

The Paradoxical Origin of Jesus Christ according to Matthew's Gospel

Matthew 1:1-25

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As the child of Mary, Jesus is a new creation generated by the Holy Spirit. As the adopted son of Joseph, he is a descendant of David and Abraham. Although he represents two generations and wears two christological hats concurrently, he is one person and has one name, Jesus. His life manifests a direct correspondence between his activity and his name, between his person and his work. That is why his naming is so important.

Unlike the other evangelists Matthew introduces his gospel with a table of ancestry.¹ Certain features distinguish it as a novel presentation of a family tree. In contrast to Luke 3:23-38, the only other genealogy of Jesus in the New Testament, it begins with Abraham, the grand patriarch of Israel, and moves forward through the individual generations to its culmination in "Jesus who is called Messiah." Forty names succeed each other in unbroken father-son relationships; the forty-first is Jesus, but his link to this chain of successive generations is ambiguous. The verb *egennesen* ("he generated") is used 39 times to connect these father and son pairs, but at the crucial point in verse 16 it does not relate Jesus to Joseph. Instead Joseph is identified as "the husband of Mary," and Mary is designated as the one "from whom Jesus who is called Messiah was born." Four other women of different reputations have been included previously among the male descendants through whom the family line moves, even though they are not to be counted separately as individual generations. Finally, in contrast to Luke's register of names - and most others - Matthew's genealogy is numerically structured according to a pattern, which seems to demarcate three divisions each consisting of fourteen names (1:17).

All of these distinctive features have something to do with the origin of Jesus. He is the climactic goal and termination of Israel's history, and yet he does not appear to be directly or immediately linked to it. The ambiguity of verse 16, which in spite of the textual variants in the manuscript tradition that seek to resolve it, raises the question of Jesus' relationship to Joseph.² Is he his son or not? If he is, what is the purpose of 1:18-25? If he is not, how can he belong to the genealogy and be regarded as its culmination?

To comprehend this unusual table of ancestry it is necessary to recognize its arbitrary character. This becomes more apparent through a comparison of its content with its Old Testament sources. The first fourteen generations from Abraham to David correspond to those named in

¹ See Marshall D. Johnson's excellent study, *The Purpose of Biblical Genealogies, with Special Reference to the Setting of Genealogies of Jesus* (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1969) esp. pp. 153, 176ff. Unfortunately Johnson reads the peculiarities of Matthew's genealogy in the light of a polemical setting of Jewish slander rather than the evangelist's design of numerical schemes, which are eschatologically oriented. See H.C. Waetjen, "The Genealogy as the Key to the Gospel according to Matthew," *JBL* 95 (1976), pp. 205-230. Also C.T. Davis, "The Fulfillment of the Creation: A Study of Matthew's Genealogy," *JAAR* 41 (1973), pp. 520-535.

² Waetjen, op. cit., pp. 216-218.

various lists recorded in the Old Testament, especially 1 Chron. 1:28-2:15.³ There are, however, gaps in the second division of fourteen. Three successive kings of Judah: Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah, listed in 1 Chron. 3:11-2, have been excluded. Jehoiachim who succeeded Josiah and who was the father of Jehoiachin or Jechoniah, is also missing. Various reasons for their omission have been offered, but none has been especially convincing.⁴ Why certain ones and not others may no longer be ascertainable. What matters is that verse 17 indicates an imposed limit of fourteen generations to each division, and that requires the exclusion of some names.

This arbitrary employment of the number fourteen, however, is called into question by an apparent deficiency in the third and final section of the genealogy, which lists only thirteen generations. That might be accounted for by the inadequacy of the extra-biblical source from which most of these names have been derived, for only two of them, Salathiel and Zerubbabel, appear in the ancestry tables of 1 Chron. 3:17-24. But such reasoning from silence is groundless. On the other hand, at this point it might seem more cogent to dismiss the entire genealogy with all of its idiosyncrasies as the work of earlier tradition. Matthew simply adopted it and without critical revision placed it at the head of his gospel.⁵

