

# MARY IN THE LUCAN INFANCY NARRATIVE

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## I

EXEGETIC, as I understand it, is the art of expounding an author's work in his terms rather than in yours. It is the attempt to overcome any cultural and conceptual gap which may exist between his 'then' and your 'now' in order to gain insight into his work and to appreciate what it meant for his age rather than what it has come to mean for ours. On one level exegesis is therefore a very narrow (in the sense of 'limited') exercise. Of course, the claim to be able to bridge the gap of some two thousand years is impossible from the start. However much one steep oneself in the history, language and literature of an ancient culture, inevitably one's view will be coloured by one's own cultural inheritance. Apart from anything else, we all tend to see what we are interested in and to ignore what we are not.

Luke himself stands within a tradition.<sup>1</sup> He has inherited material upon which he has put his own particular stamp or interpretation. The problem is that, whereas we may evaluate any modern expositor's interpretation against his text, i.e. the NT, in the case of the Infancy Narrative, we have not got to hand the sources which Luke used. Therefore we cannot easily distinguish what was given from what he has made of it. In the case of the main body of the Third Gospel, we are reasonably sure that he used Mark's Gospel, together with a sayings source (Q) which he had in common with Matthew. Therefore, by analysing his use of these two sources we can see what use he has made of his inherited tradition. However, when it comes to the opening two chapters of Luke we are in a quandary, because Mark and Q do not contain a birth narrative. The only comparable material is to be found in Mt 1-2, and this is not very helpful, because most scholars are agreed that Luke's infancy narrative is independent from that found in Matthew.<sup>2</sup> So much so that Raymond Brown is led to say, 'Despite ingenious attempts at harmonization the basic stories are irreconcilable'.<sup>3</sup> So a comparison of the treatment of the birth of Christ in Matthew and Luke does not of itself help us to reconstruct the traditions which

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<sup>1</sup> There is a vast amount written on this subject. See for example the bibliography in Laurentin, René: *Structure et Théologie de Luc I-II* (Paris, 1964), pp 191-226.

<sup>2</sup> For the contrary view, that Luke knew not only Matthew's Birth Narrative, but sets out to expand it, see Goulder, M. D. and Sanderson, M. L.: 'St Luke's Genesis', in *Journal of Theological Studies* (JTS), 8 (1957), pp 13 f.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, Raymond E.: *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (London/Dublin, 1973), pp 53 ff.

lie behind the narratives. Certainly scholars have attempted to do so,<sup>4</sup> but their results have been so conjectural that they seem totally unable to agree as to the nature and extent of these sources, and consequently unable to distinguish source from redactor. If we take the great canticles, the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus*, as examples, NT scholars cannot agree as to whether these are the creation of Luke or are taken and used by him from other sources. Some affirm that their original language was hebrew or aramaic and that at the most Luke is merely responsible for translating these semitic sources into greek.<sup>5</sup> Other scholars are equally certain that semitisms in the language of these hymns are the product of Luke's conscious imitation of the style of the LXX<sup>6</sup> — an imitation wholly appropriate to an exposition of the birth of Jesus in terms of the fulfilment of OT prophecy,<sup>7</sup> or, to put it more exactly, an exposition which makes the claim that the messianic age has dawned and that one striking evidence of this is the re-emergence of the prophetic activity.

The problem of trying to determine the sources behind the Infancy Narrative is similar to that of trying to determine the sources which may lie behind Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles. As Paul Minear has put it,

Scholars' inability to agree on the sources underlying Acts is a reminder of how difficult it would be to recover the sources of the gospel if Mark and Matthew had not been preserved. Luke is so able an editor that many, if not most, of the marks of his pen are irrecoverable except where we have access to Mark and Q.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from sources, another difficulty which confronts us is how are we to classify the Infancy Narrative in Luke? With what kind of literary *genre* are we dealing? Has it grown out of the early Church's desire for biographical details about the genesis of Jesus? Certainly such a motive can be seen at work in the production of the apocryphal gospels which sprung up early in the Church's life. Gospels such as the Protogospel of James and the Gospel of Thomas<sup>9</sup> have infancy narratives clearly designed to satisfy a very natural, human curiosity about the details of Christ's birth. And not only about the central figure, Jesus,

<sup>4</sup> For recent research on the possible sources cf Oliver H. H.: 'The Lucan Birth Stories and the purpose of Luke-Acts', in *New Testament Studies* (NTS), 10 (1963-64), pp 205-15.

<sup>5</sup> Cf Burrows, Eric, and Sutcliffe, E. F.: *The Gospel of the Infancy and other essays* (London, 1940), p 36; Sahlin, H.: *Der Messias und das Gottesvolk: Studien zur protolukanischen theologie* (Uppsala, 1945); Laurentin, R., *op. cit.*, p 13; Winter, P.: 'Some observations on the language of the Birth and Infancy stories in the Third Gospel', NTS 1 (1954-55), pp 111-21.

<sup>6</sup> Cf Turner, N.: 'The relation of Luke I, II, to Hebraic sources and to the rest of Luke-Acts', NTS 2 (1955-56), pp 100-9. Goulder, M. D. and Sanderson, M. L., *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> For the view that fulfilment of prophecy is a *motif* which pervades Luke-Acts, see Schubert, Paul: 'The structure and significance of Luke 24', in *Neotestamentliche studien für R. Bultmann* (Berlin, 1957).

<sup>8</sup> Minear, Paul S.: 'Luke's use of the Birth Stories', in *Studies in Luke-Acts* (London, 1968), p 112.

