

The Christmas Stories in the Readings

Kieran J. O'Mahony, OSA
www.tarsus.ie

- **Introduction**
- Matthew 1-2
- Luke 1-2
- Christmas: Vigil
- Christmas: Midnight
- Christmas: Dawn
- Christmas: Day

Sequence

- A Christmas Quiz
- Questions which arise
- Patterns
- Matthew: author, context, theology
- Luke: author, context, theology
- The OT in the NT

Quiz

How did you get on?
Questions which arise?

Patterns

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matthew • Genealogy to Abraham • Annunciation to Joseph • The Magi and Star • The Holy Innocents • Egypt • Bethlehem - Nazareth • 5 Major Citations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luke • Genealogy to Adam • Annunciation to Mary • Shepherds • John the Baptist – • Nazareth - Bethlehem • Citations and echoes |
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Matthew 1-2

		Genealogy	1:1-17	
A		Joseph's dream Jesus' birth	1:18-25	Isaiah 7:24
	B	The Magi	2:1-12	Micah 5:1, 3 2 Sam 5:2
C		Flight into Egypt	2:13-15	Hos 11:1
	D	The holy innocents	2:16-18	Jer 31:15
E		Return (to Nazareth)	2:19-23	?Jdg 13:5-7 ?Is 11:1

Luke 1-2

1. Annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist	2. Annunciation of the birth of Jesus the messiah	Luke 1:1-25 Luke 1:26-38
3. The visitation (Magnificat)		Luke 1:39-56
4. The birth of John the Baptist (Benedictus)	5. The birth of Jesus the Messiah (Gloria)	Luke 1:57-80 Luke 2:1-20
6. The presentation (Nunc dimittis)		Luke 2:21-40
7. Jesus in the Temple	7. Jesus in the Temple	Luke 2:41-52

Matthew

- Traditionally: Matthew / Levi the tax collector
- But: unlikely for several reasons
- Mark
- Antioch on the Orontes
- Ambivalence to Judaism: antagonism /fulfilment
- After the destruction of Jerusalem and the re-organisation of Judaism i.e. post 70
- After the separation of church and synagogue, i.e. post 70
- Matthew's community: technically a "sect."
- Before Ignatius of Antioch, who cites this text, i.e. before the beginning of the 2nd century

1-4	Narrative:	Birth and Beginnings
5-7	Sermon:	Blessings, Entering the Kingdom
8-9	Narrative:	Authority and Invitation
10	Sermon:	Mission Discourse
11-12	Narrative:	Rejection by this Generation
13	Sermon:	Parables of the Kingdom
14-17	Narrative:	Acknowledgment by Disciples
18	Sermon:	Community Discourse
19-22	Narrative:	Authority and Invitation
23-25	Sermon:	Woes, Coming of the Kingdom
26-28	Narrative:	Death and Rebirth

Luke

- Luke: traditionally Luke the "beloved physician"
- Definitely post 70 because he uses Mark
- Destruction of Jerusalem
- Many scholars: 85 or 90
- The author uses Josephus, so later than 93 AD.
- The author has access to the Pauline corpus.
- Cf. Reaction to Jewish revolts in the Diaspora (115-117).
- Cf. Context of the Pastorals ("wolves", heresy, rejection of the OT, uneasy with the empire, yet no direct persecution).
- So: around AD 110 or 115.
- Luke 1-4 Preparation
- Luke 5-9 Ministry in Galilee
- Luke 10-19 Road to Jerusalem
- Luke 20-24 Saving events in the Holy City

OT in the NT

- Always in "conversation" with OT narrative, patterns, theology etc. NB Genesis and the Isaiah.

- Impossible to read the NT without the OT
- Cf. The Jewish Annotated New Testament

OT in the NT: Matthew

- Genealogy: Abraham, David, Exile
- Birth: Joseph
- Magi: Balaam
- Herod: Moses' birth
- Flight: Moses' "exile"
- Return: Moses' return

OT in the NT: Luke

- Annunciations: See also: Ishmael Gen 16:7-12; Isaac 17:1-21; 18:1-12; Samson Jdg 13:3-21; John the Baptist Lk 1:11-20; Jesus Mt 1:20-21.
- OT couples: Elkanah and Hannah: 1Sam 1-3; 1:17; Abraham and Sarah: Gen 18:11
- Davidic descent (many places)
- Accomplishments of the child: 2Sam 7:9, 13-14, 16. Cf. also Ps 2:7 and 89:29; Is 11:1-2; 4:2-3; 2Sam 7:14

Conversation

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Sequence

- Matthew's context
- Matthew 1-2
- Stories behind the stories
- Citations
- The big picture
- And today?
- Conversation

Matthew's Context

- After Mark
- Probably in Antioch in Syria
- Most likely a mixed community
- Just broken away from the mother religion
- Very strong: Moses in Matthew (throughout)

		Genealogy	1:1-17	
A		Joseph's dream Jesus' birth	1:18-25	Isaiah 7:24
	B	The Magi	2:1-12	Micah 5:1, 3 2 Sam 5:2
C		Flight into Egypt	2:13-15	Hos 11:1
	D	The holy innocents	2:16-18	Jer 31:15
E		Return (to Nazareth)	2:19-23	?Jdg 13:5-7 ?Is 11:1