Nevertheless, in spite of these difficulties verse 17 must not be set aside too quickly; it provides the key to the genealogy. A correct counting of its individual generations is crucial to an understanding of its numerical schemes and their theological purpose. According to verse 17, "... all the generations from Abraham to David (are) fourteen generations and from David to the Babylonian deportation fourteen generations and from the Babylonian deportation to the Messiah fourteen generations." David is mentioned twice; he ends the first division of names and begins the second. An enumeration indicates that he is the fourteenth generation and so the end of the first section of the genealogy. If he is counted a second time, the number of names in the second group totals fifteen. Obviously, if verse 17 is to be observed, this cannot be correct, unless Jechoniah were omitted at the end of the second division and counted at the beginning of the third. That would furnish an additional name for the final section and happily bring the total to fourteen. But at the same time it would distort the reckoning for David would be counted twice, but Jechoniah, representing the transition of the Babylonian exile, only once.⁶ If, however, each name represents one generation and is reckoned accordingly, the correspondence with the numerical scheme of verse 17 is almost perfect. David and Jechoniah stand at the end of the first and second sections of the genealogy respectively. Although they are named twice, they are only to be counted once. As a matter of fact, since verse 17 substitutes an historical event, the Babylonian deportation, in place of Jechoniah as the conclusion of the second division of generations and the beginning of the third, it is evident that Matthew's genealogy is more than a table of ancestry. Its structure, as indicated by verse 17, presents an historical outline.

Both David and the Babylonian deportation mark an end as well as a beginning in this procession of people and events. David closes that era of history which had been opened by Abraham, a time of "beginnings." But he also inaugurates a new epoch, "an age of kings," as the

³ G.F. Moore, "Fourteen Generations: 490 Years," *HTR* 14 (1921), p. 98.

⁴ Johnson, *Genealogies*, p. 180. G. Kuhn, Die Geschlechtsregister Jesu bei Lukas und Matthäus, nach ihrer Herkunft untersucht," *ZNW* 22 (1923), pp. 221-222, suggested the common denominator of a violent death which the three kings shared but recognized that this included Amon (Matt. 1:10) who was not eliminated from the genealogy. E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus. Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, arranged & edited by W. Schmauch, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 3rd ed. 1962, p. 3, suggests the omission is due to the inexactness of the LXX.

⁵ G. Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit. Untersuchungen zur Theologie des Matthäus*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1962, p. 38, n. 3. Also R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, New York: Harper & Row, 1963, p. 356.

⁶ Rodney T. Hood, "The Genealogies of Jesus," *Early Christian Origins: Studies in Honor of H. R. Willoughby*, ed. by A. Wikgren, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961, p. 10.

second division of the genealogy might aptly be called. He is referred to in 1:6 as "the king," and as such he is the founder of the dynasty that follows. The Babylonian deportation serves the same purpose in this historical scheme: it is an event of transition that terminates the age of kings and ushers in a new period of Israel's history as Jechoniah is carried into captivity with the Jewish people. This third epoch, which is closed by Jesus the Messiah, might appropriately be designated "a time of exile."

However, as already noted, this third division of the genealogy appears to be incomplete: only thirteen names are listed. This deficiency may be attributed to the carelessness of Matthew's redaction⁷ or the inaccuracy of his sources.⁸ It may also be resolved by counting Jesus as the thirteenth generation and the risen Christ as the fourteenth.⁹ But neither explanation corresponds to the character and purpose of the evangelist's work. On the one hand, as will become evident, Matthew is a masterful literary artist and is in control of his writing as well as his use of the materials of tradition that are available to him. On the other hand, he presents Jesus as the Christ already from the time of his birth.

The incomplete number of generations in the third section of the genealogy is deliberate and is clarified by the origin and significance of the number fourteen which, according to verse 17, is the basis of the author's schematization of Israel's history. The best clues are provided by the Messiah Apocalypse of 2 Baruch 53-74. Matthew could not have utilized this millennial writing, for it was composed after his Gospel. But he appears to have been familiar with its pattern of fourteen or twelve plus two. His scheme matches the apocalypticist's organization and interpretation of Israel's history.

