

MARY OF NAZARETH: A STORY OF TRANSFORMATION

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“Oh Virgin, Mother, daughter of your Son.” (Dante, *Divine Comedy*, 33.1)

1. INTRODUCTION

We know little about Mary as a historical figure. As with hardly any other figure of early Christianity, her historical impact has developed far beyond what is to be found in the New Testament texts. Mary is nearly ubiquitous in the history of art, music, and piety. In many churches, the most-frequented devotional site is focused upon her representation.

Over the centuries, much came to be associated with Mary that cannot be derived from the New Testament texts and that even stands in contradiction to them. This finding causes problems: it is difficult to read the ancient texts detached from the imposing history of Marian veneration and the Mariology of later centuries. In addition, confessional differences have had a determinative effect in interpreting the earlier materials. For example, Marian dogmas in the Roman Catholic Church are not recognized by most other churches and, particularly in Protestantism, skepticism in regard to the “exaggerations” of the Catholic veneration of Mary prevails. Another path is followed by the Orthodox churches, in which modern Roman Catholic dogmas are not accepted but in which Marian veneration still plays a considerable role.

The effects such ecumenical issues have on New Testament exegesis should not be underestimated. The different weights given to the magnitudes of “Scripture” and “tradition” in Protestant and Catholic perspectives have determined the interpretation of individual texts. When I write about Mary, I move within the tensions formed by these and other factors. My own exegesis is marked by my Protestant-Lutheran origins as well as by the fact that I grew up and still live in a large, secularized German city in which Marian feast days are not generally observed and are largely unknown among the population. My context gives rise to a skeptical attitude, but it also, conversely, leads me

to admire the richness of a history whose potentially negative aspects—for example, the problematic impact images of Mary can have upon women’s self-image—have never concerned me personally or directly.

2. THE OVERALL VIEW—OR, ABSENCES

The oldest New Testament texts are the Pauline Epistles.¹ In them, the *name* of the mother of Jesus nowhere appears; in one passage, however, she is mentioned (Gal 4:4–5):

But when the fullness of time came,
 God sent his child [υἱός], born of a woman [γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός],
 born under the law [γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμου],
 so that he might redeem those under the law,
 so that we might receive the adoption as children [υἰοθεσία].

Paul likely adopted a traditional formula that probably contained the expression “born of a woman.” Exegetes have repeatedly attempted to derive something about Mary and the virgin birth from this text, despite the lack of any basis in its wording. The issue here for Paul is not a virgin birth, but rather a *normal* one. The text is constructed chiasmically, that is, the two ending clauses beginning with “so that” refer in reverse order to what was said before: by virtue of the fact that Christ stands under the law, he can liberate others from the law; by virtue of the fact that he was born as a child, he can effect the adoption of others as children of God. Paul emphasizes the incarnation but not a special birth; in the center stands the Christ, not Mary.

In the other Pauline Epistles, and in all further letters of the New Testament, Mary plays no role. She also is absent in the sayings source (= Q), which, along with Mark, underlies Matthew and Luke. Acts (1:14) only briefly mentions her. Revelation contains a text that was to become significant in Marian veneration, but originally it has nothing to do with her (Rev 12). I address both Acts 1:14 and Rev 12 below, but I begin with the Gospels. Here, too, an absence is notable: Mark and John narrate no birth stories; the natiivities found only in Matthew and Luke become the mainspring for further development. The oldest witnesses offer no basis for a positive interpretation of the role of Jesus’s mother in his life.

1. On the following, see esp. Heikki Räisänen, *Die Mutter Jesu im Neuen Testament*, 2nd ed., AASF B 158 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1989), 17–25; Jürgen Becker, *Maria: Mutter Jesu und erwählte Jungfrau*, *Biblische Gestalten* 4 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001), 68–80.

3. MARY, THE HISTORICAL JESUS, AND THE JESUS MOVEMENT

3.1. TEXTS OF ESTRANGEMENT

Mark 6:1–6 recounts the rejection of Jesus in his hometown of Nazareth. When Jesus teaches in the synagogue, those present say:

“Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother [ἀδελφός] of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him.” And Jesus said to them, “Nowhere is a prophet valued less than in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.” (Mark 6:3–4)

This text provides the earliest notice of the name of Jesus’s mother: Maria, the Latinized form of Miriam. Jesus’s mother, thus, bore the same name as the sister of Moses and Aaron (see Exod 2:4–7; 15:20–21; and *passim*). At the same time, we learn—at least, from an impartial reading—that this Mary was the mother of many children. Mark mentions Jesus’s four brothers by name; in addition, his sisters are mentioned in the plural. Mary therefore had at least seven children.² Other New Testament passages also speak of Jesus’s brothers (and sisters): Matt 12:46–50; 13:55; Mark 3:31–35; Luke 8:19–21; John 2:12; 7:3–10; Acts 1:14; and 1 Cor 9:5. In the post-Easter period, James, Jesus’s brother, was a leading member of the community of his followers (see Acts 15:7; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19; 2:9).

In the exegesis of these passages, disagreement surfaces about whether these siblings are “genuine” (i.e., Mary’s biological children). Two other possibilities have been suggested: either the “brothers” and “sisters” are his half-siblings, that is, Joseph’s children from an earlier marriage, or they are Jesus’s cousins. The first solution appears initially in the second-century apocryphal *Protevangelium of James*.³ The second variant, which finds advocates from the time of Jerome up to modern non-Protestant exegesis,⁴ often rests upon the identifications made with named women listed as witnessing the cruci-

2. Since the number of sisters is not mentioned, there could have been more than two. Later texts offer them various names, including Anna, Mary, and Salome; see the references in Josef Blinzler, *Die Brüder und Schwestern Jesu*, 2nd ed., SBS 21 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1967), 35–38.

3. On this text, see Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, trans. R. McL. Wilson, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 1:421–38.

4. On the different positions, see Hans von Campenhausen, *Die Jungfrauengeburt in der Theologie der Alten Kirche*, SHAW 1962 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1962); Blinzler, *Brüder*.

fixion. For example, the Mary described in Mark 15:40–41 as the mother of James and Joses (see also Mark 6:3) is seen as the sister or sister-in-law of Jesus's mother, whereby these "brothers" become his cousins.

