
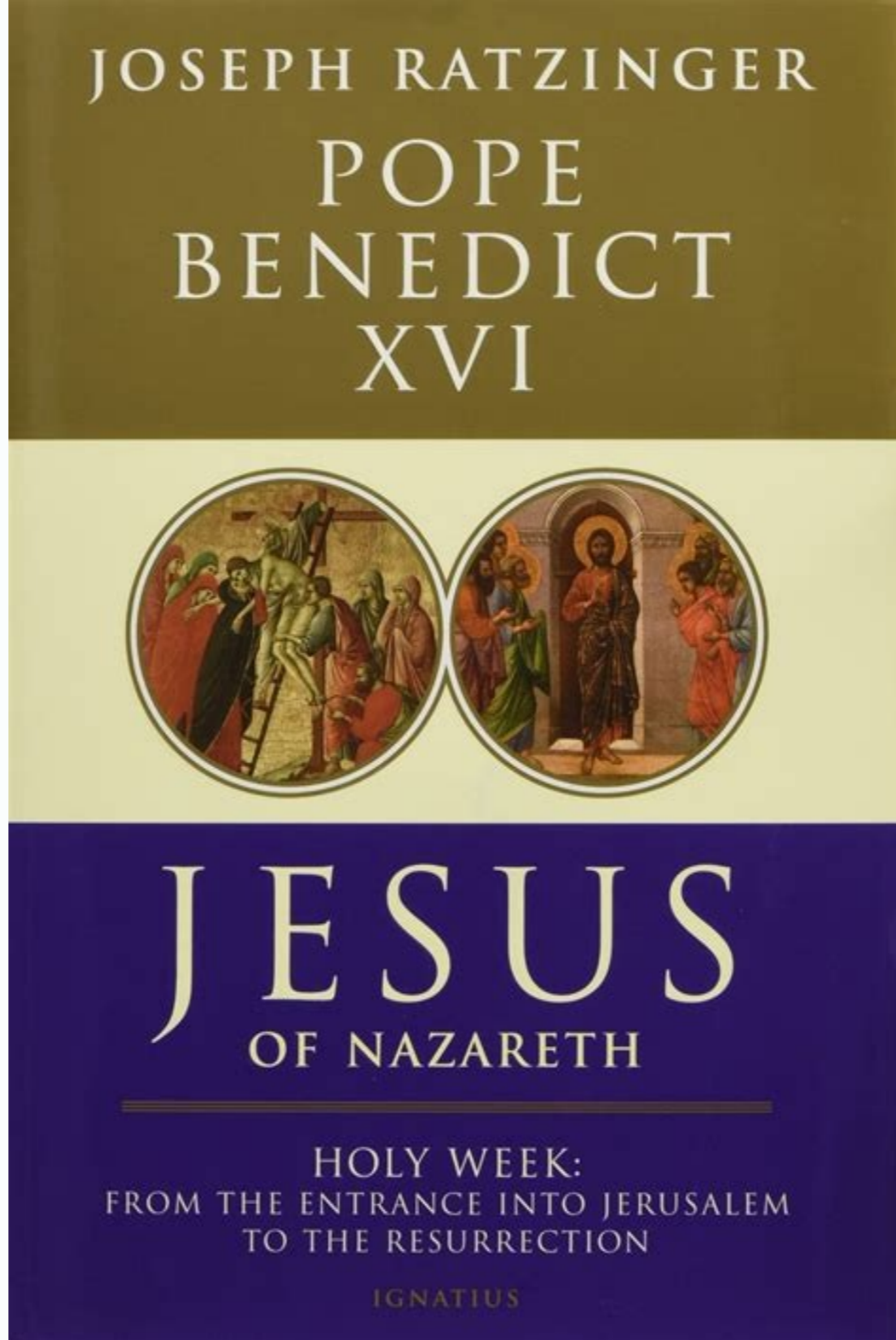


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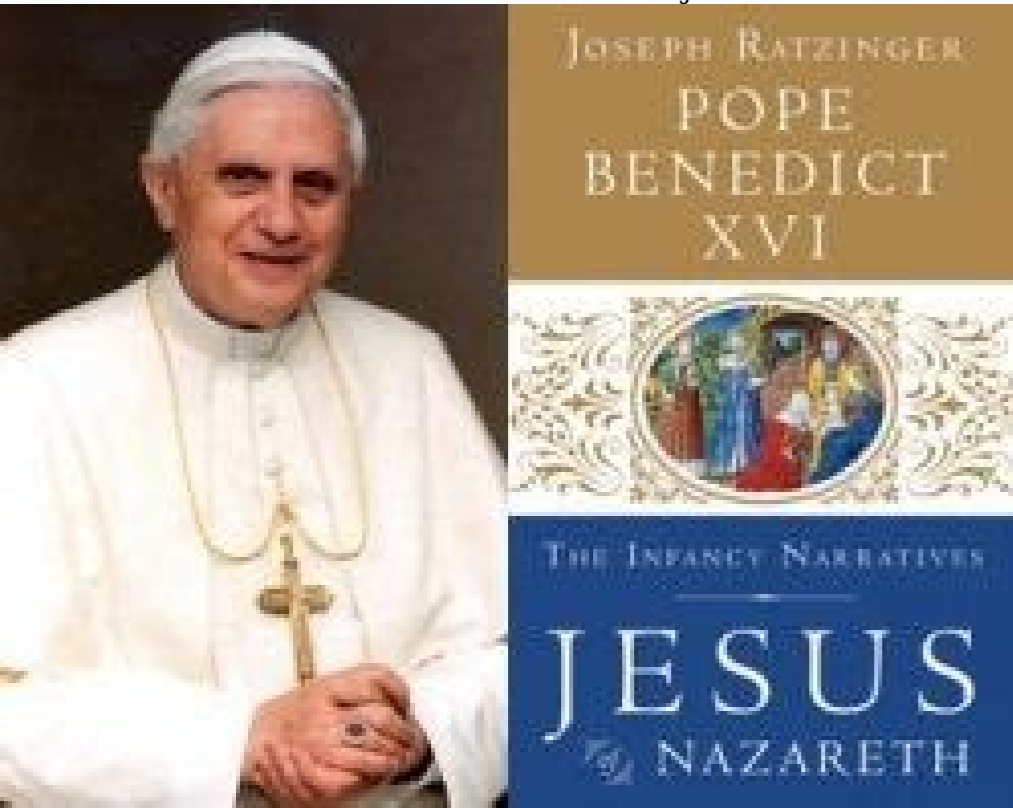
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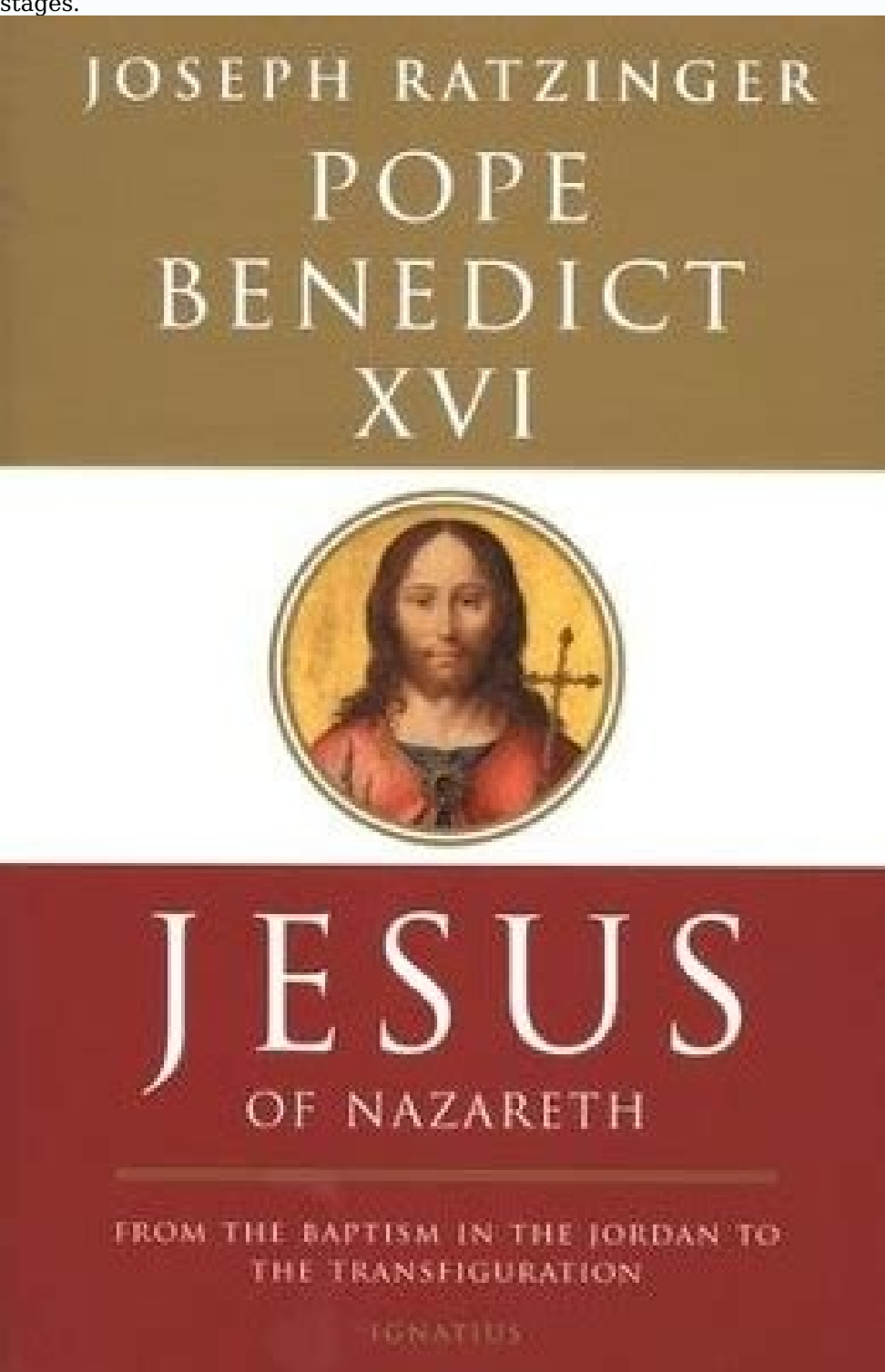
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CHAPTER III The Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem The historical and theological framework of the nativity story in Luke's Gospel The birth of Jesus The presentation of Jesus in the Temple CHAPTER IV The Wise Men from the East and the Flight into Egypt The historical and geographical framework of the narrative Who were the "Magi"? The Star Jerusalem—stopping point on the journey The worship of the Wise Men before Jesus Flight into Egypt and return to the Land of Israel EPILOGUE The Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple