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*THE CONTINUITY OF HIGH CHRISTOLOGY IN THE FOUR GOSPELS
UP THROUGH JOHN'S ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS AT THE RIVER JORDAN*

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THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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Introduction

From its declaration that “the Word was God”¹ to Thomas’ worship of Jesus as “My Lord and my God!”² John’s gospel proclaims a majestically high Christology.³ Indeed, some have seen in John a Christology that finds no parallel in the Synoptic Gospels.⁴ For them, John’s *logos*⁵ and incarnational⁶ thought and his explicit portrayal of Jesus’ divinity is juxtaposed with the less exalted portraits of Jesus in the Synoptics.⁷ To put it simply, “If Jesus was as He is depicted in Matthew and Mark and Luke, He cannot have been as He is depicted in John. The two are incompatible.”⁸

But is this contrast between John and the Synoptics accurate? Does it give a fair reading to the Christological titles and roles assigned to Jesus by the other evangelists? It is our position that such a view fails to account for the Christological motifs developed in the Synoptics⁹. Further, by doing so it creates a false dichotomy between John and the other evangelists on the point of exalted Christology.

¹ John 1:1. Unless otherwise noted all Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible.

² John 20:28.

³ For a summary of Johannine Christology followed by an extensive bibliography see Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: its unity and disunity in the light of John 6*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2, Reihe, Herausgegeben von Martin Hengel und Otfried Hofius, 78, (Tubingen, Germany: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996), 266. See also Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary, Volume I*, (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 280-320.

⁴ See e.g. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, New Updated Edition*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 29-32.

⁵ A.E. Harvey, *A Companion to the New Testament, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 290-292.

⁶ John Macquarrie, “Incarnation,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alistair E. McGrath (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 269-270.

⁷ Cf. D.A. Carson, “The Johannine Writings,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et al (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 133.

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Gen. Ed. F.F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 45. Morris states the maxim though he disagrees with it.

⁹ For a summary of Synoptic Christology see D.A. Hagner, “Synoptic Gospels,” in *NDBT*, 128-129. For an extended treatment see Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994).

Scope & Purpose

It is outside the scope of this paper to survey all of the Christological motifs¹⁰ in the gospels, so we limit ourselves to the depiction of Jesus in the opening scenes of each. While all four evangelists approach Jesus' coming into the world from a unique perspective, they all connect his entry into human history with the ministry of John the Baptist, culminating in their encounter at the Jordan. We will restrict ourselves to these opening scenes¹¹ and demonstrate that in all four gospels the evangelists magnificently declare Jesus' identity. Thus, exalted Christology emerges as a unifying theme between the Gospels' introduction of Jesus, rather than a point of discontinuity.

Given our scope we will mostly neglect various questions in the text including authorship, audience, historicity, textual variants, and the Synoptic Problem.¹² These, and other issues, will only be considered when they directly impact the question, "*Do the Synoptics as we currently have them present Jesus in the highest Christological terms from the outset or is this a unique feature of John's Gospel?*" In order to answer this question we will survey the gospels in the order in which they were likely written¹³ and conclude with an integration of our findings.

Mark

Despite the importance of the "messianic secret" for the *players* in Mark's gospel his concern for the *audience* is that they recognize Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

This is clear from his opening lines, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son

¹⁰ "Motif" is preferable to "title" given the inadequacy of titles to provide a complete picture of Christology. For a brief discussion of the issue see R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist & Teacher*, New Testament Profiles (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 280-281.

¹¹ Matt 1:1-3:17, Mark 1:1-11, Luke 1:1-3:22, John 1:1-34.

¹² Discussions of each of these issues can be found in the commentaries in our Bibliography.

¹³ For a defense of the chronology used in this paper (Mark-Matthew-Luke-John) see Raymond E. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997) 164, 217, 274, 368-371.

of God,”¹⁴ to Peter’s confession, “You are the Christ,”¹⁵ to the declaration of the centurion at the cross, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”¹⁶ As an evangelist, Mark is concerned with relating the life of Jesus of Nazareth; as a theologian, he identifies Jesus positively as “Lord of the Church and Son of God”.¹⁷ His focus at the outset is on his task as theologian, and in highly exalted terms he thrusts Jesus into human history. Mark is not concerned with Jesus’ birth, youth, or family background but commences with a majestic title and the Baptist’s preparatory ministry.¹⁸

The beginning...

Mark makes careful use of the few words of his gospel, filling them with theological import. His title, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,”¹⁹ is no exception. Lohmeyer believes Mark harks back to Genesis by opening his gospel with “Beginning” *arche*.²⁰ Such a phrase arrests our attention, suggesting that a new era has dawned. This new era promises “good news” *euangelion* that ushers in a “new situation for the world.”²¹

Jesus Christ

The good news is *about* “Jesus Christ”, a name and title pregnant with meaning. Unlike the other evangelists Mark does not *explicitly* connect Jesus’ ministry with the

¹⁴ Mark 1:1.

¹⁵ Mark 8:29.

¹⁶ Mark 15:39. C.f. Ralph P. Martin, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 126.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁸ In this he resembles John but differs from Matthew and Luke. See Donald H. Juel, *The Gospel of Mark, Interpreting Biblical Texts*, Gen. Ed. Charles B. Cousar (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 93.

¹⁹ Mark 1:1.

²⁰ E. Lohmeyer, *Kommentar*, 10, as quoted in Martin, 127. In this way Mark resembles John (1:1- “In the beginning”- *en arche*) over Matthew (1:1- “record”- *biblos*) and Luke (1:1- “account”- *diegesin*). However, Brown (*Birth*, 140) sees Genesis motifs in Matthew’s gospel as well.

²¹ William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Vol 2, Gen ed. F.F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 43.

removal of sins²² at this early point in his gospel²³ however, we should not miss the *implicit* reference given in Jesus' name itself²⁴ which means, literally, "Yahweh is salvation."²⁵ In itself the name is not necessarily significant²⁶ however in the light of Jewish history and the remainder of what is revealed throughout Mark the reader can hear in the *name* of Jesus echoes of Matthew 1:21, "He will save His people from their sins."

Christ/Messiah means literally "anointed one" and should be understood here as a designation referring to a coming king, anointed by God, from the house of David.²⁷ Jewish expectation of a coming Messiah in Jesus' time was prevalent.²⁸ While the OT mentioned many "anointed ones"²⁹ an evolution in Jewish expectation had occurred during the inter-testamental period and by Jesus' time the messianic hope for many had coalesced around a single kingly figure, anointed by God to rescue His people.³⁰ Mark's claim should be understood in these exclusive terms. Jesus is *the Messiah*.

Son of God

To this point Mark has introduced Jesus in exalted terms that could stand alone, as they do in some manuscripts. However, others complete the title with, "the Son of God". Given textual and contextual considerations we opt for the view that "Son of God" should

²² C.f. Matt 1:21, Luke 1:77; 2:11, 30, John 1:29.

²³ Mark will make this connection explicit soon (Mark 2:1-12).

²⁴ Jesus *Iesou* is a Hellenized form of the Hebrew *Joshua* and Aramaic *Jeshua*.

²⁵ This owes not only to its etymology, but its common usage among the Jewish people at Jesus' time. See R.A. Cole, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Gen. Ed. R.V.G. Tasker (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), 55.

²⁶ The name *Jeshua*/*Joshua* was common in the OT (c.f. 1 Sam 6:14, 1 Chr 24:11, 2 Chr 31:15, 2 Kings 23:8, Ezra 2:2, et al) and there is at least one other "Jesus" named in the NT (Acts 13:6).

