

The Protevangelium of James

TOOLS AND TRANSLATIONS

The Westar Tools and Translations series provides critical tools and fresh new translations for research on canonical and non-canonical texts that survive from the earliest periods of the Christian tradition to the Middle Ages. These writings are crucial for determining the complex history of Christian origins. The translations are known as the Scholars Version. Each work, whether a translation or research aid, is accompanied by textual notes, translation notes, cross references, and an index. An extensive introduction also sets out the challenge a text or research aid addresses.

EARLY CHRISTIAN APOCRYPHA

Editorial Board:
TONY BURKE
BRENT LANDAU
JANET SPITTLER

Translations of non-canonical texts out of the Christian tradition are offered as part of the Westar Tools and Translations series in cooperation with the North American Society for the Study of Christian Apocrypha (NASSCAL). The Early Christian Apocrypha series features fresh new translations of major apocryphal texts that survive from the early period of the Christian church. These non-canonical writings are crucial for determining the complex history of Christian origins. The series continues the work of Julian V. Hills, who edited the first six volumes of the series for Polebridge Press.

- Volume 1: *The Acts of Andrew*
- Volume 2: *The Epistle of the Apostles*
- Volume 3: *The Acts of Thomas*
- Volume 4: *The Acts of Peter*
- Volume 5: *Didache*
- Volume 6: *The Acts of John*
- Volume 7: *The Protevangelium of James*
- Volume 8: *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Nativity of Mary*

The Protevangelium of James

Lily C. Vuong



CASCADE Books • Eugene, Oregon

THE PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES
Early Christian Apocrypha 7

Copyright © 2019 Lily C. Vuong. All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical publications or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher. Write: Permissions, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3, Eugene, OR 97401.

Cascade Books
An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401

www.wipfandstock.com

PAPERBACK ISBN: 978-1-5326-5617-0
HARDCOVER ISBN: 978-1-5326-5618-7
EBOOK ISBN: 978-1-5326-5619-4

Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Names: Vuong, Lily C., 1978–, author

Title: The Protevangelium of James / Lily C. Vuong.

Description: Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018. | Early Christian Apocrypha 7. |
Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: ISBN: 978-1-5326-5617-0 (paperback). | ISBN: 978-1-5326-5618-7
(hardcover). | ISBN: 978-1-5326-5619-4 (ebook).

Subjects: LCSH: Protevangelium Jacobi—Criticism, interpretation, etc.

Classification: BS2860.3 V8661 2019 (print). | BS2860.3 (epub).

Manufactured in the U.S.A.

06/05/19

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright
© 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.
Used by permission.

For Olivia Grace and Gabriel James

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>Abbreviations and Conventions</i>	xi
Introduction	1
The Protevangelium of James	49
<i>Bibliography</i>	109
<i>Index of Ancient Sources</i>	117

Acknowledgments

WHEN I WAS FIRST approached to write a new translation and commentary for the *Protevangelium of James*, I was excited at the prospect of diving back into this rich and entertaining apocryphal narrative on the early life of the Virgin Mary after having spent a good deal of time writing and publishing my dissertation on the topic. It was perhaps serendipitous that I was working on another project for a book series at the time whose main editor was Ronald Hock. After informing him that I would be writing this new commentary with the same book series he wrote his commentary on the *Protevangelium of James* twenty-three years earlier, he immediately and very generously mailed me everything he thought I'd find useful – articles, rare books, and even his own handwritten notes on the topic. I am incredibly grateful for being the recipient of such invaluable resources and am thankful to Ron for his kindness and support.

This new translation would not have been possible without the invitation from the series editors of the Early Christian Apocrypha Series and the North American Society for the Study of Christian Apocryphal Literature (NASSCAL), especially Tony Burke who read every draft and offered critical and helpful notes and comments, significantly improving its content and style and preventing any missteps; I am wholly indebted to his careful attention to detail. I am also thankful to Brent Landau, Janet Spittler, and Eric Vanden Eykel who read and provided thoughtful and useful comments during the final stages of the manuscript.

Given that my interest in the *Protevangelium* can be traced all the way back to my studies in graduate school, I am thankful to Annette Yoshiko Reed, Stephen Shoemaker, Tobias Nicklas, and Pierluigi Piovaneli, who played key roles in informing and refining my thinking of Apocryphal literature.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would also like to thank my colleagues at Central Washington University and to the School of Graduate Studies and Research for their support for this project. Additionally, I owe many thanks to Kevin McGinnis for his helpful notes on my translation, Olivia Bode, who aided me with many copy-editing issues, and the editorial staff at Wipf and Stock, especially Matthew Wimer, K. C. Hanson, and Ian Creeger, for guiding the book through publication.

As always, I owe my greatest debt to my family. Special thanks go to Eileen Jankowski who read and edited the manuscript several times, and who has always been a great source of support and encouragement. To my children, Olivia and Gabriel, for making my life richer and more exciting, but also for understanding all the extra hours I had to spend at the office. Above all, I am grateful to my husband, James, for his unwavering love and support and for taking on more than his share of the parenting responsibilities while I worked to bring this project to completion.

Lily C. Vuong
Central Washington University
Ellensburg, Washington
August 2018

Introduction

ON DISPLAY AT THE Yale University Art Gallery is a painting from Dura-Europos, an ancient city in eastern Syria and the location of major excavations in the 1920s and 1930s. Yale archaeologists found the painting in the remains of a third-century house that was used as a church—the earliest Christian church ever discovered. On the southern wall of the building’s baptistery is the image of a woman drawing water from a well, while looking over her left shoulder. While most scholars have assumed it is a depiction of the Samaritan woman narrated from the Gospel of John, Michael Peppard has suggested that the painting is better interpreted as Mary at the well.¹ The canonical Gospels of Matthew and Luke do not give a specific location for the Annunciation, despite general assumptions that place the scene at her home based on centuries-long depictions of the Annunciation in Western art. While the scene of Mary drawing water from the well or spring is not a detail found in the canonical infancy narratives, it is a feature of the *Protevangelium of James* (*Protevangelium* hereafter) in which the divine voice attempts to make contact with Mary to announce her special role in salvation history (*Prot. Jas.* 11:1–9). Additionally, the image also depicts a vacant space behind the woman, most likely representing the invisible divine voice of the Annunciation,² a detail again found in the *Protevangelium* which describes a bodiless voice speaking to Mary before the appearance of an angel; hence Mary is said to have been looking “all around her, to the right and left, to see from where the voice was coming” (*Prot. Jas.* 11:3). If Peppard’s

1. Peppard, *World’s Oldest Church*, 155–201.

2. There are two possible options for the identity of the voice: the angel Gabriel, who appears after Mary retreats to her house or the divine voice of God. In Rabbinic literature, *bat kol*, “daughter of a voice” is commonly interpreted as the voice or presence of God. See Zervos, “Early Non-Canonical Annunciation,” 682–86.

