



Robert Campin, Annunciation Triptych (Merode Altarpiece), ca. 1427–1432, oil on oak, 64.5 x 117.8 cm, The Met Museum, New York. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

# MATTHEW 1; LUKE 1

COME, FOLLOW ME: NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

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The sacred account of the Lord's birth is found only in Luke's Gospel. Luke's account has Mary as the main character (with the angel Gabriel, Zacharias, Elisabeth, the shepherds, Simeon, and Anna as supporting figures). Mary receives an angelic visitation and prophesies. Matthew's Gospel, however, describes Mary and Joseph's betrothal and then skips ahead to Jesus as a toddler. Contrasting Luke, Matthew paints Joseph as the main character and the receiver of divine dreams (with the magi and Herod in secondary roles).

## **Lk 1:1–4. Luke's Parallel Structure of John the Baptist and Jesus**

Luke begins and ends his Gospel in the Holy City on the Holy Mount. Luke begins not only at the Jerusalem temple but also with a priest and priestess, Zacharias and Elisabeth (Lk 1:5–25; 56–79). Connections with the temple and its symbolism dominate both Matthew's and Luke's Nativity narratives.

Luke was a gentile convert to Christianity, a beloved companion and physician to the Apostle Paul. (Luke is mentioned by name in Col 4:14; Phlm 1:24; and 2 Tim 4:11. We also see that he joins Paul in some travels because he includes phrases like “we went” [see Act 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–37; 28:1–16]. Many scholars think he was from the city of Antioch in ancient Syria.) Luke writes in the best Greek in the New Testament. His second volume, the book of Acts, is written with even more skill than his Gospel, probably because he is not constrained by his source materials that follow much of Mark and Matthew (see table 1 in the Introduction). Greek scholars have carefully compared Mark’s and Luke’s similar passages and found that Luke refines Mark’s juvenile Greek. Mark writes in more of a stream-of-consciousness storytelling style, which Luke polishes into an organized structure with better educated Greek.

Luke probably writes for a Greek audience to defend Christianity. He adds the evidence that portrays Christians as law-abiding people who pay their taxes to Rome. He also demonstrates how Christianity is the logical outgrowth of Judaism—one of the few legal religions of the empire. The logic follows that if Judaism is legal, then Christianity should be too. He writes at a time when Christians are being persecuted for their beliefs. Throughout his two volumes he gives repeated examples to Theophilus that Christians should be protected under the legal system.

Luke organizes his account into parallel stories—either opposites (like a rich man followed by a poor widow in chapter 21) or complements (as in the parable of a woman’s lost coin and the man’s lost son in chapter 15). Luke’s Gospel begins with a classical Greek prologue (1:1–4) and then changes styles for his narrative.

Luke creates parallel episodes of John the Baptist’s and Jesus’s birth. Luke carefully organizes the nativity narratives of John and Jesus side-by-side for easier comparison. The two stories are organized to show Jesus’s supremacy. Whereas John the Baptist’s family is described as Old Testament upright prophets, Luke intentionally highlights Jesus’s birth narrative to show that He is more than a man, more than a prophet: He was Jehovah, the great Creator of the World, the Son of God. In fact, Luke uses that title, “Son of God,” for Jesus seven times (which we find he uses often for its symbolic meaning of whole, complete or perfect). The nativity narratives act as a bridge between the old and new covenants.

*Table 1. Comparison of John the Baptist and Jesus birth narratives in Luke*

<b>John the Baptist</b>	<b>Jesus</b>
Annunciation by Gabriel (1:5–25)	Annunciation by Gabriel (1:26–38)
Elisabeth’s greeting to Mary (1:39–45)	Mary’s greeting at Elisabeth’s home (1:46–56)
Birth (1:57–58)	Birth narrative and angelic declaration (2:1–20)
Circumcision, naming (1:59–63)	Circumcision, naming (2:21); presentation at the temple (2:24)
Destiny declared by Zacharias (1:64–79)	Destiny declared by Simeon and Anna (2:29–38)
Conclusion (1:80)	Conclusion (2:39–40)



**1:1–4. “from the beginning were eyewitnesses.”** Luke acknowledges that he was not present when the events described in his Gospel took place but that his information came from those who were. We assume that Luke interviewed Mary as an important eyewitness during the time they were both in Ephesus for a couple of years on Paul’s third apostolic mission. Historical tradition from the fifth century places Mary near Ephesus living with her adopted son, the Apostle John.<sup>1</sup>

