

1 THE INFANCY NARRATIVES (birth stories of Jesus).

2 The stories regarding the birth of Jesus are only found in 2 of the 4 Gospels – Matthew and
3 Luke. Mark begins his Gospel with the preaching of John the Baptist and Baptism of Jesus
4 and John’s Gospel declares Jesus as the ‘word made flesh’ or logos right at the outset. One
5 possible reason for these differences is the fact that Mark’s Gospel, the first to be written, was
6 recorded under time pressure. Essentially, the Gospel of Mark is Peter’s story of his
7 experience with Jesus. Facing persecution, Peter’s life was under threat and it was imperative
8 that his experience with Jesus was recorded quickly. This may account for the brevity of
9 Mark’s Gospel and the sense of urgency and pace one feels when reading it. John’s Gospel,
10 the last of the 4, is written much later. The church has begun to build a theology of belief
11 around Jesus. Jesus was ‘the word’ of God, enfleshed. John’s Gospel is full of theological
12 nuances which point to the development of ideas about Jesus accepted by the church;
13 something which the earlier Gospels have to a lesser extent. This is a natural and normative
14 process in the growth of beliefs within any new ideology.

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16 As interesting as all this is, we are still left to deal with the 2 infancy narratives in Luke and
17 Matthew. The surprising thing to notice is that we have 2, almost completely different
18 accounts. This raises a variety of questions: which one of these accounts is true? Is there any
19 veracity in these accounts? Are they historical accounts? Since they seem inconsistent are
20 they credible accounts and since they are different is it right to conclude that they are
21 unreliable? Is there any reasonable way to account for the differences that would enable a
22 Christian to conclude that they tell the ‘same story?’

23 Although there are a significant number of differences in the 2 accounts some essential points
24 are made by both writers. Jesus is born in Bethlehem. His parents are named as Mary and
25 Joseph. Both Gospel writers share a sacred world view and refer to supernatural events – the
26 most astonishing of all, the idea that Jesus is conceived by Mary, without the aid of a human
27 father, but by the power of God’s spirit and born of a virgin. But here the similarities end.
28 Other than the conception and birth of Jesus even the supernatural events are different.

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30 Let’s compare.

31 Matthew begins his narration about Jesus through the genealogy of Joseph not Mary. He
 32 quotes extensively from the Prophets; an unnamed angel appears to Joseph to inform him of
 33 Mary's miraculous pregnancy and quotes Isaiah 7.14 'The Lord himself will give you a sign.
 34 A virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel.' Jesus is born 'in a
 35 house' in Bethlehem, in 'the days of Herod the King'

36 Matthew records how the first non-Jews to see Jesus are the magi – from the east. He does
 37 not say how many there were; the tradition of 3 is based on the giving of three gifts – Gold,
 38 Frankincense and Myrrh. He quotes Micah 5:2 'But you O Bethlehem Ephrathah, out of you
 39 will come a ruler' as well as 2 Samuel 5:2 'who will shepherd my people, Israel.' Matthew
 40 also records how the Magi, duped Herod, Herod's slaughter of the innocents (the massacre of
 41 all baby boys 2 years and under). Joseph is warned in a dream and flees to Egypt with Mary
 42 and the child, returning after the death of Herod. Again, Matthew quotes the prophets – this
 43 time Hosea 11.1 'When Israel was a child, I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son.'

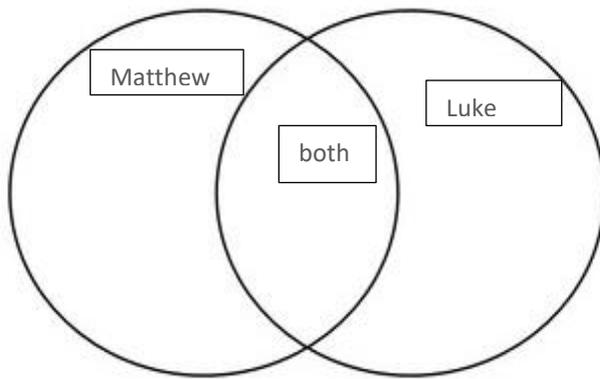
44 In comparison, Luke focuses on Mary. An Angel named Gabriel announces her pregnancy
 45 (the annunciation). There is no mention of Mary as married, rather betrothed to Joseph. She
 46 visits Elizabeth, who is also pregnant with John the Baptist and expresses her joy in the hymn
 47 the Magnificat. Elizabeth gives birth to John and her husband Zechariah makes a famous
 48 prophecy, the Benedictus.