Stories behind the stories

- Genealogy: Abraham, David, Exile
- Birth: Joseph
- Magi: Balaam and Balak
- Herod: Moses (birth)
- Flight: Moses (murder)
- Return: Moses (Pharaoh's death)

Genealogy

- Abraham, David, Exile
- The number 14
- The women in particular
- The final generations: Jacob, Joseph, Jesus

	Possession (David)		
Promise (Abraham)		Loss (Exile)	Longing (Messiah)
1700 BC	1000 BC	587 BC	6 BC

Joseph story

- Genesis 37-50
- He dreams several times
- He goes down to Egypt
- In Egypt, he is a refuge for his family

Balaam story

- Numbers 22-24
- A evil king (Balaam) tries to get a seer to bring disaster on Israel
- The seer fails and instead of cursing, he blesses
- He prophesies a glorious future, "a star shall come out of Jacob".

Camels and kings

Psa. 72:10 May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts.

11 May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service.

Psa. 72:15 Long may he live! May gold of Sheba be given to him. May prayer be made for him continually, and blessings invoked for him all day long.

Is. 60:5 Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

6 A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Moses

- Moses mentioned
 - Moses alluded to
 - Moses affirmed
 - Moses radicalised
 - Why?
- Exodus 1: The Birth of Moses
 - Exodus 2: Moses flees his homeland
 - Exodus 3 and 15: Moses is called out of Egypt
 - Let's look at the detail.

Jesus	Moses
Matt. 2:13 Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt , and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."	Ex. 2:15 When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian , and sat down by a well.
Matt. 2:16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.	Ex. 1:22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, " Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."
Matt. 2:19 When Herod died , an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said ,	Ex. 2:23 After a long time the king of Egypt died. Ex. 4:19a The Lord said to Moses.
Matt. 2:20 "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead. " 21 Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother , and went to the land of Israel.	Ex. 4:19b "Go back to Egypt; for all those who were seeking your life are dead. " 20 So Moses took his wife and his sons , put them on a <u>donkey</u> and went back to the land of Egypt.

Citations

Is. 7:14 Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

- Hebrew Bible: young woman (*almah*) Greek OT: virgin (*parthenos*)

Mic. 5:2 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

2Sam. 5:2 For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel."

Hos. 11:1 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

Jer. 31:15 Thus says the LORD:
A voice is heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her children,
because they are no more.

- The last quotation doesn't really exist as such in the OT.

Is. 4:3 Whoever is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy,
everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem,

Judg. 13:5 for you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines.”

Judg. 13:7 but he said to me, ‘You shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth to the day of his death.’”

The big picture

Who? 1:1-17	How? 1:18-25	Where? 2:1-12	Whence? 2:13-23
Abraham David Exile Tamar Rahab Ruth Bathsheba Mary	Joseph Ishmael Isacc Samson David (Is 7:14)	Moses Balaam Balak Rachel (Jer 31:15) (Kings Camels)	Joseph Moses Nazorean Is 4:3; Judges 16:5-7; Gen 49:26; Is 11:1 Remnant David
Origin	Birth	Exile	Exodus

And today?

- Matthew has created a special “tapestry”
- Jesus is firmly stitched into Bible and prophecy
- The story thread derives from many biblical stories
- There is some history
- There is lots of “theology”

Conversation

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Sequence

- Luke's context
- Luke 1-2; actually really Luke 1:5-4:15
- Luke's context
- Overall shape
- Genre
- Historicity
- Problem: John the Baptist

Luke's context

- After Mark and Matthew
- Probably in Rome
- Most likely a mixed community
- Gentile mission an established fact
- Possibly: tendency to reject the Jewish roots of Christianity

1. Annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist	2. Annunciation of the birth of Jesus the messiah	Luke 1:1-25 Luke 1:26-38
3. The visitation (Magnificat)		Luke 1:39-56
4. The birth of John the Baptist (Benedictus)	5. The birth of Jesus the Messiah (Gloria)	Luke 1:57-80 Luke 2:1-20
6. The presentation (Nunc dimittis)		Luke 2:21-40
7. Jesus in the Temple		Luke 2:41-52

Overall shape

- The "career" of Jesus really starts in 4:16-30
- 1:5-4:15 makes up the first major unit
- Three episodes dealing with John and Jesus
- 1:5-25 corresponds to 1:26-38 (1:39-56 = transition)
- 1:57-80 corresponds to 2:1-52
- 3:1-20 corresponds to 3:21-4:15
- John = prophet (1:16-17; 1:76; 3:1-6)
- Jesus = Messiah (1:32-33; 1:69; 2:4, 11; 3:23-38)
- Jesus = Son of God (1:35, 2:49; 3:22)

Genre

- Biography, including the following elements
- Pre-public career of a great person
- Family background
- Miraculous conception
- Omens and other predictions of future greatness
- Childhood prodigies

- Suetonius Lives of the Twelve Caesars Augustus 94, as follows:
- Portents (6 of 14 items)
- Dreams (3 of 14 items)
- Prophecies (2 of 14 items)
- Childhood Prodigies (2 of 14 items)
- Miraculous conception by Apollo (1 of 14 items)

