



“And She Shall Bring Forth a Son”

Matthew 1-4

Dave LeFevre

Adult Religion Class

New Testament, Lesson 4

2 October 2017

“And She Shall Bring Forth a Son”

Matthew 1-4

Introduction

Matthew was for centuries considered the most important and earliest of the four gospels. It was the favorite of the Catholic Church because it uses the word “church” and because of the special commission to Peter, on which they based their papal succession. It’s also the most quoted of the four gospels generally.

It’s fascinating to note that possibly not more than thirty days of Christ’s three-year ministry are recorded in the gospels, with an intense focus on the last few days in all four books. Matthew has most of those days in his book, but there are entire sections that cover only a single day, something that is easy to overlook if you are only reading small parts or from a harmony version.

Matthew quotes Mark extensively—in many cases word for word (in the Greek). The substance of 606 of Mark’s 661 verses appears in Matthew. Some are also shared with Luke but not in Mark. That leaves about 42% of Matthew that is unique.

Gospel	Exclusive	Common
Mark	7%	93%
Matthew	42%	58%
Luke	59%	41%
John	92%	8%

The Joseph Smith Translation changes the title of this book to “The **Testimony of St Matthew.**” This change is also applied to John’s book but not to Mark or Luke, presumably because Matthew and John were first-hand witnesses of Christ’s ministry, while Mark and Luke got their information second-hand from other sources.

Matthew’s first chapters have many unique elements, especially the infancy narratives. He presents his purposes early on—portray Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law of Moses and other Old Testament prophecies; have him proclaim the coming of God’s kingdom and the ‘new’ law of God; and establish Jesus as both king and Messiah. His composition does this marvelously, moving deftly through the messages with efficiency and organization that would make it easy for his listeners (most people in the ancient world heard books but did not read them) to quickly discover his message and follow the story, which included familiar cultural elements and many quotes from well-known scriptures.

Q

As stated, Matthew and Luke quote extensively from Mark. This overlapping material is called the “Triple Tradition” because it’s in all three accounts. But there are about 220-235 verses (depending on who is counting) that are in both Matthew and Luke but are *not* in Mark. This is called the “Double Tradition.” So where does this overlapping text come from? Is Matthew quoting Luke, or Luke quoting Matthew, or are they both quoting a third source that we no longer have?

There are several competing theories about it, but the dominant one among scholars today is a hypothetical document called “Q” (from the German word for ‘source,’ *Quelle*). Many believe that this document was used by both Matthew and Luke as the basis for their shared sections. The theory is basically that there was first an oral tradition about Jesus (people told the stories to each other). Then perhaps someone wrote the stories so that they might be preserved. This is Q. Then the gospel writers took the oral stories, testimonies from eyewitnesses (including themselves with Matthew and John), and Q, and wrote their own accounts. The existence of Q helps explain some of the wording in Matthew and Luke that is nearly identical—implying that they are not simply interpreting an oral tradition but are both copying from a single source.

There are many books and articles talking about Q theories—where it came from, who wrote it, what it contained, how it relates to Paul, and more. For our purposes, I believe it is important to emphasize that there is no Q document. One has never been found, not even a little scrap of papyrus: it is completely hypothetical. So all the debate about what it contains is simply drawn out of what we see in Matthew and Luke. But I wanted to bring it up because if you look at any New Testament studies and commentaries today, you will run into it, and I have found that Latter-day Saints are sometimes confused or concerned about it.

We need not be. It is a handy way to explain the “Double Tradition,” the overlapping texts in Matthew and Luke. And if such a document did exist at one point, it doesn’t cause any problems for our doctrine or theology. After all, it is fairly logical that someone would remember or write down things that Jesus said and did early on, as some believe that Matthew did, perhaps even while Jesus was alive.

Where the controversy sometimes arises is that *some* scholars have promoted the Q document as the *only* original story of Jesus, and because the 220 or so verses that are overlapping in Matthew and Luke are almost all teachings (only one miracle is included), they have used this to claim that the stories of Jesus’ divinity and power are late creations by his disciples and thus not the ‘true’ Jesus. But those conclusions are based on a host of assumptions about when the gospels were written and by who, all of which are intended to deny faith in Christ. They deny the resurrection and they deny all prophecy. We would not agree with this extreme interpretation. But we should not be concerned with a discussion about Q or any similar early record of the life and sayings of Jesus. Indeed, our own Book of Mormon and early Church history attests that God encourages his Saints to write things down early on.

For those who want to explore the Q question in more detail, see *The Synoptic Problem* (referenced in the bibliography below).

Themes

There are three common themes in Matthew:

- 1) ***The importance of the Church and Kingdom of God.*** Matthew is the only gospel to use the word “church” (*ekklesia*), such as 16:13-19.
 - a. Matthew 18 is a unique chapter about regulating the church, including conversion (1-5), removing harmful elements (12-14), resolving differences (15-17), and genuine forgiveness (21-35). D&C 42:84-92 is similar in content and concludes by quoting Matthew 18:17. This is heightened in the JST by emphasizing commandments (5:50; 6:29-30; 9:35-36; 16:25-29) and ordinances (5:1-4; 18:10-11).
 - b. Jesus as King and Messiah are both emphasized as well, starting with the genealogy (1:1-17) which is the royal line, which emphasizes the number 14 (the number for the name of “David” in Hebrew; d=4 + v=6 + d=4). This is demonstrated by: the wise men searching for the king and Herod’s alarm over it (2:1-16); parables of the kingdom (13:1-52); the triumphal entry (21:1-11); and the inscription above Jesus’ head at the crucifixion (27:37). The Greek phrase “kingdom of heaven” occurs thirty-three times in Matthew, and “kingdom of God” four more.
- 2) ***Jesus’ condemnation of first-century Judaism and traditions.*** In Matthew, Jesus attacks the formalism and hypocrisy of the Jews more than in the other gospels. This comes out even more strongly in the JST (adding to the uniqueness of Matthew), such as 9:15-16, where it is expanded to talk about the deadness of the Pharisee’s baptism. In the JST version of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches the disciples to call the hypocritical Jews to repentance (Matt 7:6-7).
- 3) ***Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.*** Matthew, like Jacob (7:11) saw Jesus’ mission as the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies. He did not come to destroy but to fulfill (5:17). Scholars have identified at least sixty Old Testament quotations in Matthew. Eleven of these are in chapters 26-27, the “Passion” chapters of Matthew. More specifically, Matthew cites fourteen specific scriptures as being fulfilled by Jesus, eight of which come from Isaiah. These citations take the form, ‘Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet’ or something similar, giving them the name formula citations. The list is:

<u>Matthew</u>	<u>OT Scripture</u>
1:22-23	Isaiah 7:14
2:5b-6	Micah 5:1 and 2 Samuel 5:2
2:15b	Hosea 11:1
2:17-18	Jeremiah 31:15
2:23b	Isaiah 4:3 (perhaps) and Judges 16:17
3:3	Isaiah 40:3
4:14-16	Isaiah 8:23-9:1
8:17	Isaiah 53:4
12:17-21	Isaiah 42:1-4
13:14-15	Isaiah 6:9-10
13:35	Psalms 78:2 (though Matt says Isaiah)
21:4-5	Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9
26:56	formula without citation (cf Mark 14:49)
27:9-10	Zechariah 11:12-13 (also Jeremiah 18:2-3; 32:6-15)

Some of these relate to the minutiae of Jesus' life, showing to the early Christians that Jesus was the fulfillment of scripture in every detail of his life.

