

The Virgin And The Priest The Making Of The Messiah

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4 Angel of the Lord

Matthew is considered the most “Jewish” gospel. The author displayed extensive knowledge of Hebrew Scriptures and traditions, which he used liberally throughout the narrative.

Written in Greek, possibly in translation from a Hebrew original, it was aimed primarily at Greek-speaking Diaspora Jews. The gospel’s unique record of Jesus’ instruction to his disciples to “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” suggests that it was not written for Romans. It is ironic, therefore, how much the Roman church derived from it.

The introduction of Matthew is a genealogical listing designed to provide a theological explanation for Jesus’ conception. Most readers skip these seventeen verses for two reasons. First, it does not make for scintillating reading (so and so begat so and so, etc), and second, the common presupposition that Jesus had no human father makes a list of his ancestors meaningless. This is unfortunate. Only after the reader has digested the contents of the first seventeen verses, can he appreciate the sequential aspect of the eighteenth verse, “now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.” In other words, Jesus’ birth happened the same way as his predecessors.

To prove purity of blood descent, it was not necessary for a genealogy to go back as far as Matthew had done for Jesus. People were not expected to possess accurate records of ancient history, nor would they be believed if they produced them. Besides, since the narrative stated that Joseph was not Jesus’ father, it was taken for granted that the names of Jesus’ ancestors were given purely for pedagogical reasons.

To prove that Jesus’ birth took place according to heaven’s tradition, Matthew had to break with the established custom of listing only male names in a genealogy. In addition to Mary, he mentioned four other maternal predecessors -- Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba) -- all of whom produced forefathers of Jesus. As their stories were recorded in Scripture, each was celebrated in popular folklore as a matriarch of the Jewish nation, despite having had questionable relationships with men.

The reason why Matthew included only the names of these four women, and no others, has often been debated. There is a general agreement that somehow they were analogous to Mary, but exactly how remains a mystery.

THE FOUR MATRIARCHS

Tamar

Tamar’s story is the subject of Genesis 38. She was married to Er, oldest son of Judah, from whose descendants the Messiah was to come. Er died childless, and Tamar was given to his brother Onan, according to the custom of levirate marriage, where the brother of a dead husband took his widowed wife. Not wanting children by Tamar, Onan “spilled

his seed on the ground.” As this “was displeasing to the Lord,” Onan was put to death. Consequently, Judah’s third son, Shelah, was betrothed to Tamar by the same marriage custom.

Judah was reluctant to allow a consummation of this union due to his suspicions that Tamar was somehow responsible for the death of his two other sons. So Tamar took matters into her own hands. Disguising herself as a prostitute, she wore a veil, and waited in the appropriate location. Unaware of her true identity, Judah approached Tamar for sexual favors. For payment, she asked for his signet, cord, and staff.

Three months later, news of her pregnancy reached Judah. “Tamar your daughter in law has played the harlot; and moreover she is with child by harlotry.”¹ In righteous indignation, Judah demanded that she be burned in public for betraying her husband.

Tamar produced Judah’s signet, cord, and staff to identify him as the man responsible. Judah acknowledged them, and his statement that Tamar “is more righteous than I, in as much as I did not give her to my son Shelah,” was made in reference to Jacob’s prophesy that the Messiah would come from a descendant of Judah, “the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”² Since Judah’s sons were childless, he had no male heir. Therefore, his relationship with Tamar was essential to guarantee the prophecy. Tamar gave birth to twin boys, Zerah and Perez. King David was descended from Perez.

Rahab

In Jesus’ genealogy, Rahab is listed as the wife of Salmon, although their child-bearing union has no biblical source, and does not feature in any other known Jewish tradition. It may be exclusive to Matthew and his school of Jewish Christianity. Rahab’s story is in the Book of Joshua. Before the Israelite army attacked Jericho, two spies were sent to explore the city and report back. In Christian tradition, Salmon, a prince of the tribe of Judah, was one of the two spies sent by Joshua.

While in Jericho, the Hebrew spies stayed with Rahab, who is described as a “harlot,” which presumably attracted them to her. The King of Jericho soon discovered their whereabouts, but his plan to capture the spies was thwarted by Rahab’s cunning. In gratitude, the victorious Joshua spared Rahab’s family from the devastation of the city. Boaz, the son of Rahab and Salmon, was the great grandfather of King David. *Ruth*

Ruth was a Moabite woman married to an Israelite. When her husband died leaving her childless, she left her homeland and returned with Naomi, her mother-in-law, to settle in Bethlehem. This was a bold move, as she would probably have been labeled a prostitute in her new land. Moses had forbidden the Israelites sexual relations with Moabite women on account of their reputation for loose morals.

Nonetheless, Ruth soon attracted the attention of Boaz, a wealthy older relative in Naomi’s family. Naomi persuaded Ruth that Boaz would make her a good husband, and his responsibility as a kinsman was to marry her. One night, acting on Naomi’s instruction, Ruth sneaked into Boaz’s bed, and asked him to marry her. Although Boaz wanted her to stay, he tried to wriggle out of marriage by suggesting that another kinsman was more eligible than he.

