

January 2-8, 2023

Matthew 1; Luke 1

“BE IT UNTO ME ACCORDING TO THY WORD”

Summary: *Matthew 1. Christ is born of Mary—She conceives by the power of the Holy Ghost—Our Lord is named Jesus.*

Luke 1. Gabriel promises Zacharias that Elisabeth will bear a son, whom they will name John—He also tells Mary that she will be the mother of the Son of God—Mary visits Elisabeth and utters a psalm of praise—John the Baptist is born—Zacharias prophesies of John’s mission.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

How confident can I be about an Apostle’s testimony?

Matthew was a comprehensive Jew with an overall understanding of the scriptures and clearly saw the details of the Lord’s life as fulfillment of prophecy. He wrote for the Jews around him and used many passages from the Old Testament. His purpose was to show that Jesus is the Messiah of whom the prophets spoke. He begins with a genealogy that identifies a Davidic line through Joseph of Nazareth. In chapter 3 of Luke, we have another, very similar family connection from King David. The difference between the two genealogies may be because Matthew gives the “Priestly,” or “authority line,” and Luke possibly gives the “Maternal,” “genetic” line. It is interesting to note that at the present time, the State of Israel adheres to the Jewish law of matrilineal descent for matters which could affect Israeli family law. You are considered a Jew through your mother’s Jewish line. (Chief Rabbinical Board of the State of Israel see Elberg, Rabbi S., September, 1984, HaPardes Rabbinical Journal, Hebrew, vol.59, Is.1, p. 21.) We learn much about the time immediately prior to the birth of Jesus from Luke, who was not even there or at least was not of the first generation of disciples/apostles of Jesus. He gives us a key about trusting the witnesses of Apostles and Prophets. “It seemed good

to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, . . .” (Luke 1:3) The Apostle Luke was Paul’s scribe and wrote two books of the New Testament, Luke and Acts. “Luke, the beloved physician and missionary associate of Paul, first wrote his Gospel, telling of our Lord’s mortal ministry, and second this book of Acts, which summarizes portions of the ministries of Peter and Paul. Both accounts are addressed to Theophilus, a prominent personage of the period, who, since Luke’s writings are addressed to Gentile or Roman readers, may have been a distinguished citizen of Rome.” (Bruce R. McConkie, Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Vol.2, p.21)

What were the names of Joseph’s and Mary’s fathers, and Mary’s mother’s name?

Mary’s ancestors were the same as Joseph’s. She was a descendant through the royal line of King David. “Matthew says Joseph was a son of Jacob, and Luke says that he was a son of Heli. It appears, however, that Jacob and Heli were brothers and that Heli was the father of Joseph and Jacob the father of Mary, making Joseph and Mary first cousins with the same ancestral lines.” (Bruce R. McConkie, The Mortal Messiah, 4 vols. [1979–81], 1:316) The names Jacob and Joachim may be interchanged. here is a conjecture that; “Heli and Joachim are

linguistically related, such that it would be very natural for a single man to go by these two names. Joachim seems to be a variant form of Eliacim, which is abbreviated as Eli, a variant of Heli. Hence, though the two names may at first appear quite different, there is a great linguistic similarity between Heli and Joachim. In any case, there are many persons in the New Testament who are called by multiple names: Nathanael is called Bartholomew, Thomas is called Didymus, Cleophas is called both Clepas and Alphaeus (though this last is more debatable), Salome is called Mary (her full name being Mary Salome), etc.”

(<http://newtheologicalmovement.blogspot.com/2011/07/why-isnt-joachim-mentioned-in-jesus.html>) “Under Crusader rule during the 12th century, a small watchtower and a church (dedicated to Anne and Joachim, parents of Mary, mother of Jesus) were built on the (Zippori) city's hilltop. The remains of the watchtower, partly renovated in later times, still dominates the hilltop today.

How closely are we connected to Pre-mortal life?

(<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/vie-zippori>) The tradition that Joachim and Anne were parents of the Virgin Mary comes from a tradition derived from apocryphal writings, such as is found in the 2nd-century *Protevangelium of James* (“First Gospel of James”) and the 3rd-century *Evangelium de nativitate Mariae* (“Gospel of the Nativity of Mary”).

In harmony with the plan of happiness, the premortal Messiah Jesus, the Firstborn Son of the Father in the spirit, covenanted to be our Savior. “Behold, my Beloved son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever”. (**Moses 4:2**) Many Sons and daughters of God became noble and great in the premortal world (**see Abraham 3:22–25; Jeremiah 1:4–6; Alma**

13:3–5). “The doctrine of (Pre-mortal life), – revealed so plainly, particularly in latter days, pours a wonderful flood of light upon the otherwise mysterious problem of man’s origin. It shows that man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal body to undergo an experience in mortality. It teaches that all men existed in the spirit before any man existed in the flesh, and that all who have inhabited the earth since Adam have taken bodies and become souls in a like manner . . . Man is the child of God, formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant of an earthly father and mother is capable in due time of becoming a man, so the undeveloped offspring of celestial parentage is capable, by experience through ages and aeons, of evolving into a God.” (**First Presidency, Messages of the First Presidency 4:205-6.**)

How does the pre-mortal life preparation, serve us in mortality?