<sup>9</sup> Cf Hennecke, E.: *New Testament Apocrypha* (London, 1973), pp 370-401.

but about the 'supporting cast' in the great drama. Therefore they set out to fill in the details as to who Mary's parents were, to recount her own miraculous birth, to tell of the disbelief of one of the midwives attendant at the birth that a virgin could have a child. Joseph — so much in the background in the lucan account — also has a greater role in these narratives. We are told of his previous marriage and of his life as a carpenter.

When we compare the biblical accounts with those found in these apocryphal gospels, what is most striking is not merely the restraint in the former, but the subordination of all the characters to the main figure in the drama — Jesus. In the apocryphal works the main concern seems to be to tell a good tale, whereas in the canonical gospels the predominant concern is to proclaim a saviour. In the one, therefore, narrative interests become dominant; in the other it is theological rather than biographical motivation which comes to the fore. In other words, the NT accounts are not primarily written to answer the question, 'What happened at the birth of Christ?', but to provide a theological reflection upon that birth, in the light of the Church's subsequent experience of the resurrection.

Furthermore, the primary data for that theological reflection was not only the traditions about Jesus but also the OT. In Matthew this is obvious, not least because the evangelist himself makes it overt. By using the formula, 'All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet',<sup>10</sup> he tells us clearly that he is viewing the events of the birth of Christ against the backcloth of the OT.<sup>11</sup> When we look at the Infancy Narrative in the Third Gospel, we find no such direct reference to the OT. But this does not mean that Luke's account is any the less a reflection upon scripture. It is simply that his method of introducing his texts is different from that of Matthew. Rather than use direct quotations he employs a whole welter of allusions to the OT. This is most obvious in the canticles. These great hymns of thanksgiving and praise, put into the mouths of Mary and Zechariah, are a *pastiche* made up of phrases taken from the Jewish scriptures.<sup>12</sup> Anyone who has sat through the 'Long Prayer' in a nonconformist service will immediately recognize the *genre*. There the minister in his extemporaneous prayer will probably utilize almost exclusively the language of the Authorized Version (with perhaps a passing reference to the *Book of Common Prayer* thrown in for good measure) as he articulates the petitions of the people. Sometimes these references will be conscious and deliberate, recalling the people and events of the biblical narrative in his recitation of the mighty acts of God. Frequently these references will be unconscious; the product of a mind steeped in the cadences of the King James Version.

<sup>10</sup> Mt 1, 22. Cf Mt 2, 5. 15. 17. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Mt 1, 23 (Isai 7, 14); 2, 6 (Mic 5, 2); 2, 15 (Hos 11, 1); 2, 18 (Jer 31, 15) (2, 23 does not correspond to any known OT text).

<sup>12</sup> Cf Plummer, A.: *The Gospel according to S. Luke* (Edinburgh, 1922), pp 30, 31, 39, for examples of OT phraseology employed in the *Magnificat* and *Benedictus*.

Similarly, Luke is so steeped in the language and thought of the OT that the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus* abound in both. And the same can be said, not only of the canticles, but also of the narrative sections of Luke's account of the birth of Christ.

In both Jewish and Christian traditions scripture has been thought to require a contemporary interpretation. That is, after all, how the canon of scripture itself grew up — as a result of the contemporizing of past tradition by subsequent generations. Thus the chronicler, wanting to speak to the condition of the returned exiles, looked back upon the tradition of the deuteronomic historian and reinterpreted it in such a way that the Israel of his generation could see themselves as the heirs of the Davidic covenant, even after monarchy had long come to an end. Similarly, Luke uses OT traditions to lay claim to the Davidic promises for Jesus of Nazareth, and to appropriate the promises made to the old Israel for the Church.

Meditation upon the OT with a view to giving it a contemporary application is sometimes designated Midrash.<sup>13</sup> Certainly the rabbinic midrashists of the post-Christian era attempted to do just that: i.e. starting from the scriptural text, they tried to interpret and expound it in such a way as to make it applicable to their situation. But the important thing to notice is that in Midrash the starting point is always the text.<sup>14</sup> This is in contrast to the method used in the Infancy Narratives of the NT. Here the aim of the evangelists is not to expound the OT but to tell a new story, the birth of Jesus, utilizing scripture as illustrative material where it suits their purposes. Therefore, it is misleading to speak of the Infancy Narratives as Midrash.<sup>15</sup> The text for the midrashists' sermon is the OT, whereas the 'text' for the evangelists' gospel is Christ.

So far I have said very little in any direct fashion about the subject of Mary in the Lucan Infancy Narrative. Well, all the best gardeners tell me that I must first clear and prepare the ground before I can begin to sow! And what I have been trying to establish so far is that Luke's Gospel is primarily the work of a theologian and *littérateur*; that his Infancy Narrative is a reflection upon the birth of Jesus in the light of the OT; that apart from the OT itself it is extremely difficult to know anything of the sources that he used; and that Luke's main motive is not to provide biographical data, but to expound the theological significance of the incarnation.

The implications this has for our approach to the role of Mary in Luke will, I hope, emerge as we proceed. In summary they are: (a) that I think we can know very little of the Christian source or sources used by the redactor of the

<sup>13</sup> Bloch, Renée: 'Midrash', in *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément V* (Paris, 1957), cols 1265-6.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, Addison G., *The literary genre Midrash* (New York, 1967), properly insists upon more precision in the use of the term Midrash. He argues against those (e.g. R. Bloch) who would employ the term of virtually any meditation or exposition which employs scripture. For Wright, it should be kept for exposition which starts from the scriptural text.

<sup>15</sup> Cf Wright, *op. cit.*, pp 139-42, *contra* Laurentin, *op. cit.*, pp 93-96, and Bloch, *op. cit.*, col 1279.

