



MATTHEW 2 AND LUKE 2

COME FOLLOW ME COMMENTARY

BY LYNNE WILSON

The Book of Mormon and the Nativity

Without the Book of Mormon's witness, biblical scholars have doubted Matthew and Luke's nativity stories as they discuss different ideas, contradict each other at times, and have no second source within the Bible. Yet, we find references to Jesus' nativity narratives scattered across the Book of Mormon. This study guide highlights several details that confirm Matthew and Luke's accounts, including: 1 Nephi 1:8; Mosiah 3:15; Alma 7:10, 25:15; 3 Nephi 1:13. With the Book of Mormon as a second witness, the world has two prophetic voices confirming Jesus' birth.

LUKE 2

Luke develops his message by using his structure to compare and contrast the parallel accounts of John the Baptist (JBpst) with Jesus' birth, naming, circumcision, and growth. In every case, Jesus is shown superior.

Table 1:

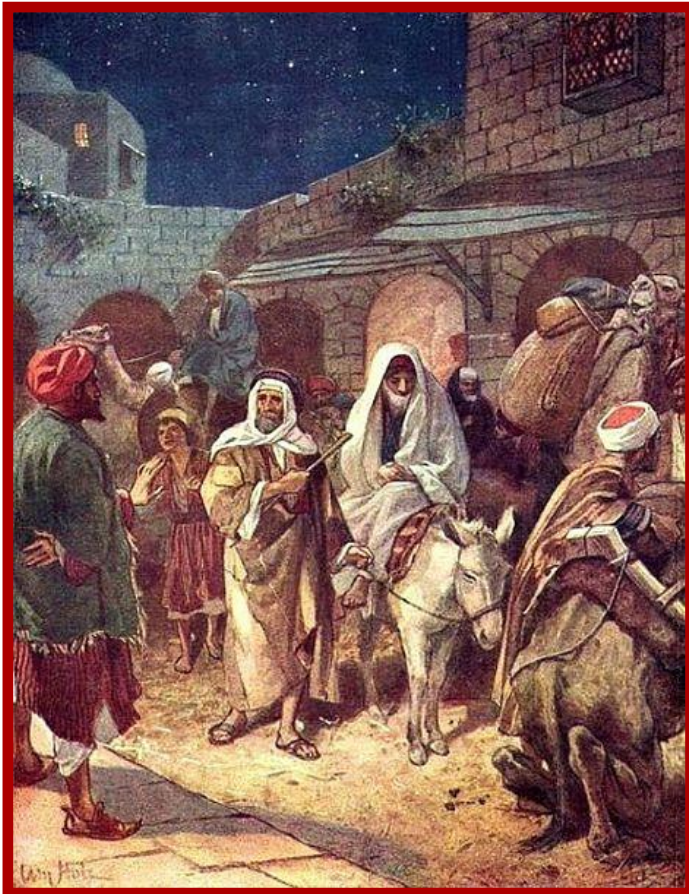
Luke's Parallel accounts of John the Baptist and Jesus' Birth, Circumcision, Naming, and Infancy

JOHN	JESUS
1. Notice of Birth: (1:57) d) Joy over John's birth (1:58) f) All astonished (1:65-66)	1. Jesus' Birth a) Census brings Joseph with Mary to Bethlehem (2:1-5) b) Mary gives birth to Jesus; swaddles him in a manger (2:6-7) c) Angelic declaration of destiny to the Shepherds (2:8-14) d) Joy over Jesus' birth (2:15-18) e) Mary treasured all this in her heart (2:19) f) Shepherds return, all who hear are astonished (2:20)
2. Circumcision + Naming (1:59-66) a) Circumcised + named (1:59-64) c) Neighbors' reaction (1:65-66) d) Zacharias' prophecies (1:67-79)	2. Circumcision, Naming and Presentation in Temple (2:21-38) a) Circumcised and named (2:21) b) Presentation in the Temple (2:22-24) c) Simeon and Anna's Reaction (2:25-27, 36-37) d) Simeon's prophecy (2:29-32) e) Anna's prophetic testimony (2:38)
3. Conclusion: Growth of child (1:80)	3. Conclusion: Growth of child (2:39-40)

Mary and Joseph Travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem (Lk 2:1-7)

Lk 2:1-2 By citing the decree of Caesar Augustus, Luke not only gives us this historical context, but also sets up a great irony. In 27 BC, the Senate and people gave Octavian, the title Augustus Caesar until his death in AD 14. His

adopted father, Julius Caesar, was posthumously proclaimed a god by the senate in 42 BC, so Augustus used the title “son of god” as part of his official nomenclature on coins and inscriptions throughout the empire. His victories put an end to the violent civil wars and brought peace to the Roman world (or *Pax Romana*), thus, he was called “savior of the whole world.” Also, his birthday was adopted as the beginning of the new year. As a biblical scholar observed, “It can scarcely be accidental that Luke’s description of the birth of Jesus presents an implicit challenge to this imperial propaganda, not by denying the imperial ideals, but by claiming that the real peace of the world was brought about by Jesus.”¹



Joseph and Mary arrive in Bethlehem by William Hole. Image via Wikimedia Commons

the route was well known, as these Jews made pilgrimages to Jerusalem each year.⁴ Just five miles south of Jerusalem was David’s birthplace, Bethlehem. Those who studied the Jewish scriptures knew that the promised Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was at least 90 miles, but most travelers added several more miles to circumvent the dangerous Samaria.⁵ In the Old Testament (OT) the “city of David” refers to Jerusalem (see 2 Sam 5:7, 9). In the New Testament (NT), “the city of David” always refers to David’s birthplace, Bethlehem (Luke 2:11). This is an interesting observation when taking into account the Book of Mormon prophecy that the Jesus “shall be born at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers” (Alma 7:10).

Lk 2:5-6 The text emphasizes that Mary’s pregnancy fulfills Gabriel’s annunciation. A literal translation suggests that Mary and Joseph were at Bethlehem for some time before the child is born: “It happened, in their being there,

Luke uses the official Roman rhetoric for the Empire: “*oikoumene* / all the world,” or “inhabited earth,” called for an enrollment or registration for taxation (see NAS, NIV, JB, RSV). Although no census of the whole Empire is known under Augustus, it sets the stage for the Savior for all the world to count and redeem all the world.² Herod the Great acted as a client king in Palestine from 40 to -4/0BC, and paid tribute to Rome.

Lk 2:3 The Romans did not require enrollment in one’s ancestral city. Imperial authority delegated the provinces to carry out their census.³ It was an old Hebrew practice to enroll by families in their ancestral districts (women, including Mary, would be counted only if it were a poll tax).

