

The Problem with Mary's Virgin Birth of Jesus

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Verses quoted are NIV® unless otherwise noted

The infancy narratives of the birth of Jesus are only found in Matthew and Luke, while John and Mark contain no infancy narratives. Matthew and Luke don't merely mention a virgin conception in passing. Each gives us two entire chapters of material concerning Jesus' origins.

But their stories are dramatically different.

Matthew has:

- **Joseph's dreams (call son "Jesus")**
- **Magi (wise men)**
- **Star**
- **Herod**
- **Massacre of the children**
- **Flight into Egypt**
- **Return from Egypt**

Luke has:

- **Zechariah and Elizabeth (parents of John the Baptist)**
- **Gabriel appearing to Mary (call son "Jesus")**
- **John the Baptist's miraculous conception**
- **Magnificat (Mary's song)**
- **Roman census**
- **manger**
- **shepherds**
- **angelic host**
- **Simeon and Anna**
- **Jesus in the Temple at age twelve**

And the differences are striking:

Matthew doesn't mention Luke's spectacular events. Luke doesn't mention Matthew's spectacular events.

No Magi in Luke. No shepherds in Matthew. No star in Luke. No massacre in Luke. No flight into Egypt in Luke. No census in Matthew. No manger in Matthew. No presentation involving Simeon and Anna in Matthew. No twelve-year-old Jesus story in Matthew.

That strongly suggests Matthew and Luke weren't simply copying a common infancy narrative. Their traditions are largely independent. Some scholars therefore regard their points of scant agreement as evidence for both traditions developing independently predating both gospels.

The virgin conception is conspicuously absent from our earliest surviving Christian writings, absent from Mark, and absent from John. It first appears explicitly in Matthew and Luke, whose infancy narratives are substantially different from one another.

The Harmony Problem

There is another major problem: Matthew and Luke are difficult to harmonize.

Matthew's apparent sequence is:

Jesus born in Bethlehem → Magi → Herod → Egypt → Herod dies → family moves to Nazareth.

Luke's sequence is:

family comes from Nazareth → census takes them to Bethlehem → Jesus born → Temple presentation in Jerusalem → family returns to Nazareth.

Luke says after the Temple ceremonies:

Luke 2:39

"When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth."

There is no mention of Egypt.

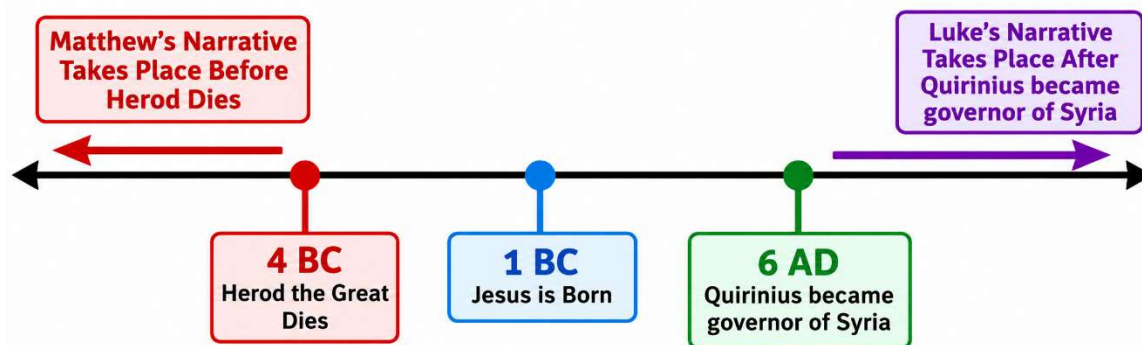
Matthew, meanwhile, makes Egypt central to his theological presentation:

Matthew 2:15 "*Out of Egypt I called my son.*" (Also see Hosea 11:1)

The Chronological Timeline Problem

Biblical scholars have pinpointed the death of Jesus on Friday, April 3, 33 AD. Luke 3:23 says Jesus was "*about thirty years old*" when he started his public ministry, and John mentions three Passovers indicating Jesus' ministry lasted from two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half-years, therefore, we can place the birth of Jesus in the year 1 BC (there is no zero year.)

