

Class 6b

JESUS' INFANCY & CHILDHOOD

Outline

- Dig Sites
 - Nazareth and Bethlehem
- Recap: Criteria of Historicity
- Four Infancy Narratives: How Historical Are They?
 - Gospel of Matthew
 - Gospel of Luke
 - Infancy Gospel of James
 - Infancy Gospel of Thomas

Dig Sites: Nazareth & Bethlehem

IAA dig near the Church of the
Annunciation in Nazareth,
revealing Roman-era
foundations of a house





Israeli Archaeologist at work at an excavation in Nazareth

RECAP: CRITERIA OF HISTORICITY

Evaluating Historicity

For Literary Texts

Something in the texts is MORE likely to be historical if it is

- IN the text (not an argument from silence)
- eyewitness testimony
- embarrassing to the author
- multiply attested in independent witnesses
- coherent with other sayings/actions established as historical
- discontinuous with known Jewish or Christian tradition
- consistent with Jesus' execution

Evaluating Historicity

For Literary Texts

Something in the texts is **LESS** likely to be historical if it is

- NOT actually said anywhere (not in any text)
- a later tradition (though it may still be named for an apostle)
- NOT embarrassing; it actually bolsters author's claims
 - adds laudatory epithets, legends, miraculous events
 - adds interpretation (ties to Jewish figures, traditions, prophecies)
 - explains problems in earlier stories
- only reported in one witness
- continuous with later Christian tradition

FOUR INFANCY NARRATIVES: HOW HISTORICAL ARE THEY?

Matthew's Infancy Narrative

A Genealogy that Reveals Jesus' Significance (Matt 1:1–2:23)

- Genealogy 1:1-17

How is it organized, and what does this symbolize?

Matthew's Infancy Narrative

Five Vignettes in a Highly Structured Narrative (Matt 1:1–2:23)

- Genealogy 1:1-17

- Joseph's dream 1:18-25
- The *magoi* and the king 2:1-12
Isaiah 7:14 (1:22-23)
Micah 5:1 (2:5-6)
- Flight into exile 2:13-15
Hosea 11:1 (2:15)
- Slaughter of infants 2:16-18
Jeremiah 31:15 (2:17-18)
- Exodus from Egypt 2:19-23
Unknown prophecy (2:23)

What events in Jewish history do these episodes recall or echo?

Matthew's Infancy Narrative

The more highly structured the narrative, and the more it self-consciously mirrors Jewish tradition, the less likely it is historical, the more likely it is an artistic emphasis on the significance of Jesus to the author's eyes.

Luke's Infancy Narrative

Highly Structured – in a Very Different Way (1:5–2:52)

	John the Baptist	Jesus
Before births		
Birth		
Childhood		

Luke's Infancy Narrative

Do any of the episodes match up to the criteria of historicity, or do they demonstrate later theological reflection and embellishment (and if so, of what sort)?

Infancy Gospel of James Manuscript Evidence

James was one of Jesus' brothers, hence the tradition that he reported on Jesus' infancy.

This gospel was very popular and was collated in several liturgical collections.

Because the text was not regarded as canonical, it was amended more often, so the versions are quite different from one another.

There are over 140 Greek mss (the oldest is Papyrus Bodmer 5 from the 300s), and multiple translations:



- ❖ 4 Syriac
- ❖ 2 Georgian
- ❖ 1 Latin (+ extracts)
- ❖ 1 Irish
- ❖ 3 Armenian
- ❖ 1 Arabic
- ❖ 2 fragments in Coptic
- ❖ 1 Ethiopic paraphrase
- ❖ 169 Church Slavonic mss

Infancy Gospel of James



- **Date** 150–200 CE + later additions, place
- **Genre** A narrative like the NT gospels, but confined to stories of parents and Jesus' birth
- **Gospel comparison** Presupposes and conflates the canonical infancy stories, adding legendary elements (1 Sam 1:1-2:11; 2 Chr 24:20-22)
- **Content** Mary's conception, birth, upbringing, betrothal to older Joseph (with sons from a prior marriage), birth of Jesus, virginity *in partu* and *post partum*

James' Infancy Narrative

Do any of the episodes match up to the criteria of historicity, or do they demonstrate later theological reflection and embellishment (and if so, of what sort)?

