

QUESTION:

What's your take on the independence or interdependence of Mt 1-2 and Lk 1-2. Do you think Luke's infancy narratives are based on Matthew's? Or vice versa? Or on some other unknown earlier common source? Or neither and they're both independent? It sounds like you're advocating independence. But if they are separate and independent, then we have to account for common elements in the two. Some commonalities are easier to explain (e.g., location in Bethlehem [Micah 5.2]; mother's name Mary [Mk 6.3]), but others less so (e.g., both have the same name Joseph for Mary's husband even though that name is not in Mark or Q; both have the unexpected and unprecedented miracle story of a virgin birth). Thoughts?

RESPONSE:

This is a great and very perceptive question. It is rooted in my thread, just finished, on Bethlehem and Nazareth, in which I argued that both Matthew and Luke have given us stories to explain how Jesus could be the messiah - who (in their opinion) was to be born in Bethlehem - if, instead, he was actually from Nazareth. My argument was that both accounts are implausible (wisemen following a star; census for the whole world to be registered under Caesar Augustus; etc.) and that they are hopelessly at odds with one another. So neither one is historical.

But then what is their relation to one another? The question summarizes the situation well: even though they differ in almost every way, the stories agree at several key points. Jesus' mother was a woman named Mary, betrothed to a man named Joseph; she gave birth while still a virgin; and it happened in Bethlehem, even though Jesus was raised in Nazareth. Don't these points of agreement indicate that one knew the other or that they are both based on a common source?

In my view, the answer to that question is ...

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