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Joseph Ratzinger Pope Benedict XVI, "Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives"

Jesus is the Son of a God, who came to this world in order to commit justification of the sinners. His story is described in detail in four Gospels, written by four of his disciples. Even though many facts of Jesus' life are well known, some questions regarding his provenance, his ancestors, and some episodes of his childhood continue to arise. However, the only answer to all these questions is faith, which people need to maintain if they want to be saved by God.

Pilate asked Jesus about the place from where he came. Jesus was blamed and prosecuted over his claim to be the Son of God. Even though such claim was hard to believe for the judge, he took this claim seriously since Jesus claimed to be the king of the kingdom that is not situated on Earth and he was going to reveal the truth to the world (12). Pilate wanted to know, where Jesus was from, in order to be able to better understand him and his true intentions and desires. To Pilate, Jesus seemed to be different from other people who claimed to be kings.

Saint John raised the question of provenance of Jesus in his Gospel. This question was also raised in Synoptic Gospels. Disciples were interested whether Jesus came from heaven as he claimed or just a human-being born on Earth (12).

It is known that Nazareth was the hometown of Jesus. People in synagogues of Nazareth were also surprised to hear that Jesus himself is the Son of God. It was so because Jesus explained the sacred Scripture in a different way than it was explained before his interpretation. Jesus said that those words were written about him. He claimed that he is the Son of God, and it

is he, about whom it was told in the prophecies of the sacred Scripture. He also said that he has a special mission given to him by God. People were shocked to hear this claim from the son of a carpenter and Mary (12) and thus denied this claim to be true.

People knew Jesus as one of them, so they said that his claim of his divine origin could be only his own presumption. In addition, as stated in John's Gospel, when Nathaniel was told by Philip that the one of whom Moses spoke, was supposed to come from Nazareth, Nathaniel responded that nothing good could come from Nazareth (13). To many, Jesus seemed to have an ordinary origin just like any other person

On the one hand, it is well known, who Jesus is and from where he comes (13). On the other hand, it is a mystery, who by his provenance. Gospels were written, in order to share the information about Jesus with the whole world and give answers about Jesus and his origin.

Gospel of Mathew begins with the genealogy of Jesus, in order to raise the issue of provenance of Jesus at the very beginning and, by describing his genealogy, prepare the readers to perceive the whole Gospel from the correct perspective. According to Matthew, in order to perceive genealogy of Jesus, the reader's attention is focused on Abraham and David. Abraham's mind (after building the Tower of Babel) is set to the events, which will take part in the future. He believes the promise of God and is truly a pilgrim of belief. Abraham has faith in God and the future (13). The blessing comes from God, through Abraham and goes to Jesus.

In Matthew's Gospel, it is highlighted, that David received the promise that his kingdom would last forever. This promise was fulfilled in Jesus (13). It is noteworthy that the promise went from Abraham to David, then from Solomon to Babylonian bondage, and then ultimately to Jesus. It took three sets of fourteen generations for the promise to be fulfilled. Hebrew letters bear a symbolic meaning, because they also highlight the number fourteen and the name 'David'.

It means that the genealogy becomes the Gospel of Christ the King. The only question remains, whose throne will Christ occupy?

The genealogy by Matthew also includes four names of the women, who were sinners. These women are Ruth, Rahab, Uriah's wife, and Tamar. These characters serve to underline that Jesus took their sins, along with the sins of all people, in order to fulfill his mission, given to him by God, which is the justification of sinners. In addition, these four women were all Gentiles, and none of them were Jewish (13). Ultimately, the mission of Jesus was the justification of all sinners, not only Jews. The main woman in the genealogy is Mary.

Even though, Joseph was Mary's husband, he was not the father of Jesus. According to Matthew, Jesus was conceived in Mary through the Holy Spirit (14). However, Joseph, as the official father of Jesus relates him to the descendants of David.

In the Gospel of Luke, genealogy of Jesus is described before his public ministry. It is a bit different from Matthew's genealogy. For example, some of the names vary. However, the sources, on which the Gospel was based, cannot be reconstructed (14). Luke traces Jesus' genealogy back to Adam, to show that humanity was started by God. Despite the differences in the gospels, Jesus is the Son of God, and people who have faith in him are born once as originated from God (16). Our faith in Jesus makes our genealogy start from God.

Matthew and Luke were writing real events and not some imaginary stories (18). They included only the important information into the gospels. John the Baptist is a highly important figure. His mission was also very significant (17). John the Baptist is the priest, who unites his mission with Jesus. John's roots are in the Old Testament. However, along with the New Covenant, he is open to the new actions of God (19).

The annunciation of John the Baptist birth was received by his father, Zechariah, who was a priest while the liturgy was in progress (20). The annunciation of Jesus' birth was made by an angel Gabriel. He came into the house of Mary in Nazareth, and delivered a God's message that she was going to give birth to the Son of God, who will rule the world in God's name forever (24).

Herod was the king, elected by Rome. He knew that a kingdom was promised by God to the descendant of David. Herod was not a descendant of David, so when he heard that Virgin Mary is going to give birth to the new king, the descendent of the throne of David, he saw threat to his position in the face of Jesus (25). Herod was afraid that Jesus will take the throne away from him. However, Jesus had no intention of taking throne from Herod. Jesus' kingdom was established only on love and faith in God. Jesus' kingdom will last forever and will never end because it is God, who rules the world through him. Thus, the promise given to David is completely fulfilled through Jesus.