49 We then read that a Census has been called by Caesar Augustus, making it necessary for
 50 Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem. There was 'no room at the inn' and the baby is born
 51 'in a manger' – probably a stable or out house. According to Luke this happens when
 52 'Quirinius was governor of Syria' In contrast to Matthew who has Magi visit the infant,
 53 Luke has shepherds, who are informed by angels and go immediately to Bethlehem to visit
 54 him.

55 Eight days after the birth Jesus is presented in the Temple in Jerusalem and is circumcised.
 56 Mysteriously, Anna and Simeon recognise the baby as the Messiah and Simeon speaks a
 57 hymn known as the Nunc Dimittis. Following this Joseph, Mary and Jesus return to their
 58 hometown in Nazareth.

59 TASKS: In your workbook COMPLETE the following.

- 60 1. What is meant by the term 'infancy narratives' and in which Gospels are these found?
 61 2. Create a Venn Diagram illustrating where the Gospels are similar and different



62 3. What are some of the main questions
 63 which arise from the presence of such differences? Make a list.

64 4. Why do both writers naturally include supernatural events without any hesitation in their
 65 accounts? List the supernatural events that occur. (write lk or mt by each

66 5 To what extent do you think the presence of supernatural elements cause problems with
 67 veracity?

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69 Homework Essays.

70 Homework essays are an essential part of exam preparation. They should not be rushed and
 71 should go through a process of draft, re draft and final. As such, I advise that you handwrite
 72 your first draft, re read and annotate and improve in Green and type up a final draft. I will
 73 expect to see evidence of this process. The final piece needs to be as perfect as you can make
 74 it! Why, because they become the best source of revision for timed essays which will start
 75 after half term.

76 Of course, you will be getting feedback and then you need to improve again – this time
 77 adding. (which is WHY I would complete typed as its easier to edit)

78 Typed work must be in Times New Roman font 12 with spacing of 1.15. It must be printed
 79 off in time for the lesson – no during it or emailed to me. I do not have time to print your
 80 work!

81 Essay number 1:

82 AO1: 20 MARKS.

83 Compare the birth narratives found in Matthew and Luke's Gospel

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85 ISSUE OF HISTORICAL ACCURACY IN THE MATTHEW AND LUKE.

86 There are some issues with historical accuracy found in both narratives. Again, this raises
 87 questions of the veracity of the stories. If they are incorrect in historical facts can they, in
 88 fact, have any value? Surely, this would prove that they are mere fantasy. Would we not be
 89 better to simply reject them?

90 WHAT ARE THE HISTORICAL INACCURACIES?

91 Firstly, both authors allude to historical events. Matthew records a massacre of all baby boys
 92 under the age of 2 and Luke, who insists on the historical accuracy of his passage states that
 93 Quirinius of governor of Syria at the time.

94 The Problem:

95 Although Matthew accurately portrays the historical character of Herod, a murderous,
 96 narcissistic, tyrant; Herod does have his own three sons killed in various fits of jealous rage;
 97 no other contemporary historian records the massacre of the innocents. This seems highly
 98 unusual. Such a momentous event would have been recorded by posterity had it actually
 99 have occurred. It is fair to conclude that Matthew has used some ‘poetic license’ here.

100 Luke’s historical problems lie in the naming of Quirinus as governor of Syria – but Quirinius
 101 was not governor of Syria at the time of King Herod. Furthermore, while Quirinius did call a
 102 census – it was not until 6 or 7 CE – And there is no record of a ‘first enrolment’ for this
 103 census years earlier. So again, dates seem to be wrong.

104 The three hymns that Luke attributes to Mary, Zechariah and Simeon were actually hymns
 105 used by the early Christians and Luke therefore misleads his readers by using them here and
 106 placing them in the mouths of Mary, Zechariah and Simeon.

107 HARMONISING THE ACCOUNTS and REDACTION CRITICISM

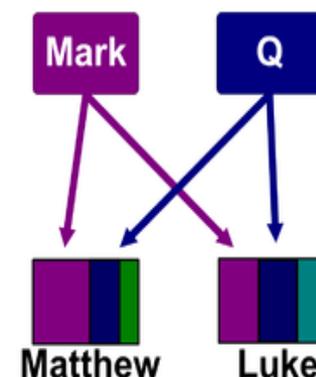
108 So, how can we account for such differences in content and such historical inaccuracies?

