

Online Notes from my Class on the Nativity Stories

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Several of our newer members approached me asking if I would again teach the class on the Nativity stories I taught several years ago. It occurred to me that it might be easier to post my extended and updated notes, along with the hand-outs I distributed, online so they could be accessed and read at convenient times by those interested, thus saving class time and trips to Church in the dark of winter.

In our services, the story from Matthew seems to take preeminence,¹ as it is read in the First, Sixth, and Ninth Royal Hours, and is the Gospel for the Divine Liturgy on Christmas Day. Luke's story is read during the Third Royal Hour and during Vespers on Christmas Eve. Because of this arrangement, I am presenting Luke's story first, followed then by Matthew's.

Because many of us are unfamiliar with the non-canonical books of *The Nativity of Mary* and *The Protoevangelium of James*, books which the Church has nevertheless relied on for some of our feasts and iconography, I am including a combined, edited edition of these as well before the commentary on the canonical gospel stories. Many of the Biblical references in my commentaries come from our canonical books of the Old Testament which are found in *The Orthodox Study Bible*, but which are not found in Protestant Bibles. If you do not have the *OSB*, any Bible which has the "Apocrypha" or the "Deutero-canonical" books will work.

So, with Fr. Nikolay's blessing, I am making all my material available to you. I hope these notes will help all of us come to a greater appreciation of the wondrous gift God himself has given us by becoming incarnate of the holy Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary; that we come a greater understanding of what Matthew and Luke are telling us in their gospels; and that our hearts are prepared to participate even more in the services of the Nativity of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ.

If you have any questions, comments, or find typo's, please feel free to visit with me at church or email me at ric_bec_staats@hotmail.com.

Christ is born! Glorify him!

Richard (John) Staats
Week of the Holy Forefathers, 2022

¹ Unlike the Western church which reads Matthew's gospel at the feast of Epiphany, which, according to their tradition, celebrates the arrival of the Magi, the Orthodox Church celebrates their arrival at Christmas, and being the Church of the Gentiles, we read Matthew's Gospel for the Nativity (see History of Christmas below).

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1. Brief History of the celebration of Christmas.

A BRIEF AND SIMPLIFIED HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS

- I. The earliest Christian feast was Pascha (commemorated every Sunday in Orthodoxy with the troparions and kontakions of the “8 Tones” focusing on the Resurrection).
 - A. The date of Pascha was known by the Church, but the date of Jesus’ birth was unknown. (This will have an effect on when, and if, Christmas is celebrated.)
 - B. In order for the catechumens to receive the Eucharist on Pascha, Holy Saturday became the principal day for Holy Baptism.
 1. Our readings for Holy Saturday Vespers focus on baptism, *eg*, the epistle: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Rom 6:3-11) and the gospel, “Go...make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...” (Matt 28:1-20).
 2. On Pascha we sing, “Yesterday [*ie* Holy Saturday] I was buried with thee...Yesterday I was crucified with thee...” (Ode III of Paschal Matins).
 3. The Lenten season developed as a part of the 40-day fast preparing the catechumens for baptism on Holy Saturday.
- II. The first major feast to be celebrated after Pascha in the Eastern Church was *Theophany*, the Baptism of Jesus.
 - A. The Feast of Theophany dates back to Apostolic times, and is mentioned in the Apostolic Constitutions, and the testimony of St. Clement of Alexandria (2nd century).
 1. Theophany originally celebrated both Jesus’ baptism (recorded by all 4 evangelists), *and* his birth (combining Matthew and Luke)—perhaps based on a misreading of Lk 3:23, that Jesus was *exactly* 30 when he was baptized, his baptism thus being on his birthday.
 2. Theophany became the 2nd appointed time for baptisms; like the Lenten fast, a 40-day ascetical preparation by the catechumens was attached to Theophany, and was referred to as “the Winter Lent.”
- III. Meanwhile in Rome, the Western Church confronted the ever-popular pagan Saturnalia.
 - A. Saturnalia, celebrated the birth of Saturn on Dec. 17, who ruled during the “Golden Age” when people “enjoyed the spontaneous bounty of the earth without labor in a state of innocence.”
 1. This celebration was later extended from the 17th of December through the 25th.
 2. It was celebrated with banquets (masters often serving their slaves), giving of gifts, and gambling was permitted for all, even slaves, something normally prohibited or at least frowned up
 3. A “King of Saturnalia,” appointed by lot, ruled as master of ceremonies for the proceedings; his capricious commands, such as "Sing naked!" or "Throw him into cold water!" had to be obeyed by the other guests.

4. The Greek historian Lucian describes this feast as having lots of drunkenness, singers (sometimes naked—see 3 above) going from house to house (forerunner of caroling?), and special cookies shaped like people (gingerbread men?).
- B. In AD 274, Emperor Aurelian declared 25 December to be the *Natalis Solis Invicti* (the Nativity of the Invincible Sun)—perhaps linked to winter solstice, when the sun begins to shine longer each day following the solstice.
 - C. “Converting” the feast of *Natalis Solis Invicti* on Dec 25, the Western Church proclaimed that the true *Invincible Sun* (and *Son*—works only in English) was Christ, the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2).
 1. The Paschal Gospel of the Eastern Church became the Gospel for the Daytime Mass in the West: “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome him” (Jn 1:5).
 - D. *Natalis Solis Invicti*, celebrated on Dec. 25, became *Natus Christus*, *Nativity of Christ*.
 1. The West took only Luke’s account of Christ’s nativity, since his gospel has more details about Jesus’ nativity.
 2. Also, based on their understanding of Matthew, the Western Church believed that the Magi arrived about 2 years *after* Jesus’ birth; thus the West separated the nativity accounts and celebrated the arrival of the Magi on Jan. 6 (Epiphany), which ended the “Twelve Days of Christmas.”
 - a. The Eastern Church understood that the star appeared about 2 years *before* Jesus’ birth, as it would take the Magi about 2 years to reach Bethlehem at the time of his birth (icon of Nativity show magi on horses approaching the cave).
- IV. With the West emphasizing *Natus Christus* to counteract *Natalis Solis*, Jesus’ baptism was overlooked and became a lesser feast—the Tridentine lectionary of the mid 1500’s had no dated celebration of the Baptism of the Lord.
- A. For the Sundays following Epiphany, the Western lectionary put readings in a “chronological” order, e.g. 1st Sunday after Epiphany commemorated the child Jesus in the temple; the 2nd Sunday, the Wedding at Cana, etc.
 1. The 1928 American *Book of Common Prayer* was first Anglican *BCP* to add the baptism of Jesus on the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany, moving the Wedding in Cana to the 3rd Sunday after Epiphany.
 2. It was not until 1969 that the Roman church revised its lectionary, making the First Sunday after Epiphany the commemoration of Jesus’ baptism. Other liturgical confessions soon adapted that lectionary in 1983.
 - B. With the *nativity* of Jesus being the focus in the West rather than the *baptism* of Jesus, baptisms were no longer celebrated on Epiphany by the Latin church, so there was no need for a 40-day fast; instead, a six week *liturgical* preparation for Christmas was observed until Pope Gregory the Great (6th cent) shortened this to four Sundays, and the focus became the Second Coming (*Adventus*) of Christ.

1. In some parts of the Western Church, especially in France, “St. Martin’s fast” a fast on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, was observed from around Nov. 11th until Christmas (about a 40 day fast), until Pope Gregory’s reform.²
- V. Around the middle of the 5th century, the Eastern Orthodox Church adopted Dec. 25 (on the Julian calendar, which on today’s Gregorian calendar is January 7) as the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, while still keeping Theophany as the Feast of the Lord’s Baptism.
- A. The 40-day fast of Theophany was therefore moved to before Nativity, creating what we now know as the Nativity fast, which begins our *spiritual* preparation for both the celebration of Christ’s Nativity on Christmas (Dec 25) and his Baptism on Theophany (Jan 6).
- VI. The celebration of Christmas was actually banned in both England and New England.³
- A. It may seem like Christmas has always been celebrated in the United States, but that’s not the case. In fact, the joyous religious holiday was actually banned in America for several decades by Christians themselves.
 1. "Most Americans today are unaware that Christmas was banned in Boston from 1659 to 1681."
 2. All Christmas activities, including dancing, seasonal plays, games, singing carols, cheerful celebration and especially drinking were banned by the Puritan-dominated Parliament of England in 1644, with the Puritans of New England following suit. Christmas was outlawed in Boston, and the Plymouth colony made celebrating Christmas a criminal offense.
 3. In England, the ban on the holiday was lifted in 1660, when Charles II took over the throne. However, the Puritan presence remained in New England and Christmas did not become a legal holiday there until 1856. Even then, some schools continued to hold classes on December 25 until 1870, when Ulysses S. Grant became the first president to declare Christmas a national holiday.
- VII. The United States was one of the last Western countries to switch from the Julian calendar (“Old Calendar”) to the Gregorian calendar.
- A. In England and Britain’s American colonies, there were two calendar changes, both in 1752. The first adjusted the start of a New Year from Lady Day (25 March) to 1 January while the second discarded the Julian calendar in favor of the Gregorian calendar, removing 11 days from the September 1752 calendar to do so.

* * *

² The Latins have a history of reducing the number of fasting days during the year, *e.g.*, the early Christian weekly fast on Wednesdays and Fridays was reduced in the West to Fridays, the Ash Wednesday fast being the only remnant of the Wednesday fast. The Protestants basically did away with all fasts. Rome has reduced the Eucharistic fast, most recently in 1964 and then again in 1973.

³ The following comes from an article, www.livescience.com/32891-why-was-christmas-banned-in-america-.html.

2. Introduction to the New Testament

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE GOSPELS

- I. Two key historical events form the background for the New Testament:
 - A. Alexander the Great's conquests in the 4th century BC spread Koine Greek throughout the whole Mediterranean region, and Greek became the *lingua franca* of the region until about AD 300.
 - B. Augustus (27 BC – AD 14): *Pax Romana* and Roman road building expertise.
 1. Impact on Israel being at the cross-roads of the Fertile Crescent.
 - a. With the Roman peace and the expanse of roads, traders and travelers were constantly coming through Israel, so many Jews became fluent in Greek.
 - b. By the 3rd cent. BC, "old" Hebrew was no longer spoken nor understood by the Jewish people, especially those living in Egypt.
 - i. Hebrew "scriptures" were translated into Greek, called the Septuagint (LXX); the Jews considered this text to be divinely inspired, as 70 rabbinic scholars gathered in Alexandria, Egypt around the third century BC, each translating the Hebrew separately, all translated the texts exactly the same. The Jews at the time did not have a canon of scripture, so many writings were included which are not found in today's Massoretic text⁴ (MT).
 - c. The LXX text would have been what was read in the synagogues (*cf.* Lk 4:17 *ff* with MT Isaiah 61:1*f*).
 2. All of the NT was written in Greek and nearly all OT quotes are from LXX.
 1. One possible exception of early Matthew?
 - a. Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis (writing *ca* 100), "Matthew put the oracles (of Jesus) in the Hebrew language." Papias could simply mean, written in a *Hebrew style* of Greek, or he may be referring to a distinct work now lost.
 - b. Irenaeus of Lyons (writing *ca* 180) and Jerome (writing *ca* 400) also report that Matthew wrote his account "in Hebrew letters."
 - c. No Hebrew manuscript of this gospel has ever been found.
 2. Jesus taught in Greek—Gospel texts are all in Greek, not Aramaic. If Jesus taught in Aramaic, wouldn't it make sense for the evangelists (who also knew Aramaic) to have recorded his words in the language in which they heard them? The reality is, they did, but it wasn't Aramaic, but Greek.
 3. St. Paul, a Jew and a Roman citizen, yet he writes all his letters in Greek, including to the Church in Rome!

⁴ The Massoretic text is the present day Hebrew version, found in nearly every English translation of the Old Testament. It was "created" early in the ninth century A.D. and is itself the result of a doctrinal upheaval which shook Judaism at that time. One OT scholar described it as hopelessly corrupt, and the Septuagint text is called upon time and again to understand this text. Yet this is the text Protestants rely on.

4. Jewish reaction: Because the LXX was quoted to show that Jesus was the Messiah, the rabbis later declared that “God only speaks Hebrew,” thus discounting not only the LXX, but *all* the NT writings.
 - a. Influence of Jerome in the West—Jerome was suspicious of LXX and “apocrypha” due to influence of a Jewish rabbi friend of his.
 - i. The separation of certain OT books which the Church has always read from the OT text, either placing them “between the Testaments” and calling them “Apocrypha,” or totally rejecting them, as many of the Reformers did, can be traced back to Jerome.
 - ii. Augustine criticized Jerome for abandoning the Church’s text of the LXX in favor of a Hebrew text.

II. Background information on the Gospel.

- A. Written by Apostles or those who knew them well, according to the Church’s tradition—although we have named gospels for them, none of the accounts have the author directly identified within that narrative, but there are hints:
 1. Matthew = the tax collector who became an apostle (Matt 9:9; 10:3).
 2. Mark = traditionally, a follower and interpreter for Simon Peter (1Peter 5:13); maybe the young man who ran away naked from the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14:50-52).
 3. Luke = physician (Col 4:14), iconographer, the first to “write” the icon of the Theotokos:



the “beloved physician” companion of St. Paul; considered by the Church to be one of the two on road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13 *ff.*).

4. John = “beloved disciple” (Jn 21:20-24a), exiled on Patmos (Rev 1:9).
- B. Although inspired by the Holy Spirit, each author of the Gospel used his own background and perspective when writing his gospel, so there is a uniqueness to each.
 1. Matthew = writes to a Jewish audience; Jesus as the fulfillment of OT prophecies, uses Jewish phrases (*e.g. kingdom of the heavens; eg, 5:1, 6:9*); but also has Greek word plays that a Greek speaker would use.
 2. Mark = probably written to a Roman audience (has a number of Latin terms); favorite word is “immediately,” Jesus is a “man of action;” I think it is a *Reader’s Digest* gospel, a condensed gospel, and some call it a Holy Week gospel with an introduction; bookends of Mark (1:10-11; 15:38-39).
 3. Luke = written to a Greek audience using sophisticated Greek (266 words found only in Lk); emphasis on the poor, the humble and outcast; very familiar with OT; Acts is volume 2 of Luke’s narrative, with the spreading of the gospel. Together, Lk/Acts make up more than half of the NT.

4. John = the Theologian; Different chronology and style than the Synoptics, *eg*, cleansing of temple comes at beginning of Jesus' 3 year (?) ministry (2:13 *ff*); a gospel of "signs," with emphasis on *ego eimi* / I AM sayings (*e.g.* Jn 18:4-8). and long theological dialogues.

C. Source theory vs Primacy of Matthew and date when written

1. Modern scholarship: Mark and Q, with M and L. – Q has never been found.
 - a. The theory is that Mark was the first gospel written, because it's the shortest; he had a "source" (*Quelle* [Q] means "source" in German) which contained sayings of Jesus, but not in narrative form. Matthew then copied much of Mark, but Matthew also had his own sources, known as *M*; Luke also copied much of Mark, but had his own sources, *L*.
2. Scholars = Mark earliest, all written after AD 70 (fall of Jerusalem problem)
 - a. Liberal scholars believe that Jesus could not have accurately predicted the fall of Jerusalem, so everything "put into the mouth of Jesus" was written by the evangelists after the fall of Jerusalem, so gospels have to be dated after AD 70. These "scholars" have never met an Orthodox *staretz*, evidently!
3. Tradition of Church Fathers = Matthew written first.
4. My position: follow Church's tradition; all written before 70 (Nero reigned 54-68).
 - a. The fact that Mark is shorter does not indicate that it was the first gospel written; it could mean that since Matthew was already written and known, he didn't feel the need to rewrite everything Matthew wrote. However, writing in Rome, he may have needed to focus on the Passion of Jesus so the Church in Rome would fully understand what had happened.
 - b. I have no problem believing Jesus could have accurately described the fall of Jerusalem and the consequences of that fall.

III. A different mindset (φρόνημα, *phrónema*): Greek East vs Latin West.⁵

- A. Greek culture was Philosophical (Plato, Aristotle) and Poetic and dramatic (2 theaters at the Acropolis for plays—happy / sad masks), Euripides, Homer, Aristophanes.
- B. Roman culture focused on Law and order (*Pax Romana*) and kept the peace with secular (vulgar) entertainment (chariot races, the Colosseum, cheapness of life with gladiatorial fights and reenacted battle scenes).
- C. Ecumenical Councils (East) vs Pope (West) (Greek word for "individual" is *idiōtēs*, idiot)—the Double-headed eagle of Byzantium vs single-headed eagle of Rome.
 1. In Constantinople, the Emperor was in charge of matters legal and governmental; the Patriarch was equal to the Emperor, but was in charge of matters religious and ecclesiastical. Both wore crowns, which is why our bishops' miters are crowns.

⁵ "Orthodox teaching does not merely differ from Western Christianity in *content*, but the reason for the difference is equally important...Not only the content but the approach to theology differs...This difference in the way Orthodox Christians think is nearly impossible to convey to Western Christians and extremely difficult for Orthodox Christians even to articulate...Orthodox Christians are accustomed to the lack of definitions and the absence of certainty." Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou, *Thinking Orthodox: Understanding and Acquiring the Orthodox Christian Mind*, Ancient Faith Publishing, Chesterton, Indiana, 2020. Italics are in original text.

Ecclesiastical concerns were settled by Councils, usually convened by the Emperor, but presided over by the Patriarch.

2. With the capital now in Constantinople instead of Rome, the Patriarch of Rome (the Pope) began to amass political power, combining in himself governmental and ecclesiastical powers,⁶ which will culminate in declaring himself supreme over the other bishops and above Councils.⁷

D. Intuitive (*mysterion*) vs scholasticism (*sacramentum*)

1. (E) Anaphora of St John: “Send down thy Holy Spirit ... upon these gifts... and *make this bread* the precious Body of our Lord....the precious Blood of thy Christ, *changing them by thy Holy Spirit.*”-- emphasis on work of the Holy Spirit.
2. (W) suffix *-ment* means “the act of making...;” *sacra* = sacred; the Roman confession teaches as *doctrine* that the change of the substance of the bread and the wine occurs when the celebrant speaks *in persona Christi*—*ie, the celebrant* has the “power” to make the change—bells rung and elevation with genuflection after each *verbum Christi*.
 - a. there is no epiclesis in the Roman Canon, nor mention of the Holy Spirit: “We come to you, Father...through Jesus Christ your Son. Through him we ask you to...bless these gifts we offer you in sacrifice...Let it become *for us* the body and blood of Jesus Christ, your only Son, our Lord....”
 - b. Roman clergy exert their “power” over the laity because of this teaching.
 - c. “Subjective” interpretation?—the bread and wine “become for us” *ie, to those who receive*” them—not objective presence, but a form of receptionism .

E. Physical vs ethereal

1. *doxa* as brightness vs *gloria* as honor, high estimation.
2. architecture of church buildings (Orthodox domes, based on Genesis, with Christ looking down on us, vs Western spires/steeples, pointing up to an unseen God, emphasizing the “smallness” of man).

III. Challenges facing 21st century English-speaking Americans:

A. Understanding a Greek mindset.

- B. Are scriptures “historically accurate” and “literally true”? As westerners, and surrounded by conservative evangelicals, we might be led to believe that the evangelists were writing “histories” as we understand that word today. That is not the case (especially with Genesis creation stories)!

1. some differences between Synoptic (first 3) accounts and John:
 - a. Length of Jesus’ ministry: Synoptic = about 1 year; John = about 3 years.
 - b. Was the Last Supper a Passover? Synoptic = yes; John = no.
 - c. Only one miracle of Jesus is reported in all 4 accounts: the feeding of the 5,000.