Bibliography ABBREVIATIONS The following abbreviations are used for books of the Bible: Acts Acts of the Apostles Amos Amos Bar Baruch 1 Chron 1 Chronicles 2 Chron 2 Chronicles Col Colossians 1 Cor 1 Corinthians 2 Cor 2 Corinthians Dan Daniel Deut Deuteronomy Eccles Ecclesiastes Eph Ephesians Esther Esther Ex Exodus Ezek Ezekiel Ezra Ezra Gal Galatians Gen Genesis Hab Habakkuk Hag Haggai Heb Hebrews Hos Hosea Is Isaiah Jas James Jer Jeremiah Jn John 1 Jn 1 John 2 Jn 2 John 3 Jn 3 John Job Job Joel Joel Jon Jonah Josh Joshua Jud Judith Jude Judg Judges 1 Kings 1 Kings 2 Kings 2 Kings Lam Lamentations Lev Leviticus Lk Luke 1 Mac 1 Maccabees 2 Mac 2 Maccabees Mal Malachi Mic Micah Mk Mark Mt Matthew Nahum Nahum Neh Nehemiah Num Numbers Obad Obadiah 1 Pet 1 Peter 2 Pet 2 Peter Phil Philippians Philem Philemon Prov Proverbs Ps Psalms Rev Revelation (Apocalypse) Rom Romans Ruth Ruth 1 Sam 1 Samuel 2 Sam 2 Samuel Sir Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) Song Song of Solomon 1 Thess 1 Thessalonians 2 Thess 2 Thessalonians 1 Tim 1 Timothy 2 Tim 2 Timothy Tit Titus Tob Tobit Wis Wisdom Zech Zechariah Zeph Zephaniah Publisher's Note The Revised Standard Version (RSV) is the preferred translation for Scriptural quotations within the text. In some instances, however, in order to reflect as clearly as possible the verbal associations emphasized by the author, it has been necessary to translate directly from the original biblical text. FOREWORD This short book on Jesus' infancy narratives, which I have been promising to write for some time, is at last ready to be presented to the reader.