Lk 2:4 Israelites always went “up” to Jerusalem and its vicinity (Ezra 1:3), in part because it was a holy place, as well as being 2,564 feet above sea level. The

(that) the days of her giving birth were (ful)filled.”⁶ Yet, an apocryphal source has the babe delivered in a cave before they reach Bethlehem.⁷ The timing of the miracle adds to the miraculous event.

The Book of Mormon adds an extra detail to the story. The day before the Savior was born the prophet Nephi received a revelation as recorded in 3 Nephi 1:13, “the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world.” The voice is an example of divine investiture of authority for another to speak for God, as Jesus’ spirit was in utero at that time.⁸

Lk 2:7 The only author to include Jesus’ birth is Luke, the “beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14). He gives us an opportunity to peek through a window of antiquity and look on this sacred scene. The birth process has the elements of pain (often nigh unto death), blood, agony, water, life and exquisite joy. These all echo Jesus’ suffering for our Eternal lives. The two are combined by St. Athanasius: “He was made human that we might be made divine.”⁹

Luke does not describe the birth process, but focuses on how and where Mary laid the baby (and repeats it three times 2:12 and 16, for emphasis). Being swaddled, or “wrapped him in strips of cloth” (NIV), was a sign of parental care (Ezekiel 16:4; Wisdom of Solomon 7:4). Some see this foreshadowing Jesus being wrapped in a linen shroud before burial (Luke 23:53).¹⁰

The Greek word, “*phatne* / manger,” can mean a stall for tying up animals, or trough for feeding them. Troughs were either a low rock shelf in a cave, or a moveable large rock with a section carved out for feed. The manger was emphasized as a fulfillment of Isaiah 1:3; “The ox knows its owner, and the donkey knows the ‘*phatne* / manger’ of its lord, but Israel has not known me” (Septuagint, LXX). This also foreshadows Jesus’ mission: “the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head” (Matt 8:20), and his last supper—which was also in a *katalyma* / inn / guest room (Luke 22:11).



The Virgin and Child in Swaddling Clothes by Albrecht Dürer. Image via Wikimedia Commons

The Greek word, “*katalyma* / inn” usually represented a place where travelers could lay down their baggage while stopping over-night. Public inns were not snug or comfortable like modern hotels, but more like a khan, where groups of travelers spend the night under one roof.¹¹ They were often low structures built of rough stone, generally only a single story. They were usually square enclosures, some with arched recesses around the courtyard. The recessed area was a step or two above the courtyard and often paved with stone where travelers stayed on cots or mats. Their animals could be tied in the courtyard below until the paved area of the inn was full. If travelers filled

the covered area, the animals were kept outside or in a cave, so that more people could roll out their mats in the courtyard.

In the hill area of central Palestine, the limestone rocks are filled with caves, and entire khans were found in caves.¹² If the early accounts of a cave as the birth location are correct, then Isaiah 33:16 can also be interpreted as a prophecy of the Lord's birth, "He will dwell in a high cave of strong rock" (LXX).

Archeologists have found one khan in Bethlehem. The problem was not of insufficient space but of a proper place. The courtyard probably could have fit another mat among the throngs. But Joseph and Mary's needs were different than just a traveler seeking a place to lay down. Divine intervention prevailed in finding their lodging away from the crowds for Mary's delivery. We see an ironic pattern throughout Christ's ministry and beyond as so few find room in their hearts for Him.



Angels announcing Christ's birth to the shepherds by Govert Flinck. Image via Wikimedia Commons

Angels Visit Shepherds (Lk 2:8–14)

Lk 2:8 The fields where the shepherds kept watch was approximately two miles from Bethlehem (also referred to as the "tower of the flock" or Migal Edar, Genesis 35:21; Micah 4:7, 5:2). The Mishnah explains that animals found between Jerusalem and Migdal Eder were used for temple sacrifices.¹³ The symbolism of the sacred sheep who will leave the shepherds' fields to be anointed and sacrificed in the temple, is a poignant type of the Anointed One who

will also leave Bethlehem to become “the great and last sacrifice, yea ... infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:10). Isaiah prophesied, “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7).

God chose to announce the news of the birth of the Messiah to the lowly populace of the area, not to the political or religious leaders. Shepherds were often considered dishonest and outside the Law. According to the early rabbis, herdsman were ineligible to judge or act as a witness, because some grazed their flocks on other people’s lands.¹⁴ Just like the situation of Elisabeth’s and Zacharias’ barrenness, or Mary’s and Joseph’s questionable conception, we are once again presented with a group who are social outcasts and ostracized. Ironically, they are shown to be righteous, humble, devote followers of their God. Jesus himself chose to adopt the symbol of “the good Shepherd” (John 10:11, 14; also see Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4).

Sheep were out in the fields between March and November. The shepherds were “watching the watches of the night,” to protect them, or during the lambing season to help with the birthing process.¹⁵ These shepherds may have gone from the birth of their lambs to the birth of the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29).

Lk 2:9–10 In the OT, “an angel of the Lord” describes God’s visible presence among men.¹⁶ The glory of the Lord in the OT is the “*shechinah*,” or the cloud of brightness (Exodus 16:10, 24:16). It symbolizes the Divine Presence. In the NT, an angel is a messenger. Outside of the Nativity scenes, “an angel of the Lord,” appears only in the Gospels during the Lord’s Passion and at the empty tomb (Luke 22:43; Matthew 28:2,5). The angel terrified the shepherds—which is the standard reaction to angelic appearances in scripture (Luke 1:12–13, 29–30; Isaiah 60: 1, 5; etc.).

The angel’s message to “all people” contrasts with Augustus’ edict to “all the world” (Luke 2:1). The angels’ announcement for “all people” is not an exaggeration, but is for the entire human history, including the gentiles, all living and dead.¹⁷

Lk 2:11 The angel announces the messianic hope through the birth of a baby. This includes the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:6, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” The author re-emphasizes that Jesus’ birth (not Augustus’) marks a new beginning of time. Luke uses the phrase, “this day/*semeron*,” twenty times. It gives an eschatological sense that the last time is at hand.¹⁸ The angel also introduces two other titles: Savior and Christ the Lord. Christ is Greek for Messiah (in Hebrew), which translates to Anointed One in English. The atmosphere and language of Luke’s nativity narrative speaks of the promised messiah.

Lk 2:12–13 As with the annunciation pattern, the angel gives a customary *sign* (Luke 1:20, 1:35–36). The birth also fulfills the sign given to King Ahaz through Isaiah: “the Lord himself shall give you a sign, Behold, a virgin shall conceive” (Isaiah 7:14). King Benjamin taught in Mosiah 3:15, “many signs, and wonders, and types, and shadows showed he unto them, concerning his coming; and also holy prophets spake unto them concerning his coming.”