Such interpretations are possible readings, but, in my view, not probable ones. Each interprets Mark's text on the basis of a later position: the conviction that Mary was a virgin not only before Jesus's birth, but also during and afterwards (*semper virgo* includes *virginitas in partu* and *post partum*).⁵ The interpretations are thus dogmatically preconceived. If one did not believe that Mary was a perpetual virgin, one would not entertain the idea that Jesus's "brothers" and "sisters" were not his biological siblings. When we want to understand the New Testament texts in their own historical context, the consequence is that Mary was the mother of at least seven children.

Regarding Jesus's relatives, another formulation in Mark 6 is of interest. In Mark 6:4, Jesus speaks of his rejection not only by his hometown and household, but also by his relatives. In the Synoptic reception of Mark's story, the relatives are omitted (see Matt 13:59; Luke 4:24), and further versions of the logion make no mention of them.⁶ Mark has critically distanced Jesus from his extended family. This tendency is reflected in another Marcan text in which Jesus distances himself from his blood relatives and promotes instead a metaphorical kinship:

And he went into a house. And the people came together to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. And when his own people heard of this, they came in order to take hold of him, for they said, "He has lost his senses." (Mark 3:20–21)

And his mother and siblings⁷ came and stood outside, and sent word to him and called him. And the people sat around him, and one said to him,

5. So in the documents of the second council at Constantinople in 533 and at the Lateran Synod in 649. On the development of mariological dogmatics, see, for example, Elzbieta Adamiak, "Wege der Mariologie," *Concilium* 4 (2008): 410–17, and Wolfgang Beinert, "Die mariologischen Dogmen und ihre Entfaltung," in vol. 2 of *Handbuch der Marienkunde*, ed. Wolfgang Beinert and Heinrich Petri, 2nd ed. (Regensburg: Pustet, 1996), 267–363.

6. See John 4:44; Gos. Thom. 31/P. Oxy. 1:30–35.

7. I translate the Greek ἀδελφοί (a masculine plural, which can stand for masculine as well as also for mixed groups) here with "siblings" or with "brothers," as required by the logic of the text in each case. I translate the ἀδελφοί of Jesus in Luke and John in the following also as "siblings," since nothing indicates that only brothers are meant. I proceed in the same way with other plural groups. On the justification for this approach, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1984), and Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist*

“Behold, your mother and your brothers and your sisters outside are asking for you.” And he answered them and said, “Who is my mother and my siblings?” And he looked at those who sat around him and said, “Behold, this is my mother and these are my siblings! For whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and my mother.” (Mark 3:31–35)

The text displays Mark’s typical “sandwich” construction: the two passages cited above frame the story containing the charge that Jesus is possessed (3:22–30). Matthew and Luke retell Mark 3:31–35, but they do not repeat Mark’s structure since they offer no equivalent to 3:20–21. Through these and other textual changes, Matthew and, more so Luke, mitigate the severity of Mark’s statement.⁸

Luke’s version reads:

But his mother and his siblings came to him and, because of the crowd, were not able to get to him. But someone reported to him, “Your mother and your siblings are standing outside and want to see you.” But he answered and said to them, “My mother and my siblings are those who hear and do the word of God.” (Luke 8:19–21)

Here, Jesus’s mother and siblings merely want to “see” him, not to “take hold” of him, and they are not of the opinion that he is crazy. Luke characterizes the attitude of Jesus’s relatives toward him in a friendlier way; the same is also true for the presentation of Jesus’s attitude toward his mother and siblings. The formulation Luke uses at the end leaves open the possibility that Jesus’s biological relatives become his “true” relatives—the groups are not necessarily in opposition.

A further formulation from Luke’s special tradition, at the end agreeing almost verbatim with the previous formulation, underscores this tendency:

And while he said this, a woman among the people raised her voice and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts at which you nursed.” He, however, said, “Those who are blessed are really the ones who hear and keep the word of God.” (Luke 11:27–28)

Social History of Early Christianity, trans. Barbara Rumscheidt and Martin Rumscheidt (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 34–35; trans. of *Lydias ungeduldige Schwestern: Feministische Sozialgeschichte des frühen Christentums* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1994), 59.

8. See Räisänen, *Mutter*, 68–69, 137–39; Becker, *Maria*, 141–43, 151–56; François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia, trans. Christine Thomas (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2002), 315–16; trans. of *Das Evangelium nach Lukas 1*, EKKNT 3.1 (Zurich: Benzinger, 1989).

Rather than excluding the blessing upon Jesus's mother expressed in the first sentence, the second sentence expands it.⁹ Family relationship is not a criterion for blessing and discipleship, but it is also not a criterion for exclusion. What counts, alone, is the hearing and doing, or keeping, the word of God. Luke "tames" Mark's tradition and so integrates it into the two-volume work that, after all, begins with a positive portrayal of Mary and that continues in the opening of the second part by locating Mary among her son's followers (Acts 1:14). Luke's tendency toward a greater "Mary friendliness" is clear; a first step in the transformation of Jesus's mother has been made.

The remaining question is whether any historical memory lies hidden behind the Synoptic reports of the distance between Jesus and his family. Is it plausible that the historical Jesus had a reserved or even broken relationship with his mother and his siblings? In my opinion, much speaks in favor of this:¹⁰

(1) The "antifamily" texts are the *oldest* accessible traditions about Jesus and his mother. They are *cited repeatedly*, and the Synoptic evidence is supported by possibly independent¹¹ evidence in John's Gospel as well as in the Gospel of Thomas (see John 2:4, 11–12; 7:3–10; Gos. Thom. 99).

(2) The passages mentioned are not isolated; rather, they can be *linked together* extremely well *into a network* within the Jesus tradition. In a series of sayings, Jesus demands the renunciation of family ties as a precondition of discipleship (Matt 10:37–38//Luke 14:26–27(Q))//Gos. Thom. 55, 101; Mark 10:29–30//Matt 19:29–30//Luke 18:29–30; Matt 8:21–22//Luke 9:59–62). Jesus himself is the model for this attitude.

