



Luke's Infancy Narrative

How Jesus is God's Son receives different explanations in the gospels. For Mark, Jesus is adopted as God's Son. For Luke and Matthew, he is God's unique Son by God's special procreative action in union with Mary. For John, Jesus is divine (God's Word) from before the world's creation and his incarnation.

Mark's gospel contains no infancy narratives but begins when Jesus is an adult. After a brief introduction which sets the story of Jesus within the Old Testament matrix of prophecy and the hope for a promised messiah, Mark begins with the baptism of Jesus. Upon coming out of the water, a voice from heaven, which of course can be none other than God, uses the customary terminology of an adoption formula to affirm Jesus as God's beloved Son (Mark 1:11).

Interestingly enough, both Matthew and Luke revise Mark's gospel by adding narratives about the birth of Jesus that change the claim of sonship from adult adoption at his baptism to natural generation. They do this because, in the five to fifteen years between Mark's gospel (written about AD 70) and theirs, the claim that Jesus was the Son of God underwent a major change in emphasis from adoption to natural generation.

Luke wants to persuade his readers of Jesus' divine sonship by narrating events that are in keeping with Jesus' divine status. Jesus' unique relation to God is revealed in the circumstances surrounding his birth. God alone was responsible for the life of this child in a way that went beyond God's normal role of giving life to a child in connection with the sexual intercourse of the parents.

In the eyes of the community, Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary. But Luke indicates in both his birth account and in his genealogy that Joseph was not Jesus' natural father. Through the power of the Holy Spirit (the divine principle of life), God alone, not Joseph, supplied the "seed" for Jesus that was nurtured in Mary's womb. Mary was a virgin and had not had sexual relations with Joseph (Luke 1:26–38).

Luke traces the ancestry of Jesus as Son of God, working his way backwards from son to father. But he also offers a subtle clue to his readers about Jesus' divine sonship. Luke begins the genealogy by noting that what people thought did not conform to the reality. Jesus "was the son (as was thought) of Joseph" (3:23), which brings the genealogy into conformity with the first two chapters of his gospel that maintained that Jesus was not the natural son of Joseph but the unique Son of God, born from the virginal womb of Mary.

Even though he added the infancy narrative of Jesus special status as God's Son, Luke retained Mark's adoption formula at the baptism of Jesus. However, because Luke shifted his explanation of Jesus' divine sonship to his birth, God's identification of Jesus as a beloved and chosen son (Luke 3:22) no longer serves as a simple adoption formula but rather as a public confirmation of the divine paternity and Jesus' special relation to God.

***And a voice came from heaven,
"You are my Son, the Beloved;
with you I am well pleased."***

—Luke 3:22