The scene climaxes as a numerous heavenly host bursts into view. The glorious and profound benediction to the shepherds' vision fulfills Isaiah 6:3, "The whole earth is full of his glory." The shepherds hear angels praising God "in the Highest," which literally means, "in the highest heavens." The Greek emphasizes the plurality of heavens, and God's dwelling in the highest of those heavens.¹⁹ Restored scripture echo this truth starting with Lehi who also "saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God" (1 Nephi 1:8; also D&C 76:70–96).

Lk 2:14 Earlier the angel promises that the good tidings are for all people, so in this sense, God's favor toward man is universal and inclusive; all are deserving of His good favor. Elder James Talmage asked, "What a consummation to be wished—Peace on earth! But how can such come except through the maintenance of good will toward men? And through what means could glory to God in the highest be more effectively rendered?"²⁰

Another way to analyze this beautiful couplet is as poetry. There are three parallel elements in each line: a noun, a location, and a directional phrase. The glory given to God is poised with the peace given to man. Heaven and earth are balanced and become one in the heralding of Jesus' birth. "Glory" and "peace" are parallel; "in the highest" and "on earth" are parallel; and "to God" and "among men favored" by God, (people whom he favors).²¹

Glory in the highest to God, and
Peace on earth among men favored (by Him)



Adoration of the Shepherds by Gerard von Honthorst. Image via Wikimedia Commons

Shepherds Visit the Babe (Lk 2:15–20)

The first scene told of a promised baby born in Bethlehem, whom Mary wrapped in strips of cloth and laid in a manger. In the second scene angels tell the shepherds of the baby's birth and are given a sign to find the baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger. Now Luke's account climaxes as the witnesses arrive at the manger. The shepherds' pilgrimage of a couple of miles led them up a terraced hill to the craggy summit crowned with the town of Bethlehem to find the swaddled babe in a manger.

Lk 2:15–17 The shepherds “*came with haste.*” Immediate obedience, motivated by spontaneous trust, reoccurs as a theme in scripture (Luke 1:39, etc.). In contrast to the state of Israel that Isaiah described in chapter 1:3, “The ox knows his master, and the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand” (NIV), here Israel symbolically comes to know the manger of their Lord. This is not only the zenith of the shepherds' lives, but also the zenith of world history up to that point.

The text claims the shepherds shared the good news, yet, strangely, nowhere in the rest of the Gospels outside of these nativity chapters can we find any references or hints to suggest Jesus had a miraculous birth or was born in Bethlehem (John 1:45; 6:45; 7:41–2; Luke 3:23). Mary and Jesus are the only two found in both the infancy narrative and the ministry texts.²²

Lk 2:18 Again Luke develops a parallel phrase with JBPst's naming and circumcision (Luke 1:66). The neighbors who witnessed his birth also “marveled” (Luke 1:21, 63; 2:33). Luke organized the two births and naming accounts to be as interdependent, just as their lives will develop interdependently.²³

Lk 2:19 Mary's silence is amplified as she, “*synterein / kept, preserved, treasured*” in her heart. The depth of her pondering contrasts to the shepherds' reaction, who “made known abroad” (2:17).

Lk 2:20 The shepherds become the first missionaries as they spread the message of their witness. Yet, they are only intermediaries, as the message they proclaim is far more important than they themselves.

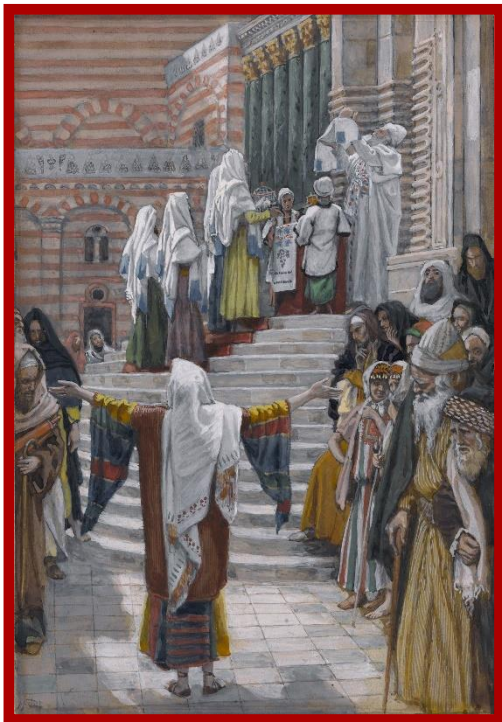
Jesus' Circumcision and Naming (Lk 2:21)

Lk 2:21 Luke repeats, “When the days were accomplished” three times: 1) Jesus' birth (2:6), 2) Jesus' circumcision, and 3) Mary's purification (2:22). The repetition connects the three events. The law of Moses dictated circumcision customs (Leviticus 12:2–3). For JBPst, it was the center of his birth scene, while for Jesus, the circumcision is almost a side note. It is certainly viable to view John as the last of the old-covenant prophets, and thereby giving his circumcision more importance as part of that covenant given to Abraham's seed. All that happened during John's naming and circumcision adds importance to the old covenant setting. On the other hand, with Christ came the new covenant and a new definition of circumcision of the heart (Colossians 2:11, Galatians 3:24). The poet John Milton saw Jesus' circumcision with symbolic importance for what lay ahead.²⁴

“He who with all heaven’s heraldry whilere
Entered the world, now bleeds to give us ease.
Alas! How soon our sin
Sore doth begin
His infancy to seize!”

In the parallel account, when JBPst’s is named, it caused a stir among the people (Luke 1:59–66), while Luke only mentions it for Jesus, and moves quickly ahead to the temple.

At the Temple (Lk 2:22–40)



The Presentation at the Temple by James Tissot.

Lk 2:22–24 Luke has five references to the Mosaic Law running through this scene (2:23, 24, 27, 39). The reference to Mary’s 40-day purification period (Lev 12:3–4) underscores the message that the future greatness of Jesus is made possible through obedience to the Law of the Lord.²⁵ The law required a sacrifice as part of the purification of the mother after childbirth (not for redemption of the firstborn as Luke mistakenly records). A woman was ritually unclean for seven days before the circumcision and 33 days after her delivery of a male (and doubled to 80 days for a female). The number 33 immediately remind us of the span of Christ’s mortality. Symbolically, $33 + 7 = 40$, represents complete, whole, or perfection (Exodus 24:18; Numbers 14:34; 2 Samuel 5:4; Hebrews 3:17; etc.).

Luke goes into some detail to explain the Jewish customs. His wording is from the Septuagint (LXX) of Leviticus 12:8. Luke’s explanation suggests that his audience was unfamiliar with the details of Law of Moses. Rather than sacrificing a costly lamb, the Law provided a less expensive option for the purification sacrifice—a pair of turtledoves or pigeons (one was for a sin offering, the other for a burnt offering, Leviticus 2:18).