There is a difference between the reactions of Mary to the annunciation of Jesus' birth and Zechariah to the annunciation of John the Baptist's birth. Mary does not put the message of God into doubt. She is sure, that the will of God shall be fulfilled and she will give birth to Jesus, the Messiah. In contrast, Zechariah doubts that he will be able to conceive a son because of his old age (26). However, there is nothing impossible to God, so both prophecies were fulfilled.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, Mary was engaged with Joseph. Thus, according to the Jewish law, Mary and Joseph were bonded by the law. Even though, she was still living with her parents, Joseph had the right to call her his wife. He was supposed to take Mary home in a year, and finalize their marriage. Thus, when he had heard that she bears the child conceived from the Holy Spirit, he decided to divorce her secretly, in order to avoid people condemning her

(he was a decent man) (28). However, after the dream, in which angel explained the God's will to Joseph, he remained with Mary and protected her from all dangers.

Jesus has two natures - as a God and as a man at the same time (34). By the God's will, he was conceived in Virgin Mary, and was born into this world to save all sinners (36). However, if sinners desire to be saved by God, they must have faith and need to know that he was born by Virgin Mary from the Holy Spirit. Virgin Mary appears to be the symbol of Christian faith and hope.

Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem (37). His birth in that specific city is related to Caesar Augustus. Mary and Joseph committed a journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem in order to give a safe birth to a child. His exact place of birth was outside the city, in a place where shepherds pastured their sheep (43). David, to whom God promised the eternal kingdom, was also a shepherd. Thus, the place of Jesus' birth is also symbolic. After his birth, Jesus returned to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph, and grew up there.

The fact that Mary and Joseph belonged to the poor people of Israel, and still it was Mary, who gave birth to Jesus, was the proof that all God's promises are fulfilled (47). The fact that shepherds were the first to see the sign of Jesus' birth also proves the fulfillment of God's promises because David was a shepherd, too. The greatest proof of fulfillment of God's promises is the fact that, during his life on Earth, Jesus suffers with ordinary people, and then, at the end of his mission on the Earth, he is saved by God. Thus, the ordinary men will be saved, if their faith in God is strong (49).

The life story of Jesus is very symbolic. For example, the bright star, which showed the wise men the road to the place where Jesus was born, is the symbol of Gentiles, who found their way towards religion, towards faith in God, and Jesus Christ (56). The Magi found Jesus at the

right place and worshipped him (59). The infancy narratives presented by Matthew enables the readers to better understand the Jesus' origin (64).

Jesus helped people to start their new relationship with God (65). Jesus, the Son of God, was born as a human and by this he established a closer relationship between people and God. Even though, Jesus was the Son of God, he was born in a human body, so he was not an abstract notion anymore, but he was associated with a certain year, historical period and place (68). By going through different human stages, he shows that he is both God and human.

In my opinion, the main overriding theme of the book is that, even though there are some unknown details regarding the provenance of Jesus and some periods of his life on Earth, in order to be saved by God, people need to have faith. They must learn to worship God, even if there is not enough evidence to prove some of his claims. In my opinion, only if people believe that Jesus Christ was given birth by Virgin Mary, even though her virginity cannot be proved, they will show their faith to God and thus will be saved.

I think, the book is exciting and interesting to read because it contains relevant information on the raised issue. I find it highly useful for people, who are interested in infancy narratives of Jesus. The main issue raised in the book is the need to believe that Jesus is the Son of God even if it cannot be proven by facts. The author thoroughly analyzes the provenance of Jesus, the provenance of Joseph, his legal father, and Virgin Mary. The author also dwells on the reasons, why Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and why Herod was afraid that Jesus will take his throne.

I agree with the author that Jesus is the Son of God and people need to have faith in God, even if there is not enough evidence to prove Jesus' provenance, such as his conception in Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. I think so because faith is based on the ability of people to believe in

something without the ability to prove it, touch it, or to see it. For example, we do not need to be able to touch air, or to see it, in order to believe that it exists.

The book helped me to understand some aspects of the class better. It helped me to perceive the provenance of Jesus and his intentions deeper than before. For example, now I understand that Herod was afraid of Jesus because he did not understand that Jesus is the king of all people, and he does not need the golden throne to rule the world because his power is in the minds and hearts of people. I also understand now that Jesus was born as a human-being, in the family, whose ancestors were sinners (as all people) because by doing this, he took all their sins and all sins of all people, and thus justified the sinners.

It was compelling for me to find out that people were shocked that the Son of God could be born in the family of ordinary people, such as Joseph and Mary. While reading the book, I understood that people were shocked by this fact, and tried to deny it, because they thought that Son of the God cannot be born by a human-being. I also learned, that John the Baptist and Jesus Christ are related, because they both had a mission, given to them by God, and births were special and came as a blessing of God. I also learned, that promise, given to David by God was fully fulfilled through Jesus because Jesus was related to the house of David through his legal father, Joseph.

In my opinion, even though different questions arise regarding Jesus, such as his origin, his genealogy, his life and his teaching, it is not important to find and prove all the answers to these questions. It is crucial that, in order to be saved by God, we must have faith in God, and believe the things written in the Bible. It means that we should not search for proof for certain things, but we must just believe in God and in his power and caring love for all people.

To conclude, Jesus is the Son of God. His story is recorded by four of his disciples in their gospels. However, there are some differences between the gospels, and there is some missing information about certain periods of Jesus' life in some of the gospels. Moreover, since lots of time has passed since Jesus lived on Earth, some sources have been lost, and thus, some facts cannot be proven. However, people that seek salvation in God need to have faith in God. They must learn to believe God, even though some facts cannot be proven. In my opinion, God tests people through the facts, which cannot be proven, in order to see, whose faith is indeed strong.