²⁷ Mark uses it in titular form to declare the identity of the one whose life became good news. For a discussion of Mark's titular Christology see Edwin K. Broadhead, *Naming Jesus: Titular Christology in the Gospel of Mark*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, 175, Exe. Ed. Stanley E. Porter (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

²⁸ Though it was by no means universal or universally understood and is perhaps overstated at times today. Cf. Juel, 99-103.

²⁹ E.g. kings, priests, etc.

³⁰ Juel, 101-103.

be retained as integral to the opening lines of the gospel³¹ that serve—not only as a title—but as a summary of its content.³²

Juel asserts that Mark gives us his most explicit identification of Jesus in this title.³³ Jesus is *the Messiah*, but He is more. He is *the Messiah who is uniquely the Son of God*. Lohmeyer summarizes the implications of Jesus' divine Sonship for Mark, "The Son of God is not primarily a human but a divine figure...He is not merely endowed with the power of God, but is himself divine as to his nature; not only are his word and his work divine, but his essence also."³⁴ Lohmeyer's claim captures the essence of what is communicated about Jesus as "Son of God" throughout the gospel.³⁵

The wilderness messenger

We will speak more of the Baptist's ministry in our treatment of the other gospels, suffice to say that in Mark's mind John bears the mantle of Isaiah in preparing the way of the LORD.³⁶ John's proclamation "announces the coming of the Messiah who introduces the new age of redemption promised through the prophets."³⁷ To put it simply, John must "make a road for God."³⁸ In the OT the way was prepared for "the LORD"³⁹, here John is preparing the way for the One would come to be known as Lord⁴⁰ of the church.⁴¹

³¹ Following Cole (55), Lane (41), Martin (126-127) and others. For a discussion of the textual issues see C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, The Cambridge Greek Testament (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 38.

³² Cole, 55.

³³ Juel, 92.

³⁴ E. Lohmeyer, *Kommentar*, 10, quoted in Martin, *Mark*, 127, cf. Lane, *Mark*, 44.

³⁵ C.f. Mark 1:11, 3:11, 8:38, 9:7, 12:6, 13:32, 14:36; 61, 15:39.

³⁶ For a discussion of Isaiah themes throughout the gospel of Mark see Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel* (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2000).

³⁷ Lane, 45.

³⁸ Cole, 57.

³⁹ Hebrew *Yahweh*, Gk. LXX *kurios*.

⁴⁰ Gk. *kurios*

⁴¹ Lane, 46.

John's appearance in Israel as a prophet was a spectacular event, breaking nearly four hundred years of God's prophetic silence. Yet his task—vital and urgent as it was—was infinitely less valuable than the One he preceded.⁴² This One is mightier and performs an infinitely superior baptism.⁴³ John places himself in drastic juxtaposition to this One by stating his unworthiness to loose His sandals.⁴⁴

Encounter at the Jordan

By the time Jesus arrives at the Jordan He has been proclaimed by the evangelist as Messiah, the Son of God, and by John as the mighty baptizer in the Holy Spirit, the divine emissary for whom God has sent John to prepare the way. In order to climax this opening scene One above the evangelist and the Baptist must speak.⁴⁵ As Jesus comes up out of the waters of baptism the heavens are torn apart and the Spirit of God descends as a dove.⁴⁶ God's voice⁴⁷ is heard from heaven speaking to Jesus, "You are my beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."⁴⁸

The address from heaven is drawn from several OT texts⁴⁹ and is intended to communicate not only Jesus' identity as the promised Davidic Messiah/king, but the special relationship between Father and Son.⁵⁰ "Beloved Son", a present indicative, expresses "an eternal and essential relationship" while the aorist indicative, "in whom I

⁴² Cole, 58.

⁴³ Mark 1:7-8.

⁴⁴ Lane, 52.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁶ C.f. Isaiah 64:1. For a discussion of the significance of the dove in this passage see Martin, 127.

⁴⁷ Many scholars suggest this should be understood as the *bath qol*, Hebrew for "daughter of the voice", understood as an "echo" of God's voice (see e.g. Martin, 105).

⁴⁸ Mark 1:11. The sight of the dove and the sound of the voice strengthen the theophany (Dowd, 11).

⁴⁹ Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 42:1, and probably Genesis 22:2.

⁵⁰ Martin, 105. Cf. Lane, 58. The unique character of the relationship is strengthened if we follow Cole (58), and Lane (58) in detecting a connotation of "only" in the phrase "beloved" (cf. Gen 22:2). Contra Juel (91) who suggests that "Son" should be understood primarily as a royal/messianic title.

am well pleased” refers to God’s pleasure in Jesus’ current actions.⁵¹ Thus we should interpret “Beloved Son” in “the highest sense, transcending messiahship.”⁵² Understood against their Hebraic background the events at the baptism are intended to convey to the reader Jesus’ supernatural origin.⁵³

Summary

The climax of Mark’s introduction of Jesus reminds us of his opening words, this is “the gospel of Jesus the Christ, the *Son of God*.” Mark’s Christology, while clearly exalted, is also *implicitly* incarnational. Jesus is a man—from Nazareth in Galilee of all places!—and yet He is the Beloved Son of God. In short order Jesus will heal the sick and cast out demons,⁵⁴ forgive sins,⁵⁵ claim Lordship over the Sabbath,⁵⁶ control nature,⁵⁷ receive worship,⁵⁸ feed multitudes,⁵⁹ walk on water,⁶⁰ and rise from the dead.⁶¹ Jesus does that which only God has the power and authority to do and receives the titles and accolades that God alone deserves.

Matthew

Luz is correct that, “Matthew’s Christology is more than a semantic field structured by titles...Rather it is the story of a human being in whom God is and was ‘with us’.”⁶² Thus we will consider the broad motifs related to Jesus as they occur in the

⁵¹ Lane, 58.

⁵² Ibid., 57.

⁵³ Martin, 128.

⁵⁴ Mark 1:32-34.

⁵⁵ Mark 2:5.

⁵⁶ Mark 2:28.

⁵⁷ Mark 4:35-41.

⁵⁸ Mark 5:6.

⁵⁹ Mark 6:30-44.

⁶⁰ Mark 6:45-52

⁶¹ Mark 16:6.

⁶² Ulrich Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, trans. Rosemary Selle (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 96. C.f. discussion of Christology and titles in France, 280—281.

opening scenes of Matthew's narrative in order to sketch a portrait of the evangelists' Christological concerns.

The record...

Matthew begins, "The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah,⁶³ the Son of David, the Son of Abraham."⁶⁴ That *Messiah* should be understood as referring to the "Messianic King" of Jewish expectation seems clear.⁶⁵ That it is equivalent to "Son of David" in the author's mind is also likely.⁶⁶ However Messiah should not be understood strictly as a *title*, but in the broader context of what the gospel reveals about Jesus. For in Matthew Jesus ultimately exceeds all that the Jews expected of the Messiah. The title, while accurate, is thus inadequate.⁶⁷ Its full meaning must be derived from the remainder of what is said about Jesus.⁶⁸

Son of David

"Son of David" has a greater prominence in Matthew than in the remainder of the NT.⁶⁹ But what does the title convey? To be sure the Son of David is the Messiah and the rightful heir to David's throne.⁷⁰ However, Luz argues that the *tradition history* of

⁶³ NRSV, NASB have "the Messiah" while NIV, NKJV have "Christ". The Greek is *Christou* with no article supplied. The title "Christ/Messiah" occurs with the definite article just seven times in the Synoptics, six of them in Matthew. When used in reference to Jesus the title should be understood as "an embodiment of the faith of the early church," Brian M. Nolan, *The Royal Son of God: The Christology of Matthew 1–2 in the Setting of the Gospel*, Orbis Biblicus Et Orientalis, 23 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1979), 116. Brown understands "Jesus Christ" (Matt 1:1, 1:18) to be almost a proper name, derived from the devolution of "Jesus the Messiah" to "Jesus the Christ" to "Jesus Christ" in early Christian usage (*Birth*, 59).