(3) The passages mentioned are *contrary to the tendency* revealed in the sources to moderate or to reinterpret the broken relationship between Jesus

9. This becomes especially clear when this version is compared to Gos. Thom. 79: "A woman in the crowd said to him, 'Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts that nourished you.' He said to her, 'Blessed are those who have heard the word of the Father and have kept it honestly. For there will be days on which you will say, Blessed the womb that has not conceived and the breasts that have given no milk.'" See Judith Hartenstein, *Charakterisierung im Dialog: Die Maria Magdalena, Petrus, Thomas und die Mutter Jesu im Johannesevangelium im Kontext andere frühchristlicher Darstellungen*, NTOA 64 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2007), 282–84.

10. The following argument is based upon the generally accepted criteria of historical Jesus research. See Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); trans. of *Der historische Jesus: Ein Lehrbuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996); see also Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *Die Kriterienfrage in der Jesusforschung: Vom Differenzkriterium zum Plausibilitätskriterium*, NTOA 34 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997).

11. This independence is a controversial topic; there is no consensus about the literary relationship among John, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Synoptic Gospels.

and his mother and family in a positive manner. The difficulty in transmitting the tradition speaks in favor of its originality.

Summary: the oldest reports about the mother of Jesus suggest an afamilial ethos. A reserved relationship between Mary and Jesus is historically probable. These reports were felt to be problematic already within the New Testament. For this reason, they were moderated (a tendency also frequently found in more recent secondary literature). It is precisely this moderation that speaks for their authenticity.

3.2. MARY AFTER EASTER

Is it possible that Mary's attitude toward Jesus and the movement he initiated changed? A short note at the beginning of Acts speaks in favor of this conclusion. Jesus's disciples, mentioned by name, have gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem: "These all with one mind devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his siblings" (Acts 1:14). Luke thus reports the integration of Mary and Jesus's siblings into the community. Whether historical data lie hidden behind Acts 1:14 is difficult to determine. What prompts skepticism is the fact that the report dovetails with the Synoptic tendency to minimize Jesus's family problems. On the other hand, that Jesus's brother James appears not only in Acts but also in the Pauline Letters as a prominent member of the early community (see Acts 15:7; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 2:9, etc.) and that Paul in 1 Cor 9:5 counts Jesus's married brothers (in plural) as members of the community speak to the historical plausibility of Luke's report. Apparently, several members of Jesus's family changed sides after Easter. Mary could have been among them. But, in the last analysis, this question cannot be decided with certainty.¹² Further ancient sources for determining Mary's whereabouts after Easter are lacking;¹³ within Acts, she is not mentioned again.

3.3. JOSEPH'S ABSENCE AND MARY'S AGE

In the sources considered thus far, Joseph's nearly complete absence is conspicuous. In most cases, Mary appears together with Jesus's siblings, but not with Joseph. Mark does not mention Joseph at all, and, with the exception of

12. Räisänen, *Mutter*, 141–42, is undecided on this point; Becker, *Maria*, 53–60, supports it.

13. Later traditions have Mary dying and being buried in Jerusalem; still other traditions locate her eventually in Ephesus, see Becker, *Maria*, 62–68; Schalom Ben-Chorin, *Mutter Mirjam: Maria in jüdischer Sicht* (Munich: Paul List, 1971), 124–33.

the childhood stories in Matthew and Luke, he makes no appearance in these Gospels either. He thus plays no role in Jesus's public life or afterwards.

A possible explanation for this absence is that Joseph had died before Jesus's public activity began.¹⁴ Several arithmetical speculations can be combined with this theory.¹⁵ The usual age of marriage for women at that time was approximately between twelve and fourteen; Mary would have born her first child, Jesus, in her early teen years. If Jesus was approximately thirty years old at his first public appearance (see Luke 3:23), Mary, accordingly, was then in her midforties and thus already beyond the life expectancy for women at that time.¹⁶ If we assume that Joseph was the father of Jesus's siblings, numbering at least six according to Mark 6:3//Matt 13:55–56, then Joseph must have lived several years after the birth of Jesus. At the time of Jesus's visit to Nazareth, Mary was presumably already a widow, and her oldest son would have been obligated to care for the family. The familial irritation is also understandable against this background.

4. JESUS'S MOTHER IN JOHANNINE THEOLOGY

In the Gospel of John, the name of Jesus's mother never appears, but she appears twice as the "mother of Jesus" (2:1–12; 19:25–27) and is otherwise mentioned once (6:42). Since Joseph is mentioned twice as Jesus's father, the omission of the mother's name seems significant—it is not likely to be attributed to ignorance. Also significant is the fact that John's Gospel locates the mother of Jesus at the beginning of his public activity but not at his birth. The Gospel's prologue emphasizes Jesus's preexistence and heavenly origin but is not interested in his earthly origins and his mother. At the same time, Joseph's

14. Becker, *Maria*, 44–46 argues for this. In any case, the designation of Jesus as "son of Mary" in Mark 6:3 is certainly not an allusion to the virgin birth, of which Mark's Gospel, of course, knows nothing (see Räisänen, *Mutter*, 49; Campenhausen, *Jungfrauengeburt*, 9–10; Raymond E. Brown et al., eds., *Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1978], 61–64). The legend, already recorded in ancient times, that Jesus was an illegitimate child of Mary by a Roman soldier and that Joseph repudiated her because of this "faux pas" (so the critic of Christianity Celsus, according to Origen, *Cels.* 1.29.32) serves polemical purposes and is historically not probable.

15. On the following, see also the computations in Becker, *Maria*, 51.

16. This is estimated (on the basis of the witnesses of gravestone inscriptions) as ca. thirty-five years for women and forty-five for men, see Becker, *Maria*, 51; Christina Urban, "Hochzeit, Ehe, und Witwenschaft," in *Familie-Gesellschaft-Wirtschaft*, vol. 2 of *Neues Testament und Antike Kultur*, ed. Klaus Scherberich (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner, 2005), 25–30 (29).

fatherhood is neither doubted nor placed in opposition to the frequent characterizations of Jesus as the “son” of God and of God as the “father” of Jesus. Nowhere is there any mention of a virgin birth; apparently, Jesus’s earthly and heavenly “sonships” are to be seen as simultaneous.¹⁷ This indicates that sonship and fatherhood have different connotations in the ancient world than they do today. I shall return to this point, but first, I consider the role of the mother of Jesus in Johannine theology.