⁶ A Papal Bull, *Unam Sanctam*, in 1302, stated, “We are informed by the texts of the gospels that in this Church and in its power are two swords; namely, the spiritual and the temporal.”

⁷ Western churches still are centered around one person (or family), Lutheran around Luther, the Calvinists around Calvin, Evangelicals around “charismatic” pastor, etc.

- C. German *Historie* vs. *Geschichte*⁸ might help us understand the word history better.
1. *Historie*, means “facts, validated by and according to the standard of history as an academic discipline...it stresses objective fact which can be recognized by all observers.”
 - a. *eg*, the Civil War began on April 12, 1861, when Confederate shore batteries under General P.G.T. Beauregard opened fire on Union-held Ft. Sumter in Charleston Bay.
 - b. As Joe Friday said on *Dragnet*, “Just the facts, ma’am.” [showing my age again!]
 2. *Geschichte* means “refers to reports, stories, tales”...its emphasis is on that “which can be appreciated only by participants...which may or may not be proved” with objective facts like *Historie*.
 - a. *Heilsgeschichte*, “an interpretation of history emphasizing God's saving acts (*Heils* mean “salvation”)⁹ and viewing Jesus Christ as central in redemption.”¹⁰
 - b. an example of both: “we preach Christ crucified [*Historie*], a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is God’s power and God’s wisdom” [*Heilsgeschichte*], 1 Cor. 1:22-24.
- D. The Gospel was written “by people of faith for people of faith” [Tertullian, 155-220]; not so much *Historie* as *Heilsgeschichte*.
1. The Truth of the Scriptures may not always be seen by simply stating “the facts.” The Truth of the Bible is found when the *faithful* interact with the stories in such a way that they become participants in them through the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of the Truth” (*to Pnevma tēs alētheías* Jn 16:13, articles present). The Scriptures are not just a record of some past events; rather, they are stories about God’s interaction with his people in order to save, restore and heal us.
 2. Tertullian (died around 240), “Never discuss the Bible with heretics—the Scriptures do not belong to them!”
 - a. In order to correctly understand the Scriptures, one must be part of the Orthodox Church—the community of the faithful found in *both the OT* (which is why we celebrate OT saints) and NT, for she is the pillar and foundation of the truth (1st Tim 3:15). The Orthodox Church existed before the Bible was written; her members wrote the Bible, and she is therefore its interpreter (*cf* 2 Peter 3:16; Acts 8:30-35).

IV. Canonical and extra-canonical writings

- A. A number of documents circulated among the churches, *e.g.* 1 and 2 Clement, the Didache, Shepherd of Hermas, the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary, and the Protoevangelium of James.

⁸ The following information is taken from *Two kinds of history: Geschichte vs. Historie / Changing or Remaining* at herowu0501.blogspot.com/2007/04/two-kinds-of-history-geschichte-vs.html.

⁹ In Nazi Germany, *Heil Hitler* literally meant, Hitler is salvation (or savior).

¹⁰ merriam-webster.com/dictionary.

- B. Regional Churches had their favorites, and variations appeared in the mss. (*e.g.*, Lk 2:14-15)
1. Sinaiticus, 4th cent ms.—von Tischendorf in 1859 at St. Catherine’s on Mt. Sinai—story about finding text in waste basket not entirely true. Acquired by Tsar Alexander II; sold to British Library in 1933. Includes Epistle of Barnabas and part of the Shepherd.
 2. Alexandrinus, 5th cent ms.—one of the oldest and most complete. Includes 1 and 2 Clement.
 3. Vaticanus, perhaps a 4th cent ms. but its origins are unknown; maybe one of 50 Bibles commissioned by St. Constantine I (emperor A.D. 306-337).
 4. Byzantine or Imperial text family, circulated around Constantinople.
- C. With the rise of heresies and disputes, there was the need to set a Canon (“measuring stick”), to compare these various writings against the standard. This did not mean that the “non-canonical” books were to be rejected or ignored, but it did mean they “deviated” from the norm somehow (*e.g.*, uncertainty of apostolic origin, portrayed something about Jesus which didn’t seem right).
1. Generally speaking, the East was less concerned about making a sharp contrast between the canonical and non-canonical books than the West (“legal” mindset of West?)—books that were non-canonical were still regarded as having a spiritual quality.
 2. The four Gospel accounts were united in one collection at an early date. They were simply called “the Gospel,” (like “the Gospel Book”), with each being referred to as “the Gospel according to *N.*”
 3. Athanasius, in his Paschal letter of 367, listed the books that would become the 27 NT canonical books, and he used the word “canonized” to describe them.
- D. The NT canon was “closed” for Christians before the OT!
1. At the time of Jesus, there was a debate about what constituted the “holy writings:” some saw 2 divisions: “the Torah and Prophets” (Matt 22:40); others included “the Writings”—*eg.*, Psalms (Jn 24:44).
 2. Orthodox East accepted all the OT writings found in the LXX.
 3. Western confessions, under influence of Jerome:
 - a. Luther placed “apocrypha” in a separate section in his German Bible of 1534.
 - b. Rome declared apocrypha as “deuterocanonical” in 1546 at Trent (these do not include all the books accepted by Orthodoxy).
 - c. Anglicans, like Luther kept these books, but “doth not apply them to establish any doctrine” (Article VI of the 39 Articles of Religion, 1563). Authorized Version (KJV) printed apocrypha in a separate section until 1666.
 - d. Protestants (Calvin, Zwingli, Menno Simons, *et al*) rejected apocrypha in the 16th century.
 4. New Testament:
 - a. Hebrews was last accepted NT book by the West and the Apocalypse of John was the last book accepted by the Orthodox as canonical (this book is never read as part of the readings in public worship in the Orthodox Church).
 - b. The Patriarchal Text of 1904, some Greek spellings revised in 1912

- i. A committee appointed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate met in 1902 on Mt. Athos to study 20+ major Byzantine mss in order to provide a uniform ecclesiastical text, which has been adopted by all Greek-speaking Orthodox Churches.



GOSPEL OF THE NATIVITY OF MARY¹¹
WITH THE
PROTOEVANGELIUM OF JAMES¹²
ALONG WITH
VERSES FROM THE SERVICES OF THE FEASTS

Texts taken from *The Lost Books of the Bible*, with some revisions¹³

(GM) The blessed and ever glorious Virgin Mary, sprung from the royal race and family of David, was born in the city of Nazareth and educated at Jerusalem in the temple of the Lord. Her father's name was Joachim, and her mother's Anna. The family of her father was of Galilee and the city of Nazareth. The family of her mother was of Bethlehem. Their lives were plain and right in the sight of the Lord, pious and faultless before the people, because they divided all their substance into three parts: One part they devoted to the temple; another they distributed among strangers and persons in poor circumstances; and the third they reserved for themselves. In this manner they lived for about twenty years virtuously, in the favor of God, and the esteem of the people, but without any children. And they vowed, if God should favor them with a child, they would devote the child to the service of the Lord; on which account they went at every feast in the year to the temple of the Lord. And it came to pass, that when the Feast of the Dedication¹⁴ drew near, Joachim, with some others of his tribe, went up to Jerusalem. Issachar¹⁵ was high priest at that time, and when he saw Joachim bringing his offering along with the rest of his neighbors, he despised both Joachim and his offerings, and asked Joachim why he, who had no children, would presume to appear among those who had? Adding, that his offerings could never be acceptable to God, who had judged him unworthy to have children; the Scripture having said, Cursed is everyone who shall not beget a male in Israel.¹⁶

* * *

(PeJ) And Joachim became extremely upset and considered the history of the twelve tribes of his people, saying to himself, "I will look in the history of the twelve tribes of Israel and see whether I am the only one who has not conceived a child in Israel." And he searched and found that all the righteous people had indeed raised children in Israel. And he remembered the patriarch Abraham, and how the Lord God gave Isaac to him in his old age.

Then, Joachim still being very upset, did not go home to his wife, but went into the mountain wilderness and pitched his tent there;

¹¹ From the time of the early Church, this Gospel (GM), was attributed to St. Matthew, and was received as authentic by most of the early Christian communities.

¹² The Protoevangelium of James (PeJ), written around AD 145, is the oldest source outside the New Testament to assert the perpetual virginity of Mary. Some indication of the popularity of the *Protoevangelium of James* may be drawn from the fact that over 150 Greek manuscripts containing it have survived. It was translated into Syriac, Ethiopic, Coptic, Georgian, Old Slavonic, Armenian, Arabic and Latin. Two of the 12 Major Feasts of the Orthodox Church, along with liturgical texts, are based on these two texts.

¹³ As Fr. George Sondergaard of blessed memory pointed out, "These books were never in the Bible, nor where they lost!" The Church knew about them all along, and although many were included in various early canons, and were well received by the Church, they were never officially canonized by the Church.

¹⁴ *ie*, Hanukkah, once called the Feast of the Maccabees; 1st Macc 4:36-59; 2 Macc 1:18-23 [holy fire & Pascha].

¹⁵ PeJ calls him *Reubel*.

¹⁶ This may be in the Talmud, because I can't find a biblical reference to this quote.

(GM) he was not inclined to return home, for fear that his neighbors, who had been present and heard all the high priest said, should publicly reproach him in the same manner.

(PeJ) And he fasted forty days and forty nights,¹⁷ saying to himself, "I will not go back for food or drink until the Lord my God visits me; prayer will be my food and drink."

* * *

(GM) And after he had been there for some time, the angel of the Lord stood by him with a great light. And the angel said, "Stop being afraid, Joachim! Neither be troubled at the sight of me, for I am an angel of the Lord, sent by him to you, and I am to reveal to you that your prayers are heard, and your alms ascended in the sight of God. For he has surely seen your shame, and heard you unjustly reproached for not having children: for God is the avenger of sin, and not of nature; so when he shuts the womb of any woman, he does it for this reason: that he may in a more wonderful manner again open it, and the child which is born then is not the product of lust, but the gift of God. For consider Sarah, the first mother of your nation: She was barren even till her eightieth year, was she not? And yet even in her old age she brought forth Isaac, in whom the promise was made a blessing to all nations. And Rachel, so much in favor with God and beloved so much by holy Jacob, continued barren for a long time; yet afterwards she was the mother of Joseph, who was not only governor of Egypt, but delivered many nations from perishing with hunger.

"There are frequent conceptions in advanced years, and those who were barren have brought forth to their great surprise. Therefore Anna your wife shall bring you a daughter, and you shall call her name Mariam.¹⁸ She shall, according to your vow, be devoted to the Lord from her infancy, and be filled with the Holy Spirit from her mother's womb; she will neither eat nor drink anything which is unclean, nor will her conversation be outside among the common people, but in the temple of the Lord, so that she may not fall under any slander or suspicion of what is bad. And in the process of her years, as she will be born in a miraculous manner of one who was barren, so will she, while yet a virgin, bring forth the Son of the most High God in a way unparalleled. He shall be called Jesus, and, according to the meaning of his name, be the Savior of all nations.¹⁹ And this shall be a sign to you of the things which I declare: when you come to the golden gate of Jerusalem, you will meet your wife Anna, who, being very worried that you have not returned sooner, will rejoice to see you."

When the angel had said this he departed from him.

Although by the will of God other women who were barren have brought forth famous offspring, yet among all such children Mary has shone most brightly with divine brightness. For, herself born wondrously of a barren mother, she bore in the flesh the God of all.... [Great Vespers]

* * *

(PeJ) In the meanwhile, Anna was mourning and lamenting for two reasons, saying, "I lament that I am a widow, and that I am childless."

¹⁷ Jesus follows his grandfather's example of fasting in the wilderness for 40 days and nights (Matt 4:1ff; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1ff. Compare also Jn 4:30ff).

¹⁸ *Mariam* is the Hebrew/Greek form of *Mary*, coming perhaps from an Egyptian name (cf sister of Moses and Aaron—Exodus 6:20 LXX); it might mean *Wished for child*, or *Graced*. Her song (Ex 15:20) is similar to the beginning of the *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46).

¹⁹ *Jesus* is the Greek form of *Joshua*, meaning *he saves* (cf Matt 1:21b and Sirach 46:1 [OSB p 973]).

When the great day of the Lord was approaching, her servant Judith said to her, "How long are you going to humble yourself? Look, the great day of the Lord is approaching. You are not allowed to mourn!"

So Anna removed her mourning garment, washed her head and put on her wedding dress. Around the ninth hour, she went for a walk in her garden.

And Anna looked up to the sky and saw a nest of sparrows in the laurel tree. Immediately, Anna began crying out mournfully, saying to herself, "Woe is me! Who gave birth to me? What womb caused me to grow? For I was born cursed in the eyes of the people of Israel. I am reviled and they treat me with contempt, and they banished me from the temple of the Lord my God. Woe is me, what am I like? I am not like the birds of the sky, because even the birds of the sky are fruitful before thee, Lord. Woe is me! What am I like? I am not like the domestic animals, for the domestic animals are fruitful before thee, Lord. Woe is me! What am I like? I am not like the wild animals of the earth, for the wild animals of the earth are fruitful before thee, Lord. Woe is me! What am I like? I am not like these waters, for these waters are fruitful before thee, Lord. Woe is me! What am I like? I am not like this earth, for the earth produces its fruit in season and blesses thee, Lord."

* * *

(GM) Suddenly, an angel appeared to Anna saying, "Stop being afraid! For I am that angel who has offered up your prayers and alms before God, and now I am sent to you to tell you that a daughter will be born to you. She will be called Mariam, and will be blessed above all women. She will be, immediately upon her birth, the most highly favored of the Lord, and will continue during the three years of her weaning in her father's house, and afterwards, being devoted to the service of the Lord, she will not depart from the temple, until she arrives to years of discretion. In a word, she shall serve the Lord night and day in fasting and prayer, abstaining from every unclean thing, and never knowing any man; but being an unparalleled instance without any pollution or defilement and a virgin, she shall bring forth a son, who both by his grace and name and works, will be the Savior of the world. Arise therefore, and go up to Jerusalem, and when you come to the golden gate, as a sign of what I have told you, you shall meet your husband, for whose safety you have been so much concerned.

The prayer and groaning of Joachim and Ann at their barrenness and childlessness have proved acceptable, and have come unto the ears of the Lord...the one offered his prayer in the mountain, the other bore her reproach in the garden... [Ikos from Matins]

(GM) According therefore to the command of the angel, both of them left the places where they were, and when they came to the place specified in the angel's prediction, they met each other. Then, rejoicing at each other's vision, and being fully satisfied in the promise of a child, they gave thanks to the Lord, who exalts the humble. After having praised the Lord, they returned home, and lived in a cheerful and assured expectation of the promise of God. So Anna conceived...

(PeJ) In the ninth month Anna gave birth, and she asked the midwife, "Is it a boy or a girl?" And the midwife said, "A girl." And Anna said, "I have been greatly honored today." And the midwife put the child to bed. And when the prescribed days were completed,²⁰ Anna gave the infant the name Mariam.

²⁰ see Lev 12:5.

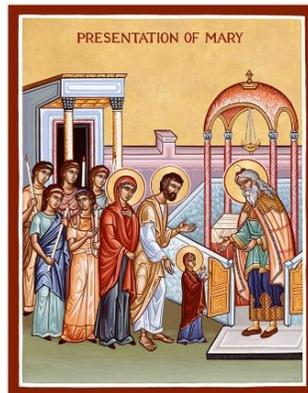
...the lament of Ann is changed to joy.....No more are the gifts of Joachim turned away....
[Aposticha, Great Vespers, Nativity of the Theotokos]

As foretold by the angel, today hast thou come forth, O Virgin, the all-holy offspring of righteous Joachim and Ann. [Aposticha, Great Vespers]

In their barren affliction the holy parents of the Mother of God cried aloud unto the Lord; and they brought her forth for the common salvation and glory of all generations...The holy parents of the Mother of God received from heaven a gift worthy of God, a Throne higher than the very cherubim—she who in childbirth bore the Word and the Creator. [Canticle 6 (first canon), Matins]

O marvelous wonder! The fount of life is born of a barren woman, and grace begins gloriously to bear its fruit. Rejoice, O Joachim, inspired by God, who hast become the father of the Theotokos! There is no other father in mankind like unto thee, for through thee has been given to us the Maiden in whom God came to dwell.... [from Lauds, Matins]

* * *



(PeJ) When the child turned three, Joachim said, "Let's call the pure women of the Hebrews, and let them each take up lamps and light them so that the child won't turn back and her heart will never be led away from the Lord's temple." And they did these things until they went up to the temple of the Lord.

(GM) And there were about the temple, according to the fifteen Psalms of the steps,²¹ fifteen stairs to ascend; because the temple was built on a hill, the altar of burnt-offering, which was without, could not be approached but by stairs; and the parents of the blessed Virgin and infant Mary put her upon one of these stairs; the Virgin of the Lord in such a manner went up all the stairs one after another, without the help of any to lead or lift her.

(PeJ) And the priest welcomed her, kissed her, and blessed her and said, "The Lord God has exalted your name for all generations; through you the Lord will reveal salvation to the children of Israel in the last days."

²¹ Psalms 119-133; all with superscription, *Ode on the Steps*; the Jews would read one psalm on each of the 15 steps to the temple.

Having received the fruit of the promise come from the Lord, today in the temple Joachim and Ann offered the Mother of God as an acceptable sacrifice; and Zacharias the great High Priest received her with his blessing...the virgins adorned by virtues go before her carrying torches....

[from Vespers, Entry of the Theotokos]

Ye virgins, joyfully bearing torches, attend the pure Virgin on her way, as she enters the Holy of Holies... [Aposticha from Vespers]

The young girls rejoice today, and with their lamps in hand they go in reverence before the spiritual Lamp, as she enters into the Holy of Holies. [from Vespers]

(PeJ) And her parents left for home, marveling and praising and glorifying the Lord God because the child had not turned back to look at them. And Mary was in the Holy of Holies of the Lord, and she was fed like a dove, receiving food from the hand of an angel.

Led by the Holy Spirit, the holy Maid without spot is taken to dwell in the Holy of Holies. By an angel is she fed, who is in truth the most holy sanctuary of our holy God.... [from Vespers, revised]

After thy birth, O Lady and Bride of God, thou hast gone to dwell in the temple of the Lord, there to be brought up in the Holy of Holies, for thou art thyself holy, and Gabriel then was sent to thee...to bring thee food.... [from Vespers]

The most holy Virgin, Temple that is to hold God, is dedicated within the temple of the Lord; and virgins, bearing lamps, now go before her. Her noble parents, Joachim and Ann, leap for joy and dance...and she, the All-Pure, with rejoicing goes round the divine habitations and is fed by the hands of an angel.... [Aposticha from Vespers, revised]

The Theotokos, when she was three years old after the flesh, was led to the Lord; and Zacharias, the priest of God, received her in the temple with rejoicing...Ye virgins carrying lamps, be of good cheer today...as the Queen and Mother enters the temple of Christ the King. [Canticle One from Matins]

Dwelling-place of God, the Theotokos Mary, three years old after the flesh, is offered in the holy temple, and the virgins her companions, carrying lamps, go before her. [Canticle Three from Matins]

* * *

THE AGED JOSEPH IS CHOSEN TO BE THE GUARDIAN OF THE VIRGIN MARY

(PeJ) After Mary had been in the temple for twelve years, a group of priests took counsel together, saying, "Look, Mary has been in the temple of the Lord all these years. What should we do about her now, so that she does not defile the Holy of Holies of the Lord our God?" And they said to the high priest, "You have stood at the altar of the Lord. Go in and pray about her. And if the Lord God reveals anything to you, we will do it." And the priest went in taking the vestment with twelve bells²² into the Holy of Holies and prayed about her. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord stood before

²² The high priest's garment had bells sown onto it, and when he entered the Holy of Holies, a rope was also tied around his waist. These were precautions in case he should die while inside the Holy of Holies, for "no one may see God's face and live" (Ex 33:20). As long as those on the outside of the veil heard the bells on the high priest's robe, they knew he was alive. If the bells stopped ringing, they would pull him out of the Holy of Holies with the rope. The

him, saying, "Zacharias, Zacharias, depart from here and gather the widowers of the people and let each one carry a staff."