⁶⁴ Matthew 1:1.

⁶⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, ed. Grant R. Osborne, (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 52.

⁶⁶ Nolan, 149.

⁶⁷ Brown, *Birth*, 135-136.

⁶⁸ So France, 282-283, who suggests that the Messianic secret for Matthew owes to the fact that Matthew wanted his audience to see Jesus as Messiah, but not strictly according to their Messianic expectations.

⁶⁹ Matthew uses the term 10 times (more than the remainder of the NT combined), Mark and Luke only 4, John does not utilize it (Brown, *Birth*, 134). Seven of his usages are unique to Matthew (France, 284).

⁷⁰ Keener, *Matthew*, 52. See also France, 286 and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina Series, Volume 1, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 32.

the phrase is insufficient to establish its meaning for Matthew. Rather, Matthew utilizes the phrase to make a connection with his audience, before pushing them to a much greater understanding of the term.⁷¹

The genealogy

That Matthew's genealogy is highly selective and serves a deliberate theological purpose is obvious.⁷² Hebrew genealogies were generally given in order to demonstrate identity via tribal origins, under gird one's official status (e.g. kings, priests), or underscore a collective personality.⁷³ Matthew utilizes Jesus' genealogy⁷⁴ in each of these ways, identifying Jesus as Son of David,⁷⁵ of the tribe of Judah, who would restore Israel and enlighten the nations.⁷⁶ Thus Jesus' lineage prepares the reader for the conclusion that He is the climax of Israel's national history, and has a Gentile-mission.⁷⁷ He is the prophesied Messiah/King and "Son of David" of 2 Samuel 7:13-14.⁷⁸

Child of the Holy Spirit

If the genealogy communicates that Jesus was the Son of *David*, the conception and birth stories proclaim that He is the Son of *God*.⁷⁹ Indeed, Brown sees in the announcement of the angel of the Lord⁸⁰—and not the baptism scene—the first time in

⁷¹ Luz, 85ff. Thus "Son of David" is connected with the extension of mercy and physical healing, activities not expected of him by the Jews (cf. Luz, 86-87). As a result the blind, religiously ignorant, and even foreigners recognize Jesus as the Son of David, while the religious elite reject Him (France, 285).

⁷² France, 284.

⁷³ Brown, *Birth*, 64-66.

⁷⁴ Or, more technically, Jesus' genealogy via his "legal" father Joseph. For a discussion of Joseph's "legal" vs. "adoptive/foster" paternity of Jesus see Brown, *Birth*, 138-139.

⁷⁵ France, 284.

⁷⁶ Nolan, 169.

⁷⁷ Keener (*Matthew*, 55) and Harrington (32).

⁷⁸ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Robert R. Barr, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 16.

⁷⁹ Harrington, 36. Cf. France, 297.

⁸⁰ Matthew 1:20.

Matthew that God calls Jesus “Son”.⁸¹ The conception by the Spirit and the virgin birth serve Matthew’s ultimate goal to “explain and exalt the character of the Lord,”⁸² and demonstrate that Jesus—unlike all those who came before in His genealogy—is the product of divine, not natural, begetting.⁸³

Jesus, Immanuel

Jesus’ name is explicitly given salvific force in Matthew. We have noted that Jesus means literally “God/Yahweh saves”⁸⁴, but here the saving activity is explicitly assigned to Jesus, “for *He* will save *His* people from their sins.”⁸⁵ Brown sees allusions to numerous OT texts here including Ps. 130:7-8, “the LORD...will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”⁸⁶ This further enforces the notion that in Jesus God is uniquely at work in the earth, as expressed in the name “Immanuel”.

Scholars disagree on Matthew’s intention in his use of the Immanuel passage(s).⁸⁷ For Schnackenburg it means “In Jesus God is helping, redeeming, protecting his people.”⁸⁸ Brown insists that we understand Immanuel to mean that in Jesus God’s

⁸¹ Brown, *Birth*, 135 where he argues that in light of the OT the “angel of the Lord” should be understood as God’s presence in the earth. Connected to this however is Brown’s speculative assertion that the growth of Christological understanding in the early church can be traced through Acts/early epistles (God naming Jesus Son at resurrection) to Mark (God naming Jesus Son at baptism), to Matthew & Luke (God naming Jesus Son at conception), to John/Christological hymns (God naming Jesus Son in pre-existence). This theory of Christological development colors Brown’s entire treatment of the gospel (Brown, *Birth*, 140-142). One obvious objection to such a notion is that according to Brown Luke reflects a *later* development in Christological understanding than Acts, although according to Brown (c.f. *Intro*, 319-327) Luke was likely written *earlier* than Acts by the same author!

⁸² Keener, *Matthew*, 64.

⁸³ Brown, *Birth*, 138-143.

⁸⁴ Schnackenburg, 19.

⁸⁵ Italics mine. This verse harks back to Moses, another deliverer of God’s people spared from the massacre of infants carried out by an evil king. But it also reminds the reader of Joshua, the eponymous savior of Israel who led them from wilderness to Promised Land (c.f. Brown, *Birth*, 137-138).

⁸⁶ Brown, *Birth*, 152.

⁸⁷ Isaiah 7:14, c.f. Isaiah 8:8-10.

⁸⁸ Schnackenburg, 19. So also, Nolan, 131.

eschatological—not personal—presence has come.⁸⁹ Luz goes further in saying that Jesus is, “the new and definitive form in which *God* is present with his people.”⁹⁰ France however claims that Matthew’s use of “God with us”, rather than the weaker “God *is* with us” to render the name “at least leaves open the startling idea that this baby is himself God, present among men.”⁹¹ Keener asserts that “Immanuel” is an example of Matthean Christology recognizing Jesus as God.⁹²

It is our view that one must first impose a *low* Christology on the gospel⁹³ in order to not see an *exalted* one here in Matthew’s opening scenes. This Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David, conceived in a virgin by the Holy Spirit. His two names proclaim that He will save His people from their sins, as *He is God* with them. The equivalence suggested here between Father and Son is assumed throughout Matthew’s gospel as Jesus acts in God’s place, taking on divine prerogatives, receiving worship, and fulfilling OT Scriptures that spoke exclusively of Yahweh.⁹⁴ Thus in Jesus God is *personally* with us.

King of the Jews

It is sufficient to note that “King of the Jews”⁹⁵ was understood to mean both Messiah,⁹⁶ and a usurper to Herod’s throne, as “King of the Jews” was Herod’s official title.⁹⁷ Thus Herod understandably considered Jesus to be a threat to his unpopular rule.⁹⁸

⁸⁹ Brown, *Birth*, 150-153. Again, this owes entirely to Brown’s presupposition that incarnational theology evolved after the writing of Matthew and is unique to John, a contention that is hardly incontrovertible.

