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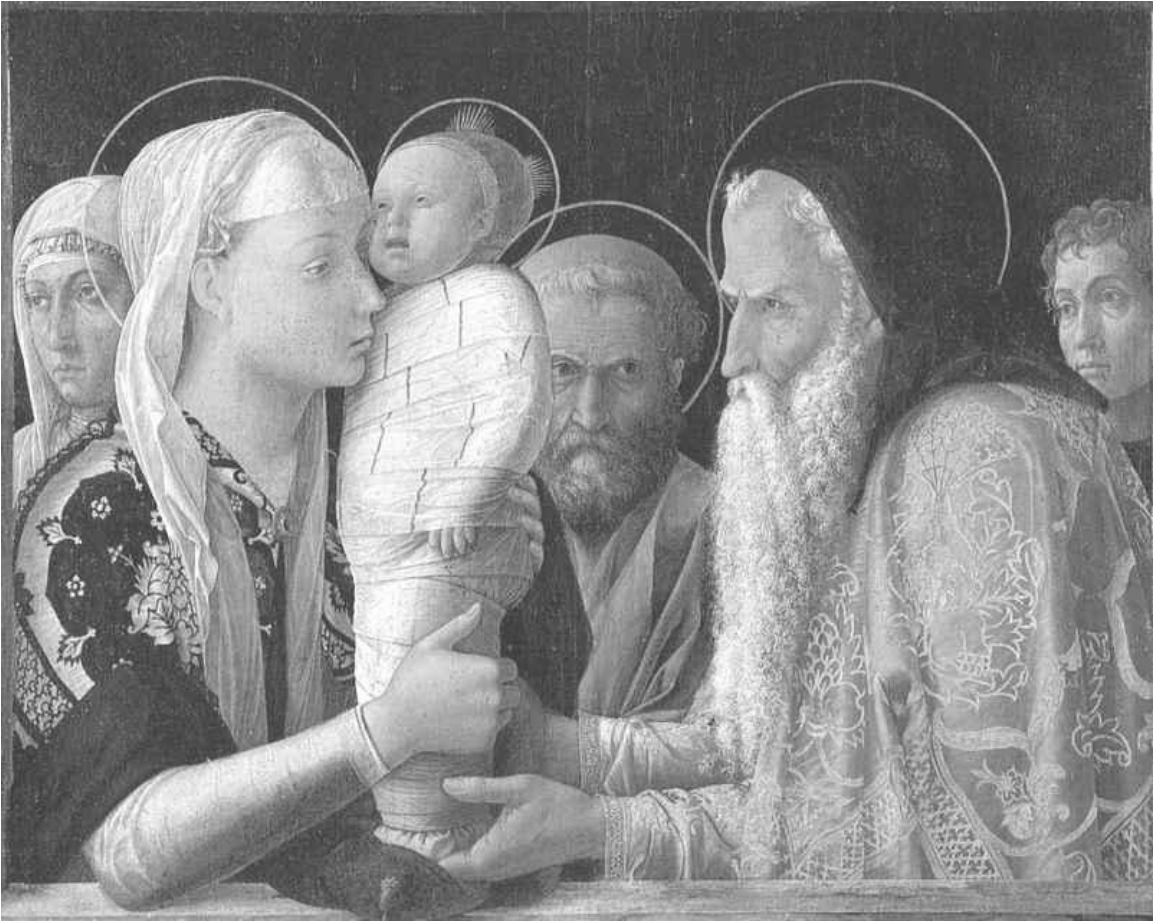
PRIEST

THE MAKING OF
THE MESSIAH

Everything You *Believe* is **Wrong**

Mark Gibbs

The Virgin And The Priest The Making Of The Messiah



Mark Gibbs

The Vineyard Press

To My Wife, Desak

The Virgin and The Priest: The Making of The Messiah

ISBN: 1438207063

EAN 13: 9781438207063

Frontispiece: Andrea Mantegna, *Presentation at the Temple*, c.1460

Cover: Raphael, *The Marriage of Mary*, 1525

Picture Credits: page 69, 73, 78, 111, 275, 289, 292 (Art Resource) 218 (Corbis).

