

THE FOUR-IN-ONE STORY OF THE LORD JESUS: AN INTERWOVEN GOSPEL NARRATIVE

Matthew - M; Mark - R; Luke - L; John - J

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Introductions. ^{R1}The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah. ^{J1}In the beginning before creation the *Messianic* Word already existed and was present with God; indeed the Word was himself Deity. He is the same one who was present with God in the very beginning since he created everything that exists, and nothing exists that he did not make. So the essence of life was in him, and that life was the light of mankind. The light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

^{J1}John was the name of a man sent from God to be a witness for the light, to testify so that all people might believe. He himself was not that light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light, by coming into the world, is the one who enlightens all kinds of people. He was in the world, and the world was created through him; yet the world did not recognize him. He came to his own world, but even his own people did not receive him. However, to all who did accept him, to those who trust in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human will, nor a husband's will, but born from God.

^{J1}The Word became human and made his home here on earth among us. Many of us have clearly examined his glory, the glory of the unique Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John in testifying about him had exclaimed, "This is the one of whom I said, 'The one coming after me has surpassed me because he existed before me.'" For all believers have received grace after grace from his fullness. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus the Messiah. No one has ever seen God, but he who is uniquely Deity and is near to the Father's heart, he has revealed him.

^{L1}Many have undertaken to draw up an orderly narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the message handed them down to us. With this in mind, since I myself (Luke) have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good to me also to write for you an account in sequence, most honorable Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.

THE PERIOD OF PREPARATION

Angelic announcements about John and Jesus. ^{L1}In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both were righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. However, they were childless since Elizabeth could not conceive, and both were well advanced in age. When Zechariah's division was on duty, and he was serving as a priest before God, it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord's temple to burn incense. At the hour of incense the whole assembly of people was praying outside. An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and gripped with fear. But the angel announced to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, whom you will name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, will never drink wine or strong drink, and will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. He will turn many Israelites back to the Lord their God, by going before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah. He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and disobedient people to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the coming of the Lord."

^{L1}Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well along in

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years.” The angel responded, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and bring you this good news. Now listen! You will be silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place since you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their appointed time.” Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, wondering why he was staying so long in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he was unable to speak to them. Then they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple since he kept making signs to them and remained mute. When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and remained in seclusion for five months, saying, “The Lord has done this for me in showing me his favor in these days by taking away my disgrace among people.”

^{L1}In the sixth month of her pregnancy, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to a man named Joseph, of the lineage of King David. Gabriel appeared to her saying, “Rejoice! Because the Lord is with you, he has shown special grace to you.” Mary was greatly troubled at his words and was wondering what they might mean. So the angel explained to her: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Pay attention to my announcement: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call his name Jesus. He will be so great that he will be called the Son of the Most High God, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor, King David. He will reign over the descendants of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end.” Mary then asked the angel, “How can this be since as a virgin I have never been intimate with a man?” Then the angel explained, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the supernatural power of the Most High God will overshadow your body so that the holy child to be born will be called the Son of God. Consider that your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for a woman called barren. For it is impossible for a word of God to fail!” Mary responded, “Look at me, the Lord’s slave. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel left her.

Prophetic messages of Elizabeth, Mary, and Zechariah. ^{L1}A few days later Mary got ready to hurry to a town in the hill country of Judah, where she entered Zechariah’s house and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed loudly, “You are blessed among women since the child in your womb is blessed! But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!” So Mary spoke out, “My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior because he has looked with favor on the humble state of his slave. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed because the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is on those who fear him in every generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered the proud in their inmost thoughts; he has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he promised to our ancestors, to Abraham and his offspring forever.” And Mary stayed with her about three months and returned to her home.

^{L1}Now the time for Elizabeth to give birth was completed, and she bore a son. Then her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. When they came to circumcise the child on the eighth day, they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother spoke up to say, “No! He will be called John.” But they responded, “But none of your relatives has that name.” So they motioned to his father to find out what he wanted him to be called. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John,” and they were all amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. The neighbors were all filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about these things. All who heard took them to heart saying, “What then is this child going to be?” For indeed, the Lord’s hand was with him.

^{L1}Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: “Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel because he has visited his people and provided redemption for us. He has raised up a powerful royal savior for us in the house of His servant David, just as he spoke by the mouth of his ancient holy prophets: salvation from our enemies and from the clutches of those who hate us. He has dealt mercifully with our ancestors and remembered his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophetic spokesman of the Most High; for you will go ahead of the Lord to prepare his road, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of our God’s merciful compassion by which the dawn from on high will visit us to shine on those who live in

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darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” The child grew up and became strong in spirit, and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.