Third Gospel. Therefore, assertions that Mary herself was a primary source of Luke 1-2 remain conjectural; (b) that unlike the apocryphal gospels, Luke's motive is not primarily to satisfy the need for biographical data about the events of the nativity, but to provide theological insight into their significance. I believe that this is born out by a study of Mary in Luke, and I hope to show that it is not Mary *qua* person who particularly interests the evangelist, but Mary *qua* symbol; and finally, (c) that it is the OT which provides the key to understanding this symbol.

## II

Firstly I would like to deal with the contention that Luke is not primarily interested in Mary as a person. In none of the synoptic gospels does Mary have a role to play in the ministry of Jesus. Only in the Fourth Gospel does she appear, and then at the beginning and the end of Christ's ministry, i.e. at the wedding feast at Cana,<sup>16</sup> and in company with Mary of Cleopas and Mary Magdalene at the cross.<sup>17</sup> The various Marys mentioned by Matthew<sup>18</sup> and Mark<sup>19</sup> as being present at the crucifixion merely become 'the women' in Luke.<sup>20</sup>

A similar apparent lack of interest in the person of Mary is displayed in the lucan version of Mark's account of Jesus teaching in the synagogue on the sabbath. Whereas Mark has the audience saying, 'Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?'<sup>21</sup> Matthew has, 'Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?'<sup>22</sup> Luke, on the other hand, omits all reference to Mary. In his version we find, 'Is not this Joseph's son?'<sup>23</sup> It is this kind of evidence which has led Hans Conzelmann to write, 'Mary disappears to a greater extent in Luke, than in Mark and Matthew!'<sup>24</sup>

In all three synoptic gospels we have the story of the visit of Mary and the brothers to see Jesus,<sup>25</sup> and in spite of the fact that Luke appears to abbreviate the marcan account, the same point is made.

Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.  
But he said to them, My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.<sup>26</sup>

Thus we can see that in all three gospels Mary *qua* kinswoman is not only unimportant, but where she is depicted in that role she is used as an example

<sup>16</sup> Jn 2, 1-11.      <sup>17</sup> Jn 19, 25-27.      <sup>18</sup> Mt 27, 55 ff.      <sup>19</sup> Mk 15, 40.

<sup>20</sup> Lk 23, 49.      <sup>21</sup> Mk 6, 3.      <sup>22</sup> Mt 13, 55.

<sup>23</sup> Lk 6, 42; cf Jn 6, 42, 'is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?'

<sup>24</sup> Conzelmann, H.: *The theology of St Luke* (London, 1960), p 172.

<sup>25</sup> Mk 3, 31-5; Mt 12, 46-50; Lk 8, 19-21.

<sup>26</sup> Lk, 8, 20f; cf 1QH IX, 34f: 'Until I am old Thou wilt care for me: for my father knew me not and my mother abandoned me to Thee. For Thou art a father to all the sons of Thy truth and as a woman who tenderly loves her babe so dost Thou rejoice in them'. Vermes, G.: *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London, 1968), p 182.

of the secondary importance of human attachment compared with divine affiliation. 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple'.<sup>27</sup> What is true for those who would be the sons of God was also true for the Son of God.

The supremacy of the family of God over the natural family is brought out even more pointedly in a saying only recorded in Luke:

As he said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked! But he said, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!<sup>28</sup>

It seems unlikely that this was included in Luke's Gospel as a warning against undue reverence of Mary! Within its context it is clearly intended as a warning to the Jews against any assumption that physical descent was a guarantee of God's gracious favour. Here Jesus is making the same point made by John the Baptist: 'Do not begin to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham'.<sup>29</sup>

So far, then, we have seen that Luke has very little place for Mary in his account of Christ's ministry, that he seems to have scant interest in her as a person, and furthermore, that of all the evangelists, he seems more willing to depict her as a type of the old Israel which Christ came to supercede.

You may ask why I have been looking at the role of Mary in the rest of the Third Gospel and not simply concentrating upon the Infancy Narrative? What has my discussion so far got to do with the first two chapters of the gospel? Contemporary NT scholarship has indeed tended to isolate these chapters from the rest of the Lucan corpus, treating them, for one reason or another, as if they were wholly other; as if they had very little to do with the rest of Luke's work. And this is a particularly surprising phenomenon when one bears in mind that recent exegesis has insisted upon the homogeneity of Lucan theology. It was, I think, Paul Minear, in his article in the *Festschrift* for Paul Schubert, who first pointed out this anomaly.<sup>30</sup> Minear has powerfully, and I believe convincingly, argued the case for regarding the Infancy Narrative as an integral part of the Lucan corpus and therefore not to be isolated from the whole. Consequently, in looking at the place of Mary in Luke, I have eschewed the usual practice of concentrating exclusively upon the Birth Stories, without reference to the rest of Luke-Acts. One thing that emerges if we start with the main body of the gospel; Luke depicts Mary as an example of the old Israel. What we must now consider is whether the same can be said of Lk 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> Lk 14, 25 ff. Cf Mt 10, 35-37.

<sup>28</sup> Lk 11, 27 ff.

<sup>29</sup> Lk 3, 8. Cf Mt 3, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Minear, *op. cit.*, pp 111-30.

Let us start with the last scene at the end of chapter two.<sup>31</sup> This is the occasion of Jesus's *bar mitzvah*, when, at the age of twelve he took upon himself the full responsibilities of adult membership of Israel. He went up, we are told, in company with his parents, to the Jerusalem temple. However, unknown to them, he did not set out on the homeward journey with the rest of the party, but stayed behind to listen to, and to question the Doctors of the Law. When his parents did eventually find him, Mary said to him:

Son, why have you treated us so? Behold your father and I have been looking for you anxiously. And he said to them. How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?<sup>32</sup> And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them.<sup>33</sup>

Here Mary and Joseph are depicted as displaying the same kind of lack of comprehension, as to the true nature and destiny of Christ, as did the disciples.<sup>34</sup> It is only after the resurrection that they are to understand the significance of the Christ event. Until then, Mary had to keep these things in her heart without grasping their full import. Therefore she, as much as the disciples, was to be in need of the pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit. Luke's last mention of Mary is in the company of the disciples, meeting together for prayer in the upper room in Jerusalem.<sup>35</sup> By implication she is among those who received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In the lucan view until that time the Church, the new Israel, is not yet born. Therefore, in the period of the ministry, Mary remains an example of the Israel from whom that new creation is to come.