The pattern which this visionary sees in the history of Israel is analogous to an enormous cloud that has emerged from "a very great sea . . . full of waters white and black" (53:1). "Now this was done twelve times, but the black were always more numerous than the white" (53:6). The first waters that fall upon the earth are dark because they symbolize the sin of Adam, and they become darker because of the sin that results in the waters of the flood (56:5-16). The bright waters that follow are "the fount of Abraham" and the births of his son and grandson (57:1). They are succeeded by the dark waters of slavery in Egypt (58:1). Bright waters usher in the fourth period, the time of Moses and the Exodus (59:1-12). But the fifth waters soon fall to make an end of this through the evil works of the Amorites (60:1). The sixth waters are interpreted to be the illustrious reigns of David and Solomon (61:1-8). Jeroboam's sin of the two golden calves, however, brings back the dark rains (62:1-8). The eighth waters are bright again because righteousness flourishes in the time of Hezekiah's rule (63:1-11). Manasseh's wickedness represents the murky ninth waters (64:1-10). The bright tenth waters signify the restoration that takes place under Josiah (66:1-8). "And the eleventh black waters which thou hast seen: this is the calamity now befalling Zion," namely Jerusalem laid waste by the king of Babylon (67:1-6). The bright twelfth waters are interpreted as a time of restoration when Zion will be rebuilt, the Temple offerings reinstated and the priests reinstated (68:4-8).

⁷ J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) pp. 293-295.

⁸ Lohmeyer, *Matthäus*, p. 3.

⁹ K. Stendahl, *Matthew. Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, rev. ed. ed. by M. Black and H.H. Rowley, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962, pp. 770-771, para. 674c. This possibility, as far as I have been able to determine, was first posed by von Hofmann, *Weissagung und Erfüllung im Alten und Neuen Testamente* (Nördlingen: C.H. Beck, 1841-1844) vol. 2, p. 42, who considered it at least probable that Jesus was intended by Matthew to be the thirteenth generation and the risen Christ who would come again as the fourteenth. See also T. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus. Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 2nd ed., 1905) p. 53, n. 19.

Twelve episodes of epochs have occurred, but the goal of history has not yet been reached. "For the last waters which thou hast seen which were darker than all that were before them, those which were after the twelfth number which were collected together belong to the whole world" (69:1). Although this final rainfall is not numbered, it is to all intents and purposes the thirteenth. As such it is the unluckiest, the most tragic period in history: "And it shall come to pass that whoever gets safe out of the fire shall be destroyed by famine . . . for all the earth shall devour its inhabitants."

At the consummation of this darkest rainfall a lightning bolt flashes across the sky which is identified as the messiah: "... he shall summon all nations, and some he shall spare and some of them he shall slay" (72:2). After he has carried out the great judgment, the fourteenth and final age is inaugurated, "the beginning of that which is not corruptible" (74:2). "Then healing shall descend in dew, and disease shall withdraw, and anxiety and anguish and lamentation pass away and gladness proceed through the whole earth" (73:2).

Matthew's numerically structured genealogy parallels this arbitrary schematization of Israel's history. Moreover, the supposed discrepancy between the statement of verse 17 that there are fourteen generations from the Babylonian deportation to the Messiah and the actual number thirteen names listed in the table is resolved by it. Indeed, it is in the third division of the genealogy that the scheme of twelve plus two or fourteen has its real application. That is, there are twelve ancestors and Jesus the Messiah who, in contrast to all the other individuals in the family tree is to be counted twice. He represents two generations, not consecutively, but simultaneously from the beginning of his life.