And now it is true that I am a near kinsman, yet there is a kinsman nearer than I. Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will do the part of the next of kin for you, well; let him do it.
Ruth 3:12-13

If the kinsman refused, Boaz promised to marry Ruth. The next day, Boaz gave Ruth a payment of “six measures of barley,” and instructed his staff that “it not be known that the woman came on the threshing floor”. Aware Naomi was the instigator, he told Ruth she “must not go back empty handed to your mother-in-law.” So Boaz paid Ruth and Naomi for his evening, and tried to keep it a secret.

At a meeting of the city elders, the nearer kinsman rejected an offer to take Ruth as his wife. Boaz honored his promise and married Ruth. Witnesses to his acceptance speech declared, “May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.” Both women put themselves at considerable risk to entrap men of high standing in the community, and produced male heirs in the messianic lineage. Obed, the son of Ruth and Boaz, was the grandfather of David.

Bathsheba

The legend of Bathsheba, from the Second Book of Samuel, is the most well known of the four women. She is not mentioned by name, only as “the wife of Uriah,” because Matthew wants to draw attention to her adulterous relationship with King David, and not her subsequent marriage to him.

As David was “walking upon the roof of the king’s house”, he noticed a beautiful woman bathing [Plate 15]. On inquiry, he was told that she was Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite, a soldier in the king’s army. All the same, David summoned her to his presence and “he lay with her.” She conceived a child from this union and sent news of her pregnancy to David. His immediate reaction was to recall Uriah from the frontline so that he would sleep with his wife and believe he was the child’s father. The plan backfired when Uriah, out of a sense of solidarity with troops still fighting, refused to have sexual relations. David ordered him to be sent back and placed in the forefront of the battle to be killed quickly. This plan succeeded.



Plate 15. Jan Massys, *David and Bathsheba*, 1562, Louvre, Paris Most artists depicted Bathsheba as a seductress, not as David's submissive victim

After a period of mourning, Bathsheba married David and gave birth to a son. But the child died because “this thing that David had done displeased the Lord.” Later, Bathsheba gave David a second son, Solomon, listed by Matthew as Jesus’ ancestor.

Typically, commentators on this story regard Bathsheba as David’s unwitting victim, and for this reason she is not categorized with the other women in Jesus’ genealogy. However, the custom of Middle Eastern women was to be covered from head to toe whenever in public. Women in Jerusalem did not bathe naked outdoors, and have never done so. Even within the family compound, women took the greatest care possible to be out of sight. Matthew would not have referred to Bathsheba if he understood her as an ingénue. Knowing that David took regular walks on the palace rooftops, she deliberately positioned herself to be in his line of view. Bathsheba manipulated David’s weakness in order to seduce him; not the other way around.

PATTERN OF CONCEPTION

The specific details in the accounts of the four women differ, but they were listed because of the common themes they shared with Mary. These may be briefly summarized as follows:

- (1) The woman was the initiator of a sexual relationship that led to the birth of a forefather in the messianic line. She was proactive, using different techniques of seduction, risking her life and reputation in the process. Tamar dressed as a

prostitute to deceive Judah; Rahab drew the Hebrew spies into her house, and married into the Israelite community; Ruth went directly into Boaz's bed and propositioned him; Bathsheba bathed naked in full view of David to spark his passion.

(2) The father of her child was of considerable status in the community; most definitely of a higher social rank than the woman (at least three and possibly all four women were of Gentile origins). Judah was the wealthy and powerful head of his clan; Salmon was a leader in the tribe of Judah, trusted by Joshua; Boaz was a wealthy businessman and an elder of Bethlehem; David was the King of Israel.

(3) Another man, intended for or married to the woman, failed to consummate a sexual relationship with her. Shelah and Tamar had no conjugal relations while betrothed. The nearer kinsman had first refusal on marrying Ruth, but declined to do so. Uriah turned down the opportunity to sleep with Bathsheba, his wife. In the case of Rahab, there is a lack of clear supporting information in the narrative, but she deceived the King of Jericho. Matthew most probably understood that the King had unrequited designs on Rahab, perhaps from the same source by which he knew Salmon was her husband.

At first, only the third premise seems to apply to Mary. She was betrothed to Joseph, and their relationship was not consummated either before or during her pregnancy with Jesus, "but knew her not until she had borne a son." But once Mary's pregnancy was established, Joseph, "being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce Mary." None of the patriarchs had conceived miraculously, and the likelihood never occurred to Joseph. As Mary's child was described as being of the "Holy Spirit," the father ranked higher than Mary. The second premise, therefore, also applied.

Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14, "behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel," implied Mary was proactive toward her child-bearing mission. It did not explain a miraculous birth, but that an unmarried woman would sacrifice herself for the sake of God's Providence. The man's role was perfunctory. As with her maternal precursors, Mary put herself in a precarious, even life-threatening situation to conceive a messianic child.

The circumstances of Jesus' birth were prefigured by the births of his illustrious ancestors. His father's name was a delicate and controversial matter, so it was withdrawn to protect those not qualified or able to accept it. But Matthew informed like-minded Jewish Christians that Jesus' father was an Essene priest.

ANGEL OF THE LORD

Matthew held the most advanced angelology of all the New Testament writers. His gospel alone contains twenty-eight angelic references. Three times, the "angel of the Lord" appeared in a dream to give Joseph instruction. While he mulled over the fate of his pregnant fiancé, the angel told Joseph that the child was 'conceived of the Holy Spirit.' After Jesus was born, the angel revisited with a direction to take the Holy Family to Egypt to escape Herod. After Herod's death, the angel informed Joseph that it was safe to return the family home.

