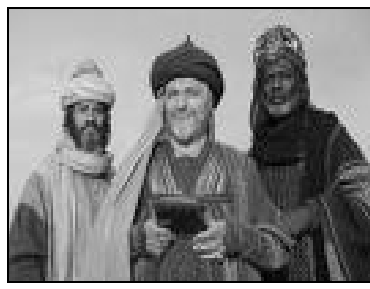


God, is based on showing that God's promises have been **totally** fulfilled through his greatest prophet, his own son Jesus, but that it was the Jews themselves who rejected that fulfilment.



Luke, therefore, parallels the lives of John the Baptist and Jesus to emphasise that fulfilment: both have births announced by angels, both are born in unusual circumstances, both are circumcised into the Jewish faith, both are great prophets and both are recognised as such in songs of praise to God.

Luke's Gospel encompasses gentiles even at that early stage: Mary's Magnificat includes '**all** generations shall call me blessed', Zechariah's Benedictus states 'give light to those **who live in darkness**', Simeon's Nunc Dimittis has the direct 'a light of revelation for the **gentiles**'

Luke's account of Jesus' visit to Jerusalem shows that Jesus was brought up as a loyal Jew, and the incident in the Temple shows he was fervent in his beliefs. Luke demolishes any argument before it arises that Jesus' subsequent ministry was anything but a genuine expression of the will of God.

Why Does Luke Ignore the Magi?

Luke has argued, as part of his theodicy, that Jesus was the fulfilment of **all** God's promises to the Jews. However, while recognising Jesus as the Davidic Messiah he did not wish to bring to his gentile audience the connotations the title carried for Jews. In this context, it makes sense for Luke to have decided to omit the visit of the Magi, paying homage and bringing material kingly gifts. This view is reinforced by the genealogy of Jesus omitting the kingly line of Solomon (above).

Luke's Gospel was also one for the poor 'he has pulled down princes from their throne and raised the lowly, filled the starving with good things and sent the rich away empty'. This is probably another reason why Luke does not wish to emphasise Jesus' role as a king; instead he has poor shepherds being informed of the birth and then visiting Jesus.

Jesus in the Gospels

10. The Nativity Story in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke



Questions For Reflection

1. Why do Matthew and Luke contain different Nativity stories?
2. What was the main purpose of the genealogies in the two Gospels?
3. What is Luke's purpose behind his parallel accounts of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus?

Introduction

The birth of Jesus is recorded in Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but the accounts differ in several ways. Although this may be explained in terms of them having different sources, if Luke also had Matthew's Gospel as a source (on the basis that Matthew's Gospel preceded Luke's) it is strange that he makes no reference to the visit of the Magi and flight onto Egypt, especially as in his preface to Theophilus he claims 'to have carefully gone over the whole story from the beginning'. I shall summarise my own possible solution to later.



There are also significant variations in the genealogies presented, while it is impossible to place the census in Luke's Gospel as taking place when he states, namely when Quirinius was Governor of Syria, because this would give a date some 10 years **after** the death of King Herod. There was a census, presumably for tax purposes, but this commenced about 8BC, and although it took place over a number of years and could well link with the death of Herod in 4BC, it is highly unlikely to have extended to Quirinius' time.

The Genealogies

Both Gospels seek to show that Jesus had a kingly descent from David and were content to trace it through Joseph, although he was only Jesus' adopted father., and not through Mary's bloodline.

Matthew, with his emphasis on preaching to fellow Jew, only traced Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham, starting with Abraham and going in ascending order to Joseph. Luke, writing for gentiles, adopted a more universal approach by tracing it back in descending order from Joseph to Adam, to the beginning of all humankind.

There is a great deal of artificiality in the structure of the genealogies (who is Joseph the son of, Jacob (Matthew) or Heli (Luke)?) but it is notable that Matthew follows a line through Solomon and most of the Jewish kings, but Luke does not, choosing instead a much less well known son of David, Nathan (2 Sam.5) who had no kingly descendants.

Luke and Matthew in Agreement

In most other respects, Matthew and Luke are in complete agreement (Mtt.1/2 // Lk.1/2)



- Jesus was born when Herod was king
- Mary was a virgin and was conceived of the Holy Spirit
- Joseph was descended from David
- Jesus' name was decided before his birth
- Mary and Joseph were living together before Jesus was born
- Jesus was born in Bethlehem but went to live in Nazareth.

Matthew's Purpose

Matthew's Gospel, written for a Jewish audience, seeks to prove Jesus as the fulfilment of OT prophecies. So, Matthew quotes **Isaiah 7** 'Lo, the young woman is with child .. called Immanuel', and **Micah 5** 'But you Bethlehem, from you will come a future ruler of Israel' and **Hosea 11** 'I called my son out of Egypt' (after the Holy Family return from exile) and **Jeremiah 31** 'A voice is heard in Ramah .. Rachel weeping for her children' (after Herod kills the young children of Bethlehem). The source of his fifth quote 'He will be called a Nazarene' is not in the OT and is unknown.

Luke's Purpose

Luke's Gospel is to strengthen the faith of gentile Christians. At one level it may be surprising, then, that he lavishes such care and attention on John the Baptist's birth, that he produces a genealogy of Jesus, and that he feels the need to record the prayers of such Jewish figures as Zechariah, Simeon and Anna. In this sense, he is being more Jewish in his writings than Matthew. However, there is a logic and subtlety in Luke's writings. In spreading his version of the 'good news' to gentiles Luke needs to defend God from the accusation that he has abandoned his chosen people. If God has abandoned his promises to them, then what is there to stop him from abandoning his new gentile converts in the future? Luke's theodicy, his defence of