Infancy Gospel of Thomas Manuscript Evidence



The name "Thomas" is the Aramaic word for "twin." An early tradition imagines the disciple Thomas to be Jesus' twin (metaphorical, of course).

A version of this circulated in Arabic and would later influence the Qur'anic portrait of Jesus' childhood.

Our oldest copies of this gospel date to the fifth century CE:

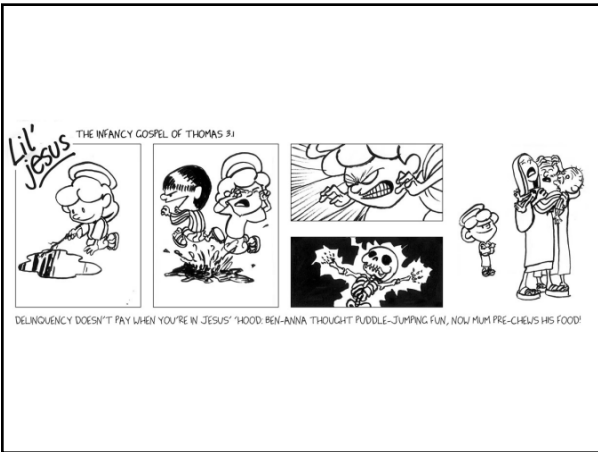


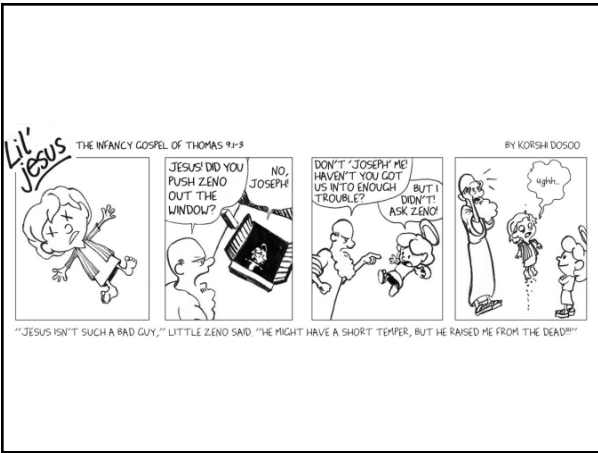
- ❖ 8 Greek (1300s +)
- ❖ 3 Syriac (500s +)
- ❖ 2 Latin (400s–500s +)
- ❖ 1 Georgian
- ❖ 1 Ethiopic
- ❖ 15 Church Slavonic mss (1000s +)

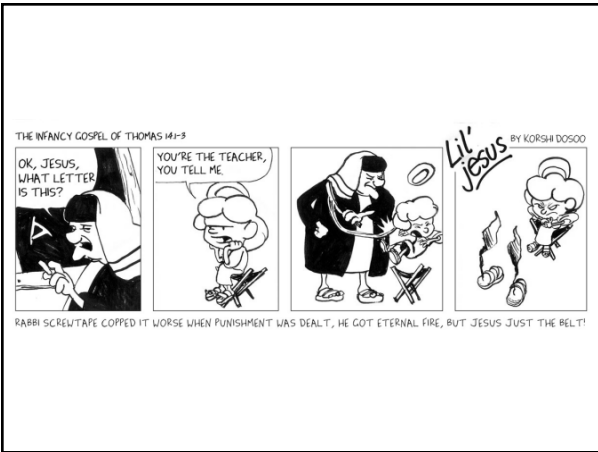
Infancy Gospel of Thomas



- **Date** 100s CE, Syria?
- **Genre** Collected traditions loosely strung together in a narrative form
- **Gospel comparison** Vignettes of Jesus' childhood unlike anything in the NT gospels, though some scenes are modeled on the adult Jesus' miracles in canonical NT
- **Content** Imagine an impulsive and willful child with divine powers







Thomas' Infancy Narrative

Do any of the episodes match up to the criteria of historicity, or do they demonstrate later theological reflection and embellishment (and if so, of what sort)?