THE PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES

interpretation is correct, this painting would be the oldest depiction of Mary's Annunciation at the well. This interpretation is especially intriguing given that in the same house church a procession of women walking towards a large building with doors is also depicted. On the east wall, the feet and bottom garments of five women approach the structure. On the west wall three full women are each carrying a lit candle.³ Admittedly, there is no consensus on the identities of the women in the image, but Gertrud Schiller is convinced that the women are the virgins who guide Mary to the temple (*Prot. Jas. 7:4*).⁴ If these two proposals are correct, then the church house at Dura-Europos would appear to display artistically two dominant themes informed by this apocryphal text.

While the *Protevangelium's* presence and impact on the Dura-Europos church house is debatable, there is no doubt regarding the *Protevangelium's* influence on early Christian traditions, practices, and forms of piety associated with the Virgin Mary. Offering rich details from Mary's miraculous conception by her mother Anna to her own conception and birth of Jesus, this narrative stands as the foundation for her prevailing depiction as extraordinarily pure and holy, but also for later apocryphal, hagiographical, and liturgical writings. Despite its early date, this document's contributions to Marian piety and devotion cannot be overestimated.⁵ Surviving in at least 140 Greek manuscripts and translated into multiple languages including Syriac, Georgian, Latin, Armenian, Arabic, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Slavonic (see section on transmission below), the *Protevangelium's* frequent copying attests to its popularity throughout the Christian world.⁶ Moreover, the text functions as a source for a vari-

3. Peppard, *World's Oldest Church*, 111–54.

4. Cf. in *Ps.-Mt. 10* and *Nat. Mary 7, 8*; Schiller, *Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst*, vol. 3, fig. 1. Dinker ("Die ersten Petrusdarstellungen," 12) believes that the women carrying candles are the five wise virgins from Matthew 25; A. Grabar (*Early Christian Art*, 68–71, fig. 59) has identified the figures as the women who approach Jesus' tomb. At the Exodus chapel in Egypt, however, there is an image labeled *parthenoi* depicting the temple virgins' procession. Its date ranges between the fifth and seventh centuries (images and discussion in Cartlidge and Elliott, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha*, 36–37).

5. There are no specific prayers or cult in honor of Mary in the *Protevangelium*, but its foundations for Marian piety with its elaborate and expanded descriptions of Mary's life is undeniable. For the influence of the *Protevangelium* on Marian piety and devotion, see esp. Shoemaker, *Mary in Early Christian Faith and Devotion*, 47–61 (on devotion) and 53–54 (on piety).

6. See de Strycker, "Handschriften," 588–607; Daniels, "Greek Manuscript Tradition"; and Zervos, "Prolegomena," on the Greek manuscript tradition. See Elliott,

INTRODUCTION

ety of later writings on the life of Mary, including the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, the *Nativity of Mary*, the *Armenian and Arabic Gospels of the Infancy*, the *History of Joseph the Carpenter*, and Maximus the Confessor's *Life of the Virgin*.⁷ From its use in liturgical readings for various feasts, including Mary's Nativity, Conception, and Presentation, to its inspiration for numerous artistic representations found in church paintings, mosaics, and sarcophagi, the text enjoyed near canonical status despite its categorization as apocryphal.

As a narrative that features characters and events from the NT text but lacks a presence in the canon, the *Protevangelium* fits the criteria for extracanonical and apocryphal literature. However, other features attributed to works deemed apocryphal, including its rejection as a possible candidate into the NT canon, seem problematic not least because of its popularity and influence on early Christian practices, traditions, and beliefs. In his study of this categorization process, François Bovon proposed that church leaders, theologians, and ordinary Christians did not simply distinguish between canonical and apocryphal texts or accepted and rejected texts; rather, they were familiar with a third category of writing which were, according to Bovon, "useful for the soul."⁸ Such writings functioned as the basis for religious life in the early church and were deeply cherished by the masses and even sometimes relied upon by orthodox leadership.⁹ Stephen Shoemaker has argued that Marian apocrypha is better understood not as failed scripture but as an accepted part of ecclesiastical tradition,¹⁰ and that the *Protevangelium* in particular should be more appropriately understood as "quasi-canonical" given its vast influence on Christian tradition.¹¹

Apocryphal New Testament, 52–57, for a list of the most important ancient and modern translations and manuscripts and de Santos Otero (*Die handschriftliche Überlieferung*, 2:1–32) who has also catalogued 169 Slavonic manuscripts of the *Protevangelium* and related texts.

7. Special consideration for the way these works have used and deviated from the *Protevangelium* will be addressed in the present volume.

8. Bovon, "Beyond the Canonical and Apocryphal Books," 125–37; and Bovon, "Useful for the Soul," 185–95.

9. Epiphanius of Salamis (d. 403), for instance, cites apocryphal material as an authoritative part of Christian tradition when he recounts information about Mary's parents that is most definitely drawn from the *Protevangelium*.

10. Shoemaker, "Between Scripture and Tradition," 492.

11. Shoemaker, *Mary in Early Christian Faith and Devotion*, 49.

THE PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES

As a highly influential text about the most prominent woman in Christian history, the *Protevangelium's* traditions were widely disseminated in later popular literature such as the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* and its derivative, the *Nativity of Mary*, each of which are witnessed in at least a hundred manuscripts. Instead of being perceived as a rejected scripture, it was received with some authority for helping understand questions about how Mary was conceived, what she was like as a child, and why she was chosen to give birth to the son of God; in addition, the text provides understanding of her role in salvation history and how and why she should be venerated.

Summary

Since Mary stands as the unequivocal center of the *Protevangelium*, the narrative's contents are marked by the various stages in her life and are shaped by a deep desire to understand her for her own sake, particularly why and how she came to be praised for holding the paradoxical role of Virgin Mother. The text is dependent upon and clearly reworks elements of the canonical gospels of Matthew and Luke, but Jesus' nativity scene, which commences during the last quarter of the narrative, comprises only a fraction of the text. The narrative focuses squarely and deliberately on Mary's character and her role and contributions to Christian history. The following summary serves not only to describe the basic plot of the narrative, but also to point out several comparisons to its canonical sources as well as to other literary influences on the text.

Mary's Pre-Story and Conception

The *Protevangelium* opens with information about Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, the circumstances of Mary's birth, as well as the community in which they lived—precisely the information lacking in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Reminiscent of great biblical couples (e.g., Sarah and Abraham; Elizabeth and Zechariah), we discover that despite their good standing in the community and their wealth (*Prot. Jas.* 1:1), Joachim and Anna suffer from infertility. The initial scene is set at the Jerusalem temple wherein Joachim's double offering of sacrifice is rejected because of his childlessness (1:5). After confirming in the "Book of the Twelve Tribes of Israel" that he alone stands childless, Joachim runs off

INTRODUCTION

into the wilderness, fasting forty days and forty nights, to lament and wait for an explanation from God for his situation (1:6–7).