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Preface

Church attendance in developed nations has been on a downward spiral for the best part of a century. The strong likelihood is that it will continue to decline. In the past, almost everyone was a churchgoer. But today, irrespective of whether or not they believe in God, the majority of the population regards organized religion as an anachronism.

Increased levels of education since the end of World War II brought with them a greater demand for intellectual satisfaction. Now, most people will only accept something as 'true' if it can be explained by reason or else resonates with their experience. Absolute 'truths' must pertain to reality. Not reality as perception, but reality which is the same for everyone. Doctrines that insist on faith in the irrational and unfamiliar no longer have mass appeal, because by implication, they are not true.

Formerly, the Church could withdraw some of its erroneous tenets, for example, that the sun orbits the earth, because they were incidental to its central theology. In the modern era, as potential embarrassments cropped up with increasing regularity, the Church adopted the position that religion and science were mutually incompatible. Therefore, any attempts to reconcile them were futile.

The idea that life allowed for the existence of contradictory laws did not impress Einstein, who famously stated that "God does not play dice with the universe." His comment that "science would provide a surer path to God than religion," reflects a widely held opinion that religious institutions are paralyzed by the instinct for self-preservation and reluctance to acknowledge error. As far as most people today are concerned, the Church has not only ceded to science the ability to interpret the physical world, but also the world unseen, and all that that implies.

Despite public skepticism toward the Christian Church, the indisputable fact of history is that Western civilization is a Judeo-Christian legacy. The predominant culture is actually based on a complex synthesis of Hebraism and Hellenism, but its catalyst was provided by events in the life of one man -- Jesus. And we simply cannot understand the modern world without first understanding our Judeo-Christian past.

The phenomenal success of the movies, *The Passion of Christ* and *The Da Vinci Code*, prove that the desire to know what happened two thousand years ago has not diminished. Still, from whatever point of view Jesus is presented, we don't know *who* he was.

For traditionalists, the focal point of 'genuine' Christianity is Christ, the risen God. 'Christ' transcends human attributes, so in the grand scheme of things, the historical man Jesus is incidental. At the opposite end of the spectrum, liberal academics cite a lack of documentation to prove much of anything about Jesus, and being good scholars they only go where the 'facts' lead.

Making sense of Jesus then, is not easy. Apparently, he was rejected by those 'in charge of religion' as an ordinary man with blasphemous delusions of grandeur. But now that he is regarded as God, or as a character to be defined only on the limited basis of a few prose narratives, Jesus cannot be legitimately considered as an actual human being with normal physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual needs.

The Virgin and The Priest does not directly address the issue of Jesus' marital status, or even if he had children. Researching the possibility of a surviving bloodline without first

identifying Jesus' parents, not only puts the genealogical cart before the horse, it perpetuates the confusion over his status. Jesus' 'divinity' has been the foundation of Christian theology ever since Church councils began, and still conditions public perception of him today. For that reason, Jesus' ancestors, rather than his descendants, ought properly to be the starting point of any investigation of his life.

Officially, Protestant Churches do not insist on the virgin birth doctrine as do Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Mary's miraculous conception, however, is taken for granted by most of their membership, and by a large percentage of the general population. Even non believers jump on the bandwagon when Christmas comes around. Who can blame them? It is a beautiful story. A young virgin conceives a child miraculously. She gives birth to God's only Son in a humble stable. Wise men travel from afar to offer gifts to the newborn king.

The word 'miracle,' however, can only be used legitimately when describing events that lack a rational or scientific explanation, and as an *absolute* principle, all forms of life are created by, and therefore preceded by, a relationship or interaction between opposites: male/female or positive/negative. So regardless of any theological claims, if Jesus existed then he must have had biological parents. His birth, therefore, was *not* a miracle. Moreover, if Jesus' father were identified it might help explain other aspects of his life, and inject a dose of much-needed reality into the study of Christian origins.