Considering that Jesus' family did not support his ministry and disapproved of his public speaking,³ it is extremely unlikely that Joseph testified to having received a series of

divinely inspired messages about Jesus. More likely, Joseph's association with the "angel of the Lord" was a device to explain events in the narrative.

The conventional understanding of an angel is as a spirit, normally invisible to the human eye. Angels that assume a physical form, usually remain incognito while doing so. Occasionally, they appear to saints or prophets bringing messages from God, but the rest of us have to take the existence of angels on faith.

In works of art, angels are normally depicted with wings, which is not to suggest that they fly like birds, but that they are not subject to the normal restrictions of time and space. In ancient literature, angels were regularly mistaken for or confused with people. For example, in the early books of the Bible, angels were described as men. Jacob wrestled a man, and not an angel, at the Ford of Jabbok, and three men, not angels, visited Abraham and Sarah. Later translations changed them into angels as the popular culture was influenced by Hellenism. The root of "angel" is the Greek word *angelos*, which means 'messenger.' Significantly, angels only have male gender in Judaism.

Matthew's fascination with angels was symptomatic of a particular strand of Jewish thought that flourished during the later stages of the Second Temple period. This is best described as Enochic Judaism, after the angel-obsessed non-canonical literature known collectively as the Book of Enoch. Until recently, historians assumed that the origins of the Book of Enoch were in the beginning of the Christian era, because so much of its content was paraphrased, even quoted, in the New Testament. This theory was shattered by the discovery of Enoch manuscripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran in 1947. Although the roots of Enochic literature remain shrouded in obscurity, the New Testament did not influence it. The Book of Enoch influenced the New Testament.

PRIESTS AND ANGELS

Much of Second Temple angelology derived from Zoroastrian influences during the period of exile in Babylon. Angels were central to the religion of the Persian rulers of Babylon, but the perception of angels was not as beings living only in the spirit world. An important tenet of Zoroastrianism was the concept of angelomorphism. Specifically, angels and priests (Magi) were interchangeable. Magi were priestly angels, or *Yazads*, who took part in the sacred liturgical rites that reconciled God and man. They interacted between the physical and spiritual worlds to mediate between the occupants of both [Plate 16].



Plate 16. Classic depiction of a Zoroastrian Priest-Angel, mediator between earth and heaven

The same idea of angels was expressed in the literature of the Second Temple period. The Book of Malachi stated that, “the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger (*angelos*) of the Lord of Hosts.”⁴ Scribes used messenger or “*angelos*” only in the masculine form, because the priesthood was an entirely male institution.

In the Book of Jubilees, literature treasured by the Qumran sect, Isaac is described blessing Levi, from whom the priesthood descends, and likening his “seed” to the angels.

May the Lord give you and your seed greatness and great glory. May he draw you and your seed near to him from all flesh to serve in His sanctuary as the angels of the presence and the holy ones.⁵

The Qumran community had Judaism’s most sophisticated view of angels. In a fragment of the “Blessings” scroll, the priests were given an angelic blessing by the Master at Qumran,

May you be as an angel of the presence in the Abode of Holiness to the glory of God of the hosts... May you attend upon the service in the Temple of the Kingdom and decree destiny in company with the angels of the presence.⁶

An angelomorphic Qumran liturgical scroll, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, found during excavations at the fortress at Masada, thirty miles south of Qumran, suggests that angelic rites were still being performed during the second half of the first-century C.E., when Matthew’s gospel was written.

In the rabbinic writings, the Jerusalem Temple was portrayed as an earthly reflection of

heaven, a holy sanctuary where angels, organized in hierarchical ranks, worshipped God. The earthly hierarchical Temple priesthood was the physical counterpart of the heavenly angelic priesthood.

Essentially, if an “angel” performed normal human actions then he was an earthly priest. For that reason, Matthew’s “angel of the Lord,” who gave Joseph religious guidance and instruction, a customary duty of the priesthood, must be understood as a priest. He communicated with Joseph because he was directly responsible for his predicament. As with Judah and Boaz before him, the priest/angel fathered a son in the sacred bloodline. As ancestral forefathers in the messianic lineage, Judah and Boaz gave prophetic blessings to their progeny. Likewise, Matthew’s “angel of the Lord” gave a messianic prophecy for *his* child, “he will save his people from their sins.”

ZACHARIAS AS ANGEL

In the Protovangelium, Mary receives news of her impending pregnancy from the angel of the Lord, and asks if she would conceive directly from God;

And she, when she heard it, questioned in herself, saying: Shall I verily conceive of the living God, and bring forth after the manner of all women? And the angel of the Lord said: Not so, Mary, for a power of the Lord shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of the Highest. And thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.⁷

The angel’s response was unequivocal -- ‘Not so, Mary’ -- she would *not* be impregnated miraculously. “A power of the Lord” would “overshadow” her, but the child would be conceived and delivered naturally. When Joseph returned home to find Mary pregnant, he compared himself to Adam, “Is not the story of Adam repeated in me? For as at the hour of his giving thanks the serpent came and found Eve alone and deceived her, so hath it befallen me also.” This was a problem for Joseph.