1. Two angelophanies

1:26-38 (birth and destiny)
2:8-20 (birth of the saviour)

2. Four prophecies

1:67-70 by Zechariah
2:25-35 by Simeon
2:36-38 by Anna
3:16-17 by John the Baptist

3. Portent

1:41-45 (portent and prophetic interpretation)

4. Event

3:21-22 (= 1:41-45; portent and interpretation)
Descent of the Holy Spirit; bath qol

5. Prodigies

2:41-51 (astounds the rabbis)
4:1-13 (defeats the devil)

6. Family

Genealogy, via David to Adam

- A reader of Luke, familiar with the conventions of biographical writings, would have taken 1:5-4:15 as an anticipation / prophecy / foreshadowing of the future career of Jesus.
- In other words, the reader is provided with a detailed theological description of the hero before the real narrative starts in 4:16.

Historicity

- The birth narratives share certain features:
- The child Jesus, the parents Mary and Joseph
- Annunciations, virginal conception
- Nazareth and Bethlehem
- King Herod (the Great)
- Genealogies

- Matthew
- Genealogy to Abraham
- Annunciation to Joseph
- The Magi and Star
- The Holy Innocents
- Egypt
- Bethlehem - Nazareth
- 5 Major Citations

- Luke
- Genealogy to Adam
- Annunciation to Mary
- Shepherds
- John the Baptist
- Nazareth - Bethlehem
- Citations and echoes

John the Baptist

- JB was a 1st cent. Jewish prophet, proclaiming an eschatological message with some apocalyptic traits.
- His message was imminent judgement and the way to avoid that was by repentance, illustrated by his baptism.
- There is an implied critique of the adequacy of the Temple worship.

- The differences between JB and Qumran are greater than the similarities.
- He anticipated "the coming one", but it is difficult to be more precise than that - an angel? the messiah? a heavenly figure? God himself?
- He had a big influence in his day - as the need to execute him illustrates. Still, any idea of a revolt is due to Herod's paranoia rather than to anything JB actually said.
- The relationship between Jesus and John is hotly disputed - e.g. did Jesus follow his "mentor's" example and baptise?
- Mark: already proclaims "the coming one"
- Matthew: discussion over baptism
- Luke: actually in jail at the baptism
- John: locates JB in Jn 1; no baptism
- [Nazoreans]: Jesus refuses
- In the Acts: 1:5, 22; 10:37; aa:16; 13:24; 18:25; 19:3.
- In the Gospel: 7:18-30 (NB); 9:7-9; 20:1-8
- NB: never, ever a reference to what "happened" in Luke 1-2.
- Comparison: Annunciation
- Comparison: Birth
- Comparison: the mothers meet
- **Luke 1:17** "With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."
- **Luke 1:18** Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years."
- **Luke 1:15** for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- **Luke 1:35** The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.
- **Luke 1:34** Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"
- **Luke 1:32** "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. **33** He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."
- **John**: prophet, to prepare, go before
- **Jesus**: Saviour, House of David, mercy, Abraham, holiness, righteousness, salvation, forgiveness, light, dawn, peace

Luke 1:39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, **40** where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. **41** When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit **42** and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. **43** And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? **44** For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. **45** And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And today?

- Luke has rooted the birth of John and Jesus in OT annunciations of birth
- Luke risked comparisons with the birth of the gods and emperors
- Natural v. miraculous conception
- John and Jesus are related – theologically
- John and Jesus are contrasted – theologically

Conversation

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Sequence

- All three readings
- Genealogy
- Birth
- Who is Jesus?
- Reflection
- Prayer
- Conversation

All three readings

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Isaiah 62:1-5 | Joy |
| • Psalm 88 (89):4-5,16-17,27,29 | David, Jesus |
| • Acts 13:16-17, 22-25 | David |
| • Matthew 1:1-25 | Abraham, David, Jesus |

Isaiah 62:1-5

Isa 62:1 About Zion I will not be silent, about Jerusalem I shall not rest until saving justice dawns for her like a bright light and her salvation like a blazing torch. **2** The nations will then see your saving justice, and all kings your glory, and you will be called a new name which Yahweh's mouth will reveal. **3** You will be a crown of splendour in Yahweh's hand, a princely diadem in the hand of your God. **4** No more will you be known as 'Forsaken' or your country be known as 'Desolation'; instead, you will be called 'My Delight is in her' and your country 'The Wedded'; for Yahweh will take delight in you and your country will have its wedding. **5** Like a young man marrying a virgin, your rebuilders will wed you, and as the bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so will your God rejoice in you.

Psalm 88 (89)

I will sing for ever of your love, O Lord.

'I have made a covenant with my chosen one;
I have sworn to David my servant:
I will establish your dynasty for ever
and set up your throne through all ages.'

Happy the people who acclaim such a king,
who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face,
who find their joy every day in your name,
who make your justice the source of their bliss.

'He will say to me: "You are my father,
my God, the rock who saves me."
I will keep my love for him always;
with him my covenant shall endure.'