4.1. AMBIVALENCES BETWEEN MOTHER AND SON

The first appearance of Jesus’s mother occurs at a wedding in Cana; she is mentioned even before Jesus and his followers:

And on the third day, there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples also were invited to the wedding. And when the wine had run out, the mother of Jesus says to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus says to her, “What have I to do with you, woman [τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι]? My hour has not yet come.” His mother says to the servants, “Whatever he says to you, you should do.” (John 2:1–5)

The mother of Jesus notices the lack of wine and states this fact to Jesus. Thereupon, Jesus clearly distances himself from her: he not only addresses her as “woman” instead of as “mother” or with her name (see also John 4:21; 20:15), but he also explicitly formulates this distance by his question. This formulation, used in other Gospels (see Mark 1:24 and parr.; Mark 5:7 and parr.) between demons and Jesus, signifies rejection.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Mary takes the initiative by giving instructions to the servants. She is thereby a mediatory figure who brings other persons into a relationship with Jesus (see John 1:45–46; 4:28–29).¹⁹ And Jesus reacts by changing a large amount of water into excellent wine.

If we assume that, despite Jesus’s initial rejection of his mother, the relationship between them is characterized by a secret harmony, then the end of the narrative once again gives cause for skepticism. John states that Jesus’s male and female disciples believed in him on the basis of his sign, but not, however, his mother and his siblings. They accompany him and his followers to Capernaum, but John makes no comment about their faith (see John

17. See Räsänen, *Mutter*, 180–86; Hartenstein, *Charakterisierung*, 289–90.

18. See also the expressions used in the LXX of Judg 11:12; 2 Sam 16:10; 19:23; 1 Kgs 17:18; 2 Kgs 3:13; 2 Chr 35:21.

19. On this, Hartenstein, *Charakterisierung*, 269–73, 281–82.

2:11–12).²⁰ In the next passage where Jesus's siblings appear (John 7:2–9), his mother is not mentioned. She will appear again at the crucifixion, where the siblings are noticeably absent. This final scene, however, does introduce a new “family member.”

4.2. THE MOTHER OF JESUS RECEIVES A NEW SON

In John's narrative, in contrast to the other Gospels, the mother of Jesus is present at the crucifixion:

But there, standing by the cross of Jesus, were his mother and the sister of his mother, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus therefore saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” From that hour on, the disciple took her into his own [εἰς τὰ ἴδια]. (John 19:25–27)

Here, the mother of Jesus is not only integrated into the group, she even leads the list of those present. In this scene, Jesus initiates a new mother-son relationship between her and the “disciple whom he loved.” This so-called “Beloved Disciple” is specific to John: he appears repeatedly in important passages (13:23–25; 18:15–16; 19:26–27, 34–35; 20:2–10; 21:7, 20–24), and, according to 21:24, he composed the Gospel.²¹ Whether a historical person lies behind this figure remains an open, and controversial, question. But it is clear that he continues Jesus's work and that he guarantees the continuity of the tradition for the Johannine group. Because the expression that he took Jesus's mother “into his own” (εἰς τὰ ἴδια) echoes a wording John uses in regard to Jesus in 1:11,²² it receives a deeper dimension: the Beloved Disciple takes the mother of Jesus to himself not only to care for her, but also in doing so makes her part of the community. At the same time, the Beloved Disciple becomes a substitute son; he assumes the place of Jesus. The symbolism in John 19:25–27 speaks against reading the scene as testimony to Mary's historical presence at the crucifixion, the more so since the other Gospels know nothing of her being there. To be sure, traditions assimilated in John

20. See Becker, *Maria*, 205–6.

21. The name “John” itself is not mentioned in the text; it is found first in the title added later to the Gospel and is not to be equated with the Apostle John; see Becker, *Maria*, 209–12.

22. See also the parallel formulations in John 1:18 and 13:23: just as Jesus is in the bosom (εἰς τὸν κόλπον) of God, so does the Beloved Disciple find himself at the Last Supper in the bosom (ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ) of Jesus.

show points of contact with Synoptic tradition (e.g., the ambivalent relationship between Jesus and his family as well as, possibly, Mary's joining the community), but John's portrayal of the mother of Jesus is indebted to an independent theological perspective. Jesus's mother is present at his first public appearance; she then more or less releases him to take up his activity. She is present once again at its end. At Jesus's death, she becomes the "mother" of the Beloved Disciple and thereby guarantees the disciple's position as a "new son." Decisive in this context is her maternal role; a genuine interest in the *person* of Mary does not exist.²³

In the course of a secondary combination with other stories, the two Johannine pericopes become components of a construed "biography" of Mary. The points of departure for this construct are those narratives in which the special circumstances of Jesus's birth are central. Only on the basis of these stories is the development and transformation of the figure of Mary understandable.

5. STORIES OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS

The two so-called *Vorgeschichten* in Matthew and Luke, to a large extent, go their separate ways; they cannot fall back on Mark or Q. Both, however, use traditional material,²⁴ and both show strikingly strong connections to Old Testament texts and contexts. Whereas in Luke's nativity account, Mary stands in the center, in Matthew, Joseph is the principal focus.

5.1. PATER SEMPER INCERTUS—OR, JOSEPH ASSUMES RESPONSIBILITY

The Gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogy, a form that occurs numerous times in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Gen 5; 10–11). By including this well-known genre, Matthew both links Jesus's genealogy with the other Jewish genealogies²⁵

23. See Räisänen, *Mutter*, 179; Adeline Fehribach, "The 'Birthing' Bridegroom: The Portrayal of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel," in *A Feminist Companion to John*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff, 2 vols., FCNTECW 5 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 2:104–29 (127–28).

24. See, for example, Räisänen, *Mutter*, 52–54, 77–80; Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives*, BibSem 28 (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 145–56; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 82, 93–94; trans. of *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus I: Mt 1–7*, EKKNT 1.1 (Zurich: Benziger, 1986). Becker, *Maria*, 113–15, 156–65; for an overview, see Walter Radl, *Der Ursprung Jesu: Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Lukas 1–2*, HBS 7 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1996).

25. This relationship is strengthened through the fact that the first genealogy in Gene-

and emphasizes in the process Jesus's descent from Abraham and David.²⁶ Interestingly, the Matthean genealogy repeatedly breaks the usual patrilineal enumeration by mentioning women: Tamar (see Gen 38), Rahab (see Josh 2; 6), Ruth (see Ruth), and Bathsheba, named in Matthew as "the wife of Uriah" (see 2 Sam 11). These women prepare the way for the naming of Mary at the end of the genealogy. To be determined is what connects these five women.