## **Lk 1:5–25. Scene 1: Annunciation to Zacharias in the Temple**

**1:5. “In the days of Herod, the king of Judaea.”** While Herod came from three Semitic lines (he was half Idumean and Nabatean and feigned allegiance to the Jewish law of Moses), it was his Roman citizenship and ambition that propelled him into political power. In 40 BC, the Roman Senate appointed Herod the Great as king of the Jews, but the Jews rigorously fought his position for three years. In 37 BC, Herod crushed the Jews into submission to control Palestine. His jealous and brutal reign caused his Jewish subjects to detest his leadership. History remembers his reign most for his paranoid jealousy (which led him to murder thousands) and his grandiose building projects.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to this despised king (and the Roman Caesar in Lk 2:1), another king is introduced. Luke announces this king through the voices of a priest and priestess, Zacharias and Elisabeth, in the sanctuaries of the temple and in their home.<sup>3</sup>

**1:6–7. “they were both righteous before God.”** Luke restates Zacharias and Elisabeth’s goodness three times in order to counter the societal and even religious assumption of the time that infertility was God’s punishment for sin. This assumption was prevalent even though many noble Old Testament mothers were barren, including Sarai or Sarah, Rachel, Samson’s mother, and Hannah.<sup>4</sup> These barren women connect the New Testament infancy narrative with the Old Testament patriarchal narratives of Israel. Elisabeth and John the Baptist fit the pattern of many past prophets and their mothers. As fore-ordained, “all these things were types of things to come” (Mosi 13:31; see also Hos 12:10). Luke teaches his readers that the origins of John the Baptist (and Jesus in the next scene) involve a new creation or a restoration of the covenant made with the patriarchs.

**1:9. “the custom of the priest’s office, his lot was to burn incense.”** The book of Numbers<sup>5</sup> explains that priests served in the temple from age thirty to age fifty (Num 4:3, 23, 35). In Exodus 29, Aaron and his descendants were told to wash, anoint, and consecrate or purify themselves before they serve in the tabernacle. After they washed, they donned special white linen temple clothes within the precincts (Lev 16:3–4). They were also to repent and purify their actions and words (Ezk 44:17–27). As with most religious things, there is symbolism behind the priestly clothing. It replaced the daily garb to figuratively transport the priest from this world to heaven.

The priests served in Herod’s temple five weeks a year (one week for each pilgrimage—Passover, Pentecost, and Feast of the Tabernacles—plus two other weeks each year). Each morning before dawn and again in the early afternoon, the priests gathered in “the Hall of Polished Stones” to assign the daily temple

assignments by lot.<sup>6</sup> The privilege to light the incense within the sanctuary was given only once in a lifetime.<sup>7</sup> This is Zacharias's most sacred day of temple service. The incense symbolized Israel's accepted prayers and was the most solemn part of the day's service.<sup>8</sup> Performing this intercessory act and assisting the one chosen to perform it were the few times in his life that a priest entered the sanctuary, or holy place.<sup>9</sup> It was there, near the veil, that the angel Gabriel came to make his announcement to Zacharias.<sup>10</sup>

**1:11–21. “there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord.”** Five angelic birth annunciations are recounted in the Bible, announcing the births of Ishmael, Isaac, Samson, John the Baptist, and Jesus. In each annunciation, the angel begins by saying “fear not,” then calls the addressee by name, prophesies the birth of a son, and often gives the baby's name and a sign.<sup>11</sup>

**1:22. “he could not speak.”** When Zacharias<sup>12</sup> finally came out of the holy place, those at the temple were waiting to offer the priestly benediction, but “he could not speak unto them.” His silence was a louder witness of his vision than his voice would have been. The word the King James Version renders as “speechless” in Greek can refer to both deafness and dumbness, which appears to be Zacharias's case from the information we receive later (Lk 1:62).

**1:24. “Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months.”** Elisabeth, like Sarah, feels God's grace in answering her prayers for a child. Her heartfelt rejoicing after decades of humiliation is kept inside her home since the culture encouraged women to stay indoors most of the time.<sup>13</sup>

## **Lk 1:26–39. Scene 2: Annunciation of Jesus**

**1:26. “The angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth.”** Galilee was a little, relatively unknown rocky town on a hill in the middle of Galilee. The roots of its name mean “branch.” Archeologists estimate the population was only a few hundred people at the time. Only in the Book of Mormon does a prophecy foretell that the virgin mother of the Messiah will be from Nazareth (1 Ne 11:13, 21).