Mary and Joseph would have passed through the court of the Gentiles, around the three-cubit (or five-foot) stone partition that enclosed the sacred space, through the “gate of the women,” or else “the gate of the firstlings,” into the 200 square foot Court of Women. The Court of Women was not exclusively for women, but rather it was the last place Israelite women were allowed to proceed in the temple precincts. This was the common place of study and worship, though the men and women were separated. The females and children were allowed to worship along the perimeter under a colonnade. Against a wall were thirteen chests, in the shape of a trumpet, for charitable contributions.²⁶ This is where the young couple would have paid for their offering of two doves.

Lk 2:25–27 Simeon is described with four noble characteristics: 1) “just /righteous / holy” (also see Luke 1:6, 2) “devout” or respectful and careful about religious duties, 3) “longing expectancy” or faithfully and patiently waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promises, and 4) a recipient of the Spirit of God.²⁷ The Spirit’s inspiration directs him to the temple courtyard. In this way, Simeon represents all Spirit filled Israelites who wait for the Lord’s promises. Luke explains that Simeon happened to be in Jerusalem—in contrast with Zacharias whose priestly duty brought him to the Temple (1:8–9).²⁸

One of the motifs of this scene is that both the Law and the prophets are fulfilled in Jesus. Malachi 3:1 prophesied, “The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His Temple.” Luke parallelisms continue as Simeon, and next Anna, act as double witnesses of Jesus’ divinity.

Simeon’s Servant Song



Simeon in the Temple by Rembrandt. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Lk 2:28–32 The scene includes the beautiful diversity of Simeon at the end of his life holding a child that is just beginning his life. Simeon’s prophecy has become famous in the mass as its Latin first words, *Nunc dimittis*. The poem speaks of joy and peace by highlighting the watchman and the aged. Simeon describes himself as a “servant / *doulon*,” just as Mary does in Luke 1:38, “handmaiden / *doule* / servant / slave.” As a devoted servant Simeon addresses God as his “mighty Master.” Simeon’s message testifies of God’s foreknowledge and carrying out of His plans. He quotes portions of scripture including Isaiah 52:10; 42:6; 46:13; and 60:1. He includes gentiles as well as Israelites as those who will be blessed from this child’s life.

Lk 2:33 Mary and Joseph marvel that Jesus will save both Israel and the gentiles (third use of marvel, 1:21, 63, 2:18).

Lk 2:34–35 Simeon blessed the parents and prophesies of Mary’s lot too. The four lines each have a theme of judgment.

“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel,
and to be a sign that will be spoken against,
so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.
And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” (Lk 2:34–35)

Simeon predicts that a rebellious people are about to dissent. The “fall / *ptosis* / failure” figuratively means, downfall or crash. The foundations of hell will crash with “this child’s” life. Jesus was “set or appointed” to overcome “the fall” of mankind. Simeon is referring to “this child,” the embodied Jehovah, who was placed since the fall for the rising of all mankind. This child, the Redeemer, will rule as King and judge over the fallen of the earth. It can also infer an individual downfall.

The word “*anastasis* / rising” is often translated “resurrection from death, rising again” or figuratively “a moral recovery (of spiritual truth).” This child has been set or prepared since the fall to provide “a moral recovery of spiritual truth,” and a physical resurrection.²⁹ The “rejected (or opposed) symbol” refers to the future. Jesus will be rejected as a sign (Isaiah 53:3).

Lk 2:35 There are several interpretations of what the sword that pierces means.³⁰ The JST clarifies this: “a sword shall pierce through *him to the wounding of thine* own soul.” It implies that Mary is not exempt from mortal pains, and the sorrows of motherhood. From the Garden of Eden, the devil is allowed to have power to bruise the heel of Adam’s posterity, God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent or Satan (Genesis 3:15) Mary’s son, Jesus, is the only literal seed of woman who can crush Satan’s head.

The Prophetess Anna Witnesses



The prophetess Anna by Rembrandt. Image via Wikimedia commons.

Lk 2:36–38 The female and second witness in this scene is the prophetess Anna (or Hannah in Hebrew), whose name means, “Grace or Favor.” She has several unique traits: She is from the tribe of Asher, a prophetess, over one-hundred-years-old, and speaks as a female witness. In the late second temple, Jewish women were not allowed to speak as a legal witness—but that is changed by Jesus and in Christianity where women are regularly shown as witnesses.³¹ Anna is the forerunner of the Jerusalem Christian community in her fasting and prayer in the Temple setting (Acts 2:17, 46). Luke also uses his numbers carefully by offering his audience three double witnesses plus Mary, for a total of seven voices proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. These witnesses embody all devout believers waiting for the fulfillment of the covenants of Israel.

Conclusion and Return to Galilee

Lk 2:39 Luke’s conclusion prepares the reader geographically and theologically to move from the infancy to the next stage of Jesus’ life. Luke follows the Holy Family from the purification at the temple back “to their own city Nazareth.” This appears to contradict Matthew’s nativity agenda that has the family living in a house in Bethlehem and then flees to Egypt before moving to Nazareth. However, if we read, “all things according to the law,” as a broad conditional, then Luke’s timing could include more (i.e. the prophecies had to be fulfilled “out of Egypt have I called my Son.”) The Law and the prophets were all “a type of his coming” (Alma 25:15). Luke’s goal was to record his theology, not a complete history. Furthermore, he probably did not know the details from Matthew’s account. A possible timeline of these events would be:

Table 2: Timetable of Nativity Events

LUKE	Shepherds come to Bethlehem	Circumcision 8 days old	Mary's purification 40 days old			Return to Nazareth
MATTHEW	Star seen at its rising/east			Magi come	Flee to Egypt	Return to Nazareth

Lk 2:40 This verse is identical to what was said of JBpst in 1:80, up until the word, spirit:

JBpst: And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit

Jesus: And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him

With each of Luke's parallel accounts, Jesus is endowed with extra wisdom and grace from God. Luke witnesses that Jesus has superiority to all things—including the prophets and Law of Moses. Jesus' "favored by God" connects the infancy of Jesus to his ministry.