To protect the early church, the gospel writers deliberately crafted explanations of Jesus' birth to mystify the uninformed and obscure the truth from those deemed incapable of receiving it. To achieve this, they used an ancient 'messianic' scribal code belonging to an esoteric strand of Judaism. Later, as the church developed in the Gentile nations, ignorance of this code proved disastrous. Centuries of pointless and unnecessary theological argument precipitated divisions in human society that led to centuries of bloodshed, persecution, and suffering on a truly unimaginable scale. In explaining the messianic code, *The Virgin and The Priest* does not so much go where the facts lead, because hardly any exist. The case presented is not one that would stand up in a modern court of law. There are no sworn affidavits, no eye witness testimonies, and no DNA paternity-test results. The argument follows only where reason takes it, supported by a framework of coherent and consistent logic, based on the Jewish traditions of the biblical writers. Corroborative evidence is presented from apocryphal gospels, writings of early Church Fathers, and the Koran. The cryptic images of Renaissance masterpieces, so long a source of confusion to 'experts' and bewilderment to the general public, are deciphered to show that knowledge of Jesus' biological father was pivotal to an important and influential subversive tradition.

That the name of Jesus' father has never been publicly disclosed attests to the existence of a controlling and pervasive conspiracy of silence by those who knew it, both inside and outside the Church. The perpetrators were aided and abetted by the suffocating power of preconceived ideas, working hand in hand with history's largest ever propaganda campaign, incessantly and repeatedly broadcast throughout the world for seventeen centuries. And, in common with modern sales and marketing promotions, the message was both deceptive and illusory, designed solely to benefit vested interests. Deep down we knew it, but still bought the product.

Christianity's sacred cows have been challenged many times before, but never as comprehensively as in *The Virgin and The Priest*. Perhaps above all else, the spotlight falls on the life of Saint John the Baptist -- one of the most neglected areas of New

Testament studies and Dead Sea Scrolls research -- and the part he played in Jesus' tragic life. Hopefully, any errors along the way are minor and thus peripheral to the book's central arguments. For readers raised on the tenets of traditional religious teaching, *The Virgin and The Priest* will be a journey into uncharted waters. Bon voyage! Ubud, Bali
November, 2007

Introduction

Before diving straight into Jesus' story, it is essential to know the background. That means having a grasp of the basic fundamentals of Jewish history -- if only because Jesus allegedly claimed to be its fulfillment. The next few pages provide a general outline, but further reading is strongly recommended.

A great deal of argument exists among modern historians, archeologists, and biblical scholars about the historical reliability of the Old Testament. Similarly, in ancient Palestine much debate surrounded the sacred texts, but it was not about separating fact from fiction. Disputes were centered on how to interpret the narratives to correctly discern 'truth.' Holy Scriptures were considered guidebooks to the truth, not truth itself. The most significant groups in Jewish society, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes -- all contemporaneous to Jesus often took different meanings from the same writings.

There was general agreement, however, that the books of the Hebrew Bible comprised a reliable and inspired record of Israel and its relationship with God. There were no archives, and no way to chart ancient chronology, so recorders of the past prioritized archetypes over actual names, places and events.

History began with the Fall. Adam and Eve, the original ancestors, broke God's commandment to not "eat the fruit." As a result, they and their descendants were banished from the Garden of Eden. The writers of Genesis described the events of the Fall with references familiar to an agrarian society: 'tree,' 'plant,' 'garden,' 'fruit,' 'seed,' and so on. This agricultural metaphor was systematically repeated in later books of the Old and New Testament to explain the workings of Providence in the affairs of men. To the ancient Jews, salvation was an organic process to restore the Garden paradise. Religion, therefore, was not a matter of individual conscience, but the birthright of Israelite families. The prerequisite was not faith or deeds, but blood lineage.

Salvation history would end with the global sovereignty of the Jewish savior/king, or Messiah. No consensus existed on the specifics of how this new world order would materialize, but it was widely accepted that the Messiah would be a victorious warrior king, who would govern through his representatives -- the Jewish people. After first liberating Israel, the Messiah would subjugate the other nations. With pagan worship eradicated, the world would serve only Yahweh, the Hebrew God. In the ensuing brotherhood of man, 'swords would be turned into ploughshares,' and 'the lion would lay down with the lamb.'