Other OT scriptures that are just cited but not called out with a formula citation include: 2:5-6; 3:3; 4:4, 6-7, 10; 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43; 9:13; 10:35; 11:10; 12:7, 40; 13:14-15; 15:4, 7-9; 18:16; 19:4-5, 7; 19:18-19; 21:9, 13, 16, 42; 22:24, 32, 37-38, 43-44; 23:39; 24:30; 26:31, 64; and 27:45.

Background to the Author

Matthew is also known as Levi in the New Testament (9:9; cf Mark 2:14). He was a tax collector at Capernaum, probably working for Herod Antipas. He exhibits a great knowledge of the scriptures—even though as a publican he would not have been allowed into the synagogue. As a tax collector, Matthew/Levi was probably well-educated, with the ability to read and write, do arithmetic, and probably speak Greek.

The gospel with his name today was attributed to Matthew as early as Papias (c. 140) and certainly by Irenaeus (c. 185). Said Papias (according to Eusebius):

“Matthew composed his history in the Hebrew [Aramaic] dialect, and everyone translated [or, ‘interpreted,’ according to *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1:155] it as he was able” (*Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.16).

Irenaeus stated:

“Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect [Aramaic], while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome” (*Against Heresies*, 3.1.2).

Matthew may well have written down some of the sayings and events of Jesus' life at the time they happened—hence the comment that he first composed his work in Hebrew/Aramaic. However, the only documents we have of Matthew are in Greek.

Matthew was probably written after Mark, thus AD 65-70.

The JST version of 1:18 indicates that Matthew was drawing on at least one written source for his infancy narratives, though his is the only source we have today with that information.

Audience

Matthew was written for a Jewish audience, because he gives some of the same events and words as Mark but without the explanations and translations (cf. Mark 7:1-4 with 15:1-2; see also 1:1-7 which is a royal Davidic line; 5:22; 23:5; and 27:6).

Matthew's audience is further indicated by several factors:

“And She Shall Bring Forth a Son”: Matthew 1-4

1. He speaks of the synagogue in the second or third person (“their” or sometimes “your”, 4:23; 9:35; 12:9; 13:54; 23:34).
2. He speaks of the scribes in the third person (“their scribes”, 7:29).
3. He alludes to a time of tension between Jewish and Gentile converts, solely mentioning Jesus’ admonition to only take the gospel to the Jews (10:5-6; 15:24), but he also lists Gentile women in Jesus’ genealogy (1:3-6), has Gentile wise men (2:1), and emphasizes the faith of two Gentiles (8:10-12; 15:28). He also includes the great commission to teach all nations (28:19), showing that his message is to accept Gentiles into the Church.

Audience Examples

Thinking of his Jewish audience, some scholars believe Matthew portrays Jesus as the new Moses:

- 1) He came out of Egypt (2:13-23).
- 2) He gave a new law on the mountain (5:1).
- 3) He gave five sermons that match Moses’ five books (5-7; 10; 13; 18; 24-25).
- 4) He ends each sermon with the same wording (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1) except the last which ties them all together (26:1). These phrases are unique in Matthew and in fact unique in the entire New Testament.

Others don’t believe this was his intention, but that he is showing Jesus as presenting a new law as Jehovah on earth and as the Son of God. Either way, there are many ties to Moses, as illustrated above.

Finally, Matthew uses Jewish titles that reflect the Messianic expectation, such as “Christ,” “anointed one,” “Son of Man,” “King of the Jews,” and “Son of God.” A particular example is in his baptism, where Matthew refers to him as ‘the coming one’ (*ho erxomenos* in Greek; KJV says “he that cometh”); Mark and Luke do not use that phrase (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16). John’s disciples later asked if Jesus was the coming one (11:3). The answer is provided in the previous chapters, from 4:23 to 9:35, a chiasm/bracketing that portrays Jesus as the healing and preaching Messiah.

Outline of Matthew

Matthew writes to testify that Jesus is the manifestation of God’s love and care for his people. Jesus is *Emmanuel* (God with us) at the beginning (1:23) and likewise promises to be with the disciples always at the end (28:20). This concept brackets the entire structure of the book to remind us what he does for us.

Matthew seems to break his work into seven sections (seven representing perfection): a prologue and climax, with five middle sections, each concluding with a major discourse by Jesus. This makes it similar to the five books of Moses. Thus an overall outline for the book of Matthew is as follows (with the focus of this lesson in bold):

- 1. Prologue—Birth and Infancy (1-2)**
- 2. Proclamation (3-4);** Sermon on the Mount (5-7)
- Galilean ministry (8-9); Missionary discourse (10)
- Opposition (11-12); Parables (13)
- Christ and the Church (14-17); Church life and order (18)
- Jerusalem (19-23); Eschatological discourse (24-25)
- Climax—Passion, Death, and Resurrection (26-28)

Note: In each lesson on the gospels, where there are overlapping or parallel texts, those will be noted in the heading. References in bold are the preferred reading(s) and will be the principal section of analysis, though some unique points in the current gospel will be noted, as well as helpful JST changes.¹

¹ Not all JST changes are noted, only those of textual or doctrinal interest. Interested readers are encouraged to see Wayment, *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament* or the manuscripts themselves on the Joseph Smith Papers website (josephsmithpapers.org).

Prologue—Birth and Infancy (1-2)

Genealogy of Christ – Matt 1:1-17

Matthew starts with a list of names. To many modern readers, he couldn't have started in a more boring way. But to Matthew's Jewish and Gentile Christian audience, this was an important first step in establishing the identity, credentials, and authority of Jesus of Nazareth. The point is not strictly biological, which explains why some names are simply ignored and skipped over in Matthew's composition and why it follows Joseph's line, who Matthew will shortly establish as not being Jesus' biological father at all. But as Joseph accepts Jesus as his own son, the Davidic line comes into play, and Jesus is fully the heir of the throne of David. He is also the son of Abraham, opening Jesus' family to more than the Jews but to the whole world, as all the world is blessed through Abraham's covenant.

1:1 **the book of the generation of Jesus Christ.** The word translated "generation" is *genesis* in Greek, which means 'origin' or 'source' as well as 'beginning.' It is the word from whence we get the name of the first book of Bible, Genesis, which recounts the origin or beginning of God's work with men. Likewise, Matthew is recounting the origin or beginning of the story of Jesus, who was God among men.

On a textual note, Matthew only uses the name/title "Jesus Christ" here and in verse 18 of this chapter (though the title "Christ" for 'anointed one' is applied to Jesus five other times).

1:1 **the son of David, the son of Abraham.** Both components of Jesus' ancestry were important to his credentials. As the son of David, he was of the royal line and thus fully eligible to sit on the throne of David. He was Abraham's son, as were all Jews, and thus inheritor to the covenants and promises made to Abraham, including that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham (Genesis 18:18). Jesus is at least part of the fulfillment of that promise. Verse 1 thus summarizes the genealogy from Jesus back to Abraham, while verses 2-16 take it in the opposite direction, from Abraham forward to Christ.

1:2 **Abraham begat Isaac.** Matthew started at Abraham and went forward to Jesus in three segments, first to David, then to the fall of Jerusalem ("Jechonias," 1:11), then to Jesus himself (1:16). See 1:17 below.

1:3 **Thamar.** Matthew mentions five women: Thamar (Tamar); Rachab (Rahab); Ruth; "her . . . of Urias" meaning Bathsheba; and Mary. He likely had several purposes in including them. He wanted to show Jewish members of the Church that Gentiles should be allowed in, because here they are in Jesus' own genealogy. In addition, each woman represents a threat to the Messianic line that was overcome by God's grace. Thus these four women can be seen as demonstrating God's power to preserve the line through which the Messiah would come, in spite of challenges or problems. Finally, the four Old Testament women posed moral or at least genealogical challenges—three were clearly immoral² and all were non-Israelite.³ This can be seen as reflecting on the fifth woman, Mary, who was scandalously found pregnant out of wedlock. That these particular women in the Old Testament could be accepted as part of the Messianic line (which all in Matthew's day would have agreed was the case, since the Messiah had to come through this line), supports Mary's claim to righteous behavior; these women were all ultimately justified by God, based on the outcomes of their lives, and thus Mary can be, too.