Acts 13:16-17, 22-25

Acts 13:16 Paul stood up, raised his hand for silence and began to speak: 'Men of Israel, and fearers of God, listen! **17** The God of our nation Israel chose our ancestors

and made our people great when they were living in Egypt, a land not their own; then by divine power he led them out

Acts 13:22 he deposed him and raised up David to be king, whom he attested in these words, "I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will perform my entire will." **23** To keep his promise, God has raised up for Israel one of David's descendants, Jesus, as Saviour, **24** whose coming was heralded by John when he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the whole people of Israel. **25** Before John ended his course he said, "I am not the one you imagine me to be; there is someone coming after me whose sandal I am not fit to undo."

Gospel

- The Genealogy (1:1-17)
- The Birth (1:18-25)

Matthew 1:1-17

Matt 1:1 Roll of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham: **2** Abraham fathered Isaac, Isaac fathered Jacob, Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers, **3** Judah fathered Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Ram, **4** Ram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, **5** Salmon fathered Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz fathered Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed fathered Jesse; **6** and Jesse fathered King David.

David fathered Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, **7** Solomon fathered Rehoboam, Rehoboam fathered Abijah, Abijah fathered Asa, **8** Asa fathered Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat fathered Joram, Joram fathered Uzziah, **9** Uzziah fathered Jotham, Jotham fathered Ahaz, Ahaz fathered Hezekiah, **10** Hezekiah fathered Manasseh, Manasseh fathered Amon, Amon fathered Josiah; **11** and Josiah fathered Jechoniah and his brothers. Then the deportation to Babylon took place.

Matt 1:12 After the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah fathered Shealtiel, Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel, **13** Zerubbabel fathered Abiud, Abiud fathered Eliakim, Eliakim fathered Azor, **14** Azor fathered Zadok, Zadok fathered Achim, Achim fathered Eliud, **15** Eliud fathered Eleazar, Eleazar fathered Matthan, Matthan fathered Jacob; **16** and Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called Christ.

Matt 1:17 The sum of generations is therefore: four teen from Abraham to David; fourteen from David to the Babylonian deportation; and fourteen from the Babylonian deportation to Christ.

- Pattern: Abraham, David, Exile
- Numbers: 14 + 14 + 14
- Notice the important women
- NB at the end: Matthan the father of Jacob; and Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called Christ.

- Tamar: see Genesis 38
- Rahab: see Joshua 2-6
- Ruth: see the Book of Ruth
- Wife of Uriah (Bethsheba): see 2 Samuel 11-12

- Abraham

Matt 3:7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **8** Bear fruit worthy of repentance. **9** Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. **10** Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

- David

All the crowds were amazed and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" (Matthew 12:23). Cf. Matt 1:1, 20; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; 22:42

He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? (Matthew 12:3)

He said to them, "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet" ' ? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" (Matthew 22:43-45)

- Exile

"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more." (Matthew 2:18)

Birth

- Background
- Kind of writing

Matthew 1:18-25

Matt 1:18 This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. **19** Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally. **20** He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. **21** She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' **22** Now all this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: **23** Look! the virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. **24** When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home; **25** he had not had intercourse with her when she gave birth to a son; and he named him Jesus.

(i) Joseph: the name Joseph reminds the aware bible reader of another Joseph in the book of Genesis. That Joseph was a dreamer, threatened by his brothers, who went down to Egypt. Because of his position, Egypt became a place of refuge for his family. The character of our Joseph and the narrative surrounding him all come from Genesis 37-50.

(ii) Divorce was allowed by inference in Deut 24:1-4, although no legislation formally permits it. The rabbis discussed "warmly" the conditions under which a man might divorce his wife.

(iii) Son of David: the relationship with David immediately calls to mind the guarantee and promise to the house of David made by the prophet Nathan in 2 Sam 7 and the prayer version of it in Psalm 89. David was the anointed shepherd-king of Israel-language significant in Mt. In the centuries before Jesus' birth, people's hopes focused on a restoration of the kingdom of David, as a mark of God's continued faithfulness to his people.

(iv) Jesus is the Greek for Joshua, the name of Moses' successor, who actually led the people into the promised land. The name comes Hebrew/Aramaic and means "YHWH is salvation" or "YHWH saves/has saved." Messiah or Christ is not found in the Hebrew Bible pointing to an expected end-time agent of God's salvation. That language and expectation developed in the last two centuries before the birth of Jesus.

(v) The promise in Isaiah 7:14 is read as a messianic prophecy. In its original context, this text promised a successor to King Ahaz, born in the normal way. The Hebrew says 'alma, which could be a young woman and/or a virgin. The early Greek version of the OT (the

Septuagint) used the word “virgin”, taken up here by Matthew because it fits with his account of Jesus’ conception.

(i) Communication in a dream: the clear prototypes are Jacob (and his famous ladder) and Joseph (with the coat of many colours).
Otherwise, the Bible is hesitant, not to say suspicious, of divination by dreams.

(ii) Annunciation-type story: these stories show the following pattern.

- (1) appearance of an angel;
- (2) fear and/or prostration;
- (3) message;
- (4) objection;
- (5) sign.