According to Genesis, people were so corrupt that God "regretted he had made man," so He brought a flood judgment to wipe them out. Only the family of Noah was spared from the deluge. This was intended to be a new start for humanity, and after the flood they received the same instruction to "be fruitful and multiply" that was given Adam and Eve. However, things did not work out. The biblical text is guarded as to the reasons why, but like Adam before him, Noah's "nakedness" implied a sexual transgression had led to the loss of grace.

God's next attempt to rescue humanity involved making a unique covenant with one man, from whom a chosen people would descend. The man was Abraham, founding father of the Hebrew race.

The Jews were and still are the only people in the world who have their genealogical

origins written down and traced back to one individual, but not all of Abraham's descendants were Jewish -- only those who came through a specific bloodline. This is the most crucial aspect in understanding ancient Judaism; everything was based on ancestry. Ishmael, Abraham's first son, is understood by Arabs to be their common ancestor, but the chosen bloodline passed through Isaac, Abraham's second son.

Isaac also had two sons, Esau and Jacob, and again it was the younger brother, Jacob, through whom the providential lineage passed. Jacob, the third-generation patriarch, founded the Israelite nation. 'Israel,' literally meaning 'he who struggles with God,' was simply another name for Jacob.

Jacob had twelve sons, and Joseph was his favorite. Resented by his brothers for a dream that the entire family would one day bow down before him, Joseph was kidnapped by them and sold to Ishmaelite merchants, who took him to Egypt. The brothers told Jacob that Joseph was dead. While in Egypt, Joseph's star rose. And after successfully interpreting the meaning of one of the Pharaoh's dreams, he was appointed Grand Vizier -- a type of Prime Minister.

Due to a severe famine, Jacob moved his family south to Egypt in search of food. Not long afterward, and much to his father's delight, Joseph revealed himself to them. The reunited children of Israel remained in Egypt to eventually become a nation within a nation. The Book of Exodus states that "they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them." The Pharaoh began to fear their numbers and doubt their loyalty, and that was his justification for forcing them into manual slavery. Despite a life of hardship, the Hebrew population continued to increase and constitute a threat. So much so, that the Pharaoh ordered all male Hebrew infants to be drowned at birth in the River Nile. This event began the story of Moses.

One of the Pharaoh's daughters found Moses floating down the Nile in a basket of bulrushes. She adopted the baby and raised him in the royal household. But just as the storyline seemed to be leading up to Moses becoming Pharaoh, he killed an Egyptian taskmaster whom he had witnessed abusing Hebrew slaves. Fearing the consequences of his actions, Moses escaped into the desert wilderness of Midian and lived the life of a nomadic shepherd.

The biblical narrative explains that while he was in exile, God instructed Moses to return to Egypt and, in tandem with his older brother Aaron, liberate the Israelites and lead them into the Promised Land of Canaan. After many trials and tribulations, the brothers eventually succeeded, and the Hebrew slave population was rescued. The journey into Canaan, however, was complex and protracted, taking forty years to accomplish.

During this period, Moses received the Ten Commandments, formulated the official Israelite religion, and instituted its priesthood. Aaron was the first High Priest of Israel and all future priests were drawn only from Aaron's direct descendants. Others belonging to the tribe of Levi, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, were designated as a lesser priesthood, responsible for organizing ceremonial functions. Priests and Levites lived on tithes collected from the remaining tribes but were prohibited from owning land. Theoretically, as they did not have to work, Priests and Levites were dedicated to a life of service to the community.

Moses did not survive to witness conquest of the Promised Land, and Joshua was appointed to lead the military campaign. In a relatively short period of time, his armies

won a series of stunning victories over the enemy. The land of Palestine was taken from the Canaanites and divided among the twelve tribes of Israel. It was not a totally comprehensive defeat, however, and several enclaves of unconquered territory remained.

The period after occupation and resettlement was characterized by continuous war with Canaanite kings and external enemies. Known as the age of 'Judges' -- divinely inspired prophet-warrior leaders, who emerged periodically to prevent the Hebrews from drifting into assimilation with foreign neighbors -- it formally ended when Samuel anointed Saul as the first ever King of Israel.

Later, Saul was deposed, and in his place the legendary David was anointed king, followed by his son Solomon, who purportedly built the original Jerusalem Temple. Future generations would view this time nostalgically as the golden age of Israel. But it did not last long.