And Joseph was sore afraid and ceased from speaking unto her (or left her alone), and pondered what he should do with her. And Joseph said: If I hide her sin, I shall be found fighting against the law of the Lord: and if I manifest her unto the children of Israel, I fear lest that which is in her be the seed of an angel, and I shall be found delivering up innocent blood to the judgment of death. What then shall I do?⁸

His concern was that Mary’s child might be “the seed of an angel.” Alternatively, he wondered if a priest was the father, and thus the child was the result of a divinely ordained union. The father could only have been the angel/priest Zacharias, in whose home Mary had stayed while Joseph was away. In the gospel of Thomas, Jesus asked his disciples to describe him.

Jesus said to His disciples, “Compare me to someone and tell Me whom I am like.” Simon Peter said to Him, “You are like a righteous angel.” Thomas 13

In the same scene in the synoptic gospels, Peter testified that Jesus was the living Christ; but “righteous angel,” or priest, may have been a more authentic response. And by definition his father must have been a priest. Bearing in mind that Peter denied knowledge of him shortly afterward, and that the other disciples scattered after his arrest,

it is unlikely Jesus was viewed by them in cosmic Christological terms.

GABRIEL

The angelic priesthood was a hierarchical order, and the name Gabriel was a rank designation for an archangel or high ranking priest. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the priestly/angelic leadership is described as being “in the presence of the Lord,” and Luke introduced the angel of the Lord in the same manner, “I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God.” Luke used Gabriel to suggest that a priestly authority figure orchestrated the dual births of John the Baptist and Jesus. The angel displayed only human characteristics, so there was no reason to interpret him in terms of a supernatural being.

Zacharias was instructed to keep his counsel until the appropriate time: “And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass.” Zacharias complied because “when he came out, he could not speak to them...and remained dumb.”⁹ As a ranking priest, Zacharias himself would have qualified as a Gabriel.

In his last years, Leonardo Da Vinci made a sketch of Gabriel in preparation for a painting to be titled *Angel of the Annunciation*, which was never completed [Plate 17]. The posture is remarkably similar to his portrait of John the Baptist. And Gabriel’s features, facial expression, and hair resemble an elderly version of John. Apparently, Leonardo suggested a connection between Gabriel and John the Baptist.

The depiction of a phallus on Gabriel is the giveaway. Leonardo would not have received a commission to show an angel with an erect penis. Despite the likelihood that Leonardo was homosexual, he was hardly a producer of homo-erotic art. This drawing was part of his alternative religious iconography. What it proves is that Leonardo did not consider the angel a purely spiritual being. He had an overtly sexual or reproductive function. Previously, Leonardo used the phallic motif in *The Virgin on the Rocks* to symbolize Zacharias, the father of Jesus and John. The sketch of the angel bears an uncanny likeness to John the Baptist was because Gabriel was his priestly father, Zacharias.

The face on the most famous portrait in history, Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa* [Plate 18], has similarities to his portrait of John the Baptist and the drawing of Gabriel. All have the same mysterious smile, as though they shared the same secret -- we know something that you will *never* know.

The title *Mona Lisa* was first mentioned thirty years after Leonardo’s death by Giorgio Vasari, who wrote a biographical *Life of the Artists*. *Mona Lisa* was an abbreviation of ‘Madonna (my lady) Elisabeth.’ Leonardo worked on the painting for a decade, but he left no references on it, and *Mona Lisa*’s identity remains a mystery to art historians. Her dress is plain and timeless, and she wears no contemporary jewelry. Who then, was the anonymous Elisabeth to whom Leonardo was so obviously devoted? Contracts exist for all Leonardo’s commissioned works, but not for the *Mona Lisa*. Art “experts,” speculate that as *Mona Lisa* was a labor of love, it must have been a portrait of the wife or daughter of a contemporary Italian merchant or nobleman, for whom Leonardo had a soft spot. This idea is plausible only if one disregards Leonardo’s true spiritual passion.

On his deathbed, Leonardo was found with three of his works, the *Mona Lisa*, *John the Baptist*, and the *Madonna and child with Saint Anne*. None were commissioned. These paintings were deeply personal. *Mona Lisa* was his riposte to the ubiquitous Virgin Mary,

for whom he had little regard. She was Elisabeth, mother of his beloved John the Baptist, and the true 'Holy Mother.' *Mona Lisa* had given birth to the genuine Christ. This explains why Leonardo kept her portrait close at hand, carried it with him on his travels, and constantly reworked it. It was sacred. It was never intended for sale.