Some commentators<sup>36</sup> would view the incident of the twelve year old Jesus in the temple as the climax and final scene in the Infancy Narrative. Undoubtedly there are links between this incident and what has gone before. See for example the reiterated refrain of Mary 'keeping all these things in her heart' both at the end of this scene<sup>37</sup> and after the visit of the shepherds.<sup>38</sup> Similarly the refrain of growth, 'And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, in favour with God and man,<sup>39</sup> is taken from the Birth Story where, we are told, that Jesus, 'grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favour of God was upon him'.<sup>40</sup> However, it seems preferable to regard this pericope as an introduction to the succeeding series of episodes rather than as a conclusion to the preceding ones.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Lk 2, 41-52.

<sup>32</sup> *En tois tou patros mou* can be translated 'engaged in my Father's business', but most commentators prefer 'In my Father's house'. See Plummer, *op. cit.*, pp 77 ff.

<sup>33</sup> Lk 2, 48-50. <sup>34</sup> Cf Lk 9, 45; 18, 34. <sup>35</sup> Acts 1, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Cf Laurentin, *op. cit.*, pp 28-33; Burrow, *op. cit.*, 4-6; Gächter, P.: *Maria im erdenlegen Neutestamentliche Marienstudien* (Innsbruck, 1954), p 12.

<sup>37</sup> Lk 2, 51.

<sup>38</sup> Lk 2, 19.

<sup>39</sup> Lk 2, 52. Cf 1 Sam 2, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Lk 2, 40. Cf Lk 1, 80.

<sup>41</sup> Cf Earle Ellis, E.: *The Gospel of Luke* (London, 1966), pp 30-33, 84.

The following narratives are all concerned with the attestation of the messiahship of Jesus. The scene in the temple, whilst acting as a bridge between the nativity and the adult ministry of Jesus, has as its main thrust the introduction of the next group of narratives whose common theme is the attestation of Jesus as the Christ. Therefore in this opening scene we are presented with a story to illustrate Jesus's own growing consciousness of this, a consciousness which is affirmed and confirmed in the succeeding narratives about John the Baptist, Jesus's baptism, his genealogy, the temptations, and, to complete the section, his preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth. If this interpretation is correct, then the reference to Mary's lack of understanding is not primarily with regard to the events of the nativity which have just taken place, but has a forward reference — to the significance of the ministry which is about to begin.

This brings us to the Infancy Narrative. What role does Mary play here? That she is one of the central figures in the drama is evident, and this would seem to be in contrast to what I have been saying about the rest of the gospel. Yet, having said that Mary is one of the central figures in the narrative, it is equally important to remember that in Luke's story she is only one among a number of characters, such as Elisabeth, Zechariah, Simeon and Anna. Furthermore, she, no less than they, is not the central character in the drama. The Infancy Narrative is not the story of Mary, nor of John the Baptist, but the story of Jesus. Therefore, we must be careful not to focus our attention upon Mary in such a way as to distort the whole picture. Indeed it is only when we analyse her role within the total context of the narrative that we can understand her significance. If we isolate her from the rest of the characters, we shall not only be guilty of distortion, but we shall fail to grasp why, when she has such a small part to play in the rest of the gospel, she should be given such prominence at the beginning.

So first let us see how Luke depicts Mary as one among many. One of the more obvious features of the Lucan Infancy Narrative is the way the evangelist parallels the story of the birth of Jesus with that of John. Note the striking similarities, in language and structure, between the annunciation to Zechariah<sup>42</sup> and the annunciation to Mary.<sup>43</sup> In both instances we are told why the two women had not conceived; in the case of Elisabeth, because she was barren, and in the case of Mary, because she was a virgin.<sup>44</sup> The angel Gabriel appears first to Zechariah and then to Mary,<sup>45</sup> at which both are troubled (the Greek would suggest that Mary's perplexity was even greater than that of Zechariah).<sup>46</sup> Both are told by the angel not to fear, and are assured of the birth of a son.<sup>47</sup> In each case they are told what to call the boy,<sup>48</sup> and the future of their respective offspring is predicted.<sup>49</sup> Both Zechariah and Mary query the angel's message,<sup>50</sup> and are given a sign; Zechariah is to be struck dumb, whereas the sign to Mary

<sup>42</sup> Lk 1, 5-23.    <sup>43</sup> Lk 1, 26-38.    <sup>44</sup> Lk 1, 7, 27, 34.    <sup>45</sup> Lk 1, 12, 27.

<sup>46</sup> Lk 1, 12, *etarachthē*. Cf Lk 1, 29, *dietarachthē*.

<sup>47</sup> Lk 1, 13, 30.    <sup>48</sup> Lk 1, 13, 31.    <sup>49</sup> Lk 1, 15-17, 32 ff.    <sup>50</sup> Lk 1, 18, 34.

is to be the conception of her kinswoman, Elisabeth.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the parallels are not confined to the annunciations; they are continued in the stories of the births of John and Jesus. So, Luke tells us, there was joy at both nativities,<sup>52</sup> a joy which gives voice in the outburst of prophetic praise with which each child is greeted upon his presentation in the temple,<sup>53</sup> after circumcision.<sup>54</sup> Both children 'grew and became strong'.<sup>55</sup> These parallels in structure and language are so marked that René Laurentin has called them a 'diptych';<sup>56</sup> they are like the two complimentary leaves of a painting on an altarpiece.