109 The answer to this lies in the REDACTION CRITICISM.

110 To redact something means to edit it. REDACTION CRITICISM
 111 – had its beginning in Germany in the late 1940’s. It is a
 112 critical method for studying the Bible. Someone who is a
 113 redaction critic believes that the Gospel writers ‘edited’ their
 114 material as they wrote the Gospel.

115 Redaction Criticism argues that the writers of the Gospels had
 116 a variety of source material at the disposal and they redacted
 117 the material as they compiled their Gospel.

Two-source Hypothesis



118 WHY?

119 Both Matthew and Luke have different theological perspectives. Their communities had
120 different theological needs. Matthew (believed to be Levi the Tax collector) was a Jew
121 writing for a Jewish community. Luke, a Gentile doctor writing for non-Jewish Christian
122 communities. It is also thought by scholars that Luke is the author of Acts of the Apostles.

123 The differences in content between the accounts then may be attributed to the writer's
124 different theological perspectives. The Gospel writers edited pre-existing material to suit
125 their purposes. they collected material about Jesus BUT also interpreted them to suit their
126 purposes – or to explain to their particular audiences. They selected, chose and added.
127 They kept what they thought was the most relevant to their community. They left out what
128 was not needed. They wrote in the ways the readers would have understood. If something
129 needed explanation – they gave it; if it didn't – if there was assumed knowledge – it is left
130 unmentioned.

131 THE TWO SOURCE HYPOTHESIS

132 Scholars now know that Mark's Gospel was the first to be written and that Mark was
133 Peter's scribe. Matthew and Luke had Mark's Gospel AND (scholars believe) also had
134 another piece of writing known as source Q (from the German for source -Quelle) Quelle
135 is a collection of sayings of Jesus that were drawn from the oral tradition of the early
136 church. Thus, Mark, Matthew and Luke have similarities, Luke and Matthew also have
137 similarities (which Mark leaves out) and Luke and Matthew also have their own
138 individual differences.

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140 WHY THE DIFFERENCES?

141 Matthew was a Jew writing for Jews. Thus, in comparison to Luke he makes prolific
142 reverence to Old Testament prophets. (Micah, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Hosea). Often, he
143 simply says 'As the prophet wrote' without even giving the name. Matthew's reader knew
144 the scriptures. It required no further elaboration. Matthew also quotes for the Hebrew
145 version of the Bible rather than the Septuagint which is the Greek translation. Luke uses the
146 Septuagint – a translation familiar to the many Gentile converts.

147 Matthew's genealogy traces Joseph's ancestry to the 'line of David'. Luke traces the
148 genealogy via Mary – also of the lineage of David but Luke explains the idea of the Messiah,
149 names and explains the prophets when he quotes them and includes the circumcision of
150 Jesus. Matthew had no need to do these things. It was already known and understood.
151 Every Jewish boy, at 8 days old, is circumcised according to the covenant God made with
152 Abraham. It was simply a given.

153 So why the differences in visitors – Shepherds or Magi?

154 Matthew's birth narrative has Magi from the east worship the infant. Using a common
 155 Jewish literary technique which required no explanation to his readers (they are all Jewish),
 156 Matthew places symbolic gifts into their hands. The message is clear. This child, before
 157 whom all nations will bow down, is divine, kingly and will endure great suffering. It is simply
 158 not relevant whether or not this event actually happened.

159 Luke focuses on Shepherds. Writing for the gentile community, Luke is interested in the
 160 marginalized, poor and dispossessed. His genealogy via Mary may be for 2 reasons. Firstly,
 161 women had no status in Jewish or Greek society and secondly, some scholars suggest that
 162 Luke, traveling with St Paul, also knew Mary personally among the early Christians. This
 163 sympathy with the disenfranchised is represented by the visit of shepherds- humble men of
 164 simple ways. Jesus, divine and kingly, identifies himself with the poor, dispossessed,
 165 marginalized and disenfranchised. In the early Christian community there had been some
 166 debate as to the process of conversion for Gentiles – should they convert first to Judaism
 167 and then to Christianity? Was this due to an idea that Gentiles were not the 'chosen
 168 people'? Paul won the day over Peter in this debate 'for all are one in Christ Jesus.'