OT: Ishmael Gen 16:7-12, Isaac 17:1-21; 18:1-12; Samson Jdg 13:3-21.

NT: John the Baptist Lk 1:11-20; Jesus Lk 1:26-38. Our version in Matt is missing one element, the sign: the angel comes in a dream and there is a message. Implied are (a) fear—“Do not be afraid” and (2) an objection—Joseph wants a divorce and the angel somehow knows this.

Who is Jesus?

Over to you...

Reflections

- The feast invites us to experience real joy, remembering that “the Lord takes delight in you.”
- We all have “shadows” in our past, sometimes cast by ourselves—and yet everything is part of God’s plan.
- What’s in a name? Lots, actually. You could reflect on your own—why that name and what is its meaning? Likewise, the name of Jesus.

Prayer

God of Abraham and Sarah, of David and his descendants, unwearied is your love for us and steadfast is your covenant; wonderful beyond words is your gift of the Saviour, born of the Virgin Mary.

Count us among the people in whom you delight, and by this night’s marriage of earth and heaven draw all generations into the embrace of your love.

Conversation

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www.tarsus.ie

- Introduction
- Matthew 1-2
- Luke 1-2
- Christmas: Vigil
- **Christmas: Midnight**
- Christmas: Dawn
- Christmas: Day

Sequence

- All three readings
- Luke
- Background
- Luke 2
- Reflection
- Prayer
- Conversation

All three readings

Isaiah 9:1-7

Psalm 96 (95):1-3, 11-13

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

A child is born

Sing a new song

The appearing of the glory

Birth of Jesus

Isaiah 9:1-6

Isa 9:1 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; on the inhabitants of a country in shadow dark as death light has blazed forth. **2** You have enlarged the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at harvest time, they exult when they are dividing the spoils.

Isa 9:3 For the yoke that weighed on it, the bar across its shoulders, the rod of its oppressor, these you have broken as on the day of Midian. **4** For all the footgear clanking over the ground and all the clothing rolled in blood, will be burnt, will be food for the flames.

Isa 9:5 For a son has been born for us, a son has been given to us, and dominion has been laid on his shoulders; and this is the name he has been given, 'Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace' **6** to extend his dominion in boundless peace, over the throne of David and over his kingdom to make it secure and sustain it in fair judgement and integrity. From this time onwards and for ever, the jealous love of Yahweh Sabaoth will do this.

Psalm 96 (95)

Today a saviour has been born to us: he is Christ the Lord.

○ sing a new song to the Lord,
sing to the Lord all the earth.
○ sing to the Lord, bless his name.

Proclaim his help day by day,
tell among the nations his glory
and his wonders among all the peoples.

Let the heavens rejoice and earth be glad,
let the sea and all within it thunder praise,
let the land and all it bears rejoice,
all the trees of the wood shout for joy

at the presence of the Lord for he comes,
he comes to rule the earth.

With justice he will rule the world,
he will judge the peoples with his truth.

Titus 2:11-14

Titus 2:11 You see, God's grace has been revealed to save the whole human race; **12** it has taught us that we should give up everything contrary to true religion and all our worldly passions; we must be self-restrained and live upright and religious lives in this present world, **13** waiting in hope for the blessing which will come with the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Christ Jesus. **14** He offered himself for us in order to ransom us from all our faults and to purify a people to be his very own and eager to do good.

Luke 2:1-14

Luke 2:1 Now it happened that at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be made of the whole inhabited world. **2** This census—the first—took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, **3** and everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. **4** So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judaea, to David's town called Bethlehem, since he was of David's House and line, **5** in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. **6** Now it happened that, while they were there, the time came for her to have her child, **7** and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the living-space.

1. Annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist	2. Annunciation of the birth of Jesus the messiah	Luke 1:1-25 Luke 1:26-38
3. The visitation (Magnificat)		Luke 1:39-56
4. The birth of John the Baptist (Benedictus)	5. The birth of Jesus the Messiah (Gloria)	Luke 1:57-80 Luke 2:1-20
6. The presentation (Nunc dimittis)		Luke 2:21-40
7. Jesus in the Temple		Luke 2:41-52

Background

- Two large panels (see previous slide)
- John: prophet, to prepare, go before
- Jesus: Saviour, House of David, mercy, Abraham, holiness, righteousness, salvation, forgiveness, light, dawn, peace
- Why? See the Mandaeans even today.
- Historically:
- No empire-wide census in the time of Augustus
- Augustus: saviour and the pax romana
- Quirinius was governor of Syria—only later
- He did conduct a local census in 6 ad.
- Purpose: to indicate a birth of universal significance

So you must consecrate the fiftieth year, and you must proclaim a release in the land for all its inhabitants. That year will be your jubilee; each one of you must return to his property and each one of you must return to his clan. (Leviticus 25:10)

If your father happens to miss me, you should say, 'David urgently requested me to let him go to his city Bethlehem, for there is an annual sacrifice there for his entire family.' (1Samuel 20:6)

Then you must give over to the Lord the first offspring of every womb. Every firstling of a beast that you have-the males will be the Lord's. (Exodus 13:12)