* * *

(GM) For Esaias [Isaiah] says, "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a flower shall spring out of its root. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him."

According to this prophecy, therefore, Zacharias appointed that all the men of the house and family of David, who were marriageable but not married, should bring their several staffs to the altar, and should a flower bud forth out of whatsoever person's staff after it was brought, and should the Spirit of the Lord sit on the top of it in the appearance of a dove, that would be the man to whom the Virgin would be given and be betrothed. Among the rest there was a man named Joseph, of the house and family of David, very far advanced in years.

* * *

(PeJ) After receiving everyone's staff, the high priest went into the temple and prayed. When he was finished with the prayer, he took the staffs and went out and gave them to each man, but there was no sign among them. Finally, Joseph took his staff. Suddenly a dove came out of the staff and perched on Joseph's head. And the high priest said, "Joseph! Joseph! You have been chosen by lot to take the virgin into your own care and protection." And Joseph replied, saying, "I have sons and I am an old man, while she is young woman. I will not be ridiculed among the sons of Israel."

But Joseph took her into his own possession, and he said to her, "Mariam, I took you from the temple of the Lord and now I bring you into my house. I am going away to build houses, but I will come back to you. The Lord will protect you."

Meanwhile, the priests were meeting together, saying, "Let us make a curtain for the temple of the Lord."

And the high priest said, "Call the pure virgins from the tribe of David to me."

And the high priest remembered that the child Mariam was from the tribe of David and was pure before God. So the servants went out and got her.... And Mariam was appointed by lot to the true purple and scarlet threads. And taking them, she returned home. Now it was at this time that Zacharias became mute. Meanwhile, Mariam had taken up the scarlet thread and was spinning it.

Suddenly, a voice said to her, "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you. You are blessed among women." And Mariam began looking around to the right and the left to see where this voice came from. And trembling she went into her house. Taking the purple thread, she sat down on the chair and began to spin.²³ Suddenly, an angel stood before her saying, "Do not be afraid Mariam. You have found grace in the sight of the Lord of all. You will conceive from his word."

* * *

(GM) But the Virgin, who had before been well acquainted with the countenances of angels, and to whom such light from heaven was no uncommon thing, was neither terrified with the vision of the angel, nor astonished at the greatness of the light, but only troubled about the angel's words: and began to consider what so extraordinary a salutation should mean, what it did portend, or what sort of end it would have.

To this thought the angel, divinely inspired, replies: "Stop being troubled, Mariam: For you have found favor with the Lord, because you made virginity your choice. Therefore while you are a virgin, you shall conceive without sin, and bring forth a son. He will be great, because he shall reign from sea to sea, and from the rivers to the ends of the earth...."

censers we use have 12 bells on them for the 12 Apostles, and our Bishop's robe also has bells attached, since he represents Christ, our great High Priest.

²³ Many icons of the Annunciation show Mary holding spinning needle with purple/scarlet thread.

To this discourse of the angel the Virgin replied not, as though she were unbelieving, but willing to know the manner of it. She said, "How can that be? For seeing, according to my vow, I have never known any man, how can I bear a child without the addition of a man's seed?"

To this the angel replied and said, "Think not, Mariam, that you shall conceive in the ordinary way. Because without lying with a man, while a virgin, you will conceive; while a virgin, you will bring forth; and while a virgin you will nurse. For the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, without any of the heats of lust. So that child which shall be born of you shall be holy, because he only is conceived without sin, and being born, shall be called the Son of God."

Then Mariam stretching forth her hands, and lifting her eyes to heaven, said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord! Let it be unto me according to your word."

"All mortal thought is overwhelmed," answered the Virgin, "as it ponders the strange wonders of which you tell me. I am filled with joy at your words, yet am afraid! I fear lest you deceive me, as Eve was deceived, and lead me far from God."

"O holy Virgin," replied the angel, "you speak to me of the customary manner whereby mortals are born. But I thee you of the birth of the true God. Beyond words and understanding, in ways that he alone knows, he shall take flesh from you." [Canticle Eight from Matins, Annunciation]

* * *

(PeJ) And Mariam made the purple and the scarlet thread and carried it to the high priest. And taking it, the high priest blessed her and said, "Mariam, God has magnified your name. You will be called blessed among all the generations of the earth." Then, Mariam went gladly to her cousin Elizabeth. And she knocked at the door and when Elizabeth heard, she ran to the door and opened it for her. And she blessed her and said, "From where have you come to me? Why should the mother of my Lord come to me? See how the child in me leaps and blesses you."

And looking into heaven, Mary said, "Who am I, Lord, that all the generations of the earth will call me blessed?" And she spent three months with Elizabeth. Day after day her womb swelled, and she hid herself from the children of Israel. Now Mary was sixteen years old when these mysterious things happened to her.

In the sixth month of her pregnancy, Joseph came from his house building and went into the house and found her pregnant. He struck his face and threw himself on the ground in sackcloth and wept bitterly, "How can I look to the Lord God? What will I pray about her, for I took her as a virgin from the temple of the Lord and did not protect her? Who has set this trap for me? Who did this evil in my house? Who stole the virgin from me and defiled her. Has not the story of Adam been repeated with me? For while Adam was glorifying God, the serpent came and found Eve alone and deceived her and defiled her - so it has also happened to me." And Joseph got up from his sackcloth and called her and said to her, "After having been cared for by God, what have you done? Did you forget the Lord your God? You were raised in the holy of holies, you received from the hand of an angel; do you know how much you have humiliated yourself?" Then, she wept bitterly, saying, "I am pure and I did not know a man."

Joseph said to the Virgin: What has happened to you, O Mary? I am troubled; what can I say to you? Doubt clouds my mind; depart from me! What has happened to you, O Mary? Instead of honor, you bring me shame. Instead of joy, you fill me with grief. Men who praised me will blame

me. I cannot bear condemnation from every side. I received you, a pure virgin, from the temple of the Lord. What is this that I now see? [1st Royal Hour, Nativity of our Lord, revised]

Come, O Christ-bearing people! Let us behold wonders that will amaze every mind! As we worship in faith, let us sing praises. Today the Maiden great with child goes up to Bethlehem. There she will give birth to the Lord! Choirs of angels go before her. Joseph, her husband, cried out when he saw these things: What is this strange mystery in you, O Virgin? How will you bear a child, O calf who never bore the yoke of man? [6th Royal Hour, Nativity of our Lord]

When Joseph went up to Bethlehem, his heart was filled with sadness. But you cried out to him, O Virgin: Why are you so troubled? Why are you in misery seeing me with child? Do you not understand at all? I bear a fearful mystery! Cast your fears away, and learn a strange wonder: God, in his mercy, descends from heaven to earth. Within my womb has he taken flesh! When he is pleased to be born, you shall see him. You will rejoice and worship him, your Creator. The angels ceaselessly praise him in song, glorifying him with the Father and the Holy Spirit. [9th Royal Hour, Nativity of our Lord]

(PeJ) And night overtook Joseph. And suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Do not fear this child, for the child in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son for you and you will call his name Jesus. For he will save his people from their sins."

* * *

(GM) Joseph thereupon, according to the command of the angel, married the Virgin, and did not know her, but kept her in chastity.... And he guarded the child.

* * *

(PeJ) Now there was an order from the Emperor Augustus to register how many people were in Bethlehem of Judea. And Joseph said, "I will register my sons. But my wife? I am ashamed. Should I register her as my daughter? This day, I will do as the Lord wills."

And Joseph saddled his donkey and sat Mary on it and one son led the way and another followed. When they came to the middle of the journey, Mary said to him, "Joseph, take me off the donkey, the child pushing from within me to let him come out." So he took her off the donkey and said to her, "Where will I take you and shelter you in your awkwardness? This area is a desert."

And he found a cave and led her there and stationed his sons to watch her, while he went to find a Hebrew midwife in the land of Bethlehem.... So the midwife went with him. And they stood near the cave and suddenly, a great light appeared in the cave so that their eyes could not bear it. And a little while later the same light withdrew until an infant appeared. And he came and took the breast of his mother Mary.

In the secrecy of a cave thou wast born, but heaven spoke openly through a star, revealing thee to all, O Savior! [Vespers]



3. An Introduction to the Gospel of Luke

LUKE'S NARRATIVE

- I. Luke's focus.
 - A. Universality of *salvation* (a favorite word of Luke's) –Jesus is descended from Adam in Lk's genealogy 3:23-38; ending of Acts, Paul is in Rome, the gospel reaching the capitol of the Roman Empire.
 - B. The active role of the Holy Spirit: *filled with the Holy Spirit* is a favorite phrase for Luke; the Holy Spirit is very present and active in Luke's gospel and in Acts.
 - C. Rome has nothing to fear from Christians
 1. Luke uses important Roman people to date his events.
 2. Healing of centurion's slave (7:1-10)
 3. Three times Pilate declares that he sees "no crime deserving death" in Jesus (23:22).
 4. The Roman centurion at the cross declares that Jesus "was innocent" (23:47).
 5. Ending of Acts, Paul in Rome, where he lives "in his own rented house" (Acts 28:30).
 6. According to our tradition, Luke wrote his gospel in Rome, around A.D. 62.
- II. Uniqueness of Luke:
 - A. The "Annunciations and Nativities" chapters (1&2).
 - B. The response of people throughout Luke is *amazement, joy and wonder* (24:12; 41).
 1. Luke is only gospel to attribute *laugh* to any of Jesus' sayings (Lk 6:21b,25b).
 - C. An account filled with angels, songs, and healings.
 1. Zacharias, Mariam, the Angels, Simeon.
 2. Healings begin Jesus' ministry and continue throughout (4:31-40; 5:12-26; 6:19).
 - D. Luke's "pairing:" *eg*:
 1. Zacharias and Gabriel; Zacharias and people outside.
 2. Gabriel and Mariam; Mariam and Elisabeth
 3. Angels and shepherds
 4. Joseph, Mary, (Jesus) and Symeon, Anna.
 5. Herod and Pilate
 6. Two on road to Emmaus.
 7. Parables:
 - a. Lost sheep and lost coin (15:3-10)
 - b. Prodigal son (15:11-32) – 2 sons; each son with father.
 - c. rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31)
 - d. Pharisee and Tax Collector (18:9-14)

- E. Women, Gentiles, and the poor are brought out of the shadows and have a prominent place.
1. Elisabeth and Mariam; Anna the prophetess; the queen of the south ((11:31), sick woman in synagogue (13:10-17) *et al.*
 2. Raising of widow's son (7:11-15); Woman with spirit of infirmity (13:11-13)
 3. Widow of Sarepta and Naaman (4:27); Good Samaritan; ten lepers (17:11-19)
 4. Sermon on the plain (6:20 *ff*)—contrast Matt's Sermon on the mountain—*the poor* (omits Matt's *in spirit*), and *Woe to the rich and full*.
 5. parable of rich man and Lazarus.
- F. Vocabulary uses medical and nautical terminology (in Acts).
1. Lk 4:23, "Physician, heal yourself," found only in Luke.
 2. Lk 8:22: "he embarked"..."set sail/put out to sea" (both nautical terms).
- G. Sending forth of 70
1. Lk 10:1 *ff.* —*cf* Matt 10:5*ff*—70v12, Matt only to Jews, Lk maybe to Gentiles? (acc to our tradition, Luke was of the 70—OSB p 1822).
- H. God's greatness is seen in humbleness.
1. Mary's humility (1:48).
 2. "no place in the inn."
 3. No crown of thorns; words from cross (especially 23:34)

* * *

4. The Biblical text of Luke's Nativity story

PORCTIONS OF LUKE'S NATIVITY STORY

(THE PATRIARCHAL TEXT OF 1904)²⁴



1 Forasmuch as many took in hand to set in order a narrative concerning those things which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered *them* to us who from *the* beginning became eyewitnesses and servants of the Logos [Word], it seemed good to me also, having followed closely all things accurately from the beginning, to write to you in order, most excellent Theophilos, that thou mightest fully know the certainty of those words concerning which thou wast instructed....

²⁶ And in the sixth month [*of Elisabeth's pregnancy*] the angel Gabriel was sent forth by GOD²⁵ to a city of Galilee, the name of which *was* Nazareth, to a virgin who was espoused to a man whose name *was* Joseph, of *the* house of David; and the name of the virgin *was* Mariam. And the angel entered and said to her, "Rejoice thou who hast been shown grace, for the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women."

²⁹ And having seen *him*, she was greatly troubled at his word, and was considering what kind of salutation this may be. And the angel said to her, "Cease being afraid, Mariam; for thou didst find grace with GOD. And behold, thou shalt conceive in *thy* womb and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name Jesus. This *One* shall be great, and shall be called Son of *the* Highest; and *the* Lord GOD shall give to Him the throne of His father David. And He shall reign over the house of Jacob to the ages, and of His kingdom there shall be no end."

²⁴ Taken from *The Orthodox New Testament* (published by Holy Apostles Convent in Buena Vista, CO. 4th Edition, 2008). The *ONT* translation was produced by Orthodox translators, using the text approved by the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople in 1904, and revised in 1907 and 1912. This text used 116 documents found in the Orthodox Church lectionaries, 45 of which are from Mount Athos and Constantinople, the rest coming from Athens and Jerusalem. The source texts used date from the 9th to the 16th centuries, with a majority coming from the 10th to the 14th centuries. The *OSB* uses the *New King James* text, based on what is called the *Textus Receptus* (Receive Text), which, as Fr. Laurent Cleenewerck points out in his Introduction to *The Eastern Orthodox Bible*, "One major limitation with the NKJV is that it is a commercial, copyrighted translation which lies completely outside the control of the Orthodox Christian community. Moreover, certain issues of translation and terminology...also called for revisions within an Orthodox context." – Introduction, *Eastern Orthodox Bible*, p.17.

A word in *italics* indicates that this word is supplied to the English text, but it is not in the Greek.

²⁵ When GOD is used, it indicates that the article is present, literally, "the God."

But Mariam said to the angel, “How shall this be, since I know not a man?”

And the angel answered and said to her, “*The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; wherefore also that Holy One Who is born of thee shall be called Son of God. And behold, Elisabeth, thy kinswoman, she hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month for her who is called barren; For all of that which is spoken shall not be impossible with GOD.*”

And Mariam said, “Behold, the slave of *the* Lord; may it be to me according to thy word.”

^{38b} And the angel departed from her.

³⁹ And Mariam rose up in those days and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; and she entered into the house of Zacarias, and greeted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, as Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with *the* Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice, and said, “Blessed *art* thou among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of thy womb. And whence *is* this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, as the sound of thy salutation came into mine ears, the babe in my womb leaped in exultant joy. And happy *is* she who believed, for there shall be a fulfillment of those things which were spoken to her from *the* Lord.

⁴⁶ And Mariam said,

“My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in GOD my Savior,²⁶
for He looked *kindly* upon the humility of his handmaiden.

For behold, from henceforth all the generations shall call me blessed!

Because the mighty *One* did great things for me, and hallowed is his name,
and his mercy is upon those fearing Him to generations of generations.

He worked strength with His arm; He scatter *the* arrogant in the imagination of their heart!

He pulled down *the* mighty from *their* thrones, and exalted *the* humble;

He filled those who are hungry with good things and those who are rich He sent away empty.

Being mindful of *His* mercy, He helped Israel His servant,
just as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.”

⁵⁶ And Mariam stayed with Elisabeth²⁷ about three months, and returned to her *own* house....

2 And it came to pass in those days *that* a public decree went out from Caesar Augustus for all the inhabited world to be registered. This registration first took place when Quirinius governed Syria. And all were going to be registered, each to *his* own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of *the* city of Nazareth, into Judea, to a city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of *the* house and lineage of David, to register himself with Mariam, who had been espoused to him *as* wife²⁸ and who was pregnant. And it came to pass, while they were there, the days were fulfilled for her to bring forth. And she brought forth her Son, the

²⁶ This is my revision of the *Magnificat* found in the *ONT*—*cf* the Song of Hannah, 1 Kingdoms 2:1 (1 Samuel, MT).

²⁷ lit, *her*.

²⁸ CT omits, *as wife*.

firstborn, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in the manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ And shepherds were in the same country, living out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of *the* Lord stood by them, and *the* glory of *the* Lord shone around them, and they were afraid *with* a great fear. And the angel said to them, “Cease being afraid; for behold, I announce to you good tidings *of* great joy, which shall be to all people; for a Savior, Who is Christ *the* Lord, was born to you today in *the* city of David. And this *shall be* a sign to you: Ye shall find *the* newborn Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in the manger.”

¹³ And suddenly there came to be with the angel a multitude of *the* heavenly host praising GOD, and saying, “Glory to God in *the* highest, and on earth peace, good will among men!”

And it came to pass, as the angels went away from them into the heaven, also the men,²⁹ the shepherds, said to one another, “Let us now pass through as far as Bethlehem and see this thing which is spoken *of* as having come to pass, which the Lord made known to us.” And having hastened, they came and found out both Mariam and Joseph, and the newborn Babe lying in the manger. And after they saw, they made known publicly concerning the saying which was spoken to them about this little Child. And all those who heard wondered about those things which were spoken to them by the shepherds. But Mariam was keeping closely all these sayings, conjecturing in her heart.

²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising GOD over all *the* things which they heard and saw, even as it was spoken to them.



²⁹ *the men*, omitted in CT.

5. Commentary on Luke's text.

MY COMMENTARY ON LUKE'S NATIVITY STORY

Chapter 1

- I. Luke's Preface (1:1-4): Very formal, highly educated Greek; lots of words occurring only once within the NT; different style than the rest of his writing.
 - A. *many took in hand*—by Luke's time there were already other accounts of the gospel and/or sayings of Jesus circulating among the churches, including those written by “false apostles,” (2 Cor 11:4, 12-13), *eg*, gospel according to the Egyptians” or “Of the Twelve.”
 - B. What makes Luke's account “accurate?” *they delivered them to us who...became eyewitnesses and servants of the Logos....*
 1. St. Ambrose: “The spoken word is not meant, but the eternal Logos, who ‘became flesh and dwelt among us.’”³⁰
 2. *delivered (traditioned) them over to us- parédosan*—a term which comes from a relay race, when one runner hands over the baton to the next runner.
 3. Theophilus, *theo* = God, *philos* = lover; not only a specific person, but anyone loving God.
 - a. not simply that *thou mightest know*, but *thou mightest fully know*
 - b. *concerning which thou wast instructed (catēchē' thēs)*; there was already a catechumenate at this time.

Luke as playwright and artist

Act 1, Scene 1: Setting the Stage (1:24-28): Gabriel's annunciation to the Virgin Mary and her visit to Elisabeth.

- I. The characters:
 - A. *Gabriel*, “the strength of God”
 1. Gabriel has already appeared to Zachariah (Lk 1:11-20); he is “the one having stood before the face of GOD.” He also appears in Daniel 8:16, 9:21 *ff*.
 2. *sent forth, apestálēn* = sent as an official messenger (*apostle* comes from this word).

