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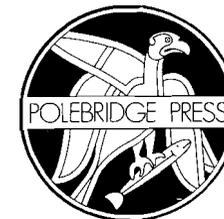
**The Complete Gospels**

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*Annotated Scholars Version*

Revised and Expanded Edition

Robert J. Miller, editor



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## Introduction

### Contents

The earliest Christian traditions—say, the credo of 1 Cor 15:3–5 or the hymn of Phil 2:6–11—focus attention on the end of Jesus' life, on his death and resurrection. By the end of the first century, Christians show interest in the beginning of Jesus' life, in the circumstances of his birth, as is evident from the birth stories that open the gospels of Matthew and Luke (Matthew 1–2; Luke 1–2). This interest continues into the second and later centuries and in fact prompts a new genre of Christian writing, the infancy gospel, or narratives that focus exclusively on the birth or on the childhood of Jesus.

One such gospel is the Infancy Gospel of James. This gospel ends with the birth of Jesus and its immediate aftermath in Herod's murder of the infants, but the ending is not the culmination or goal of the narrative. For the birth story comprises at most one-third of the narrative. The real narrative interest is in Mary; it is her story—the circumstances of her birth, the years of her infancy and childhood, the announcement of her conception—that is central to the narrative as a whole.

The story of the Infancy Gospel of James falls into three roughly equal parts. The first eight chapters narrate the miraculous circumstances of Mary's birth and the unusual circumstances of her childhood. The story opens with the plight of the wealthy, righteous, but childless couple, Joachim and Anna. Their childlessness is particularly grievous, but their laments and prayers to God are eventually heard, so that Anna becomes pregnant. Their gratitude is so great that they promise their offspring to the Lord, and so at age three, Mary is sent to serve the Lord in the temple in Jerusalem.

The second eight chapters begin with the crisis posed by Mary's becoming a woman and thus her imminent pollution of the temple. The priests resolve the crisis by turning her over to a divinely chosen widower, the carpenter Joseph, who agrees to be her guardian, but refuses to marry her. While he is out of town plying his trade, Mary is visited by an angel and told of her favor with the Lord. By the time Joseph returns she is visibly pregnant. A priest suspects that Joseph is responsible and accuses them both. The two are put to a test, but pass and are publicly exonerated.

The last eight chapters begin with Augustus' edict of enrollment that requires Joseph to register in Bethlehem. Here the story has reached the point where it begins to follow the accounts in the opening chapters of Matthew and

Luke. But the infancy gospel, while recalling the canonical stories, does not hesitate to go its separate way. Thus Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem (see Luke 2:1), but are now accompanied by his grown sons from his previous marriage (17:5). Mary gives birth to Jesus (see Luke 2:7) but is visited, though not helped, by local midwives (19:1–20:12), who testify to the miraculous nature of the birth—Mary, though she has given birth, is still a virgin (19:18). The astrologers trick Herod, who responds by murdering the infants (see Matt 2:16), but now Jesus is saved by being hidden in a feeding trough (22:4) and even the infant John is threatened by Herod but saved by his father Zechariah's martyrdom and by Elizabeth's hiding in the hills with him (22:5–23:8).

The infancy gospel ends with the author, James, claiming that he has written his account shortly after the death of Herod (25:1).

### Authorship and dating

The claim that a certain James wrote this infancy gospel and did so shortly after the death of Herod in 4 B.C.E. would, if true, imply that the narrative was composed by the James known in the New Testament as "James the Lord's brother" (Gal 1:19; see Mark 6:3), but here as only one of the sons of Joseph from a previous marriage. But, whatever the relation, James is thereby an eyewitness of the birth of Jesus and of Mary's life, at least from the time she became Joseph's ward. Thus the claim to authorship by James functions to establish the credibility and truth of the account.

But is the claim true? The answer is no. The claim falls on the following argument. The gospels of Matthew and Luke both narrate the birth of Jesus, but they do so quite differently. One difference is that only Matthew's account includes the visit of the astrologers and the subsequent murder of the infants by Herod (see Matt 2:1–12, 16–18), and only Luke's account includes the parallel story of the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah and Elizabeth (see Luke 1:5–25, 39–80). An observant reader of both gospels, however, might ask: How did John, born only months apart from Jesus, escape Herod's soldiers?

The Infancy Gospel of James answered this question by having Zechariah choose death rather than tell of John's whereabouts and by having Elizabeth flee to the hills with John. The author thereby shows that he knew of the canonical accounts, and since Matthew and Luke were written toward the end of the first century, well after James's death in 62 C.E., the author of the infancy gospel could not have been James.

Just who wrote the infancy gospel can no longer be determined, but whoever did write it wrote after Matthew and Luke and probably around the middle of the second century, when evidence of this document begins to show up in other Christian writings.

*Origins and thematic focus*

The origins of the Infancy Gospel of James probably lie in a trajectory that begins with the Gospel of Mark, written about 70 C.E. This gospel opens with the simple claim that Jesus is the son of God (Mark 1:1). This claim may then have prompted Matthew and Luke, writing independently of each other a decade or two later, to explain how it was that Jesus came to be the literal son of God (Matthew 1–2; Luke 1–2).

In many ways, the Infancy Gospel of James is dependent on the traditions preserved in the Matthean and Lukan accounts, as evidenced by the numerous quotations, phrases, and echoes in the infancy gospel from these accounts, not to mention other portions of the New Testament and the Septuagint (see the cross references). In fact, the infancy gospel expands on the canonical traditions, developing their logic, for example, by solving the problem of John's fate during the murder of the infants.

And yet, in other ways, the Infancy Gospel of James is not simply a development of the New Testament birth stories. For, despite all the bits and pieces taken from these stories and other Christian literature, the infancy gospel also shows an independence from this literature and a unity of its own. This independence is evident in the various narrative deviations from the stories in Matthew and Luke. But more important are the changes in characterization. Thus Joseph, who in the Matthean and Lukan accounts was engaged to Mary and later married to her (Matt 1:18, 24–25; Luke 2:5), is now turned into an old man, a widower with grown sons who is embarrassed to accept Mary even as a ward (9:11) and becomes at most only her protector (13:1; 14:1; 16:7). Similarly, Mary, the central character, is no longer a virgin in the ordinary sense of a young woman of marriageable age, but a virgin of extraordinary purity and unending duration.