Aware that childbearing is a blessing awarded to the righteous by God (Gen 3:14), Anna too responds by wailing not only because of her barren state but also because she believes she is now a widow given Joachim's disappearance (2:1). Anna's cries elicit a rebuke from her slave girl that sends Anna into the garden to offer a poignant lament over how she alone is fruitless in such a fruitful world: "because even the [birds, beasts, animals, waters, earth] reproduce before you, O Lord" (3:1–8). Anna's pain and embarrassment ceases, however, upon the arrival of an angel of the Lord who informs her that she will indeed conceive and that her child will be "spoken of throughout the whole world" (4:1). Anna immediately dedicates her child to life-long service to the Lord (4:2), confirming that her childlessness was the result of unlucky circumstances rather than a deficiency of righteousness.

Joachim also is the recipient of an angelic visit when he is informed of his wife's new status (4:4), prompting him first to gather his flocks for a sacrificial offering (4:5–7), and only secondarily to return home to celebrate with his wife (4:8). Joachim's righteousness is separately confirmed upon presenting his gifts at the temple and finding "no sin" indicated on the prophetic leafed headdress worn by the priest (5:2). Straightaway, the *Protevangelium* establishes Joachim and Anna as righteous and pious people fit to parent the child who would be the mother of the son of God.

Mary's Birth, Infancy, and Stay at the Jerusalem Temple

In due time, Anna gives birth to her miraculous child and makes clear she is honored by her daughter, whom she names Mary (5:5–8). As expected of the "miraculous child being born to a once barren mother" motif, Mary's life is immediately marked as exceptional—particularly with respect to her purity, but also by her agility and physical growth. In addition to waiting the prescribed days before nursing Mary (5:9), Anna is said to have transformed Mary's bedroom into a sanctuary so that no "profane or unclean" person or thing can make contact with her daughter; Mary's only companions are the "undefiled daughters of the Hebrews" (6:4–5). After Mary amazingly walks seven steps at the age of six months, Anna swoops her up, vowing her feet will not touch the ground again until she is taken up to the temple (6:1–5). Contact with the outside

THE PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES

world takes place during a magnificent banquet in honor of Mary's first birthday (6:6). At the celebration, Mary is given a double blessing (first by the temple priests and second by the high priests), the first of which is followed by an "amen" from all the people, reinforcing universally the blessed status and role of Mary (6:7-9). After the banquet, Anna sings another prayer, but this time the tone is joyful, thankful, and full of hope (6:11-13). When Mary reaches the age of two, Anna and Joachim discuss their vow to send Mary to the temple, but ultimately decide to wait one more year (7:1). The year passes and then the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews are summoned to help Mary with the move from her parent's house to God's house (7:4-5). Anna's and Joachim's fear that Mary will have a difficult transition are alleviated upon seeing her dance at the altar, receiving love and blessings from the priests and the whole house of Israel (7:9-10). Mary spends her childhood at the sacred Jerusalem temple, nurtured like a dove and fed by a heavenly angel (8:2).

Mary's Adolescent Years: From Girlhood to Womanhood

After a nine-year time lapse, Mary's approaching twelfth birthday sets the scene for the second part of the narrative. However, unlike the banquet celebration of her first birthday, this anniversary is marked by the fear of the priests that Mary's transition from childhood to womanhood might "defile the temple of the Lord our God" (8:4). Concerned for both the sanctity of the temple and Mary's well-being, the priests have Zechariah, the high priest, pray for guidance (8:5). Zechariah's prayer is answered when an angel of the Lord appears and instructs him to gather all the widowers in town to determine by lot who should be chosen to guard Mary (8:7-9). Leaving Mary's fate to God, the priest pays heed to the instructions, facilitating the arrival of Joseph on the scene, who is depicted differently and more fully than the canonical Gospels—he is old and already a father of sons (9:8). Reminiscent of Num 17:1-9 where Aaron's staff buds to signal the selection of the proper priestly line, Joseph is chosen by God's will when a dove springs from his rod and then lands on his head (9:5-6). Though resistant to the selection at first, Joseph is warned of the consequences when God's intentions are disregarded and takes Mary (now described as the Virgin of the Lord) home under his guardianship (9:11-12).

INTRODUCTION

The Annunciation and Mary as the Lord's Virgin

Immediately after returning home, Joseph departs to build houses, leaving Mary under the watch of the Lord alone (9:12); Mary is soon summoned back to the temple to help weave the temple curtain. Reinforcing Mary's royal lineage, the high priest remembers to include her among the other virgins found from the tribe of David to spin (10:1–6). By lot, Mary is given the scarlet and pure purple threads (10:7), symbolic of virtuousness and royalty, respectively. While working on her part of the curtain, one day Mary ventures out to a public space to draw some water (from a well or a spring)—a drastic contrast to the previous depiction of her private and enclosed childhood bedroom chambers and her stay at the temple. Only in this outdoor space is Mary first called upon by a bodiless voice that offers her greetings and blessings. Unable to locate the voice's source, Mary returns to her house frightened (11:1–4). Perhaps to distract herself, Mary returns to her spinning only to be physically approached by an angel of the Lord who tells her not to fear because she is favored by the Lord and has been chosen to “conceive from his Word” (11:5). As in the Annunciation scene in Luke, but in a more creative manner and with additional details, Mary converses with the angel over how this conception will transpire given her status as a virgin. After the angel explains that she will not give birth like other women and that the power of God will overshadow her, she is instructed to name her child Jesus because “he will save his people from their sins” (11:7).

After fully consenting to her new role, Mary presents her part of the curtain to the high priest who blesses Mary's work and says she will be “blessed among all the generations of the earth” (12:2). Mary then visits her kinswoman, Elizabeth. Miraculously expecting a child herself (the future John the Baptist), Elizabeth, much like her depiction in Luke, acknowledges Mary's present state as significant and remarkable so much so that the child inside her has sprung up to bless her (12:5). However, unlike Luke's depiction, Elizabeth does not offer praise of Mary for believing in the divine word nor does Mary respond with a song of praise (cf. the Magnificat of Luke 1:46–56). Instead, and oddly enough, Mary has actually forgotten the exchange she had with the angel Gabriel and again questions why she is the recipient of all these blessings. This exchange is not commented on further; instead, Mary is said to have simply stayed with Elizabeth for three months while her belly grew. Frightened and still unclear of how her situation came to be, the visibly pregnant Mary, now

THE PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES

sixteen years of age, decides to return home to hide her condition from the “children of Israel” (12:6–9).