* * *

The Seven Archangels:

Tobit 12:15 and Rev 8:2

All are celebrated on 8th of November.

Michael, “Who is like God?” (Dan 10:13, Jg 5:9, Jude 9, Rev 12:7-8), Commander of angels.
Gabriel, “the strength/power of God” (Dan 8:16, 9:21-22, Lk 1:19, 26).

³⁰ Unless otherwise noted, quotes from the Fathers are taken from *The Orthodox New Testament*, Vol I, The Holy Gospels, Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO, 1999.

Raphael, “Healing of God” (Tobit 3:16-17, 5:5, 12:15).

Uriel, “Fire of God” (2nd Esdras 4:1, 5:20, 10:28—included in Slavonic Bible as 3rd Esdras, but not in Greek Bible)

Selaphiel (Salathiel), “prayer of God,” (3rd Esdras 5:16; perhaps unnamed in Rev 8:3-4).

Jehudiel (Jegudiel), “Who glorifies God.” } (these last two are not in Scripture, but from
Barachiel, “the Blessing of God.” } Jewish and Christian tradition)

* * *

B. *a virgin...espoused to...Joseph...Mariam.*

1. *a virgin*, without the article emphasizes the “virginity” of the maiden.
2. *Joseph of the house of David* (cf. Ps 131:11-12) in contrast to Herod, who was not a descendant of David.
3. *was espoused* (from *mnēsteúomai*), “to be engaged; to be betrothed.” According to Jewish Encyclopidia.com:
 - a. generally an arranged marriage, but with the consent of the prospective bride, if she was 12 years + 1 day old.
 - b. A betrothal was binding upon both bride and groom, and they were considered as husband and wife in all legal and religious aspects, yet they were not permitted to live together. This non-consummated marriage could only be ended by a formal divorce.
 - c. 12 months were to pass before marriage was completed by a formal “home-taking;” however, if the groom was a widower, this time could be shortened to 30 days [this happens in Matthew’s gospel].
4. “The Greek word given for the name of the Mother of God has usually been translated ‘Mary.’ However, most often the Greek word is actually...Mariam, rather than Mary ... we do not presume that we can change her name in the mind of others from Mary to Mariam, but we preferred to give a faithful and literal rendering whenever the evangelists recorded her name as Mariam.” —*ONT*

II. The Entrance (1:28-29): *the angel entered and said, “Be rejoicing....*

A. How to translate this? *Chai're, kecharitōménē*. Both words from same root: *char=* rejoice, delight; grace, favor.

1. *Chai're* = pres. imperative means, “begin and continue rejoicing!” A Lukan characteristic (cf. Palm Sunday Vespers OT readings of Zephaniah 3:14 and Zechariah 9:9).
 - a. “The imperative form of Χαῖρε, far from being a conventional greeting, always refers to the joy attendant on the deliverance of Israel; wherever it occurs, it is a translation of a Hebrew verb meaning ‘Rejoice greatly!’” J. McHugh, in *The Mother of Jesus*, quoted in footnote of *Eastern Orthodox Bible*.
2. *kecharitōménē* = perf pass part, “having been highly favored / greatly graced.”
 - a. the phrase “full of grace,” *plē'rēs cháritos*, is found in John 1:14 to describe the Incarnate Logos. This is obviously not the same word as in Luke. I believe this phrase, *full of grace* when used by Orthodox with Mary can be confusing to others, thinking we share the Roman Catholic idea of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. But one could argue that “greatly graced” and “full of grace” are really the same concepts.

3. Jerome in the Vulgate translated this as *gratia plena, full of grace*. The Roman Catholic dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception may be based on this. The Latins teach that Mary was conceived free from original sin, which is common to everyone else. This, Fr. Thomas Hopko says, makes Mary "the great exception, rather than the great example." The Orthodox Church does not accept the Immaculate Conception as a doctrine.

B. *Blessed art thou among women*.

1. *Blessed* = *evlogēménē* (perf pass part), lit, "having been blessed [by God] are you." This word usually translated Hebrew *baruk*, generally reserved for blessing God; *eulogy* comes from this word: "to speak well of" (*eu* = well; *logia* = to speak).
 - a. Critical text (used by RSV, NRSV, NIB) omits this part of the greeting.

III. The Announcement (1:30-33)

A. *Cease being afraid /anxious--* same words used to Zacharias.

1. The usual translation of *phobéō* is "to be afraid;" Mary was accustomed to seeing angels (PeJ), she is not afraid of them, but she might have been concerned about why this visit! This word can be translated as "anxious, apprehensive." I believe *anxious* would be a better translation here.

B. *didst find grace*, Mary is in the company of those having found favor with God: *eg*, Noah (Gen 6:8), and Moses (Ex 33:12b).

1. St Photios the Great: "The Virgin found favor with God because she had made herself worthy before her Creator, for, having adorned her soul with the fairness of purity, she had prepared herself as an agreeable habitation of him..."
2. "In gladness I cry to you...for you, O All-pure One, have found grace before the Lord such as no other woman ever found." – (Canticle 1, Matins of Annunciation)

C. A three-fold saying to Mary:

1. *thou shalt conceive in thy womb*
 - a. a conception beyond explanation, as Mary is to remain a virgin.
 - b. Jesus, in his humanity, will have only Mary's DNA.
2. *thou shalt bring forth a Son*; the gender of the child is given.
3. *thou shalt call His name Jesus*.
 - a. Mary is not free to name the child whatever she would like—her Son's Name is given to her by her Son's Father—*cf.* Lk 2:49b.
 - b. Zacharias is given John the Baptist's name by Gabriel as well.

D. A three-fold saying about her Son:

1. *This One... be called Son of the Highest*—a Lukan term, but used in OT for God.
 - a. absence of articles points to *nature* or *essence*; Jesus by *nature* is *Son of Highest*, a title used for God, so he is *divine* in his *essence*. Jesus is thus both fully human, born from Mary's womb, and fully divine as Son of God.
2. *GOD shall give to Him the throne of His father David*
 - a. Jesus, through his mother, is the descendant of David, the Messiah promised to David (2 Kings 7:12; Ps 131:11; Is 9:6).

3. *He shall reign over the house of Jacob...of His kingdom there shall be no end--* see 2 Kgs 7:16b (2 Sam, MT); Dan 2:44b; Ps. 144:13.
 - a. This phrase is used in the Nicene Creed. As Orthodox, we do not believe in “the Rapture” nor a literal 1000 year reign of Christ. The “1000 years” is understood as the here and now, beginning with Jesus’ ascension and ending with his Second Coming, when at the Last Judgment, he will establish his Kingdom which “will have no end.”

E. Mary’s response:

1. Very similar to Zacharias’- not a lack of faith, but more a question of how this can happen; lit = “How is this to me?”
 - a. “O angel, help me understand the meaning of your words. How shall what you say come to pass? Tell me clearly, how shall I conceive, I who am a virgin? And how shall I become the mother of my Maker?” – (Canticle 1, Matins of Annunciation)
 - b. St Gregory of Nyssa: Her response “meant that she had the intention, though betrothed, of remaining a virgin. The angel announces offspring, but she cleaves to her virginity...she neither lacks faith nor departs from her promise, because she was bound to preserve her flesh, which was consecrated to God, as a sacred gift.”
2. *I know not (οὐ) a man*
 - a. “I will give birth in time to a timeless son; I cannot explain how he will be conceived in me. I have known no man; how then shall I bear a child? Who has ever seen a birth without seed?” When God so wills, as it is written, the order of nature is overthrown. [2nd Kathisma, Nativity of Christ, verb tense altered]

F. Gabriel’s reply:

1. The *Holy Spirit (Pneuma Agion)*, article absent, pointing to the essence: a spirit has no physical body, and its essence is holiness, *ie*, this is not a carnal conception.
2. *will overshadow (episkiásei) you.*
 - a. Mary is the true Tabernacle of the Testimony—
 1. Exodus 40:28-29; the Lord’s *glory* is his *brightness*, the *Shekinah YHWH* (שְׁכִינָה יְהוָה); the cloud, the symbol of the Holy Spirit *overshadowed her* (*epeskíazen avtēn* – fem. a prophetic verse), that is, the Tabernacle.
3. The conception of Jesus by Mary was not a sexual act with a god, as was often the case in pagan mythology with the birth of demigods.
 - a. St. Ephraim the Syrian: “He came down in a manner that he knows, He stirred and came in a way that pleased him. He entered and dwelt in her without her perceiving.”
 - b. St. Gregory Palamas: “Since what overshadows produces its own form and figure over whatever it casts a shadow, there came to pass in the womb not only a union, but the formation of the incarnate Word of God from both the power of the Most High and the all-holy virginal womb. Thus, in an indescribable manner the Word of God took his dwelling in her.”
 - c. majority mss omit *born of thee*. This seems to be an attempt to down-play the role of Mary as Theotokos.

- d. *called Son of God = uiós Theoú*; articles absent, emphasizes the divine nature of this Child’s Sonship.
 - 4. The Trinity is revealed: The Holy Spirit will overshadow Mary, who will conceive the Son of God (the Father).
 - 5. Gabriel reveals that Elisabeth is pregnant with a son; no one knew that she was pregnant, much less with a son, since Elisabeth hid herself away.
 - a. *all of that which is spoken shall not be impossible with GOD—cf. Gen 18:14, Job 42:2.*
- G. Mary’s response: *Let it be unto me according to your word.*
- 1. *the slave = ē doúlē*, lit, “the [female] slave; the bondmaid.” More than just “a handmaiden,” which could simply be a lady-in-waiting, or one who was compensated for her work.
 - 2. Synergy: without Mary’s freely willed obedience to God, the Incarnation could not have happened. So we sing: *Today is the beginning of our salvation...the Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin!* [troparion, Annunciation].
 - a. The whole life of Christ, which begins with his incarnation, is salvific, not just his death on the cross.
 - b. Fr. Patrick Reardon: “Fathers insisted that ‘whatever was not assumed was not redeemed’ ... What Jesus accomplished on our behalf, and for our benefit, depended entirely on *who He was*.”³¹
 - 3. St. Irenaeus: “Eve, though wedded to Adam, was still a virgin. Being disobedient, she became the cause of death to herself and to all mankind. So Mary, having a man betrothed to her, but nonetheless a virgin, was obedient and became to herself and to the whole human race a cause of salvation...For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the Virgin Mary set free through faith.”
 - 4. Fr. Patrick: “Mary’s ‘Be it done unto me according to your word’ was...the first step along the road to Jesus’ ‘Not my will, but Yours, be done.’...It was from Mary that Jesus learned to respond in faith to the call of God, not counting the cost. Their destinies were inextricably entwined in the mystery of redemption.”³²

SELECTIONS FROM
THE CANON FOR THE FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION

St. Theophan, the metropolitan of Nicea, in the eighth century composed the canon in the form of a dialogue between the Archangel and the Most-Pure Virgin, skillfully strewing Old Testament prophecies of the Incarnation.

* * *

Canticle One

Let your forefather David sing to you, O Lady, striking upon the harp of the Spirit: ‘Listen, O Daughter,³³ to the voice of the Angel, for he discloses to you joy past telling.’

³¹ Patrick Henry Reardon, *Reclaiming the Atonement*, Vol 1; Ancient Faith Publishing, Chesterton, Indiana, 2015. Italics are in the text.

³² Patrick Henry Reardon, *The Jesus We Missed*; Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 2012.

³³ Psalm 44:11 (LXX numbering)

Gabriel: In gladness I cry out to you: incline your ear and give heed to me, as I tell you of God's conception without seed. For you, All-Pure one, have found grace before the Lord such as no other woman ever found.

The Theotokos: O Angel, help me to understand the meaning of your words. How shall what you say come to pass? Tell me clearly, how shall I conceive, who am a virgin? And how shall I become the mother of my Maker?

Gabriel: You think, so it seems, that I utter deceitful words; and I rejoice to see your caution. But take courage, O Lady: for when God wills, strange wonders are easily accomplished.

Canticle Three

The Theotokos: There is no longer a ruler from Judah's line, but the time is at hand in which Christ, the expectation of nations,³⁴ shall appear. But do make plain to me how I, being a virgin, shall bear him?

Gabriel: O Virgin, you seek to learn from me the manner of your conceiving, but this is beyond all interpretation. The Holy Spirit will overshadow you in his creative power, and shall make this come to pass.

The Theotokos: My mother Eve, accepting the suggestion of the serpent, was banished from the paradise of delight.³⁵ therefore I fear your strange salutation, for I take heed, lest I slip.

Gabriel: I am sent as the envoy of God to disclose to you the divine will. Why are you, O Undefined, anxious of me, I who am rather afraid of you? Why, O Lady, do you stand in awe of me, I who stand in reverent awe of you?

Canticle Four

The Theotokos: I learned from the Prophet, who foretold the coming of Emmanuel in times of old, that a certain holy virgin should bear a child.³⁶ But I long to know how the nature of a mortal shall undergo union with the Godhead.

Gabriel: The bush that burnt with fire and yet remained unconsumed,³⁷ discloses the secret mystery that shall come to pass in you, O pure Maiden who has been highly graced. For after childbirth you will remain a virgin still.

The Theotokos: O Gabriel, herald of the truth, shining with the radiance of Almighty God, tell me truly: how shall I, my purity remaining untouched, bear in the flesh the Word that has no body?

Gabriel: I stand before you in fear, as a servant before his mistress, and in awe I am afraid to look at you now, O Maiden. In his good pleasure the Word of God shall descend upon you, like dew upon the fleece.³⁸

³⁴ cf. Genesis 49:10

³⁵ cf. Genesis 3:1, 23

³⁶ Isaiah 7:14

³⁷ Exodus 3:2

³⁸ Judges 6:38; Ps 71:6

Canticle Five

The Theotokos: I cannot understand the meaning of your words. For there have often been miracles, wonders worked by the might of God, symbols and figures contained in the Law. But never has a virgin borne a child without knowing a man.

Gabriel: You are amazed, O all-blameless Virgin; and amazing indeed is the wonder that comes to pass in you: because you alone shall receive in your womb the King of all who is to take flesh. In the utterances and dark sayings of the prophets and by the symbols of the Law, it is you who are prefigured!

The Theotokos: How can the One whom nothing can contain, upon whom none can gaze, dwell in the womb of a virgin whom he himself has formed? And how shall I conceive God the Word, who with the Father and the Spirit has no beginning?

Gabriel: The One having promised to your forefather David that he would set upon the throne of his kingdom One from the fruit of his loins,³⁹ he it is who has chosen you, the beauty of Jacob,⁴⁰ as his spiritual dwelling-place....

Canticle Eight

Hearken, O pure Virgin Maid: let Gabriel tell you the counsel of the Most High that is ancient and true. Make ready to receive God: for through you the Incomprehensible comes to dwell with the human race.

The Theotokos: All mortal thought is overwhelmed, as it ponders the strange wonders of which you tell me. I am filled with joy at your words, yet am afraid: I fear, lest you deceive me as Eve was deceived, and lead me far from God.

Gabriel: See, your difficulty is resolved! You have well said that this matter is hard to grasp. Obey, then, the words of your own lips: do not doubt as though it were deceitful, but believe in this thing as very truth.

The Theotokos: Childbirth comes from mutual love: such is the law that God has given to mankind. I know not at all the pleasure of marriage: how then can you say that I shall bear child? I am afraid that you speak in deceit.

Gabriel: O holy Virgin, you tell me of the usual manner by which people are born. But I tell you of the birth of the true God. Beyond words and understanding, in way that he alone knows, he shall take flesh of you.

The Theotokos: You appeared to me to speak the truth, for you came as an angelic messenger, bringing joy to all. Since then, I am purified in soul and body by the Spirit, be it unto me according to your word: may God dwell in me.

VII. Exit and end of scene: ...*And the angel departed from her.*

³⁹ Ps 131:11

⁴⁰ Ps 46:5

Intermission

- I(a). Act 2, Scene 1 (1:39): Setting the Stage and an entrance.
- A. The characters: *Mary, Elizabeth, and John the Baptist in the womb.*
 - B. ...*leaped for joy*—a favorite word of Luke’s.
 - C. *Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit*—favorite phrase of Luke’s.
- II(a). An Announcement (1:40-45)
- A. *Blessed (evlogēmēnē) art thou among women;*
 - 1. Elisabeth echoes Gabriel’s words, but adds:
 - B. *and blessed is the fruit of thy womb... that the mother of my Lord....*
 - 1. John, leaping in Elisabeth’s womb is rejoicing before the Lord, letting his mother know that Mary is pregnant with the Lord; otherwise Elizabeth wouldn’t know this.
 - a. John is *filled with the Spirit* in fulfillment of Gabriel’s annunciation (1:15b).
 - 2. *Lord* means God; in OT, God’s unspeakable name, יהוה YHWH was always spoken as *Adonai* / Lord. LXX always translates this as *Kyrios* / Lord.
 - a. Thus Elisabeth calls Mary “Mother of [my] God / *Theotokos*.”
 - C. *having believed*; Mary is the first and the most faithful disciple for Luke. She has two honors: (1st) unique to her, she is the mother of the incarnate Word; and (2nd) as one as an example for us, she heard the word of God and kept it (Lk 11:27-28).

* * *

[An excursus]

Where did “Jehovah” for God’s Name come from?

[The vowel points for Adonai אֲדֹנָי (*Lord*) were combined with JHVH (German spelling) = יהוה! [--creating a name which simply could not pronounced in Hebrew, which was to remind the reader [not to pronounce the holy Name, YHWH, but following the vowel points, substitute “Adonai.”] [“Jehovah” then is **not** God’s name, but a fabricated name! It was first popularized by William [Tyndale, and used in several Protestant translations, *eg* Geneva Bible and the King James Version; [and, unfortunately, is still used in some English translations. The simple fact that the Jehovah [Witnesses use this name for God shows that they do not understand the real name of God.

[When reading most Protestant English translations of the Old Testament, one often encounters [the word **LORD**, written in small capitol letters, or even LORD in all caps. One might think that [this is for emphasis, but this is simply not the case. If one reads the Introductory comments in the [front his or hers Bible, one would see that when LORD is used, it indicates that the Hebrew יהוה is [used in the text; so following good Jewish tradition, “Lord” is substituted in its place.]

* * *

- III(a). Mary’s response: *Magnificat* (1:46-55)
- A. Mary knew the Old Testament scriptures well, having been raised in the temple, because her song is full of quotes from these. Of course, this canticle is often compared to the

song of Hanna in 1 Kingdoms 2:1ff (1 Samuel, MT), but other scriptures are quoted as well. Perhaps, thinking of Psalm 68(69):31, Mary begins her song.

1. ...*my spirit hath rejoiced in GOD my Savior*, echoes Habakkuk 3:18, Psalm 33(34):3-4, and Micah 7:7 (*GOD my Savior*) continues Luke's message of the joy of Christ's coming.
 - a. *for He looked kindly... (epéblepsen)*; this word carries the implication of "God's loving care, that looks upon someone" [Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*]; a look which is attentive, observing someone closely.
 - b. *upon the humility (tapeínōsin)*; not just "low estate," but specifically *humility* and *self-abasement*; the verb form means to "level a mountain; to make humble (in a good sense); to humble oneself." It also describes a "poverty-stricken condition." Luke's emphasis on the humble and poor⁴¹ is seen with this canticle of the Mother of God.

2. *all the generations shall call me blessed*. Leah, the wife of Jacob, exclaimed, "...the women will call me blessed" when Asher was born (Gen 30:12) from Leah's handmaid, since Leah had stopped bearing. Mary, the virgin, will bring forth a son greater than Asher, and she is greater than Leah; so throughout all the generations, the Church has fulfilled her words by calling her "our most holy, most pure, most blessed and glorious Lady Theotokos...."