Indeed, Mary's purity is so emphasized that it becomes thematic and thus answers the fundamental question which guides the narrative: why Mary, of all the virgins in Israel, was chosen to be the mother of the son of God. The answer: no one could have been any purer. Thus Anna transforms Mary's bedroom into a sanctuary where she receives no impure food and is amused by the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews (6:5). When she turns three years of age, these young women escort her to the temple in Jerusalem where she spends the next nine years in absolute purity and is even fed by the hand of an angel (7:4–8:2). When, at age twelve, she is made the ward of Joseph, she spends her time spinning thread for the temple with the other virgins from Israel (10:1–12:1). When she is later suspected of impurity, she passes a test and has her innocence proclaimed by the high priest (15:1–16:7). Finally, when she gives birth to Jesus, two midwives certify that she remains a virgin (19:18–20:11). In short, it is through her purity that Mary fulfills the blessing which the priests made when she was only one year old: that she might be blessed with a blessing that could not be surpassed (6:9).

## The Infancy Gospel of James

**1** *According to the records* of the twelve tribes of Israel, there once was a very rich man named Joachim. <sup>2</sup>He always doubled the gifts he offered to the Lord, <sup>3</sup>and would say to himself, "One gift, representing my prosperity, will be for all the people; the other, offered for forgiveness, will be my sin-offering to the Lord God."

<sup>4</sup>Now the great day of the Lord was approaching, and the people of Israel were offering their gifts. <sup>5</sup>And Reubel confronted Joachim and said, "You're not allowed to offer your gifts first because you haven't produced an Israelite child."

<sup>6</sup>And Joachim became very upset and went to the book of the twelve tribes of the people, saying to himself, "I'm going to check the book of the twelve tribes of Israel to see whether I'm the only one in Israel who hasn't produced a child." <sup>7</sup>And he searched (the records) and found that all the righteous people in Israel did indeed have children. <sup>8</sup>And he remembered the patriarch Abraham because in his last days the Lord God had given a son, Isaac.

<sup>9</sup>And so he continued to be very upset and did not see his wife but banished himself to the wilderness and pitched his tent there. <sup>10</sup>And Joachim fasted 'forty days and forty nights.' <sup>11</sup>He would say 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."

**2** *Now his wife Anna* was mourning and lamenting on two counts: "I lament my widowhood and I lament my childlessness."

<sup>2</sup>The great day of the Lord approached, however, <sup>3</sup>and Juthine her slave said to her, "How long are you going to humble yourself? Look, the great day of the Lord has arrived, and you're not supposed to mourn. <sup>4</sup>Rather, take this headband which the mistress of the workshop gave to me, but which I'm not allowed to wear because I'm your slave and because it bears a royal insignia."

<sup>5</sup>And Anna said, "Get away from me! I won't take it. The Lord God has greatly shamed me. Maybe a trickster has given you this, and you've come to make me share in your sin."

*Childless Joachim**Childless Anna*

1:1  
 0 Sus 4  
 1:8  
 0 Gn 21:1–7  
 1:10  
 ① Q 4:2,  
 Mt 4:2, Lk 4:2;  
 0 Ex 24:18,  
 1 Kgs 19:8  
 2:1  
 ⑤ 1 Sm 1:2  
 2:5  
 0 Is 64:12

1:4 In the OT and NT *the great day of the Lord* usually refers to the day of judgment, but here (and in 2:2) a festival seems more likely. The Feast of Sukkoth has been suggested, but the vagueness of the reference precludes any more precise determination.

2:4 The words *headband* and *mistress of the workshop* are obscure, and no solution has been achieved.

2:5 The word translated *trickster* is obscure, but may refer to a clever young man with whom Juthine has had an affair.

*Anna laments*

*Anna's vision*

<sup>6</sup>And Juthine the slave replied, "Should I curse you just because you haven't paid any attention to me? The Lord God has made your womb sterile so you won't bear any children for Israel."

<sup>7</sup>Anna, too, became very upset. She took off her mourning clothes, washed her face, and put on her wedding dress. <sup>8</sup>Then, in the middle of the afternoon, she went down to her garden to take a walk. She spied a laurel tree and sat down under it. <sup>9</sup>After resting, she prayed to the Lord: "O God of my ancestors, bless me and hear my prayer, just as you blessed our mother Sarah and gave her a son, Isaac."

**3** *And Anna looked up* toward the sky and saw a nest of sparrows in the laurel tree. <sup>2</sup>And immediately Anna began to lament, saying to herself: "Poor me! Who gave birth to me? What sort of womb bore me? <sup>3</sup>For I was born under a curse in the eyes of the people of Israel. And I've been reviled and mocked and banished from the temple of the Lord my God.

<sup>4</sup>"Poor me! What am I like? I am not like the birds of the sky, because even the birds of the sky reproduce in your presence, O Lord.

<sup>5</sup>"Poor me! What am I like? I am not like the domestic animals, because even the domestic animals bear young in your presence, O Lord.

<sup>6</sup>"Poor me! What am I like? I am not like the wild animals of the earth, because even the animals of the earth reproduce in your presence, O Lord.

<sup>7</sup>"Poor me! What am I like? I am not like these waters, because even these waters are productive in your presence, O Lord.

<sup>8</sup>"Poor me! What am I like? I am not like this earth, because even the earth produces its crops in season and blesses you, O Lord."

**4** *Suddenly a messenger* of the Lord appeared to her and said: "Anna, Anna, the Lord God has heard your prayer. You will conceive and give birth, and your child will be talked about all over the world."

<sup>2</sup>And Anna said, "As the Lord God lives, whether I give birth to a boy or a girl, I'll offer it as a gift to the Lord my God, and it will serve him its whole life."