MATTHEW 2

Scene 2: Arrival of the Magi (Mt 2: 1–12)

The second of five scenes in Matthew's nativity introduces the visit from the magi in parallel episodes:

JERUSALEM

1. Magi go to Jerusalem after seeing a sign by a star (2:1–2)

2. Herod asks scribes where Messiah will be born (2:3–6)

3. Herod instructs magi to find the child and return (2:7–8)

BETHLEHEM

1b. Magi go to Bethlehem led by a star (2:9–10)

2b. Magi find Messiah and offer royal gifts (2:11)

3b. Dream directs magi *not* to return to Herod (2:12)

Mt 2:1 In addition to being David's hometown, the word Bethlehem means: "House of Bread" in Hebrew—making it doubly relevant for the birth place of the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35). Bethlehem in Judea was a small agricultural town perched on a rocky outcropping 2,704 feet above sea level, just five miles south of Jerusalem. At the time of Jesus' birth, the population was about 300. Not too far away, on the highest hill just southeast of Bethlehem, King Herod built an imposing castle, the "Herodium" that dominated the region. Bethlehem is mentioned 41 times in the OT. References include (a) where Ruth and Boaz met (Ruth 1, 2:4, 4:11), (b) where David's ancestral home was, (c) where David was anointed by the prophet Samuel as king over God's people (I Sam 16:1-13; 17:12, 15; 20:6, 28), (d) and where was the traditional site of Rachel's tomb (Gen 35:19, 48:7). It was well known by Micah's prophecy as the birthplace of the promised Messiah: "Out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler of Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (Micah 5:2). In first century Judaism, the scriptural relationship between Bethlehem and the Messiah was well known. It was not just Herod's chief priests and scribes who knew of this scriptural reference to the Messiah's birthplace. In John 7:42 the people of Jerusalem ask, "Has not the Scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" Rabbinical teaching unhesitatingly points toward Bethlehem as the birthplace of Messiah ben David.

Herod the king



Herod the Great. Image via Wikimedia Commons

Herod represented three of the Semitic races, two by birth (Edomite and Ishmaelite), and the third by his feigned allegiance to the Law of Moses (Jew). Nonetheless, his conceptions of governmental policy were completely Roman, and his ideal of life and enjoyment were entirely Greek. At twenty-five, energetic and athletic, Herod became the governor of Galilee and subdued the unrest there. In 40 BC he went to Rome where Antony and Octavius appointed him King of Judea. However, the Jewish people did not welcome him as their king. He fought the Jews for three years, married Mariamne I, a princess from the Hasmonean family (only to kill her later as he realized she and her children had more of a right to the throne than he did). Finally, in 37 BC he gained possession of Jerusalem.³² A masterful politician, Herod maintained favor with the Roman rulers, but his devout Jewish subjects utterly despised him. He was most known for his paranoid jealousy that led to a brutal reign, and his grandiose building projects.³³



Image via public domain pictures

Magi or Wise men

Matthew uses the Greek word, "*magoi* / magi / astrologers / wise men" that may refer to traveling magi of Babylon, astrologers known among the Medes and Persians, Zoroastrian priests, or any other Arabian group of wise seekers. The text suggests they are not Jewish,³⁴ as does Isaiah 60:3, "And

the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.” There were several traditions as to their number. Augustine and Chrysostom say that there were twelve. Three developed to represent the three known continents and triple gifts. Apocryphal literature gives them names and countries and personal appearances. Practical logic tells us that such a journey through the deserts east of Judah would have required a good-sized company for protection of the valuable gifts, and animals to carry supplies and tents for such a journey.

Mt 2:2 Herod the Great was pathologically jealous, so the suggestion of a new king was interpreted as a personal challenge. Furthermore, the assertion of the wise men “we have seen his star” (past tense) was a legitimate claim for the birth of a king in that era. The magi appear not to know the prophecy where the new King should be born. There is the possibility that they stop at Herod’s palace for political decorum. The text does not say that, though. The text suggests they do not know the Jewish scripture outlining the birthplace of the “King of the Jews.”

His star

Following a star to a special location was common to the ancient world and adds historical probability to the story. Jews, like most ancients, believed in the influence of the planets upon the destiny of man. The Greeks and Romans considered that the appearance and disappearance of heavenly bodies symbolized the births and deaths of great men.³⁵ Since the astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) made careful astronomical studies of peculiar celestial phenomena in the decade before Jesus’ birth, studying possibilities of the star of Bethlehem has fascinated astronomers. The Adler Planetarium in Chicago presented the three most probable candidates for the “the star of Bethlehem.”³⁶

1. A supernova or “new star:” The explosion of a distant star that gives out a great deal of light for weeks.
2. A comet moves in elliptical paths around the sun, sometimes with a tail or reappearing several days later
3. A planetary conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars was in 7 to 6 BC.

The star had been prophesied in the OT as well. “I shall see him, but not now... there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17). The Book of Mormon also verifies this tradition of many signs in the heavens. Samuel the Lamanite promised “great lights” and many signs and wonders in the heavens to precede Jesus’ birth (Helaman 24:2–6).

in the east,

Matthew’s describes a star that was seen: “*anatole* / a rising of light / at its rising.” *East* is only by implication and it does not describe a traveling star.

Mt 2:3 Luke uses the same word for “troubled” when the disciples see Jesus walking on the water (terrified might be the better translation). The people of Jerusalem knew the consequences if Herod suspected a rival to his title and throne. This evokes a parallel in history was Moses’ birth and continues on several incidences.

Table 3: Parallels Between Moses' and Jesus' Births

1. Fathers received dreams of the sacred mission of the unborn sons (Mt 1:20-21; Josephus, *Ant.* II, IX.2)
2. Wicked leader forewarned by scribes of Hebrew birth that will be a threat (Mt 2:4-6; *ibid.*, IX. 3)
3. Wicked leader and people filled with dread at hearing of Hebrew deliverer's birth (Mt 2:3; *ibid.*, IX.2-3)
4. Wicked King (or Pharaoh) seeks to destroy the infant (Mt 2:13-14; Ex. 2:15)
5. Lord commands to go to Egypt (Matt 2:13; Ex 4:19)
6. Wicked King slaughters male children (Matt 2:16; Ex 1:22)
7. Kings die (Matt 2:20; Ex 1:22)
8. Lord commands to return to Palestine (Matt 2:23; Ex 12:4)



The Adoration of the Magi by Matthias Stom. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Mt 2:4 The Chief Priests were the captains of the temple. The scribes—also known as lawyers (NEB) and teachers of the law (NIV)—developed the Mosaic and oral laws in detail and applied them to the circumstances of their time. They represented the Sanhedrin, or leadership body of the Jews. At the time of Jesus' birth, Herod the Great had decimated the Sanhedrin to a mere shadow of its former (and future) existence.