3. *hallowed is his name, áyion tó ónoma avtoú*; in the Lord's prayer, *hallowed be thy Name* is *ayiasthē tō tó ónomá sou* (Lk 11:2). It is not stretching the imagination too far to believe that Mary taught Jesus the holiness of God's Name, which he then taught us in the Lord's prayer. This also echoes Psalm 110 (111):9c, which of course, as good Jews, Mary would have taught Jesus the Psalms which he learned by heart.

4. *mercy / éleos*, "pity, mercy, compassion" (used 6 x's in Lk). Root = ἔλι: ἔλαια, "olive," used for food; ἔλαιον (olive oil), used in healing wounds, anointed the sick; it was burned in lamps, (as in our icon lamps); and for cooking. The word for *almsgiving* or *charitable giving* is a form of this word. This line echoes Ps 102(103):17.
 - a. A caveat: God's mercy is not given to everyone, but to *those fearing (phobouménōis)*⁴² Him. The ones fearing the Lord hope in him and expect salvation from his arm, which *works with strength*, for judgment against those who abandon him, and for the humble and poor, which results in him
 - b. *scattering the arrogant in the imagination of their heart, pulling down the mighty, and exalting the humble*.
 - i. concerning the arrogant: cf Psalms 17(18):28, 137(138):6. Pride is the quality which characterizes all the great enemies of God throughout the Old Testament. Humility is an abomination to the arrogant (Wisdom of Sirach 13:19), and arrogance is sin which withdraws him from God (Wis Sirach 10:12-13); but in the end, God will humble the arrogant (Isaiah 2:11-18),

⁴¹ In Luke's "Sermon on the plain," Jesus does not say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," but rather, "Blessed are the poor" (Lk 6:20b).

⁴² present active participle of *phobéō*, more than just having reverence or respect for God, but a holy fear recognizing God's power and majesty compared to us mortals.

pulling down the mighty and seating the humble in their place. (see Wis Sirach 10:14, 1 Kingdoms (1 Sam):2:8).

- ii. the *heart* was considered to be the whole inner life into which God looks; it is the faculty of thought or understanding, the source of emotions, wishes and desires, the seat of conscience.
5. *He filled those who are hungry* (cf Psalms 103(104):27-28; 104(105):40; 106(107):9; but *the rich*⁴³ and those pursue false means of salvation will be *sent away empty* (see Ezek 7:19b; Amos 4:6; Isaiah 5:13-14).
- i. Jesus perhaps echoes these words his mother taught him in Lk 6:21, 24-25a.
6. The canticle ends with Mary asserting that this help to *Israel His servant* has happened because God is *mindful of His mercy, being mindful* of what He *spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed*, and in Luke's genealogy, Jesus is the seed of Abraham (Lk 3:23, 34).

IV(a). Exit and end of scene

- A. *Mariam stayed with Elizabeth about three months.*

[Another excursus]

The Virgin Mary is the True Ark of the Covenant

- I. The Ark, a feminine word in Greek, is a type which is fulfilled in Mary.
 - A. The ark was overlaid on all sides with gold; Psalm 44(45):10b, is a prophecy about “the queen mother,” who is Mary: “Upon thy right *hand* stood the queen, having been clothed in a vesture of interwoven gold....”⁴⁴
 - B. The cherubim *overshadowed* the mercy seat, 3 Kingdoms (1 Kings)8:7, and the Holy Spirit *overshadowed* Mary who brought forth the “Great Mercy.”
- II. The contents of the Ark according to Hebrews 9:4b-5.
 - A. The ark contained a golden pot of manna, the “bread from heaven (Ps 77(78):24), and Mary's womb became the golden pot which held the “Bread of Life...having come down out of the heaven” (see John 6:31-58).
 - B. Aaron's rod, the sign of the chosen priesthood, and Mary's womb contained the true High Priest, “according to the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 109:4b; Heb 5:7-10).
 - C. The tablets of the covenant, the Ten Commandments, and Mary's womb contained “the One who once gave the Law to Moses on Sinai” and established the new covenant with his blood.
- III. Comparison of Mary's journey to Elizabeth with the ark's journey to Jerusalem –see 2 Kingdoms (2Sam) 6:3-15.

⁴³ *rich* can also mean “those with abundance;” and sometimes the word meaning “those who are fat” is used as a euphemism for “rich.”

⁴⁴ My translation.

- A. The ark was in the house of Abinadab, which was *on the hill*; Mary journeys to the house of Elizabeth, which is *in the hill country*.
- B. "...the ark was brought up with shouting" (6:15); Elizabeth *cried out in a loud voice* when she heard Mary's voice.
- C. David danced and sang before the ark; John the Baptist *leaped for joy* (dancing?) in his mother's womb when he heard Mary's voice.
- D. David asks, "How will the ark come to me?"(6:9), while Elizabeth asks, "*How is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*"
- E. Uzzah reaches out to steady the ark in the wagon, placing his hands upon it, and is struck down (the holiness and virginal purity of the ark—not to be touched, but carried with poles, see Ex 25:12-15); compare story of the Jewish priest Athonios, who tried to topple the funeral bier of the Theotokos, but when he reached out his hand, an angel invisibly cut off his hand.⁴⁵
- F. The ark "remained for three months in the house of Obed-Edom; *Mary remained with Elisabeth about three months*."

Intermission

Chapter 2

I(b). Act 3, Scene 1: The characters

- A. Caesar Augustus (27 BC- AD 14)—Luke sets time frame in Roman history.
 - 1. Augustus took the title: *Savior of the whole world*.
 - a. Having been born in September, Sept 1st became New Year's Day for the Roman Empire (still the Ecclesiastical New Year for Orthodox).
 - 2. God uses "the savior of the whole world's" decree to bring Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, where the true Savior of the whole world is born.
 - a. "When Augustus ruled alone upon the earth, the many kingdoms of men came to an end; and when thou wast made man of the pure virgin, the many gods of idolatry were destroyed...The peoples were enrolled by the decree of Caesar, and we the faithful were enrolled in the name of the Godhead..." [Vespers, Nativity].
 - b. "When it was time for thy coming on earth, the first imperial taxation was held, but thou also didst take a census, O Lord, recording the names of all believing in thy birth! Thou didst use the decree of Caesar for thine own end: to make manifest thy timeless and eternal Kingdom! Therefore we pay thee our taxes, not with golden coins, but with the riches of Orthodox theology, O God and Savior of our souls." [Matins]

⁴⁵ See A STRANGE SCENE IN THE ICON OF THE DORMITION @ OrthoChristian.com.

- B. Quirinius was governor in Syria (12 BC- AD 16).
- C. Joseph, of the house and lineage of David.
1. Bethlehem, *beth* = house, *lehem* = bread. The Bread of Life is born in the “house of bread.” Every Orthodox Church is Bethlehem, because Christ makes bread his Body, and dwells in the tabernacle. Icon of Nativity is usually above Table of Preparation.
- D. Mary, *who had been espoused as wife and who was pregnant...while they were there...she brought forth her Son, the firstborn* .
1. *The firstborn* is a legal title, naming this son the chief heir (*cf* Heb 1:6). It does not mean that there were other children born after the firstborn.
 - a. The perpetual virginity of Mary was prophesied by Ezek 44:1-3a. “he brought me back by the way of the outer door of the Holies that faces toward the east, and she⁴⁶ was locked.⁴⁷ And the Lord said to me, ‘This entry shall be locked, she shall not be opened, and no one shall pass through her, because *the* Lord, the God of Israel, will enter through her, and she will remain locked! Therefore the one having sovereignty (*o ēgoúmenos*), this One will sit in her to eat bread in the presence of *the* Lord...’”
- E. The newborn Jesus, *wrapped in swaddling clothes*.
1. to show that a child was wanted and accepted, the child was washed and swaddle (*cf.* Wisdom of Solomon 7:4 and Ezek 16:4 for description of an unwanted child). In our nativity icon the infant Jesus is washed and swaddled in the manger. Many contemporary Western crèches show Jesus simply covered with a loin cloth with his arms and legs free! This is incorrect according to the Scriptures—the sign is the shepherds would find the Child swaddled.
 - a. “God, the All-perfect, is born of Mary. By his birth he seals her virginity. He is bound in swaddling clothes to loose the bonds of sin! Through his birth, the pains of Eve are healed! [Vespers]
 - b. “Christ our God...rules the heavenly hosts, yet now he lies in a manger of silent beasts. The One loosing the tangled knots of sin is now wrapped in swaddling clothes” [Ode 6, Matins]



This...



Not this!

(From a Roman Catholic catalogue)

⁴⁶ *she* = *auté* (*fem*); referring to the door/ *púlēs* (*fem*—also used to mean “opening of a womb,” is another prophetic reference to the Theotokos, who remains ever-virgin.

⁴⁷ *locked* = *kekleisménē*; “locked; closed up;” *key* = *kleis*. Same word is used in Jn 20:19, 26.

II(b). The setting:

- A. *in the manger*: The Church's teaching follows that of Justin Martyr (2nd cent) who taught that Jesus was born in a cave: "Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One...." [Kontakion of the Nativity]
1. St. Cyril: *The Lord* found humanity reduced to the level of the beasts; therefore is he placed like fodder in a manger...and whereas we were brutish in soul, by now approaching the manger, even his own table, we find no longer fodder, but the bread from heaven...
 2. St. John Chrysostom: As thou didst deign to lie in a cave and in a manger of irrational beasts, so now deign to enter into the manger of my irrational and beastly soul and into my soiled body. [2nd Prayer of Preparation for Holy Communion].
- B. *there was no room for them in the inn; tō katalúmati*, "lodging house; an inn."
1. *cf.* Jeremiah 14:8b: "Why have you [Lord] become as a sojourner in the land, and like a native of the land turning aside for lodging / *katalúma*?"
 2. "Mary was of David's seed, so she went with aged Joseph to register in Bethlehem...Since there was no room at the inn, the cave became a beautiful palace for the Queen.... [Troparion (revised), Royal Hrs.]

II(b). An Entrance and an Announcement (2:8-14)

- A. Shepherds were considered as outcasts by the rabbis and their testimony was not admissible in the Sanhedrin. Here is Luke's "role reversal:" the "majesty" of King David was first seen when he was the "humble outcast" of a shepherd—*cf* 1 Kingdoms (1 Sam) 16:1, 7, 11-13; 2 Kingdoms (2 Sam)7:8; Ps 77:70-72, 151.
1. The 1st sacrifice pleasing to God recorded in the Bible was offered by Abel, a shepherd (Gen 4:2b, 4).
 2. The "shepherding" of God: Ps 22:1, 27:9b, 47:15; also Ezek 34:11-15 and Jer 23:3-4.
 3. Paul calls the presbyters to "shepherd" the Church (Acts 20:28b), as does Peter (1 Pet 5:2); Jesus himself took the title (Jn 10:11) and Peter uses it to describe Jesus (1 Pet 5:4).
- B. The angelic announcement
1. *the glory = doxa*, "brightness" *of the Lord shone around them...*"God is light" (1John 1:5), so whenever the angels appear, the uncreated light of God is present.
 2. *Cease being afraid!* (*mē phobeísthe*, *mē* with pres imperative means, "stop an ongoing activity, don't continue). These are the same words the angel speaks to Zacharias and Mary; an angelic refrain to us mortals?
 3. *I announce (euaggelízomai) to you good tidings of great joy*—worded like an official imperial proclamation, which would have been familiar to 1st century people.
 - a. *euaggelízomai* (or *evangelizomai*, "evangelical") in Christian terms, means a divine message of salvation, a Messianic proclamation.

- b. In the Greco-Roman world, from the time of Alexander the Great to the Roman Empire, this word was used to refer to world-shaping reports of military victories.
- c. An inscription found in Priene, in modern-day Turkey, referring to Caesar Augustus says: “the birthday of [Augustus] has been for the whole world the beginning of the *gospel (euangelion)* concerning him.”
- d. *great joy*, a favorite Lukan theme.
- 4. *this joy will be to all the people*; the universality of the gospel, an emphasis of Luke.
- 5. *was born today*: aor pass—a point in time, “was born.”
today, sē’meron (not “this day”—same mistranslation in English Lord’s Prayer).
- 6. *a Savior* (article is absent, emphasizes saving attributes of Christ) vs “savior Augustus.”
Christ (the) Lord, article absent = *anointed/messiah* and *God (YHWH)*.
- 7. *this is the sign to you*—(cf. Is 7:14) *babe wrapped in swaddling clothes...in a manger* (see comments above).

C. The angelic canticle:

- 1. *heavenly host; stratiás*, root *strat*, means “army-related,” eg soldiers, commanders of armies, not chubby little half-naked “cherubs,” but mighty warriors.
- 2. *on earth peace, good will among men* = reading of Byzantine texts.
 - a. *men* = *anthō’pois*, not necessarily gender specific; rather *human beings* as opposed to animals; mankind, people.
 - b. *eudokía* (nominative case) = *good will*, is the reading of the Patriarchal text followed by the Orthodox; majority texts, used by most English Bible translations and used by most Protestants, read *eudokías* (genitive or accusative case) = people of goodwill, or among those whom he favors.
 - i. “Today heaven and earth are united, for Christ is born. Today God has come to earth, and humanity ascends to heaven...Glory to God in the highest, I hear the angels sing today in Bethlehem. Glory to him whose good pleasure it was that peace should come on earth!” [Great Compline]
 - ii. “All the angels in heaven make merry and dance today. All creation leaps for joy. The Lord and Savior is born in Bethlehem!” [Great Compline]
 - iii. “A great and wondrous mystery unfolds today. The Virgin gives birth and remains a virgin! The Word was made flesh without leaving his Father! Angels and shepherds magnify him! Let us join in their song: Glory to God on high, and on earth, peace!” [Aposticha from Great Vespers, revised]
 - iv. “Today the Virgin comes to the cave where she will give birth to the Eternal Word. Hear the glad tidings and rejoice, O universe! With angels and shepherds give honor to the Eternal God, the One revealing himself as a little child! [Kontakion (revised) from the Royal Hours]

D. The Shepherds’ Response:

- 1. As the angels ascend into the sky, the shepherds act:
 - a. *the heaven, tón ouranón*, singular; can mean heaven or sky; singular with article is generally translated as *the sky*. For the early Christians, *heaven* was the

dwelling place of God and his angels, not where the departed go as is the general modern understanding of the word

- b. *oi ánthrōpoi*, “the men,” the human beings, as opposed to angels, heaven and earth are joined—this is omitted in Critical Text.
2. *Let us pass through as far as Bethlehem*. The shepherds immediately begin their journey.
 - a. *they found out, aneuron* = “to find by diligently searching.” Bethlehem was very crowded, so the shepherds had to search to find this family—Luke showing the courage and faithfulness of the shepherds.
 - i. “the shepherds...having run to the Shepherd, beheld him as a blameless Lamb that had been pastured in Mary’s womb.” [Akathist to the Theotokos]
 - b. the shepherds become the first “evangelists:” *they made known publicly concerning the saying, which was spoken to them about this little Child*.
- E. *Mariam was keeping closely all these sayings, conjecturing in her heart*.
1. Mary as the first disciple—Lk 8:15, 21; 11:27-28.
 2. “Exit” and end of scene: *And the shepherds returned....*



6. An Introduction to the Gospel of Matthew.

MATTHEW'S NARRATIVE

- I. Matthew's focus.
 - A. Jesus is not only the Messiah Israel was looking for, but also Emmanuel, "God with us." Matthew tells us that Jesus is God with us at the beginning of his gospel, (Matt 1:23); about the middle of his gospel (18:20); and at the end of his gospel (28:20).
 - B. Jesus, as the God/Man, repeats in his own life the story of the Jewish people, thus fulfilling the prophets ("fulfill[ed]" is used 17 times in Matthew) and sanctifying the history of Israel. For example:
 1. Joseph, son of Jacob, is a dreamer (Gen 37:5-11, 18-19), is the model for Joseph, son of another Jacob (Matt 1:16, 20-24, 19-21).
 2. The killing of male babies in Egypt under Pharaoh (Exodus 1:15-22) is paralleled with the killing of 14,000 holy innocent boys killed under Herod (Matt 2:16).
 3. Israel crosses the Jordan after 40 years in the wilderness, and Jesus is baptized in the Jordan and he begins his 40 days of temptations in the wilderness.
 - C. Jesus is greater than the prophet Jonah (12:41b, 42b).
 - D. Jesus is portrayed as the new Moses, the Lawgiver.
 1. Matthew organizes his narrative around 5 discourses like the 5 books of Moses (Genesis thru Deuteronomy are ascribed to Moses).
 - a. chpts 3-7, 8-10, 11-13:52, 13:53-18, 19-20; each ends with, "when Jesus had finished speaking these words..."
 2. The "Sermon on the Mount" recalls Moses *getting* the 10 commandments on Mt. Sinai—Jesus, the source of those, *gives 10 blessings* and gives the Torah new meanings: *cf* 5:20 and 5:21 "you have heard...but I say...."
 - E. Matthew seeks to provide an answer to his Jewish audience as to why the Gentiles are being drawn to the Church more than the Jews.
 1. God's promise to Abraham is being fulfilled: "In you, Abraham, all the tribes of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3).
 - a. The Jews, having turned inward, forgot the promise that "All the nations shall come and bow before thee, O Lord, and shall glorify thy name" (Ps 85:9)⁴⁸; and their calling: "I have given you as a light to nations" (Is 42:6).
 2. The Magi (Gentiles) become the first to acknowledge Jesus as the King of the Jews.
 3. The Jews do not have the faith of the Gentiles:
 - a. Healing of the Centurion's servant: (8:10-12)—*Amen, I say to you that I have never found so great a faith, not even in Israel!*
 - b. Healing the daughter of the Canaanite woman: (15:21-28)—*Woman, great is your faith!*
 4. Ends with the Great Commission: *Go, make disciples of all nations.*"

⁴⁸ Psalm references use the LXX number for the Psalm, not the Hebrew number. Thus Psalm 85 is 86 in MT.

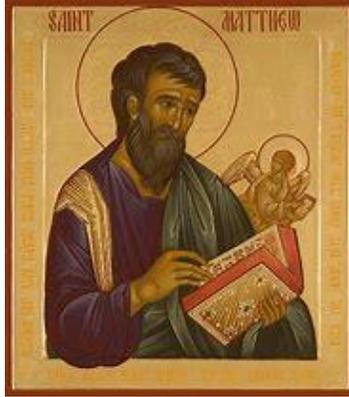
II. Uniqueness of Matthew

- A. Nativity story focuses on Joseph.
- B. Hebrew style, *e.g.* the kingdom of *the heavens* (pl), 32 times, rather than “kingdom of God.”
- C. Jesus is referred to as “the Son of David” 8 times (*e.g.* 9:27; 12:23).
- D. Jesus sends the Twelve to the “lost sheep of Israel,” 10:5 *ff.*
- E. Jesus’ strong denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees, chapter 23.
- F. Matthew has over 60 OT references and refers to 25 of the OT books.
- G. Peter’s confession, 16:16 *ff.* and importance of the Church (referred to 8 times; *e.g.* 18:15).

* * *

7. The Biblical text of Matthew's Nativity story.

MATTHEW'S NATIVITY STORY
(THE PATRIARCHAL TEXT OF 1904)⁴⁹



1 *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren, and Judas begat Phares and Zara by Thamar, and Phares begat Esrom, and Esrom begat Aram, and Aram begat Aminadab, and Aminadab begat Naasson, and Naasson begat Salmon, and Salmon begat Booz of Rachab, and Booz begat Obed by Ruth, and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David the king.*^{6b} And

David the king⁵⁰ begat Solomon of her *who had been the wife* of Urias, and

⁴⁹ Taken from *The Orthodox New Testament* (published by Holy Apostles Convent in Buena Vista, CO. 4th Edition, 2008).