<sup>3</sup>And right then two messengers reported to her: "Look, your husband Joachim is coming with his flocks." <sup>4</sup>You see, a messenger of the Lord had come down to Joachim and said, "Joachim, Joachim, the

2:6

⊕ 1Sm 1:6

2:9

⊕ Gn 17:16, 21:1-3

4:1

⊕ Lk 1:26-31,

Jgs 13:2-7

4:2

⊕ 1Sm 1:11, 28

4:4

⊕ Lk 1:8-13

2:6 Childlessness was understood, not as having a natural cause, but as a sign of divine punishment (see Gen 16:2; 20:18; and especially 1 Sam 1:5-6).

2:7 Putting on her *wedding dress* suggests

that Anna is anticipating the outcome of her plea to God for a blessing similar to that which God gave Sarah, that is, for the blessing of offspring.

Lord God has heard your prayer. Get down from there. Look, your wife Anna is pregnant."

<sup>5</sup>And Joachim went down right away and summoned his shepherds with these instructions: "Bring me ten lambs without spot or blemish, and the ten lambs will be for the Lord God. <sup>6</sup>Also, bring me twelve tender calves, and the twelve calves will be for the priests and the council of elders. <sup>7</sup>Also, one hundred goats, and the one hundred goats will be for the whole people."

<sup>8</sup>And so Joachim came with his flocks, while Anna stood at the gate. <sup>9</sup>Then she spotted Joachim approaching with his flocks and rushed out and threw her arms around his neck: "Now I know that the Lord God has blessed me greatly. This widow is no longer a widow, and I, once childless, am now pregnant!"

<sup>10</sup>And Joachim rested the first day at home.

**5** *But on the next day*, as he was presenting his gifts, he thought to himself, "If the Lord God has really been merciful to me, the polished disc on the priest's headband will make it clear to me." <sup>2</sup>And so Joachim was presenting his gifts and paying attention to the priest's headband until he went up to the altar of the Lord. And he saw no sin in it. <sup>3</sup>And Joachim said, "Now I know that the Lord God has been merciful to me and has forgiven me all my sins." <sup>4</sup>And he came down from the temple of the Lord acquitted and went back home.

<sup>5</sup>And so her pregnancy came to term, and in the ninth month Anna gave birth. <sup>6</sup>And she said to the midwife, "Is it a boy or a girl?"

<sup>7</sup>And her midwife said, "A girl."

<sup>8</sup>And Anna said, "I have been greatly honored this day." Then the midwife put the child to bed.

<sup>9</sup>When, however, the prescribed days were completed, Anna cleansed herself of the flow of blood. <sup>10</sup>And she offered her breast to the infant and gave her the name Mary.

4:9 The mss differ over whether Anna is *pregnant* or will be pregnant. The future tense would be more likely if the word *rested* in the next sentence were a euphemism for sexual intercourse, but since this word is used of Joseph in much the same circumstances (see 15:2) and no such euphemism is intended there, it is probably better to prefer the literal meaning and so the present tense (*is pregnant*). Thus, Anna's conceiving a child becomes as much a miracle as later Mary's will be.

5:2 A metal *disc* was part of the high priest's garb and was attached to his headband (Exod 28:36), but its use here, to reveal sin, is otherwise unattested. The disc may have been a mirror, and mirrors were used to obtain revelations.

5:9 Childbirth rendered a woman ritually unclean, unable to touch anything holy or enter the temple. For the regulations on how and when a woman *cleansed herself* after childbirth, see Lev 12:1-8.

*Birth of Mary*

4:5-7

⊕ Jgs 13:15-20

5:1

⊕ Ex 28:36-38

5:4

⊕ Lk 18:14

5:8

⊕ Lk 1:46

5:9

⊕ Lv 12:1-8

Mary's first  
birthday

Mary at the temple

**6** *Day by day* the infant grew stronger. <sup>2</sup>When she was six months old, her mother put her on the ground to see if she could stand. She walked seven steps and went to her mother's arms. <sup>3</sup>Then her mother picked her up and said, "As the Lord my God lives, you will never walk on this ground again until I take you into the temple of the Lord."

<sup>4</sup>And so she turned her bedroom into a sanctuary and did not permit anything profane or unclean to pass the child's lips. <sup>5</sup>She sent for the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews, and they kept her amused.

<sup>6</sup>Now the child had her first birthday, and Joachim gave a great banquet and invited the high priests, priests, scholars, council of elders, and all the people of Israel. <sup>7</sup>Joachim presented the child to the priests, and they blessed her: "God of our fathers, bless this child and give her a name which will be on the lips of future generations forever."

<sup>8</sup>And everyone said, "So be it. Amen."

<sup>9</sup>He presented her to the high priests, and they blessed her: "Most high God, look on this child and bless her with the ultimate blessing, one which cannot be surpassed."

<sup>10</sup>Her mother then took her up to the sanctuary—the bedroom—and gave her breast to the child. <sup>11</sup>And Anna composed a song for the Lord God: "I will sing a sacred song to the Lord my God because he has visited me and taken away the disgrace attributed to me by my enemies. <sup>12</sup>The Lord my God has given me the fruit of his righteousness, single yet manifold before him. <sup>13</sup>Who will announce to the sons of Reubel that Anna has a child at her breast? 'Listen, listen, you twelve tribes of Israel: Anna has a child at her breast!'"

<sup>14</sup>Anna made her rest in the bedroom—the sanctuary—and then went out and began serving her guests. <sup>15</sup>When the banquet was over, they left in good spirits and praised the God of Israel.

**7** *Many months passed*, but when the child reached two years of age, Joachim said, "Let's take her up to the temple of the Lord, so that we can keep the promise we made, or else the Lord will be angry with us and our gift will be unacceptable."

<sup>2</sup>And Anna said, "Let's wait until she is three, so she won't miss her father or mother."

<sup>3</sup>And Joachim agreed: "Let's wait."