Since Luke presents the stories of John and Jesus as a diptych, it is not surprising that he also parallels Mary and Elisabeth. Both not only fulfil a parental function, but that very function is interpreted as evidence of divine favour,<sup>57</sup> because they are to give birth to sons who 'shall be great'.<sup>58</sup> Just as Mary is portrayed as one with Elisabeth in being the recipient of God's mercy, so her solidarity with the rest of the characters in the narrative is also evident. Elisabeth, Zechariah, Simeon and Anna are depicted as representatives of the faithful of Israel [the *dikaioi*]:<sup>59</sup> those who are 'looking for the consolation of Israel'.<sup>60</sup> These are the poor, not simply in the economic sense, but the 'poor in spirit',<sup>61</sup> the poor of Yahweh, the *anawim*:<sup>62</sup> those who are able to welcome God with a genuine, open humility. Like successive generations of the 'remnant' of God's people, they prayerfully and eagerly awaited the coming of the Messiah; like John the Baptist, they were his forerunners, who 'went before the face of the Lord to prepare his way'.<sup>63</sup> And it is among their number that Luke includes Mary.<sup>64</sup> She is the slave of the Lord,<sup>65</sup> whose humility<sup>66</sup> has been rewarded by the birth of the Messiah. In her song, the *Magnificat*, she articulates the faith of the *anawim*; that Yahweh will reverse the world's scale of values and reward his remnant, the faithful of Israel:

He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Lk 1, 20-23, 36.

<sup>52</sup> Lk 1, 58; 2, 20.

<sup>53</sup> Lk 1, 68-79; 2, 29-35.

<sup>54</sup> Lk 1, 59; 2, 21.

<sup>55</sup> Lk 1, 80; 2, 40. Cf 2, 52.

<sup>56</sup> Laurentin, *op. cit.*, pp 32 f.

<sup>57</sup> Lk 1, 30, 58.

<sup>58</sup> Lk 1, 15; 2, 32.

<sup>59</sup> Lk 1, 6; 2, 25. Cf 2, 36-38.

<sup>60</sup> Lk 2, 28. Cf 2, 38.

<sup>61</sup> Mt 5, 3. Cf Lk 6, 20.

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of the *anawim* see Gelin, Albert: *The poor of Jahweh* (Collegeville, Minnesota, 1964).

<sup>63</sup> Lk 1, 76.

<sup>64</sup> Cf Gelin, *op. cit.*, pp 91-98.

<sup>65</sup> Lk 1, 38.

<sup>66</sup> Lk 1, 48, *tapeinosis*.

<sup>67</sup> Lk 1, 51-53.

## III

However, it is not merely as one of the *anawim* that Mary is presented; it is as the epitome of their faith that she is portrayed, and therein lies her prominence in the narrative. 'Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord'.<sup>68</sup> Whereas Zechariah's objection to Gabriel's annunciation is interpreted as lack of faith and, hence, rebuked.<sup>69</sup> Mary's objection, 'How shall this be, since I have no husband?',<sup>70</sup> is taken as a straight question; and her response, in contrast to Zechariah's, is portrayed as one of submission to the will of God, 'Let it be to me according to your word'.<sup>71</sup> So Mary is not only one of the *anawim*, but is the supreme example of the faithful of Israel who pave the way for the Messiah and from whom he was to spring. As such she is greeted by Gabriel as one who is the recipient of God's grace [*kecharitōmenē*].<sup>72</sup>

However, we must not lose sight of the reason for Mary's supremacy over the other *anawim*. In his story of her visit to Elisabeth, Luke tells us quite clearly why Mary is 'blessed . . . among women'; it is because the fruit of her womb is blessed.<sup>73</sup> She is honoured by Elisabeth as the mother of the Lord.<sup>74</sup> Throughout the entire Infancy Narrative she remains 'the handmaid of the Lord'. Therefore, any contrasts which Luke expresses between Mary and the other characters in the story, are there not to single Mary out in any significant way, but to highlight the supremacy of Jesus over John. It is not so much that Mary is more important than Elisabeth; rather it is that Jesus is more important than John. So John is to be 'filled with the Holy Spirit', whereas Jesus is to be conceived by the Holy Spirit;<sup>75</sup> John's task will be to act as the messianic forerunner, whereas Jesus is not to be merely a prophet, but, as Son of the Most High, to be the davidic Messiah of whose kingdom there will be no end.<sup>76</sup> The homage paid to Mary by Elisabeth is entirely subordinate to the homage paid to the unborn Messiah by John, who 'leaped for joy'<sup>77</sup> in his mother's womb at their meeting. Thus the *Benedictus*,<sup>78</sup> the hymn of praise sung by Zechariah at the birth of his son John, is preceded by the *Magnificat*,<sup>79</sup> Mary's hymn of praise for the coming Messiah. Within the structure of the narrative as a whole, this inversion of Luke's usual ordering of events is striking. Up to this

<sup>68</sup> Lk 1, 45.

<sup>69</sup> Lk 1, 18-20.

<sup>70</sup> Lk 1, 34.

<sup>71</sup> Lk 1, 38.

<sup>72</sup> Lk 1, 28. Cf Lk 1, 30.

<sup>73</sup> Lk 1, 42.

<sup>74</sup> Lk 1, 43.

<sup>75</sup> Lk 1, 15. 35.

<sup>76</sup> Lk 1, 17. Lk 1, 76 f; 1, 32 f.

<sup>77</sup> Lk 1, 41, 44.