169 It is clear to see that each Gospel writer edited – through selection, adaptation, omission,
 170 what was needed for their community to understand, right from the outset, the message
 171 and point of the Gospel

172 DEALING WITH THE HISTORICAL INACCURACIES.

173 Supernatural Events:

174 Both gospels include supernatural events – angelic apparitions, mysterious moving stars, and
 175 the idea that Mary conceives Jesus by the Holy Spirit and is a 'virgin'. Surely the inclusion
 176 of such events proves that they cannot be historical.

177 This is a 'world view issue.' The gospel writers share a common understanding of the world.
 178 Some scholars, such as Bultmann, such that any reference to the supernatural is to be
 179 understood as a myth. A myth is anything where the work of a divine being is presented. The
 180 writers and their readers all shared this common understanding. For modern readers,
 181 especially those post enlightenment and deep in a secular world view such writings are
 182 difficult to accept. We need to look beneath the myth to understand what the writer was
 183 meaning. (More on this in RESURRECTION.)

184 There is also some debate about the meaning of the word 'virgin'. This is due to translation.
 185 Today, a virgin is someone who has not yet had sexual intercourse. When Matthew uses the
 186 word 'virgin' he uses the Greek word 'parthenos' for the Hebrew word Almah. Something is
 187 lost in translation here for Almah means 'a young woman of marriable age' rather than
 188 technically a virgin. Some argue that this explains away the supernatural conception of Jesus.
 189 Having said that – this simply opens the door to another issue: If Jesus is not divinely
 190 conceived is he the incarnation?

191 So, what's the deal with the other historical inaccuracies? Why does Matthew 'make up'
192 such a story about Herod?

193 Well, for the very same reason as he chose to omit circumcision and quote prophets without
194 reference. Matthew, again using a common Jewish literary technique, makes a clear link
195 between the law giver MOSES and the one who fulfils and completes the law, Jesus.

196 Jesus is the new Moses. Like Moses, he is under threat as an infant by political powers. Like
197 Moses, who leads the Jewish people to liberation from slavery in Egypt Jesus returns to
198 Nazareth from Egypt thus fulfilling 'out of Egypt I called my son.'

199 The Jewish readers knew exactly the point Matthew was making here. It is not simply that
200 Matthew is lying or making things up – it is that Matthew, sharing a worldview with his
201 readers, knows exactly how to make his point in a way that would ring true to them.

202 That leads us with Luke's historical inaccuracies. It is one thing to suggest a writer is simply
203 using a literary technique to make a direct link with an earlier character and entirely another
204 to get both governor and dates wrong. Remember Quirinius was not governor at the time of
205 Herod and although he did call a census it was not until 6-7 CE. And what about those 3
206 hymns?

207 Scholars suggest that issue with the name may simply have been a copying error. Quirinius
208 was not governor but Saturnius was. This would clear up this issue since Saturnius as
209 governor would match Luke's dating. However, there remains much debate about the census.
210 The idea of having people – far further afield than Galilee, return to their ancestral home after
211 thousands of years seems preposterous. Furthermore, the Romans kept accurate records
212 simply for tax purposes, so there seems little to no need. Many scholars argue that Luke
213 needed a reason to place Jesus' birth at Bethlehem so make it obvious to the readers that he
214 was from the line of David. There remains little to no evidence of a census happening at this
215 time.

216 As for the placing of the 2 hymns in the mouths of Zechariah, Mary and Simeon, this is
217 simply a way of preserving common prayers that the community had become fond of.

218 Even so, given all the differences and difficulties with corroborating these events with
219 historical reference it is still perfectly possible to accept the veracity of the birth stories if one
220 considers

- 221 1. The reasons for the writer's choice of material
- 222 2. The concepts each writer was trying to express
- 223 3. The different communities for whom they were writing.

224 THERE IS NO reason why both accounts cannot be 'true' simultaneously. That is, if we
225 are considering theological truths as opposed to historical truths and accept that these
226 stories are set within a time where the religious worldview was commonly held.