<sup>4</sup>When the child turned three years of age, Joachim said, "Let's send for the undefiled Hebrew daughters. <sup>5</sup>Let them each take a lamp and light it, so the child won't turn back and have her heart captivated by things outside the Lord's temple." <sup>6</sup>And this is what they did until the time they ascended to the Lord's temple.

6:1  
Ⓢ Lk 2:40

6:6  
Ⓞ Gn 21:8

6:11  
Ⓢ Lk 1:25;  
Ⓞ Gn 21:1, 30:23

6:13  
Ⓞ Gn 21:7

7:1  
Ⓞ 1 Sm 1:22;  
Ⓞ InJas 4:2

6:12 The meaning of *single yet manifold before him* is obscure.

Mary at twelve

Joseph  
accepts Mary

<sup>7</sup>The priest welcomed her, kissed her, and blessed her: "The Lord God has exalted your name among all generations. <sup>8</sup>In you the Lord will disclose his redemption to the people of Israel during the last days."

<sup>9</sup>And he sat her down on the third step of the altar, and the Lord showered favor on her. <sup>10</sup>And she danced, and the whole house of Israel loved her.

**8** *Her parents left* for home marveling and praising and glorifying the Lord God because the child did not look back at them. <sup>2</sup>And Mary lived in the temple of the Lord. She was fed there like a dove, receiving her food from the hand of a heavenly messenger.

<sup>3</sup>When she turned twelve, however, there was a meeting of the priests. "Look," they said, "Mary has turned twelve in the temple of the Lord. <sup>4</sup>What should we do with her so she won't pollute the sanctuary of the Lord our God?" <sup>5</sup>And they said to the high priest, "You stand at the altar of the Lord. Enter and pray about her, and we'll do whatever the Lord God discloses to you."

<sup>6</sup>And so the high priest took the vestment with the twelve bells, entered the Holy of Holies, and began to pray about her. <sup>7</sup>And suddenly a messenger of the Lord appeared: "Zechariah, Zechariah, go out and assemble the widowers of the people and have them each bring a staff. <sup>8</sup>She will become the wife of the one to whom the Lord God shows a sign." <sup>9</sup>And so heralds covered the surrounding territory of Judea. The trumpet of the Lord sounded and all the widowers came running.

**9** *And Joseph, too*, threw down his carpenter's axe and left for the meeting. <sup>2</sup>When they had all gathered, they went to the high priest with their staffs. <sup>3</sup>After the high priest had collected everyone's staff, he entered the temple and began to pray. <sup>4</sup>When he had finished his prayer, he took the staffs and went out and began to give them back to each man. <sup>5</sup>But there was no sign on any of them. Joseph got the last staff. <sup>6</sup>Suddenly a dove came out of this staff and perched on Joseph's head. <sup>7</sup>"Joseph, Joseph," the high priest said, "you've been chosen by lot to take the virgin of the Lord into your care and protection."

<sup>8</sup>But Joseph objected: "I already have sons and I'm an old man; she's only a young woman. I'm afraid that I'll become the butt of jokes among the people of Israel."

7:7  
Ⓢ Lk 1:48

7:8  
Ⓞ 1 Sm 18:16

8:1  
Ⓢ Lk 2:39–40

8:7  
Ⓢ Lk 1:11;  
Ⓞ Nm 17:1–11

8:4 Mary would *pollute the sanctuary* when she began to menstruate. The Law considered a woman ritually unclean during her period. See Lev 15:19–24.

9:7 This is the first occurrence of the word

*virgin*, which plays a prominent role in Mary's characterization for the remainder of the story.

9:8 That Joseph has *sons* and is an *old man* marks a significant change in the portrayal of

Virgins &  
temple veil

Mary's vision

<sup>9</sup>And the high priest responded, “Joseph, fear the Lord your God and remember what God did to Dathan, Abiron, and Kore: the earth was split open and they were all swallowed up because of their objection. <sup>10</sup>So now, Joseph, you ought to take heed so that the same thing won’t happen to your family.”

<sup>11</sup>And so out of fear Joseph took her into his care and protection. <sup>12</sup>He said to her, “Mary, I’ve gotten you from the temple of the Lord, but now I’m leaving you at home. I’m going away to build houses, but I’ll come back to you. The Lord will protect you.”

**10** *Meanwhile, there was* a council of the priests, who agreed: “Let’s make a veil for the temple of the Lord.”

<sup>2</sup>And the high priest said, “Summon the true virgins from the tribe of David.” <sup>3</sup>And so the temple assistants left and searched everywhere and found seven. <sup>4</sup>And the high priest then remembered the girl Mary, that she, too, was from the tribe of David and was pure in God’s eyes. <sup>5</sup>And so the temple assistants went out and got her.

<sup>6</sup>And they took the maidens into the temple of the Lord. <sup>7</sup>And the high priest said, “Cast lots for me to decide who’ll spin which threads for the veil: the gold, the white, the linen, the silk, the violet, the scarlet, and the true purple.”

<sup>8</sup>And the true purple and scarlet threads fell to Mary. And she took them and returned home. <sup>9</sup>Now it was at this time that Zechariah became mute, and Samuel took his place until Zechariah regained his speech. <sup>10</sup>Meanwhile, Mary had taken up the scarlet thread and was spinning it.

**11** *And she took* her water jar and went out to fill it with water. <sup>2</sup>Suddenly there was a voice saying to her, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women.” <sup>3</sup>Mary began looking around, both right and left, to see where the voice was coming from. <sup>4</sup>She became terrified and went home. After putting the water jar down and taking up the purple thread, she sat down on her chair and began to spin.

<sup>5</sup>A heavenly messenger suddenly stood before her: “Don’t be afraid, Mary. You see, you’ve found favor in the sight of the Lord of all. You will conceive by means of his word.”