Joseph Returns Home to Mary at Six Months Pregnant

After three months have passed, Joseph returns home to find Mary six months pregnant and unable to explain her condition (cf. Matt 1:18). Breaking into a despairing lament over Mary’s pregnancy and his own failure to keep her safe, Joseph evokes an Adam and Eve analogy: just as Eve was deceived and defiled while alone, the same too has happened to Mary. Assuming that Mary is guilty of adultery, Joseph’s initial reaction of fright turns into an aggressive and accusatory questioning of his wife: “You who have been cared for by God —why have you done this? Have you forgotten the Lord your God? Why have you shamed your soul . . . ?” (13:6–7). After weeping bitterly, Mary responds to Joseph’s questions confidently and directly: “I am pure and have not known a man [sexually],” but is still unable to explain how she is pregnant (13:8–10). Joseph’s anger subsides, but he returns to a state of fear as he contemplates what he should do with her. Afraid that keeping the situation secret will get him into trouble with the law, but also that revealing it will result in an innocent death, Joseph contemplates divorcing her quietly (14:2–4; cf. Matt 1:19). Resolution comes when an angel appears to Joseph in a dream explaining to him that the child inside Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit and that he will be responsible for “sav[ing] his people from their sins” (14:6 cf. Matt 1:20–23). After finding out the truth about Mary’s situation, Joseph glorifies God and recommits to his task of guarding the Virgin of the Lord.

Mary’s and Joseph’s Purity Tested

When Joseph’s absence at the council is noticed, Annas the scribe decides to inquire about his whereabouts only to find the temple virgin they put under his care is now pregnant (15:1–3). Joseph’s role as Mary’s protector or guardian is tested again. This time, however, the results are positive and Joseph stays loyal to Mary and stands trial for the accusations made by the temple priests (15:10–12, 14–15). Both Mary and Joseph are questioned harshly over the pregnancy and accused of humiliating themselves and lying—ironically, much in the same tone that Joseph used when he

INTRODUCTION

first questioned Mary. Both Mary and Joseph assert their innocence in the matter (15:13, 15). Unconvinced by their testimony, the high priest decides to leave it to God's will to determine their fate by having them both undergo a test involving the drinking of bitter water and being sent into the wilderness (Num 5:11–31; and *m. Sotah* 5.1). After Mary and Joseph pass the test by returning safely, they are cleared of any charges and sent home.

Mary Gives Birth to Jesus

After some unspecified time has passed, but while Mary is still pregnant, a census ordered by King Augustus for all of Judea (cf. Luke 2:1, where the census is for the entire world) requires Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem to register (17:1). The basic story line proceeds with other scenes from canonical Gospel accounts, including the birth of Jesus, the visit from the Magi, and King Herod's attempt to locate and kill Jesus who has been prophesied to unseat him. The *Protevangelium's* repackaging of the account, however, sets the scenes on a new and more vivid stage. While preparing for their travels Joseph contemplates how he should enroll Mary, underscoring their untraditional relationship: "How shall I register her? As my wife? I'm too ashamed to do that. As my daughter? The children of Israel know that she is not my daughter" (17:2–3). With both the appearance of his son Samuel (17:5) as a reminder that Joseph already has children and the repeated references to Mary as a child (17:2), Joseph's role as guardian rather than husband is again highlighted. While en route to Bethlehem, Mary undergoes a prophetic experience in which she sees two peoples, one lamenting and the other rejoicing, most likely representing those who will not accept Jesus' role in salvation history (i.e., the Jews) and those who will (i.e., "Christians") (17:9). Whereas Luke's infancy narrative has Mary give birth in Bethlehem, in the *Protevangelium* Mary starts experiencing contractions before they reach the town, thus forcing her to give birth in a cave outside of Bethlehem. After leaving his sons to guard and care for her, Joseph ventures out to locate a Hebrew midwife to help with the delivery. At this point in the narrative a major shift occurs not only in content, but also in writing style: Joseph experiences and relays in the first person a vision in which everything is suspended in time: "I . . . was walking, and yet I was not walking" (18:3); "the ones chewing were not chewing; and the ones lifting up something

THE PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES

to eat were not lifting it up” (18:6). This interruption in time signifies the exact moment Jesus enters into the world.

When the suspension of time breaks, the narrative returns to Joseph’s search for a midwife. Upon finding one, Joseph engages in an awkward exchange with her over the status and relationship he has with Mary: “Then who is the one who has given birth in a cave? My betrothed . . . Is she not your wife? . . . She is Mary, the one who was brought up in the temple of the Lord . . . I received her by lot as my wife . . . she has conceived by the Holy Spirit . . .” (19:5–9). The two finally make it back just in time to see a cloud overshadowing the cave, and an intense, bright light within the cave that recedes to reveal Mary with Jesus already nursing at her breast (cf. 5:9 when Anna waits the prescribed days). While the midwife is too late to help with the delivery, she does, however, help with attesting to the miraculous events that unfolded: “My soul has been magnified today because my eyes have seen an incredible sign . . . a virgin has given birth” (19:14–18). When a second midwife named Salome appears on the scene, the first unnamed midwife confesses to all that has transpired, but her testimony does not convince Salome. Requiring physical proof, Salome instructs Mary to position herself for a gynecological examination, in which Salome literally attempts to insert her fingers into Mary (20:2–4). The incompatibility of the sacred (Mary’s genitals) and the profane (Salome’s hand) results in the combustion of Salome’s hand (20:4). Immediately recognizing that this is punishment for her transgression and disbelief in the virgin birth, Salome calls out to the God of her fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and begs for forgiveness (20:5–7). Salome finds relief when an angel appears instructing her to hold the child if she wants to seek not just forgiveness, but also salvation and joy (20:9). After she is healed, Salome leaves the cave a believer, but is told not to report on any of what happened until the child goes to Jerusalem (20:12).

The Magi Pay Homage to Mary and Jesus

One of the last sections of the narrative follows the Magi who cause a commotion in Judea with their inquiry about the identity and whereabouts of the new king of the Jews (Matt 2:1–18). Like Matthew’s account, the *Protevangelium* attests to the Magi seeing a star in the East and following it because they seek the identity of the messiah as prophesied

INTRODUCTION

in the Jewish Scriptures (21:2). However, while Matthew reports that the star stopped at a house in Bethlehem “over the place where the child was” (Matt 2:9), the *Protevangelium* relates that the star from the East led them to the cave (21:10–11). In both accounts, the Magi approach and offer pouches of gold, frankincense-tree, and myrrh before Mary, who is identified in the *Protevangelium* for the first time as a mother (21:11). Both accounts include advice to Joseph and Mary not to go home via Judea since they will encounter Herod’s wrath; however, this message is sent by dream in Matt 2:12, but delivered by an angel in the *Protevangelium* (21:12). Herod responds to being tricked by the Magi by sending out his henchmen to kill all children two years old and younger. This element of Matthew’s story is expanded and given a colorful new life in the *Protevangelium*, where Jesus’ life is saved not by Joseph’s flight into Egypt (Matt 2:13–15), but through Mary’s quick wit and courage to wrap her child in swaddling clothes and hide him in an ox-manger (22:3–4; cf. Luke 2:7).