A word in *italics* indicates that this word is supplied to the English text, but it is not in the Greek.

The *ONT* translation was produced by Orthodox translators, using the text approved by the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople in 1904, and revised in 1907 and 1912. This text used 116 documents found in the Orthodox Church lectionaries, 45 of which are from Mount Athos and Constantinople, the rest coming from Athens and Jerusalem. The source texts used date from the 9th to the 16th centuries, with a majority coming from the 10th to the 14th centuries. The *OSB* uses the *New King James* text, based on what is called the *Textus Receptus* (Receive Text), which, as Fr. Laurent Cleenewerck points out in his Introduction to *The Eastern Orthodox Bible*, "One major limitation with the NKJV is that it is a commercial, copyrighted translation which lies completely outside the control of the Orthodox Christian community. Moreover, certain issues of translation and terminology...also called for revisions within an Orthodox context." – Introduction, *Eastern Orthodox Bible*, p.17.

⁵⁰ Critical Text (CT), published by the United Bible Society, text used by the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) and *The New International Version* (NIV), omits *the king*.

Solomon begat Roboam, and
Roboam begat Abia, and
Abia begat Asa,⁵¹ and
Asa begat Josaphat, and
Josaphat begat Joram, and
Joram begat Ozias, and
Ozias begat Joatham, and
Joatham begat Achaz, and
Achaz begat Ezekias, and
Ezekias begat Manasses, and
Manasses begat Amon,⁵² and
Amon begat Josias, and
Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren
in the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹² And after the deportation to Babylon,
Jechonias begat Salathiel, and
Salathiel begat Zorobabel, and
Zorobabel begat Abiud, and
Abiud begat Eliakeim, and
Eliakeim begat Azor, and
Azor begat Sadok, and
Sadok begat Acheim, and
Acheim begat Eliud, and
Eliud begat Eleazar, and
Eleazar begat Matthan, and
Matthan begat Jacob, and
Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary,
of whom was born Jesus Who is called Christ.

¹⁷ Then all the generations from Abraham until David *are* fourteen generations, and from David until the deportation to Babylon *are* fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon until the Christ *are* fourteen generations.

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was thus: For His Mother, Mary, having been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together was found to be with child of *the* Holy Spirit. But Joseph her husband, being just, and yet not willing to make her an example, wished to divorce her secretly.

²⁰ And after he pondered these things, behold, an angel of *the* Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not become afraid to take to thee Mariam⁵³ thy wife; for that which is in her was begotten of *the* Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son and thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins. Now all this came to pass, in order that it might be fulfilled that was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ‘Behold, the

⁵¹ CT reads, *Asaph*; but 1st Supplements (1st Chron) in LXX reads *Asa*.

⁵² CT reads, *Amos*.

⁵³ other mss read, *Maria*.

virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel,” which is, being interpreted, “GOD⁵⁴ with us”.

²⁴ And Joseph, having been awakened⁵⁵ from sleep, did as the angel of *the* Lord commanded him, and took to him his wife, and was not knowing her until she brought forth her Son, the firstborn,⁵⁶ and he called His name Jesus.

2 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in *the* days of Herod the king, behold, Magi⁵⁷ from *the* east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He Who was born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and came to do homage to Him.”

But after Herod the king heard *these things*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And after he gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he kept on inquiring of them where the Christ is born. And they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it hath been written by the prophet: ‘And thou, Bethlehem, *in the* land of Juda, art in no wise the least among the governors of Juda; for out of thee shall come forth a Governor Who shall shepherd My people Israel.’”

Then Herod, after he secretly called the Magi, inquired carefully of them the time of the appearing star. And having sent them to Bethlehem, he said, “Go and search our carefully for the young Child; and when ye find *Him*, bring tidings to me, in order that I also might go and do homage to Him.”

And after they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they saw in the east was going before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. And having seen the star, they rejoiced exceeding *with* great joy. And after they came into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and did homage to Him. And after they opened their treasures, they offered gifts to Him: gold and frankincense and myrrh. And having been divinely warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed into their own country by another way.

¹³ And after they departed, behold, an angel of *the* Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, and take the young Child and His Mother, and flee thou into Egypt, and be there until I should tell thee; for Herod is about to seek the young Child, to destroy Him.”

And he arose and took the young Child and His Mother by night and departed into Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled that which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”

¹⁶ Then Herod, after he saw that he was mocked by the Magi, was angered exceedingly. And he sent forth and killed all the *male* children that *were* in Bethlehem and in all her borders, from two years old and under, according to the time which he inquired carefully from the Magi. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremias the prophet, saying, “A voice in Ramah was heard, lamentation and weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping *for* her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.”

⁵⁴ When “GOD” appears in the text, it indicates that the article is present in the Greek, literally reading, “the God,” which is sometimes awkward in English.

⁵⁵ other mss read, “having been roused.”

⁵⁶ omitted in CT.

⁵⁷ Greek =*mágoi*.

¹⁹ But after Herod died, behold, an angel of *the* Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Arise, and take the young Child and His Mother, and go into *the* land of Israel; for they who sought the soul of the young Child have died.”

²¹ And he arose and took the young Child and His Mother, and came into *the* land of Israel. But after he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea instead of Herod his father, he was afraid to go there. And having been divinely warned in a dream, he withdrew into the parts of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city which is called Nazareth, in order that it might be fulfilled that which was by the prophets, that He shall be called a Nazarene.



MY COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW'S NATIVITY STORY

Chapter 1: Matthew's Genealogy

- I. Matthew's opening words, *Biblos genéseōs*, are the same words used in (LXX) Gen 5:1, which begins the genealogy of Adam to Noah [notice omission of Cain and Able; Seth becomes the heir of Adam].
 - A. Genesis is full of genealogies (*e.g.* Gen 5, 10, 11:10ff) which were important to the Jews. Matthew, writing to Jews, begins with a genealogy, hearkening back to the first book of the Torah, showing God's control of history, *ie*, history is not cyclical or meaningless, but is headed toward the fulfillment God has in mind.
 - B. *son of David, son of Abraham*—Jesus is the One who unites in himself the promise to David (Ps 131:12, the Davidic kingship) and promise to Abraham (Gen 22:18, the blessing of all nations of the earth); Jesus is not just the Messiah of the Jews, but the Savior of all nations.
 1. Like Jesus in the Old Testament (Joshua is Hebrew name), this Jesus will lead his people into the Promised Land[see Joshua 1:2], *ie*, the kingdom of the heavens.
 - a. Blessed Theophylact: "Matthew...added 'son of David' so that you would not think he was speaking of the other Jesus; for there was another renowned Jesus, who became commander after Moses, but he was called 'son of Nave' [Hebrew = Nun], and not 'son of David'."
- II. The genealogy in Matthew (1:2-16) is divided into three groups:
 - (1) the period of the Patriarchs and Judges; (2) the Davidic kingship; and (3) Post-exilic period (a hint of the Trinity? Father with the Patriarchs, Son with Davidic kingdom, Spirit with the returned exiles (*cf.* Ps 125)).
 - A. Begins with Abraham, who *was reckoned as righteous* by God (Gen 15:6). This will be one of the lenses through which Matthew will choose some of the people in his genealogy—*ie*, those who are righteous; but he also includes those who committed notorious sins—the genealogy contains what I call, "the good, the bad and the ugly" [showing my age with this movie title!].
 - B. Women are included (this is highly unusual in Hebrew genealogies), most of whom are Gentiles; Matthew shows that God uses women and Gentiles to fulfill his purposes, which would have been a novel concept to pious Jews.
 - C. God does not see people the way we do; rather God sees into the heart (*cf.* 1 Kgs 16:7 [1 Samuel in MT]).
 1. Ruben was Jacob's first-born son, but Joseph was his favorite son, and yet it was Judas who received Jacob's blessing (Gen. 49:8-12).

2. Tamar, played the prostitute (Gen. 38:6-26), but was “more righteous” than Judas (Gen 38:26), for Judas had withheld Shelah from her out of fear that he “die like his brothers.”
 - a. Birth of Phares and Zara (Gen. 38:27-30).
Blessed Theophylact: “This account indicates a certain mystery. For just as Zara first showed his hand and then withdrew it, so, too, the life in Christ appeared in those holy ones who lived before the law...for all these were not counted as righteous by the observances of the law...but by living the evangelic life of the Gospel...But when the law came, this manner of life receded. Just as in the story, Phares was born and then Zara came forth again, so too, when the law had been given, the evangelic life later shone forth again, marked with the scarlet thread, that is, sealed with the blood of Christ.”
 3. Rahab [Rachab], was a prostitute in Jericho, a Gentile, who hid two Hebrew spies from the men of Jericho who were seeking them (full story: Josh 2:1-23, 6:16b, 21-24).
 4. Ruth, a Moabite, followed her mother-in-law out of love, becoming a “God-fearer;” according to Deut 23:3, she would not have been allowed to enter the assembly of Israel.
 - a. Boaz [Booz] does “what is right” by levirate marriage (Ruth 4:10).
 5. David was “small among [his] brothers and the youngest” (Ps “151” and 1 Kgs [1 Samuel-MT] 16:11b).
 6. *of her who had been the wife of Urias*; Bathsheba is not mentioned by name, but her husband is, whom David set up to die in battle after David impregnated her (2 Kgs [2 Sam] 11:1-27); the intentional omitting of Bathsheba’s name is to downplay her role and place the blame squarely on David (see 2 Kgs [2 Sam] 12:1-13). She may have also been a Gentile.
 - a. Solomon was not David’s first-born, but Adonijah (*cf.* 3 Kgs 1:5 *ff* [1Kgs]).
 7. See Isaiah 1:1 for list of Ozias, Joatham, Ahaz and Ezekias.
 - a. Ozias “did what was right in the sight of the Lord” (4th Kgs 15:3 [2 Kgs]), yet he did not remove the high places; he is struck with leprosy (see Isaiah 6).
 - b. Asa, Iosaphat, Ozias, Ezekias and Josias “did what was right in the sight of the Lord.”
 - c. Manasses, on the other hand, “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord,” rebuilding the high places [pagan places of worship], “multiplying evil in the sight of the Lord.”
 - d. His son Amon “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, just as his father had done” (4th Kgs 21:2-7; 19-22 [2 Kgs]).
- D. The deportation to Babylon was a crucial, catastrophic, defining moment in Judaism.
1. The city of Jerusalem was set on fire and the temple was destroyed (Ps 73, 136 and Lamentations of Jeremiah)—end of temple worship, so no more sacrifices.
 2. The king was forced to watch the murder of his sons and then was blinded and led away captive (Jer 52:8)—end of kingship.

- E. The questions raised among devout Jews were, “Is this the end? Has God now forsaken us forever? Are there any descendants of David left? Will the kingship ever be restored?”
1. None of the people listed in 3rd group are found in the OT—this is from a tradition Matthew knew.
 2. The temple and kingship will be rebuilt and restored under Herod the Great, but he is not a descendant of David.
 - a. Herod’s temple does not have the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, as it was lost. The Holy of Holies therefore is empty, until the Theotokos is brought to the temple as the true Ark.
 3. Isaiah proclaims that “a rod will come from the root of Jesse” (Is 11:1, 10). Matthew affirms this by listing these people to show that Jesus is the true descendant of David, not Herod.
 4. Psalm 88: prophetically points to Christ, after the fall of the Davidic throne (vss 39 ff) who is the *Mercy and Truth of God*, who *calmed the surging of the waves*, who *founded the earth*, the true *firstborn* of God, and the true *seed of David*, whose *throne is as the days of heaven*, whose *soul was delivered from the hand of hades*.
 - a. One of the unique psalms which ends not with “Amen” but with *yénoito*, *Let it be, let it be*, the same words the Theotokos uses to Gabriel (may want to correct your *OSB* here).
 - b. The choosing of these people “is not an afterthought in salvation history. It is what God had in mind, rather, *from the beginning* of His choices. Abraham, Isaac, David, whoever was chosen, was chosen for the sake of Christ.” (Fr. Patrick Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*).
- F. With Joseph, there is an *abrupt change* in the “formula,” *N begat N*.
1. Joseph is referred to as the *husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus....*

III. Some explanations of genealogy (1:17)

- A. Three sets of 14 generations. Is there a significance to 14? Must be important, but not sure what Matthew had in mind.
1. Hebrew consonants (there are no vowels in Hebrew) have numeric value like Roman numerals. Total number of *David* in Hebrew is 14, as d= 4; v=6; d=4. Matthew centers his genealogy around David, as he begins with Jesus, *son of David*, and ends first section with David; his 2nd section begins with David; his 3rd section ends with Jesus (*son of David*).
 2. In Numbers 33, there are 42 stages /camp sites in the journey of Israel to the Promised Land. Perhaps each person represents on stage on the journey to Christ?
 3. Blessed Theophylact writes: “ [He] divides the generations into three conditions, to show the Jews that although they were ruled by judges...and by kings...and by priests...yet it did not benefit them at all in acquiring virtue; but they were in need of the true Judge and King and Priest, Who is Christ.”

Act 1, Scene 1: A second Joseph – (most scenes end with an OT quote).

- I. Matthew's Gospel recapitulates Jewish history; Joseph, the betrothed of Mary, like OT Joseph, is the son of Jacob; both are dreamers and protectors of their family.
 - A. Mary was found (*euréthē*, think "eureka") to be with child.
 1. *being righteous* (according to Matthew's criteria), Joseph ponders what to do—betrothals could be dissolved only by legal divorce, which would bring shame or death upon the woman if she were pregnant (see Deut 22:20 ff).
 - a. Blessed Theophylact: "[Joseph] did not wish to be harsh, but in his great goodness took compassion on her, showing himself to be above the law, and already living in a manner superior to the decrees of the law."
 - B. *angel appeared to him in a dream....* (1:20-23)
 1. *Joseph, son of David*—this is the only time in the NT when *son of David* is applied to someone other than Jesus—however, *son of David* is a favorite title for Matthew, who uses it more in his account than in any other NT writer.
 2. *do not become afraid* = *mē phobēthēís*, aor mid subj, forbids an act not yet in progress.
 - a. Blessed Theophylact: "You perhaps think that she is an adulteress. But I say to you that she is 'thy wife,' that is, she has not been corrupted by anyone."
 - b. by declaring that Mary will give birth to a son, Jesus' birth confirms the truthfulness of the angel's announcement.
 - c. Angel explains that Mary is pregnant *by the Holy Spirit*; for she is the fulfillment of that *which was spoken by the Lord....*
 - i. quotes Is 7:14 (LXX)—*ē parthénos*, *the virgin*, article is present, indicating a particular virgin, with emphasis on her *virginity*; Hebrew *almah* means a "young woman;" emphasis is on her *age*.
 - ii. This "correction" of the Hebrew by the LXX is part of the reason the Church has considered the LXX divinely inspired.
 - d. *thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins*; Joseph will assume the role of father by naming the child, but he is given the name which he will name the child—a divine, and divinely given, Name.
 - i. In Isaiah (LXX), the prophet says to Ahaz, "Thou, Ahaz, will call his name Emmanuel." Matthew changes "thou" to "they;" descriptive of who Jesus is to the people.
 - e. where does angel's quote end? Greek mss do not have quotation marks. Some translations ends with vs 21; others continues through 23a. I think the quote runs through verse 23, which is what the *ONT* shows as well.
 - i. Quote from Isaiah "ends" the scene.
 - C. *Emmanuel*, a set of bookends in Matthew: *God with us* (1:23) and 28:20, *I am with you....*
 - II. Joseph, righteous and obedient, does as the angel bids him:
 - A. *took to him his wife* = *parélaven*, literally, "take to one's side; to take into your house;" but *was not knowing her until* (*éōs*)....

1. Many Evangelicals and Protestants falsely teach that Mary and Joseph had a normal sexual relationship after Jesus was born; they say that although Jesus was miraculously conceived while Mary was a virgin, Mary, Joseph and Jesus were a normal family, Jesus' "brothers and sisters" being his younger siblings—although some even go so far as to say Jesus was conceived in a normal way, but "adopted / anointed" by God as the Messiah. Some of their writings include the following:
 - a. The Free Bible Commentary.org: "These verses reaffirm a truly supernatural virgin birth [*ed* read "conception"]. They also imply that the couple had a normal married life after the birth of Jesus."
 - b. Barnes' Notes on the Bible: "the Bible does not affirm that she had no children afterward. Indeed, all the accounts in the New Testament lead us to suppose that she did have them."
 - c. Adam Clarke Commentary: "The virginity of Mary, previously to the birth of Christ, is an article... of faith: her perpetual virginity *is of no consequence*" [*italics added*].
 - d. Ben Witherington (Ashbury Theological Seminary): "Matthew 1:25...suggests Mary and Joseph did not have marital relations until after the birth of Jesus. The stories thereafter suggest Mary and Joseph, being good Jews, went on to have *numerous* children...the natural way who are rightly called Jesus' brothers and sisters" [*italics added*].

II. Orthodox teaching:

- A. *was not knowing*; imperfect tense, indicates "continuous action;" the implication being that Joseph continued not having marital relations with her even after she had given birth to Jesus.
 1. *until* (*éōs*); is a Semitic usage, does not mean that something ends when such and such happens, rather it is continues afterwards (see note in *OSB*, p. 1267). We can see this understanding clearly in the following passages:
 - a. Matt. 28:20, "I am with you all the days until (*éōs*) the end of the age"—but does that mean that after that the Lord is not with us?
 - b. From the LXX (how words are used in the LXX helps understand their meaning in the New Testament)
 - i. Ex 15:16, "May fear and trembling fall upon them...until (*éōs*) your people should pass by..."—but after that fear and trembling will no longer be on them?
 - ii. 2 Kgs 7:18b, "...that you have loved me until (*éōs*) now," but no more?
 - iii. Ps 71:7, "...righteousness will dawn and peace abound, until (*éōs*) the moon is taken away"—then righteous and peace will no longer exist?
 - iv. Ps 109:1 (most quoted Psalm in NT), "Sit on my right until (*éōs*) I make your enemies a footstool for your feet," but then you will no longer sit at my right hand?
 - iv. Ps 111:8, "Firm is his heart, he will never be afraid until (*éōs*) he looks on his enemies."
- B. From the fathers:

1. Blessed Theophylact: Joseph keeps the betrothal so Mary would “escape the notice of the devil. For the devil had heard that the Virgin would conceive, and he was keeping the Virgin under his surveillance. So that the deceiver might be deceived, Joseph betrothed the Ever-virgin, outwardly appearing to be her spouse, but not so in actual deed.”
2. St Bede: “The reason for the marriage...was the guarantee afforded by Joseph’s genealogy, the protection of Mary against stoning as an adulteress, and the concealment of the virginal birth from the evil one.”
3. St John of Damascus, “While every virgin loses her virginity in bringing forth, she [the Theotokos] was a virgin before her delivery, a virgin in her delivery, a virgin after she brought forth.”
4. Even though they are not a part of “the Fathers,” the Reformers, Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, all professed the perpetual virginity of Mary.