Plate 17. Leonardo Da Vinci, *Sketch of the Angel Gabriel*



Leonardo Da Vinci, *John the Baptist*

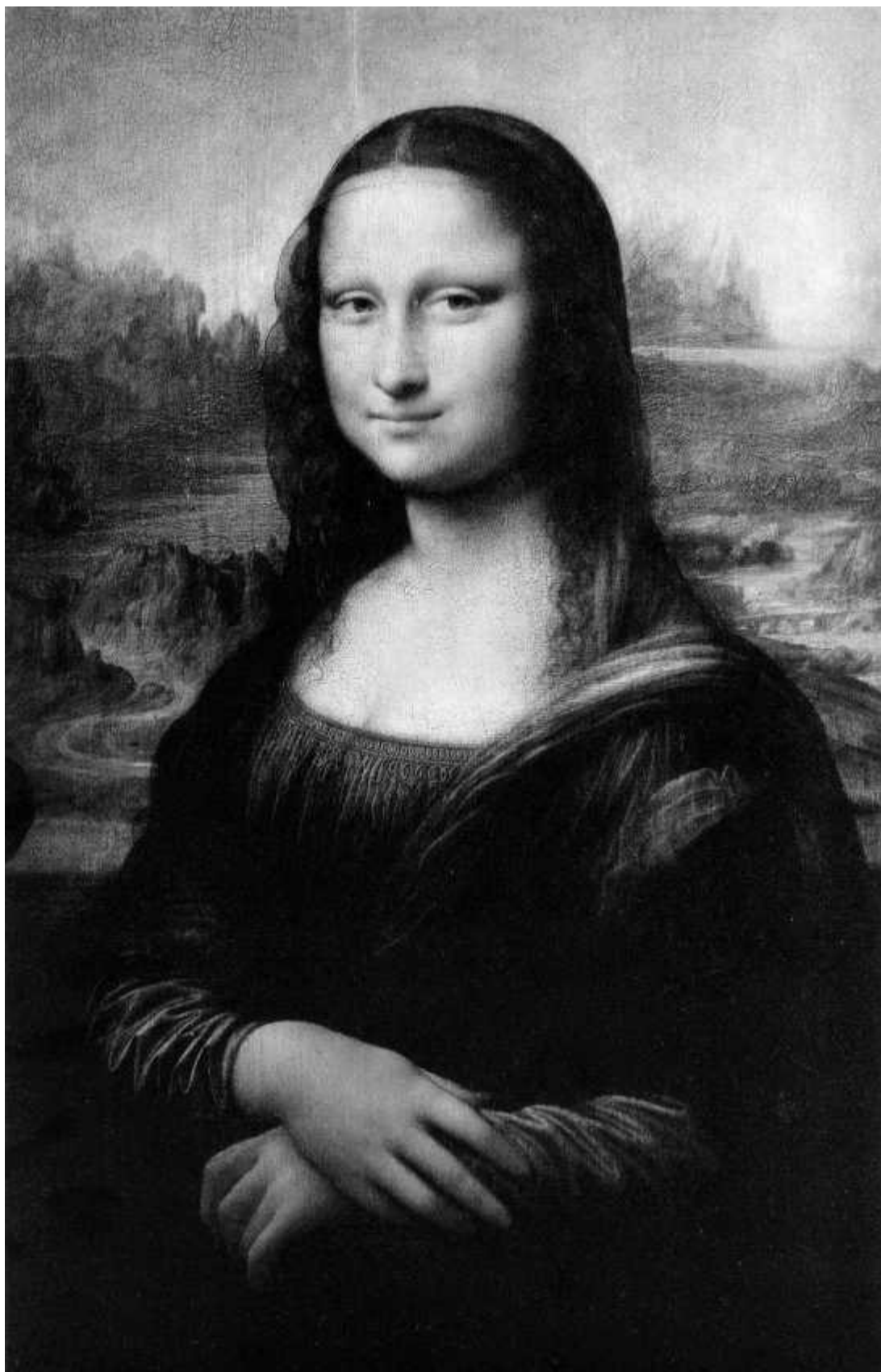


Plate 18. Leonardo Da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*

THE PEACOCK ANGEL

In representations of the annunciation to Mary, Gabriel was sometimes depicted as a “Peacock Angel” [Plates 19 & 19a]. Or alternatively, peacocks were painted in the

background. Worship of the Peacock Angel is an integral part of the secretive Yazidi religion of ethnic Iraqi Kurds, and is mentioned in the sacred books of the Iraqi Mandeans, but its origins are believed to be Zoroastrian. Reverence for the Peacock Angel has led outsiders to accuse Yazidis of ‘Satan’ worship because both are identified with an archangel, assumed to be Lucifer. But the anthropologist E.S. Drower, who lived with both the Yazidis and the Mandeans, was convinced that the meaning of the “Peacock Angel” is as a symbol of man in perfection and not an external supernatural entity.¹⁰



Plate 19. Fra Fillipo Lippi, *The Annunciation*, 1450, National Gallery, London

The beautiful luminescent colors of a peacock's tail feathers derive from different angles of light and not from pigmentation, so made an ideal symbol for high spiritual status in a part of the world where “light” was commonly used as a metaphor for godliness and truth. Within the same context, medieval alchemists used the peacock as a symbol of generation into one of the transformative stages.

In Indian mythology, peacocks are vehicles for the Hindu gods. The golden throne of the former Kings of Delhi was known as the peacock throne. Kings of Babylon and Persia sat on peacock thrones, and today an ornate peacock throne in Golestan Palace, Teheran, remains a symbol of the former Shah of Iran. Ancient Egyptian priests were depicted wearing peacock feather hats, and Renaissance artists often portrayed the Magi similarly attired. Gabriel's peacock feathers showed that he was of an advanced spiritual level; a ranking priest/angel in the Magi/Essene tradition. They also suggest royalty.