The lineage and birth of Jesus as Joseph’s legal son. ^{M1}This is the record of the lineage of Jesus, the Anointed Messiah, who was uniquely descended from King David and Abraham. Abraham became the father of Isaac, who fathered Jacob, who fathered Judah and his brothers. Judah fathered Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez fathered Hezron, who fathered Aram, who fathered Aminidab, who fathered Nahshon, who fathered Salmon, who fathered Boaz by Rahab. Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth, Obed fathered Jesse, who fathered King David. David fathered Solomon by Uriah’s wife. Solomon fathered Rehoboam, who fathered Abijah, who fathered Asa, who fathered Jehosaphat, who fathered Joram, who fathered Uzziah, who fathered Jotham, who fathered Ahaz, who fathered Hezekiah, who fathered Manasseh, who fathered Amon, who fathered Josiah, who fathered Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. Then after the exile to Babylon Jechoniah fathered Salathiel, who fathered Zerubbabel, who fathered Abiud, who fathered Eliakim, who fathered Azor, who fathered Zadok, who fathered Achim, who fathered Eliud, who fathered Eleazar, who fathered Matthan, who fathered Jacob, who fathered Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called the Messiah. All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to King David, and fourteen from David until the people were exiled to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

^{M1}This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she learned she was pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, being a righteous man, decided to break the engagement quietly, so as not to disgrace her publicly. While Joseph thought about these things, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream, announcing, “Joseph, descendant of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the baby in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this happened in fulfilling the Lord’s message through his prophet (Isa. 7:14): **“Look! The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will recognize him as Immanuel”–which means, ‘God with us’.** When Joseph woke up, he did what the Lord’s angel had told him to do and took Mary home to be his wife. However, he did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son, whom he named Jesus.

^{L2}Indeed, a major event in those days was the decree issued by Caesar Augustus that a census should be taken of the whole empire. (This census took place prior to the one when Quirinius governed Syria.) So everyone went to their own town to be registered. Indeed, Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Bethlehem the town of David in Judea since he was of the house and lineage of King David, to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. Indeed, while they were there the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in cloth and laid him in an animal feeding trough, because there was no place for them in the inn.

^{L2}That night, some shepherds were nearby out in the fields watching their sheep. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord was shining around them, and they became very frightened. So the angel declared to them, “Do not be afraid, for look, I announce to you good news of great joy that will be for all people since today in David’s town a Savior has been born to you, who is the Lord Messiah. This is how you will recognize him: You will find a baby lying in a feeding trough, snugly wrapped in cloths. Suddenly there was a very large group of the heavenly host with the angel, who were praising God by saying: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem and see this wonderful event, which the Lord has made known to us. So they hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in a feeding trough. Indeed, when they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. However, Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard, just as they had been told.

^{L2}On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. And when the days of purification according to the Law of Moses were completed, his parents brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as written in the Lord’s Law [Ex. 13:12]: **“Every firstborn male will be called holy to the Lord”**) and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is stated in the Law (Lev. 5:7): **“a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”**

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The testimony of Simeon, Anna, and the Magi. ^{L2}Significantly, there was a righteous and devout man in Jerusalem named Simeon, who was expecting a savior to encourage Israel. Indeed, the Holy Spirit was upon him to reveal to him that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah, and being guided by the Spirit he entered the temple complex. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the practice of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your slave in peace, for my eyes have seen your anointed savior, whom you have prepared in the sight of all the people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory for your people Israel." His parents were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and told his mother Mary: "Indeed, this child is appointed for the falling and rising of many in Israel and for a miraculous sign that will be opposed, so that the deepest thoughts of many people will be exposed. A sword will also pierce even your own soul."

^{L2}There also was a prophetess named Anna, a daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was very old, having lived with her husband seven years after marriage and had been a widow until the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple complex, serving God night and day with fasting and prayers. At that very moment, she came up and began to thank God and speak about him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. So Joseph and Mary completed everything according to the Law of the Lord.

^{M2}After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea during the reign of King Herod, some court advisors, called Magi, arrived in Jerusalem from an eastern empire, and inquired, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We have seen his star when it arose and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was deeply disturbed, as was all of Jerusalem. He summoned all the chief priests and teachers of religious law and demanded of them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem of Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written (Micah 5:2): **'O Bethlehem of Judah, you are not just a lowly village in Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'**" Then Herod invited the Magi for a private audience and found out from them the exact time they first saw the star. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Search carefully for the child, and when you find him, come back and tell me so I can worship him too." After they heard the king, they departed. Once again the star appeared to them, guiding them to the place where the child was. When they saw the star, their joy was boundless. Entering the house they saw the child with his mother Mary and bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

Escape from Herod to Egypt. ^{M2}After they left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the child and his mother, escape to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod is starting to look for the child to kill him." So he got up during the night and left for Egypt with the child and his mother and stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet (Hos. 11:1): **"I called my son out of Egypt."** Herod became furious when he learned that the Magi had outwitted him and so gave orders to kill all the boys around Bethlehem under two years of age, according to the time he had learned from the Magi. So what was said through the prophet Jeremiah (31:15) came true: **"A cry of anguish is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning. Rachel crying for her children, refusing to be comforted—for they are dead."**

^{M2}After Herod died, an angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream in Egypt and told him, "Get up and take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because the people who were trying to kill the child are dead." So Joseph returned immediately to Israel with Jesus and his mother, but when he learned that Archelaus was now reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. ^{M2,L2}After being warned in a dream, he went back to the district of Galilee, and lived in their own town called Nazareth. So what was spoken through the prophet came true: **"He will be called a Nazarene."**

The Messiah's growth and early life. ^{L2}Indeed, the boy grew up and became strong, filled with wisdom, and God's grace was on him. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year for the Passover Festival. When he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. When the days were over, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming he was among the company, they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple complex sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were

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astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand the meaning of this statement. Then he went down with them to Nazareth and kept on obeying them. In fact, his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. Indeed, as Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, he also grew in favor with God and with people.

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