C. From the services:

1. “A great and wondrous mystery unfolds today: the Virgin gives birth and remains a virgin! The Word is made flesh without leaving his Father! [Great Compline]
2. “Virginity is foreign to mothers! Childbearing is strange for virgins! But in you, O Theotokos, both were accomplished! [Hymn to the Theotokos]
3. “Come, let us sing to the mother of the Savior! After childbearing she remained a virgin! [Praises of Matins]
4. “In giving birth, you preserved your virginity! In falling asleep you did not forsake the world, O Theotokos! [Troparion, Dormition]

III. *the firstborn (tón prōtótokon)*, is the legal title given to the child to indicate the heir; it does not imply that there are other younger children (see note in *OSB*, p 1365).

Chapter 2—Act II, Scene 1: The Gentiles are the first to seek Christ.

I. Setting the scene:

- A. Herod (37—4 or 1 BC?), sets scene within Jewish history.
 1. Son of a Jewish convert; was a “nominal Jew;” appointed king of Judea by the Roman Senate; not a descendant from David; a ruthless ruler who killed any threat to his kingship.
 - a. Herod executed several members of his own family—including his wife, numerous in-laws, and several sons; and 45 members of the Jewish Sanhedrin.
 - b. Caesar Augustus reportedly made a pun that he would rather be Herod’s pig (ὄφις - ἑῷος) than his son (πίος - εῷος).”
- B. *Magi from the east came to Jerusalem....*
 1. Magi (*máyoι*): Often used in a pejorative sense: “this word is translated as ‘magician’ or ‘sorcerer’ in the sense of illusionist or fortune-teller, and this is how

it is translated in all of its occurrences in the New Testament (*eg* Acts 13:6) except in Matthew’s gospel.”⁵⁸

- a. Western church fathers (*e.g.* Augustine and Jerome) translated this word as *magicians* even in Matthew—a very different imagery than “wise men” or “kings” we are used to hearing.
- b. By the 5th cent B.C., magi were identified as interpreters of omens and dreams.
- c. They were known to worship the stars, practice astrology, alchemy and magic, and were regarded as authorities in matters religious.
- d. According to our liturgical texts, they came from Babylon (not the Jew’s favorite city! – see Ps 136/137).
 - i. “Daughter Babylon drove David’s children from Sion with sword and spear. Now she sends her sons, the magi, bearing gifts, to worship in David’s city....” [Ode 8, Matins, revised]
 - ii. “Babylon plundered Sion, and captured all her royal wealth; but now, with a guiding star, Christ lures her treasure-laden magi back to Sion....” [interesting word, *lures*. – Ode 8]

II. These Gentile magicians, coming to the royal city and asking about a new *king of the Jews*, the title Herod stole, were certainly not greeted by the Welcome Wagon!

- A. As astrologers, they had noticed a new star *rising*—*anatolē*; probably not “in the east,” as a geographical location but rather *in its rising*, an astronomical expression.
 1. The Magi “did not see the star in the east, for then they would have traveled east following it, instead of west.” [Endnotes, *Orthodox New Testament*]
 2. To have seen the star “in the east” would be an unusual grammatical construction in Greek.
 3. “...we ask the heavens to send us a star, for behold, the Magi proceed from the East to the West, desiring to see the Salvation of mortal men...” Aposticha verse For the Forefeast of the Nativity.
 4. Balaam, a Gentile and prophet, an interpreter of dreams, saw divine visions at night (maybe a Magi?) and makes a prophecy about “a star *rising* out of Jacob” (Num 24:17b, part of the 2nd OT reading at Christmas vespers); in Rabbinical literature he is called “the wicked,” blind in one eye and lame in one foot—from his donkey rubbing him against the wall—a delightful story if you are unfamiliar with it (Num 22:21-35).
- B. *came to do him homage = prosekúnēsan*; to prostrate oneself before; to kiss. “The classic Eastern gesture of abasement before a superior, originally a kiss of reverence.”
 1. “St John of Damascus and the 7th Ecumenical Council specifically narrowed down the definition of *proskuneo*...as ‘veneration.’...For clarity’s sake, the Council also declared that the highest form of worship would be associated with the unambiguous word *latruo/latreia*...[which] is never used in the Scriptures in reference to anyone but God.” [*Eastern Orthodox Bible*, Introduction].

⁵⁸ Drum, W. (1910), “Magi,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: Robert Appleton Company, quoted in “Magi” in Wikipedia.

2. Although this act of the Magi does not necessarily mean that they recognized Jesus as the Incarnate God, it does mean that they at least respected him as a divinely appointed King of the Jews. The Church's liturgical readings, however, indicate that they grasped the hidden mystery: "The magi, kings from Persia, perceived without any doubt that thou wast born on the earth, O heavenly King! Drawn by the light of a star, they hurried to Bethlehem... They fell down before thee and adored thee, seeing thee, the Timeless One, lying in the cave as a little child." [Great Compline]

- C. Herod was not pleased to hear that they had come to bow down to another king, and *he was troubled*, (Herod's ego! He was referred to as "the Great!")
 1. *troubled*, from *tarássō*, means "to stir up the water of the sea; the shaking of an earthquake; agitated, restless."
 2. *all Jerusalem with him*; when Herod was unhappy, nobody in Jerusalem was happy!

III. The Jews have the answer in their scriptures.

- A. *after he gathered all the chief priests and scribes....*
 1. *gathered* is a favorite Matthean term, e.g. 13:40, 22:41, 23:37.
 2. *he kept on inquiring*, impf.; maybe in the sense of "Are you sure?"
 - a. Herod acting out his anxiety. He evidently doesn't know the Jewish scriptures.
 3. *And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written by the prophet..."*
 - a. Matthew reports what was told to Herod, a paraphrase of Micah 5:2, coming from neither the LXX nor the Hebrew.

IV. The "righteousness" of the Gentiles vs the "blindness" of the Jews.

- A. By observing the stars, these "outsiders" perceived God at work before those having the Scriptures understood what they were reading! The Jews did not know how to discern the sign of the times (*cf* Matt 16:3).
- B. The Magi understood the star: the Jews did not understand their own prophets! So, like Balaam, the Magi—these Babylonians—were more righteous than the Jews! (Matthew's emphasis on the righteousness of the Gentiles).
 1. "Thou filled the stargazers with joy, O Lord! They knew the hidden meaning of the prophet Balaam's words. Thou hast made the star of Jacob to rise. It led them, the first-fruits of the Gentiles, unto thee..." [Matins, Ode 4, revised]
- C. The Magi follow a star with determination and rejoicing; Herod, having the Scriptures, sits in Jerusalem with jealousy and hatred. The Gentiles seek the Messiah; the Jews remain unmoved.
- D. "End" of scene with OT quote.

Act II, Scene 2: A secret meeting to plot hidden treachery.

- I. Herod *secretly called the Magi, inquired carefully of them the time of the appearing star*—as if to say, “Tell me what you know and I’ll tell you what I know.”
 - A. Herod’s deception played on the magicians: *that I also might come and do homage to Him.*
 1. *having summoned / gathered* (see above)—used by Matthew especially in the Passion narrative—gives the readers of his gospel a hint of Herod’s real plan—“in his raging madness he plotted to kill Christ.” [Matins, Ode 9].

II. End of scene: the Magi depart.

Act II, Scene 3: The Magi reach their destination.

- I. *the star was going before them... and stood over where the young Child was.*
 - A. Blessed Theophylact: “Do not think this is such a star as we see, but a divine power and angelic appearing in the form of a star... This star shone even in the daylight, moved when they moved, and stood still when they rested.”
 - B. *after they came into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother.....*
 1. *the house = oikian*; although usually translated as “house,” its basic meaning is simply “a dwelling place;” therefore, the magi could have entered a cave, as in our iconography. In other words, our iconography does not contradict the Scripture.
 2. Notice the absence of Joseph in this scene—the focus is on Virgin Mother and Child (as in the carol, *Silent Night*, but the focus is not on “Round John Virgin”—an old joke).
- II. *they offered gifts... gold and frankincense and myrrh.*
 - A. these gifts represented themselves: as alchemists, they sought to turn base metal into precious gold; as teachers of religion, they offered incense to their gods; as magicians and healers, they offered myrrh, which has great healing properties.
 1. medical practitioners [in the ancient world] had recognized and documented [myrrh’s] antiseptic, anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties, prescribing [it] for everything from indigestion to chronic coughs... myrrh appears with more frequency than any other plant substance in the writings of the Greek physician Hippocrates, who revolutionized the field of medicine in the fourth and third centuries B.C. [The History Channel, *A Wise Man’s Cure: Frankincense and Myrrh*, Jennie Cohen; June 27, 2011]
 - B. St Gregory the Great: “Gold befits a king; incense is offered in sacrifice to God; the bodies of the dead are embalmed with myrrh. The magi, therefore, with their mystical gifts also preach him whom they worshipped, a king with the gold, God with the incense, a mortal with the myrrh.”

- i. John Henry Hopkins, Jr based his lyrics to *We Three Kings of Orient are* on this.
- C. “When Jesus the Lord was born in Bethlehem of Judah, magi came from the east to worship God made man. Eagerly opening their treasures, they offered precious gifts to him. Purest gold, for the King of the ages; frankincense, for the God of all; myrrh, for the Immortal One, as though he were dead three days.” [Great Compline]
 - 1. The 3 gifts listed have given rise to the idea that there were 3 magi.
 - a. Ps 71:10-11 provides the imagery “kings” coming from 3 different areas.
 - b. Isaiah 60:6b lists 2 of the gifts, although no mention of kings.

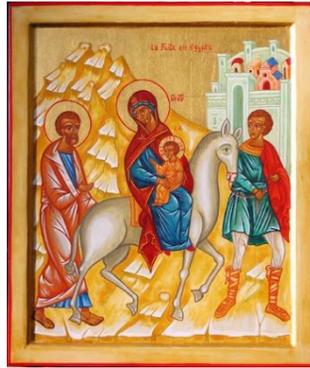
Act III, Scene 1: Two groups depart Israel

- I. *having been divinely warned...not return to Herod, they departed into their own country....*
 - A. God led the Magi by a star to Christ; he now warns them in a dream (like Balaam and Joseph?)
 - 1. The deceiver is deceived! Mocking Herod, but obeying God (being “righteous,” cf Acts 5:29), the Magi return home bypassing Jerusalem, having seen the true King they were seeking.
 - 2. Troparion: “Thy nativity, O Christ our God, has shone to the world the light of wisdom. For by it, those worshiping the stars were taught by a star to worship thee, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know thee, the *Dayspring*⁵⁹ from on high. O Lord, glory to thee!”
 - a. In the Old Testament, *Dayspring / anatolē*’ has Messianic overtones: it is usually translated as *branch* or *stem* (cf. Ode 4 in Matins); Troparion could even be translated as, *to know thee, the Branch/Stem from on high!*
- II. *Angel appears to Joseph...saying: Take the young Child and His Mother, and flee thou into Egypt.*
 - A. *appeareth...saying*: the historical present is used frequently in the gospels to add immediacy to story.
 - 1. Joseph, the NT dreamer, is told to take Jesus and Mary and go to Egypt; his OT namesake was also taken to Egypt (Gen 37:28), the repeating of Israel’s history in Jesus.
 - a. According to tradition, this journey to Egypt would have been as follows: Mary rides a donkey usually holding the baby Jesus, with Joseph either leading the donkey or following behind. James, the “brother of the Lord,” is seen either leading the donkey or following behind.
 - b. In Exodus 4:20, Moses took his wife and children back to Egypt on donkeys.

⁵⁹ *Dayspring / anatolē*’ is the translation used in *The Festal Menaion*, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, *Orthodox Hymns of Christmas*, published by the Russian Orthodox Theological Fund, and the ROCOR text. *Orient* comes from the Latin, found in the Douay-Rheims translation of Luke 1:78.

Another definition of *dayspring* is *the beginning of a new era or order of things*, which Christ comes to bring.

- c. Notice that the angel does not say, “Take *your* child and his mother.”



- B. Another set of bookends: *Herod is about to seek the little child, to destroy /apolésai him—cf. 27:20, the chief priests and elders persuaded the crowds...to utterly destroy /apolésōsin Jesus.*
- C. *Out of Egypt I called My Son*, Hos.11:1, MT used—“ends” scene.
1. according to Coptic tradition, Jesus lived in Egypt about 3 ½ years.

Act IV, Scene 1: Meanwhile, back at the ranch....

I. Herod...mocked by the Magi... slew all the male children.

- A. Another set of bookends: Herod mocked/ *enepaichthē* (2:16); Jesus mocked *enépaizon* (27:29, 31, 41).
1. a form of this verb is used in Ps 103: “dragon mocking the sea.”
 2. although the word *male* is not in the Greek, it is implied by the masculine article.

- B. *two years old or under*; many commentators (especially Western ones) say this indicates that Jesus was 2 years old when the Magi arrived, long after the shepherds were at the manger in the cave. However, Blessed Theophylact, following St. John Chrysostom says, “Since their journey would take a long time, the star appeared well before [Jesus’] birth so that they could worship Him while He was still in swaddling clothes.”

1. Our icon actually shows Magi in distance, not at the manger. By the time word got back to Herod and he realized he had been mocked, a rather lengthy period of time could have passed. Herod also may have been “hedging his bets” by setting an age limit of 2 years.

II. “End” of scene: *In Ramah a voice was heard*, Jer 31:15, MT used; [LXX=38:15].

Act IV, Scene 2: Jesus returns to Israel.

I. Recapitulation of the Exodus from Egypt.

- A. *Archelaus* ruled from maybe 1 B.C.- A.D. 6, when he was deposed by Rome because of his cruelty. For Archelaus to have “out-cruelled” his father and Rome must indicate that he was really cruel.
- B. *the region of Galilee* was a Gentile area (*cf.* 4:15, quotes Isaiah 9:1b)
 - 1. *might be fulfilled... that he will be called a Nazarene (Nazoraíos).*
 - 2. May be related to the Messianic title *Branch/Stem*, in Hebrew is *neser/ נֶזֶר* (Isaiah 11:1), or might be related to *nazir/ נזיר* a vow taken by a nazirite (see Num 6:1ff).
- C. “End” scene, although there is no exact match of this prophecy in the OT.

Summary

- I. Jesus is the longed-for Messiah of the Jewish people and the rightful heir of David the king. However, he is not just a human king, but the God/Man, “conceived by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary” as the Creed states.
- II. At the same time, Jesus, as “the seed of Abraham,” fulfills the promise that the nations would be blessed. So it is that Magi from Babylon are the first to pay him homage, the Jews being blind, even though they have the Scriptures. Jesus grows up in Nazareth, a Gentile territory, perhaps as a Nazirite like Sampson (Judges 13:5) who delivers his people out of the hands of the evil one, and he remarks that the Roman centurion has faith unlike he has seen in Israel (Matt 8:10).
- III. Jesus recapitulates the history of the Jewish people: Joseph is like the OT Joseph who is a dreamer, and a protector of his family when he becomes a prince of Egypt. So Jesus is taken into Egypt by his protector, Joseph. Like the killing of the innocent baby boys under Pharaoh, so Herod kills the innocent boys, trying to destroy Jesus.
- IV. Another “bookend: Nazareth is in Galilee; Jesus is last seen by his 11 apostles on a mountain in Galilee (28:16).
 - A. *cf* Deut 34:1,5-6, death of Moses on the mountain; God buried Moses and no one saw him again. Jesus is greater than Moses, because he died but is risen and was seen by his disciples (notice there is no mention of the ascension in Matthew).



Why 'Homage'? The Story of Epiphany

David A. Davis

What's with the "homage"? In biblical account of the Wise Men traveling to see the Child Jesus; they come to pay him homage. King Herod, so threatened by any word of a messiah tries to trick the Magi by telling them to go and search diligently so that he too, might pay him homage. What's with all the "homage"? I mean the word, "homage". It's not a word you hear every day; homage. It's fun to say. It makes the old story sound so much fancier, so much more formal, so literary, so much more biblical, homage. I have always assumed that "homage" was just an old school expression. I figured in modern bible translations "homage" was left in the story of the Wise Men because it is such a classic, old, venerated expression ... "they paid him homage". Imagine my surprise when I opened the King James and found no "homage" at all. The wise men fell down and worshipped him, but there's no "homage". The word never appears in the King James. In the 17th century, "homage" was apparently reserved for the king. "Homage" doesn't appear in English translations until the mid to late 1980's. So much for old school.

I saw "The Kings Speech" over the holiday. It's the movie about King George VI, and his ascent to the throne just as World War II was breaking out in Europe. The movie tells of the king's unique relationship with his speech therapist and the king's courage in the face of his lifelong stammer. As one could imagine with a movie about the royal family, there's a whole lot of homage going on. When the freshly minted, not yet coronated king all duded up in his royal dress comes back to see his family, they are busily packing for the move to the palace. His daughters are organizing their rocking horses when he comes around the corner expecting the kind of leg hug that every father loves from his 6 or 8 year old kids. The young Elizabeth, the one who would be queen, whispers to her sister Margaret, "curtsy". And they do, with a head bow, saying to their puzzled father, "Your royal highness". They were paying homage. There was a lot more homage in that movie than there is in the bible.

The form of the word in Greek, *proskuneo*, is translated as worship all through the gospel of Matthew. When the devil tries to tempt Jesus into falling down and worshipping him, it's the same word. After Jesus walked on the water, those in the boat worshipped Jesus. Same word as what the Magi did. And at the end of the gospel, when the disciples took hold of the feet of the Risen Christ and worshipped him, when he appeared there at the mountain where he gave the Great Commission, they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. The worship of the Risen Christ — same as the Wise Men did. Same word. Some critics of translations using the word "homage" argue that it waters down the faithful response of worship coming from the Magi. Rooted in the feudal system of a servant paying homage to a lord, or a subject paying homage to a king, the term diminishes the faith-filled transformation in the hearts of those wise men from the east who came and knelt down and worshipped the Savior, Messiah, Christ the Lord; they worshipped the new born king in their heart. They worshipped him, they didn't just pay him homage!

So what's with the "homage"? It's because Herod is in the house. Not right there in the house with Mary and Joseph, but Herod is all through the story here in Matthew. "Homage" has everything to do with Herod. Here in the second chapter of Matthew, before the story is about the Wise Men,

the story is about Herod. It's Herod's turf. Herod is all over and all around and those Wise Men traipse in there and pay homage not to Herod but to that baby; they bring royal trinkets, not to Herod but to Jesus; they kneel down and bow their head and pledge their allegiance, not to this king, but to that one. It would be like going to a Jets game and instead of standing up and cheering "JETS", you would cheer "JESUS". It would be like standing in the rotunda of the Capital building and pledging allegiance to the Son of God. It would be like standing next to the one you love before a gathering of friends and family all dressed up and pledging your lifelong vow not to one another but to the Messiah. It would be like sitting up there on Wall Street right outside the stock exchange and announcing to your colleagues that all the dividends, all the profit, all the bonus you need is right there in the manger, thank you very much.

When Herod is in the house, "homage" doesn't water down the transformation of the heart. It raises the stakes. Surrounded by Herod on all sides, and in every way, the Wise Men weren't kneeling before the Child Jesus to air their piety. They were pledging their lives. When one is surrounded every day, on all sides, and in every way by Herod, by the world that Herod represents; power, wealth and authority; "homage" is pretty much an everyday thing; an everyday decision; and everyday choice. It becomes a way of life. When Herod is in the house, it's all about the homage. It's not so old school after all.

huffingtonpost.com/david-a-davis/homage.

10. Orthodox view of Mary.

THE EVER-VIRGINITY OF THE THEOTOKOS⁶⁰

If we exclude the case of Tertullian and Helvetius,⁶¹ the consistent tradition of the early Fathers and writers has been to call the Mother of the Lord “ever-virgin....