227 Certainly, both agree that

228 Jesus was born in Bethlehem when Herod was king of Judea. His mother was Mary and
229 she was betrothed to Joseph, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and Mary was a

230 virgin. People travelled to see the new baby and the Old Testament prophecies are
 231 fulfilled by Jesus who came to save all humanity – not just the Jewish nation

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233 TASKS

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GIVE EVIDENCE FOR EACH POINT P10-11

MATTHEW'S GOSPEL	LUKE'S GOSPEL
Matthews Gospel is aimed at Jewish readers	Luke's Gospel is aimed at Gentiles
Matthew shows Jesus is connected (through Joseph) to King David	Luke tells the story from Mary's viewpoint
Matthew shows Jesus has come for Jews and Gentiles	Luke shows that Jesus has come for both Gentiles and Jews
Matthew's Gospel is Jewish in 'flavour'	Luke's Gospel is Greek in flavour
Matthew doesn't need to emphasize the Jewishness of Jesus – his readers already understand that.	Luke emphasis' the Jewishness of Jesus
	Luke links Jesus to the marginalised and poor.

3. What is meant by Redaction Criticism and what do the redactors argue?
4. Explain how redaction criticism helps solve issues of inconsistency in content in both Matthew and Luke's gospel.
5. What are some of the historical issues in both Matthew and Luke's Gospel?
6. How do redactors solve the problem of the lack of historical support for the massacre of the children by Herod?
7. Explain the solution to Luke's inaccurate recording of Quirinius as governor.
8. Which aspect of Luke's account remains problematic historically for many scholars and why?

Homework.

Complete the tasks above.

Create a Knowledge organizer for INFANCY NARRATIVES - it must be only 1 side. It should have key words and definitions, the 2 accounts, redaction criticism and harmonizing the differences.

Revise for a knowledge test on work so far for next week.

267 THE DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION

268 The doctrine of the incarnation expresses this belief that Jesus Christ is God. This belief was
269 expressed in 325AD at the council of Nicea:

270 ‘We believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of the Father.... being of one
271 substance with the Father...for our salvation came down from heave and was incarnate and
272 was made man.’

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274 The creed asserts that Jesus is both FULLY GOD; begotten from, not created by, the father;
275 and FULLY HUMAN – taking his human nature from Mary. The idea that these two natures,
276 human and divine, are simultaneously held in the person of Jesus is known as the
277 HYPOSTATIC UNION.

278 HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE?

279 Before we even begin to try to explain the incarnation it is important to recognise that on
280 matters of faith the use of reason will only get us so far. As Soren Kierkegaard pointed it,
281 when faces with the paradox of something like the incarnation one needs to take a leap of
282 faith. Something as seemingly contradictory as the incarnation only makes sense in the
283 context of faith.

284 JESUS IS THE SON BUT THE SON IS NOT JESUS.

285 To even begin to understand the doctrine of the incarnation it must be recognised that the
286 ‘son of God’. And ‘Jesus’ are not entirely the same thing. This historical Jesus was a human
287 figure who entered into history 2000 years ago. He is an historical person who begins to exist
288 and ceases to exist at a particular point in history. Hence he is born and he dies. God is
289 infinite and has no being and no end; God has always and will always exist. The Trinitarian
290 belief that God is one yet also three comes into play here. The son has always existed
291 because the son is of the same substance with God. (More about this in the topic TRINITY).
292 The historical Jesus however begins to exist at his birth and ceases to exist at his death. One
293 attempt to try and explain this is through kenotic theology. Kenotic theology attempts to
294 understand the incarnation.

295 KENOSIS.

296 Kenosis means to make empty. St Paul in his letters talks about Jesus in terms of kenosis.
297 ‘though he was in the form of god he emptied himself and became a slave, being born in
298 human likeness.’

299 So what does St Paul mean by Jesus ‘emptied himself?’ It cannot mean that Jesus emptied
300 himself of his divinity; if this were the case then the son would cease to be God. So how does
301 God ‘empty himself?’

302 Kenotic theology holds that there was some form of preincarnate self-limitation by God the
 303 son to take on human form whilst maintaining his divine presence (substantial presence.) God
 304 choses to come into human history and take on entirely human nature. It also holds that Jesus
 305 emptied himself of his own will as a human being and submitting completely to the will of
 306 God.