**1:27. “to a virgin espoused to a man.”** When a Jewish child turned twelve, they were considered a minor. At that important age of twelve, a girl was legally old enough to marry (though we find examples from this time when couples were married at age ten). Once the minors were twelve-and-a-half years old, they were considered legal adults and had to pay taxes. Most fathers or guardians tried to have their daughters betrothed before twelve and a half because after that day, “she may exercise right of refusal four or five times” in the selection of her husband.<sup>14</sup>

Jewish espousal, *mnésteuó* (“to betroth”), was more binding than a modern engagement. Marriages were usually arranged within the same village and socioeconomic class and sometimes within extended families.<sup>15</sup> Jewish girls could marry anyone within the tribe of Israel. However, it was best for young men descending from Aaron to marry within their tribe of Aaron, or Levi, to keep the priesthood lines pure. After the couple's fathers or guardians arranged the marriage and agreed on a purchase price, a public ceremony

was held in which the fathers or guardians of the couple wrote out a marriage contract.<sup>16</sup> This made the betrothal more than an engagement or celebration. Even though the couple was not to share bed and board yet, the vows were as binding as a marriage and could only be broken by divorce or widowhood.<sup>17</sup>

Everyone within the Roman Empire was subject to Caesar Augustus's laws that encouraged family growth. He imposed a tax for unmarried females over twenty and unmarried males over twenty-five. Furthermore, if a woman of childbearing age was divorced or widowed and had not delivered five children, she had the legal responsibility to marry again within two years and have children—or pay a penalty tax.<sup>18</sup>

Jewish couples' first marriage usually took place a year after the betrothal (or when maturation occurred).<sup>19</sup> The groom's family hosted a second celebration where the couple repeated their marriage vows under a *chuppah*, or canopy.<sup>20</sup> A feast followed the ceremony. Depending on the family's means, the wedding celebration could last for days (see Joel 2:16; John 2:2–10).

Because couples married so young, they often lived with the groom's family for a few years. Most often the teenage bride learned how her mother-in-law cooked and kept the house. If all went well, the mother-in-law was also present to help with the couple's first child. Once the couple could afford their own place, they often moved next door or within the same village.<sup>21</sup>

**1:27. “the virgin’s name was Mary.”** Mary's name in Hebrew is Miriam, like the great prophetess and older sister of Moses (Ex 15:20), and it was a popular name among the Jews. This Mary is the most famous of the seven Marys mentioned in the New Testament. Luke emphasizes Mary's chastity in his word choice, using *parthenos* (“virgin”), not merely *pais* (“girl”) or *paidiske* (“maid”). Many assume that Mary, like Joseph, was from a Davidic line, but perhaps that is only true through her marriage; later we learn she has a relative who is a direct descendant of Aaron—Elisabeth.

**1:28–31. “the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured.”** The angel Gabriel addresses Mary with honor and peace and then reassures her to fear not. Mary has found favor with God because of her obedience, soft heart, and purity and by developing faith, hope, and charity. She is the greatest woman born.

**1:31–33. “call his name JESUS.”** Gabriel tells Mary to name the child Jesus (see 2 Ne 25:19). Gabriel's message rings with Old Testament scripture and the messianic role outlined by the prophecies given by Nathan in 2 Sam 7:8–16 (see also Isa 9:7; Amos 9:11).

**1:34. “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”** We have to assume that Mary's questioning comes from a different place than did Zacharias's since the outcome is different. Many English translations render the second part of her question as “I am still a virgin.” It is humanly impossible, but Gabriel explains that the powerful Holy Spirit can work miracles. Mary believes that “with God nothing is impossible” (Lk 1:37). The “holy thing” of verse 35 becomes the “Holy One of God” in Mk 1:24, Lk 4:34, and Jn 6:69 and the “Holy One” in Act 3:14. Jesus is set apart and consecrated to the service of God as the Holiest of all born on the earth.

**1:35. “The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.”** Luke tells us that there was never a moment on this earth when Jesus was not the Son of God—contradicting much biblical debate over the subject.

**1:36. “cousin Elisabeth.”** The King James Version “cousin” is an unclear reference to a kinswoman, and based on the women’s age difference, Elisabeth may be Mary’s aunt. Elisabeth, Mary’s only known blood relative, is from the tribe of Aaron, which opens the way for Mary’s lineage to also have priesthood blood. Elisabeth, Zacharias, and John the Baptist all create a bridge between the New and Old Testaments.

**1:37. “with God nothing shall be impossible.”** Gabriel’s testimony and message of great faith also creates bridges to Old Testament passages with similar messages: “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” (Gen 18:14), and “I know that thou canst do every thing” (Job 42:2).

