Brown (1997, 240-141) analyses his comparison between St. John the Baptist and Jesus as an annunciation Diptych and a birth Diptych. Green (1997, p. 83) makes his analysis in terms of the language used comparing Luke 1:1-20 (John the Baptist) with Luke 1: 28-38 (Jesus). Luke is not telling a new story but a story that had its roots in the Old Testament. Green, (1997, p. 53-55) makes a comparison between the story told in Genesis of Abraham, Melchizedek, Sarah and Isaac and the story told by Luke of Zechariah, Gabriel, Elizabeth and John, each time comparing it with the story of Jesus involving Mary, Gabriel and finally Simeon.

One of the beauties of the whole of St. Luke's writing is his character references that appear in the Infancy narrative-

There was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the order of Adijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, her name was Elizabeth. Both were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord (Luke 1: 5 & 6).

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon: this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him (Luke 2: 25).

To Luke the shepherds (the downcast of the Jewish world) are what the Magi are to Matthew (the elite of the Gentile world). David after all was called from looking after sheep to be anointed king by Samuel (I Samuel 16: 11). Luke put the case for the humble and disadvantaged throughout his Gospel. To him Mary is still the first disciple, but she has a lot to learn. It is only through the experience of the cross and resurrection of her son Jesus that she will come to her full understanding but this will be a painful process, as is shown by the prophecy of Simeon, *and a sword will pierce your soul too* (Luke 2: 35).

CONCLUSIONS

The study of the qualities of the infancy narrative in the Apocryphal Literature has enhanced the appreciation and understanding of the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. The latter appear well researched in terms of Old Testament typography and quotations. The impression is that their historical facts are as accurate as possible.

Each Canonical infancy narrative has a beauty in its construction and content. St. Luke uses Greek literary techniques such as 'parallel lives', comparing Jesus with St. John the Baptist. Of note is the fact that St. Luke includes four of the richest prayers in the New Testament in his infancy narrative: Mary's prayer at the Annunciation (Magnificat, Luke 1: 46-55), the prophecy of Zechariah (Benedictus, Luke 1:68-78) and Simeon's prayer in the temple (Nunc Dimittis, Luke 2: 29-32). Added to these is the praise of the Angel and multitude of the heavenly hosts, accurately translated from the Greek *Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those he favours*. St Matthew gives us the Magi, with the theological exposition of their deeply prophetic gifts.

The description provided in the Canonical Gospels provides a minimalist unsensational account of the most important event in the history of mankind: that moment when God became man at the Incarnation, with the cooperation of Mary.

The combined account of Matthew and Luke provides us with a *sensus fidelium*, an account that ecumenically can be accepted by all Christians. This, not just because they provide a believable story; but they also provide a theology that is orthodox and modest. Right from the Sub-Apostolic age the Church Fathers in their sermons added their spiritual commentaries to these narratives. For example, of the thirty-nine homilies we have from Origen on St. Luke's Gospel, twenty are on the Infancy Narrative (Just, 1003, p. xxii). There was a large treasury therefore, from the second century onwards, of theological and spiritual material derived from the Canonical infancy narrative; *antedating* much of the Apocryphal additions.

What then did the Apocryphal literature attempt to add; and what were the stimuli for this? In comparison with canonical sources the content of the Apocryphal text may be difficult to believe, and overplays its hand. Even so, it usually attempts both a theological message and some kind of provenance for that message.

Apocryphal texts may pervert the Canonical message, such as Gnostic interpolations in the Gospel of Philip. Others augment their detail and stories, for example, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. This fantastical embroidery may have been written with the objective of enhancing Christ's provenance by confirming his divinity in infancy. Alternatively it may have been written as a historical fiction by popular demand. It is probable we will never know the reality.

Apocryphal texts of greater note imply, and attempt to answer, questions that appear not to have impacted on the Canonical early texts, such as the lineage of Mary, and challenges to St Luke's succinct definition of the divinity of Christ. The Protevangelium of James acquaints us with Joachim and Anna, parents of Mary, and her lineage; introduces the concept of a Mary without sin, but falls short of the assertion of her immaculate conception. This text may not refute Docetism but they do refute Ebonite errors, by asserting the Godhead of Christ from his birth and confirming that Joseph was solely Christ's adopted father. Questions and challenges such as these were not current when the Canonical texts were produced, and must

have stimulated some of the Apocryphal content. The Protevangelium has a few of the qualities of the Canonical writings, being both poetic and sincere.

It has to be remembered that the embryo church was a church of the resurrection. The study of the incarnation did not start immediately. If we accept Mark as the first Gospel we note the absence of an infancy narrative. It has to be remembered that when the Gospels were written there were still people alive who had experience of the ministry of Jesus, his crucifixion and the resurrection. The Apostles only knew Jesus for the last three years of his life. So when it came to writing an infancy narrative with its importance for understanding the Incarnation there must have been difficulty in finding source material. Certainly Matthew and Luke had no first hand experience. They even may have drafted their Gospels before they came to write an infancy narrative. It appears that they wrote them as bridging passages between the Old and New Testaments and were carefully constructed documents, researched to the best of their ability. Each pericopy looks back to the Old Testament for predictions, signs and typologies. It also views the events through their experience of the ministry of Jesus, his purpose and the developing theology of the Church. It has also to be remembered that right from the beginning the text of the Gospels was more carefully guarded. Thus we have conservative, restrained accounts. Yes, there is evidence of editing of the canonical Gospels but there was not the freedom to add exciting stories that were circulating. These stories could be added to other collections of literature that may well have been in demand and could more freely be embellished, not only meeting the demands of curiosity but also attempting to answer some current theological challenges.