Herod’s Wrath, Zechariah, and the Epilogue

The remainder of the scene has no parallels in the canonical Gospels. Elizabeth’s son John is also in danger because of Herod’s threat. Finding no place to hide her son, Elizabeth heads to the mountains to escape the executioners, but when exhaustion prevents her from continuing on, she calls out to the Lord for help; the Lord responds by splitting open the mountain to conceal her (22:5–9). While Elizabeth is able to escape with her son, the fate of her husband is not so bright. Approached by Herod’s henchmen at the temple where Zechariah serves as a priest, he is questioned about his son’s whereabouts. When Zechariah provides no useful information, he is slain at the altar of the temple and his blood is said to have turned into stone (24:9). The narrative concludes with the priest entering the temple to find only dried blood at the altar but no body, the lamenting of Zechariah’s murder, and the appointment of Simeon as Zechariah’s replacement (24:4–14). A brief epilogue ends the *Protevangelium* with information about James, the brother of Jesus, the supposed author, and the circumstances surrounding the composition of his account—namely, that he was inspired and given wisdom to write the account during Herod’s reign when there was an uproar in Jerusalem (25:1–4) following Herod’s death and his son Archelaus’s subsequent rise to power.

Title

Despite the testimony of the epilogue, the “Protevangelium of James” is neither the original nor the ancient title of the text; over its long and complicated history it has gone by many different names. In 1552, when Guillaume Postel reintroduced the book to the West,¹² he called the work, *Protevangelium sive de natalibus Jesu Christi et ipsius Matris virginis Mariae, sermo historicus divi Jacobi minoris* (*The Proto-Gospel or the Births of Jesus Christ and His Virgin Mother Mary, A Historical Discourse of Saint James, the Less*), based on a Greek manuscript that has since been lost.¹³ The *Protevangelium Jacobi* (or James, as in standard English translation for the Jacobs of the New Testament) is a shortened version of this Latin title. There has been some discussion over whether Postel lifted the title verbatim from the manuscript or whether he simply offered a rendering of it; the latter seems more likely since no other manuscripts attest to this title. The various extant manuscripts only complicate the situation further given that there are a variety of long and confusing titles given to this work. For example, one title reads, “Narrative and History concerning How the Very Holy Mother of God was Born for Our Salvation” (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, gr. 1454) and another, “Narrative of the Holy Apostle James, the Archbishop of Jerusalem and Brother of God, concerning the Birth of the All Holy Mother of God and the Eternal Virgin Mary” (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, II, 82).¹⁴ The Bodmer Miscellaneous Codex, our earliest manuscript of the text dating from the third or fourth century,¹⁵ provides the simple title, “Birth of Mary, Apoc-

12. The *Protevangelium*’s claim that Jesus’ “brothers” were sons from Joseph’s previous marriage was condemned by Jerome, who argued influentially that these siblings were his cousins (*Helv.* 11–16). Jerome’s reasoning was connected to his ascetic position that held that Joseph too was a perpetual virgin. As a result, the *Protevangelium* was condemned by Popes Damascus and Innocent I and then by the Gelasian decree in the sixth century. On the tracing of the *Protevangelium*’s reentrance to the West, see Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi*, 16–17 and 36. Also helpful is Backus’s fuller discussion of Postel’s translation in “Guillaume Postel.”

13. For a list of other known titles, see Daniels, “Greek Manuscript Tradition,” 2–6 (which gives 70 variations); Zervos, “Prolegomena,” 2–4 provides 30 more.

14. Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, 1–2; Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 32.

15. Those convinced by the earlier third-century date include, e.g., Testuz, *Papyrus Bodmer V*, 22; and Vanden Eykel, *Looking Up*, 18. Cullmann (“Protevangelium of James,” 421) and Klauck (*Apocryphal Gospels*, 65) have opted for the later fourth-century date. Against general consensus, Raithel (“Beginning at the End,” 1) dates

INTRODUCTION

alypse of James,”¹⁶ and even still, it is doubtful that the second half of the title is original,¹⁷ though the attribution to James is fairly common in the manuscript tradition. Several possible early witnesses exist for this text,¹⁸ but only one offers a title for the work. In his commentary on Matthew, Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–254) refers to Jesus’ brother as Joseph’s son from a previous marriage and states that his source is either the “Gospel of Peter” or the “Book of James” (*Comm. Matt.* 10:17 on Matt 13:55).¹⁹ It is possible that the *Protevangelium* was originally known very plainly as the “Book of James.”

The *Protevangelium of James*²⁰ and the *Infancy Gospel of James*²¹ or *Proto-Gospel of James*²² are the most widely used contemporary titles for this work,²³ an odd circumstance since neither reference Mary, despite the

the manuscript to the end of the second century. For recent studies on the Bodmer Miscellaneous Codex, see Nongbri, “Construction of the Bodmer,” 171–72. Working against inadequate descriptions of the manuscript provided by the earliest editors and the lack of quality in the photographing of plates and facsimiles, Nongbri has been making some important advances on the codicological makeup of the Bodmer Papyri.

16. The term “apocalypse” in the title is a reference to the manner in which the narrative was received—that is, through divine revelation—not to a designation of the text to the literary genre of “apocalypse.”

17. De Strycker, *La forme la plus ancienne*, 211–12.

18. For other possible witnesses see the section on dating below.

19. Origen’s double title is curious. The extant texts of the *Protevangelium* and the *Gospel of Peter* fragments do not share direct parallels; the *Protevangelium*’s primary interest is the life of Mary, while the *Gospel of Peter* focuses on Jesus’ death and resurrection. Kraus’s and Nicklas’s work on the alleged Greek manuscripts of the *Gospel of Peter* contends that it is almost impossible to know exactly what it contained because it is so fragmentary (*Das Petrusevangelium und die Petrusapokalypse*, 3–8, 16). If Origen actually meant the *Gospel of Peter*, then one must be open to the possibility that the *Gospel of Peter* contained a nativity section of some sort.

20. Used by Elliott, “Protevangelium of James,” 57–67; Cameron, “Protevangelium of James,” 109–21; Cullmann, “Protevangelium of James,” 426–37 (though he adds: “The Birth of Mary [The History of James],” etc.).

21. Used by Hock, *Infancy Gospels*, 1–81; Hock, “Infancy Gospel of James”; Miller, “Infancy Gospel of James,” 373–89, etc.

22. Used by Ehrman, “Proto-Gospel of James,” 63–72; Ehrman and Pleše, “Proto-Gospel of James, the Birth of Mary, the Revelation of James,” 31–71. Cowper uses, “Gospel of James,” but also adds in parentheses: “Commonly called the Protevangelium of James. The Birth of Mary, the Holy Mother of God and Very Glorious Mother of Jesus Christ,” 3–27.

23. Vorster (“Intertextuality,” 270–71) questions the intentionality of the titles and notes that the “Protevangelium” title focuses on the birth of Jesus whereas the “Birth of Mary” highlights Mary’s birth.