⁹⁰ Luz, 85. For Luz “Immanuel Christology” frames the entirety of Matthew’s gospel (85), which taken together with other elements results in a “high” Matthean Christology, “from above” (94).

⁹¹ France, 312.

⁹² Keener, *Matthew*, 64.

⁹³ As, for example, Brown does with his theory of Christological development (c.f. Brown, *Birth*, 140-142).

⁹⁴ France, 308-311.

⁹⁵ Matthew, 2:2.

⁹⁶ C.f. Matthew 2:4. This Messiah would be a “ruler” and “shepherd” to the people of Israel (c.f. Matt 2:6). The identification of Bethlehem as the Messiah’s birthplace is unequivocal (Schnackenburg, 23).

⁹⁷ Harrington, 42.

⁹⁸ Brown, *Birth*, 170. Herod’s massacre of the innocents then, however horrific to us today, is in line with his insecurity and his cruel personal nature (c.f. Nolan, 150-154).

They fell to the ground and worshipped him

The coming of the magi⁹⁹ is a striking scene, in which Gentile astrologers travel long distance to prostrate in worship¹⁰⁰ before the infant Jesus.¹⁰¹ It is important for our study to note that no player in John's gospel worships Jesus until He works miraculous signs as an adult.

John's proclamation

John's ministry in Matthew serves much the same purpose as in Mark. He functions like an OT prophet, proclaiming the coming work of God, in this case the arrival of a Messiah/Judge figure whose presence calls for repentance and cleansing from sin.¹⁰² The "superhuman" rank of the One he foretells is made explicit in John's unworthiness to "remove his sandals."¹⁰³ John's proclamation of a coming One who would *pour out the Spirit* and *act as Judge* prepares for the coming of God Himself, these are things that only God can do.¹⁰⁴

Encounter at the Jordan

Jesus' submission to John's baptism is part of Matthew's concern to describe Him as the righteous Son of God.¹⁰⁵ The opening of the heavens prepares for future revelation or deliverance¹⁰⁶ and the dove may recall the life and salvation offered after the flood.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁹ Keener sees the pilgrimage and homage of the nations *vis a vis* Ps 72:10, Is 60:6 (Keener, *Matthew*, 67) while for Brown it anticipates the coming of the Gentiles to faith in Christ (Brown, *Birth*, 169).

¹⁰⁰ Gk. *prosekunesan*.

¹⁰¹ Keener (*Matthew*, 67) and Schnackenburg (24) both see genuine worship here, contra Harrington (42) who seems more comfortable with "homage".

¹⁰² Keener, *Matthew*, 75-81.

¹⁰³ Matthew 3:11. C.f. Keener, *Matthew*, 83. In John's time servants removed sandals and OT prophets could rightly call themselves the servants of God. But John is not even worthy to be servant/slave to the coming One (c.f. Harrington, 54 and Schnackenburg, 32).

¹⁰⁴ See e.g. Keener (*Matthew*, 83), Harrington (54), and Schnackenburg (33).

¹⁰⁵ Luz, 93.

¹⁰⁶ C.f. Isaiah 64:1.

¹⁰⁷ Keener, *Matthew*, 85-86.

The voice from heaven, along with the Scriptures and the Baptist, acts as a third direct witness to Jesus' identity.¹⁰⁸

This is My Beloved Son...

Matthew's picture of Father, Spirit and Son at the baptism anticipates Jesus' final words¹⁰⁹ and underscores the Son's special relationship with the Father. As with the other evangelists, particularly John, "The presentation of Jesus as the Son of God is central to Matthew's theological enterprise," and the voice at the baptism is clearly, "a declaration that Jesus is the Son of God."¹¹⁰ The background for the words spoken to Jesus is a compilation of OT texts¹¹¹ that combine to convey the intended point.¹¹² Matthew's depiction of Jesus as Son of God demonstrates the unique *relationship* between Father and Son, and points forward to the unique *status* of the Son who receives worship, has all authority, and is named alongside Father and Spirit.¹¹³ In Matthew only God can reveal Jesus as His Son, as He does here at the baptism.¹¹⁴

Summary

For Matthew Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, from the opening scenes¹¹⁵ to Peter's confession¹¹⁶ to Jesus' own testimony under oath.¹¹⁷ This Jesus who is by human lineage the descendent of David, is by spiritual lineage the Son of God, indeed, He is God

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 86. If the angel of the Lord's proclamation is considered, this would be the fourth witness.

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 28:19ff.

¹¹⁰ France, 293. Jesus' divine Sonship had been implied by the conception account (Matt 1:18ff) and intimated by the flight from Egypt (Matt 2:15). Here it is stated explicitly. If Schnackenburg is right that we should understand the voice as God's and not the traditional *bath qol* ("daughter/echo of the voice") then the theophany is considerably strengthened (Schnackenburg, 35).

¹¹¹ Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 42:1, 2 Samuel 7:16.

¹¹² Keener, *Matthew*, 86.

¹¹³ France, 292-298. C.f. Luz (93), "[Son of God] denotes Jesus' special and unique relation to God and his unique God-given status."

¹¹⁴ Luz, 93. C.f. Matthew 1:22-23, 2:15, 3:17, 11:25-27, 16:17, 17:5.

¹¹⁵ Matthew 1:1; 3:17.

¹¹⁶ Matthew 16:16.

¹¹⁷ Matthew 26:63-64.

with us. And He is the One who promises to be *with* His disciples, “even to the end of the age”.¹¹⁸ Thus Matthew can be seen as presenting not only an *exalted* Christology but an *incarnational* one as well.¹¹⁹

Luke

Certain elements of Christology in Luke’s opening-scenes are parallel to Matthew and Mark and do not need a re-treatment here. However, he has unique information in his narrative that contributes to our discussion and deserves our attention. In addition Luke has a unique *approach* to how he frames the information. His gospel begins, not with a declaration of Jesus’ identity¹²⁰, but with a personal rationale for writing.¹²¹ The narrator does not make pronouncements about Jesus’ identity; he allows it to be revealed through the narrative itself, in the words of Spirit-filled people, prophets, angels, Jesus, John, and finally God Himself.¹²² Thus it is the *narrative*, not the *narrator* that serves to express Luke’s Christology.¹²³

Luke’s opening scenes set the tone for what is revealed throughout his two-part work, namely that Jesus is Lord and Christ,¹²⁴ the promised Savior of the world.¹²⁵ This

¹¹⁸ Matthew 28:20. C.f. France, 312 and Brown, *Birth*, 153.

¹¹⁹ C.f. Luz, 96 who points out that Matthew’s combination of Son of Man and Son of God motifs throughout his gospel “anticipates remarkably closely the doctrine of the two natures in the later church.”

¹²⁰ As do Matthew, Mark, and John.

¹²¹ Luke 1:1-4 (c.f. Matthew 1:1, Mark 1:1, John 1:1).

¹²² Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 33.

¹²³ For a full treatment see Mark Coleridge, *The Birth of the Lukan Narrative: Narrative as Christology in Luke 1-2*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series, 88, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

¹²⁴ C.f. Luke 1:43; 2:11; 10:36. Luke is also concerned to show the salvation of the Gentiles, the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, the prophetic role of the Spirit, and the Christological statement that Jesus fulfills Davidic promises. See Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic-Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology*, Journal For the Study of The New Testament Supplement Series, 110, Ex. Ed. Stanley E. Porter, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 84-85.

¹²⁵ Norval Goldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Gen. Ed. F.F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 43-44. See also Bock, 30.

claim is established primarily through the juxtaposition of Jesus and the Baptist.¹²⁶

Along these lines Brown offers an outline of Luke 1-2 in seven episodes that will aid us here.¹²⁷ Let us examine these episodes.