After Solomon's death, civil war erupted and the formerly unified nation was split into two opposing kingdoms, north (Israel) and south (Judah). The southern kingdom was home for the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and the northern kingdom comprised the remaining ten tribes. The priesthood and the Levites remained for the most part in the south, because that was where Jerusalem was located. The Bible records that the northerners drifted in and out of idolatry and built their own competing cult centers, and that this ultimately led to their destruction.

It is extremely difficult to put dates on any of these occurrences, because a paucity of supporting evidence exists to verify either the historicity of events or of the characters involved. Moreover, biblical chronology followed an esoteric numerology, so important time periods were often recorded as forty years or multiples of forty, seven years or multiples of seven, and so on. All of which indicates that the writers never intended to compose historical journals. Details of the narratives were specially constructed so as to comply with fundamental principles that proved a divine connection.

With its larger population and more fertile land, Israel was always richer than Judah in the south, and made an irresistible target for any expanding empire. The rise of the Assyrian Empire during the eighth century B.C.E. meant disaster for the northern kingdom. Surviving Assyrian archives corroborate much of the biblical account. By 720 B.C.E., the Assyrians had not only invaded and conquered Israel; they had deported all of its citizens, and transmigrated settlers from other parts of the empire to take possession of the land.

What happened to the lost northern tribes remains a source of intense speculation, but from this time onward, as far as the biblical scribes were concerned, the only true 'Israelites' were in the south, and the majority belonged to the tribe of Judah. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the Bible prophesies Judah will rule the other tribes of Israel and that the Messiah will come from the line of Judah. In fact, the Old Testament is so pro-Judah that it must have been compiled and edited only after the purge of the northern tribes.

One hundred years later, when Babylon had overtaken Assyria to become the dominant power in the region, the army of King Nebuchadnezzar marched into Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem, an event described in the Bible and in Babylonian records. In 597 B.C.E. Jerusalem collapsed, and the victors took the usual spoils of war. More significantly, the priesthood, aristocracy, and skilled craftsmen were taken captive and exiled in Babylon.

In the decade that followed, the population left behind rallied against Nebuchadnezzar, but to no avail. In 587 B.C.E., the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem again, and this time the city was totally devastated and the Temple left in ruins. Outlying cities of Judah were similarly destroyed. Most of the inhabitants fled to Egypt, leaving Judah virtually uninhabited. Zedekiah, the last Judahite king, was blinded, chained in fetters, and taken back to Babylon after first witnessing the public execution of his sons.

The fate of the Hebrew religion was left with the exiles in Babylon. If they had integrated with the local culture, it would most probably have meant the end of Judaism. But the course of history took a dramatic twist in 539 B.C.E. when the Persian King Cyrus invaded and conquered Babylon. He issued a royal decree permitting both the return of Jewish exiles and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple.

Whether Cyrus was motivated by altruism or pragmatism, the homecoming to Palestine was not a speedy process. Reportedly, three great waves of returnees spread over several generations, culminated in approximately 458 B.C.E. when Ezra the Scribe (who was also a priest) arrived in Jerusalem armed with a letter of authority from Darius, the King of Persia. Not all the Jews wished to return, however, and a significant number chose to remain in Babylon.

In due course a new Temple was constructed and the Palestinian Jews had themselves a semi-independent homeland. The Davidic monarchy, however, was not restored, and the priesthood became the de facto new ruling class. The foundations were made at this time for what would later become known as Second Temple Judaism.

Alexander the Great defeated the Persian Empire in the fourth century B.C.E., and in 332 B.C.E. the Jewish state was incorporated into the Greek dominated world and became known as Judea. After about 150 years of Greek rule, Jewish resistance against the forces of Hellenization erupted into a full scale war. When the dust finally settled, a period of relative independence followed that lasted for a hundred years, coming to an end with the arrival of the army of the Roman General Pompey in 63 B.C.E.