<sup>6</sup>But as she listened, Mary was doubtful and said, “If I actually

9:9  
◊ Nm 16:25–33  
9:11  
Ⓢ Mt 1:24  
10:7  
◊ Ex 26:31, 36,  
35:25; 2 Chr 3:14  
10:9  
Ⓢ Lk 1:20–22, 64  
11:2  
// In Thom 19:4;  
Ⓢ Lk 1:28  
11:5  
Ⓢ Lk 1:30–33

Joseph from that in the canonical accounts. **9:11** That *Joseph took her* recalls Matt 1:24, but with this significant difference: there it is as his wife, here merely as his ward. **10:2** Strictly speaking, there was no *tribe of David*. According to Luke, Mary is related to

Elizabeth, who belongs to the tribe of Aaron (Luke 1:5, 36).

**10:9** The *time that Zechariah became mute* reflects an attempt on the part of the author to place his narrative in the context of the canonical account (see Luke 1:20–22, 64).

conceive by the Lord, the living God, will I also give birth the way women usually do?”

<sup>7</sup>And the messenger of the Lord replied, “No, Mary, because the power of God will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, son of the Most High. <sup>8</sup>And you will name him Jesus—the name means ‘he will save his people from their sins.’”

<sup>9</sup>And Mary said, “Here I am, the Lord’s slave before him. I pray that all you’ve told me comes true.”

**12** *And she finished* (spinning) the purple and the scarlet thread and took her work up to the high priest. <sup>2</sup>The high priest accepted them and praised her and said, “Mary, the Lord God has extolled your name and so you will be blessed by all the generations of the earth.”

<sup>3</sup>Mary rejoiced and left to visit her relative Elizabeth. <sup>4</sup>She knocked at the door. Elizabeth heard her, tossed aside the scarlet thread, ran to the door, and opened it for her. <sup>5</sup>And she blessed her and said, “Who am I that the mother of my Lord should visit me? You see, the baby inside me has jumped for joy and blessed you.”

<sup>6</sup>But Mary forgot the mysteries which the heavenly messenger Gabriel had spoken, and she looked up to the sky and said, “Who am I that every generation on earth will congratulate me?”

<sup>7</sup>She spent three months with Elizabeth. <sup>8</sup>Day by day her womb kept swelling. And so Mary became frightened, returned home, and hid from the people of Israel. <sup>9</sup>She was just sixteen years old when these mysterious things happened to her.

**13** *She was in* her sixth month when one day Joseph came home from his building projects, entered his house, and found her pregnant. <sup>2</sup>He struck himself in the face, threw himself to the ground on sackcloth, and began to cry bitterly: “What sort of face should I present to the Lord God? <sup>3</sup>What prayer can I say on her behalf since I received her as a virgin from the temple of the Lord God and didn’t protect her? <sup>4</sup>Who has set this trap for me? Who has done this evil deed in my house? Who has lured this virgin away from me and violated her? <sup>5</sup>The story of Adam has been repeated in my case, hasn’t it? For just as Adam was praying when the serpent came and found Eve alone, deceived her, and corrupted her, so the same thing has happened to me.”

<sup>6</sup>So Joseph got up from the sackcloth and summoned Mary and said to her, “God has taken a special interest in you—how could you have done this? <sup>7</sup>Have you forgotten the Lord your God? Why have you brought shame on yourself, you who were raised in the Holy of Holies and fed by a heavenly messenger?”

Mary & Elizabeth

Joseph  
accuses Mary

11:6  
Ⓢ Lk 1:34  
11:8  
Ⓢ Lk 1:35, Mt 1:21  
11:9  
Ⓢ Lk 1:38  
12:2  
Ⓢ Lk 1:42, 48  
12:3–6  
Ⓢ Lk 1:39–44  
12:6  
Ⓢ Lk 1:48  
12:7  
Ⓢ Lk 1:56  
12:8  
Ⓢ Lk 1:24  
13:5  
◊ Gn 3:1–13  
13:6  
◊ Gn 3:13  
13:7  
Ⓢ In Jas 8:2

**12:3** The author assumes that readers will know who *Elizabeth* is. She is the wife of Zechariah and mother of the future John the Baptist (see 22:5; Luke 1:5).

Joseph's vision  
Mary & Joseph  
accused

<sup>8</sup>But she began to cry bitter tears: "I'm innocent. I haven't had sex with any man."

<sup>9</sup>And Joseph said to her, "Then where did the child you're carrying come from?"

<sup>10</sup>And she replied, "As the Lord my God lives, I don't know where it came from."

**14** *And Joseph became* very frightened and no longer spoke with her as he pondered what he was going to do with her. <sup>2</sup>And Joseph said to himself, "If I try to cover up her sin, I'll end up going against the law of the Lord. <sup>3</sup>And if I disclose her condition to the people of Israel, I'm afraid that the child inside her might be heaven-sent and I'll end up handing innocent blood over to a death sentence. <sup>4</sup>So what should I do with her? (I know,) I'll divorce her quietly."

<sup>5</sup>But when night came a messenger of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream and said: "Don't be afraid of this girl, because the child in her is the holy spirit's doing. <sup>6</sup>She will have a son and you will name him Jesus—the name means 'he will save his people from their sins.'" <sup>7</sup>And Joseph got up from his sleep and praised the God of Israel, who had given him this favor. <sup>8</sup>And so he began to protect the girl.

**15** *Then Annas* the scholar came to him and said to him, "Joseph, why haven't you attended our assembly?"

<sup>2</sup>And he replied to him, "Because I was worn out from the trip and rested my first day home."

<sup>3</sup>Then Annas turned and saw that Mary was pregnant.

"He left in a hurry for the high priest and said to him, "You remember Joseph, don't you—the man you yourself vouched for? Well, he has committed a serious offense."

<sup>5</sup>And the high priest asked, "In what way?"

<sup>6</sup>"Joseph has violated the virgin he received from the temple of the Lord," he replied. "He had his way with her and hasn't disclosed his action to the people of Israel."

<sup>7</sup>And the high priest asked him, "Has Joseph really done this?"