REFERENCES

- ALLISON, D.C. (2001) Matthew. In *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Edited by Barton, J. and Muddiman, J. Oxford University Press. Oxford.
- ALEXANDER, P.S. (1990) Midrash. . In *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*. Edited by Coggins, R.J. and Houlden, J.L. SCM Press. London
- ATTWATTER, D. (1997) [General Editor] *A Catholic Dictionary*. (Third Edition) Tan Books and Publishers, Inc. Rockford, Illinois.
- BARRETT, C.K. (1978) *The Gospel According to St. John*. (Second Edition) SPCK London.
- BROWN, R.E. (1966) *The Gospel According to St. John*. The Anchor Bible. Doubleday. London.
- BROWN, R.E. (1990) Infancy Narratives. In *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*. Edited by Coggins, R.J. and Houlden, J.L. SCM Press. London.
- BROWN, R.E., PERKINS, P. and SALDARINI, A.J. (1990) Apocrypha; Dead Sea Scrolls; Other Jewish Literature. In *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Edited by Brown, R.E., Fitzmyer, J.A. and Murphy, R.E. Geoffrey Chapman. London.
- BROWN, R.E. (1997) *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Doubleday. London.
- CROSS, F.L. and LIVINGSTONE, E.A. (1997) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford University Press. Oxford.
- CULLMANN, O. (1991) Infancy Gospels. In *The New Testament Apocrypha* (Volume 1) edited by Schneemelcher, W. and translated by Wilson, R.Mc.L. James Clark Cambridge.
- DAVIES, M. (1990) Exegesis. In *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*. Edited by Coggins, R.J. and Houlden, J.L. SCM Press. London.
- DONAHUE, J.R. and HARRINGTON, D.J. (2002) *The Gospel of Mark*. In the Sacra Pagina Series. Edited by Harrington, D.J. A Michael Glazier Book. The Liturgical Press. Collegeville. Minnesota.
- EHRMAN, B. D. (1999) *After the New Testament, A Reader in Early Christianity*. Oxford University Press. Oxford
- ELLIOTT, J.K. (1993) *The Apocryphal New Testament*. Clarendon Press. Oxford.
- ENSLIN, M.S. (1940) The Christian Story of the Nativity. *Journal of Biblical Literature* **59** : 317-338.

GREEN, J.B. (1997) *The Gospel of Luke*. In *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. William B Eerdmans publishing Company. Cambridge.

HAHN, S. and MITCH, C. (2000) *The Gospel of Matthew*. Ignatius Press. San Francisco.

HARDON, J.A. (1981) *Modern Catholic Dictionary*. Robert Hale. London.

JOHNSON, L.T. (1991) *The Gospel of Luke*. Sacra Pagina series edited by Harrington D.J. A Michael Glazier Book The Liturgical Press. Collegeville, Minnesota

JOHNSON, L.T. (1997) *The Writing of the New Testament. An Introduction*. (Revised Edition) SCM Press London.

JUST, A.A. (2003) *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament III Luke*. Inter Varsity Press. Downers Grove, Illinois.

KARRIS, R.J. (1990) The Gospel according to Luke. In *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Edited by Brown, R.E., Fitzmyer, J.A. and Murphy, R.E. Geoffrey Chapman. London.

KLAUCK, H.S (2003) *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction*. (Translated by Mc Neil, B.) T&T Clark International. London.

KOCK, G.A. (1997) James In *Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity* Edited by Ferguson, E. Garland Publishing. London.

LAPHAM, F. (2003) *An Introduction to the New Testament Apocrypha*. T & T Clark International. London.

LELOUP, J.Y. (2003) *The Gospel of Philip* (English translation by Rowe) Inter Traditional International. Rochester. Vermont.

PORTER, J.R. (2001) *The Lost Bible, Forgotten Scriptures Revealed*. Duncan Baird Publishers. London.

TUCKETT, C.M. (2001) Mark. In *The Oxford Bible Commentary*. Edited by Barton, J. and Muddiman, J. Oxford University Press. Oxford.

VAN VOORST, R.E. (2000) James. In *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by Freedman, D. N. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. Cambridge.

VIVIANO, B.T. (1990) The Gospel according to Matthew. In *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Edited by Brown, R.E., Fitzmyer, J.A. and Murphy, R.E. Geoffrey Chapman. London.

COMPOSITE REPRESENTATION OF THE INFANCY NARRATIVES

Including the infancy Narratives of St. Matthew and St. Luke but also added events recorded in the Protevangelium of James, Infancy Gospel of Thomas and extra material from Pseudo-Matthew.