After three decades of Roman administration through a series of proxies, the Emperor Augustus installed Herod the Great as the client king of Judea in 37 B.C.E. As a convert to Judaism, Herod was not accepted by the majority of the population as a legitimate king, but nevertheless he embarked on an extensive reconstruction project that made the Jerusalem Temple into possibly the most magnificent building in the world. During the final years of Herod's rule, the birth of Jesus took place.

Jewish society and its core beliefs survived this incredible history because written records and oral traditions of their past were preserved, and the sayings of the prophets were recorded. In the main, their historical tragedies had not led to widespread cynicism or to the adoption of religions of their foreign masters, as was customary for subject peoples. This made the Jews fascinating to outsiders. But although the Jewish idea of a worldwide messianic kingdom was well known throughout the region, it did not endear Jews to their neighbors. To most outsiders, the racial and religious separation ethic of Judaism meant that non-Jews were considered inferior, even subhuman.

Messianic expectation reached fever pitch during the early Roman period. The rebuilt Temple had become a wonder of the ancient world and wealthy Diaspora Jews (the name given to Jews living outside Palestine) made constant pilgrimages to Jerusalem. The

Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek and circulated widely among the Greek speaking Diaspora population, estimated to be at least double the two million strong inhabitants of Palestine. Gentiles, impressed by the moral and ethical lifestyle of the synagogue, were converting to Judaism in ever increasing numbers. Yet by 70 C.E. the Temple had been destroyed and the priesthood totally obliterated. Neither institution has ever been restored.

The nation of Israel finally re-emerged in 1948, and it might easily be described as a protectorate of the new Rome -- the United States of America, complete with Emperor/President, Senate, eagle standard, and capital city where the government buildings follow the Greco-Roman style and are adorned with pagan gods and goddesses. The prosperous Diaspora Jews have resettled in the new Rome. And as before, the restored Israel is surrounded by unsympathetic neighbors, and survives with the help of a siege mentality.

Although Jewish prophecy was committed to the advent of the Messiah, no hard and fast details were given. Much of scripture, however, was compiled to meet the criteria of a covert messianic formula or code, essential to protect heaven's secrets. Understanding this messianic code was the first qualification of an ancient scribe. But when the crucial time came two thousand years ago, the code was not followed. Old Testament prophecy predicted a glorious future for the Jews in the coming messianic era, "all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed." In reality, the Jews endured nineteen hundred years of exile and persecution that culminated in the Nazi-inspired genocide.

Meanwhile, Christianity -- the Gentile religion -- claimed the Jewish Messiah. And even though the New Testament recorded a travesty of ignorance, prejudice, and injustice, the Church declared that messianic prophecy *was* fulfilled. New and revolutionary theologies were developed to explain why the Messiah did not restore the Garden of Eden, why there was no peace on earth, and why swords were *not* turned into ploughshares. Needless to say, none were Jewish explanations.

Serendipitously, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered at the same time as Israel was granted statehood. Found hidden in desert caves, numerous first century Jewish manuscripts specializing in messianic prophecy, constitute the final installment of the Hebrew Bible. Finally, the bridge linking the Old and the New Testaments can be crossed. Let us now go back to first century Palestine, unravel the secrets of the messianic code, and find out what really happened.

RELIGION/HISTORY/ART

History's Greatest Secret Revealed!

FOR OVER TWO CENTURIES scholars have been on a quest to find the historical Jesus - to discover the real person behind the theological gloss. But so far there has been no breakthrough on the name of Jesus' father. His identity remains unknown, and to all intents and purposes, unknowable.

The Virgin and The Priest, one of the most controversial books ever written, interprets the Infancy Narratives of the New Testament in light of the Hebrew scriptural traditions of the gospel writers. With compelling logic, Mark Gibbs not only challenges the validity of the doctrine of virgin birth, but presents overwhelming evidence that Zacharias, the priestly father of John the Baptist, was Jesus' biological father.

The religions of Christianity and Islam, and significant events that shaped the course of history over the last two thousand years, are revealed to have had their roots in a bitter sibling rivalry that split the messianic family and divided the movement of Jesus and John the Baptist.

Mark Gibbs has spent thirty years researching the history of religion, and during that time he amassed a wealth of diverse material, which is crystallized in *The Virgin and The Priest*.

www.thevirginandthepriest.com

US \$19.95