13:8  
Ⓢ Lk 1:34;  
Ⓣ InJas 15:13  
14:1–6  
Ⓢ Mt 1:19–24  
14:2  
Ⓣ Dt 22:23–24  
14:3  
Ⓢ Mt 27:3–4

**13:10** That Mary is unable to say *where it came from* is surprising, given the explicit announcement (see 11:7). Presumably Mary forgot, as also in her conversation with Elizabeth (see 12:6).

**14:3** That there could be a *death sentence* derives from Deut 22:23–24.

**14:4** That Joseph should *divorce her quietly* makes little sense here because they are neither engaged nor married. The author is clearly dependent on Matt 1:19.

**14:5** The command here, *Don't be afraid of*

*this girl*, differs significantly from the parallel account in Matt 1:20 ("Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife"). This difference is deliberate, reflecting the very different relationship between Joseph and Mary in this gospel.

**15:6** That Joseph should be held responsible for having *violated* Mary and made her pregnant is odd because, when he had left to build, she was twelve years old (see 8:3) but now she is sixteen (see 12:9).

<sup>8</sup>And he replied, "Send temple assistants and you'll find the virgin pregnant."

<sup>9</sup>And so the temple assistants went and found her just as Annas had reported, and then they brought her, along with Joseph, to the court.

<sup>10</sup>"Mary, why have you done this?" the high priest asked her. "Why have you humiliated yourself? <sup>11</sup>Have you forgotten the Lord your God, you who were raised in the Holy of the Holies and were fed by heavenly messengers? <sup>12</sup>You of all people, who heard their hymns and danced for them—why have you done this?"

<sup>13</sup>And she wept bitterly: "As the Lord God lives, I stand innocent before him. Believe me, I've not had sex with any man."

<sup>14</sup>And the high priest said, "Joseph, why have you done this?"

<sup>15</sup>And Joseph said, "As the Lord lives, I am innocent where she is concerned."

<sup>16</sup>And the high priest said, "Don't perjure yourself, but tell the truth. You've had your way with her and haven't disclosed this action to the people of Israel. <sup>17</sup>And you haven't humbled yourself under God's mighty hand, so that your offspring might be blessed."

<sup>18</sup>But Joseph was silent.

**16** *Then the high priest* said, "Return the virgin you received from the temple of the Lord."

<sup>2</sup>And Joseph, bursting into tears. . . .

<sup>3</sup>And the high priest said, "I'm going to give you the Lord's drink test, and it will disclose your sin clearly to both of you."

<sup>4</sup>And the high priest took the water and made Joseph drink it and sent him into the wilderness, but he returned unharmed. <sup>5</sup>And he made the girl drink it, too, and sent her into the wilderness. She also came back unharmed. <sup>6</sup>And everybody was surprised because their sin had not been revealed. <sup>7</sup>And so the high priest said, "If the Lord God has not exposed your sin, then neither do I condemn you." And he dismissed them. <sup>8</sup>Joseph took Mary and returned home celebrating and praising the God of Israel.

**17** *Now an order came* from the Emperor Augustus that everybody in Bethlehem of Judea be enrolled in the census. <sup>2</sup>And Joseph wondered, "I'll enroll my sons, but what am I going to do with this girl?"

**16:2** There is probably a lacuna here, for no finite verb accompanies the participle *bursting*. How much has dropped out is difficult to tell, but perhaps nothing more than "said nothing" is missing.

**16:3** *The Lord's drink test* reflects a similar, yet far from identical, test described in Num 5:11–31. For another such test, outside the biblical tradition, see Achilles Tatius, *Cleitophon and Leucippe*, 8.3.3; 6.1–15; 13.1–14.2.

**17:1** With the *order from the Emperor*

*Augustus* the gospel begins to follow the sequence of events narrated in Luke 2:1–39, with some attention to Matt 1:16–2:16. Note, however, that Augustus' order here extends only to *Bethlehem of Judea*, not to the whole world, as in Luke 2:1.

*The drink test*

*On the way  
to Bethlehem*

15:11  
Ⓣ InJas 8:2  
15:13  
Ⓣ InJas 13:8  
15:17  
Ⓢ 1Pet 5:6  
16:3  
Ⓣ Nm 5:11–31  
16:7  
Ⓢ Jn 8:11  
16:8  
Ⓢ Lk 5:25  
17:1–11  
Ⓢ Lk 2:1–7

*Time stands still* How will I enroll her? <sup>3</sup>As my wife? I'm ashamed to do that. As my daughter? The people of Israel know she's not my daughter. <sup>4</sup>How this is to be decided depends on the Lord."

<sup>5</sup>And so he saddled his donkey and had her get on it. His son led it and Samuel brought up the rear. <sup>6</sup>As they neared the three mile marker, Joseph turned around and saw that she was sulking. <sup>7</sup>And he said to himself, "Perhaps the baby she is carrying is causing her discomfort." <sup>8</sup>Joseph turned around again and saw her laughing and said to her, "Mary, what's going on with you? One minute I see you laughing and the next minute you're sulking."

<sup>9</sup>And she replied, "Joseph, it's because I imagine two peoples in front of me, one weeping and mourning and the other celebrating and jumping for joy."

<sup>10</sup>Halfway through the trip Mary said to him, "Joseph, help me down from the donkey—the child inside me is about to be born."

<sup>11</sup>And he helped her down and said to her, "Where will I take you to give you some privacy, since this place is out in the open?"

**18** *He found a cave* nearby and took her inside. He stationed his sons to guard her <sup>2</sup>and went to look for a Hebrew midwife in the country around Bethlehem.

<sup>3</sup>"Now I, Joseph, was walking along and yet not going anywhere. <sup>4</sup>I looked up at the vault of the sky and saw it standing still, and then at the clouds and saw them paused in amazement, and at the birds of the sky suspended in midair. <sup>5</sup>As I looked on the earth, I saw a bowl lying there and workers reclining around it with their hands in the bowl; <sup>6</sup>some were chewing and yet did not chew; some were picking up something to eat and yet did not pick it up; and some were putting food in their mouths and yet did not do so. <sup>7</sup>Instead, they were all looking upward.