THE PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES

fact that the text is essentially her biography—all activities and conversations that take place in the narrative are connected to her in some way. More problematic with these two popular titles is that they seem to imply they are something that they are not. The implication of “Protevangeli-um” is that it is a gospel of sorts. The gospel genre traditionally involves content from the life and ministry of Jesus, which is simply not found in this text. While the pre-script “proto-” is accurate in its suggestion that the text precedes what is found in the canonical gospels, the implication that it is a gospel is still problematic since Jesus appears only at the end of the account and for only brief moments at his birth and infancy. The fully English title, *Infancy Gospel of James* or the *Proto-Gospel of James*, runs into similar problems because it implies a similarity in content and style to other writings categorized as infancy gospels, which again are traditionally about Jesus. While Jesus does make an appearance at the end, the crux and overarching concern is for Mary.²⁴ Indeed the birth of Jesus and the minor activities associated with his infancy serve primarily to elevate Mary and her exceptional status and condition.

While there is a clear case for why the title of our text should be changed, the traditional title in its semi-anglicized form, the *Protevan-gelium of James*, will be used here mostly for the sake of convenience; it is popularly and widely used²⁵ and changing it will only contribute to confusion about its already complicated history, which offers no clear indication of its original form.

Date

General consensus assigns a mid-second century to early third-century date to the text. While dates as late as the fifth century were proposed at the beginning of the twentieth century, these proposals were debunked with the discovery of the third- or fourth-century Bodmer Miscellaneous Codex in 1952, which serves as our earliest manuscript of the *Protevan-gelium*.²⁶ In support of the earlier dating of the text scholars have looked

24. Cf. Toepel (*Protevangeli-um*, 38–41, 269–70) who argues that the text should be categorized as an infancy gospel because its goals are primarily to praise the miraculous deeds of a god (i.e., Jesus).

25. E.g., Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 48–67; Cameron, *Other Gospels*, 107–21; Vuong, *Gender and Purity*; Gregory and Tuckett, eds., *Early Christian Apocrypha*.

26. Note that this earliest manuscript also shows signs of secondary developments, i.e., omissions, editing, etc. See de Strycker, *La forme la plus ancienne*, 13–18.

The Protevangelium of James

1 (1) ¹In the Histories^A of the Twelve Tribes of Israel,^B there was a very wealthy man named Joachim.^C ²And he used to double the gifts^D he offered to the Lord, ³saying to himself, “One portion from my abundance^E will be for all the people; the other portion for forgiveness will be for the Lord God as my sin-offering.”

A. *Histories*: whether this account can be deemed an “infancy narrative” is challenged from the onset with the self-designation of “historia.” Given that the criteria for infancy gospels (e.g., a focus on Jesus’ birth and nativity) are not met in the *Protevangelium*, a sacred narrative about Mary may be a more apt generic designation. See section on “purpose” in Introduction.

B. *twelve tribes of Israel*: cf. 1:6 “twelve tribes of the people.” This writing is unknown, but may be comparable to the *Book of Kings of Israel and Judah* (2 Chr 16:11; 24:27; 27:7; 32:32) or to the *Book of the Wars of YHWH* (Num 21:14) (Vanden Eykel, *Looking Up*, 106 n.18). The intentions of the reference are ambiguous and can easily be used to indicate a connection to the entire history of the OT (van Stempvoort, “Protevangelium Jacobi,” 415–16), or simply an attempt at producing a family tree for Joachim and therefore Mary (Smid, *Protevangelium*, 25). *of Israel*: so Tischendorf and Syriac manuscripts but lacking in de Strycker (and P. Bodmer V).

C. *wealthy man named Joachim*: the name Joachim is likely influenced by Sus 4. Joakim, the husband of Susanna, is described as a rich man with a fine garden adjoining his house. Other references to the name Joachim appear in Neh 12:26 and Jdt 4:6 where Joiakim and Joakim, respectively, are identified as priests. While Joachim is not a priest in the *Protevangelium*, his level of concern for ritual purity resembles a priestly focus.

D. *double the gifts*: Joachim establishes himself from the start as a wealthy and devout man who goes beyond the requirements for purification and atonement. Cf. Job 1:5 who also presents extra offerings to atone for any unintentional sins that may be accrued by either himself or his family. Likewise, see 1 Sam 1:5 where Elkannah offers double portions for his wife Hannah.

E. *abundance*: *περιουσίας*, so de Strycker (from P. Bodmer V). Two-thirds of Tischendorf’s manuscripts have this reading, though he favors *περισσείας* (“surplus”).

THE PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES

(2) ⁴Now the great day of the Lord^A was approaching, and the children of Israel were offering their gifts. ⁵And Reubel^B stood up before him^C and said, “You are not permitted to offer your gifts first^D because you have not produced an offspring in Israel.”^E

(3) ⁶And Joachim was very distressed and went to the Book of the Twelve Tribes of the people, saying to himself, “I am going to examine the Book of the Twelve Tribes of Israel to see if I alone have not produced an offspring in Israel.” ⁷And he actively searched and found that all the righteous had raised children in Israel. ⁸And he remembered the patriarch Abraham because at the end of his days, the Lord God had given him a son, Isaac.^F

A. *great day of the Lord*: Cf. Joel 2:11; Acts 2:20; 1 Thess 5:2; and 2 Pet 3:10–13, where the phrase most likely refers to the day of judgement or related to the end of days, a possible usage here but with the caveat that it is also clearly associated with a celebration or festival. On its possible interpretation, see note on 2:2 below.

B. *Reubel*: Ρουβήλ, so de Strycker. Many of Tischendorf’s manuscripts have Ρουβίμ (“Reubim”).

C. *Reubel stood up before him*: while Reubel’s position is not completely clear, his reprimand of Joachim has encouraged various readers to interpret him as having some authority at the temple. Indeed, several manuscripts include a description of him in the role of a priest. It is also very possible that Reubel is simply a busybody who has many children and wants to call Joachim out because of his childlessness.

D. *you are not permitted to offer your gifts first*: Joachim is not banned from offering gifts, but his childlessness prevents him the honor of doing so before all others. While there is no documented tradition concerning the order in which one may present gifts, likely he was able to lead previously because of his wealth and generosity.

E. *you have not produced an offspring in Israel*: childlessness in biblical literature was a common motif used to indicate God’s anger and displeasure. However, in Joachim’s and Anna’s situation, this negative view seems not to be the case given the narrator’s first description of Joachim as righteous. Instead, Joachim’s and Anna’s situation resembles the particulars of exceptional birth stories of matriarchs. Anna’s infertility appears to be modeled after or at least reminiscent of Sarah (Gen 16–21), Rebecca (Gen 25:21), Rachel (Gen 30:1), Samson’s mother (Judg 13), Hannah (1 Sam 1), and Michal (2 Sam 6:23). Even Elizabeth, Mary’s cousin in Luke 1, is afflicted with fertility problems. That these important biblical matriarchs eventually are blessed by God and given children under miraculous conditions signals the expectation that Anna’s fertility problems are not permanent and that she too will be able to conceive.

F. *he remembered the patriarch Abraham . . . had given him a son, Isaac*: cf. Gen 16–21. Joachim’s remembrance of Abraham and Isaac encourages

(4) ⁹And Joachim was grievous and did not appear to his wife, but sent himself into the wilderness and pitched his tent there. ¹⁰And Joachim fasted for forty days and forty nights,^a saying to himself, “I will not go down for food nor for drink, until the Lord my God visits me. My prayer will be my food and drink.”

cf. John 4:34

2 (1) ¹Now his wife Anna^b wailed twice over and spoke a twofold “lament: “I mourn my widowhood and I mourn my childlessness.”^c

the same expectation of Joachim’s character as righteous and of a miraculous birth.