His birth marks the end of the age of exile. He is "the king of the Jews" who draws the Magi from the east, and "they rejoice with exceeding great joy" when they arrive at his home in Bethlehem in order to pay him homage. But his birth also elicits the dreadful response of Herod the Great who dispatches his soldiers to slaughter all the infant boys in Bethlehem and the surrounding regions. Jesus as the sole survivor of this massacre becomes the bearer of this holocaust character and will embody its judgment at the end of his life when this sequence of the new age and death will be reversed. His abandonment by God at death will constitute the darkest moment in history for it will be accompanied by the return of the creation to its primeval chaos: "...and the earth was shaken and the rocks were torn apart" (27:51). The awakening of the saints which immediately follows signals the beginning of this new creation: "And the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints having been asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered the holy city and were manifested to many" (27:53-3). Because Jesus' life is the ground on which the consummating events of history occur, he is the bearer of two generations. His death not only relates him to the thirteenth episode in the scheme of the Messiah Apocalypse; the resurrection of the saints effected by the emission of his final divine breath of life (27:50), links him to the fourteenth, the beginning of a new time. But an ambiguity arises at this point. If Jesus represents two generations, in as far as he is the fourteenth (as well as the thirteenth) he is also a figure of transition like David the king. He ends the third period, the age of exile, and inaugurates a new era. That implies that the genealogy is not terminated by Jesus. Jesus is not the end of history and the beginning of a new creation. He upholds the continuity of history which, according to Jesus' discourse on eschatology is consummated by the Parousia of the Human Being and the ingathering of his community (24:29-31).

But numerical patterns govern the construction of Matthew's genealogy. Both appear to have been derived from apocalyptic millennialism. Twelve plus two or fourteen, as it is specified in verse 17, parallels the schematization of history in the Messiah Apocalypse of 2 Baruch. The four

ages implied in the division of the generations correspond to the plan of history conveyed by Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a giant image composed of four precious metal (Dan. 2) and Daniel's vision of four chaos monsters emerging from the sea (Dan. 7).

But these numerical arrangements, which the evangelist combines in 1:17, are eschatological interpretations of history, which cannot be reconciled with each other. According to the number fourteen or twelve plus two, Jesus is the end of history and the agent of a new creation. According to the number four, he belongs to the history of salvation. He is an arching figure who bridges two epochs, the one he has terminated with the one he inaugurates. In contrast to Daniel's millennial vision, Jesus is "the one like a human being" who brings the kingdom of God in history, not at the end of it. Matthew makes no effort to resolve this discrepancy. The numerical schemes and their incipient eschatologies are united with two different christologies and held in tension throughout the gospel.

In this light the meaning of the gospel's opening Words: "Book of the origin of Jesus Christ" can more adequately be understood. It is not immediately apparent whether they are intended as a superscription of the whole composition or only the introduction to the genealogical table, which follows. The latter seems more logical since the genealogy presents the origin of Jesus as the culmination of the historical process of Israel's begetting. Although such a continuity is implied, verse 18, which clarifies the ambiguity of verse 16, discloses that there is no immediate link between Joseph and Jesus. The progression of father begetting son moves forward uninterrupted for forty generations. At the forty-first the continuity is broken. Jesus who was generated by the holy Spirit introduces a disjunction. In this respect he is like Abraham who stands at the beginning of the genealogy as the grand patriarch of Israel, the originator of a new people and their unique history. As a result, the superscription: "Book of the origin of Jesus Christ" cannot apply only to the genealogical table. It reaches beyond it to 1:18-25 which explains the origin of Jesus and his relationship to the preceding generations. Yet as soon as these closing verses of the prologue are connected to the opening words of the evangelist, the body of the gospel that follows must necessarily be included because the subsequent content of Jesus' life elucidates the disclosure of 1:18b as well as the discrepant eschatologies that are conveyed by the two numerical schemes of verse 17.

While the origin of Jesus was linked initially to the progression of father and son generations in the genealogy, it is subsequently connected to Mary in verses 16 and 18. Like the four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and "the wife of Uriah" who precede her, she is another irregularity in the history of Israel. The differences in the evangelist's syntactical constructions, however, hint that her pregnancy is the greatest anomaly of the entire genealogy. The four who serve as her forerunners were presented as the objects of the preposition *ek* ("from"): ". . . Solomon generated Boaz from Rahab;" "Boaz generated Obed from Ruth;" "David generated Solomon from the wife of Uriah."¹⁰ In contrast Joseph did not generate Jesus from Mary, although she is identified as his wife and Jesus' mother.