An ox recognises its owner, a donkey recognises where its owner puts its food; but Israel does not recognise me, my people do not understand." (Isaiah 1:3)

"I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a lodge [katalyma] and a tent" (2 Sam. 7:6 LXX)

- David, anointed king, in history and in early Judaism
- The Lord writes in the census book of the nations, "This one was born there." (Psalms 87:6)
- When the time came for Rebekah to give birth, there were twins in her womb. (Genesis 25:24).
- For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior (Wisdom 18:14-15)
- I was nursed with care in swaddling cloths. (Wisdom 7:4)

Luke 2:1-14

Luke 2:8 In the countryside close by there were shepherds out in the fields keeping guard over their sheep during the watches of the night. **9** An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, **10** but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. **11** Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. **12** And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.' **13** And all at once with the angel there was a great throng of the hosts of heaven, praising God with the words: **14** Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those he favours.

Background

For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us. He shoulders responsibility and is called: Extraordinary Strategist, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

How delightful it is to see approaching over the mountains the feet of a messenger who announces peace, a messenger who brings good news, who announces deliverance, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7)

As for you, watchtower for the flock, fortress of Daughter Zion- your former dominion will be restored, the sovereignty that belongs to Daughter Jerusalem. (Micah 4:8)
David was going back and forth from Saul in order to care for his father's sheep in Bethlehem. (1 Samuel 17:15)

As for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, seemingly insignificant among the clans of Judah- from you a king will emerge who will rule over Israel on my behalf, one whose origins are in the distant past. (Micah 5:2)

Reflections

- Bring to mind a time when the birth of a child made a huge impact on you. Use the experience to meditate upon the incarnation.
- There is great joy in the Gospel tonight. Have you even felt such spontaneous, exultant happiness? A prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

Prayer

Good and gracious God, on this holy night you gave us your Son, the Lord of the universe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, the Saviour of all, lying in a manger. On this holy night draw us into the mystery of your love. Join our voices with the heavenly host, that we may sing your glory on high.

Give us a place among the shepherds, that we may find the one for whom we have waited, Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, in the splendour of eternal light, God for ever and ever. Amen.

Conversation

The Christmas Stories in the Readings

Kieran J. O'Mahony, OSA
www.tarsus.ie

- Introduction
- Matthew 1-2
- Luke 1-2
- Christmas: Vigil
- Christmas: Midnight
- **Christmas: Dawn**
- Christmas: Day

Sequence

- All three readings
- Luke: David, treasured, pondered, seen and heard, shepherds
- Reflections
- Prayer
- Conversation

All three readings

Isaiah 61:11-12	Your saviour comes
Psalm 97 (96): 1,6,11-12	New light will shine
Titus 3:4-7	The kindness and love of God
Luke 2:15-20	Let us go to Bethlehem

Isaiah 62:11-12

Isa 62:11 This is what the Lord has proclaimed to the remotest part of earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Look, your salvation is coming; with him comes his reward, his achievement precedes him!'

Isa 62:12 They will be called 'The Holy People', 'Lord's Redeemed', while you will be called 'Sought-after', 'City-not-forsaken'.

Psalm 97 (96)

This day new light will shine upon the earth: the Lord is born for us.

The Lord is king, let earth rejoice,
let all the coastlands be glad.
The skies proclaim his justice;
all peoples see his glory.

Light shines forth for the just
and joy for the upright of heart.
Rejoice, you just, in the Lord;
give glory to his holy name.

Titus 3:4-7

Titus 3:4 But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour for humanity were revealed, **5** it was not because of any upright actions we had done ourselves; it was for no reason except his own faithful love that he saved us, by means of the cleansing water of rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit **6** which he has so generously poured over us through Jesus Christ our Saviour; **7** so that, justified by his grace, we should become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Luke 2:15-20

Luke 2:15 Now it happened that when the angels had gone from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us.' **16** So they hurried away and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. **17** When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, **18** and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the

shepherds said to them. **19** As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as they had been told.

Luke 2:15-20

- This reading is simply the continuation of the reading for Midnight Mass. Some of the information given there applies here too, of course.
- It illustrates a response to the events of salvation and already some are worshipping the baby.
- There are considerable OT echoes: Gen 25:24; Wis 7:4.

David

(i) David as shepherd: When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah. (1 Sam 16:6-13)

(ii) Davidic shepherd to come: I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. (Ezek 34:23) My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. (Ezek 37:24)

(iii) Bethlehem: Often mentioned in connection with David (1 Sam 17:12, 15; 20:6, 28; 2 Sam 23:14-16; 1 Chr 11:16-18; Luke 2:4; John 7:42). A significant echo can also be found in the book of Ruth (Ruth 1:1-2, 19, 22; 2:4; 4:11). The key text, however, is the one cited by Luke

Treasured

The only two other occurrences of the word "treasured" illustrate the range of meaning rather well:

(i) Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved." (Matt 9:17)

(ii) for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. (Mark 6:20)

Pondered

- In the New Testament, the other word "pondered" is limited to Luke-Acts (Luke 2:19; 14:31; Acts 4:15; 17:18; 18:27; 20:14).
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- The meaning ranges from the literal (to take with) to the metaphorical (to consider, to discuss). Heart also has a certain prominence in Luke-Acts (16-11-**22-7+20**).