In 525 AD, a monk named Dionysius Exiguus created the year numbering system based on his backdated calculations to the birth of Jesus. Dionysius calculations turned out to be remarkably accurate. Jesus died at age 33 in 33 AD, and was born in 1 BC.



The infancy narrative in Matthew takes place during the reign of Herod the Great (who died around 4 BC) while Luke's infancy narrative takes place roughly ten years later with the well-attested census associated with Quirinius, who became the governor of Syria in 6 AD. In Matthew's narrative, this means Herod died four years before Jesus was born, or in Luke's narrative, Jesus was already six-years old. This ten-year disparity means one or both accounts of the birth of Jesus is in error.

Matthew 2:1 "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, **during the time of King Herod**, Magi[wise men] from the east came to Jerusalem.

Luke 2:1

¹ In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place **while Quirinius was governor of Syria**.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

Naming of "Jesus" ("Yeshua" in Hebrew) verses "Immanuel" Problem

- In Matthew an angel told Joseph to name his son "Jesus"
- In Luke an angel told Mary to name her son "Jesus"
- yet in Matthew 1:22-23 (referencing Isaiah 7:14) their son was to be called "Immanuel ???."

So why does the naming conflict exist?

Matthew, unlike Luke, tries to shoehorn the narrative to references in prophecy from the prophets, but a major error exists.

Matthew 1:22-23

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you[plural] a sign: The virgin[or young woman] will conceive and give birth to a son, and[they] will call him Immanuel.

The problem is the original Hebrew word DOES NOT mean **virgin** rather it means **young woman**. The authors of the NIV® translation purposely edited the original text by inserting the word "**virgin**" solely to satisfy the error made in Matthew 1:22-23.

Even worse, the context of Isaiah 7 and 8 has nothing to do with the Messiah, rather it speaks of a hypothetical child being born who would still be an infant barely knowing right from wrong before Gog and Magog would be utterly destroyed. It says nothing about the Messiah.

So, not only was Jesus not called Immanuel, the whole reference to Isaiah 7:14 is fictitious.

Luke's Non-fulfillment of Prophecy Problem

Luke 1:30-33 contains a prophecy Jesus obviously never fulfilled:

Luke 1:30-33

³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.

³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

This references the future Davidic kingdom of everlasting worldwide peace fulfilled by "**David**" (Ezekiel 34:23-24 , Ezekiel 37:24, Isaiah 37:35, Jeremiah 30:9) who has the spirit of Elijah (Malachi 4:5), whose reign will never end, whose "**kingdom that will never be destroyed.**" Jesus obviously never fulfilled this role, it does not apply to Jesus. See Daniel 2:44, Daniel 7:14, Daniel 7:27.

Daniel 2:44

*"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up **a kingdom that will never be destroyed**, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, **but it will itself endure forever.***

Daniel 7:14

*He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. **His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.***

Daniel 7:27

*Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. **His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.***

Descendant of King David Lineage Problem

If Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus, then Jesus would not be of the tribe of Judah, nor descended from King David (Jewish father passes down tribe identity.)

The Roman Census Problem

Luke 2:3 "**And everyone went to their own town to register.**" accounts for Joseph and Mary returning to Bethlehem where Jesus was born.

This was to fulfill Micah 5:2 that appears to foretell the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. But the Roman census did not require people to return to their hometowns, much like today's censuses, the headcounts are tallied where the people actually live at the time.