It is not a third volume, but a kind of small "antechamber" to the two earlier volumes on the figure and the message of Jesus of Nazareth. I have set out here, in dialogue with exegetes past and present, to interpret what Matthew and Luke say about Jesus' infancy at the beginning of their Gospels. I am convinced that good exegesis involves two stages.



Firstly one has to ask what the respective authors intended to convey through their text in their own day—the historical component of exegesis.

JOSEPH RATZINGER

POPE BENEDICT XVI



THE INFANCY NARRATIVES

JESUS of NAZARETH

But it is not sufficient to leave the text in the past and thus relegate it to history. The second question posed by good exegesis must be: is what I read here true? Does it concern me? If so, how? With a text like the Bible, whose ultimate and fundamental author, according to our faith, is God himself, the question regarding the here and now of things past is undeniably included in the task of exegesis. The seriousness of the historical quest is in no way diminished by this: on the contrary, it is enhanced. In this sense, I have taken pains to enter into dialogue with the texts. In so doing I have been conscious that this conversation, drawing in the past, the present and the future, can never come to an end, and that every exegesis must fall short of the magnitude of the biblical text. My hope is that this short book, despite its limitations, will be able to help many people on their path toward and alongside Jesus. Castel Gandolfo, on the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary 15 August 2012 Joseph Ratzinger—Benedict XVI CHAPTER I “Where Are You From?” (JOHN 19:9) THE QUESTION ABOUT JESUS’ ORIGIN AS A QUESTION ABOUT BEING AND MISSION While he was interrogating Jesus, Pilate unexpectedly put this question to the accused: “Where are you from?” Jesus’ accusers had called for him to receive the death penalty by dramatically declaring that this Jesus had made himself the Son of God—a capital offense under the law. The “enlightened” Roman judge, who had already expressed skepticism regarding the question of truth (cf.

Jn 18:38), could easily have found this claim by the accused laughable. And yet he was frightened. The accused had indicated that he was a king, but that his kingdom was “not of this world” (Jn 18:36). And then he had alluded to a mysterious origin and purpose, saying: “For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth” (Jn 18:37). All this must have seemed like madness to the Roman judge. And yet he could not shake off the mysterious impression left by this man, so different from those he had met before who resisted Roman domination and fought for the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. The Roman judge asks where Jesus is from in order to understand who he really is and what he wants. The question about Jesus’ provenance, as an inquiry after his deeper origin and hence his true being, is also found in other key passages of Saint John’s Gospel, and it plays an equally important role in the Synoptic Gospels. For John, as for the Synoptics, it raises a singular paradox. On the one hand, counting against Jesus and his claim to a divine mission, is the fact that people knew exactly where he was from: he does not come from heaven, from “the Father,” from “above,” as he purports to (Jn 8:23). No: “Is not this Jesus, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” (Jn 6:42). The Synoptics tell of a similar dispute that arose in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus’ hometown. Jesus had expounded the words of sacred Scripture not in the customary manner, but by relating them to himself and his mission with an authority that went beyond the bounds of all exegesis (cf. Lk 4:21). The listeners were understandably shocked by this treatment of Scripture, by the claim that he himself was the inner point of reference and the key to exegesis of the sacred text. Shock led to denial: “ ‘Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at him” (Mk 6:3). They know perfectly well who Jesus is and where he comes from—he is one among others. He is one like us. His claim can only be presumption. Moreover, Nazareth was not associated with any such promise. John recounts that Philip said to Nathanael: “We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote: Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael’s response is well known: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (Jn 1:45f.). The ordinariness of Jesus, the provincial carpenter, seems not to conceal a mystery of any kind. His origin marks him out as one like any other. Yet the reverse argument is also adduced against Jesus’ authority, as in the dispute with the man born blind, after he received his sight: “We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man [Jesus], we do not know where he comes from” (Jn 9:29). When Jesus preached in their synagogue, the people of Nazareth had said something rather similar, before dismissing him as someone well-known to them and just like them: “Where did this man get all this?”