<sup>78</sup> Lk 1, 67-79.

<sup>79</sup> Lk 1, 46-55.

point the pattern followed has been the description of an event concerning the nativity of John, followed by an event concerning the birth of Jesus; so we have the annunciation to Zechariah followed by the annunciation to Mary. Leaving on one side for the moment the section which deals with the visit of Mary to Elisabeth, this pattern is followed throughout the rest of the narrative. So the story of the birth, naming and circumcision of John which is concluded with Zechariah's *Benedictus*, is paralleled by the story of the birth, naming and circumcision of Jesus, which is concluded by Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis*. However, between the two annunciations and nativities is placed the story of the visit of Mary to Elisabeth, and the *Magnificat*, which seems to interrupt the usual lucan order, of first John and then Jesus. Some scholars<sup>80</sup> have suggested that the *Magnificat* was originally intended as the song of Elisabeth rather than Mary. However, in my opinion, the text as it stands makes perfectly good sense. Precisely in inverting his usual order, John-Jesus, Luke is making a theological rather than a chronological point; that Jesus, as the Messiah, has the priority and preeminence over John, his precursor. The *Magnificat* precedes the *Benedictus* in significance, if not time, because Jesus is superior to John. In altering his usual pattern Luke is drawing attention to this.

Even the *Benedictus* is principally about the Messiah rather than his forerunner. John is given only two verses:

And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.<sup>81</sup>

Otherwise, as in the case of the *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus* utilizes OT prophecies<sup>82</sup> to show that they have found their fulfilment in Jesus. In both hymns it is Jesus who is the focus of attention.

In fact all the songs of the lucan Infancy Narrative sing of the Redeemer. Furthermore, in opening his gospel with these canticles, Luke is asserting that the messianic age has in fact dawned. This is clearly seen if we compare these chapters with the opening of Acts. There the apostolic preaching, which succeeds the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, is seen as the fulfilment of the prophetic promise that the messianic day would dawn:

And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants (*doulai*)<sup>83</sup> in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Cf von Harnack, A., and Creed, J. M.

<sup>81</sup> Lk 1, 76 ff.

<sup>82</sup> Cf Goulder, M. D., and Sanderson, M. L., *op. cit.*, pp 21 ff.

<sup>83</sup> Cf the description of Mary as *hē doulē Kuriou* in Lk 1, 38.

<sup>84</sup> Acts 2, 17 ff, which quotes Joel 2, 28 ff.

Just as the series of sermons in Acts are prompted by the pentecostal Spirit and are powerful testimonies to Jesus as Messiah, so the canticles in the opening chapters of *Luke's Gospel* are similarly inspired by the Spirit<sup>85</sup> and make the same affirmation of Jesus's messiahship. Furthermore, in the characters of Mary, Elisabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, Anna and the shepherds, Luke has given us examples of some of these menservants and maidservants, who would see visions and dream dreams, and, above all, would be the recipients of the Spirit which was to herald the coming of the Messiah.

I have suggested so far that Luke portrays Mary as the supreme example of the faithful of Israel, of whom the Messiah was to be born. He does this, not only in the way he structures the narrative, but also in the language he employs: language which is full of OT allusions and symbols. To miss these is to fail to appreciate the claims that Luke is making. Already we have seen that Mary is presented as one of the *anawim*. Now we must explore the other biblical allusions.

To read Lk 1-2, even superficially, is immediately to call to mind stories in the OT of women who gave birth to remarkable offspring: Sarah, old and childless and yet who was blessed with the birth of Isaac;<sup>86</sup> the mother of Samson (the last and greatest of the Judges), who, like Elisabeth, had previously been barren, but to whom an angel was to announce that she would have a son.<sup>87</sup> The similarities between these and the lucan Infancy Narratives are obvious: all describe miraculous conceptions, announced by angelic messengers and issuing in the birth of a great hero. John the Baptist, like Samson, is to take a nazirite vow.<sup>88</sup> But it is probably to the story of the birth of Samuel that Luke is most indebted.<sup>89</sup> In many ways Mary, 'the handmaid of the Lord' is patterned on Hannah, 'the handmaid'<sup>90</sup> who, of all OT mothers, is the archetypal figure of maternal devotion and religious piety, dedicating her son entirely to the service of Yahweh in the temple, and there rejoicing over her son's birth with a paean of praise. Much of the thought and even the language of Hannah's song is taken up by Mary, the new Hannah, in the *Magnificat*.<sup>91</sup> So now Mary becomes, not merely the symbol of the faithful of Israel in general, but the symbol of the faithful mother in particular.

Judaism expressed its thought in essentially masculine and paternalistic categories. However, on occasion it could and did use the figure of a woman to personify Israel. True, this is frequently to depict Israel as a faithless wife,<sup>92</sup> but not all instances of the portrayal of Israel as a woman are pejorative. The

<sup>85</sup> Cf Lk 1, 41. 67. 80; 2, 25 ff; Acts 2.

<sup>86</sup> Gen 21, 1-8.

<sup>87</sup> Jg 13, 2-24.

<sup>88</sup> Lk 1, 15.

<sup>89</sup> For a full treatment of all the parallels between Lk 1-2 and 1 Sam 1-3, see Burrows, *op. cit.*, pp 1-58.

<sup>90</sup> 1 Sam 1, 11.

<sup>91</sup> Cf Creed, J. M.: *The Gospel according to St Luke* (London, 1930).