Micah 5:2

*"But you, **Bethlehem** Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, **whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.**"*

But Jesus did not become the "*ruler over Israel*", nor was his "*origins from of old*". Micah 5:2 was describing the Jewish Messiah named David who has the spirit of Elijah (being the origins from old.) But in prophecy, names and places, pronouns, genders, and plurals are replaced with end times equivalents, so David need not be born in Bethlehem (and having the spirit of Elijah, we can deduce Elijah came from the tribe of Judah and is a descendant of King David.)

The Author of John Knew Nothing About Jesus Being Born in Bethlehem

Despite being the last gospel written, based on John 7:40-43, neither the author of John, nor the people of the time, had any knowledge that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

John 7:40-43

⁴⁰ On hearing his [Jesus'] words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." ⁴¹ Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others asked, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee? ⁴² Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" ⁴³ Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

This lends credence to what some scholars believe, that both infancy narratives were fabricated separately, and appended late in the first century or early in the second century, in order to feign scriptural credibility to the story of Jesus.

Mary Appears Unknowing About Jesus

Even more intriguing is Mark 3:20–21, 31–35.

Jesus' family comes looking for him after people report what he is doing (performing miracles, healing, driving out demons.) Mark says:

"When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'"

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrive. This creates a genuine tension with Luke's infancy narrative. Luke portrays Mary as having been personally told by Gabriel:

Luke 1:35

"The Holy Spirit will come on you... So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

Mary knows nothing about who Jesus was, nor his family, yet an angel told Mary Jesus was the son of God?

If Mary had experienced the Annunciation, miraculous conception, angelic messages, shepherds, Simeon's prophecy, etc., why would Jesus' family later think something had gone wrong with him?

JOHN and MARK Contain No Infancy Narratives, Why?

If any Gospel writer had theological reason to mention a supernatural conception, John certainly did. John contains no infancy narratives, neither does Mark.

Paul never mentions the virgin conception in his surviving letters.

Nevertheless, if Paul regarded the virgin conception as an important theological doctrine, his complete failure to mention it is noteworthy, particularly because Paul discusses Jesus' sonship and incarnation repeatedly.

The Messiah "*called a Nazarene*" Problem

Matthew 2:23 purports to quote a prophet of Israel foretelling the Messiah would be "*called a Nazarene*."

Matthew 2:23

*and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that **he would be called a Nazarene**.*

The problem is no prophet of Israel ever said or wrote this. It is not found anywhere in Tanakh. It is fiction.

Matthew Repeatedly Constructs the Story Around Fulfilling Prophecy

Despite the made-up Nazarene misquote, Matthew repeatedly constructs the story around fulfilling prophecy in a manner that questions the story being fabricated just to match to prophecy?

Virgin conception → Isaiah 7:14

Bethlehem → Micah 5:2

Egypt → Hosea 11:1

Massacre → Jeremiah 31:15

Jesus' childhood also begins to resemble Moses:

Pharaoh kills Hebrew boys.

→ **Moses survives.**

Herod kills Bethlehem's boys.

→ **Jesus survives.**

Moses leaves danger.

→ **Jesus goes into Egypt.**

God tells Moses those seeking his life are dead (Exodus 4:19).

→ **An angel tells Joseph those seeking Jesus' life are dead (Matthew 2:20).**

This creates the query of the origins of the two vastly different infancy narratives, where Matthew seems fixated on shoehorning Jesus into prophecy albeit poorly, while Luke fails to fulfill prophecy, along with the aforementioned problems and discrepancies, lends one to speculate if either narrative is even true. They both cannot be true, so which is false?

The corollary between the virgin birth stories of Jesus, and the virgin births stories of pagan Greco-Roman gods, such as ***Romulus*** and ***Remus***, is too uncanny to dismiss.

But given the problems of the two narratives just from the text alone, forces one to reject one narrative or possibly both. Lastly, Jesus certainly does not need a virgin birth story to establish his authority, nor his being seated on his throne to the right side of God.

URL to this sermon: <https://eliasmonastery.com/Problems-With-Mary-Virgin-Birth.pdf>

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