1:6 **JST**

KJV	JST
And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;	And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her whom David had taken of Urias;

This change emphasizes the sin of David in the relationship and not just the fact of Bathsheba's previous marriage.

² A case for Ruth acting immorally can be made from Ruth 3:7-9, but that interpretation is not certain. At a minimum, she was a Gentile idol worshipper before her conversion, which is considered like immorality in prophetic teachings.

³ Bathsheba is not explicitly called out as a Gentile but her husband, Uriah, was a Hittite, so the argument is that she was likely also.

KJV	JST
And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.	And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, as the prophets have written , who is called Christ.

Matthew more than other gospel writers emphasizes that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The Joseph Smith Translation makes several changes to Matthew that enhance this perspective, including this one which alludes to multiple (“prophets”) non-specific prophetic statements about the birth of Jesus as Messiah.

1:17 ***fourteen generations***. The number of the letters of David's name (based on their position in the alphabet) added together (DVD, 4+6+4=14). Some of the details of Matthew's genealogy come from Ruth 4:18-22, 1 Chronicles 1-8, and 1 and 2 Kings, as noted below (see also “Chronology” in the LDS Bible Dictionary for a list of Judah's kings). Matthew gets fourteen generations in each of the three groups by condensing some generations. It's possible that Matthew was not altering the genealogies himself but rather using accepted records from his day. Either way, verse 17 almost has a sense of wonder—Matthew is amazed that it worked out so perfectly to have three groups of fourteen generations.

First list:

Matthew	OT Name	Reference(s)
1. Abraham	Abraham	1 Chr 1:34
2. Isaac	Isaac	1 Chr 1:34
3. Jacob	Jacob/Israel	1 Chr 1:34
4. Judas	Judah	1 Chr 2:1
5. Phares	Pharez	Ruth 4:18; 1 Chr 2:4
6. Esrom	Hezron	Ruth 4:18; 1 Chr 2:5
7. Aram	Ram	Ruth 4:19; 1 Chr 2:9
8. Aminadab	Amminadab	Ruth 4:19; 1 Chr 2:10
9. Naasson	Nahshon	Ruth 4:20; 1 Chr 2:10
10. Salmon	Salmon/Salma	Ruth 4:20; 1 Chr 2:11
11. Booz	Boaz	Ruth 4:21; 1 Chr 2:11
12. Obed	Obed	Ruth 4:21; 1 Chr 2:12
13. Jesse	Jesse	Ruth 4:22; 1 Chr 2:12
14. David	David	Ruth 4:22; 1 Chr 2:15

Second list:

Matthew	OT Name	Reference(s)
1. Solomon	Solomon	1 Chr 3:5
2. Roboam	Rehoboam	1 Chr 3:10
3. Abia	Abia	1 Chr 3:10
4. Asa	Asa	1 Chr 3:10
5. Josaphat	Jehoshaphat	1 Chr 3:10
6. Joram	Joram ⁴	1 Chr 3:11
7. Ozias	Azariah	1 Chr 3:12
8. Joatham	Jotham	1 Chr 3:12
9. Achaz	Ahaz	1 Chr 3:13
10. Ezekias	Hezekiah	1 Chr 3:13
11. Manasses	Manasseh	1 Chr 3:13

⁴ 1 Chronicles 3:11-12 list three others (though with similar names) between Joram and Azariah—Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah.

12. Amon	Amon	1 Chr 3:14
13. Josias	Josiah	1 Chr 3:14
14. Jechonias	Jeconiah ⁵	1 Chr 3:16

Third list:

Matthew	OT Name	Reference(s)
1. Jechonias	Jeconiah	1 Chr 3:16
2. Salathiel	Salathiel	1 Chr 3:17
3. Zorobabel	Zerubbabel ⁶	1 Chr 3:19; Ezra 3:2
4. Abiud ⁷		
5. Eliakim		
6. Azor		
7. Sadoc		
8. Achim		
9. Eliud		
10. Eleazar		
11. Matthan		
12. Jacob		
13. Joseph		
14. Jesus		

Though we are only examining Matthew in this lesson, it is notable that Luke’s genealogy (Luke 3:23-38) has a number of differences, including the identification of Jesus’ (step) grandfather—Jacob in Matthew and Heli (or Eli) in Luke, and thus the family line for many generations. Some have argued that Matthew records Joseph’s family line and Luke Mary’s, but Luke is quite clear that he is going through Joseph, not Mary (Luke 3:23). Other theories have been proposed, but a definitive answer is difficult to come by.⁸ In the end, we can only say that at this distance, we cannot know precisely the sources nor the variables in building each list; they are different for reasons unknown to us now.

Birth of Christ – Matt 1:18-25

Matthew tells the birth story from Joseph’s perspective (Luke from Mary’s). It is possible that he met and knew Joseph before Joseph died, or that he got his information from James or other of Joseph’s sons. It is also possible that he got it from a written source (see 1:18 below). After this chapter, we never hear of Joseph again. The story is simply told: his espoused wife becomes pregnant but before he can take action, Joseph is told by an angel to marry her anyway and what to name her son. Matthew quotes scripture and the angel more than Joseph himself: indeed, we only see Joseph in action and never hear his voice.

1:18 *JST*

KJV	JST
Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.	Now, as it is written , the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: After his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

⁵ Should be Jehoiakim; not only did Jeconiah not have more than one brother (Matthew says “brethren” in 1:11), but he was Josiah’s grandson. His father, Jehoiakim, has more than one brother.

⁶ 1 Chronicles 3:19 says Zerubbabel was the son of Pedaiah but many references (Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2; Nehemiah 12:1; Haggai 1:1, 12, 14; 2:2, 23) say that he is Salathiel’s son, which is what Matthew says as well.

⁷ Starting here, there is no verifiable Biblical line as Abiud is not listed in 1 Chronicles or elsewhere as one of the sons of Zerubbabel.

⁸ One author suggests that Matthew is recording the “legal descent through the kingly line” while “Luke gave the natural or literal descent.” See Richard Draper, “From the Annunciation Through the Young Adulthood of the Lord,” in Holzapfel and Wayment, *The Life and Teachings*, 1:126.

In the first JST New Testament manuscript, the “as it is written” phrase was inserted later in the verse: “Mary was espoused to Joseph **as it is written**, before they came together.” In either location, the phrase appears to allude to a written prophecy that Matthew has in hand that he sees as pre-figuring the infancy narrative of Jesus.

1:18 **Mary was espoused to Joseph.** The practice of the day was to become “espoused,” which was something like being engaged for a year, during which both parties prepared for the actual marriage. During espousal, they were known as ‘husband and wife’ yet any sexual activity was considered adulterous. It was during this period, “before they came together” (had the wedding) that it was discovered Mary was pregnant. Matthew adds “of the Holy Ghost” (or as Alma 7:10 says, “by the power of the Holy Ghost”) to prepare us for what is next, but strictly speaking, Joseph simply knew she was pregnant and was thus guilty of adultery by the law. How and when he learned this is not explained, though during espousal couples would rarely have time alone, so it was likely he found out not from Mary but from someone else, such as her parents or a neighbor, who knew of her condition.