According to Jane Schaberg, the stories of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah depict women who stand outside "normal" patriarchal order and family relationships and whose existence consequently is highly endangered. However, the problematic situation for each woman takes a general turn for the better, which occurs through the auspices of the men who lead them back into the social order, guarantee their status, and/or legitimate them and their children.²⁷ The naming of the four women is, thus, preparation for a further story in which something similar is to be expected.

First, however, the verse that mentions Mary interrupts the genealogical structure: "Jacob, though, begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, from whom was born [ἐγέννησεν] Jesus, called Christ" (Matt 1:16). In continuity with the genealogy, "Joseph begat Jesus" would be expected. The divergent passive form indicates that Joseph is not precisely the father. Nevertheless, the evidence for Jesus's Davidic descent is provided via Joseph. The verse poses a riddle, the solution to which is given in the next story:

Now the birth of Jesus was as follows. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, and before they had come together, it was found that she was pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit [ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου]. But Joseph, her husband, was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace. He made the decision to release her secretly. But when he had considered this—behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary to yourself as your wife, for that which is begotten in her is from the power of the Holy Spirit [τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματος ἑστίν ἁγίου]. But she will bear a son, and you are to give to him the name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Now all this occurred so that that which was said by Lord through the

sis (Gen 5:1) and that in Matt 1:1 begin with the same formulation: βιβλος γενέσεως ("book of origin/ beginnings").

26. The genealogy in Luke 3:23–38 also verifies David and Abrahamic descent; this family tree then is continued backwards to Adam. Mary is not mentioned, and the lists differ between David and Joseph.

27. See Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 20–34; Jane Schaberg, "Die Stammütter und die Mutter Jesu," *Concilium* 25 (1989): 528–33; further suggestions for interpretation include Räsänen, *Mutter*, 57–80; and Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 83–85.

prophets might be fulfilled, *Behold, the virgin [ἡ παρθένος] will become pregnant and bear a son, and they will call him Emmanuel*, which means: *With us is God*. Now Joseph arose from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him; he took his wife to himself, but he knew her not until she had born a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. (Matt 1:18–25)

According to this story, Joseph is not Jesus's father; he does not have sexual intercourse with Mary up to the time of Jesus's birth (nothing is said about the time after the birth). But Joseph *becomes* the father of Jesus by giving him his name; that is, in legal terms Joseph legitimizes Jesus by accepting him as his child. Since in the ancient world (in contrast to today), biological fatherhood was not verifiable, fatherhood is socially determined: the man decides whether the child is his child. Jesus is in this sense Joseph's child; thus, Jesus's descent via Joseph is established.²⁸

Because the concept of "fatherhood" in antiquity functioned differently than it does today, it is inadvisable to apply our biological knowledge to the interpretation of ancient texts. This is true also for the question concerning the means by which Mary became pregnant. In my view, attempting to settle this question along the lines of modern biology misses the point of this text;²⁹ much more important are the theological messages: that the power of the Holy Spirit was effective in, or took a part in, the conception and that thereby Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled.

Much has been written about the "virgin" in the citation from Isa 7:14. As is known, the Hebrew text uses the expression *הַעַלְמָה*, the young woman, which the Septuagint (in contrast to other Greek translations that use the more precise equivalent *νεᾶνις*) renders as *ἡ παρθένος*. This expression *can* mean a virgin in the biological sense, but it does not necessarily mean this.³⁰ In addition, it is unclear to which point in time the citation refers: it does not say explicitly that the virgin remains a virgin when or after she became pregnant—we have only accustomed ourselves to understanding the text in this way, and, at the same time, we have accepted the Holy Spirit more or less as a "biological father." There is already an interesting objection to this inter-

28. See Räsänen, *Mutter*, 63–64; on the legal circumstances, see Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 42–62.

29. For this reason, I cannot agree here with Schaberg, who wishes to find indications of a rape or seduction of Mary in the two nativity accounts.

30. See Gen 34:3 LXX, where Dinah, after she is raped, is called *παρθένος*; on this, see Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 69–71. Interesting in this context is Philo of Alexandria, who in *Cher.* 50 claims that sexual union makes virgins into women, while God can make women again into virgins. In the same context, he locates Sarah (after menopause) once again in the order of virgins.

pretation in one ancient text: "Some say that Mary became pregnant from the Holy Spirit. They are mistaken. They do not know what they are saying. When would it ever have been the case that a woman became pregnant from a woman?"³¹ The argument is persuasive because, in Semitic languages, "the Holy Spirit" is feminine. The power of the Spirit could be the mother of Jesus, but not his father.

The citation from Isaiah, thus, intends not to explain biological facts but rather to portray the "origin" of Jesus as divine and as the fulfilment of a prophecy and thereby to tell Jesus's story as a continuation of Israel's history. This continuity is also manifest in the form of an annunciation, for which there are several parallels in the Hebrew Bible (see Gen 17:15–22; 18:10–15; 25:21–24; 28:12–16; Judg 13). The one authorized and the one who acts is Joseph; Mary is not addressed directly, and she does not speak. This arrangement is continued in Matt 2: a further angelic appearance warns Joseph about the danger from Herod, whereupon he, with Mary and Jesus, flees to Egypt (2:13–15). Joseph protects his wife and child from the menace,³² and he returns with them when a third dream proclaims the end of the danger (2:19–21). While at the beginning of Matt 2, the magi find Mary and the child in Bethlehem (2:1–12; only here does the name Mary occur in Matt 2), at the end, Joseph returns with the child and his mother, as a precaution, to Nazareth (2:22–23). The stories are marked throughout by fulfilment citations; their historical value is slight.³³ The issue is the continuity of events within Israel's history and Judaism's Scriptures.

5.2. GABRIEL GOES IN TO MARY

In Luke 1–2, the birth stories of Jesus and John the Baptist are woven together; the proclamation of the birth, as well as the birth itself, is told first for John and then for Jesus. In between stands Mary's encounter with Elizabeth, the mother of John. To proclaim Jesus's birth, the angel Gabriel is sent by God to Nazareth; this time, the angel does not visit Joseph, but rather Mary, who again is called a virgin (*παρθένης*) (1:26–28). Here, Gabriel speaks directly to Mary:

31. Gos. Phil. 17 (NHC II, 55:23–27) from the second to the third century; see on this Silke Petersen, "Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!" *Maria Magdalena, Salome und andere Jüngerinnen Jesu in christlich-gnostischen Schriften*, NHMS 48 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 281–86.