A. *into the wilderness . . . for forty days and forty nights*: cf. Noah and the flood in Gen 7:4, 12, 17; 8:6; Moses with God in Exod 24:18; Elijah’s flight (1 Kgs 19:8); Jesus’ temptation by Satan in the wilderness in Matt 4:2. See also Acts 1:3, when Jesus’ ascension occurs 40 days after his resurrection. Note too that fasting and praying contribute to Joachim’s righteous and pious character by evoking Jesus’ stay in the wilderness (cf. John 4:34). The linguistic parallels between Jesus’ 40 days and Joachim’s 40 days are striking and evoke the theme of testing as well as death and resurrection.

B. *Anna*: Anna bears a common biblical name and her situation closely parallels Hannah’s from 1 Samuel: both are infertile; they desperately pray and call upon God to help them with their barren states; and both are taunted and belittled by their slaves (2:6; 3:2–8; 1 Sam 1:6; 2:10). Like Hannah, Anna also uses song to express both her despair and joy, and their children, Samuel and Mary respectively, are dedicated to the Lord before they are born (4:2; 1 Sam 1:11). Additionally, Anna and Hannah wait until their children are weaned before leaving them at the temple (7:2; 1 Sam 1:22–23). Even the women’s husbands share a noticeable closeness in their characterization and situation. Both Joachim and Elkannah, for instance, are depicted as pious Jews who go up regularly to offer sacrifices; Joachim is described offering double gifts akin to Elkannah’s double portions offering for his wife, Hannah (1:2; 1 Sam 1:3–5). One final parallel is the misreading of the couples’ situation by temple priests: Eli misinterprets Hannah’s heartfelt and desperate prayer as drunkenness (1 Sam 1:13–14) and Reubel attributes Joachim’s childlessness to his participation in sin (1:5). Other possible influences include Tob 1:20 where the name Anna is also used for the wife of Tobit and the prophetess in Luke 2:36–39, who is described as a widow who fasts and prays day and night, which is reminiscent of Anna’s solemn prayer in the garden (3:1–8).

C. *I mourn my widowhood and I mourn my childlessness*: the despair Anna feels because of her “widowhood and childlessness” evokes LXX Isa 47:9 in which Babylon is punished for its mistreatment of Israel.

THE PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES

(2)² Now the great day of the Lord^a drew near³ and Juthine,^b her slave, said to her, “How long will you humble your soul? Look, the great day of the Lord is approaching, and you are not allowed to grieve.⁴ But take this headband,^c which the mistress of the work gave me; I am not allowed to wear it because I am your^d slave and it has a royal insignia.”^e (3)⁵ And Anna said, “Away from me! I will never do these things. The Lord God has greatly humbled me. Who knows if a wicked-doer has given this to you, and you have come to make me share in your sin.”^f ⁶And her slave Juthine

A. *great day of the Lord*: this specific day is referenced three times at *Prot. Jas.* 1:4; 2:2; and here at 2:3. Given its festive description, the Feast of Tabernacles has been suggested because “the last day” is referred to as “the great day” in John 7:37. Another possibility is Yom Kippur given the details of Anna’s change of mourning clothes and the solemn but also celebratory nature of this holy day. If the latter proposal is indeed correct, the identification of the festival evokes a powerful symbolic connection between Jesus, the messiah who would bring final atonement, and his mother, the woman who was conceived on or near the Day of Atonement (Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 75–79). On the view that Yom Kippur is both a day of solemnity and festivity, see e.g., Lev 25:10; *m. Yoma* 7.4; and Philo, *Spec.* 1.186–87.

B. *Juthine*: there are at least 18 variations with regard to the name of Anna’s slave. De Strycker here uses Ἰουθίνη, but Εὐθίνη (P. Bodmer V), Ἡευθίνη, Ἰουθίνη, Ἰουθίν, Ἰουθίνην, Ἰουθ, Οὐθίνη, Οὐθένη, etc. are also attested. Tischendorf has Ἰουδίθ (Judith).

C. *headband*: the precise meaning of the term κεφαλοδέσιμον is unclear, but given that it seems to be an item that is worn around or on the head, I have translated it as “headband.” It is also possible it was more of a crown or diadem.

D. *I am your*: so de Strycker’s εἰμι σή (P. Bodmer V); Tischendorf has simply εἰμί. The Armenian and Syriac fragments support the identity of Juthine as a slave belonging personally to Anna (from σοῦ εἰμι) rather than simply a household slave.

E. *royal insignia*: Anna’s rejection of the “headband” may relate to the fact that it bears a “royal mark or insignia” and thus it may also be an indication of Anna’s Davidic lineage, which is hinted at throughout the text. In the Armenian versions, Anna’s royal lineage is made clear: “It is improper for me to speak with you like this, for I am your maidservant and you of royal character” (2.2; Terian, *Armenian Gospel*, 151).

F. *share in your sin*: despite the obscurity of the meaning behind the “headband,” Anna’s strong negative response to it reinforces the idea that the object may carry some form of transferable sin, curse, or trickery. Her rejection also emphasizes Anna’s piety and loyalty to God since she will not participate in any questionable activity seen as contrary to God even if doing so might help her in what she most desperately desires.

said, “Why would I curse you? Because you have not listened to me? The Lord God has closed your womb^a to prevent you from bearing fruit in Israel.”^b

(4) ⁷And Anna was very distressed. She took off her mourning clothes,^c washed her face,^d and put on her bridal clothes.^e ⁸And in the middle of the afternoon,^f she went down to her garden to take a walk. She saw a laurel tree and sat underneath it.⁹ And after resting a little^g she prayed to the Master, saying, “O God of my fathers,^h bless me and hear my prayer, just as you blessed our mother Sarahⁱ and gave her a son, Isaac.”^j

cf. Gen 21:1–3

A. *closed your womb*: the term used here is ἀποκλείω; cf. the use of συγκλείω to describe both Sarah’s and Hannah’s infertile condition (LXX Gen 20:18 and LXX 1 Sam 1:6).

B. *Juthine . . . bearing fruit in Israel* (2:3–6): the interplay between Anna and her slave Juthine is reminiscent of the relationship between two other biblical matriarchs and their slaves: Sarah is mocked by Hagar for her infertility (Gen 16:4–5) and Penninah irritates Hannah for her closed womb (1 Sam 1:6). More specifically, Juthine’s reproach of Anna parallels Reubel’s rebuke of Joachim only a chapter earlier.

C. *mourning clothes*: Anna wears the mourning clothes of a widow who believes her husband is dead. See Esth 4:1, 3; Job 2:8; Dan 9:3, Matt 11:21, etc. for similar expressions of grief.