**1:38. “the handmaid of the Lord.”** Mary submits herself as a slave or servant (*doule* can be translated as both). She expresses her humility as a servant of the Lord, but there is more meaning to it culturally than that. Even though enslaved Jewish boys and men were released after seven years, young girls who were sold or taken into servitude became their masters’ property for life so they could bear children to them.<sup>22</sup> One-third of the Roman Empire lived in servitude, and half of the population of large cities like Jerusalem was enslaved. Mary probably knows the lifelong implications of her submission and is agreeing to bear and raise God’s child.<sup>23</sup> Hers is the first mortal voice in the New Testament to testify that Jesus is the Son of God.

**1:39. “went into the hill country with haste.”** Young maidens were not allowed to travel alone in Judea or even go out at all unaccompanied.<sup>24</sup> We presume that Mary travels to visit her relatives with a local caravan or pilgrimage. Luke’s inclusion of “with haste” demonstrates Mary’s faith in Gabriel’s message and her courage and determination to fulfill her new calling. The Judean hill country is south of Jerusalem and extends from the coastal plain inland and eastward. Temple protocol encouraged priests to live within a day’s journey of the temple, so we assume Elisabeth and Zacharias lived fairly close to Jerusalem (tradition from AD 530 claims they lived in the town of Ein Kerem).

## **Lk 1:40–45. Elisabeth’s Witness**

**1:40–45. “the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.”**

Gabriel had promised Zacharias that the baby John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even in his mother’s womb (Lk 1:15). Additionally, Elisabeth has been blessed with the Spirit. She expresses unrestrained joy as she prophesies that Mary’s child will be the Lord. The first two mortal witnesses of Jesus’s birth and divinity are women, contrary to Hebraic tradition that did not allow women to bear witness.<sup>25</sup> The mature Elisabeth honors Mary for believing—“Blessed is she who has believed” (1:45 BSB)—unlike her husband. Being blessed of God (or fortunate) can also mean believing the Lord will fulfill His promises.

## **Lk 1:46–56. Mary’s Hymn**

**1:46–55. “My soul doth magnify the Lord.”** Mary becomes the spokeswoman for all the down-trodden who come to God.<sup>26</sup> Her poetic praise is used by other Christians in their liturgy known as the Magnificat, from the first word of the prayer in Latin. Her poetic response has similarities to Elisabeth’s witness, and both include a mosaic of Old Testament phrases. Even though we read them in King James Version English rather than the original Greek and Hebrew, we can see the parallel words and ideas in three samples:

- Isa 12:2, “God is my salvation” / Lk 1:47, “My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour”
- Ps 136:23 (see also 1 Sam 1:11), “Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth forever” / Lk 1:48, 50, “He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. . . . And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation”
- Lev 11:44, “I am holy” / Lk 1:49, “Holy is his name”<sup>27</sup>

**1:56. “Mary . . . returned to her own house.”** After three months, shortly before Elisabeth goes into labor, Mary returns to Nazareth. It seems odd that the young girl would not stay to help with the baby, but Mary probably had to leave whenever a caravan of people traveled north through Nazareth.

## **Lk 1:57–62. Birth of John the Baptist**

**1:57–58. “Elisabeth . . . delivered.”** The healthy and miraculous arrival of Elisabeth’s son, John, fulfills Gabriel’s promise that the birth would bring rejoicing. Her relatives rejoice with and for her. She knows God’s mercy has provided the gift of her the baby’s birth (Lk 1:58).

**1:59. “on the eighth day they came to circumcise.”** A son’s circumcision was a “token of the covenant” (Gen 17:11). Circumcising on the eighth day was so important that circumcisions were performed on that day even if that day fell on a Sabbath. In modern revelation, we learn more about the great events of the eighth day after John’s birth: “[John] was ordained by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old unto this power [the Aaronic Priesthood?] to overthrow the kingdom of the Jews, and to make straight the way of the Lord before the face of his people, to prepare them for the coming of the Lord, in whose hand is given all power” (D&C 84:28). Appropriately, the priesthood that holds the keys of the ministering of angels was bestowed by an angel.

**1:60. “His mother answered and said, Not so.”** Elisabeth clarifies her son’s name as Gabriel instructed. Even though Zacharias couldn’t speak, he most likely previously found a way to communicate Gabriel’s sacred message to his wife (possibly a literate male family member or friend acted as an intermediary to help the couple communicate through writing). Most Jewish boys started their education at age five and learned to read and write. However, most Jewish women were illiterate.<sup>28</sup> Yet there were exceptions, including the wealthy and a few daughters of teachers. Jewish women at that time not only

were illiterate but also were expected to be silent in public.<sup>29</sup> Speaking out, especially to correct a man, was socially uncouth as a woman. Yet Elisabeth speaks out in this situation, showing her obedience to Gabriel's direction and demonstrating that her faith in God is greater than her fear of men.

