## Comments to Matthew and Luke’s Nativity Descriptions

**Nativity of Jesus only in two Gospels**

The Nativity of Jesus, not like almost all other recorded activities of Jesus Christ’s ministry, is reported only in two Gospels, that is of Matthew and Luke. And even in these two Gospels only the basic information is repeated: the names of Jesus’ parents and the name of the town He was born and the town He grew up.

**Joseph vs. Mary**

**Matthew’s Nativity is focused on Joseph** – This Gospel mentions Joseph’s hesitation to wed Mary and how an angel appearing to Joseph in a dream advised him to wed Mary. In another dream an angel urged Joseph to take Mary and their newly born child to Egypt to escape Herod’s persecution. Finally, Matthew mentions Joseph’s return and settling in Nazareth with his family. On the other hand, **Luke’s Nativity is devoted to Mary** – Angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she’ll carry a child conceived by the Holy Spirit. After the announcement she visits her cousin, Elizabeth, the future mother of John the Baptist. As Mary arrives, Elizabeth’s yet unborn child recognizes the divinity of the child Mary carries.

**Adoration of the Magi vs. the Shepherds**

While Matthew reports that the Wise Men, or Magi, came to pay homage to the child Jesus, Luke describes how the simple shepherds watching their flocks were asked by angels to seek “the Messiah, the Lord”, “wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger”. (Luke 2:12)

**Abraham vs. Adam**

Even the genealogy of Jesus differs – Matthew traces Jesus’ genealogy to Abraham while Luke’s tree goes through Abraham even back to Adam as the son of God.

**Complementariness of the Gospels:**

**Thinking and Feeling; Past and Future**

Keeping faithfulness to the text and acknowledging that nothing can be random in the Scripture, I suggest looking at these two Gospels as complementary – both Gospels together provide the full image of the mystery of Jesus’ Nativity and each one analyzed separately emphasizes only one side, one aspect of that mystery. Additionally, I suggest approaching the **Matthew Gospel as the Gospel that represents thinking** and all what thinking implies – planning (Magi had the knowledge of the stars, scheming by Herod, escape to Egypt), rituals, following orders (angel’s message) and approaching the **Luke Gospel as the Gospel of feelings** – Gabriel’s message to Mary “*do not be afraid*” (Luke 1:30) and the angel’s message to the shepherd: “*do not be afraid for see – I’m bringing you good news of great joy for all people*”. (Luke 2:10)

Moreover, we can see the Matthew’s Gospel as **the Gospel of the past** while **Luke indicates the future**. Matthew reports a completion of the mission of Abraham - who left his family in Ur, Chaldea, to settle in the Promised Land – now we see the Wise Men coming from the Orient to pay homage to the King of the Jews; Egypt which for many generations of Jacob’s children was the country of slavery, now is a place of safety for the Holy Family. On the other hand, Luke signals future missions of John the Baptist and of Jesus. At the presentation of their eight-day old infant, Joseph and Mary heard the prophetic words of Simeon, the Temple priest *“This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel…*” (Luke 2:34) Mary, moreover, heard “*and a sword will pierce your own soul too."* (Luke 2:35)

**Questions for reflection**

**Archetype and Individuation**

We can also view the main events presented in Jesus’ Nativity in both Gospels as the archetypes, representations of events that frequently occur in our lives in many configurations. We could transform the simple images presented in the Nativity of Jesus as

1. **Joseph’s hesitation to wed Mary**
   1. When do we hesitate and doubt while facing important decisions in our lives?
   2. When do we think and plan before making the final decision?
   3. Whom do we consult to assure that we make the right decision?
   4. Do we get any help from our dreams? Does sleep help us to resolve our challenges?
2. **Mary’s surrender** 
   1. When do we totally surrender without hesitation (like Mary)?
   2. When do we follow emotions rather than deliberate thinking?
   3. When do we accept messengers and their message?
   4. How do we listen to others?
3. **Adoration of the Shepherds** 
   1. When do we embrace and listen to what is revealed to us by others?
   2. When do we follow others?
   3. What do we take for granted? How do we express our gratitude for such gifts?
4. **Adoration of the Magi** 
   1. How do we share our knowledge?
   2. Whom do we respect, revere, pay homage to?
   3. Do we expect recognition by society for our achievements?
5. **Birthing and looking for safety**
   1. How do we bring forth (give birth) our individuality?
   2. Do we help others to be fully recognized/ born?
   3. When did we have to seek for a shelter or a safe space?
   4. When or where do we feel threatened?

**Evolution of Consciousness in Art**

Jesus’ Nativity became a great inspiration for artists over the centuries. Viewing pictures created in different epochs we can see how the consciousness of the artist was changing. We can analyze the collected paintings or drawing from a few points of view:

1. How was the background presented – schematic to very naturalistic representation.
2. How was the spiritual aspect of the scene presented – objects, figures, postures, etc.
3. How were faces of people presented – simple facial features to individualistic inward soul expressions.
4. What symbols were presented – are symbols acquired through divine inspiration or self-knowledge.
5. Is the name of the artist known and recorded on the painting.