D. *face*: κεφαλήν, literally her “head.”

E. *bridal clothes*: the rationale behind Anna’s decision to exchange her mourning clothes for her bridal gown for the upcoming festival is difficult to determine with precision. However, if the festival is in fact the Day of Atonement, a tradition attributed to R. Simeon b. Gamaliel in *m. Ta’an.* 4.8 that describes the daughters of Jerusalem dressed in white and dancing in the vineyards on Yom Kippur, offers possible insight into this practice and its function in the narrative. The donning of white clothes also has clear eschatological overtones as seen in Rev 3:4–5 with references to the “day of the Lord” in Rev 16:15 and Matt 22:12.

F. *middle of the afternoon*: literally “about the ninth hour,” thus about 3 pm. Cf. Acts 3:1 that also identifies three o’clock in the afternoon as an hour of prayer.

G. *after resting a little*: μετὰ τὸ ἀναπαύσασθαι, literally “stopping.” So de Strycker (from P. Bodmer V), lacking in Tischendorf.

H. *O God of my fathers*: πατέρων μου, so de Strycker (P. Bodmer V lacks μου). Tischendorf has παρτέρων ἡμῶν (“God of our fathers”).

I. *our mother Sarah*: τὴν μητέρα Σάραν, so de Strycker (from P. Bodmer V). Tischendorf has τὴν μήτραν Σάρρας (“the womb of Sarah”).

J. *gave her a son, Isaac*: Anna’s remembrance of Sarah’s blessing (Gen 17:16) parallels Joachim’s remembrance of Abraham at 1:8.

3 (1) ¹And Anna looked up towards heaven and saw a nest of sparrows in the laurel tree. ²And straightaway Anna lamented to herself, saying, “Woe is me. Who gave birth to me? What kind of womb bore me?^a ³For I was born as a curse before the children of Israel. And I was reproached and they mocked and banished^b me from the temple of the Lord my God.

(2) ⁴“Woe is me! What am I like?^c I am not like the birds of the sky because even the birds of the sky reproduce before you, O Lord.

⁵“Woe is me! What am I like? I am not like the unreasoning beasts because even the unreasoning beasts reproduce before you, O Lord.^p

⁶“Woe is me! What am I like? I am not like the wild animals of the earth because even the wild animals of the earth reproduce before you, O Lord.

(3) ⁷“Woe is me! What am I like? I am not like these waters because even these waters are calm yet leap, and their fish bless you,^e O Lord.

⁸“Woe is me! What am I like? I am not like this earth because even this earth produces its fruit in its season and blesses you, O Lord.”

A. *Woe is me . . . What kind of womb bore me?:* Anna’s lament starts with the questioning of her own birth, which she describes as being cursed. Consistent with the biblical motif that associates barrenness with the unblessed, Anna sees her condition as wholly in the hands of God. Anna’s lament, which surveys the procreation abilities of birds, animals, water, and earth, functions on several levels. First, it reinforces Anna’s intense grief for being singled out, but also highlights God’s creative power and a divinely created world that views motherhood and childbirth as part of the natural order.

B. *banished:* ἐξώρισαν; later Greek and Armenian manuscripts have ἐξέβαλλον (“thrown out”).

C. *what am I like:* τίμι ὡμοιώθην ἐγώ; this phrase in each of the following verses has been translated in the active and present tense for effect.

D. *Woe is me! . . . O Lord:* this verse is lacking in Tischendorf. Other manuscripts combine the unreasoning and wild animals (vv. 5–6) into one stanza (see Daniels, *Manuscript Tradition*, 1:194–97).

E. *calm yet leap, and their fish bless you:* γαληνιῶντα καὶ σκιρτῶντα, καὶ οἱ ἰχθύες αὐτῶν σε εὐλογοῦσιν, so de Strycker (P. Bodmer V). Tischendorf (along with Armenian and Georgian manuscripts have γόνιμά εἰσιν ἐνώπιόν σου (“reproduce before you”).

4 (1) ¹And behold an angel of the Lord^a appeared^b and said to her, “Anna, Anna, the Lord has heard your entreaty. You will conceive a child and give birth, and your offspring will be spoken of throughout the whole world.”^c

cf. Luke 1:31

²And Anna said, “As the Lord God lives,^d whether I give birth to a male or female child,^e I will offer it as a gift^f to the Lord God and it will serve him all the days of its life.”^g

cf. 1 Sam 1:11, 28; 2:11

A. *angel of the Lord*: the sudden appearance of an angel of the Lord recalls Luke 2:9 and Acts 12:7.

B. *appeared*: ἐπέστη is attested in most of Tischendorf’s manuscripts and better suits the context. De Strycker (and P. Bodmer V) has ἔστη (“stand”); ἐφάνη (a synonym for “appeared”) is also attested.

C. *your offspring will be spoken of throughout the whole world*: this phrase recalls Matt 24:14 and 26:13 where the words are spoken by Jesus with reference to the spreading of “good news.” Cf. Rom 1:8 and 2 Cor 2:14.

D. *as the Lord God lives*: this phrase is commonly used throughout the *Protevangelium* to initiate vows or oaths (see Hannah’s vow for her son Samuel; 1 Sam 1:11). It is also commonly used for the same purpose in the Hebrew Bible, e.g., Judg 8:19; Ruth 3:13; 1 Kgs 1:29, 2 Kgs 2:2; 2 Chr 18:13; Jer 4:2; Hos 4:15. While the vow Anna makes is presented here as hers alone, Joachim takes up his wife’s words as a shared promise at *Prot. Jas.* 7:1. In the Armenian versions, the text inserts Joachim’s voice in Anna’s initial vow to make clear the promise is made on behalf of both parents (4:1; Terian, *Armenian Gospel*, 152).

E. *whether I give birth to a male or female child*: while Anna’s prayer for a child and vow thematically recall other famous biblical tales of barren women who give birth to miraculous and special children, her declaration that she welcomes a child of either sex is noteworthy in presaging the birth of a daughter. All other significant births have resulted in male children (e.g., the sons of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Samson’s mother, Hannah, and Elizabeth).

F. *I will offer it as a gift*: Anna’s immediate response to promise her child to God reinforces her righteousness and piety. By giving up her child as a “gift” to the temple, Anna promises to make a personal sacrifice to God. Additionally, her vow recalls other biblical children who are also dedicated by their parents to serve God. Specifically, Anna’s declaration has parallels to the Nazirite vow that was open to both males and females and involved maintaining a heightened level of purity. Num 6:1–21 describes some of the requirements: being set apart for the Lord, abstention from the grapevine and all products produced from grapes including their seed and skin, and regulations on hair cutting. Samson (Judg 13:5), Samuel (1 Sam 1:11, 28; 2:11), and possibly even John the Baptist (Luke 1:15) all performed the Nazirite vow.

G. *all the days of its life*: Anna’s vow for her unborn child is a life-long commitment; thus Mary’s role as the Lord’s virgin starts not on the day of her birth but the moment Anna utters the vow to the angel.