There is an interesting interplay with the titles for Jesus here (in the KJV). The magi have just asked for information about the new “King of the Jews.” Herod asks his people for information about “the Messiah / Christ.” The same two titles are interchanged in Matthew's passion when the chief priest demands, “tell us whether thou be the Messiah?” (Matt 26:63). Yet the Romans crucify him as “King of the Jews” (Matt 27:37).³⁷

Mt 2:5 Matthew refers to the prophecy in Micah chapter 5:2. We see an anomaly in the Jewish leader who has access to the prophecy, is not willing to travel five miles to see the newborn king, while of the magi are willing to make a long journey to find, believe, and worship. This verse is the second of fourteen Matthew's fulfillment passages:

Table 4: Matthew's Fulfillment Passages in the Nativity Narratives

VERSE	FULFILLMENT PASSAGE	NT SCRIPTURE	OT SCRIPTURE
1:22	Now this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the prophet saying	Matt 1:23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel	Isa 7:14 Behold a virgin shall conceive, and Bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.
2:5b	For thus it is written by the prophet,	Matt 2:6 Thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.	Micah 5:2 Beth-lehem Ephrath, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel.
2:15	That it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,	Matt 2:15 Out of Egypt have I called my son.	Hosea 11:1 When Israel was a child then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.
2:17	Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,	Matt 2:18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.	Jer 31:15 A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.
2:23	That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets,	Matt 2:23 He shall be called a Nazarene.	Possibly lost scripture, or a <i>branch</i> from “ <i>netser</i> ” citing Isaiah 11:1, 2–6; or 60:21

Mt 2:6 The KJV “*rule my people*” is also translated, “*poimaino / to tend as a shepherd*” in the NEB, JB, NAS and NIV. This phrase is the same from 2 Sam 5:2 “You shall be shepherd of my people Israel” (RSV and NIV). So, Matthew may have referenced both Micah and Samuel.

Mt 2:7–8 The magi ask Herod, “*akriboun / inquired, ascertained...the exact*” with a technical term used in astronomical observations. Herod is specifically asking for the year, month and day the star came up over the horizon in verse two. King Herod “secretly” (RSV, NAS, NIV) inquired of the magi in preparation for order in 2:16 to massacre all the boys “of two years of age and under.” Matthew refers to the baby Jesus eight times as “*paidion / young child, half-grown boy or girl, or infant.*” Matthew and Luke are focusing on different times in Jesus’ young life, and their choices of words verify that. Luke uses “*brepfos / babe or infant*” for the newborn babe until the circumcision and purification in the temple.

Mt 2:9–10 The star that the magi saw at its rising has reappeared now over Bethlehem. The scriptures describe a star that they saw once reappearing to led them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.



Detail of *The Adoration of the Magi* by Edward Burne Jones.
Image via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Mt 2:11 Matthew has the holy family living in a home in Bethlehem with no reference to the first months of Jesus’ life as Luke does. The magi’s worshipful behavior shows them to be sincere believers of the Messiah. God has allowed them to be Special Witnesses of His Son. No other witnesses mentioned in the nativity of the Christ, except perhaps Joseph and Mary, sacrificed more than they did—travel time, costs, and hardships of such a journey.

The Magi bringing gifts is foreshadowed in Isaiah 60:6. “the multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah: all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord.” Psalm 72 may also be a dual prophecy. The gifts include symbolic messages:

1. **Gold / *zahab*** is the precious metal that the early Christians saw as a gift for a King.
2. **Frankincense** is a fragrant gum resin exuded from the Boswellai tree, at that time found only in South Arabia, Ethiopia, Somaliland, and India. Frankincense was used for perfume, temple incense (Ex 30:34–38), and temple offerings (Isa 43:23; 66:3; Jer 17:26; 41:5). Early Christians saw it symbolizing the divinity of Jesus
3. **Myrrh** is a valuable aromatic gum that grows in Arabia, Abyssinia, and India. It shared uses of frankincense and was additionally used in embalming (Mark 15:23; John 19:39). Early Christians also saw myrrh as representing the human nature of Jesus and lineage of Shem (Deuteronomy 4, 11; Numbers 15).

Mt 2:12 The magi foil Herod by following the direction from their divine dream and leave Bethlehem “another way.” The Magi return to their own country (singular).

Scene 3 (Mt 2:13–15)

Mt 2:13–14 Another divine dream opens another scene. Joseph will also foil Herod by following heavenly instructions to leave Bethlehem as well. Joseph takes his family across the southern border of Judea into Egypt. The border of Egypt and Palestine at that time was a line from the Mediterranean coast, just south of the city of Gaza, through Beersheba, to the Dead Sea south of Masada. We are not told how far the family went into Egypt, but they may have only had to walk 38 miles south of Bethlehem. The third of fourteen fulfillment citations refer to this.

Mt 2:15 Nowhere in Matthew’s Gospel are his OT quotations so closely placed as in 2:15–23 where they constitute about one third of the content. Where this OT quotation comes from is not clear—it may be Hosea 11:1 or Numbers 24:7–8. On the most fundamental level, the Hosea passage refers to the Exodus of Israel from Egypt.



Scene of Flight in Egypt by Gentile da Fabriano. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Scene 4 (Mt 2:16–18)

Mt 2:16 Herod’s slaughter of the babes around Bethlehem harkens to the time of Moses’ birth when all the Israelite baby boys were killed (Ex 1–2). Once again, the History of Israel portends of Jesus’ life (Hosea 12:10). If the population of Bethlehem was only 300 at this time, and if the whole the region numbered about 2000, the annual birthrate in the region would be thirty. Thus, the maximum number of male children under two years of age would scarcely have numbered more than 20.

Mt 2:17 Again Matthew’s message is enhanced by use of scripture. This scriptural prophecy belongs to Jeremiah 31:15, which refers to scattered Israel in terms of Rachel weeping over her lost children. Nevertheless, as God ultimately broke the power of tyrants who persecuted Israel in Egypt and in the Exile, so will He frustrate the power of this tyrant, King Herod. Of all the Old Testament quotations in Matthew’s infancy narrative, this is the most difficult to imagine being applied to Jesus in circumstances other than those described by Matthew.³⁸

Matthew's last three Old Testament quotations (2:6, 2:15, and 2:18) offer an overview of the history of Israel in geographical miniature. By mentioning Bethlehem as the city of David, Egypt as the land of the Exodus, and Ramah as the mourning place of the Exile, Jesus' early life is summed up in the history of these prophetically significant places. "All things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of him" (2 Nephi 11:4).



Massacre of the Innocents by Peter Paul Rubens. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Scene 5 (Mt 2:19–23)

Mt 2:19 The challenge of dating Herod's death has been debated for centuries. Josephus marks Herod's death shortly after an eclipse of the moon and before a Passover.³⁹ Scholars debate it between 6 BC and AD 6. Herod's death date is used to date the Lord's birth year. The Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 10:4, "six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem) gives us a clue.

King Herod died at his luxurious palace in Jericho, at age 70. Josephus describes the repulsive details:

Herod's distemper greatly increased ... by God's judgment upon him for his sins . . . it brought upon him a vehement appetite to eating, which he could not avoid to supply with one sort of food or other. His entrails were also exulcerated, and the chief violence of his pain lay on his colon; an aqueous and transparent liquor also had settled itself about his feet, and a like matter afflicted him at the bottom of his belly.⁴⁰

Only five days before his death he had made a frantic attempt at suicide, and had ordered the execution of his eldest son Antipater. Knowing that no one would lament his passing, he came up with a plan so that many would weep. He commanded all principal men of the entire Jewish nation to come to Jericho—under pain of death. As they arrived, he locked them in the hippodrome, and secretly gave orders to his sister, Salome, to kill them at the moment

of his death—ensuring that the nation would mourn at his death.⁴¹ To Salome’s credit, she did not follow through with his orders, but freed the men and allowed them to return home.