32. There are numerous ancient parallels to this story of endangerment (Moses, Nimrod, Augustus, Cyrus, etc.), see Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 92–93, 119–20; Becker, *Maria*, 120–22.

33. Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 1, 90–93, 97–100, 119–20; Becker, *Maria*, 120, 123–24, 131–32.

And he went in to her [εἰσελθὼν πρὸς αὐτήν] and said: “Greetings, favored one, the Lord is with you.” But she was frightened at this word and pondered what kind of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found grace with God, and, behold, you will be found pregnant and will bear a son and give him the name of Jesus. He will be great and be called a son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will be king over the house of Jacob for all eternity, and his kingdom will have no end.” But Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I know no man [ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω]?” And the angel answered and said to her: “The power of the Holy Spirit will come upon you [πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ] and the power of the Most High will overshadow you [δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι]; for this reason, the one born [τὸ γεννώμενον] will be called holy, Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth your relative: she, too, has conceived a son in her old age, and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month, for no thing [ῥῆμα] is impossible with God.” And Mary said, “Behold, I am the slave³⁴ of the Lord: may it be done to me according to your word [ῥῆμα].” And the angel went out from her [ἀπήλθεν ἀπ’ αὐτῆς]. (Luke 1:28–38)

The narrative is puzzling in regard to the questions of how, when, and by what means Mary becomes pregnant. In the following, I ask readers not to interpret the story with the “foreknowledge” that the “Holy Spirit” is more or less the “father” of the child. In my opinion, the story is more complex.³⁵ First, Mary’s reactions are strange: the fact that she is frightened at the sight of the angel is a typical reaction in such narratives; her reflection upon the content of his announcement, however, is not. It is odd that Mary—even were she a virgin at the time of the address—is surprised at a prophecy that announces her *future* pregnancy.³⁶ (Conspicuously, after this scene Luke does not again call Mary a *παρθένος*.)

34. The translation “maid” for *δούλη* in the context of ancient societies—marked by the institution of slavery—has a minimizing effect; Mary’s self-designation as *δούλη* of God signals both a distancing from the structures of secular rule of human beings over human beings (as explained in Luke 1:51–52) and a connection to Moses, Abraham, and David, for example, each of whom is called *δούλος*, slave of God, in the LXX. Mary, thus, also stands in their tradition. See Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 137–38.

35. Many of the following observations correspond to those in Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 78–144. However, my conclusions diverge in part from hers (esp. concerning the assumption of rape).

36. Speculations about Mary’s taking a vow of lifelong abstinence as a solution to the textual problem appear to be out of place, since not only Luke but the entire New Testament knows nothing of such a vow.

In the scene directly following, when Mary gets up and hurries to Elizabeth, she is pregnant. The beginning of the pregnancy, thus, must lie either between the two scenes—or *during the encounter with Gabriel*. Now, Gabriel does not say that the child is produced through the working of the πνεῦμα, but rather that the child *for this reason*, because of this working, will be called holy. In the biblical parallels to his statement the result is never a pregnancy;³⁷ the working of the Spirit in the Bible normally leads not to the birth of children, but to the bestowal of a prophetic gift.³⁸ In Luke's narrative, the power of the Spirit is less suspect than are Gabriel's actions.³⁹ "To go into" (εἰσελθεῖν κτλ. πρὸς) serves in many Old Testament narratives as a synonym for sexual intercourse.⁴⁰ In the previous annunciation in Luke's Gospel, the formulation is different: Gabriel *appears* (ᾤφθη) to Zechariah in the temple (Luke 1:11). Mary's perplexity as well as the wordplay involving the ambiguity of ῥῆμα (word/thing) in verses 37 and 38 also indicates that something special occurs within this scene. It must be reemphasized: we should not attempt to understand either Matt 1 or Luke 1 in terms of modern biological knowledge. In the

37. The combination of πνεῦμα and ἐπέρχομαι κτλ. occurs in LXX Num 5:14, 30; Job 1:19; 4:15; Isa 32:15. The "power of the Highest" is, as "power from on High" in Luke 24:49, a synonym for the power of the Spirit. Forms of "overshadow" appear in Matt 17:5//Mark 9:7//Luke 9:34; Acts 5:15; as well as LXX Exod 40:35; Pss 90:4; 139:8; Prov 18:11, but never in the sense of "beget/impregnate". On the interpretation of "overshadow" see, for example, Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 112–17 (protective function); Kerstin Schiffner, *Lukas liest Exodus: Eine Untersuchung zur Aufnahme ersttestamentlicher Befreiungsgeschichte im lukanischen Werk als Schrift-Lektüre*, BWANT 172 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2008), 236 (connection with the cloud in Exodus); Leonardo Boff, *Das mütterliche Antlitz Gottes: Ein interdisziplinärer Versuch über das Weibliche und seine religiöse Bedeutung* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1985), 110–17 (hypostatic seizure of Mary through the Holy Spirit).

38. On the linkage of the bestowal of the Spirit and prophecy, see Irmtraud Fischer, *Gotteskünderinnen: Zu einer geschlechterfairen Deutung des Phänomens der Prophetie und der Prophetinnen in der Hebräischen Bibel* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002), 235–46.

39. According to Ben-Chorin, *Mirjam*, 41, the name Gabriel (biblically known from Dan 8:16) means "my husband is God." Chorin (48) recognizes the "fathering power of God" in Gabriel himself (this idea works also if we assume the probably more plausible derivation of the name of Gabriel as "God has shown himself powerful"). In the apocryphal Epistle to the Apostles (second century), the resurrected Christ speaks of his past as Gabriel: "On that day, namely, when I took on the form of Gabriel, the angel, I appeared to Mary and spoke with her. Her heart accepted me, she believed. I formed myself, I went into her body, I became flesh" (Coptic version, 14 [25]).