<sup>92</sup> Cf Hos 2; Ezek 16.

nation can be referred to as 'Zion, the mother of us all'.<sup>93</sup> Jeremiah speaks of Jerusalem as 'the daughter of Zion', and her suffering at the time of invasion to be like a woman in labour, who cries out in distress.<sup>94</sup> Third Isaiah also personifies Zion as a woman giving birth, this time, not in prolonged anguish, but speedily, bringing forth a new Israel.<sup>95</sup> It is this latter emphasis upon a new, restored, purified community, which comes to predominate in the description of Israel as 'the daughter of Zion' or 'the daughter of Jerusalem'. 'Shake yourself from the dust, arise, O captive Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion',<sup>96</sup> exhorts the great prophet of the Exile, Second Isaiah. Israel's punishment is ended,<sup>97</sup> and she is now to look forward to restoration: 'Behold the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth: say to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your salvation comes'.<sup>98</sup>

So the phrase, 'daughter of Zion' is used to personify not merely Israel, but the 'remnant', who, after Exile, are to be restored by Yahweh to their homeland.<sup>99</sup> This identification with the remnant is evident in Jer 31-21: 'Return, O virgin of Israel, return to these your cities', and also in:

Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!. . . At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you together; Yea, I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth; when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.<sup>100</sup>

Just as the Exile can be described in terms of Yahweh's departure from his temple,<sup>101</sup> so the return is seen in terms of the re-entry of God to Jerusalem:

The king of Israel, the Lord is in your midst; you shall fear evil no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst.<sup>102</sup>

Rejoice, greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>93</sup> 2 Esdras 10, 7.

<sup>94</sup> Jer 4, 31. Cf Jer 6, 23; 8, 19-21.

<sup>95</sup> Isai 66, 7-11.

<sup>96</sup> Isai 52, 2.

<sup>97</sup> Lam 4, 22. Cf Lam 2, 18.

<sup>98</sup> Isai 62, 11.

<sup>99</sup> Cf Mic 4, 8.

<sup>100</sup> Zeph 3, 14, 20.

<sup>101</sup> Ezek 10.

<sup>102</sup> Zeph 3, 15b-17a. Cf Zech 2, 10.

<sup>103</sup> Zech 9, 9a.

Thus the personification of the remnant of Israel as 'the daughter of Zion' became part of the language of Jewish eschatology. The promises made to her were applied not merely to the fate of the returned exiles, but to the messianic age, yet to come, in which they would find their complete fulfilment.

When we turn to the Infancy Narrative in Luke's Gospel we find that Mary is not described as 'the daughter of Zion'. However, there is some evidence that in his portrayal of Mary, the evangelist is indebted to this OT symbol. We should beware, nevertheless, of making too much of the evidence there is. The verbal parallels between the prophecies concerning the daughter of Zion and the annunciation to Mary (usually cited as irrefutable evidence of dependence) are, in fact, slight.<sup>104</sup> Thus, if we compare Zeph 3, 14-17 with Lk 1, 28-35, the only language they have in common is the word of greeting (*chairē*). The injunction not to fear, and the assurance of the Lord's presence, although found in both, are far from identical in verbal form.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, Laurentin's attempt to equate the phrase 'in your womb' (*en gastri*)<sup>106</sup> with Zephaniah's promise of the presence of Yahweh 'in your midst' (*en mesōi sou* or *en soi*) seems wholly far-fetched. It is dependent upon the existence of a hypothetical Hebrew source, used by Luke, and which originally had the Hebrew word *bekereṯ*, 'in the midst', signifying the presence of God with Mary, the personification of Israel, the daughter of Zion.<sup>107</sup>

However, although we cannot regard the linguistic evidence as sufficiently strong to postulate that Luke was directly utilizing these 'daughter of Zion' texts, there are certain general similarities which suggest that the personification of Israel as 'the daughter of Zion' may have influenced Luke in his presentation of Mary. Firstly, as we have seen, Mary is depicted as the personification of the faithful of Israel. Just as Israel can be described as Yahweh's servant (*doulos*)<sup>108</sup> and the suffering servant of Second Isaiah be identified with Israel,<sup>109</sup> so Mary is the servant (*doulē*) of the Lord, who also suffers: 'And a sword will pierce through your own soul', predicts Simeon of Mary. This seems to be a reference to the sword of judgment which Ezek 14, 17 said would pass through Israel. As A. R. C. Leaney has written, 'The crucifixion pierces the soul of Mary and divides the land and the people: those who acquiesced in it fall through their rejection of the Messiah'.<sup>110</sup> Secondly, like the daughter of Zion, Mary is not so much the personification of Israel in general, as the symbol of the remnant, the faithful, the *anawim*, who are to be the heirs of the divine promise. So the

<sup>104</sup> *Contra* Laurentin, *op. cit.*, pp 64-71, who in his efforts to establish a correspondence between Mary and the daughter of Zion seems to put too much weight on the very few verbal agreements between Zeph 3, 14-17 and Lk 1, 28-35.

<sup>105</sup> Cf Lk 1, 30, *Mē phobou Mariam* with Zeph 3, 16 *Tharsei Siōn*; and Lk 1, 28 *Ho Kurios meta sou* with Zeph 3, 15, *Kurios en mesōi sou*; Zeph 3, 17, *Kurios ho Theos sou en soi*.

<sup>106</sup> Lk 1, 31.

<sup>107</sup> Laurentin, *op. cit.*, pp 68-71.

<sup>108</sup> Cf Ps 79, 10.

<sup>109</sup> Isai 42, 1; 48, 20; 49, 3, 5.

<sup>110</sup> Leaney, A. R. C.: *The Gospel according to St Luke* (NBTC, London, 1966), pp 100-01.

*Magnificat* is, at one and the same time, the song of Mary and of Israel: 'My soul magnifies the Lord. . . . For he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. . . . he has helped his servant Israel'.<sup>111</sup> Thus both the daughter of Zion and Mary are dramatically identified with idealized Israel. Finally, in the depiction of Mary as the faithful mother, we are reminded of the daughter of Zion, the recipient of the eschatological promise of the presence of Yahweh.