Seen and heard

And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have **seen and heard**: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. (Luke 7:22)

Then he said, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have **seen and heard**. And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptised, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.' (Acts 22:14-16)

Shepherds

- Shepherds represent two apparently contradictory things:
 - David the shepherd-king
 - Shepherds as unclean, permanently ritually impure
- Both are true at the same time.

Reflections

- This was no ordinary child. It is the birth of the Son of God. In order to take in the implications of that we can do well to recall Meister Eckhart's reflection and ask ourselves how the birth of Jesus takes place in us:
- What good is it to me if the eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within myself? And what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace and if I am not also full of grace?
- The shepherds were both frightened and thrilled. Good news can sometimes be terrifying. Pregnancy and the birth of a child can give rise to both feelings. Hopefully the joy and wonder at new life outweigh the fear and apprehension. What has been your experience?

Prayer

Today, O God of light, your loving kindness dawns, your tender compassion shines upon us, for in our Saviour, born of human flesh, you reveal your gracious gift of our birth to life eternal.

Fill us with the wonder of this holy day: let us treasure in our hearts what we have been told, that our lives may proclaim your great and gentle mercy.

Conversation

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- Introduction
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Sequence

- All three readings
- The Prologue
- Editorial traces and layout
- Echoes
- Reflections
- Prayer
- Conversation

All three readings

Isaiah 52:7-10	The salvation of our God
Psalm 98 (97) 1-6	Sing a new song
Hebrews 1:1-6	He has spoken to us
John 1:1-18	The Word was made flesh

Isaiah 52:7-10

Isa 52:7 How beautiful on the mountains, are the feet of the messenger announcing peace, of the messenger of good news, who proclaims salvation and says to Zion, 'Your God is king!' **8** The voices of your watchmen! Now they raise their voices, shouting for joy together, for with their own eyes they have seen Yahweh returning to Zion. **9** Break into shouts together, shouts of joy, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has consoled his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. **10** The LORD has bared his holy arm for all the nations to see, and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Psalm 97 (98)

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Sing a new song to the Lord
for he has worked wonders.
His right hand and his holy arm
have brought salvation.

The LORD has made known his salvation;
has shown his justice to the nations.
He has remembered his truth and love
for the house of Israel.

Shout to the Lord, all the earth,
ring out your joy.
All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Sing psalms to the LORD with the harp
with the sound of music.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
acclaim the King, the Lord.

Hebrews 1:1-6

Heb 1:1 At many moments in the past and by many means, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but **2** in our time, the final days, he has spoken to us in the person of his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the ages. **3** He is the reflection of God's glory and bears the impress of God's own being, sustaining all things by his powerful command; and now that he has purged sins away, he has taken his seat at the right hand of the divine Majesty on high. **4** So he is now as far above the angels as the title which he has inherited is higher than their own name.

Heb 1:5 To which of the angels, then, has God ever said: You are my Son, today I have fathered you, or: I shall be a father to him and he a son to me?

Heb 1:6 Again, when he brings the First-born into the world, he says: Let all the angels of God pay him homage.

John 1:1-18

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him. **4** What has come into being in him was life, life that was the light of men; **5** and light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it.

John 1:6 A man came, sent by God. His name was John. **7** He came as a witness, to bear witness to the light, so that everyone might believe through him. **8** He was not the light, he was to bear witness to the light.

John 1:9 The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world. **10** He was in the world that had come into being through him, and the world did not recognise him. **11** He came to his own and his own people did not accept him.

John 1:12 But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believed in his name **13** who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God himself. **14** The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:15 John witnesses to him. He proclaims: 'This is the one of whom I said: He who comes after me has passed ahead of me because he existed before me.'

John 1:16 Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us, received— one gift replacing another, **17** for the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

The Prologue

- One of the very greatest texts of early Christianity
 - Great influence at the early church councils
 - Serves as an introduction to the Gospel
 - Seems to come from an earlier text adjusted for use
 - Can we trace the text behind the text?
 - Sources
 - Narrative insertions in the poetry
 - Whatever disturbs the rhythm
 - Adjustments to the original which are not part of Johannine theology
 - Adjustments which fit exactly the Evangelist's theology
-
- The prose "upsets" the poetry
 - There is a concentration of non-Johannine vocabulary in 14e, 16-18.

- The evangelist's addition of 15 severs 14 from 16, where the "we" confession is continued, indicating that the evangelist was editing a pre-existing text.
- The Law/Grace antithesis is not Johannine but Pauline, indicating that this editorial material was added in a Hellenistic community where the Pauline antithesis was known and affirmed.