1:19 **Joseph her husband, being a just man.** Joseph is described as a “just” or ‘righteous’ person, meaning he lived the law of Moses. Though under the law of Moses, Joseph could have had Mary stoned for her sin, that rarely happened in his day. That left him no choice but to divorce her and keep the Law—indeed, adultery would have been grounds for the immediate dissolution of the espousal contract.⁹

1:19 **put her away privily.** The choice that Joseph had was what type of divorce—public or private. As a sign of his abiding love for his young wife, he was inclined to do it privately, which only had to be witnessed by two or three, minimizing Mary’s exposure to shame.

1:20 **while he thought on these things.** His mind was mostly made up but he had not yet announced any kind of decision. While pondering this weighty situation, the young man experienced a communication from heaven that helped him understand what was really happening.

1:20 **in a dream.** As a righteous man, Joseph was able to receive divine communication, such as a dream from the Lord that instructed him how to care for God’s son.

1:20 **JST**

KJV	JST
But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream , saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.	But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a vision , saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

Joseph received divine communication four times in chapters 1 and 2 of Matthew (1:21 [and 24]; 2:13, 19, 22). In all four, the JST changes Joseph's “dream” to “vision,” though the language still indicates a nighttime not a daytime vision. (In 2:12, the wise men also have a dream which the JST leaves as a dream, but in 27:20, when Pilate’s wife has a dream about Jesus, it, too, is a vision in the JST.) This is similar to Lehi’s experience, where he equated the two terms (1 Nephi 8:2).

1:21 **thou shalt call his name Jesus.** “Jesus” is the English version of the Greek name *Iēsus*, which in turn is a form of the Aramaic name *Yeshua*, meaning ‘salvation.’ In the Old Testament (Hebrew), the longer form of the name was *Jehoshua*, or as we see it in Exodus, Joshua, which means ‘Jehovah is salvation.’¹⁰ This was a fairly common name in Joseph’s day, but the angel explained that it had special significance for Mary’s child, “for he shall save his people from their sins.”

1:22 **JST**

KJV	JST

⁹ Draper, “From the Annunciation,” 1:133-134.

¹⁰ Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, 14.

Now ~~all this was done~~, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the ~~prophet~~, saying,

Now this **took place**, that **all things** might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the **prophets**, saying,

Though the quotation in verse 23 is from Isaiah 7:14, the JST change makes it clear that it is only representative—Matthew intends to show that everything Jesus did throughout his mission fulfills the words of the prophets.

1:23 **a virgin shall be with child**. Matthew gets the term “virgin” from the LXX translation of Isaiah 7:14. In the Hebrew, the term is *’alma*, which has the meaning of a young woman. Of course, most young women would have been virgins, but that isn’t required with the term. Isaiah’s original context is a prophecy about a young woman in his day who is a sign to the king, so the child he spoke of was born long before the time of Mary. Matthew nevertheless sees it as a prophecy of Jesus because of the language, and this starts a pattern of using OT scriptures in a way that we today would say is out of context, but that would not have been a concern to Matthew or his readers in that day.

1:23 **call his name Emmanuel**. Matthew correctly translates the Hebrew word as “God with us.” That is not, of course, what they named the baby (though the woman in Isaiah’s day may well have done so), but the angel’s symbolic name represents the condescension of Jehovah, to come down among men and be like us (see 1 Nephi 11:16).

1:24 **JST**

KJV	JST
Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:	Then Joseph awaking out of his vision , did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

As mentioned above, the JST changes it from a dream to a vision, but it is still a sleeping experience for Joseph.

1:25 **knew her not**. Though Joseph and Mary became married, they abstained from sexual relations until after Jesus was born, according to Matthew’s account. It was common in the ancient world not to have intimacy during pregnancy.

The Wise Men – Matt 2:1-12

There is great irony in Matthew’s account of the wise men from the east. How is that foreigners from very far away are aware of this great event, the birth of the king of the Jews and the Messiah, when those in Jerusalem are oblivious to it?

Matthew 1:18 – 2:23 includes five citations of Old Testament prophecies that Matthew sees as fulfilled in the infancy narratives of Jesus. They are:

- Matthew 1:23, quoting Isaiah 7:14
- Matthew 2:6, quoting Micah 5:2
- Matthew 2:15, quoting Hosea 11:1
- Matthew 2:18, quoting Jeremiah 31:15
- Matthew 2:23, quoting possibly Isaiah 4:3; 11:1; 53:2; Judges 13:7; or 16:17

This could be an attempt to match the five sections of his gospel later (which are organized by doings and sayings of Jesus, each ending with a formulaic phrase).

The whole infancy section appears to be designed to call out as many similarities as possible to Moses and the Exodus, building on Matthew’s theme that Jesus is the new law giver (which extends through the entire book). This includes:

- Herod sought to destroy the child, so Joseph took him away (Matthew 2:13-14); Pharaoh sought to destroy Moses, so he left (Exodus 2:15)

- Herod killed all the boys two years and younger (Matthew 2:16); Pharaoh commanded that every male child be thrown in the Nile (Exodus 1:22)
- Herod died (Matthew 2:19); Pharaoh died (Exodus 2:23)
- The angel told Joseph to return to Israel because those that sought Jesus' life were dead (Matthew 2:19-20); the Lord told Moses to return to Egypt because those seeking his life were dead (Exodus 4:19)
- Joseph took Mary and Jesus and returned to Israel (Matthew 2:21); Moses took his wife and sons and returned to Egypt (Exodus 4:20)

The parallels are even more striking when considering the non-canonical Exodus accounts, such as those in Josephus (*Antiquities* II.ix.205-237) and Philo of Alexander (*Life of Moses*). Some of these additional parallels include:

- Pharaoh had been warned by one of his scribes (or in a dream, in some accounts) of the birth of a Hebrew that would be a threat to his kingdom.
- Alarmed, Pharaoh and all of Egypt were filled with dread.
- Pharaoh ordered the death of all Hebrew males, but God appeared in a dream to Amram (Moses' father) who told him not to despair but that his son would deliver the people.

2:1 **Jesus was born in Bethlehem.** Matthew gave no details of the birth or of how Joseph and Mary came to be in Bethlehem. In fact, from the information he provided, it appears Bethlehem was their home during the espousal and after the marriage. Certainly when they came to Nazareth later in 2:23, it sounds very much like it is a new adventure for the young couple in Matthew.

2:1 **wise men.** The Greek term used is *magoi*, from which we get 'Magi.' The term applies to priests of ancient Persia, usually scientists, diplomats, or religious leaders. They may have been Jews or (more likely) had access to Jewish records, perhaps from the Babylonian captivity. The journey could have taken many months.¹¹ We don't know the number of people in the party; the traditional count of three comes from the gifts they leave with Mary and Joseph.

2:2 **Saying.** The verb form indicates that the wise men were going around the city continually asking their question. They finally asked enough people—or the right people—that it came to the attention of the king, who first did his own research with his scribes and leaders, then brought the wise men in to have them help him solve the threat he felt (though without letting them know that was his goal).

2:2 JST

KJV	JST
Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.	Saying, Where is the child that is born the Messiah of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him.

Two things are clear from the JST changes. First, the wise men came seeking a child. Thus when Herod later asked about the appearance of the star, he was trying to gauge how old the child was, but he knew from the start it was a child they sought. Second, the wise men knew it was the Messiah (Christ) they were seeking, not just an earthly king (a further indication of their Jewishness). A king might be a threat to Herod politically, and he knew how to handle rivals (he killed them). But a Messiah is more than a king—he has the potential to engender great loyalty among the people and take Herod's position not by force, conquest, or trickery, but by the sheer will of the people and even the power of God. This was something Herod would fear more than a rival king.

2:2 **seen his star in the east.** Many questions are unanswered about this star. What was it—comet, supernovae, alignment of planets and stars, or something else? How did it remain in the east for the wise men, given that everything moves across the sky at night from east to west? Why did they go west when the star was in the east?