The ambiguity of 1:16 demands clarification, and scribal revision has attempted to furnish it by unequivocally specifying Mary in advance as "a virgin" and thereby removing the vagueness of Jesus' relation to Joseph. But the clarification is provided by the evangelist himself in verse 18, "But the genesis of Jesus Christ was thus." "Genesis" or origin is a repetition of the word that appears in the superscription of 1:1. Some ancient scribes substituted *genesis*, a word that is similar in sound but is spelled differently and means "birth." Although "genesis" is the textual reading preferred by most authorities, the word "birth" is nevertheless used in many English translations of

¹⁰ See the summary in Johnson, *Genealogies*, pp. 152-179.

1:18. But Matthew is interested in Jesus' origin, not his birth; and the immediate purpose is the clarification of the important ambiguity of verse 16. The adverb "thus" indicates that this will now be done.

Without reluctance or uncertainty Matthew ascribes Jesus' origin to the generating activity of the holy Spirit: "While his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph before they had sexual intercourse she was found pregnant from the holy Spirit." By its position at the end of the sentence the phrase "from the holy Spirit" receives special emphasis; it is curiously similar to several previous prepositional phrases in the genealogy which call attention to various irregularities in the history of Israel: "from Tamar," "from Rahab," "from Ruth," "from the wife of Uriah."

The conceptualization of the relationship between Mary and the holy Spirit which Matthew intends to convey is crucial to a proper understanding of Jesus' origin: "Mary was found pregnant from the holy Spirit;" "for that which has been generated in her is from holy Spirit" (1:20). The verb *gennan* ("to generate") which was used 39 times to link father and son pairs and which therefore carries the meaning of "fathering by an act of sexual intercourse" is also used of Jesus' origin. This and the phraseology of procreation which the evangelist employs, "before they had sexual intercourse" (1:18b), "... he did not know her ..." (1:25a), might suggest that the holy Spirit is the male partner of Mary and that Jesus' generation is to be conceived as the result of their sexual union. Such an understanding of Jesus' origin is often attached to a certain uniqueness that is ascribed to Mary. In contrast to the four women who precede her in the genealogy she is construed to be a virgin. The tradition of 1:18-25 often serves as a proof text of the so-called virgin birth of Jesus. But there is no such identification of Mary by the evangelist except in the fulfillment quotation of 1:23 which interrupts the narrative; and then it is the designation "the virgin." In spite of its absence in many English translations the definite article is purposeful and should not be overlooked. Mary is "the virgin," and as such she plays a distinguished role in the origin of Jesus.

Moreover, the generation of Jesus is not to be interpreted as the result of a sexual union. The preposition *ek* ("from"), as in "from the holy Spirit" may simply denote origin without the accompanying connotation of male impregnator. Matthew's use of the clause *en gastri echousa* in verses 18b and 23 seems to be chosen carefully and, as in the Septuagint text of Gen. 38:18, 24, 25 and 2Sam. 11:3 simply expresses the condition of being pregnant. It has been substituted by the evangelist in his fulfillment quotation (1:23) in place of the clause *en gastri lempsetai* ("she will conceive") that appears in the Septuagint version of Is. 7:14 and implies a conception originated by the agency of the male principle when it is followed by the preposition "from."¹¹

In the New Testament the combination of the verb "to generate" (*gennan*) and the accompanying prepositional phrase, "from the (holy) Spirit" is limited to the Johannine tradition where it seems to have the character of a formula. In John 3:5 John tells Nicodemus that one must be "generated from water and Spirit." The Spirit is an inexplicable reality which "blows where it wills and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes to. So is everyone who has been generated from the Spirit."¹²

Such a divine origin by the creative activity of the Spirit is attributed to Jesus by the evangelist Matthew. Mary has no husband. She is only "betrothed to Joseph" who "did not know her until she bore a son." There is no possibility of her conceiving and bearing a child. It is entirely the work of the Spirit who generates Jesus by a direct act of creation.