40. See, for example, Gen 30:10 LXX: "And Jacob went in to her [εἰσῆλθεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτήν] and Zilpah, Leah's servant, conceived and she bore Jacob a son"; see also Gen 16:2, 4; 29:21, 23, 30; 30:3, 4; 38:2, 8; 16:18; Judg 15:1; 16:1; Ruth 4:13; 2 Sam 16:22; 17:25; 20:3; 1 Chr 2:21; 7:23; Esth 2:12, 15; Prov 6:29. There are also many other instances (see, for example, Gen 7:1), but they change nothing in regard to the ambiguity of the formulation.

ancient world, various theories on how conception took place existed. It was not evident that there was something like a female “seed,” nor could the way in which the male contribution worked in conception be clearly determined.⁴¹

Numerous other narratives in antiquity attribute the conceptions of prominent persons (e.g., Plato and Alexander the Great) to divine action. Renowned is Virgil’s *Fourth Eclogue*, which names the future ruler of the world a “descendent of the gods” and the “offspring of Jupiter” (line 51).⁴² Philo of Alexandria attributes the pregnancies of Sarah, Leah, and Zipporah to divine activity and not to their husbands (*Cher.* 45–47); Plutarch finds it a matter of course that women can become pregnant through divine effect (*Num.* 4). In this context, it is striking how reserved Luke is in recounting Jesus’s divinely effected birth: every form of concretization is lacking. For Luke, what is important is the fact of a divine working; what exactly takes place remains unspoken.

Remarkable in Luke’s narrative is Mary’s explicit consent, which is lacking in other biblical annunciations. In the directly preceding annunciation in Luke’s Gospel, Zechariah does not believe the angel and, for this reason, becomes temporarily mute (see Luke 1:18–22, also the unbelieving reactions in Gen 17). In contrast, Mary’s consent is all the more striking. In Luke’s story, she is not a passive object of divine action but rather decides for the pregnancy herself. And she remains active as the story continues.

5.3. MARY ENCOUNTERS ELIZABETH, AND BOTH SPEAK PROPHETICALLY

In Mary’s encounter with Elizabeth, the narrative threads of the births of Jesus and John, separated in Luke 1, meet and intersect. Mary sets off to visit Elizabeth, whose pregnancy Gabriel had proclaimed to her as a sign of God’s power. It becomes evident that, at the time of the encounter, Mary, too, is pregnant:

And when Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the unborn child in her womb leaped, and Elizabeth was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit [ἐπλήσθη πνεύματος ἁγίου] and called out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” (1:41–42)

41. The female ovum was discovered in the nineteenth century. The masculine share could be understood virtually as a formative idea, in contrast to what is female matter; see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), with Aristotle (*Gen. an.* 729b–730b). The effective cause is not necessarily connected with the material sperm (*Gen. an.* 737a,8–17).

42. *Cara deum suboles, magnum Iovis incrementum*. See Eduard Norden, *Die Geburt des Kindes: Geschichte einer religiösen Idee*, 2nd ed., SBW 3 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1931); Becker, *Maria*, 135–40, with further examples.

Elizabeth subsequently praises Mary's faith (1:45), whereby the contrast to the doubt expressed by Zechariah is emphasized. The temporal shifts in the narrative structure and the enhancements in the Jesus narrative in contrast to the narrative about John also show that, with Jesus, there is "something greater." The ranking of John and Jesus beginning in Luke 3 is anticipated here.

The power of the Spirit works in Elizabeth also, and it leads her to speak prophetically, just as Zechariah, in the following narrative of John's birth, is filled with the power of the Spirit and prophetically speaks (see 1:67). Such a sequence is typical: the *πνεῦμα* of God gives rise to prophecy—ideally among all human beings (see Num 11:29; Joel 3:1–5; Acts 2:17–21). The connection between pneumatology and prophecy can be established in regard to Mary as well. In Luke 1:35, the angel proclaims to her the descent of the *πνεῦμα*; her prophetic address follows in 1:46–56. Thereby, the Mary-Jesus story once again outdoes the Elizabeth-John story: the result of the bestowal of the Spirit upon Mary is described in more detail and more pointedly than that of the bestowal upon Elizabeth (see Luke 1:35 with 1:41). Similarly, Mary's address surpasses Elizabeth's in length and significance:

And Mary said:

My soul praises the Lord,

and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior,

because he has looked upon the humble station [*ταπεινώσις*] of his slave.

Behold, from now on all generations will praise me as blessed,

because the Mighty One has done great things with me. And holy is his name,

and his mercy from generations to generations for those who fear him.

He has exercised supremacy with his arm,

he has scattered those who think arrogantly in their hearts.

He has thrown down the mighty from their thrones

and raised up those of humble station [*ταπεινούς*],

the hungry he has filled with good things

and sent away the rich empty.

He has taken to himself Israel, his child,

and has remembered his mercy.

As he has spoken to our elders,

to Abraham and his descendants forever.

And Mary remained with her for about three months and then went back to her house. (Luke 1:46–56)

This is Mary's longest speech in the New Testament. It begins with God's actions with respect to her own person but then gains a dimension encompassing all of world history. The use of *ταπεινώσις* in verse 48 focuses not upon Mary's personal humility but rather upon social degradation and oppres-

sion (see v. 52). With the sequence of degradation, then of seeing, then God's mercy and action, the speech takes up central motifs of the Exodus tradition anew.⁴³ It is not without reason that the Magnificat (so-called in accordance with the hymn's first word in the Latin translation) has become a central text for liberation theology.⁴⁴ Its situation is the oppression of the Jewish people under Roman rule; thus, a reading that foregrounds individual humility and a mother's joy curtails its political dimension.

The Jewish woman⁴⁵ Mary is here written into the history of her people in several respects. She bears—certainly not by chance⁴⁶—the name of Miriam, the sister of Moses, who is the first woman in the Old Testament who is called a prophet and who, in consequence of this designation, praises God for the salvation from the Egyptian pursuers (see Exod 15:20–21). Through the incorporation of textual allusions, Mary stands in the line of spirit-endowed, prophetic women, wherein Deborah (Judg 4–5) and Hannah (1 Sam 1–2), for example, also stand.⁴⁷ Further, the Magnificat contains a series of allusions to the “victory hymns” of these women, as well as from other texts, especially the Psalms.⁴⁸ Like Matthew, Luke also emphasizes the continuity of the history he tells with the “Scriptures,” although with other literary intertexts.