PROLOGUE HYMN SOURCE	WISDOM PARALLELS
1 In the beginning was <i>Wisdom</i> And <i>Wisdom</i> was with <i>God</i> And <i>God</i> (divine) was <i>Wisdom</i>	Prov 8:22-23; Wis 6:22; Sir 24:9 Prov 8:23,30; Wid 9:4, 9
2 The same (She) was in the begging with <i>God</i>	
3a All things through her <i>become</i> (egeneto)	Prov 3:19; 8:30; Wis 7:21-27; 8:1; 9:12; 1QS X.11
4 What <i>became</i> in her was <i>life</i> And the <i>life</i> was the <i>light</i> of men	Prov 3:18; 8:35 Wis 7:26; Prov 6:23; Test Levi 14:4; (Sir 17:11)
5 And the <i>light</i> in the <i>darkness</i> shines And the <i>darkness</i> did not extinguish it (ou katelaben)	Wish 7:29-30
10 In the world she was And the world through her become (egeneto) And the world did not know her	Wis 8:1; Sir 24:6 Prov 1:29; Bar 3:23, 28, 31
11 Unto her own (eis ta idia) she came And her own (hoi idioi) did not receive (ou parelabon) her	Sir 24:8-12; 1 Enoch 42:1-2
12a But as many as received (elabon) her, 12b She gave them authority children of <i>God</i> (tekna theou) to become (genesthai)	Wis 7:14, 27; Sir 6:20-22; 15:7
14ab And <i>Wisdom</i> tabernacled among us (eskēnōsen)	Sir 24:8,10 (skēne); Wis 9:10; Bar 3:37 (cf. Prov 8:31)
14c And we beheld her glory	(Cf. Sir 24:23); Br 4:1

- 1 In the beginning was *Wisdom*
and *Wisdom* was with *God*
and *God* (divine) was *Wisdom*
- 2 The same (She) was in the beginning with *God*
- 3a All things through her became
- 4 What became in her was *life*
And the *life* was the *light* of men
- 5 And the *light* in the *darkness* shines
And the *darkness* did not extinguish it
- 10 In the world she was

and the world through her became
 And the world did not know her.
 11 Unto her own she came,
 And her own did not receive her
 12a But as many as received her,
 12b She gave them authority children of God to become
 14a/b And Wisdom tabernacled among us

1 In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with God, and the **Word** was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through him, **and without him not one thing came into being.** What has come into being **4** in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. **6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9** The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. **10** He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.

11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. **12** But to all who received him, **who believed in his name**, he gave power to become children of God, **13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14 And the Word became flesh** and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, **the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. 15 (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.**

Negatively:

- Opposition to Torah / Wisdom ideology
- Opposition a defective wisdom Christology
- Loss: feminine imagery of God

Positively:

- Creation and new creation
- Logos/Word - transcendence and wisdom
- Prophecy - Jesus was a prophet
- Gospel ("the word")
- Jesus - presence and revelation
- Dialogue with the culture (Judaism / Stoicism)

Layout

STROPHE 1: The pre-existence of the Word
 STROPHE 2: From creation through the history of Israel
 INTERPOLATION: John the Baptist's announcement
 STROPHE 3: The Incarnation
 STROPHE 4: The response of the community

1-2	18 The Word with God
3	17 What came through the Word
4-5	16 What was received from the Word
6-8	15 John announces the Word
9-10	14 The Word enters the world
11	13 The Word and his own people
12a	12c The Word is accepted
12b	12b The Word's gift to those who accepted him

In this scheme, the heart is becoming "children of God". This would have been especially important in discussion with the synagogue. The community claimed to be the true children of God. A descent/ascent model coheres with the Gospel.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning.		A. Word and God
3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.		B. Benefit from Word
6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.		C. John the Witness
9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.		D. Incarnation
10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.		X. (Pivot) Rejection/ reception Result: divine filiation
14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth		D. Incarnation
15 (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ")		C. John the Witness
16 Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.		B. Benefit from Word
18 No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.		A. Word and God

Echoes**PRE-EXISTENT LOGOS**

John 17:5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

LIFE

John 5:24 Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

MOSES

John 5:45 Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. 46 If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.

John 6:32 Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

John 9:28 Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."

SEEING GOD

John 5:37 And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form,

John 6:46 Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father.

Reflections

- The search for "origins"
- The power of the word
- The quest for wisdom
- Dialogue with the times we live in
- God as personal in Christ
- Christocentric eco-theology

1. "In the beginning" takes me back to my own new creation in Christ—back to significant moments—perhaps even to a single moment which stands out as the beginning of my own belonging in Christ. Praise.
2. Life—what makes me alive, taking hold of my imagination and energy? How is my life in Christ? Prayer of gratitude.
3. Light—a fabulous imagery. It may be that some particular land or seascape stands out in my memory as having an especially beautiful light. Prayer of enlightenment.
4. The dark side of refusal and rejection—in my life I probably have said both yes and no to grace. Where am I now in my life? Prayer of pilgrimage.
5. Wisdom was God's presence—a feminine presence, because (to use Biblical language) just as a man is "incomplete" without the love and companionship of a woman, the human person needs to be complemented by God's wisdom.
6. The power of language in my experience as an entry point to appreciating the Word made flesh. What word am I hearing especially today?

Prayer

We praise you, gracious God, for the glad tidings of peace, the good news of salvation: your Word became flesh and we have seen his glory. Let the radiance of that glory enlighten the lives of those who celebrate his birth.

Reveal to all the world the light no darkness can extinguish, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, in the splendour of eternal light, God for ever and ever. Amen.

Conversation

Happy Christmas to everyone