Annunciation of John the Baptist's conception/birth

Luke is concerned with showing God's faithfulness to His promises. The annunciation of a miraculously conceived, Spirit-filled prophet to turn people back to God signals God's redemptive activity after centuries of silence.¹²⁸ Of importance for us is that the prophet will "turn...the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God" by going "before Him".¹²⁹ Thus John is a forerunner to none other than "the Lord their God".

The annunciation of Jesus' conception/birth

Gabriel tells Mary who will inhabit her womb and how this will take place, given that she is a virgin. She will have a Son, to be named Jesus.¹³⁰ This Son will be great¹³¹, and will be called the Son of the Most High. He will receive the throne of David¹³² from God Himself, and will reign eternally as King. The conception will occur by the Holy Spirit coming upon Mary and the Most High overshadowing her. As a result the "holy"¹³³ child will be called the "Son of God."

¹²⁶ Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, New Testament Theology, Gen. Ed. James D.G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 54ff.

¹²⁷ 1) The annunciation of John the Baptist's conception/birth, 2) The annunciation of Jesus' conception/birth, 3) Mary's visitation of Elizabeth, 4) Birth/Circumcision/Naming of John the Baptist, 5) Birth/Circumcision/Naming of Jesus, 6) Presentation in the Temple, and 7) Discovery of Jesus in the Temple. C.f. Brown, *Birth*, 250.

¹²⁸ Bock, 34.

¹²⁹ Luke 1:16-17.

¹³⁰ We have noted the meaning of the name already; in Luke its salvific import is particularly significant.

¹³¹ Jesus is "great" in an unqualified sense vs. John who is "great in the sight of the Lord" (Luke 1:15).

¹³² Jesus' legal Davidic lineage was passed from Joseph (Bock, 40).

¹³³ Jesus is "holy" in an unqualified sense. Later "holy" is given as a name of God (Luke 1:49).

Gabriel's description of Jesus is a free rendering of 2 Samuel 7:8-16 that moves past OT expectation to NT Christology.¹³⁴ Not only will Jesus fulfill the expectation of a coming Davidic Messiah, but He is *by nature* the very "Son of God/Most High."¹³⁵ The name is given to "indicate the absolute uniqueness and highness of His divine Sonship... [in the annunciation] we have an impressive testimony to the divine greatness of Jesus—a greatness wholly different from that of any human being."¹³⁶

Further, Jesus will reign forever. The point at which this differs from Nathan's prophecy to David is paramount. David was promised an eternal *throne* or kingdom for his descendants, while Jesus will Himself rule forever, indicating His eternal nature.¹³⁷ How might such an eternal being find its way into the womb of a virgin?¹³⁸ Through the creative work of the Holy Spirit¹³⁹ and the overshadowing of God's power. Thus, the birth announcement highlights Jesus' position, authority, and divine identity.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ C.f. Brown, *Birth*, 310-314 where he also provides an impressive comparison/contrast between the annunciations of the conceptions/births of John and Jesus.

¹³⁵ Contra Strauss, 338 who sees Luke's primary emphasis as being that Jesus is the Davidic Messiah. For Strauss Jesus' divine Sonship is a function of His messianic identity, we contend that His messianic identity rests upon His divine Sonship. Our view is supported by Matthew 11:27 (c.f. Mark 12:6, Luke 10:22). See also F.F. Bruce, *The Gospels & Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 55.

¹³⁶ Geldenhuys, 76.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 76. Contra Brown, *Birth*, 313-314, who in order to maintain his ever-strained theory of the evolution of Christology in the early church and the uniqueness of John's incarnational thought insists that Luke knew nothing of a pre-existent Son, only one begotten in Mary's womb. Does Brown suppose that Luke envisioned the *creation*, rather than the *arrival* of an eternal being in Mary's womb?

¹³⁸ On the question of Mary's virginity in Luke see Brown, *Birth*, 298-300. Bock, 40, states unequivocally that she is a virgin (c.f. Luke 1:27, 34). On the question of the virgin birth as a historical fact see opposing arguments in Geldenhuys (72-73 & 107-108) and G.B. Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke*, The Penguin New Testament Commentaries (London: Penguin Group, 1990), 53.

¹³⁹ Brown sees echoes of the Holy Spirit at creation (Gen 1:2) and foreshadowing of the Mount of Transfiguration where the overshadowing of God's presence establishes and confirms Jesus' divine Sonship (Brown, *Birth*, 315).

¹⁴⁰ C.f. Bock, 41-42. However, Bock does not think that the players in Luke's gospel, or its first readers would have understood ontological deity from this annunciation, rather they would have heard only "Messiah/King". While this may be true of the *players* his comments regarding the *readers* are hardly conclusive given the language of eternity, supernatural conception, and holiness ascribed to the child.

Mary's visitation of Elizabeth

The juxtaposition of John and Jesus is heightened by the encounter between their pre-natal mothers.¹⁴¹ Elizabeth's words¹⁴² confirm that John the Baptist has begun his ministry of proclamation while still in the womb.¹⁴³ She answers the joyful proclamation in faith by stating that Mary is the "mother of my Lord". Mary's poetic response is made up almost entirely of OT allusions¹⁴⁴ and professes in faith that what God has promised has already been put into effect through the miraculous conception of a Child within her.¹⁴⁵ For our purposes we draw attention to the fact that she identifies God as Lord, Savior and holy¹⁴⁶, ascriptions also made to Jesus in Luke's narrative.¹⁴⁷

Birth/Circumcision/Naming of John the Baptist

Of particular interest to us is Zacharias' *Benedictus*, a spirit-inspired prophecy.¹⁴⁸ His hymn¹⁴⁹ speaks of Jesus, then of John's relationship to Him, and again of Jesus, placing the two in stark contrast. Jesus is the servant of the house of David, the horn of salvation that has been raised up.¹⁵⁰ Zachariah proclaims that God has visited his people and accomplished redemption.¹⁵¹ Conversely Zacharias' child will be "prophet of the Most High"¹⁵² who will go before the LORD to prepare His way. To those who sit in

¹⁴¹ Brown, *Birth*, 342-343.

¹⁴² Given prophetic weight by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41). C.f. Bock 33-34, Geldenhuys, 82.

¹⁴³ Brown, *Birth*, 341, c.f. Bock, 43.

¹⁴⁴ Geldenhuys, 84-85.

¹⁴⁵ Green, 50.

¹⁴⁶ Luke 1:46-47, 49.

¹⁴⁷ Luke 1:43, 2:11, 1:35.

¹⁴⁸ Luke 1:67ff.

¹⁴⁹ Like the *Magnificat* it is also drawn from numerous OT allusions. C.f. Geldenhuys, 92-93.

¹⁵⁰ The background is Psalm 18, where significantly, God is the "horn of salvation".

¹⁵¹ The aorist verbs point to the fact that God's promise is sufficient to ensure its fulfillment.

¹⁵² Compare with Jesus, "Son of Most High" (Luke 1:32).

darkness, God will come like Sunrise¹⁵³ to bring knowledge of salvation, forgiveness of sins, and tender mercies.

