

Similarities and Differences Between Matthew's & Luke's Birth Stories

Similarities:

Mary & Joseph	Conception by Spirit of God	No Donkey
Herod the Great is Mentioned	Birth in Bethlehem	

Differences:

Matthew (75-90CE)	Luke (80-95CE)
<i>Main Characters:</i> Joseph, Angel, Magi, Herod the Great	<i>Main Characters:</i> Zechariah, Gabriel, Elizabeth, Mary, Angels, Shepherds, Simeon, Anna
<i>Secondary Characters:</i> Mary, Chief Priests & Scribes, Archelaus	<i>Secondary Characters:</i> Herod the Great, Joseph, Caesar Augustus, Quirinius
<i>Location of Conception:</i> Bethlehem (after a trip to Egypt, they plan to go back to Bethlehem (apparently have a house), but with Herod's son not being a nice guy, either, they are warned in a dream to move to Galilee / Nazareth, 2:19-31)	<i>Location of Conception:</i> Nazareth (they go to Bethlehem only for a census and return after the 8-days wait and rituals required by the Torah, see 2:21 and 2:39)
<i>Location of Birth:</i> House (2:11)	<i>Location of Birth:</i> Stable (2:7)
<i>Adoration:</i> Magi (Gentile Philosophers) – How many? The text does NOT say!	<i>Adoration:</i> Shepherds (Lowly) – How many? The text does NOT say!
Star	No Star
No angels in night sky	Angels in night sky
Murder of the innocents & trip to Egypt	No murder of the innocents & no trip to Egypt
Move to Nazareth instead of back to Bethlehem for fear of Herod's son, Archelaus (2:19-23)	Return to Nazareth since they live there already (2:39-40)
Less detail	More detail
Genealogies are different between the two!	
<i>Dating the Story:</i> Includes Herod the Great who died in 4BCE	<i>Dating the Story:</i> Mentions Herod the Great who died in 4BCE (vs. 1:5) BUT it also mentions a census under Quirinius who does not come to power until 6CE (vss. 2:1-2)
<i>Themes of the Book:</i> 1. <i>Conflict of Kingdoms</i> (i.e. the Kingdom of God / Heaven vs. the kingdoms of this age / Caesar / Satan / etc.) 2. <i>Jesus is the new and better Moses who brings the "new law."</i> [Thus, it is important for Matthew to note the similarities in Jesus' & Moses' birth stories with killing of babies] 3. <i>The Church / Community</i> (Matthew is the only Gospel with the word <i>eklesia</i> – i.e. Church / assembly in Greek) 4. <i>How to continue now that there is separation between Judaism & Christianity.</i> 5. <i>Discipleship.</i>	<i>Themes of the Book:</i> 1. <i>God's redemptive purposes.</i> 2. <i>Salvation for all alike.</i> Perhaps Luke's most dramatic insight is his perception that Jesus announced salvation for all people alike. [sinners, tax collectors, Samaritans, women, the poor, etc.] 3. <i>The blessings of poverty and the dangers of wealth.</i> . . . Popular theology held that the rich were blessed by God, but Jesus turned that popular theology on its head, maintaining that God would lift up the poor and cast out the rich. 4. <i>Table fellowship.</i> 5. <i>The Role of a Disciple.</i> (Culpepper)

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Galatians 4:4 – Paul, writing BEFORE any of our gospels only say Jesus was born of a woman, nothing miraculous.

Mark 3:20-21 – Mark has no story of a miraculous birth of Jesus. So, Mark is not surprised by the story of Jesus' mother and family coming to restrain Jesus as they think he has gone out of his mind by doing his ministry.

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In trying to make Luke's genealogy (Ch. 3:23-38) not contradict Matthew's genealogy (Ch.1:1-17), some use the logic that Joseph was Heli's son-in-law. However, the SAME Greek word is used throughout Luke's genealogy (as seen below), so one could even say that Nathan was David's son-in-law or Adam is God's son-in-law. It just isn't in the biblical text that Luke is deriving the genealogy through Mary.

In the Greek, here is what we have throughout Luke's genealogy (TOY is "of the" in Greek):

- nameTOYnameTOYnameTOYname. . .nameTOYname
for instance:
- JosephTOYHeliTOYMatthatTOYLevi. . .AdamTOYGod
translated literally as:
- Joseph of the Heli of the Matthat of the Levi. . .Adam of the God
translated in the NRSV as:
- Joseph son of Heli son of Matthat son of Levi. . .Adam son of God

I did come across some interesting commentary, though, in researching it:

- In THE LAYMAN'S BIBLE COMMENTARY: LUKE written by Donald G. Miller in 1959 for John Knox Press (pages 49-50): "Several ingenious attempts have been made to solve this problem [of discrepancies between Matthew's & Luke's genealogies], but none of them has more than conjectural value. The wisdom of John Wesley on this point could well be followed. He remarked that if there were any discrepancies in the two lists, it merely meant that there were errors in the public documents from which they were taken, and that the Holy Spirit did not see fit to inspire the Gospel writers to correct the court records of their day!" Miller similarly points out 1 Timothy 1:4 saying: "to avoid 'endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the divine training that is in the faith.'"
- Fred Craddock & Gene Boring in THE PEOPLE'S NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY of 2004 from Westminster John Knox Press note: "Neither genealogy represents precisely accurate historical information based on research in family archives or interviews with family members; each is constructed from Old Testament lists and historical imagination to express the respective author's theological convictions." (pages 13-14)
- Also from Craddock & Boring: "Only Matthew and Luke portray Jesus as miraculously conceived without a human father; only Matthew and Luke include genealogies, in both cases of Joseph. . . . Like their respective birth and infancy narratives, the genealogies of Matt. 1:2-17 and Luke 3:23-38 are not to be harmonized. Both have been constructed from traditional sources with some freedom and imagination. . . . It is clear that theological confession and not biological accuracy is the concern in both cases." Page 188.

It would be nice if both agreed, but individually, I believe this is the point each is trying to make:

- Matthew - Jesus is the son David (for necessary messiah-ship) through Solomon (the "richest," wisest, and most powerful of the Jewish kings). Similarly, Jesus is the son of Abraham, the "father" of faith. Matthew will declare Jesus' being son of God elsewhere. Matthew has a concern for disenfranchised women, thus he includes several women.
- Luke - Jesus is the: son of God (as seen through Adam son of God); son of Abraham (as above); son of David (as above); but son of Nathan the prophet (son of David) - and since many priests & prophets are listed in his line, Jesus is the ultimate priest and prophet.