By reason of this unusual genesis Jesus is a second Adam who like his prototype is thoroughly human but who, in view of his divine generation, may also be called "the Son of God."

¹¹ See also 2 Kings 8:12, 15:16; Hos. 14:1; Amos 1:13; Is. 40:11.

¹² Also 1 John 3:9 and 5:1.

That in fact is one of the christological titles conferred on Jesus in the course of the gospel: by Simon Peter in 16:16 and by the centurion of the crucifixion in 27:54; and it is implied in the identification of the virgin's son as Emmanuel in 1:23.¹³ But the epithet that conveys the identity of Jesus in terms of his "having been generated in her (Mary) from the holy Spirit" as a new human being is the one that appears consistently on his lips as a self-designation: "the Son of Man".

Although the maternity of Mary is accentuated in the ambiguity of verse 16 and its elucidation in verse 18b, the narrative of 1:18-25 is told from the point of view of Joseph. This has often been noted but unfortunately interpreted as an apologetic motive. The shift back to Joseph in Matthew's explanation of Jesus' origin is based on his decisive position in the genealogy. For if Jesus is the climax of the history of Israel, at least in terms of his identity as the Son of David, he is that by reason of his relationship to Joseph and not to Mary.¹⁴ Although Joseph is not physically involved in the generation of Jesus, he is betrothed to Mary, and the irregularity of her pregnancy must be explained to him. For as a "righteous" Jew, as he is characterized in verse 19, and therefore as one who is obedient to the law, he is obligated to dissolve this betrothal in view of Mary's apparent unfaithfulness. While contemplating a quiet divorce he is approached by the angel of the Lord, addressed as "Son of David" and commanded to make Mary's child his own by adoption. Only as a result of this obedience is Jesus linked to the history of Israel.

Joseph belongs to the substance of tradition available to the evangelist. Although not mentioned in Mark or Q and appearing only in the first two chapters of Matthew's gospel, he can hardly be the invention of the evangelist. In Luke he is named both as the man to whom Mary was engaged (1:27) and as the father - "as was supposed" - of Jesus (3:23, 4:22). The fourth gospel refers to him twice as the father of Jesus (1:45, 6:42). Matthew's Joseph is unique in gospel literature. Nowhere is he sketched more concretely, nowhere does he play a more active role in relation to the birth of Jesus. Only the first evangelist characterizes him as "righteous" and then proceeds to show how this basic trait is manifested in his conduct both toward Mary and Jesus. While he wants no part in Mary's seeming unchastity, he has no desire to shame her publicly. Moreover, making Mary his wife also involves adopting her child and relating to it as a father. Joseph not only acknowledges his fatherhood by naming the boy; he assumes the responsibility of his safety by taking mother and infant to Egypt in order to escape from the murderous designs of Herod the Great and subsequently by moving his family to Nazareth in order to avoid the jeopardy of living under the rule of Archelaus.

This representation of Joseph seems to be invested with certain Old Testament features and allusions, which contribute to the evangelist's theological interpretation of Jesus' beginnings. The prototype that most readily suggests itself is the Old Testament patriarch Joseph. Not only is the name the same; both Josephs have a father named Jacob. It is not certain whether Matthew's designation of Jacob as the father of Joseph in 1:16 is intended to evoke the reader's memory of the Old Testament figure. But it is noteworthy that the last four members of the genealogical table of the first gospel are identical to those of the third gospel's catalog except for the name of Joseph's father. Matthew lists "Jacob;" Luke "Heli." Joseph is like his Old Testament counterpart in at least three other respects; (1) he is chaste and refuses to be involved in immorality; (2) he has dreams in which the future is revealed to him and (3) he rescues Jesus by adopting him and by carrying him to safety in Egypt. These are of course superficial similarities, secondary to the

¹³ Although "the Son of God" is a significant title, it is subordinate to "the Son of Man." Contrast J.D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) who argues for the primacy of "the Son of God" title in Matthew's christology.