## **Lk 1:63–80. Zacharias's Testimony and Prophecy**

**1:63–66.** *“he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John.”* After Zacharias testifies in writing, he is immediately allowed to verbally witness again. In the KJV of Luke, the word *immediately* is used thirteen times, each when divine timing plays a significant role. Here God's timing is a large part of Zacharias's miraculous healing. Miracles are precisely timed to show God's control of the elements, and this healing is no exception. Zacharias's first words show his humility. He expresses no frustration with the nine-month curse but rather expresses gratitude for God's healing. Though previously his words showed doubt, his next verbal utterance rings with faith.

**1:67–79.** *“Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord.”* Zacharias's testimony became a hymn known as the Benedictus (from the first Latin word in his song). This poem is recited in the Orthodox and Catholic Mass. Zacharias's praise includes phrases from the Old Testament and the Eighteen Benedictions (a common prayer recited by Jews at the time).<sup>30</sup> Luke has carefully crafted his account so that Zacharias's blessing parallels Elisabeth's witness (Lk 1:42). As inspired by the Spirit, Zacharias proclaims the restoration of the glories of the temple and hints at baptism for the dead: “To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.”<sup>31</sup>

**1:80.** *“The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit.”* Luke juxtaposes the experiences of John the Baptist and Jesus by summarizing the boys' growth. In the comparison, we find that Jesus's character is even greater than that of the prophet John. Luke's transition (“and was in the deserts”) removes one person from the scene to give the spotlight to another (see Lk 2:40).

## **Mt 1:1–17. Introduction**

**1:1.** *“the generation of Jesus Christ.”* In Greek, the word for “generation” is actually *genesis*. Matthew begins with this word to tie his opening to the first book of Moses.

**1:2–17.** Joseph's genealogy is carefully organized around the number fourteen, as we see in verse 17:

- So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations [~750 years];
- and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations [~400 years];
- and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations [~600 years].

The author wants to emphasize the number fourteen here and throughout his Gospel<sup>32</sup> even though the manipulated names and dates in this list do not add up to fourteen as is claimed (for example, the



author omits at least six kings). Fourteen was a significant number to the Jews because it represented the name David in ancient Hebrew. Each letter in the Hebrew alphabet was also a number.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, with both names and numbers the text shows that Joseph is a descendant of King David. (Luke also includes Joseph's genealogy, but not until chapter 3 for theological significance that we will discuss later).

I want to highlight two other interesting details about Matthew's genealogy. First, recording ancient Judaic genealogies was not a science, and recorders often skipped generations as we see here. Even though Joseph's ancestors were connected to royal lines through 598 BC (with Jechonias, or Jehoiachin; 2 Kng 24:8; 25:27–30), we have no evidence that Joseph was the dauphin (or the first son of the first son and so forth through the generations). The last king to reign before the Babylonian exile was Zedekiah. The Babylonians killed all his known sons (2 Kng 25:7); however, his baby was hidden and taken to a promised land according to the Book of Mormon (see Omni 1:25; Hel 8:21).

Second, the genealogy includes the names of four women, all of whom had peculiar circumstances.

- Tamar, or Tamar, was Judah's daughter-in-law. She became pregnant by Judah through pretending to be a harlot (Gen 38).
- Rachab, or Rahab, is described in the KJV as a harlot, though scholars debate the description. She lived in Jericho and lied to her local authorities in order to hide and protect the Israelite spies (Jos 2:1–15; 6:17).
- Ruth was a convert from Moab, an enemy nation (Rth 1–4).
- Bathsheba is not named in verse 6, but she is clearly referenced as the wife of Uriah. Her mention brings to mind King David's adultery and murder (2 Sam 11–12).

Ancient Israelite genealogies did not include women, so we assume that Matthew included the four women for a reason. Their presence adds an important message to Joseph's genealogy: a noble Israelite lineage included those adopted, converted, repentant, and forgiven women.