In two texts, Jer 31 (LXX 38), 4. 21 and Lam 2, 13 the daughter of Zion is called a virgin. However, just as in Isai 7, 14, 'Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son', only in the LXX translation, *parthenos*, could the hebrew original, *almah*, meaning simply a young woman, have the connotation of virgin, i.e. someone who had not had sexual intercourse. The original prophecies made no reference to virginity. Certainly both Matthew<sup>112</sup> and Luke<sup>113</sup> seem to have used the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the birth of a davidic king, and applied it, in its septuagintal form, to the virginity of Mary. However, there is no evidence that either evangelist identified the virgin daughter of Zion with the virgin of Isaiah. So it is unlikely that the description of Mary's virginity was intended by Luke as a reference to her identification with Israel<sup>114</sup>.

This leads us to consider one more suggested symbol; that of Mary as the ark of the covenant. According to Laurentin,<sup>115</sup> Mary, as the place of the divine residence, is assimilated to the ark. The steps in his argument are as follows: starting from the highly dubious equation of 'in your womb' with 'in the midst', he identifies Mary's conception with the dwelling of Yahweh in the midst of the daughter of Zion, Israel. He then turns to Exod 40, 35 which describes the *Shekinah*, the cloud which symbolized the presence of God and which filled the tabernacle. The same word — *episkiazein* — is used of the *Shekinah* in the tabernacle and Mary's conception by the Holy Spirit: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow (*episkiasei*) you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God'.<sup>116</sup> At this stage in Laurentin's argument, once more a word of caution needs to be introduced. He assumes that Luke can only have the Exodus passage in mind when he uses the self-same word for the overshadowing of Mary and the tabernacle. However, this is not the only place where the verb occurs. It is also to be found in Ps 90 (MT 91), 4 and 139 (MT 140), 7 — similarly to signify the divine presence.<sup>117</sup> Undoubtedly one can see a connection between the *Shekinah* and the Holy Spirit. However, since the *Shekinah* was not confined to the tabernacle or the ark, it cannot be assumed that Luke is employing a typology whereby Mary represents the tabernacle in whom the *Shekinah* resides.

<sup>111</sup> Lk 1, 48a, 54a.

<sup>112</sup> Mt 1, 23.

<sup>113</sup> Lk 1, 27, 34.

<sup>114</sup> Cf Laurentin, R.: *op. cit.*, p 73.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 73, 79, 151, following Burrows, *op. cit.*, pp 47 f.

<sup>116</sup> Lk 1, 35.

<sup>117</sup> Cf Mk 9, 7; Lk 9, 35; Mt 17, 5 where *episkiazein* is used of the cloud at the transfiguration.

In his attempt to find such a typology, Laurentin draws a comparison between the story of the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem<sup>118</sup> and the account of the visit of Mary to Elisabeth.<sup>119</sup> He directs our attention to David's question, 'How can the ark of the Lord come to me?',<sup>120</sup> seeing it as parallel to Elisabeth's, 'And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'<sup>121</sup> Just as David danced before the ark of the Lord, upon meeting Mary, Elisabeth's unborn babe leaped in her womb.<sup>122</sup> From this Laurentin would see Mary as the type of the *Shekinah*-bearing ark.

It is very doubtful, however, whether this was Luke's intention. Laurentin's argument rests upon the flimsiest of correspondences, particularly between 2 Sam 6, and Lk 1. Even the words for 'dance' and 'leap' are not the same in the greek.<sup>123</sup> It seems more likely that we have here a verbal echo of Gen 25, 22, where the twins leap (*eskirtōn*) in Rebecca's womb before the birth of Israel.<sup>124</sup> So John leaps before the birth of Jesus — the new Israel. It is true that the temple and its cult play a large part in the lucan Infancy Narrative. It was whilst Zechariah was carrying out his priestly duties in the temple that Gabriel appeared to him. The temple is the scene both of Simeon and Anna's recognition of the messiahship of Jesus, and, twelve years later, of his own growing self-awareness. This is not surprising, since Luke presents Jesus as the heir of Israel's hopes and the fulfilment of her promises. However, there is nothing in the narrative which would suggest that Luke sees Mary's entry into the temple with with the infant Jesus as analogous to the entry of the ark into Jerusalem. Although at her conception she is depicted as the recipient of the presence of the Most High, it is to go beyond the evidence to suggest that she is a type of the ark of God.

To deny that Mary is a symbol of the ark is hardly to leave the lucan Infancy Narrative bereft of symbolism! We have seen that the *anawim*, the servant, the mother, the daughter of Zion — all are represented in and by the figure of Mary. I began this paper by saying that Luke was not particularly interested in the person of Mary; that his main concern was to use her, in one form or another, as a symbol of Israel. I hope you will notice that I have not said that she is a mere symbol. There is nothing inferior about symbols. They can be very powerful and evocative. They direct us to a reality beyond themselves. So Mary directs us back to the faithful of Israel, whose yearning prepared the way for the Kingdom, and from whom the Messiah of all the nations was to spring.

<sup>118</sup> 2 Sam 6, 2-19.

<sup>119</sup> Lk 1, 39-41.

<sup>120</sup> 2 Sam 6, 9.

<sup>121</sup> Lk 1, 43.

<sup>122</sup> 2 Sam 6, 16. 21. Cf Lk 1, 41.

<sup>123</sup> So in Lk 1, 44 (cf Lk 6, 23), *skirtan*, whereas 2 Sam 6, 16, 21, has *orcheisthai*.

<sup>124</sup> Cf Goulder, M. D. and Sanderson, M. L., *op. cit.*, p 21.