¹¹ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 1;14.

These questions we cannot answer today. But Matthew may well have been alluding to a Balaam prophecy in Numbers 24:17, “...there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel...”

2:3 **and all Jerusalem with him.** Not only Herod but the whole city was troubled by the news of the *magi*. This wonderful hyperbole is meant to show the large impact the birth of the Messiah had, even as he lived in completely humility among his countrymen. It could also reflect a very real threat that Herod felt from an attack from the east, such as the Parthinians or Trachonites. Perhaps he and the city leaders feared the wise men were spies or an advance party coming to size up their defenses.¹²

2:4 **he demanded of them where Christ should be born.** This was *before* Herod met with the wise men; the king wanted to be prepared when they came. He asked “the chief priests and scribes” for an answer. Ironically, these are the same groups of men who will plot together at the end of the book to kill Jesus.

2:4 **JST**

KJV	JST
And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.	And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them, saying, Where is the place that is written of by the prophets in which Christ should be born? For he greatly feared, yet he believed not the prophets.

Herod wanted a scriptural answer to his question, not just a tradition or rumor. The JST gives the marvelous insight that Herod was a very superstitious but unbelieving man; he appears to have honored Judaism in true Roman fashion, trying not to upset any of the gods, including the local God of Judah.

2:5 **In Bethlehem of Judea.** Bethlehem (‘house of bread’) was a small town just south of Jerusalem. It was the home of David the shepherd who became king and was thus also the anticipated birthplace of the Messiah, the son of David.

2:5 **JST**

KJV	JST
And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,	And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

This is another example of enhancing Matthew’s style by emphasizing the fulfillment of the prophets through Christ’s very birth.

2:6 **thou Bethlehem.** Herod’s inquiry of the priests and scribes turned up an obvious answer as to where the Messiah would be born, from Micah 5:2. The quotation in Matthew 2:6 differs in wording from the version in our Old Testament, because Matthew is basing his quote on the Septuagint (LXX), or the Greek translation of the Old Testament, though even there he differs from the text as we know it today. The JST in Matthew changes it even further (interestingly, the JST of Micah 5:2 is unchanged):

KJV Matthew 2:6 – And thou Bethlehem, *in* the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

KJV Micah 5:2 – But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel...

LXX Micah 5:2 – And thou, Bethlehem, house of Ephratha, art few in number to be *reckoned* among the thousands of Juda; *yet* out of thee shall one come forth to me, to be a ruler of Israel...

¹² Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 1:15.

JST Matthew 2:6 – **The word of the Lord came unto us, saying,** And thou Bethlehem, **which layeth** in the land of Judea, **in thee shall be born a Prince, which** art not the least among the princes of Judea: for out of thee shall come a ~~Governor~~ **the Messiah, that who shall rule save** my people Israel.

2:8 **bring me word again.** Using the wise men as unwitting spies, Herod sends them to look for the child. He will, however, never see them again.

2:9 **the star . . . went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.** Not only did the star stay in the east to guide them to the area, but after speaking to Herod, the star miraculously leads them to the very house where Jesus could be found. One suggestion to explain this is that in the ancient world, angels were also considered stars, and so this could have been an angel leading them along. An apocryphal *Gospel of the Infancy* tells this story, saying that the *magi* were led an “an angel in the form of that star which had before guided them on their journey.”¹³ Whatever its origin, people in the Roman world would have been quite comfortable with the idea of a star heralding the coming a great person.¹⁴

2:11 **when they were come into the house.** Note that the family is living in a house. They’re quite settled in Bethlehem, which is the picture of a young couple getting started in life in their home town. Jesus is also noted as a “young child,” indicating the passing of some time since his birth.

2:11 **opened their treasures.** The three gifts are symbolic of Jesus’ mission: gold = kingship; frankincense = temple and priesthood; myrrh = death spice (used to wrap bodies).

2:12 **warned of God in a dream.** The wise men recognized inspiration from a dream—perhaps even more than one of them had the same dream, since it says “they.” As a result, they defied the king and “departed into their own country another way.”

Flight to Egypt; killing of the infants; return to Nazareth – Matt 2:13-23

2:13 **flee into Egypt.** It is about 280 miles from Bethlehem to Alexandria, the most likely place for them to have gone because of the large Jewish population there (perhaps one million Jews). Joseph appears to be able to provide for his family with his house-building skills, and they set up residence in Egypt for a time. It is also possible that they sold some or all of the gifts of the wise men and were thus able to support themselves during this period of exile, perhaps as much as a year.

2:15 **until the death of Herod.** Herod died in March or April of 4 B.C. of a painful, terrible disease (perhaps intestinal cancer). He had lived a life of paranoia and fear, killing family members and others that he thought threatened him. His last command was to have the Jewish leaders killed so that someone would mourn at the time of his death, but this was countermanded upon his death by his sister Salome. For many years, the Jews held celebrations on the anniversary of his death.

2:15 **out of Egypt have I called my son.** Matthew quoted Hosea 11:1 which is a reference to the Exodus of the house of Israel from slavery in Egypt under Moses. Matthew thus infers that Jesus, like Moses, came out of Egypt to the Promised Land by the direction of heaven. This theme of Jesus as the ‘new Moses’ or the new divine lawgiver comes up often in Matthew’s book.

2:16 **slew all the children.** Given the population of Bethlehem at the time, the slaughter was perhaps only twenty babies or less. Some critics of the scriptures say this is a fictional event since it's not mentioned in other histories, but this was probably a minor event in the life of so brutal a ruler, and thus not mentioned.

2:17 **Jeremy the prophet.** Or, Jeremiah. The next verse quotes Jeremiah 31:15, a sad reflection of Jewish families who watched their sons killed in battle against invading forces. Ramah became associated with Bethlehem in Rabbinic thought, even though it was actually north of Jerusalem (the opposite direction of Bethlehem) near the Benjamin/Ephraim border.

¹³ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 1:16.

¹⁴ Draper, “From the Annunciation,” 1:146-147.

2:22 **Archelaus did reign.** After Herod’s death, his kingdom was divided among his three sons—Archelaus over Judea and Samaria, Herod Antipas over Galilee and Perea, and Herod Philip over the area north of Galilee. Archelaus was even more brutal than his father, killing about three thousand squelching an uprising in the temple, and Rome deposed him in AD 6 and replaced him with a Roman governor, Corponius, who, twenty years and three other governors later, was succeeded by Pontius Pilate.¹⁵

2:23 **He shall be called a Nazarene.** There is no scripture in the Old Testament that reads just like this. More likely, Matthew was probably referring to a concept taken from multiple scriptures, including Isaiah 4:3; 11:1; 53:2; Judges 13:7; and 16:17. This is supported by the reference to that “which was spoken by the prophets,” a phrase only found here in the KJV of Matthew (but found several other times in the JST).

What all these scriptures have in common is not the city Nazareth but the term “Nazarite” (*Nazoraiois* here in Greek) which means a person who is consecrated, holy, or separated (“branch” in Isaiah 11:1 is *netzer* and *naziyr* is the word for Nazarite) . Nazarites typically abstained from wine and cutting of hair, at least for a period of time. See Numbers 6. Matthew, however, appears to be using the term as a geographical designation, based on the Greek Septuagint translation he was using.¹⁶

2:23 **JST**

KJV	JST
And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.	And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene. And it came to pass, that Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come. And he served under his father, and he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him. And after many year, the hour of his ministry drew nigh.

A wonderful JST addition to scripture that gives us the only insight we have into this preparation time of Jesus is found in the Appendix of the LDS Bible. If the world found an authentic, early New Testament scroll with these words, it would be the greatest Biblical discovery in the last 400 years, and yet here we have them—in the Joseph Smith Translation. It also serves as a smooth transition to the story of John the Baptist and Jesus’ baptism in chapter 3.