The view of Bock¹⁵⁴ and Brown¹⁵⁵ that Luke pictures Jesus only as the *agent* of God's light and salvation is simply inadequate. Conversely Caird articulates the full import of Zacharias' prophecy when he writes, "The child...was sent to prepare the way for the coming of God. But how was God to come? Luke's answer is that he came in the coming of his Son, that the whole life and ministry of Jesus was the promised coming or visitation of God."¹⁵⁶

Birth/Circumcision/Naming of Jesus

John now disappears from the picture until adulthood and Jesus' humble birth is contrasted sharply with the announcement of His arrival to the shepherds.¹⁵⁷ The "glory of the Lord", indicative of God's tangible presence in the earth,¹⁵⁸ accompanies the angel of the Lord¹⁵⁹ whose declaration is "today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."¹⁶⁰ Here is Luke's Christology in a succinct

¹⁵³ Geldenhuys, 95.

¹⁵⁴ Bock, 52-53.

¹⁵⁵ Brown, *Birth*, 390-391.

¹⁵⁶ Caird, 52. "Four times Luke describes the ministry of Jesus as a divine visit. God has...visited and redeemed his people (1:68; cf. 1:78, 7:16, 19:44)...The coming of the Saviour was the coming of God." (Caird, 35). Sadly Caird follows this stroke of inspiration with denials of the virgin birth, the sinless nature of Jesus, and His deity. Overall he fails in his task of exegeting Luke's Christology because he is too busy judging it as non-historical.

¹⁵⁷ Bock, 55.

¹⁵⁸ Thus it is natural that the heavenly host arrive, they dwell in the glorious presence of God (Brown, *Birth*, 426-427).

¹⁵⁹ Geldenhuys, 111.

¹⁶⁰ Brown sees the background for this in Isaiah 9:5-6, an appealing theory, but one that he divests of its meaning by changing "Mighty God" in the passage to "divine hero" in order to accommodate his view that Luke knows nothing of the deity of Christ (c.f. *Birth*, 424-425).

formula, identifying the Messiah as “Lord” and “Savior”, terms he uses interchangeably for God and Jesus.¹⁶¹

Presentation in the Temple

Jesus’ presentation in the temple is highlighted by the responses of Simeon and Anna, two elders cast in the mold of OT saints, “agog for the coming of the Gospel.”¹⁶² Anna’s testimony is characterized by her gratitude for God’s redemptive work, Simeon’s by his recognition that this baby is the promised consolation, salvation, and glory of his people, as well as the light to the Gentiles.¹⁶³

Discovery of Jesus in the Temple

Jesus’ encounter with the teachers in the temple produced amazement because of his understanding and awareness.¹⁶⁴ But it was His first recorded words, “...Did you not know that I had to be in my Father’s house”¹⁶⁵ that bear our attention. In an incident unique to Luke’s gospel the twelve-year-old Jesus speaks for Himself and states His awareness of His identity as God’s Son already beginning to perform His Father’s will.¹⁶⁶

Encounter at the Jordan

For the purposes of our discussion Luke offers little in regards to John’s ministry that has not been surveyed already. John foretells a mightier coming One who is infinitely greater than Him and offers an infinitely greater baptism. This baptism is with

¹⁶¹ One wonders if this is why Bock softens the impact of the titles by reducing Lord to “Master” and Savior to “Redeemer” (Bock, 55). Whatever his motivation the effect is a diminishing of the annunciation.

¹⁶² Caird, 63.

¹⁶³ Bock, 57-59. Simeon came into the temple “in the Spirit”, thus his words bear prophetic weight.

¹⁶⁴ Luke 2:46-47. C.f. Bock, 62.

¹⁶⁵ Luke 2:49b. “Father’s house” (e.g. NASB) is preferred over “Father’s business” (e.g. NKJV) although in both cases the disputed word is supplied by the translator. Jesus is in the house of God (the temple) and is thus identifying himself with God’s “family”, place and purposes (Bock, 63).

¹⁶⁶ So Bock, 63. Contra Brown (*Birth*, 483) who does not think Jesus’ words indicate a self-awareness of His identity as Son of God. One is left to wonder what Brown thinks the words are intended to convey! For an alternate view see Caird (66) who proposes that Jesus is gradually becoming aware of a special relationship with God.

“the Holy Spirit and fire”,¹⁶⁷ a phrase that carries connotations of salvation and judgment.¹⁶⁸ Jesus is baptized by John, the Spirit descends in bodily form as a dove, the heavens open and a voice says, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”¹⁶⁹

Unique to Luke however is the inclusion of the final phrase from Isaiah 40:5, left off by the other evangelists in John’s preaching, “And all flesh will see the salvation of God.”¹⁷⁰ This fits nicely with Luke’s pervasive theme that *to see Jesus is to see God’s salvation*. Luke also emphasizes Jesus’ role as Judge in John’s teaching, further highlighting the contrast of John and Jesus, and Jesus’ utter uniqueness in relation to humanity.¹⁷¹

We should also note that the Baptist’s words in Luke 3:16 are connected to the question of the people as to whether he was the Christ.¹⁷² This is reminiscent of the interchange with the Baptist in John’s gospel.¹⁷³ While both Luke and John may be interested in quieting a Baptist sect¹⁷⁴ we should not let that distract us from what is clearly the aim of both evangelists in these passages; to exalt Jesus as the Christ.

Summary

Thus Luke presents a majestically high Christology, supported by his recording of certain events surrounding the conception, birth and childhood of John and Jesus. For Luke Jesus is the Christ, the Son of David, the Son of God, the fulfillment of God’s OT promises to His people. But He is more than that. He is holy, eternal, Lord and Savior. Some will insist that John stands alone in his incarnational theology, but Luke clearly

¹⁶⁷ Luke 3:16. The coming of the Spirit should be taken in all its “eschatological force” (Strauss, 81-82).

¹⁶⁸ Bock, 73.

¹⁶⁹ Our comments on the significance of these events for Mark and Matthew apply to Luke as well.

¹⁷⁰ Luke 3:6 (c.f. Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3, John 1:23). For comment see Caird, 71.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

¹⁷² C.f. Luke 3:15.

¹⁷³ John 1:20-23. See Bock, 73 for a discussion.

¹⁷⁴ C.f. Green, 54-55 and Morris, 87-88.

conveys his own sense of this reality as expressed in his narrative. Jesus is God's salvation incarnate, He is God's glory incarnate, He is God's holiness incarnate. In short, He is the Man in whom God visits the earth to redeem it.¹⁷⁵

John

John opens his gospel with one of the most stunning statements in Scripture; “the Word was God.”¹⁷⁶ More incredible is that this Word became flesh in the person of Jesus.¹⁷⁷ In a sense all that John says after this revelation is just commentary.¹⁷⁸ Thus, John's depiction of Jesus as creator, life, light, glory, grace, truth, Messiah, Son/Chosen of God, Holy Spirit baptizer, and Lamb of God is essentially falling action relative to the revelation that Jesus is God made flesh.

In the beginning was the Word

John 1:1—18 introduces and summarizes the theological content of the gospel.¹⁷⁹ John's opening words “In the beginning”¹⁸⁰ are identical to Genesis, and reveal that the *logos* existed before creation.¹⁸¹ “The beginning” also anticipates the themes of life, light and darkness, all of which were integral to the creation account and are developed in relation to the *logos*.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁵ Geldenhuys, 45.

¹⁷⁶ John 1:1.

¹⁷⁷ John 1:14ff.

¹⁷⁸ As Morris (76) points out, “Nothing higher could be said.”

¹⁷⁹ Gary M. Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentary, Ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 52. Morris (71) and Bruce (28) concur against Brown, who claims that the Prologue has a different history and theology than the remainder of the Gospel. C.f. Raymond S. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)*, The Anchor Bible, Ed. William F. Albright and David N. Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966), 6.