¹⁴ T.H. Robinson, *The Gospel of Matthew. Moffat New Testament Commentary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951) p. 3.

cardinal events of Joseph's career in the Old Testament: slavery, imprisonment, and enthronement. Nevertheless, it is specifically these three qualities which are eulogized in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. The more momentous incidents of Joseph's life have receded, perhaps forced into the background by the messianic expectations surrounding Levi and Judah. At any rate, the messianic character of Joseph's life is absent; here he is acknowledged by the other patriarchs as a model of virtue: "Now Joseph was a good man and had the Spirit of God in him" (Test. of Sim. 4:1). Again, ". . . Joseph, my brother, the true and good man" (Test. of Dan. 5:1). In almost every instance chastity is the basis that is given for this evaluation. Joseph's life exemplifies the keeping of God's commandments, above all in his triumph over fornication, the sin most confessed and condemned by the other patriarchs.¹⁵ In his own testimony the patriarch vividly narrates the agonizing temptations he endured at the hand of Potiphar's wife. Little is said of his imprisonment, and almost nothing of his elevation to vice-regent of Egypt; but the experience with the Egyptian woman has been expanded and embellished to the point of completely dominating his last will and testament.¹⁶

At least two other traits are acknowledged by Joseph: love and long-suffering, and they are combined with humanity. Noteworthy is his claim, "You see, therefore, my children, what great things I endure that I should not put my brothers to shame" (17:1). And this is coupled with the exhortation, "You also love one another and with long-suffering hide one another's faults" (17:2). In the light of these qualities Joseph presents himself as Jacob's successor in caring and providing for his brothers and their children. Only Joseph can assume this position because he is the only son among the patriarchs who "was like Jacob in all things" (18:4). The words attributed to him are important in this respect for they represent him as the grand patriarch:

And after the death of Jacob my father I loved them more abundantly, and whatever he commanded I did for them. And I did not permit them to be afflicted in the least matter; and all that was in my hands I gave them. And their sons were my sons and my sons as their servants. And their life was my life, and all their sufferings were my suffering and all their sicknesses were my infirmity. My land was their land, and their counsel my counsel. And I did not exalt myself among them in arrogance because of my worldly glory, but I was among them as one of the least (17:5-8).

Dreams are not explicitly mentioned, but a vision is included which offers an apocalyptically colored glimpse of the final events of the age. More significant is Joseph's reference to a revelation received through an angel of God which warned him of the devices of Potiphar's wife: "Now therefore know that the God of my father has disclosed your wickedness to me by his angel" (6:6). Throughout the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs the angel of God reveals what has been done or what will happen.

Matthew's portrayal of Joseph bears a resemblance to the Old Testament patriarch, but the corresponding features have not been derived from the original narrative in Gen. 37-50. He seems rather to have been invested with a character that parallels the more contemporary image of Joseph presented in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, particularly the Testament of Joseph.

Chaste, righteous and kind, Joseph is called to adopt Mary's child in order to engraft him into his family tree. He does so by giving the boy a name and thereby publicly declaring himself to

¹⁵ T. Reuben 4:6-9, 11 and 6:1-4; T. Sim. 5:1-3; T. Jud. 14:2 – 15:6 and 18:2; T. Jos. 3-10. Also CD 2:14-21 and 4:17; Sirach 9:2-9 and 19:2.

¹⁶ T. Jos. 10:2-4.

be his father (1:25b). He is called Jesus, "for he will save his people from their sins" (1:21). This saving work is primarily nationalistic in character and scope: he is to be the savior of his people, the Jews. Joseph, therefore, by adopting Jesus upholds the continuity of the Davidic line and the divine promises, which have accompanied it for many generations.

At the same time, however, Jesus is more than the Son of David. His commission reaches beyond Davidic messianism. He is to save his people from their sins. Nowhere is such a function ascribed to the Old Testament king or his promised heir. It is said in 2 Sam. 3:18 that by David's hand God would save Israel from their enemies. To save from sins is a work, which is restricted to the Lord, as is evident from Ps., 130:8, the Old Testament parallel closest to 1:21b, "And he will redeem Israel from all his lawlessness." Such an irregularity, however, is in keeping with the ambiguity of Jesus' origin. According to 2 Sam. 7:11-4 and Ps. 2:7, David's heir is to become God's son by adoption. The very opposite takes place in the first gospel. Jesus, a new creation of the holy Spirit and as a result the divine Human Being is adopted by David's descendant Joseph in order to fulfill the promises made to Israel, "... and he called his name Jesus."