Jesus patiently “waited upon the Lord” for the right time to start his ministry. The phrase, “he served under his father” is intriguing, as from the text it cannot be determined if the person referenced is his (step-)father, Joseph, or his Father in Heaven. If the former, it demonstrates patient preparation for an inevitable ministry; if the latter, it is an additional witness of Jesus acting fully under the authority of God.

One of the most powerful Christological changes in the JST is also in this verse: “he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him.” Throughout the Old Testament, there are records of God teaching his people and people seeking to be taught by the Lord. Moses was promised that he would be taught what to do (Exodus 4:15) and then given the Lord’s commandments to teach to Israel (Exodus 18:10; 24:12). Those teachings were passed on to future generations, because they came from God (Deuteronomy 4:10; 6:7; 11:19). Numerous psalms implore the Lord to “teach me thy paths” (Psalm 25:4) and “teach me thy way, O Lord” (Psalm 27:11; 86:11). And Isaiah and Micah proclaim the great day when people will to go the mountain of the Lord, “and he will teach us of his ways” (Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2). God himself could not be taught by man (Job 21:22) nor could the power of God’s teaching be exceeded (Job 36:22).

¹⁵ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 1:19-20.

¹⁶ Ogden and Skinner, *Verse by Verse*, 66.

In Jesus’s ministry, he was consistently a teacher, instructing large crowds, synagogue attendees, and smaller, private groups of disciples. On multiple occasions, the power, authority, and uniqueness of his teaching was noted (Matthew 7:29; Mark 1:22, 27; 6:2; Luke 4:36; 20:2; John 3:2) and his enemies questioned his authority to teach such things (Matthew 21:23; Mark 11:28; John 9:34). But when questioned by Jewish leaders as to the source of his teaching and authority, Jesus declined to answer (Matthew 21:24; Mark 11:33; Luke 20:8).

In the addition cited above, JST Matthew proclaims that Jesus could not be taught by other men, nor was it needed. Instead, the source of his wisdom and knowledge and later his teaching, was divine. This matches the language of a promise in 1 John 2:27 that those who follow Christ have an “anointing” received of God, and when that abides in them, “ye need not that any man teach you,” because “the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth.” The anointing referred to is likely the gift of the Holy Ghost,ⁱ which Joseph Smith had learned not long before working on his translation of Matthew was “the Comforter, which showeth all things, and teacheth the peaceable things of the kingdom” (D&C 39:6; see also John 14:26). Thus we can interpret this JST addition to say that Jesus was fully taught and tutored by the Holy Spirit, and thus did not need any human teaching, for he had full access to knowledge from above (John 8:23). It does not mean that he did not learn and progress in his mortal experience (as D&C 93:10-14), but rather that his progression was not based on mortal understanding or learning. This is a significant addition to Matthew of “high” Christology.

Proclamation (3-4)

These two chapters start the first of the five sections in the book of Matthew. As explained above, each section ends with a sermon, which in this case is the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7). Prior to the sermon, Matthew tells us about Jesus’ baptism, time in the wilderness, and early preaching and calling of disciples. Taking Mark’s content at the beginning of his book, Matthew greatly enlarges and enhances these stories, using them to tell his own story of Jesus the Messiah and Son of God.

John the Baptist – Matt 3:1-12 (Mark 1:2-8; Luke 3:1-18; John 1:19-28)

John the Baptist was the one called to prepare the way and to baptize the Messiah himself. His important mission prefigured Jesus’ teachings and actions and gave Jesus an audience of humble and ready converts as soon as he stepped onto the scene.

3:1 ***In those days.*** This phrase advances us in time dramatically, rather than referring to what just previously happened in the record. Though Matthew does not give us the year, other sources allow us to at least date it between AD 24-28.¹⁷

3:1 ***John the Baptist.*** In Matthew’s record, John just marches on stage with no introduction. People likely knew him or of him already. When he appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, he introduced himself as “the same that is called John the Baptist in the New Testament” (D&C 13 heading). Had he introduced himself by the name he was best known in life, it might have been Yohanan ben Zechariah (John, son of Zechariah).

3:2 ***Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*** The Greek word for “repent” represents a change from evil to good in both heart and mind. This was John’s main message—and Jesus’ exact words when he later started preaching himself (Matthew 4:17). “Kingdom of heaven” is a phrase unique to Matthew, and he uses it about 32 times.¹⁸

3:3 JST

KJV	JST
For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness,	For I am he who was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness,

¹⁷ Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, 27; Matthews, *A Burning Light*, 33-34.

¹⁸ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 1:22-23.

Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Prepare ye the way of the Lord, **and** make his paths straight.

JST Matthew changes verse 3 from a fulfillment scripture by Matthew to a quote from John the Baptist, declaring his own mission as a fulfillment of prophecy and continuing what he started to say in verse 2.

3:3 **Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.** These two parallel phrases are saying essentially the same thing: the forerunner was to go before the king and clear the road, removing obstacles and making sure everything was in readiness for his arrival. The quote comes from Isaiah 40:3.

3:4 **his raiment of camel's hair.** John's dress was singular, which is why all three synoptic gospels call it out. It is reminiscent of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8, where Elijah is "an hairy man," which is how John would have looked with his camel hair garb). Later Jesus will teach that John was a forerunner or an Elias, which is the Greek form of the name Elijah (Matthew 11:14). His food came from his environment (locusts and wild honey), also like Elijah who was fed by ravens for a time as he hid from the king and queen (1 Kings 17:4-6).

3:6 **baptized of him.** Baptism is not a word from the OT; it is a Greek word (*baptizō*) which means to immerse or submerge. In the OT, the equivalent words would be wash or cleanse (cf. Psalm 51:2; Isaiah 1:16).

3:7 **O generation of vipers.** Other translations read, "brood of vipers" (NASB, NAB, NIV, NRSV, and JSB), meaning a family of young snakes. John compared the Pharisees and Sadducees to extremely poisonous and dangerous snakes out to hurt everyone who dared step on them (Jesus used the same language later; see Matthew 12:34, 23:33). He warned them "to flee from the wrath to come," language reminiscent of the judgment day, which both groups surely were not concerned about, since they believed that God's wrath was directed at the Gentiles, not them.

3:8 **Bring forth fruits meet for repentance.** The fruits of repentance are our righteous efforts to live God's commandments.

3:8 **JST**

KJV	JST
Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:	Why is it, that ye receive not the preaching of him whom God hath sent? If ye receive not this in your hearts, ye receive not me; and if ye receive not me, ye receive not him of who I am sent to bear record; and for your sins ye have no cloak. Repent, therefore, and bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.

John's scathing rebuke is even more powerful and direct in the JST. He is a 'sent one' (apostle) of God, so if they reject him, they also reject God and the person for whom John is preparing the way.

3:9 **We have Abraham to our father.** Claiming descent from Abraham gave the Jewish leaders much pride—they were the inheritors of God's great covenant.

3:9 **JST**

KJV	JST
And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.	And think not to say within yourselves, We are the children of Abraham, and we only have power to bring seed unto our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Jews could raise seed to Abraham either through their own progeny or through bringing converts to the faith. John indicts them in this hypocrisy, claiming (with effective hyperbole) that God can accomplish either of these things with mere stones.

3:11 ***I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance.*** Jews of that days performed many ritual cleansing activities with water, in many cases including immersion. John’s claim was that his immersion was different—it wasn’t meant to temporarily cleanse them from some legal impurity but was supposed to trigger a full change of heart, a rejection of a former life of sin for a new life of righteous living.