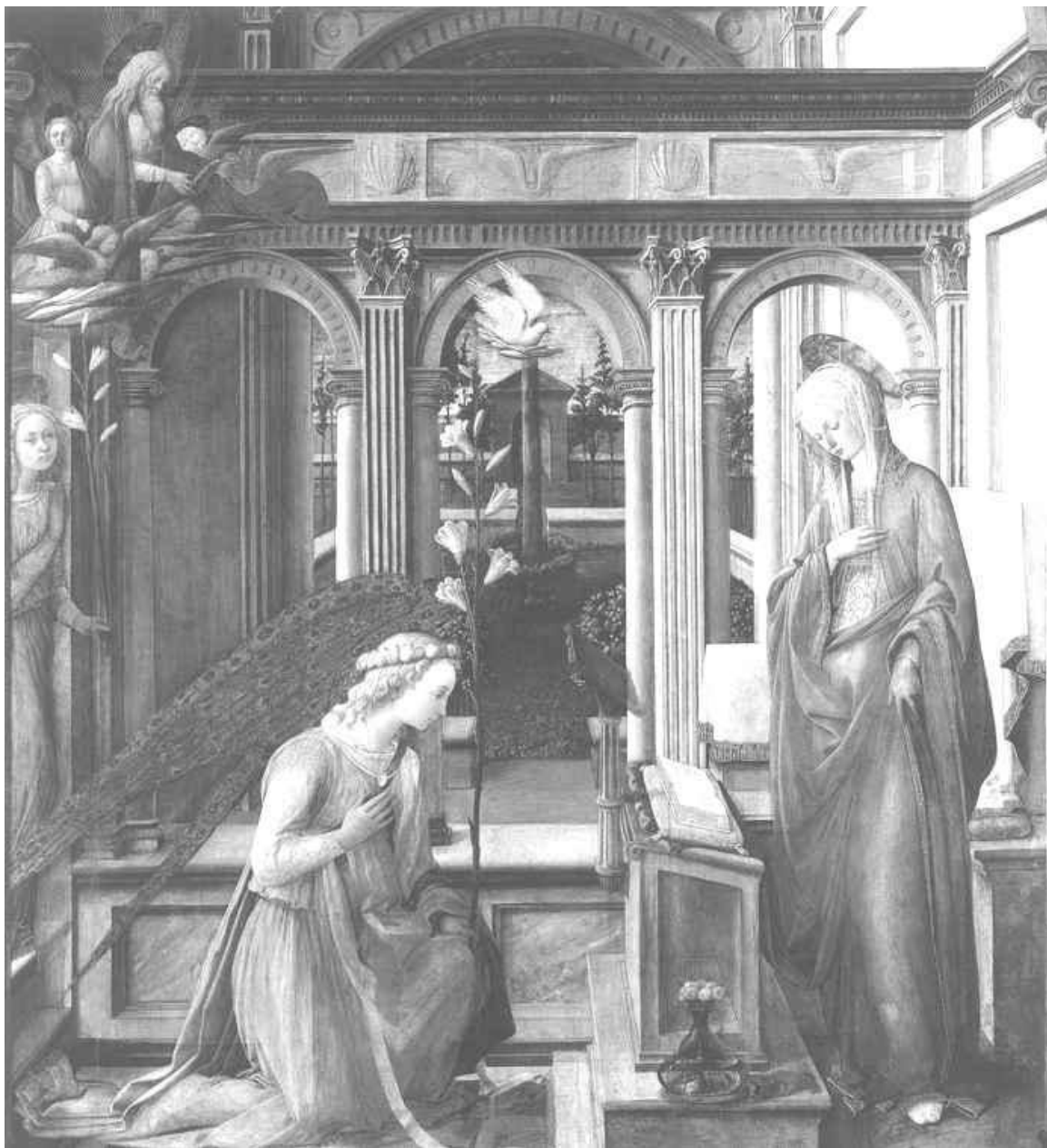


Plate 19a. Fra Filippo Lippi, *Annunciation*, 1443, Munich, Germany

A depiction of the *Adoration of the Magi* was *de rigueur* for early Renaissance artists. Many painted several versions, and some incorporated peacocks into the scene. Art historians explain that the peacock was meant as a symbol of Christ's Resurrection. But the reason given -- that the ancients believed that peacock flesh never died -- is far-fetched. Even if bodily renewal were the message intended by the artists, peacocks would have been featured in crucifixion scenes when Jesus' death was imminent, not at the moment his life was beginning.

In a Botticelli version of the *Adoration of the Magi*, a huge peacock was painted in the top right-hand-corner observing events below [Plates 20 & 20a]. Jesus' father is absent from the picture, but the peacock symbolized his paternal descent from the peacock lineage of Zacharias. In a collaborative painting by Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi [Plate 21], an exaggerated peacock looms over Mary and her child. As the Magi genuflect, a peahen swoops down from the rooftop, as the male bird watches. The peahen represented Elisabeth, wife of Zacharias. The demeanor of the female bird signified Elisabeth's resentment toward Jesus.

In the Hora Church in Istanbul, Turkey, a fourteenth century Byzantine mosaic shows Mary's parents, Joachim and Anne, preparing to hand her over to Zacharias. As they hold Mary lovingly, a large peacock stands to the right, next to a building representing the Temple. The peacock symbolizes Zacharias and the messianic lineage that was to be Mary's destiny [Plate 24].