In contrast with the early Reformers (notably Luther and Calvin) who maintained the view that Mary did not have children with Joseph, most modern Protestants seem quite eager to affirm the very opposite; that Mary did have a normal marital life with Joseph, and the James ‘the Lord’s brother’ was indeed our Lord’s younger brother in the full sense of the word.

THREE VIEWS

The so-called **Epiphanian view** (named after St. Epiphanius) is the traditional position of Eastern Orthodoxy and the preferred exegesis of the Greek Fathers. It holds that the brothers and sisters of the Lord are most probably children of Joseph by a previous marriage and other close relatives such as cousins.

The **Helvetian view** (named after Helvetius, Jerome’s opponent in the controversy) is that of most Evangelicals and Protestants: it claims that the brothers and sisters mentioned in the New Testament are children which Joseph had with Mary subsequent to the birth of Jesus.

Finally, the **Jeromian view**⁶² is named after St. Jerome who did not accept the idea that the “brothers and sisters” could have been children of Joseph (whose virginity he sought to uphold). Instead, he proposed an interpretation of the Scriptural data which concluded that the “brothers and sisters” were in fact close cousins. This is the position endorsed by the Roman Catholics.

DOGMAS AND CONVICTIONS

From an Eastern Orthodox perspective, it is important to understand that the Orthodox Faith does not include Marian dogmas as such: even the dogmatic title ‘Theotokos’ belongs to the realm of Christology, not ‘Mariology’: it is a soteriological dogma about the nature of Christ, not about his mother... Within an Eastern Orthodox context, these should be considered as “ecclesial convictions”: the Church is convinced that these things are true...but these truths, although precious, do not belong to the essence of the gospel....

The argumentation in favor of the Helvedian/Protestant view rests on what seems to be the most natural reading of the text, especially from a modern mindset and considered in a translated version....

...in light of recent attempts by Protestant apologists to establish a rule of Greek construction to the effect that ἕως [éōs] would always imply a reversal, it is especially important to realize that both Chrysostom and Origen (who rejected the reversal idea) were intimately conversant with

⁶⁰ An edited version taken from “Appendix E: Mark 6:3—The ‘Brothers’ of the Lord,” *Eastern Orthodox Bible*, Laurent Cleenewerck, 2007-2008. Footnotes below are included in the original article.

⁶¹ neither of which were saints or Fathers

⁶² also called the Hieronymian view

Greek in its manifold forms,⁶³ especially that of the Septuagint and of the New Testament. If ἔως always meant reversal for native Greek speakers, this would have been known to all and their arguments would have been absurd....

At this point, we can see that there are no direct, unambiguous reason [*sic*] that forces the biblical student to conclude that Joseph and Mary had other children. Indeed, no one in Scripture is called son or daughter of Mary except Jesus Christ himself...

One of England's finest scholars, Richard Bauckham⁶⁴ offered a comprehensive of [Mark 6:3]...When "son of Mary" is used...[he] contends that calling Jesus by his mother's name...indicates that locally, there was knowledge that Jesus was to be distinguished from his "step brothers and sisters" because the locals knew that these...had different mothers.

...we should consider the age relationship between Jesus and his most prominent *adelphos* ["brother"]: James. The Helvedian view would require that Joseph and Mary would have had six to seven children including Jesus, and that James would have been Jesus' 'younger brother.' Not only is this perspective improbably practically and culturally, it is also contradicted by at least one indication that James was older than Jesus. Although neither Hegesippus not [*sic*] Eusebius specifically addressed James' age at his martyrdom in 62 AD, Epiphanius (+403) suggested that he was ninety-two year [*sic*] old. However, James would have had to be less than 62-64 years old at his death for the Helvedian view to be tenable.

EARLY CHRISTIAN WITNESS

Writing in the middle of the second century, Origen was aware of at least two pre-existing texts which affirmed the Epiphanian view: The so-called Infancy Gospel of James⁶⁵ and the Gospel of Peter⁶⁶....Origen and the Greek Fathers after him felt that the story presented by the *Protoevangelium of James* represented a most likely account, especially on theological grounds....This account makes perfect theological sense and is accepted by Orthodox Christians as worthy of their pious belief.

SUMMARY

The same Fathers who discerned the canon of the New Testament, read Greek natively and left us a model of reverence for the biblical text are the same Fathers who called the mother of our Lord not only 'Theotokos' (bearer of the divine one) but also 'Aeiparthenos' (ever-virgin). Indeed, not a single Father or Council ever interpreted the Scriptures to teach that the Mother of the Savior, who is the very icon of the Church, had more than one biological child.

* * *

⁶³ Attic, Koine, LXX

⁶⁴ Pr. Bauckman has adopted the Epiphanian view which is the preferred view in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

⁶⁵ Protoevangelium of James 9:2; 17:1-2; 18:1

⁶⁶ Gospel of Peter (acc. to Origen. Comm. on Matt. 10:17)

MARY: “HIGHER THAN THE CHERUBIM...”
THE ORTHODOX CHURCH’S TEACHING CONCERNING THE THEOTOKOS

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the Word*, pp. 83-87:

It is significant that whereas in the West Mary is primarily the *Virgin*, a being almost totally different from us in her absolute and celestial purity and freedom from all carnal pollution, in the East she is always referred to and glorified as *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, and virtually all icons depict her with the Child in her arms. There exists, in other words, two emphases in Mariology, which, although they do not necessarily exclude one another, lead to two different visions of Mary’s place in the Church. And the difference between them must be kept in mind if we want to understand the experience of the veneration of Mary which has always been that of the Orthodox Church. We hope to show that this is not so much a specific ‘cult of Mary,’ as a light, a joy, proper to the whole life of the Church. In her, says an Orthodox hymn, ‘all creation rejoices.’

But what is this joy about? Why, in her own words, shall ‘all generations call me blessed’? Because in her love and obedience, in her faith and humility, she accepted to be what from all eternity all creation was meant and created to be: the temple of the Holy Spirit, the *humanity* of God. She accepted to give her body and blood—that is, her whole life—to be the body and blood of the Son of God, to be *mother* in the fullest and deepest sense of this word, giving her life to the Other and fulfilling her life in Him. She accepted the only true nature of each creature and all creation: to place the meaning, and therefore, the fulfillment of her life in God....

[Mary’s] response is total obedience in love; not obedience *and* love, but the wholeness of the one as the totality of the other... True obedience is thus true love for God, the true response of Creation to its Creator. Humanity is full humanity when it is this response to God, when it becomes the movement of total self-giving and obedience to Him... This is why the whole creation, the whole Church—and not only women—find the expression of their response and obedience to God in Mary the Woman, and rejoice in her. She stands for all of us....

Tradition calls Mary the new *Eve*. She did what the first Eve failed to do. Eve failed to be a woman. She took the initiative. She ‘proposed,’ and she became ‘female’—the instrument of procreation, ‘ruled over’ by man... But Mary ‘took no initiative.’ In love and obedience she expected the initiate of the Other. And when it came, she accepted it, not blindly—for she asked, ‘how shall this be?’—but with the whole lucidity, simplicity and joy of love....

Mary is the *Virgin*. But this virginity is not a negation... it is the fullness and the wholeness of love itself. It is the totality of her self-giving to God... At the end the Church will be presented to Christ as a ‘chaste virgin’ (2 Cor. 11:2). For virginity is the goal of all genuine love—not as absence of ‘sex,’ but as its complete fulfillment in love... The Orthodox Church, by celebrating the... feasts of Mary... reveals... a real faithfulness to the Bible, for the meaning of these feasts lies precisely in their recognition of the Virgin Mary as the *goal* and the *fulfillment* of the whole history of salvation, of that history of love and obedience, of response and expectation. The Orthodox Church rejects the dogma of the Immaculate Conception precisely because it makes Mary a miraculous ‘break’ in this long and patient growth of love and expectation....

Mary is the *Mother*. Motherhood is the fulfillment of womanhood because it is the fulfillment of love as obedience and response. It is by giving herself that loves gives life, becomes the source of life...The joyful mystery of Mary's motherhood is thus not opposed to the mystery of her virginity. It is the same mystery. She is not mother 'in spite' of her virginity. She reveals the fullness of motherhood because her virginity is the fullness of love.

She is the *Mother of Christ*. She is the fullness of love accepting the coming of God to us—giving life to Him who is the Life of the world. And the whole creation rejoices in her, because it recognizes through her that the end and fulfillment of all life, of all love *is to accept Christ*....



Fr. Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, pp. 192-194:

The Orthodox Church does not accept the Latin system of arguments concerning original sin. In particular, the Orthodox Church, confessing the perfect personal immaculateness and perfect sanctity of the Mother of God, whom the Lord Jesus Christ by His birth from her made to be more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim—has not seen and does not see any ground for the establishment of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in the sense of the Roman Catholic interpretation....

On the one hand, we see that God did not deprive mankind, even after its fall, of His grace-giving gifts...on the other hand, in accordance with the teaching of Sacred Scripture, in Adam all mankind tasted the forbidden fruit. Only the God-Man Christ begins with Himself the new mankind, freed by Him from the sin of Adam...He is the 'new Adam.' The Most Holy Virgin was born as subject to the sin of Adam together with all mankind, and with him [*i.e.*, mankind] she shared the need for redemption...The pure and immaculate life of the Virgin Mary up to the Annunciation by the Archangel, her freedom from personal sins, was the fruit of the union of her spiritual labor upon herself and the abundance of grace that was poured out upon her....



Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church, New Edition*, pp.258-259:

Orthodox honour Mary, not only because she is *Theotokos*, but because she is *Panagia*, All-Holy. Among all God's creatures, she is the supreme example of synergy or cooperation between the purpose of the deity and human freedom. God, who always respects our liberty of choice, did not wish to become incarnate without the willing consent of His Mother. He waited for her voluntary response: 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be as you have said' (Luke i, 38). Mary could have refused; she was not merely passive, but an active participant in the mystery....



Matthew the Poor (*Matta el Meskin*, a Coptic monk), *The Communion of Love*, pp. 42-43:

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your saying." (Lk 1:38)

We tend to pass over her words without pondering over them and so miss their depth. The Virgin here is taking a firm and decisive stand with respect to herself, the world, and God. She believed the annunciation of the angel and perceived that it was a heavenly proclamation that she had indeed been chosen to bear in her womb a child begotten by God without human seed...When Mary believed this she gave herself to God as His handmaid, or slave, in the sense that she committed herself totally to Him, body, soul and spirit. By this commitment, which took the form almost of an oath or everlasting covenant, the Virgin consecrated her whole life to God after the mystery had taken place in her...she became the supreme example of purity, and as far as God was concerned, she became a slave, completely owned by Him and living for Him alone.

We cannot overlook the feelings and emotions that were shared by the Virgin Mother and the Holy One who was born her son. The Virgin gave all her love and affection as a mother to the Christ she bore, and Christ reciprocated as her son with the same emotions and affection, showing her obedience, as the Gospel says.⁶⁷ It is true that she was a handmaid, but the handmaid of God became the mother of the Son of God, through her vow of total submission and obedience, the mother remained a handmaid.⁶⁸

When the Virgin understood clearly through the annunciation that she was to become the mother of the Holy One, the Son of God, she vowed that she would be a handmaid of God all her life. How different from Adam and Eve, who refused the word of God and deliberately and willfully ate of the food that God had forbidden them, intending to become like God Himself. The Virgin, by her words of commitment—‘Behold, the handmaid of the Lord...’—took Adam and Eve back to their state before the fall. Adam and Eve rejected the living and life-giving word of God and so the sentence of death was passed on them. The Virgin accepted the Word of God, the Word of life, and He entered into her and removed from her the curse of death...The Virgin’s words...reveal her determination to go back before the fall and openly repudiate the sin of Adam and Eve.

The Virgin is here a fine *model*⁶⁹ of the person to whom the Holy Spirit has granted the indwelling of the Word of God. That person is able to return through humility to eternal life, to the state of man before the fall...and it will always be through our humility alone that we shall mysteriously be fitted to partake of union with God.

The Virgin Mary represents a human experience that succeeded in plumbing the depths of union with God through supreme purity that became hers through the Word. She took purity from God and He took from her a body. The Virgin thus became a pattern of union with God....



Fr. Thomas Hopko states that for the Orthodox, Mary is the great *example*, not the great *exception!*



⁶⁷ [editor – cf. Lk 2:51a.]

⁶⁸ The Virgin, and with her the whole human race, is here elevated through the glory of motherhood, for she transformed our servitude into a way for us to receive and bear the Word of God in us.

⁶⁹ italics added.

My comments on the Nicene Creed:

The Orthodox Church, keeping the original Greek text of the Creed, confesses that Jesus “was incarnate of the Holy Spirit **and** the Virgin Mary [σαρκωθέντα ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου καὶ (**and**) Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου].

The Latin confession translated this as: *et incarnátus est de Spíritu Sancto **ex (from)** María Virgine*. Perhaps this was a scribal error, writing **ex** (from) instead of **et** (and); nevertheless, **ex** is the standard text.

The Greek clearly shows the synergy between God and Mary, whereas the Latin makes Mary a passive agent in the Incarnation.

In 1979, the International Committee on English Texts (made up of Roman and Protestant members) translated this phrase as: “**by the power** of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate **from** the Virgin Mary” (emphasis added). Many have interpreted this to mean that Jesus was conceived just like any other child by Mary and Joseph, but “by the power” of the Holy Spirit, he received the “Christ-consciousness!” Both Mary and Jesus are really passive participants! In 1988, this was revised by the English Language Liturgical Consultation to read as the Greek: “was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,” but the ICET text still remains in many Western liturgical texts.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ e.g, Traditional Catholic prayers, Marquette.edu/faith/prayers-nicene; Episcopal Church’s 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*; both Rome and the Episcopal Church have made the English Language Liturgical Consultation text available in supplemental materials.



11. The meaning of the Nativity icon.



ICONS are not simply religious pictures, but they are a visual proclamation of the Gospel—the Scriptures are the written word, icons are the visual word. Their primary purpose is to express the theology, the teaching of the Church, rather than just portray a historical event. There is a set “rule” which Orthodox icons must adhere to: the iconographer (literally, a “writer” of an icon) must be an Orthodox Christian who is regular in attendance in Church, receiving the Holy Mysteries of Confession and Eucharist, regular in prayer and fasting; and the iconographer is limited as to how much of his/her own expression can be put into an icon. Orthodox icons therefore are very different than Western art work often seen in churches, which tend to be realistic and often times, sensual.

The Virgin Mary is in the center, reclining on a blanket, resting, having given birth. She is usually pictured wearing blue covered in brownish red (blue in iconography represents humanity, and red, divinity). Mary's humanity is clothed with divinity—what Orthodox call “theosis,” becoming divine by grace. She is actually the largest person in the icon, being the Theotokos [“God-bearer”] or the Mother of God. It was only with her “Let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38) that God the Son was able to become a human being for our salvation.

Somewhat surprisingly, Mary's gaze is not upon her Son, which we might expect, and is common in most Western pictures; rather, she is looking away, maybe at Joseph. The fathers of the Church offer two explanations of this: (1) God told Moses: “No one shall see my face and live” (Ex 33:20), so, in humility, Mary turns away so as not to look directly upon the face of “the eternal God” [if enlarged, one would see the Greek letters in Jesus' halo, O Ω N, which mean “the Existing One,” or “I AM,” the name of God given to Moses (Ex 3:14)]; and (2) Mary looks at Joseph, perhaps interceding for him in prayer, as she is our “...constant advocate before the Creator...[who] always protect those who honor” her, and Joseph certainly honored her.

Jesus is also in the center, in a dark cave which the earth offers, “wrapped in white swaddling clothes, lying in the manger,” the “sign” given to the shepherds by the angel (Lk 2:12). On either side of his head, the Greek letters IC XC appear, which is the abbreviation of Jesus Christ in Greek. The manger also looks like a coffin, which prefigures him being wrapped in a shroud and buried in a tomb, carved in a rock. The darkness of the cave reminds us that, according to tradition, Jesus was born at night; that he was born into the darkness of a fallen world as the “new Adam;” and the darkness of the cave foreshadows the tomb.

Jesus is also not portrayed as a baby as in Western pictures, but as a little man, symbolizing that from birth, he was the “Wisdom, Word and Power of God” (*cf* 1 Cor 1:24), the “very stamp of God's nature,⁷¹ upholding the universe by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3).

An **angel** announces the birth to the shepherds while the **angelic choir** sings, “Glory to God,” while keeping watch over the Lord. Thus heaven is joined to earth, and angels converse with human beings.

The **shepherds**—the humble of the land—both young and old (with a horn-playing shepherd, trumpeting the joy of the gospel), represent that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise made to David (a shepherd—Ps88/89:36-37; 131/132:11; 77/78:70-72)⁷² and the birth of the Great Shepherd of the New Covenant (*cf* Heb 13:20).

The **Magi (wise men)** on horseback, journeying with the star, represent the nations. The Magi are three different ages, a young man, an adult and an elder, representing the three stages of a human being. The horses are also of different colors, representing the different races of the nations (the Church, being catholic, means among other things, that all races are now blessed by God, not just the Hebrews).

⁷¹ RSV translation; literally, the impress of God's hypostasis.

⁷² The Psalm numberings indicate the Psalm according to the Greek text/according to the Hebrew text. The Greek text numbering is usually a number less than the Hebrew. For most English Bibles, the Hebrew number is what is used in the Psalms.

The **Star** gives its light over Jesus (“the heavens offers a star”)—if there are 3 rays coming from the star, which symbolizes the Holy Trinity.

The **ox and donkey** are the first to understand the mystery of the Incarnation (see Isaiah 1:3); according to the fathers, they represent both the people of Israel and the Gentiles. The sheep represent Jesus as both the Lamb of God and the Good Shepherd.

At the bottom of the icon are other illustrations of a theological nature:

On the bottom left is **Joseph**, portrayed as an older man, as according to the Church’s tradition, he was a widower and much older than Mary. He stands off from Jesus and his mother, indicating that he was not the biological father of Jesus. He is still trying to understand what has happened (perhaps calling to remembrance his struggle mentioned in Matt 1:18-20) and he represents everyone struggling to accept that which is beyond human reason, that the eternal God appears as a little Child! The liturgical texts read, “We cannot fathom this mystery. We can only believe, and give glory with you, O Virgin Theotokos: O Lord, beyond all explanation, glory to you!”

An **old man** (dressed somewhat like a shepherd), is seen talking to Joseph. He symbolizes the “father of lies,” who whispers in our ears demonic suggestions and thoughts. He is the only person in the icon who is seen in profile as opposed to being portrayed full faced, implying that he is hiding something, not being fully honest. He is supporting himself with a cane, showing his frailness before the Lord.

He may also represent the earliest heresies which taught that Jesus was not truly a full human being like us, or that he was not truly God, but a creature.

The **midwives** (found in the *Protoevangelium of James*) bathe the newborn Jesus in a chalice-shaped basin representing the Mysteries of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. In the Orthodox Church, the baptismal font is shaped like a chalice, and everyone receives the Body and Blood of Christ from the chalice at Holy Communion.

This scene of Jesus being bathed and swaddled in the manger proclaims a very important Biblical understanding found in Ezekiel concerning the lack of care given to the “unwanted” child. God, speaking to Ezekiel about lawless Jerusalem, says:

“On the day you were born they did not bind your breasts, nor were you washed in water. Neither were you...wrapped in swaddling cloths. Nor did my eye pity you to do any one of these things for you...but you were cast out into the open field...”

But later, God says,

“I entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine” says the Lord. “Then I washed you in water...I clothed you...I dressed you...” (Ezekiel 16:4-5a 8c-10)

Thus Jesus being washed and swaddled is the sign that he is the beloved of God and man.



