

Introduction to the Infancy Narratives

Infancy Narratives

- The “Infancy Narratives” are the stories about the conception, birth & infancy of Jesus.
- Only the Gospels of Matthew and Luke include Infancy Narratives (Mark & John do not).
- Matthew (Mt. 1-2) and Luke (Lk. 1-2) each have very unique accounts.

Some interesting differences in the two accounts:

Matthew	Luke
Emphasis on men (Joseph, Herod, magi)	Emphasis on women (Mary, Elizabeth, Anna)
Angel’s annunciation to Joseph (in a dream)	Angel’s annunciation to Mary
Joseph & Mary seem to reside in Bethlehem (Mt. 2:11; no mention of travel)	Joseph & Mary go from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the census
Joseph & Mary may have remained in Bethlehem for some time after Jesus’ birth	Joseph & Mary returned to Nazareth (via Jerusalem) after a short time in Bethlehem
First visitors are wealthy wise men (“magi”) with “treasure chests”	First visitors are poor shepherds
Murder of innocents; Flight to Egypt	Jesus is in no apparent danger
Family settles in Nazareth after departing Egypt	Family returns to Nazareth, which is already their home
Recalls OT story of Moses and Israel’s exodus from Egypt (Ex. 1-15)	Recalls OT story of Hannah and her son Samuel (1 Sam. 1-2)
Themes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jesus the fulfillment of OT prophecies 2. Jesus is the New Moses 3. Foreshadowing of Cross 	Themes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. God’s universal plan of salvation 2. Reversal of fortunes 3. God’s care for the poor & marginalized
Tone: Dark, foreboding, danger, jealousy	Tone: Joyful, hopeful expectation, praise

The two accounts agree on the most important details:

- The **virgin birth** (Jesus' divine origins).
- The **names** of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.
- The **places** of Bethlehem (birth) and Nazareth (where Jesus will grow up).
- Jesus is from the **line of David** (Jewish roots; heir to the covenant with David).
- **Role of Jesus** as Messiah, Son of God, Savior.
- Indication that Jesus' saving ministry will extend to **Gentiles** as well as Jews.

Also note these similarities:

- **Structure of each account:** Annunciation, birth, visitors.
- **Sign in the sky** (star; angels) proclaims the birth of Christ.

Our nativities are typically a combination of both accounts:

- **Matthew:** Holy Family, star, wise men
- **Luke:** Holy Family, stable, manger, animals, shepherds, angels