¹⁸⁰ Greek *En arche*.

¹⁸¹ Brown, *John*, 4. C.f. Burge, 54.

¹⁸² Bruce, 28-29.

But what is this *logos*? After the prologue John does not use *logos* like this again in his gospel.¹⁸³ Many scholars agree with Morris that the source of *logos*¹⁸⁴ has not been conclusively identified, and therefore its precise meaning for John is in question.¹⁸⁵ Morris believes *logos* was understood as a “supremely great Being or Principle”.¹⁸⁶ Keener sees *logos* as the incarnation of Torah.¹⁸⁷ For Brown it is “divine communication”, harking back again to Genesis where God’s voice is His action, indeed in a sense His very person.¹⁸⁸ Bruce’s explanation is the most appealing. For him *logos* should be understood in relation to the OT “word of God” which denotes, “God in action, especially in creation, revelation, and deliverance.”¹⁸⁹

Word was with God... Word was God

These two phrases present a number of problems for both translators and theologians. The Greek construction of “The Word was with God”¹⁹⁰ is difficult, and the notion of *logos* simultaneously “being with God” and “being God” seems contradictory. Despite the questions it seems clear that John intends to communicate the personal nature of the *logos*, the *logos*’ intimate relationship and connection with God,¹⁹¹ and the *logos*’ unequivocal identity as God.¹⁹² “The Word was God” should not be softened to read “the

¹⁸³ Revelation 19:13 is the only other place in the NT where Jesus is called *logos*. C.f. Morris, 71-72.

¹⁸⁴ Hebrew, Greek, other?

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 74. For an extensive survey of the various proposed backgrounds for *logos* see Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary, Volume I* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 339-362.

¹⁸⁶ Or perhaps the “expression or thought” of God. Morris, 75.

¹⁸⁷ Keener, *John*, 360-362.

¹⁸⁸ Brown, *John*, 24.

¹⁸⁹ Bruce, 29.

¹⁹⁰ Greek *ho logos en pros ton theon*. Brown (*John*, 4-5) argues that we ought to translate, “The Word was in God’s presence.” Morris (76) prefers the more literal Greek rendering, “The Word was toward God.”

¹⁹¹ Bruce, 30.

¹⁹² Burge, 55.

Word was divine”, indeed the Greek does not allow it.¹⁹³ Rather, this phrase is an affirmation of the complete Johannine Christology that “Jesus is deity.”¹⁹⁴ At the same time John’s words are set against the backdrop of fierce monotheism. Thus, John is not introducing a second god; rather he is signaling that the One true God is revealed in the incarnate *logos*.¹⁹⁵ This revelation sets the stage for the entire gospel. For if the *logos* is not God, then John’s portrait of Jesus is blasphemy.¹⁹⁶

All things came into being through Him

The God of the Hebrews was the Creator God of Genesis. John has identified the *logos* as God, now he makes explicit that through the *logos* all things were created.¹⁹⁷ By stating explicitly that everything that has come into being¹⁹⁸ did so through the *logos*, it is made obvious that the *logos* did not come into being.¹⁹⁹ Thus the *logos* is eternally existent.²⁰⁰ “There can be no speculation about how the Word came to be, for the Word simply was.”²⁰¹

Life and light

We can leave aside the disagreement over the translation of John 1:4,²⁰² whatever the case it is obvious that the evangelist intends to convey that the *logos* is the harbinger of life and light.²⁰³ As Koester writes, “The hallmark of God’s Word is the ability to give

¹⁹³ Morris, 76-77. C.f. Brown, *John*, 6. Later Brown (*John*, 24-25) argues that the anarthrous use of *theos* in this phrase is possibly a softening of the term that would accommodate early Christian hesitancy to call Jesus “God”. His arguments along these lines are hardly convincing.

¹⁹⁴ Keener, *John*, 281.

¹⁹⁵ Morris, 78. C.f. Koester, 103-107.

¹⁹⁶ Bruce, 31 following C.K. Barrett.

¹⁹⁷ Or literally, “came into being”. This refers not only to what was made at creation, but all things that have come into being throughout history (Morris, 82-82).

¹⁹⁸ Greek *egeneto*.

¹⁹⁹ Burge, 56.

²⁰⁰ “It is fundamental to John that the Word is not to be included among created things,” (Morris, 74).

²⁰¹ Brown, *John*, 4.

²⁰² For a discussion of the possibilities see Brown, *John*, 6-7.

²⁰³ Bruce, 32-33.

life...This was true at creation where God spoke and gave life to the world.”²⁰⁴ For our discussion it is important to note that in connecting life and light John harks back to OT descriptions of God²⁰⁵ and anticipates the identification of Jesus as “life-bringer” and “light-bearer”.²⁰⁶

John and the Light

The introduction of John the Baptist allows him to “testify”²⁰⁷ to the identity of the Light; this is the eschatological light of God that was prophesied to come into the world.²⁰⁸ Already John “the Baptist” is juxtaposed with Jesus “the Light”. Jesus “was” in the beginning, John “came”.²⁰⁹ John is “a man sent from God”, Jesus is the *logos* that “is God”.²¹⁰

The right to become children of God

In the face of rejection from the dark world that the Light enters He lovingly offers the privilege of becoming God’s children to those who receive Him. Thus the grace of God is expressed in giving the authority/right²¹¹ of divine adoption.²¹²

The Word became flesh

“‘Flesh’ stands for the whole man...the Word became man.”²¹³ This is the awesome mystery of the incarnation, that “When ‘the word became flesh’, God became

²⁰⁴ Koester, 98. The notion of Jesus bringing life and light emerges as a consistent theme for the evangelist as Jesus reveals Himself as both life (John 11:25; 14:6) and light (John 9:5; 12:35-36).

²⁰⁵ E.g. Psalm 36:9.

²⁰⁶ Morris, 84. C.f. Brown, *John*, 26-27.

²⁰⁷ For John the evangelist the Baptist functions primarily as a witness to Jesus (Morris, 90).

²⁰⁸ Brown, *John*, 28.

²⁰⁹ Greek *egeneto*. Thus John “came into being” by Jesus’ action.

²¹⁰ Burge, 54, c.f. Brown, *John*, 8. However, while the evangelist contrasts the two in striking terms, and “insists more than any of the other Evangelists on the subordinate place of the Baptist,” he also “fully recognizes the greatness of the forerunner.” (Morris, 88-89).

²¹¹ Greek *exousia*. Not to be understood as “power/might”, but “authority/right”. C.f. Brown, *John*, 11.

²¹² Morris, 91-92.

²¹³ Brown, *John*, 13. Thus, in the face of Docetist claims John is “clear on the deity of the Word. But he is just as clear on the genuineness of His humanity,” Morris, 102.

man.”²¹⁴ “He dwelt among us” literally means, “He pitched His tent among us,”²¹⁵ a phrase that recalled images of the tabernacle of God in the Hebrews’ wilderness wanderings. This tabernacle was home to God’s glory.²¹⁶ Thus, when John says “we saw His glory,” we are to understand that to see Jesus is to see the *Shekinah* glory of God.²¹⁷

Only begotten

This glory is of the only begotten²¹⁸ of the Father. Morris urges that we not understand “only begotten” in a metaphysical sense, it means simply “unique” or “only”.²¹⁹ Thus it makes us aware of the unique Sonship of Jesus to the Father; “No other is or can be the Son of God as He is.”²²⁰ This “only Son” is “full of grace and truth” a phrase that Brown²²¹ and Bruce²²² agree should be read as “loving-kindness” in light of the contrasts drawn between Jesus and Moses.²²³ For through Moses came the Law, but through Jesus Christ²²⁴ has come the life-giving expression of God’s

²¹⁴ Bruce, 40. So Morris (93) and Burge (59) who point out the tragic irony that in the incarnation God became man and man would have nothing to do with Him!