Mt 2:20–21 Joseph has another divine dream to notify him that Herod has died and he can return. Matthew’s passage is almost verbatim from the LXX record of the Lord’s words to Moses, pertaining to the Pharaoh’s death in Exodus 4:19, “for all those who were seeking your life are dead.” Matthew included the plural “they,” in reference to those seeking to kill Jesus. We see the same plural at Jesus’ death when wicked men seek to kill Jesus is just the same as in the nativity. Just as that death freed Moses to begin his mission of returning the Children of Israel to the Promised Land, so the death of Herod enables the Holy Family to return from Egypt to the Promised Land where Jesus will fulfill his mission.⁴² The child who returns from Egypt is Emmanuel, “God with us” (Mt 1:23), just as the author describes Jesus’ return from the tomb with a similar message, “I am with you always” (Mt 28:20).⁴³

Mt 2:22 Less than a week before Herod’s death, he changed his plans again and split his kingdom for three sons to rule⁴⁴

1. Archelaus received Judea and Samaria or Idumea
2. Herod Antipas received Galilee and Perea
3. Philip received east and north of the Sea of Galilee

Archelaus was even more brutal and dictatorial than his father. He began his reign by massacring 3,000 people. Matthew including that Joseph avoided Judea correctly reflected political history. Matthew’s context sounds as if Joseph’s first thought was to return to Bethlehem of Judea (2:1), possibly because he and Mary had a house there (2:11). “Galilee of the Gentiles” was named because Phoenicians and Arabs always inhabited Galilee. At the time of Jesus there



Mt 2:23 In Mt 2:20, 22 and 23, there are three neatly balanced geographic phrases with a narrowing coverage: 1. “the land of Israel,” 2. “parts of Galilee,” and 3. “a city called Nazareth.” Joseph receives divine direction to all three locations.⁴⁵ Matthew introduced Bethlehem as the hometown for the Holy Family. Without Luke, it appears the family was Judean. Matthew makes an effort to explain why they went to Nazareth.

Matthew's fifth "fulfillment citation" stems from the name *nazoraios* / Nazarene. We do not find close fit to this prophetic scripture, but the Catholic scholar, Raymond Brown has found five possibilities:⁴⁶

1. **Geographical.** Nazorean is primarily applicable to Jesus because he dwelt at Nazareth. Jesus is referred to by the adjective, "Nazarene" four times in Mark, twice in Luke, within the dialect of Galilean Aramic, it is quite defensible to derive Nazarene from Nazareth.
2. **Holy.** Isaiah 4:3, "shall be called holy," or Judges 16:17, "I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb." Yet Jesus was clearly not a Nazarite.
3. **Religious Group.** "The sect of the Nazarenes" is used in Acts 24:5 in reference to the rising number of Christians or followers of Jesus.
4. **Vow.** Derived from *Nazir* meaning "one consecrated or made holy to God by a vow." Jesus does not fit the requirements for the vow of a Nazarene, yet He was consecrated to God's service from the womb (Matt 1:21).
5. **Branch.** Derived from "*netser* / branch." Jesus is the Messianic branch of the House of David, "There shall come a rod out of the stem of Jesse and a *Branch* out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1, also see :2-6; 60:21). The word "*netser* / branch" became synonymous with the Jewish hope of the Messiah.⁴⁷ Jeremiah also records the Lord saying: "I shall raise up a righteous shoot for David; as king he will reign and govern wisely" (23:5). The Suffering Servant Song of Isaiah 53:2 compares the servant to a "sapling," and a "root."⁴⁸

Matthew's first Old Testament quotation concerned the conception, birth, and identity of the prophesied child; the last citation concerns his mission and destiny. Matthew is now ready to leave the hallowed nativity and move onto his ordained Mission and divine Passion. ❖

Header Image: Adobe Stock

ENDNOTES

¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1993), 415. The late Father Brown's research is still the standing authoritative source on Jesus' birth accounts in the Bible.

² Ibid, 395. Jews were exempt from military service, so a census of the Jews in Palestine was only for taxation information. The total taxation for the Jewish people was between 30 and 40 percent. Rome needed taxation to afford the luxury of magnificent buildings and "*panem et circenses* / bread and circuses," for the people. An infamous census in the Old Testament is credited to King David, who "numbered the people of Israel" (II Sam 24 and I Chr. 21:1). The census incurred the wrath of God in the form of a three-day pestilence. Ironically, the place in Jerusalem where the pestilence stopped became the spot for the building of the Temple (II Chr 3:1). By mentioning a census in Judea, Luke evokes the memory of the city of David and of the Temple.

³ Joseph Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible: The Gospel according to Luke I-IX* (NYC: Doubleday, 1981), 400.

⁴ The three great annual pilgrim feasts were Passover, Pentecost or the feast of Weeks, and the feast of the Tabernacles, and (Ex 23:14-17; Lev. 23:4-8, 15-21, 33-44; Deut 16:1-16).

⁵ There were three main routes: 1) straight south through Samaria, 2) along the eastern banks of the Jordan River, to the fords of Bethabara near Jericho; or 3) to the west by the sea coast, past Carmel and Caesarea to Joppa and across to Jerusalem.

⁶ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 407.

⁷ *Protevangelium of James*, although it is not a trustworthy source on other accounts as it contradicts our scriptural accounts.

⁸ Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 1.349. First Presidency under Joseph F. Smith in a formal doctrinal statement said, “The body of man enters upon its career as a tiny germ or embryo, which becomes an infant, quickened at a certain stage by the spirit whose tabernacle it is.”

⁹ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione / On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, 54.3, PG25, 192b.

¹⁰ Brown, *Birth*, 399.

¹¹ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 408. *Katalyma* is a compound of *kata* / down + *lyein* / loose, suggesting a place where one “lets down” one’s harness or baggage for the night.”

¹² Brown, *Birth*, 400–401. The oldest Armenian version and apocryphal literature describe a cave as the birthplace, as does Justin the Apologist, and Jerome. Origen, one of the early church fathers, lived in Palestine after AD 216, and wrote: “If anyone wants further proof to convince him that Jesus was born in Bethlehem... he may observe that in agreement with the story in the Gospel about Jesus’ birth, the cave at Bethlehem is shown where he was born, and the manger in the cave where he was wrapped in strips of cloth.”

¹³ *Mishnah, Shekalim* 7:4.

¹⁴ Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem at the Time of Jesus* (Fortress Press, 1969), 374.

