

## Section 102

# Jesus' Early Life

## The Nativity

### The Birth of Jesus

Luke builds the story of the shepherds and the birth at Bethlehem, the latter seemingly only because the prophets had said the Messiah would come from the house of David and Mary came from Galilee. He had to make up a story as to why they would be in Bethlehem for the birth. He hit upon the idea of a census, but unfortunately, in trying to be convincing, got his dates muddled. Quirinius became Governor of Syria in 6 BC, Herod had died by around 4 BC and the idea of a 'world' tax which involved non-Roman citizens was a bit preposterous. In any case a woman did not count in those days and there would have been no need for her to have gone along. Josephus was perhaps more correct when he suggested that it was Cyrenius who was more interested in knowing what taxable resources he had acquired when Judea was added to his Syrian Province in 6 BC. (see section 101)

*LUKE 2.1 to 2.40*

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirin'i-us was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

### The coming of the shepherds

Luke also is the only one telling of the coming of the Shepherds

*LUKE 2:8 to 2:20*

And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

## The Circumcision

In accordance with Jewish custom Mary had to go to the Temple to be purified and for Jesus to be circumcised and given his name.

*LUKE 2:21 to 2:24*

And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons."

Luke also tells the story of Simeon and gives us the Nunc Dimittis.

*LUKE 2:25 to 2:38 [Q101-14]*

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel."

And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanu-el, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

## The Magi

Matthew tells a very different tale and he too places the birth in Bethlehem for the same reason.

*MATTHEW 2.1 to 2.18 [Q101-14]*

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.' "

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it

stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

King Herod the Great died in the year 4 BC. After his death the realm was divided between his sons: Herod Archelus became king of Judea and Samaria and Galilee, the northern part of the kingdom, was jointly ruled by his two sons Herod Antipas and Philip the Tetrarch.

#### *MATTHEW 2:19 to 2:23*

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

The story of the Magi does not seem to really fit with the story of the Nativity although it does provide an explanation as to why Joseph and Mary relocated to Nazareth after the birth. It is St Luke who placed the Annunciation in Nazareth (see section 101) but other evidence points to Mary as coming from Jerusalem. Perhaps a better explanation of the story of the Magi will be found after Jesus' death and resurrection (see section 604)

## Genealogy

Matthew attempts to provide a 'family tree' of Jesus, tracing him back through three cycles of 14 generations to Abraham

#### *MATTHEW 1 1-17*

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Ammin'adab, and Ammin'adab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Bo'az by Rahab, and Bo'az the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uri'ah, and Solomon the father of Rehobo'am, and Rehobo'am the father of Abi'jah, and Abi'jah the father of Asa, and Asa the father of Jehosh'aphat, and Jehosh'aphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzzi'ah, and Uzzi'ah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezeki'ah, and Hezeki'ah the father of Manas'seh, and Manas'seh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josi'ah, and Josi'ah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to

Babylon.

And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoni'ah was the father of She-al'ti-el, and She-al'ti-el the father of Zerub'babel, and Zerub'babel the father of Abi'ud, and Abi'ud the father of Eli'akim, and Eli'akim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eli'ud, and Eli'ud the father of Elea'zar, and Elea'zar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

Mark ignores the birth and family entirely and Luke provides a table similar to that of Matthew but leading back to Adam. He mentions Mary and Joseph but however he makes it plain that Joseph was not Jesus' natural father and hence the genealogies are somewhat pointless. He also destroys his explanation that Jesus was the son of God because having traced him, through Joseph back to Adam, he defines Adam as the son of God.

*LUKE 3 23-38*

Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jan'na-i, the son of Joseph, the son of Mattathi'as, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Nag'ga-i, the son of Ma'ath, the son of Mattathi'as, the son of Sem'e-in, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, the son of Jo-an'an, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerub'babel, the son of She-al'ti-el, the son of Neri, the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elma'dam, the son of Er, the son of Joshua, the son of Elie'zer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eli'akim, the son of Me'le-a, the son of Menna, the son of Mat'tatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Bo'az, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, the son of Ammin'adab, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Serug, the son of Re'u, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Ca-i'nan, the son of Arphax'ad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Maha'lale-el, the son of Ca-i'nan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

John on the other hand places Jesus in a mystical context

*JOHN 1 1-5*

WHEN ALL THINGS BEGAN, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was. The Word, then, was with God at the beginning, and through him all things came to be; no single thing was created without him. All that came to be was alive with his life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never quenched it.