3:11 ***JST***

KJV	JST
I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:	I indeed baptize you with water upon your repentance: and when he of whom I bear record cometh, who is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear (or whose place I am not able to fill), as I said, I indeed baptize you before he cometh, that when he cometh he may baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and fire.

In the JST, candidates for baptism needed to first show signs of repentance. But John was clear that his ordinance was but the first step; the rest of the baptism would come with the transforming power of the Holy Ghost, which refines a person like metal in a fire.

3:12 ***Whose fan is in his hand.*** This is a winnowing fan, used to toss grain in the air and let the wind blow the light chaff away while the heavier wheat kernel falls to the ground. John’s language looks to a day of judgment and justice, a separation of the good and the evil. See Jeremiah 51:2.

3:12 ***JST***

KJV	JST
Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.	And it is he of whom I shall bear record , whose fan shall be in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but in the fullness of his own time will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Thus came John, preaching and baptizing in the river of Jordan, bearing record that he who was coming after him had power to baptize with the Holy Ghost and fire.

John was the forerunner, preparing the way, something that comes out much more powerfully in the JST. He portrays Jesus as the great Messiah who will judge and purge his people, but also is clear that it is in “his own time.” Matthew’s summary phrase at the end of this JST addition captures the full sense of that mission but also serves as a smooth transition to the next event—the baptism of Jesus.

Jesus' baptism – Matt 3:13-17 (Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34)

All four gospels mention Jesus' baptism; the Synoptics discuss the event itself, while John refers to it after it has happened. Jesus would have walked eighty to ninety miles from Nazareth to reach the place where John was baptizing, down where the Jordan River encounters the northern end of the Dead Sea.

3:14 ***But John forbad him.*** John declares that he is not worthy to baptize Jesus but that it should be the other way around. He knows exactly who Jesus is—the Coming One that John has been announcing for some time.

JST: “But John ~~forbad~~ **refused** him...”

The JST change is in accord with the Greek, which has the sense of ‘hinder’ or ‘prevent.’ Other translations use “tried to prevent him” (NASB), “tried to deter him” (NIV), and “tried to dissuade him” (NJB).

3:15 ***Suffer it to be so now.*** Jesus said in essence, ‘Just let that go.’ He was telling John not to even think about his worthiness concern but to perform the necessary ordinance.

JST: “Suffer ~~it to be so now~~: **me to be baptized of thee**, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him. **And John went down into the water, and baptized him.**”

The JST indicates that their conversation took place on the shore, out of the water, and that after Jesus convinced John, they both went into the water to perform the ordinance.

3:15 **fulfill all righteousness.** Compare 1 Nephi 11:26-27 and 2 Nephi 31:4-8. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness by humbling himself before the Father and being totally obedient to the Father's will, *wherefore* he received the gift of the Holy Ghost. John also had a role in fulfilling all righteousness (“it becometh us”), which was to righteously perform the saving ordinance for the Son of God.

3:16 **and, lo, the heavens were opened.**

JST: “...straightway out of the water: **and John saw**, and lo!, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon ~~him~~ **Jesus.**”

The KJV is ambiguous about who saw the dove, but in the JST, it is clearly John. This aligns with John 1:32-34 where John declares that he saw the sign as a personal witness of who Jesus was.

3:17 **This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.** To appreciate how these words would have impacted John, as the one who heard them, it is helpful to consider relevant Old Testament scriptures, including Psalm 2:7 (sung at the coronation of a king) and, Isaiah 42:1 (a clear reference to the Messiah). Both would be called to his memory, as would the story of Isaac being offered as a sacrifice by Abraham, because Isaac was Abraham's son that he loved (Gen. 22:2).

JST: “And lo! **he heard** a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; **hear ye him.**”

When the Father has introduced the Son in scripture, more often than not, the phrase “hear ye him” (or “hear him”) is included in the announcement. Adding it here harmonizes this experience with the Father's words later in Matthew on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5) and with Joseph Smith's own experience in the Sacred Grove (Joseph Smith-History 1:17)

Temptations in the wilderness – [Matt 4:1-11](#) (Mark 1:12-13; [Luke 4:1-13](#))

In speaking of these temptations that Jesus experienced in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry, President David O. McKay said:

Now, nearly every temptation that comes to you and me comes in one of those forms. Classify them, and you will find that under one of those three nearly every given temptation that makes you and me spotted, ever so little maybe, comes to us as (1) a temptation of the appetite; (2) a yielding to the pride and fashion and vanity of those alienated from the things of God; or (3) a gratifying of the passions, or a desire for the riches of the world, or power among men.

4:1 **wilderness.** The “wilderness” is the area east of Jerusalem, long an area where individuals and groups sought solitude. Such were the Essenes—the probable writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

JST: “...into the wilderness to be ~~tempted of the devil~~ **with God.**”

This is a dramatic change in the purpose of the wilderness journey. Like other times in his life, Jesus went away alone to commune with his father

4:2 **And when he had fasted forty days.** Only Moses (Deuteronomy 9:9) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8) are recorded in scripture as having fasted as long. The number “forty” may well be more symbolic than literal, but either way, the point is that he fasted for a very long time.

JST: “And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, **and had communed with God**, he was afterwards an hungered **and was left to be tempted of the devil.**”

The purpose of the visit is reemphasized—to be with his Father—and we get the explanation that after all that came the temptations.

4:3 ***If thou be the Son of God.*** Satan begins his conversation by challenging the very thing Jesus and John had just heard the Father say, that Jesus was God’s beloved Son. Lucifer attacks that concept head on—not by denying it but by slyly challenging, ‘*If that is true, then prove it by doing this simple thing.*’

4:3 ***stones be made bread.*** The first temptation was satisfying a physical appetite. Jesus’ response was a rejection of Satan’s will for God’s. He shows how we need to apply scriptures in our daily life, and live by *every* word of God (not just our favorites).

4:4 ***Man shall not live by bread alone.*** See Deuteronomy 8:3 where Moses reminded the Israelites that they suffered hunger in the wilderness until God fed them manna, which experience was designed to teach them this lesson.

4:5 ***Then the devil taketh him up.***

JST: “Then ~~the devil taketh him~~ **Jesus was taken** up into the holy city, and **the Spirit** setteth him on a **the** pinnacle of the temple.”

The JST clarifies that Satan does not have the power to move Jesus about, but the Spirit does.

4:5 ***a pinnacle of the temple.*** As the JST change to “the” pinnacle supports, this was one of the highest corners of the walls surrounding the temple, either the southeast corner overlooking the Kidron Valley, a height of about 450 feet, or the southwest corner, in full view of the entire city. Either way, if Jesus did as Satan suggested, many people would witness his feat. This temptation thus refers to the desire for glory and praise of men, to pride, with a direct challenge to Jesus to prove his Sonship. Jesus’ response was that God should not be tempted. “Tempt” here means ‘try’ or ‘test.’ It was as if Jesus was saying, ‘God has indeed promised to protect his son. However, it is not our place to test that promise intentionally, but to have faith.’

4:6 ***And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God.***

JST: “**Then the devil came unto him and said**, If thou be the Son of God...”

After the Spirit carried Jesus to this magnificent view from the temple walls, then Satan came with his tempting words.

4:6 ***for it is written.*** Satan knows the scriptures as well and uses them for his own purposes. Here he quoted Psalm 91:11-12.

4:7 ***It is written again.*** Jesus quotes a scripture right back at Satan as his response, from Deuteronomy 6:16.

4:8 ***Again, the devil taketh him up.***

JST: “**And again, the devil Jesus was in the spirit and it** taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain...”

The Spirit again took Jesus from the temple to a high mountain.

4:9 ***And saith unto him.***

JST: “**And saith unto him, the devil came unto him again, and said**, All these things will I give **unto** thee...”