¹⁵ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 409. Four-night watches: 6:00PM–9:00PM, 9:00PM–0:00, 0:00–3:00AM, and 3:00AM–6:00AM

¹⁶ Compare Genesis 16:7, 13; Gen 22:11, 14; Exodus 3:2 and 4; Judges 6:12 and 14; Hosea 12:4,5; and Isaiah 63:9.

¹⁷ F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (NYC: Doubleday, 1980), 128.

¹⁸ Brown, *Birth*, 402.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 403. Heavens is also used as a plural in D&C 131:1 in describing the different degrees or glories attainable after this life: “In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees.”

²⁰ Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 79.

²¹ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 411. Brown, *Birth*, 404–405.

²² Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; John 2:1,3,5,12; 6:42; 19:25–27.

²³ Brown, *Birth*, 406.

²⁴ John Milton, *The Complete Poems of John Milton* (Cosmo Classics: New York, 2010), 42.

²⁵ Luke 2:23 refers to the redemption of the first born which required the payment of five shekels. Secondly, in verse 24, Luke mentions the purification of the mother after childbirth. This confusion is another example of Luke’s unfamiliarity with the details of the Old Testament and its laws. This is another reason why many assume that Luke was not born and raised Jewish. Also see Ex 13:11–16; 22:29b–30; Lev.27:26–27; Num 3:13; 18:17–18.) Even after the Levites held full priesthood responsibility, the firstborn sons were still distinguished as particularly the Lord’s and had to be formally exempted from the Lord’s service by paying a redemption tax (Num 8:15–18; 18:15, 16).

²⁶ Alfred Edersheim, *Temple and its Ministry and Services as they were at the time of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1886 reprinted 1987), 48. The poor used the third “trumpet,” to pay for a sacrifice of two turtledove (Shekal. Vi.5) Nine of the trumpets were for required sacrifices while three were voluntary gifts. When temple worshipers heard a type of organ music in the Temple courtyards, it meant that the incense was about to be rekindled on the golden altar, in the Holy Place. It signaled them to present themselves on either side the Nicanor Gate looking into the bronze altar of sacrifice (197).

²⁷ Luke mentions the Holy Ghost or Spirit three times in verses 25–27 in reference to Simeon. These three times parallel the three references in chapter one in conjunction with Zacharias (Luke 1:15, 17, 41). The Spirit, or Holy Ghost, is mentioned only in the Nativity accounts, (1:15), at the Baptism (Mark 1:9–12) and does not reappear until after the death and resurrection of the Lord (John 20:22). The Holy Ghost has been a functioning member of the Godhead before the foundations of the world. The “Holy Ghost fell upon Adam” from the time an angel revealed the plan of redemption to him (Moses 5:9). Furthermore, “the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit, were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us” (D&C 130). For more information see *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* vol. 2.650.

²⁸ “Simeon” was one of the twelve sons/tribes of Jacob/Israel (Num 1:23). His name is a diminutive of “God has heard” which was shortened to “Simeon,” or in Greek, “Simon.”

²⁹ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 429.

³⁰ Brown, *Birth*, 462.

³¹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, IV.8:15. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 21.161. For Christian changes see Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation of Women in the New Testament* (Good Sound Publishing: Palo Alto, CA, 2015), 30–34.

³² Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIV. 16:4, XV. 1:2.

³³ Herod built eight major fortresses (Masada, Machaerus, Herodium in Perea, Alexandria, Cypros, Hurcania, and the Herodium southeast of Bethlehem), two elaborate Hellenistic cities (Augustus, and Caesarea Maritima), and his crowning jewel, the Temple of Jerusalem (the rebuilding was begun in 20 BC and wasn’t completed until AD 62). His fame as a builder extended far beyond Judea. He repaved the main street of Syrian Antioch and equipped it with a colonnade. He erected pagan temples and other public buildings in Athens, Sparta, Rhodes and other great cities of the Greek world.

-
- ³⁴ The magi's lack of scriptural knowledge of an otherwise well-known Jewish tradition, in addition to the fact that they refer to "the King of *the Jews*," not "*our King*" are two of the reasons why most scholars think the magi are foreigners (Matthew 2:2).
- ³⁵ Virgil, Aeneid II 694, reports that a star guided Aeneas to the place where Rome should be founded. Finding meaning from constellations or heavenly signs was accepted practice. Josephus, *Wars*, VI. 5:3m, speaks of a star that stood over Jerusalem and of a comet that continued for a year at the time of the fall of the city. He says, "God has a care for men and by all kinds of premonitory signs shows His people the way of salvation," and relates this to a Jewish belief that "someone from their country would become ruler of the world."
- ³⁶ The Chicago planetarium production on "The Star of Bethlehem," based their research in part on Ernest Martin, *The Birth of Christ Recalculated* (Pasadena, CA: Foundation Biblical Research, 1980).
- ³⁷ Brown, *Birth*, 182.
- ³⁸ Brown, *Birth*, 223. Jeremiah 31:16–17 describes Rachel receiving an answer from God that her children are going to come back from the land of the enemy. In Jeremiah, it is a message of joy and hope, none of which appears in Matthew. Later rabbinic writings gave Rachel credit for an intercessory role in behalf of her descendants. (Brown, 206)
- ³⁹ For a thorough look at possibilities tied to Josephus dates, see Martin's *The Birth of Christ Recalculated*, 10-100.
- ⁴⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVII. 6:5. The quotation continues, "Nay, further, his privy-member was putrefied, and produced worms; and when he sat upright, he had a difficulty of breathing, which was very loathsome, on account of the stench of his breath and the quickness of its returns; he had also convulsions in all parts of his body, which increased his strength to an insufferable degree." and "lay in savage frenzy awaiting his last hour."
- ⁴¹ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVII. 6:6
- ⁴² 1 Corinthians 10:1–6, Paul also saw the history of Israel leaving Egypt typifying Jesus' life and mission.
- ⁴³ Brown, *Birth*, 214.
- ⁴⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVII. 8:1.
- ⁴⁵ Albright, *Matthew*, 22. Matthew's nativity account shows a traveling family (Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth), and again during Jesus' ministry he travels around. "Whether Jesus traveled as a child with Mary and Joseph we do not know ... It is clear that when Jesus visited his own home territory (Matt 13:53–58 and parallels) he had been away so long that he was almost unknown. John 7:5 represents members of his own family as being hostile to him."
- ⁴⁶ Brown, *Birth*, 208–213.
- ⁴⁷ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 3rd ed. (McLean, VA: MacDonald. reprint from 1838), II, 723–24.
- ⁴⁸ Brown, *Birth*, 212–219. Raymond Brown continues: "The strongest positive indication lies in the fact that the branch which will blossom from the root of Jesse is the child Emmanuel whose forthcoming birth had been announced in Isa 7:14, 'Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.' Since Matthew applied the latter passage to Jesus in 1:22–23, it is not unlikely that he was still thinking in terms of the Isaian description of the Davidic royal child."