

Matthew's Infancy Narrative (Mt 1-2)

Summary:

- Mt begins with a genealogy of Jesus, presenting Jesus as the fulfillment of the scriptures (OT) and a descendent of Abraham and David.
- An angel then announces the virgin birth of Jesus to Joseph (betrothed to Mary), in a dream – perhaps calling to mind the story of Joseph and his dreams in Gen 37-50.
- Mt mentions nothing of a census, a journey to Bethlehem, or a manger.
- After Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, Magi from the east visit him there, led there by a star, as well as the OT prophecy of Micah. They bring gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.
- Herod (the Great) orders the massacre of all the baby boys of Bethlehem, but Joseph is warned by an angel in a dream to flee with Mary and Jesus to Egypt. Note the similarities between Jesus' early life and that of Moses.
- After Herod's death, an angel tells Joseph (again in a dream) to return to Israel. Out of fear of Herod's son Archelaus (now ruler of Judea only), Joseph takes his family to Nazareth of Galilee, where Jesus is raised.

Mt's IN as a foretaste of his Gospel:

- Through his genealogy, as well as his four prophecy fulfillment citations, Mt is clearly telling us that Jesus is the fulfillment of the OT, as recurring theme of his whole Gospel.
- The visit of the Magi foreshadows the openness of Gentiles to Jesus. Their gifts perhaps symbolize three things: Jesus' kingship (gold), priesthood (frankincense), and death (myrrh).
- Herod's massacre of the innocents tells us of Jesus' rejection by his own people, something which Mt's Jewish-Christian audience would have experienced from their own synagogues.
- The flight to and return from Egypt present Jesus as a New Moses, and hint at his mission of leading a New Exodus.

Luke's Infancy Narrative (Lk 1-2)

Summary:

- Lk begins his story with the aging and childless Zechariah and Elizabeth, and the announcement of the birth of their son, John the Baptist.
- The angel Gabriel then announces the virgin birth of Jesus to Mary, a young woman/girl of Nazareth, betrothed to Joseph, a descendent of David.
- The pregnant Mary then goes to Judea to visit Elizabeth, her pregnant relative. The child in Elizabeth's womb (John) leaps for joy in the presence of the unborn Jesus.
- Mary then sings God's praises who has lifted up the lowly and sent the rich away empty. This prayer-song is frequently called the *Magnificat*, its first word in Latin.
- After Mary's return to Nazareth, John is born. His father Zechariah then praises God with the words of the *Benedictus*.
- Due to a census/enrollment called for throughout the Roman Empire, Joseph and a very pregnant Mary must go to Bethlehem, since Joseph was of the "house of David." When they get there, there is "no room for them in the inn," and so Jesus is born in a manger.
- Angels then appear to some lowly shepherds, telling them to go visit the baby Jesus. The angels then sing out the famous words of the *Gloria*.
- Jesus is circumcised and presented in the temple of Jerusalem, in fulfillment of the Jewish law. The holy family then returns to their home in Nazareth. (Notice that there is no mention of a trip to Egypt.)
- Lk's IN then concludes with a story of the twelve-year-old Jesus. While on a trip to Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph lose Jesus, only to find him in the temple astounding the teachers there with his understanding.

Lk's IN as a foretaste of his Gospel:

- Lk gives more prominence to the women in the story (Mary, Elizabeth, Anna), much like he does throughout his Gospel.
- Lk emphasizes prayer, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the joy that Jesus brings.
- God's special concern for and presence to the poor is seen in the Magnificat, the birth in a manger, and the visit of the shepherds.
- In its structure, language and elegance, Lk's IN is a true masterpiece which has captured the imagination of people perhaps more than any other Bible story. It's a wonderful "appetizer" for the "meal" of his entire Gospel.

Also of note: Like Mt, Lk also has a genealogy of Jesus. Lk, however, does not make it a part of his infancy narrative (it's in ch.3). Lk's genealogy does not match Mt's. Theologically speaking, the main difference is the way Lk's traces Jesus' lineage not just to Abraham, but to Adam (and even to God). In so doing, Lk, a Gentile-Christian, is stressing Jesus' connection to all humanity, not just the children of Abraham (i.e. the Jews). He is emphasizing that salvation is universal, extending to Jews and Gentiles.