Plate 24. Mosaic, *Scene from the Life of Mary*, 14th century, Hora Church, Istanbul, Turkey (Art Resource)

FORBIDDEN FRUITS

One of the boldest Renaissance artists was the Venetian master Carlo Crivelli (c.1435 -- c.1495). Crivelli painted numerous versions of the 'Madonna and Child,' and most share the same distinctive feature -- branches of oversized ripe fruit, more often than not apples, painted above Mary's head, and beneath her feet. Usually, the baby Jesus sits in Mary's lap, holding an apple. Art historians suggest that apples symbolized Mary's special fertility, and that Jesus was the 'fruit' of her womb. But Crivelli also liked to include another 'fruit' in his paintings. It resembled a zucchini or cucumber in appearance, but was usually upright, which is not how these vegetables grow naturally. Neither, of course, do they grow in trees [Plates 22 & 23]. Technically, such 'fruit' does not exist, but was used by Crivelli because of its conspicuously phallic shape. It is not difficult to guess what his purpose was.



Plate 20. Sandro Botticelli, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1485, National Gallery, London

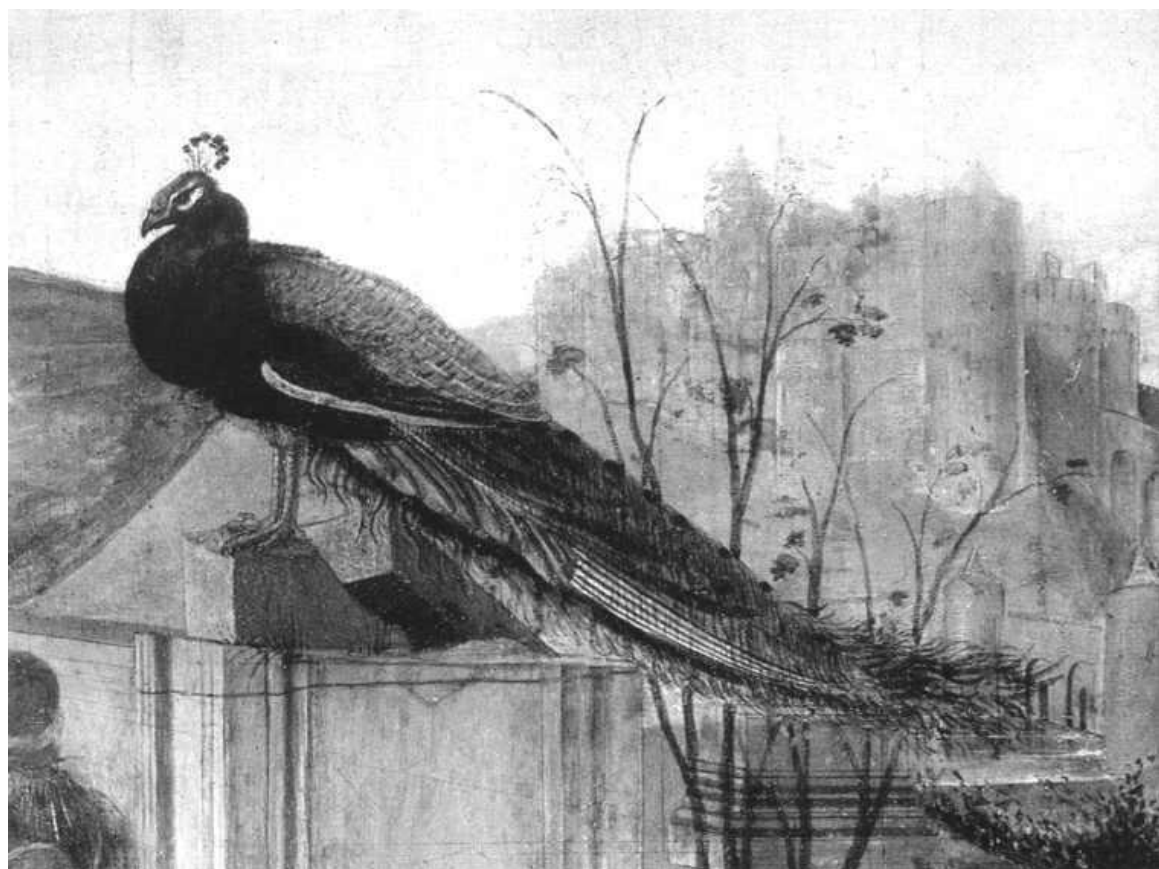


Plate 20a. Detail of Peacock



Plate 21. Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi, 1445, *Adoration of the Magi*, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Traditionally, the apple was designated as the sexually suggestive 'forbidden fruit' of the Garden of Eden, 'eaten' by Eve. The Church claimed that the apple signified that Mary had restored Eve's sin. For Crivelli, a zucchini paired with an apple represented the masculine and feminine reproductive principle by which Jesus was created.



Plate 22. Carlo Crivelli, *Virgin and Child*, c. 1480



Plate 23. Carlo Crivelli, *Madonna and Child*, c. 1485

In his painting, *The Madonna of the Swallow*, Crivelli painted a lone swallow in the top left-hand corner [Plate 25]. Predictably, the Church interpretation of the swallow, which often featured in Renaissance art, was as another symbol of the resurrection. Swallows disappeared every year and nobody knew where they went. Jesus similarly departed before he too returned. This notion conveniently overlooks the popular connotation of a solitary swallow, derived from Aesop's fable and expressed in the aphorism, "one swallow does not a summer make." Things are not what they seem. Beware of false assumptions. Crivelli used the swallow to convey a specific message about the Virgin Mary. She was *not* a virgin.