As Joseph upholds the continuity of Israel's history and the fulfillment of the Davidic promise, Mary is the bearer of this eschatological event of a new creation and the radical discontinuity it interposes. In the fulfillment quotation, as already indicated, she is identified as "the virgin." According to the introductory formula of 1:22, this whole thing happened in order to fulfill God's word spoken by the prophet. But that cannot include the virgin birth for Matthew does not seem to have known such a theologoumenon. It is not the doctrine of the virgin birth that led the evangelist to Is. 7:14. There is another meaning and purpose to Matthew's abrupt interruption of the narrative and his identification of Mary as "the virgin."

In its reference to "the virgin" the fulfillment quotation of verse 23 corresponds to the Septuagint version of Is. 7:14. The original Hebrew text, however, does not convey such a designation for it does not utilize the technical term for virgin, *bethulah*, but simply the word *almah* ("young woman"). It is very likely that the Septuagint translation interpreted this young woman to be the corporate motherhood of Israel that had already found expression in such forms of address as "Daughter of Zion," "Rachel" and "Virgin Israel."¹⁷ Israel is "the virgin" because she has not defiled herself through unfaithfulness and idolatry; and she will give birth to the messianic king.

Matthew appropriates this Septuagint version of Is. 7:14 in order to identify Mary in the light of her extraordinary maternity as the incarnation of Mother Israel. She represents the corporate motherhood of God's people giving birth to this incongruous Messiah.

Jesus therefore is the integration of both discontinuity and continuity. As the child of Mary he is a new creation generated by the holy Spirit. As the adopted son of Joseph he is a descendant of David and Abraham. The ambiguity of his origin corresponds to the two generations of the third division of the genealogy, which he simultaneously fills, as well as the eschatological tension between the two numerical schemes of verse 17 that serve as the framework of his table of ancestry.

This dual origin and its concomitant identities: the Son of the Human Being and the Son of David, explain Matthew's strange account of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In contrast to Mark's version, Jesus rides on two beasts, an *onos* which is a coronation animal, and a *polos huios hypozygiou*, a pack animal. This is not, as is often thought, a misunderstanding of the poetic parallelism of Zech. 9:9 but rather a dramatic reminder of the christological identities which Jesus bears and the dialectical eschatology which they express.

¹⁷ W.H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls for the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) pp. 274-281.

Although he represents two generations and wears two christological hats concurrently, he is one person and has one name, Jesus. This is the name, which the angel commanded Joseph to give Mary's child because "he will save his people from their sins." Since the verb *sosei* ("he will save") is an etymological pun on the Hebrew meaning of the name of Jesus, and since it is not explained as, for example, Immanuel is in 1:23, it must be assumed that Matthew's readers were familiar with it.¹⁸ The Septuagint translation of Ps. 130 (129): 8 appears to be quoted here. The differences between it and its rendition in Matthew can be accounted for on the basis of the evangelist's purposeful alteration. The substitution of the verb "he will save" for "he will redeem" is his work and not the result of an adoption of pre-Matthaeian tradition.¹⁹ There can only be one reason for it; it is the verb that conveys the meaning of the name Jesus.

He is to be called Jesus because he will save. His life will manifest a direct correspondence between his activity and his name, between his person and his work. That is why his naming is so important.²⁰ It anticipates what is yet to be told in this "Book of Origin."

¹⁸ Strecker, *op. cit.*, p. 54 and especially his reference to Philo, *de mut. nom.* 121, which shows that the meaning of Jesus could be presupposed in Hellenistic Judaism.

¹⁹ Against Strecker, *ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁰ Hans Kosmala, "The Conclusion of Matthew," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*, 4 (1965), p. 142, "Matthew describes the name-giving and its significance in greater detail than the other evangelists."