²¹⁵ Brown, *John*, 13.

²¹⁶ Morris, 102-103, c.f. Koester, 99.

²¹⁷ Morris, 104, c.f. Bruce, 40-41.

²¹⁸ Greek *monogenous*.

²¹⁹ Morris, 105. C.f. Brown, *John*, 13-14 who prefers simply “only” rather than “only begotten”.

²²⁰ Morris, 105 who sees Jesus’ unique Sonship as the great theme of John’s gospel.

²²¹ Brown, *John*, 14.

²²² Bruce, 42. At the same time Burge (60) is right that “truth” is a prominent theme for John, indeed Jesus is “the truth” (John 14:6). Thus, Brown and Bruce’s reading, while appealing, is not conclusive.

²²³ Jesus conveys a full revelation of the Father who Moses was not even allowed to look at (Burge, 60).

²²⁴ John 1:17 is the first mention of Jesus’ name in the prologue, and it is attached to the title “Christ”. The term bears the same connotations as discussed in our treatment of the Synoptics (Morris, 134) and Bruce (44-45) thinks John may use the name-title here in a way that was so widely used among Greek-speaking believers at the time that it was treated as a proper name.

character.²²⁵ Jesus—the only begotten God²²⁶—is able to uniquely reveal the Father because He exists in intimate relationship with Him, in His very bosom.²²⁷

The testimony of John

The Baptist said of Jesus, “He who comes after me²²⁸ has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me,” thus testifying to the pre-existence of Jesus.²²⁹ Jesus’ superiority over John is not relative then, but absolute.²³⁰ The Baptist’s further testimony is fully consistent with that of the Synoptics.²³¹ He makes clear that he is not the Messiah,²³² and declares that he is not fit to untie the thong of Jesus’ sandal.²³³

The Lamb of God

John’s identification of Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away²³⁴ the sin of the world” is difficult to decipher. “Lamb of God”, while familiar in Christian parlance, is hardly a common biblical term. Bruce is likely correct that Jesus fulfilled each of the proposed OT lamb references, and in fact exceeded them, as He did with the messianic expectations.²³⁵ Whatever the case, the Baptist is recalling an incident where it was revealed to him that Jesus was in fact the Lamb of God and he connects this with Jesus’

²²⁵ Morris, 111-112.

²²⁶ In favor of this reading see Morris (113), Burge (60-61), and Bruce (44-45). For a discussion of the options see Brown, *John*, 17.

²²⁷ Bruce, 45, c.f. Brown, *John*, 17.

²²⁸ The phrase could refer to Jesus’ ministry following John’s or could mean that Jesus was a disciple of John who inevitably surpassed him because He was “before John” in an ultimate sense (Morris, 108).

²²⁹ Brown, *John*, 35-36.

²³⁰ Burge, 60.

²³¹ Morris, 137. The attempts to pit John’s portrait of the Baptist against the Synoptics seem absurd to me. In all four gospels the Baptist is 1) juxtaposed with Jesus in extreme terms by the narrative, 2) the eschatological voice in the wilderness, 3) the forerunner of Jesus the Messiah, 4) a witness to Jesus’ identity, 5) the one who predicts Jesus’ ministry of Spirit baptism, 6) unworthy to untie Jesus’ sandal strap.

²³² Burge, 71. In all four gospels Jesus is identified as Messiah before John begins to preach.

²³³ Bruce (51) quotes Rabbi Joshua ben Levi from the *Babylonian Talmud*, “Every service which a slave performs for his master a disciple will perform for his teacher, except to untie his sandal-strap.”

²³⁴ Morris (148) believes that this phrase constitutes John’s view of the atonement as “bearing off” sins.

²³⁵ Bruce, 52. For discussions of potential OT backgrounds see Morris (144-148) and Brown (*John*, 58-63).

ability to remove sins.²³⁶ The recalled incident appears to be Jesus' baptism, although John's gospel does not record the event, it makes reference to the descent of the Spirit²³⁷ and the identification of Jesus as the Son/Chosen of God.²³⁸

Son of God

A textual variant with significantly less attestation has John proclaim Jesus as "the Chosen of God", rather than "Son of God".²³⁹ For various reasons this seems like the preferred reading.²⁴⁰ However, as Bruce points out either reading likely refers back to the baptism scene and demonstrates the connection between the descent of the Spirit and the identification of Jesus by the heavenly voice with allusions to Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 42:1; 61:1.²⁴¹ Thus, despite differences with the Synoptic accounts, "John clearly understands the impact of the Spirit's descent on Jesus much in the same manner of the other Gospels."²⁴²

Summary

John's opening scenes portray Jesus as God incarnate, the divine *logos* who acted as the agent of creation and the bearer of life and light to the world. Interestingly, John's explicit statement of Jesus' deity is held alongside His designation as "Christ", "Lamb of God", and "Chosen/Son of God", demonstrating that these Christological titles are complimentary, not mutually exclusive, with the notion of Jesus as God Himself in the

²³⁶ Morris, 143.

²³⁷ The descent/remaining of the Spirit on Jesus is very important to John (c.f. Burge, 74-75, Bruce 54-55).

²³⁸ Some scholars have claimed that John knew nothing of Jesus being baptized by the Baptist. However, the Johannine and Synoptic accounts make sense when harmonized, not pitted against one another.

²³⁹ In John 1:34. Nathanael will call Jesus "Son of God" in John 1:49.

²⁴⁰ Primarily because it is harder to imagine why a scribe would write the unfamiliar "Chosen of God" than the familiar "Son of God". For a discussion see Morris (153-154), Burge (74-75), and Brown, *John*, 57.

²⁴¹ Bruce, 55.

²⁴² Brown, *John*, 66.

flesh. John's Christology then is exalted and explicitly incarnational. God became the man Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Morris notes, "Each of the evangelists in his own way brings out the deity of Christ at the beginning of the Gospel. Matthew and Luke do it with the birth stories, Mark with his reference to Jesus as 'the Son of God' in his opening sentence. John [does this] in the Prologue."²⁴³ If Morris is right then it is plain that each gospel presents Jesus in the highest possible Christological terms from the outset. This is evident in the uniformity of the evangelists' confession regarding Jesus. For each one He is the Messiah, the Son of God. All four know Him as the infinitely great coming One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit; the LORD for whom John is preparing the way.

They also each communicate Jesus' deity in unique, yet complimentary ways. For John He is the *logos*, God who became man. For Matthew He is "God with us", worthy of worship even as an infant. For John He is the Light, for Luke the Sunrise. John knows Him uniquely as the "Lamb of God", Matthew knows Him as the one who will "save His people from their sins." For Luke He is the "Savior", for Mark, He is simply "Jesus", the one whose name means "Yahweh saves." John and Luke both speak of those who beheld His glory; Matthew and Mark proclaim His glory in so many words. Thus exalted Christology is a point of continuity between the four gospels. Indeed, it is central to the message of all four evangelists who together proclaim, "Jesus is both Lord and God!"

²⁴³ Morris, 153.

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