The rest of Matthew's birth narrative is organized around five prophetic scriptures and five dreams:

*Table 2. Organization of Matthew*

Scene	Scripture	Content
Introduction	1:1–17	Genealogy
Scene 1	1:18–25 (Isa 7:14)	First dream of Joseph
Scene 2	2:1–12 (Mic 5:1)	Magi's visit to Herod and Bethlehem and their divine warning
Scene 3	2:13–15 (Hos 11:1)	Second dream of Joseph and journey to Egypt
Scene 4	2:16–18 (Jer 31:15)	Herod's massacre of the male infants of Bethlehem
Scene 5	2:19–23 (Isa 4:3?)	Third and fourth dreams of Joseph and journey to Nazareth

## Mt 1:18–25. Scene 1

**1:18. “Now the birth.”** In Greek, the word for “birth” is actually *genesis*. Instead of using this word, though, the KJV uses “birth” and “generations” in this chapter, echoing back to the first book of scripture, Genesis.<sup>34</sup> The references in this verse to Genesis, begetting, new life, creating a son of God, and Holy Spirit all speak of Old Testament creation themes (Gen 1–2).

**1:18. “When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph.”** Joseph is espoused (*mnēsteutheisēs*, “betrothed”). As mentioned in the note on Lk 1:27, marriages were legal from age twelve for girls and age fourteen for boys. Shortly after the time of the New Testament, the Mishnah recorded that the ideal age for a groom to marry was eighteen, but we find examples of grooms who were between twelve and twenty-four.<sup>35</sup> (For more marriage customs, see note on Lk 1:27.)

**1:19. “Joseph her husband, being a just man . . . was minded to put [Mary] away privily.”** Joseph feels restrained to obey the law and divorce Mary. But he is kind enough to use the least public exposure for Mary—a private divorce. A Jewish fiancé or husband could divorce his wife for a range of reasons, from burning supper to being infertile. It was a religious duty to divorce a woman for adultery (along with anything that suggested moral uncleanness).

**1:20. “the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream.”** According to the traditions of the time, a groom had the religious obligation to divorce his fiancée if she were not chaste, and three legal ways to carry out the divorce existed. However, before Joseph can divorce Mary, an angelic messenger redirects him in a dream.<sup>36</sup> According to Jewish thought, a dream was one of the three reliable sources of divine information.<sup>37</sup> The angel, or messenger of the Lord, honors Joseph by calling him a son of David. Other than Jesus, Joseph is the only person in the New Testament to receive this kingly title.

**1:21. “thou shalt call his name JESUS.”** When a father named a baby, it represented his claim to the child or his willingness to adopt the baby as his own. The angel instructs Joseph to name Mary’s son after the prophet Joshua (Yeshua, Hebrew “to save” or “salvation”), from Yehoshua (“Yahweh helps”), which in Greek is Jesus. We can find many shared experiences between the two prophets.

Table 3. Comparison of Joshua and Jesus

Joshua	Jesus
Born in Egypt (Num 14:26–31).	Born into the world, or symbolic Egypt.
Called to leave Egypt (Ex 3:7–10).	Called forth from Egypt (Mt 2:20).
Forty-year purification in the wilderness (Num 14:27–33).	Forty-day purifying fast (Mt 4:2; Mk 1:13; Lk 4:2).
Defended plan go to the promised land (Num 14:27–33).	Defended Father’s plan for agency (Moses 4:2–3).

Joshua	Jesus
Named Moses’s successor (Num 27:18, 23) and anointed with hands on his head and promised by God “I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Jos 1:5).	Named the Father’s chosen Son (Abr 3:27), the Anointed one, or Messiah. “He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone” (Jn 8:29).
Led the children of Israel into the promised land (Deu 3:28; Jos 1:2, 3:5, 13–17). Israel left their old life and entered into a new covenant as a symbolic baptism—“all the people were passed clean” (Jos 3:17), walking through the river Jordan near Bethabara.	Led the way for all humankind to enter an eternal promised land, starting with His baptism at Bethabara as an example for all to follow (Jn 1:28–34).
Fought and conquered enemies of Israel so that his people could enjoy the promises of their fathers (Jos 4).	Defeated the enemy of all righteousness, Satan, and saved all Israel (Rom 11:26–27).
Distributed promised lands to the children of Israel who survived the purification in the wilderness (Jos 13–22). Established peace and a government as the prophet, or high priest, and judge.	Will give promised kingdoms of glory to all who pass their first estate and will judge humankind’s second estate (D&C 76). Will establish a government of peace and reign as the Prince of Peace, the Great High Priest (Rev 22; Isa 9:6).

**1:22. “to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.”** Matthew includes fourteen parallel versions of this verse in his Gospel. We will refer to them as fulfillment passages (see endnote 1). He uses them to illustrate how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy of the promised Messiah.