What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands!” (Mk 6:2). Here too the question “where is he from?” arises—only to be dismissed straight away by the reference to his relatives. Jesus’ provenance is both known and unknown, seemingly easy to establish, and yet not exhaustively. In Caesarea Philippi, Jesus will ask his disciples: “Who do people say that I am? ... Who do you say that I am?” (Mk 8:27ff.). Who is Jesus? Where is he from? The two questions are inseparably linked. The four Gospels set out to answer these questions. They were written in order to supply an answer. Matthew opens his Gospel with Jesus’ genealogy because he wants to put the question of Jesus’ provenance in the correct light from the very beginning: the genealogy serves as a kind of heading to the entire Gospel.

Luke, on the other hand, places Jesus’ genealogy at the beginning of his public ministry, as a kind of public presentation of Jesus, in order to answer the same question with a different emphasis—in anticipation of all that is about to unfold in the rest of the Gospel. Let us now try to understand more closely the essential purpose of the two genealogies. For Matthew, two names are of key significance if we are to understand Jesus’ provenance: Abraham and David. The story of the promise begins with Abraham, following the dispersal of mankind after the building of the Tower of Babel. Abraham points ahead to what is yet to come. He is a wayfarer, not only from the land of his birth into the promised land, but also on the journey from the present into the future.

His whole life points forward, it is a dynamic of walking along the path of what is to come. Thus the Letter to the Hebrews rightly presents him as a pilgrim of faith on the basis of the promise: “He looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (11:10).

For Abraham, the promise refers in the first instance to his descendants, but it also extends further: “all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him” (Gen 18:18). Thus the whole history, beginning with Abraham and leading to Jesus, is open toward universality—through Abraham, blessing comes to all. From the beginning of the genealogy, then, the focus is already on the end of the Gospel, when the risen Lord says to the disciples: “Make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19).

In the particular history revealed by the genealogy, this movement toward the whole is present from the beginning: the universality of Jesus’ mission is already contained within his origin. Both the genealogy and the history that it recounts are largely structured around the figure of David, the king to whom the promise of an eternal kingdom had been given: “Your throne shall be established for ever” (2 Sam 7:16).

The genealogy that Matthew puts before us is steeped in this promise. It is constructed in three sets of fourteen generations, at first rising from Abraham to David, then descending from Solomon to the Babylonian captivity, and then rising again to Jesus, in whom the promise comes to fulfillment. The king who is to last for ever now appears—looking quite different, though, from what the Davidic model might have led one to expect. This threefold division becomes even clearer if we bear in mind that the Hebrew letters of the name “David” add up to fourteen: even in terms of number symbolism, then, the path from Abraham to Jesus bears the clear imprint of David, his name and his promise. On this basis one could say that the genealogy, with its three sets of fourteen generations, is truly a Gospel of Christ the King: the whole of history looks toward him whose throne is to endure for ever. Matthew’s genealogy traces the male line, but in the course of it, prior to Mary who appears at the end, four women are mentioned by name: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and the wife of Uriah. Why do these women appear in the genealogy? By what criterion are they chosen? It has been said that all four women were sinners. So their inclusion here would serve to indicate that Jesus took upon himself their sins— and with them the sins of the world—and that his mission was the justification of sinners. But this cannot have been the determining factor for the selection, not least because it does not in fact apply to all four women. More important, none of these women were Jewish. So through them the world of the Gentiles enters the genealogy of Jesus—his mission to Jews and Gentiles is made manifest. Yet most important of all is the fact that the genealogy ends with a woman: Mary, who truly marks a new beginning and relativizes the entire genealogy. Throughout the generations, we find the formula: “Abraham was the father of Isaac ...” But at the end, there is something