<sup>8</sup>"I saw sheep being driven along and yet the sheep stood still; <sup>9</sup>the shepherd was lifting his hand to strike them, and yet his hand remained raised. <sup>10</sup>And I observed the current of the river and saw goats with their mouths in the water and yet they were not drinking. <sup>11</sup>Then all of a sudden everything and everybody went on with what they had been doing.

**18:3** From here on the earliest ms differs sharply from later mss in that it omits the vision of Joseph (18:3–11) and has shorter accounts of the incidents that follow.

17:9  
 © Gn 25:23,  
 Lk 2:34

**17:4** *How this is to be decided:* literally, "this day of the Lord," an expression that implies a time of judgment or decision. "Day" might refer to some particular day, but, if so, it is not clear which one. Or it might refer simply to that day that Joseph travels, since every day belongs to the Lord. Or it might refer to the series of events culminating in the enroll-

ment, which is how it is taken here.

**17:5** No *Samuel* is mentioned among the brothers of Jesus in Mark 6:3.

**18:1** That Jesus is born in a *cave* outside Bethlehem differs from Luke's stable at an inn there (Luke 2:7).

**18:3–11** Joseph's vision, which begins with his claim to be *walking along and yet not*

**19** "*Then I saw a woman* coming down from the hill country, and she asked, 'Where are you going, sir?'"

<sup>2</sup>"I replied, 'I am looking for a Hebrew midwife.'

<sup>3</sup>"She inquired, 'Are you an Israelite?'"

<sup>4</sup>"I told her, 'Yes.'

<sup>5</sup>"And she said, 'And who's the one having a baby in the cave?'"

<sup>6</sup>"I replied, 'My fiancée.'

<sup>7</sup>"And she continued, 'She isn't your wife?'"

<sup>8</sup>"I said to her, 'She is Mary, who was raised in the temple of the Lord; I obtained her by lot as my wife. <sup>9</sup>But she's not really my wife; she's pregnant by the holy spirit.'

<sup>10</sup>"The midwife said, 'Really?'"

<sup>11</sup>Joseph responded, "Come and see."

<sup>12</sup>And the midwife went with him. <sup>13</sup>As they stood in front of the cave, a dark cloud overshadowed it. <sup>14</sup>The midwife said, "I've really been privileged, because today my eyes have seen a miracle in that salvation has come to Israel."

<sup>15</sup>Suddenly the cloud withdrew from the cave and an intense light appeared inside the cave, so that their eyes could not bear to look. <sup>16</sup>And a little later that light receded until an infant became visible; he took the breast of his mother Mary.

<sup>17</sup>Then the midwife shouted: "What a great day this is for me because I've seen this new miracle!"

<sup>18</sup>And the midwife left the cave and met Salome and said to her, "Salome, Salome, let me tell you about a new marvel: a virgin has given birth, and you know that's impossible!"

<sup>19</sup>And Salome replied, "As the Lord my God lives, unless I insert my finger and examine her, I will never believe that a virgin has given birth."

**20** *The midwife entered* and said, "Mary, position yourself for an examination. You are facing a serious test."

<sup>2</sup>And so Mary, when she heard these instructions, positioned herself, and Salome inserted her finger into Mary. <sup>3</sup>And then Salome cried aloud and said, "I'll be damned because of my transgression and my disbelief; I have put the living God on trial. <sup>4</sup>Look! My hand is disappearing! It's being consumed by the flames!"

*A child is born*

*Salome's folly*

19:13  
 0 Ex 16:10  
 19:14  
 © Lk 2:30  
 19:19  
 © Jn 20:25

*going anywhere*, seems to describe an experience in which everything—the winds, birds, workers, herds, herders, and himself—are momentarily frozen in whatever activity they were engaged in. This moment would seem to be the time when, back at the cave, Jesus was born.

**19:6** That Joseph should refer here to Mary

as his *fiancée* is odd, given the author's deliberate attempt elsewhere to depict their relationship as that of merely guardian and ward.

**19:19** Salome inserting her *finger* recalls the language and story of doubting Thomas in John 20:24–25.

Visit of  
the astrologers

<sup>5</sup>Then Salome fell on her knees in the presence of the Lord, with these words: “God of my ancestors, remember me because I am a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. <sup>6</sup>Do not make an example of me for the people of Israel, but give me a place among the poor again. <sup>7</sup>You yourself know, Lord, that I’ve been healing people in your name and have been receiving my payment from you.”

<sup>8</sup>And suddenly a messenger of the Lord appeared, saying to her, “Salome, Salome, the Lord of all has heard your prayer. <sup>9</sup>Hold out your hand to the child and pick him up, and then you’ll have salvation and joy.”

<sup>10</sup>Salome approached the child and picked him up with these words: “I’ll worship him because he’s been born to be king of Israel.” <sup>11</sup>And Salome was instantly healed and left the cave vindicated.

<sup>12</sup>Then a voice said abruptly, “Salome, Salome, don’t report the marvels you’ve seen until the child goes to Jerusalem.”

**21** *Joseph was about ready* to depart for Judea, but a great uproar was about to take place in Bethlehem in Judea. <sup>2</sup>It all started when astrologers came inquiring, “Where is the newborn king of the Judeans? We’re here because we saw his star in the East and have come to pay him homage.”

<sup>3</sup>When Herod heard about their visit, he was terrified and sent agents to the astrologers. <sup>4</sup>He also sent for the high priests and questioned them in his palace: “What has been written about the Anointed? Where is he supposed to be born?”

<sup>5</sup>They said to him, “In Bethlehem, Judea, that’s what the scriptures say.” <sup>6</sup>And he dismissed them.

<sup>7</sup>Then he questioned the astrologers: “What sign have you seen regarding the one who has been born king?”

<sup>8</sup>And the astrologers said, “We saw a star of exceptional brilliance in the sky, and it so dimmed the other stars that they disappeared. Consequently, we know that a king was born for Israel. And we have come to pay him homage.”

<sup>9</sup>Herod instructed them: “Go and begin your search, and if you find him, report back to me, so I can also go and pay him homage.”