Those who followed Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ were permitted to come to the earth to experience mortality and progress toward eternal life. Premortal life is referred to in the scriptures. “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.” (**Jeremiah 1:5**) “Now the Lord . . . “And that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made.” (**Doctrine and Covenants 49:17**) “. . . And I, the Lord God, had created all the children of men; and not yet a man to till the ground; for in heaven created I them; and there was not yet flesh upon the earth, neither in the water, neither in the air . . .” (**Moses 3:5**) We can sense the reality of this principle as we read how two expectant mother’s babies reacted when aged Elisabeth and young Mary greeted

each other. "And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy." (Luke 1:41-44) Imagine the joy, and get a glimpse of eternity as the spirit testified to them of their motherly mortal missions. Elisabeth's son became known as John the Baptist, who preceded Jesus and prepared the way for Him. John's father was Zacharias, a priest in the temple when he received the remarkable vision that his aged and barren wife would bear a son. It parallels the Abraham/Sarah scenario of having a child at their advanced age. Those sons were prepared before earth life for their mortal missions.

How do we know that there were some righteous priesthood holders at John's and Jesus' birth?

There was a righteous branch of priesthood and priestly functions that continued at the time of John's birth. Many Jewish traditions, including clothes and manner of worship that are still used today, reflect temple functions of that time. They are familiar to Latter-day Saints because the symbols in the temple are eternal signs and tokens. In Zacharias' time, they observed the same ordinances that we use today. In the Old Testament Supplemental manual, we have previously discussed temple symbols in Jewish worship such as clothing, robe, sash, apron, shoes removed, and men separated from women in special worship environment. "The authority of the priesthood was manifest in the days of the Savior's coming. By virtue of the priesthood held

by Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, the angel appeared to him. Simeon, the prophet, blessed the infant Jesus, and the scriptures say that Simeon was filled with the Holy Ghost. So, there were a few still remaining who had faith and the power of the priesthood." (Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., *Doctrines of Salvation, Vol.3, p.86*)

What reminds us of "Christ's Eternal Gospel?"

"We know that the plan of salvation is "always and everlastingly the same; that obedience to the same laws always brings the same reward; that the gospel laws have not changed...; and that always and everlastingly all things pertaining to salvation center in Christ." (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 4-5.*) ". . . For our own part we cannot believe that the ancients in all ages were so ignorant of the system of heaven as many suppose, since all that were ever saved, were saved through the power of this great plan of redemption, as much before the coming of Christ as since; if not, God has had different plans in operation (if we may so express it), to bring men back to dwell with Himself; and this we cannot believe, since there has been no change in the constitution of man since he fell; and the ordinance or institution of offering blood in sacrifice, was only designed to be performed till Christ was offered up and shed His blood -- as said before -- that man might look forward in faith to that time. It will be noticed that, according to Paul, (see Gal. 3:8) the Gospel was preached to Abraham. We would like to be informed in what name the Gospel was then preached, whether it was in the name of Christ or some other name. If in any other name, was it the Gospel? And if it was the Gospel, and that preached in the name of Christ, had it any ordinances? If not, was it the Gospel? And if it has ordinances what were they? .

. . . From these few facts, we conclude that whenever the Lord revealed Himself to men in ancient days, and commanded them to offer sacrifice to Him, that it was done that they might look forward in faith to the time of His coming and rely upon the power of that atonement for a remission of their sins. And this they have done, thousands who have gone before us, whose garments are spotless, and who are, like Job, waiting with an assurance like his, that they will see Him in the latter day upon the earth, even in their flesh . . . We may conclude, that though there were different dispensations, yet all things which God communicated to His people were calculated to draw their minds to the great object, and to teach them to rely upon God alone as the author of their salvation, as contained in His law.”
(Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Two 1834-37 p.59-60)

What “priestly city” was John born in?

Zacharias, a worthy priest in the temple, his wife Elisabeth, and John the Baptist initially lived in a city of “Judah.” Being priests, they likely lived in a town that was disciplined by priestly rules of cleanliness. “. . . there were 48 Levitical cities which were traditionally set apart, usually four from every tribe, for the exclusive residence of the Levites. Included in these were the six cities of refuge.”

(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.) “And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb;

and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: . . . Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had showed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John . . . And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marveled all.”
(Luke 1:39-63) Ein Kerem in the fertile watershed hills just outside Jerusalem is the traditional birthplace of John. However, another small Arab town named Yatta, just outside the hills of Hebron may be a more likely location for their residence. It is farther from Jerusalem and seems a more likely place to hide than Ein Kerem. As mentioned in a previous Old Testament lesson supplement, that town's name, Yatta, may be a derivation of the word Judah. It also has an archaeological ruin of an ancient “Levite” synagogue. It is tempting to give archaeology, plus a written account of “City of Juda,” a little more credence than just tradition. With a linguistic twist we could say that John came from Utah! Utah means “tops of the mountains” and Judah is in the tops of the mountains of Israel. John from Judah preceded the era of the Savior's first coming. Prophets from Utah are preceding the era of the Savior's second coming.