307 Kenosis is a strong theme in Luke's Gospel. The gospel of Luke stresses the humanity and
 308 the humility of Jesus. Not only is he born of a woman, and then presented back to God in the
 309 Temple, he also identifies with sinners and receives baptism by John in the Jordan. At the
 310 start of the gospel it is Mary's response to the angel's news that captures the humility and
 311 obedience of kenosis. "Here am I the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your
 312 word." (1:38).

313 Secondly, the very message Mary relates to is a kenotic message in which the rich are
 314 emptied and the poor filled with good things. It echoes the message Jesus himself is given –
 315 that he will give 'recovery of sight to the blind' (4:18).

316 The rich who are full of themselves need to be emptied and those who are empty (in their
 317 bellies and in their attitudes) will be filled. So the roles are reversed in much the same way as
 318 Jesus, the glorious divine one, chooses to reverse his own role and become the obedient
 319 servant.

320 But what of Jesus' divinity?

321 SUBSTANTIAL PRESENCE

322 Substantial presence is the idea that, although unseen, God is fully present, not symbolically,
 323 but in reality or substance. The theme of presence in Matthew is a strong one: it appears at
 324 the beginning, middle and end of the gospel. Jesus is present with his people and God is
 325 somehow present through Jesus.

326 So at the beginning of the gospel the angel declares; "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and
 327 bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us)". (Matthew
 328 1:23, NIV). Jesus is present with his people as an extension of his very name and his very
 329 essence – he is by nature, God-with-us, Immanuel.

330 Even though he has "emptied himself" by being born in human likeness and taken the form of
 331 a servant, he is fully human whilst maintaining substantial presence as fully divine. In the
 332 incarnation it is claimed that Jesus as fully human and fully God is an objective reality and
 333 not merely personal to the believer.

334 CONCLUSIONS

335 The synoptic gospels, so called because they share a common source, proclaim
 336 a Jesus figure with distinctive traits. The theological message is conveyed by arrangement of
 337 source material and by added comment. The picture thus portrayed is similar and yet different
 338 – using common sources, but working and crafting them.

339 Luke sees the divine purpose worked out by empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The spirit
 340 comes upon Mary, Zechariah and Simeon in the opening narrative. The message seems to be
 341 one of a special one emptying himself in obedience and humility.

342 Matthew's gospel seems to be set in a Jewish context and lays greater stress on the fulfilment
 343 of Jewish prophecy. Some of the great themes of Isaiah, Malachi and Daniel, three great Old
 344 Testament prophets, are worked out by the author – of the Holy God coming to dwell among
 345 his people as a divine presence. Jesus is Immanuel, God-with- us, and yet also King of the
 346 Jews. He has come to shepherd his people. His presence is worked out with miraculous signs
 347 and also by the gift of the communion gathering of the new community.

348 Perhaps the idea of Kenosis and Substantial Presence is as close as we will get to
 349 explaining the doctrine of the incarnation.

350 TASKS

351 In your RE note book (which will be checked at half term so it is important you keep your
 352 best notes) complete the following questions

- 353 1. What is meant by incarnation? Support your answer with reference to the Nicene
 354 creed and the concept of hypostatic union.
- 355 2. Explain why understanding the difference between the 'son' and 'Jesus' is important.
- 356 3. What is kenotic theology and how is it seen in Luke's gospel and the writings of St
 357 Paul.?
- 358 4. What is meant by 'Substantial presence' and how is this concept evident in Matthew's
 359 infancy narrative?
- 360 5. Explain how both kenosis and substantial presence help us explain the doctrine of the
 361 incarnation

362 AO2 SKILLS.

363 AO2 questions are out of 30 marks. This means that 60% of you're a Level is based on your
 364 ability to evaluate and offer critical analysis to the issues studied.

365 For the birth narratives the following are possible AO2 exam statements.

- 366 1. The birth narratives provide/do not provide useful insight into the doctrine of the
 367 incarnation.
- 368 2. Redaction Criticism is/is not helpful for understanding the birth narratives.
- 369 3. The birth narratives are a credible and reliable source.(The issue or veracity)

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372 **THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE BIRTH NARRATIVES PROVIDE INSIGHT** 373 **INTO THE DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION.**

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If you were to argue that the birth narratives DO provide insight you could build in
 some of these ideas.