<sup>10</sup>The astrologers departed. And there it was: the star they had seen in the East led them on until they came to the cave; then the star stopped directly above the head of the child. <sup>11</sup>After the astrologers saw him with his mother Mary, they took gifts out of their pouches—gold, pure incense, and myrrh.

20:11  
Ⓢ Lk 18:14  
21:1–12  
Ⓢ Mt 2:1–12  
21:5  
Ⓞ Mt 5:1  
21:11  
Ⓞ Is 60:6

**20:12** The author seemingly refers to Joseph’s and Mary’s last trip to *Jerusalem*, which is narrated in Luke 2:22–39. **21:1** *Judea*: Here and in v. 12 “Judea” must refer to the city of Jerusalem.

**21:5** It is remarkable that after the words *what the scriptures say* the quotation from Mic 5:1, 3, which follows these very words in Matt 2:6, is omitted here.

Slaughter of  
the infants

Murder of  
Zechariah

<sup>12</sup>Since they had been advised by the heavenly messenger not to go into Judea, they returned to their country by another route.

**22** *When Herod realized* he had been duped by the astrologers, he flew into a rage <sup>2</sup>and dispatched his executioners with instructions to kill all the infants two years old and younger.

<sup>3</sup>When Mary heard that the infants were being killed, she was frightened <sup>4</sup>and took her child, wrapped him in strips of cloth, and put him in a feeding trough used by cattle.

<sup>5</sup>As for Elizabeth, when she heard that they were looking for John, she took him and went up into the hill country. <sup>6</sup>She kept searching for a place to hide him, but there was none to be had. <sup>7</sup>Then she groaned and said out loud, “Mountain of God, please take in a mother with her child.” You see, Elizabeth was unable to keep on climbing because her nerve failed her. <sup>8</sup>But suddenly the mountain was split open and let them in. This mountain allowed the light to shine through to her, <sup>9</sup>since a messenger of the Lord was with them for protection.

**23** *Herod, though*, kept looking for John <sup>2</sup>and sent his agents to Zechariah serving at the altar with this message for him: “Where have you hidden your son?”

<sup>3</sup>But he answered them, “I am a minister of God, attending to his temple. How should I know where my son is?”

<sup>4</sup>So the agents left and reported all this to Herod, who became angry and said, “Is his son going to rule over Israel?”

<sup>5</sup>And he sent his agents back with this message for him: “Tell me the truth. Where is your son? Don’t you know that I have your life in my power?”

<sup>6</sup>And the agents went and reported this message to him.

<sup>7</sup>Zechariah answered, “I am a martyr for God. Take my life. <sup>8</sup>The Lord, though, will receive my spirit because you are shedding innocent blood at the entrance to the temple of the Lord.”

<sup>9</sup>And so at daybreak Zechariah was murdered, but the people of Israel did not know that he had been murdered.

22:1–2  
Ⓢ Mt 2:16–18  
22:4  
Ⓢ Lk 2:7  
23:1–9  
Ⓢ Mt 23:35,  
Lk 1:5–25  
23:7–8  
Ⓢ Mt 23:35,  
Acts 7:59

**22:4** The *strips of cloth* and *feeding trough* recall Luke 2:12, but here these items are used in the Matthean context of Herod’s threat to Jesus’ life. By having Mary wrap Jesus up and hide him in a trough, the author can dispense with Joseph’s, Mary’s and Jesus’ escape to Egypt, which is Matthew’s solution to the threat (Matt 2:3–15).

**22:5** For the significance of why Elizabeth took John and *went up into the hill country*,

see the Introduction.

**22:8** The translation of the phrase *This mountain allowed the light to shine through to her* is very tentative, for the Greek is opaque and probably corrupt.

**23:2** Zechariah’s presence at the *altar*, where he will be killed, shows that the author has apparently identified this Zechariah, the father of John, with another Zechariah, mentioned in Matt 23:35, who did die at the altar.

Zechariah mourned

Author

**24** *At the hour of formal greetings* the priests departed, but Zechariah did not meet and bless them as was customary. <sup>2</sup>And so the priests waited around for Zechariah, to greet him with prayer and to praise the Most High God.

<sup>3</sup>But when he did not show up, they all became fearful. <sup>4</sup>One of them, however, summoned up his courage, entered the sanctuary, and saw dried blood next to the Lord's altar. <sup>5</sup>And a voice said, "Zechariah has been murdered! His blood will not be cleaned up until his avenger appears."

<sup>6</sup>When he heard this utterance he was afraid and went out and reported to the priests what he had seen and heard. <sup>7</sup>And they summoned up their courage, entered, and saw what had happened. <sup>8</sup>The panels of the temple cried out, and the priests ripped their robes from top to bottom. <sup>9</sup>They didn't find a corpse, but they did find his blood, now turned to stone. <sup>10</sup>They were afraid and went out and reported to the people that Zechariah had been murdered. <sup>11</sup>When all the tribes of the people heard this, they began to mourn; and they beat their breasts for three days and three nights.

<sup>12</sup>After three days, however, the priests deliberated about whom they should appoint to the position of Zechariah. <sup>13</sup>The lot fell to Simeon. <sup>14</sup>This man, you see, is the one who was informed by the holy spirit that he would not see death until he laid eyes on the Anointed in the flesh.

**25** *Now I, James,* am the one who wrote this account at the time when an uproar arose in Jerusalem at the death of Herod. <sup>2</sup>I took myself off to the wilderness until the uproar in Jerusalem died down. <sup>3</sup>There I praised the Lord God, who gave me the wisdom to write this account.

<sup>4</sup>Grace will be with all those who fear the Lord. Amen.

24:1

① Lk 1:21

24:8

① Mk 15:38,

Mt 27:51

24:14

⑤ Lk 2:25–26

**24:9** *They didn't find a corpse* presumably because the murderers carried the body away and buried it without a name.

**25:1** For the historical problems raised by having *James* compose this gospel after the death of Herod see the Introduction.