4:9 **All these things will I give thee.** The temptation here is wealth and power, but it was an empty promise from one who ultimately controls none of it. Jesus' response was to serve only God, because his promises are real and eternal.

4:11 **angels came.**

JST: "Then the devil leaveth him, ~~and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.~~ **And now when Jesus had heard knew that John was cast into prison, and he sent angels, and behold, they came and ministered unto him. And Jesus** he departed into Galilee;"

The person to whom angels ministered is shifted in the JST from Jesus after the temptations to John, sent by Jesus to relieve his suffering in prison (see 4:12).

[Jesus' Early Preaching; Disciples Called – Matt 4:12-25 \(Mark 1:14-20; Luke 4:14-15; John 2:12\)](#)

4:12b **he departed into Galilee.** After spending some time down near the Jordan River and in the wilderness, Jesus returned back to the Galilee to begin his public ministry.

4:13 **Capernaum.** Aramaic *Kefar Nahum* or 'house of Nahum [comfort].' It was a town of about 1,000 people on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. It had a large pier which made it a place of fishing and a center for transportation. Jesus made Capernaum his home for reasons Matthew doesn't explain except to say that it fulfills prophecy (compare Luke 4:16-30). Even though Jesus moved his home, he was never known as 'Jesus of Capernaum' but still was 'Jesus of Nazareth' (Matthew 21:11; 26:71).

4:15-16 **The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim.** Matthew quoted Isaiah 9:1-2 as being fulfilled by Jesus' move from Nazareth to Capernaum.

4:17 **Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.** Though Matthew 3:2 is slightly different in English (John says, "Repent ye"), the Greek of the two phrases is identical—Jesus is quoting John the Baptist.

4:18 **sea of Galilee.** Called "sea of Kinnereth" in the Old Testament, this lake is also known as the "sea of Gennesarat" and the "Sea of Tiberias" for two prominent cities at its edge. It is 636 feet below sea level, giving it generally pleasant temperatures. But it is surrounded by mountains that rise over 3,000 feet from the lake's surface, making for strong downdrafts and sudden storms. It was well known for nice beaches and good fishing.

4:18 **Simon called Peter, and Andrew.** Simon is a common name in that day, but Peter (Greek *Petros*) is not; it means 'rock' or 'stone.' Matthew never explains why Simon is called Peter but we get that from John 1:42, where Jesus named him *Cephas*, the Aramaic equivalent to *Petros*. With Andrew, his brother, they are successful fishermen on the Sea of Galilee.

4:18 **casting a net.** The most common way to fish, either from the shore or a small boat, was to use a *amphiblēstron* or casting net. The fisherman would throw a 25' round net, weighted at the edges onto the water. It would sink down and capture fish along the way. The fisherman would then either dive down and pull the fish out one at a time to put them into a sack or pouch, or he would pull the sides together and haul the net back to the surface with the fish still inside. Either way, the fisherman had to be a good swimmer. See also 4:21.

4:19 **Follow me.**

JST: "And he ~~said~~ **said** unto them, **I am he of whom it is written by the prophets;** follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Enhancing Matthew's message that Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecy, the JST has him state that very message personally as he calls his first disciples.

4:20 and 4:22 **straitway** and **immediately.** In Greek, the phrase is the same in both verses, *hoi de eutheōs*, meaning 'directly' or 'at once.'

4:20 **And they straightway left their nets.** The typical way for this to happen was for the disciple to seek out the master and ask to be taught. Jesus turned that around and called them to join him. That they still reacted by immediately accepting the unorthodox invitation demonstrates their faith in him.

JST: “And they ~~straightway~~ **believing on his words**, left ~~their nets~~ **net**, and **straightway** followed him.”

Having already heard Jesus teach and proclaim the coming kingdom of God, Peter and Andrew had a testimony of his words. When he called them to be disciples and follow him, there was no hesitation on their part.

4:21 **James the son of Zebedee, and John.** James is a poor translation; the name is Jacob (*Iakōbos* in Greek). We should really say ‘Peter, Jacob, and John.’ James and John, his brother, were also fisherman, apparently in a partnership with Peter and Andrew. Their father, Zebedee, was by all indications a successful and perhaps wealthy businessman, as the scriptures mention hired servants (Mark 1:20).

4:21 **in a ship . . . mending their nets.** The other way to fish was with a *seine* or drag net, or a very large net called a *trammel* net. In both cases, the net was dragged behind the ship or between two ships during the night when the fish couldn’t see it, thereby trapping them. After a good catch, the nets might have to be mended to repair damage caused by the weight of the fish, as the men were doing here. See also 4:18.

4:22 **they immediately left the ship and their father.**

JST: “And they immediately left **their father in the ship** ~~and their father~~, and followed him.”

They didn’t just leave the ship and their father but let their father while still sitting in the ship working. Their departure truly was immediate.

4:23 **teaching . . . preaching . . . healing.** In this verse, Matthew summarized the proofs of Jesus’ Messiahship that he will present in his book; Jesus taught (delivered discourses of truth), preached (heralded the coming of the kingdom), and healed (served and restored to health). The latter miraculous deeds confirmed the truth of his words.

JST: “...and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of ~~disease~~ **diseases** among the people **which believed on his name.**”

Jesus did not heal randomly but when supplicants came to him in faith and testimony that he was the promised Messiah, the one John had declared.

4:24 **he healed them.** Though scholars numerate thirty-six specific miracles of Jesus called out in the scriptures, it’s clear from references like this that he performed many, many more.

4:25 **there followed him great multitudes.** Very quickly Jesus attracted the attention of people from all over the region, including the prominently Gentile areas like Decapolis (‘ten cities’) and beyond Jordan (Perea). The population of the Galilee region could well have exceeded 300,000 at that time, with people spread out in 200 cities and villages. If only a portion of those came to see and hear him, it would indeed have represented “great multitudes.

Bibliography

Bible translations cited:

- CJB – Complete Jewish Bible
- ESV – English Standard Version
- JST – Joseph Smith Translation
- KJV – King James Version
- NASB – New American Standard Bible

- NIV – New International Version
- NJB – New Jerusalem Bible
- NLT – New Living Translation
- NRSV – New Revised Standard Version

Aland, Kurt, ed., *Synopsis of the Four Gospels, Greek-English Edition, 13th Edition*. Freiburg, Germany: German Bible Society, 2007.

Arnold, Clinton E., ed., *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, 4 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.

Beale, G. K. and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.

Brown, Raymond E., *An Introduction to the New Testament*. New York: Doubleday, 1997.

Coogan, Michael D., ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, Fully Revised Fourth Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press., Inc., 2010.

Gaventa, Beverly Roberts and David Petersen, eds., *The New Interpreters Bible: One Volume Commentary*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010.

Holzapfel, Richard Neitzel, *A Lively Hope*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999.

Holzapfel, Richard Neitzel and Thomas A. Wayment, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, 3 vols. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005.

Holzapfel, Richard Neitzel and Thomas A. Wayment, *Making Sense of the New Testament*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010.

Jackson, Kent P. and Robert L. Millet, *Studies in Scripture: Volume Five, The Gospels*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986.

Matthews, Robert J., *A Burning Light: The Life and Ministry of John the Baptist* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1972).

Metzger, Bruce M., *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, second edition. New York: United Bible Societies, 2000.

NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.

Ogden, D. Kelly and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The Four Gospels*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006.

Porter, Stanley E. and Bryan R. Dyer, *The Synoptic Problem: Four Views*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016.

Smith, Julie M., *Search, Ponder, and Pray: A Guide to the Gospels*. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014.

Wayment, Thomas, ed., *The Complete Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005.

ⁱ Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, *Making Sense of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 483; also Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 386.