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- Both Matthew and Luke agree on many points - the essential point – that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin.
- It is important that Jesus is born this way – making him fully human by virtue of his mother and full divine by virtue of God’s spirit. This hypostatic union is possible in the person of Christ. “With God all things are possible’
- Luke insists on the historical accuracy of his Gospel – so does Paul in his letters – from the earliest of times Christians believed that Jesus was God’s son. This supports a long tradition of belief suggesting that these stories do show insight into the incarnation.
- The supernatural elements of the story, whether literally true or symbolically true, point to a unique event in history. The birth of notable people and the appearance of a star at the time was common among ancient world.
- No problem in accepting the virgin birth if you accept that God chooses to enter into human history. No problem believing he would enter in a supernatural way.
- Concepts of Kenosis in Luke and Substantial presence in Matthew help us understand to some degree the idea of incarnation.

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IF you were to argue that the birth narratives DO NOT provide insight into the incarnation you could build in the following points.

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- The word VIRGIN – in the prophecy mentioned by Matthew could easily mean a ‘young woman of marriageable age’ Not necessary to conclude Isaiah meant ‘virgin birth’
- Many believe Isaiah was referring to the nation giving birth to the Messiah – which would link better with Matthew’s extensive genealogy
- The supernatural events make it seem mythological and unrealistic.
- The reference to star was a common occurrence at the birth of a notable person in the ancient world. Maybe the references here are simply to SHOW Jesus’ importance. Maybe these are techniques used by the writers

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POSSIBLE CONCLUSIONS

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- They are credible historical accounts –so show an insight into the incarnation
- They are myths – similar to myths surrounding notable births/important people but might still show us something about the incarnation. They are made up by the early church to portray Jesus as important.
- They are historically inaccurate therefore it is difficult to believe anything they hold- and this leads to rejecting them.
- Careful use of redaction criticism helps us see techniques of writers and then accept the belief they are expressing. Therefore they do provide insight into the incarnation – but only after looking at the redaction of the writers.

416 **AO2: REDACTION CRITICISM IS/IS NOT HELPFUL FOR UNDERSTANDING THE**
 417 **BIRTH NARRATIVES**

418 Possible points to include to formulate an argument that REDACTION CRITICISM is
 419 USEFUL include:

- 420 1. It helps us harmonise the differences in the narratives
 421 (You must support this with examples and evidence from both)
- 422 2. It helps us deal with the historical inaccuracies – providing reasons for them. Thus
 423 ‘saving’ the stories from being regarded as incredulous. E.g Massacre of innocents and
 424 Quirinius.
- 425 3. Enables us to consider the theological perspectives –Recognising they aren’t writing history
 426 but theology – Messiah in Matthew/ Substantial presence/ Luke Kenosis.
- 427 4. Enables us to search for the ‘historical’ Jesus
- 428 5. Explains ‘supernatural’ elements as symbolic or representing deeper meaning

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 430 Possible points to use to argue that REDACTION CRITICISM IS NOT USEFUL include

- 431 1. R.C. is simply an attempt by the Church and theologians to ‘explain’ differences and
 432 maintain the truthfulness of the stories. It is an attempt to save Christianity. The
 433 church has a vested interest in explaining away the inconsistencies and differences.
- 434 2. It is based on the opinion and findings of the redactor. It is therefore subjective.
 435 (redactors argue that the writer naturally edits –but so to will redactors). Redactors
 436 also edit and come to their conclusions via their own world view.
- 437 3. Redaction criticism only leads to further confusion and is simply ‘guess work’ and
 438 supposition. It is not always supported by firm evidence/
- 439 4. Can we be sure that the first readers definitely understood the writers techniques and
 440 theological points OR did they read it as literal accounts?
- 441 5. Suggests that ‘supernatural’ elements are not ‘real’ and attempts to make the stories
 442 more acceptable to the modern mind – BUT – that diminishes ‘virgin birth’ as actual
 443 and therefore ‘incarnation’ as ‘less than real’.(as subjective rather than an objective
 444 fact. Raises a secular world view (because there seems to be a need to explain away
 445 the supernatural) above a sacred. Leaves no room therefore for the possibility of
 446 God’s divine action in our world.

447 **TASKS:**

448 Answer the AO2 questions.

449 The birth narratives successfully provide insight into the doctrine of the incarnation

450 Redaction Criticism is essential if we are to understand the birth narratives

451 Prepare NOW revision resources for this topic.

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