### **The Book of Mormon Adds Important Details to the Nativity Narratives**

Only in the Book of Mormon do we find prophecy foretelling the name of the virgin mother of the Messiah and prophecy that she will be from Nazareth (1 Ne 11:13, 21; Mosi 3:8). Four hundred years after Nephi’s vision of Mary, when the Nephites are further removed from the memory of their Judaic homeland, Alma speaks of Jesus’s birth using a more general reference to the old-world geography: “He shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem” (Alm 7:10). These details add to the reality that the text was ancient and add to the historical account in the New Testament. A nineteenth-century American would most likely claim Bethlehem as the birthplace, not the larger city six miles away.

## Notes

1 Marko Zuzic, *A Short History of St. John in Ephesus* (Lima, OH: American Society of Ephesus, 1960), 37–45. See Rev 2:2.

2 Herod's building projects included eight major fortresses (Masada, Machaerus, the Herodium in Perea, Alexandria, Cypros, Hurcania, and the Herodium southeast of Bethlehem) and two elaborate Hellenistic cities (Augustus and Caesarea Maritima). His crowning jewel, the temple of Jerusalem (the rebuilding was begun in 20 BC and wasn't completed until AD 62). Technically, this first King Herod ruled all Palestine, not just Judea.

3 Luke includes Zacharias as a priest (not the high priest). At the time of Jesus, the priesthood was divided into offices:

- a. The reigning high priest
- b. The chief priests: the captains of the temple
  - The leaders of the twenty-four weekly divisions, or courses
  - Custody of the temple—temple overseers
  - Temple finances—three treasurers
- c. The priests: twenty-four weekly courses, each of four-to-nine daily courses, with about 7,200 priests
- d. The Levites: twenty-four weekly courses, each divided into:
  - singers and musicians
  - temple servants and guards, with about 9,600 Levites

4 For the stories of these women, see Gen 25:21; 29:31; Jdg 13:3; and 1 Sam 1:2, respectively. We find Old Testament hints of the stereotype against barren women (Gen 16:4, 11; 29:32; 30:1; Lev 20:20–21; 1 Sam 1:5–6; 2 Sam 6:23), but by the time of the late second temple, the oral laws recorded in the Mishnah enumerate a husband's religious duty to divorce his wife after ten years of infertility.

5 David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 804. Levites or descendants of Levi were more numerous and took care of the more secular tasks of running the temple—acting as the temple police, gatekeepers, tax collectors, janitors, fire keepers, and musicians. They served at the temple between the ages of twenty-five and fifty according to Num 8:24–25 (or age twenty, according to 1 Chr 23:24).

6 A “lot” was a small stick placed in a dish. The owner of the one that fell out was supposedly chosen by God to serve that day.

### *Morning Lots*

- a. Cleanse the altar and prepare its fires for the burnt animal offering.
- b. Sacrifice the lamb, toss the blood, cleanse the candlestick and altar incense, and carry the animal up the ramp to the altar.
- c. Burn incense and offer the priestly prayer.
- d. Place the meat offering on the altar.

### *Evening Lots (at the ninth hour, or 3:00 p.m.)*

Only the incense was offered as “a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations” (Ex 30:7–8). The afternoon lighting was “the time of prayer” (Act 3:1 NIV).



7 Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services, as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ* (London, UK: Religious Tract Society, 1874), 139. Mishnah Tamid 5:2–6:3. Before the incense lot was chosen, the priests offered a blessing and then recited the Ten Commandments and the Shema (Deu 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Num 15:37–41) as a confession of their faith.

8 See Ps 141:2. Mishnah Tamid 6:3; 7, describes a priest entering the sanctuary, or holy place, then taking the incense from a bowl and scattering it onto the burning coals. After offering the incense, the priest “prostrated himself and went out.”

9 Lev 16. The high priest alone went through the veil into the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement.

10 Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos* (Provo, UT: Foundation of Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992), 42. “Civilization is heirocentric, centered around the holy point of the temple. . . .The temple is also an observatory. That is what a *templum* is—a place where you take your bearings on things” (pages 15, 19).

11 Gen 16:7–12; 17:1–21; 18:1; Jdg 13:3–21; Mt 1:20; Lk 1:11–37; 2:9–12.

12 This is the most common name in the Old Testament, spelled both Zachariah and Zechariah. Do not mistake this priest with the ninth-century-BC high priest who was slain between the temple alter. See Lynne Hilton Wilson, “The Confusing Case of Zacharias,” *Religious Educator* 14, no. 2 (2013), 107–123.

13 Barry L. Bandstra and Allen D. Verhey, “Sex,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:431: To “avoid tempting another to immorality . . . [women] were veiled in public and segregated as much as possible from men. At the synagogues and Herod’s Temple they were excluded from the court of the men.”