In Crivelli's *Annunciation with St Emidius* [Plate 26], a ray of light, showing Mary's divine calling, descends from the skies and rests on her head, while a large peacock is perched overhead. At the base of the picture, in the center foreground, are the two ever-present fruits, an apple and a zucchini. Representing male and female, they symbolized the sexual relationship between the peacock/Zacharias and Mary that fulfilled her divine mission.

MISCEGENATION

The idea of miscegenation, or inter-species breeding, between supernatural beings and humans has been around a long time. In ancient Palestine, it may have held some currency among the common population, but not among the scribes and intellectual elite. Only man was made in the image and likeness of God. Adam was the son of God, and as such only he had the divine spark that made him a co creator.

In the Second Temple era, the greatest care went into aligning families by marriage for the sake of lineage and the purity of the community. This elaborate and painstakingly built foundation would be rendered obsolete if beings from other dimensions or other worlds could create human children.

References to sexual relationships between angels and women were made in the Enochic literature, in the sixth chapter of Genesis, and also by early Christian writers.¹¹ Apparently, these angelic liaisons produced offspring that caused havoc in human society. The first thirty-six chapters of the Book of Enoch, known collectively as the *Book of the Watchers*, contain details of how these fallen angels taught women the secrets of makeup and jewelry in order to beautify themselves. These angels seduced, married, and even had children by earthly women.

The meaning of this type of religious literature, when taken only at face value, can never be fully grasped. Inevitably, it is classed as imaginative fiction, having little, if any, basis in reality. For Jewish scribes, however, the religious and the secular were indistinguishable one from the other. And the often neglected political component of sacred texts was usually the driving force behind their composition.

When read as a polemic against a sexually corrupt priesthood, the *Book of Watchers* makes sense. “Fallen angels” were priests who had married Gentile women or taken Gentile concubines, and had illegitimate children by them. As a result, they were judged to have ruined the sexual and racial purity of the Israelite community.



Plate 25. Carlo Crivelli, *Madonna of the Swallow*, 1480, National Gallery, London



Plate 26. Carlo Crivelli, *Annunciation with St. Emidius*, 1485, National Gallery, London

This was a betrayal of heaven's purpose, for which these rebellious priest/angels incurred the wrath of God.

The Enochic writings were composed after the return from Babylon, when it was determined that a sexually corrupt priesthood had been responsible for previous Israelite

misfortunes. Misbehavior by the Temple priesthood was probably a concern ever since the days of Solomon, but reformers during the Second Temple period consistently blamed society's trials and tribulations on the priestly leadership's failure to follow the laws on sexual purity. The Qumran sect, who greatly revered the Enochic literature, was a prime example of a dissident movement that believed a morally corrupt Temple priesthood had betrayed the nation.

SON OF BARACHIAH?

The theological formula that Matthew wove into Jesus' genealogy was intended to prove the same thing as the Lucan nativities -- the father of Jesus was a respected priest. Zacharias qualified as a man of high standing in the community, older and wiser than Mary. Mary was proactive in their relationship in that she visited the house of Zacharias while still betrothed to Joseph. And to complete the triangulation model, Joseph was described as a chaste innocent. Matthew definitely knew of Zacharias, because he referenced the same 'Q' saying that Luke used.

Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zacharias the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this generation.

Matthew 23:34-35

The insertion of the extra identifier, "son of Barachiah," is suspiciously out of place. As previously noted, Zacharias was a contemporary figure, bracketed with Abel to cover the span of chronology in its entirety. The author of the Book of Zechariah (Hebrew spelling of the Greek 'Zacharias'), a minor prophet in the Old Testament, was known as the son of "Berechiah."¹² The introduction dates its composition as the second year of the reign of Darius I, which was 520 B.C.E.

Jesus, therefore, had no interest in this particular Zacharias. Moreover, there is no record anywhere of him being murdered. So why then, did Matthew add "son of Barachiah" to the original quotation? He didn't. It was a clumsy attempt by a later Christian editor to alter the meaning of the original to derail unwanted speculation on the identity of Zacharias.¹³ There are several instances of this practice in the gospels, and the prime motivation was usually to cover up potential embarrassments. Those who knew the facts were determined, for reasons of theological necessity, to keep them hidden.

Although Jesus' genealogy was composed from a particular esoteric viewpoint, Matthew was not necessarily being theologically wise after the event. Even if this privileged information had been widely known and accepted among the scripturally educated, it does not follow they would have believed in Jesus. In ancient Palestine, political expediency always trumped a theological claim, whatever its merits. Without powerful backers and widespread popular support, no messianic candidate would be taken seriously by the religious leadership, regardless of his credentials.

His interpretation of illicit sexual triangles did not originate with Matthew. It was an ancient oral tradition inherited by the Essene movement. But certain Essenes, who understood the dispensation of holy births, had an extraordinary commitment to the messianic ideal. Convinced they were God's agents, they meticulously planned to

'create' the Messiah. At the root of their philosophy was the opinion that God would not do everything for the Jews. Rather than wait for the Messiah, people had to take responsibility. The Messiah had to be brought into the world and nurtured for his life's mission. And that was the task of the Essene elite.