The aspects of Luke's prehistory mentioned to this point—criticism of Roman rule, continuity with Jewish tradition, emphasis upon prophetic forms of speech—are developed in the next chapter. The birth story in Luke 2:1–20 not only portrays by the stable setting and the shepherds both male and female an image counter to that of imperial splendor,⁴⁹ but also the newborn child receives the title *κύριος* (Luke 2:11)—a title that, while not assumed by the Emperor Augustus mentioned in the story, was claimed increasingly by

43. See Schiffner, *Lukas*, 231–36; Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters*, 177–79; Schaberg, *Illegitimacy*, 98–101.

44. See Boff, *Mütterliche Antlitz Gottes*, 199–210; Bovon, *Luke*, 65.

45. Ben-Chorin's *Mirjam* is pathbreaking for a Jewish view of Mary.

46. According to Schiffner, *Lukas*, 259–78, a particular increase in use of the name Miriam/Maria(m)/etc. appears during Roman occupation (first century BCE–135 CE). She interprets this assignment as an expression of hope in a renewed Exodus/liberation event, which was connected with the name Miriam.

47. On this line, see Fischer, *Gotteskinderinnen*, 124–26; Schiffner, *Lukas*, 101–3, 278–90. The line extends still further in extrabiblical Jewish literature where, for example, Hannah ranks as a prophetess or Miriam receives the proclamation of the birth (of Moses) by an angel, whereby she is filled with the power of God's Holy Spirit. See Pseudo-Philo, LAB 9, 10; on this, see Schiffner, *Lukas*, 165–66.

48. This cannot be elaborated on in detail here. See, for example, Bovon, *Luke*, 57–64.

49. On the historical problems in this narrative, see Becker, *Maria*, 184–87; Radl, *Ursprung*, 361–69.

the emperors from the middle of the first century CE (that is, at the time of the origin of the narrative). The child, as *κύριος*, is thus an antiemperor.

The continuity with Jewish tradition determines the further sequence of stories (Luke 2:21–52): Jesus's circumcision, Mary's purification "according to the torah of Moses" (2:22), and the visits to the Jerusalem temple. At the family's first visit, prophetic events once again dominate the narrative both in Simeon's speech⁵⁰ and through the appearance of the *prophet* Anna, who praises God in the presence of all who wait for the "redemption of Jerusalem" (2:38)—whereby a no less political motif is once again present.

A positive reaction on Mary's part is described twice in the course of the narrative: she keeps all these *words*, and she considers them in her heart (2:19, following the birth story; see also 2:51, following the story of the display of erudition by the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple). From here, we can draw a line to the passages discussed above where those who hear, keep, and do the *words* are praised as blessed (8:21; 11:28), as well as to the praise both of Mary as a believer (1:45) and of Mary's "union" with the Jesus community (Acts 1:14). Mary in Luke's Gospel has become a model for hearing and believing,⁵¹ a development that lies as far as is conceivable from the Mary of Mark.

6. THE OUTLOOK—OR, MARY, ISIS, AND THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN

An increasing interest in Mary and a friendlier portrayal of her person can be detected already in the New Testament texts. While she plays no role for Paul, the first "biographical" beginnings appear in Luke, and these are then developed. The second-century apocryphal Protevangelium of James begins to narrate the special circumstances of *Mary's* birth. In this text, she proves to be a virgin not only before but also *after* the birth of Jesus.⁵² From the third century on, Mary's virginity then becomes so bound up with Christianity's ascetic tendencies that Mary develops a role-model function. Through the linkage of "normal" procreation and original sin, the sinlessness of her exceptional conception is added as a new motif from the time of Augustine—an aspect completely foreign to the biblical texts.

50. Simeon's remark about the "sword that will pierce Mary's heart" (2:35) has been frequently interpreted. Along with Becker (*Maria*, 189–93), I consider it plausible to relate it to the imminent division of Israel prompted by the message of Christ and not to the crucifixion. Luke's Mary does not stand under the cross.

51. See Bovon, *Luke*, 53, 316; Becker, *Maria*, 195–96; Räisänen, *Mutter*, 118–24.

52. See the English translation of the Protevangelium of James in Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:421–38. On first-century developments, see also Campenhausen, *Jungfrauengeburt*.

A further development occurs increasingly from about the fourth century on: the elevation of Mary. The identification of Mary with the heavenly woman of the Apocalypse of John is substantiated for the first time in the writings of Epiphanius (*Pan.* 78.11):⁵³ “a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and on her head a wreath of twelve stars” (Rev 12:1). Exegesis in the meantime has to a great extent agreed that this “heavenly woman” originally had nothing to do with Mary; instead, she reveals the influence of the figures of ancient goddesses. The woman’s description picks up aspects of the portrayals of Isis; the story of an endangered birth is an adaptation of Apollo’s birth by Leto.⁵⁴ Still another goddess plays a role in the “elevation” of Mary: Artemis, who was venerated especially in Ephesus and whose followers angered Paul (see Acts 19). At the Council of Ephesus in 431, the designation of Mary as *theotokos*, “God-bearer” (Lat.: *mater dei*) prevailed over the competing title of *christotokos*, “Christ-bearer,”⁵⁵ which led to popular festivals in Ephesus, the city of Artemis. The veneration of Mary among the masses was nourished, above all, by the ancient cults of the eastern Mediterranean, even as official ecclesiastical Mariology repeatedly felt itself compelled to emphasize that Mary is, after all, not a goddess.

This development is far removed from the texts of the New Testament. The point of departure for the transformation of Mary, however, lies exactly there, especially in Luke 1–2. The extraordinary circumstances around the birth of the exceptional child lead to the consequence that his outstanding status became conferred also upon his mother. Insofar as this is so, the mother, as Dante says in the epigraph to this article, has become the “daughter” of the Son.

53. See Brown et al., *Mary*, 235; Becker, *Maria*, 221–25.

54. See Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001); Silke Petersen, “Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Gunkel, Bousset und die Himmelskönigin (Offb 12),” in *Hermann Gunkel Revisited: Literatur- und religionsgeschichtliche Studien*, ed. Ute E. Eisen and Erhard Gerstenberger (Münster: LIT, 2010), 173–91.

55. The issue originally was a christological question into which Mary is drawn; see Campenhausen, *Jungfrauengeburt*, 53–54.

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