14 Mishnah Yebamoth 13:1. Rabbi Hillel (60 BC to 20 AD) wrote that girls of twelve and a half “may exercise right of refusal four or five times” in the selection of their husbands. In reaction to this limit, the more lenient rabbinic school of Shammai retorted, “The daughters of Israel are no [such] ownerless property!” Shammai allowed the underage girl to stay in her father’s home until “she is come of age,” meaning the onset of puberty.

15 The book of Jubilees recommends marriage with a cousin (Jub 4:15:16, 20, 27, 28, 33; 11:7, 14).

16 Mishnah Ketubot 4:4–5. A price of money was usually included, and marriage was referred to as an acquisition.

17 Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1981). Also, Ken M. Campbell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 186. W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 7: “The penalty for fornication with one person while betrothed to another was death for both guilty parties.”

18 Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Western Civilization*, 7th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson & Wadsworth, 2009), 152.

19 Mishnah Ketubot 5:2: “A virgin is granted twelve months wherein to provide for herself.”

20 *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference USA, 2007), s.v. “Marriage, Huppah.” One symbol of the wedding tent was a type of tabernacle where the couple came before God to make their covenants.

21 *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. “Marriage, In the Talmud.”

22 Ex 21:7; Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1998), 23.

23 S. Scott Bartchy, “Servant,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:420, 545. Tim G. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 183.

24 Judaeus Philo, *Special Laws*, 7 vols. (London, UK: William Heinemann, 1967), 3:169, 171: “Marketplaces and council-halls, law-courts and gatherings, and meetings where a large number of people are assembled, and open-air life with full scope for discussion and action—all these are suitable to men both in war and peace. The women are best suited to the indoor life which never strays from the house. . . . A woman then, should not be a busybody, meddling with matters outside her household concerns, but should seek a life of seclusion.”

25 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 4:219; *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference USA, 2007), s.v. “Woman, Post-Biblical and Talmudic Period.”

26 Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 335, 357.

27 Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 337; Gen 50:4; Ex 6:6; 34:6; Deu 4:34; 1 Sam 2:5–7; 2 Sam 7:15; 1 Chr 29:18; Isa 13:11; 41:8, 44:1, 45:4; Jer 17:11.

28 Mishnah Sotah 3:4: “If a man gives his daughter a knowledge of the Law it is as though he taught her lechery.” Mishnah Nashim 3:58: “A father should not teach his daughter Torah because certain acumen is gained from it which she may use to hide her immorality. . . . It is also possible that she may use her knowledge of the Torah to attract men to her.” These two negative statements are made by later rabbis.

29 Sirach 26:14–26: “A silent wife is a gift from the Lord.” Mishah Ketubot 1:8. “If they saw her speaking with some man in the street . . . she must be presumed to have suffered intercourse.” Also see Mishnah Avoth 1:5.

30 From the time of the second temple, male and female Jews offered a set of eighteen benedictions that began by referring to the God (1) of the patriarchs, (2) of nature, and (3) sanctification. The prayer then petitioned God for (4) understanding, (5) repentance, (6) forgiveness, (7) redemption, (8) healing, (9) food, (10) the gathering of exiles, and (11) the restoration of His righteous reign. Then the prayer gives (12) a curse against heretics before asking for (13) mercy for the righteous, (14) the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and (15) the arrival of the messianic king. Next is a petition that God (16) hear the people’s prayers and (17) return to the temple, and last comes (18) thanksgiving to God for all His mercies. The prayer had slight variations for certain Sabbath services or holy days.

31 Lk 1:79. See Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos* (Provo, UT: Foundation of Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992), 43.

32 The Gospel of Matthew cites fourteen Old Testament prophecies and points out their fulfillment; see Mt 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9.

33 In ancient Hebrew, orthography used numbers for meaning. David’s name, *d-w-d*, was fourteen. Biblical Hebrew numbers are written as letters of the alphabet. (It would be the same in English if a=1, b=2, c=3, and so

on.) So, the name *dwd* would be d=4, w=6, d=4, or 4+6+4=14. From the fifth century BC, the accepted *gematria* of David's name was fourteen.

34 Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 123.

35 Mishnah Abot 5:21A. The ideal age for young man's marriage was eighteen.

36 D&C 130:5: "There are no angels who minister to this earth but those who do belong or have belonged to it."

37 Alfred Edersheim, *Jesus the Messiah* (New York, NY: Longmans, Green and Co, 1898), 155. In reference to Pro 19:23, Rabbi Zera claims that three things showed God's favor: "A good king, a fruitful year, and a good dream" (quoting Berakhot 55b).