

# Chapter 3: The Nativity

## Reading Outline:

- Luke 1-2; 3:23-38
  - Matthew 1-2
  - JST, Matthew 3
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  2. The Birth and Youth of the Messiah
    - 2.1. Revelations to Zacharias Regarding the Birth of John
    - 2.2. Angel Gabriel Visit to Mary
    - 2.3. Mary Visits Elisabeth
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## **1. The Genealogies of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38)**

As one begins reading the gospels or testimonies of Matthew and Luke, they both begin with two separate genealogies of Jesus. Each genealogy is different from the other. Matthew, writing to a Jewish audience, lists the legal successors to David's throne thereby rendering an account of Joseph's royal lineage, beginning with Father Abraham. Because Joseph and Mary were cousins, it is also Jesus' royal lineage. If the royal line had been unbroken and recognized in Judah, Jesus would have succeeded Joseph as the king.

E. Keith Howick states,

"...of all the accusations laid against Jesus by his enemies, no mention or insinuation is given that he was not of the royal line... [if there was error], the Lord's enemies would have quickly made such an accusation if they could."<sup>1</sup>

Luke's account is a pedigree account from father-to-son, tracing Jesus' ancestry back to Adam. Luke is writing to the Gentiles and this account is for their benefit.

## 2. The Birth and Youth of the Messiah<sup>2</sup>

The significant events and personalities surrounding the birth and youth of the Messiah are familiar to many. Our purpose will be to only highlight these events in their chronological order and to review their importance.

### 2.1. Revelation to Zacharias Regarding the Birth of John

Bruce R. McConkie notes,

"Though many of the Jews in the meridian of time were in a state of dire and awful apostasy, such darkness of mind and spirit was not universal. It did not envelope the whole nation. Elisabeth and Zacharias were righteous [individuals}...Zacharias held the office of priest in the Aaronic priesthood (see Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 272-273)."<sup>3</sup>

Luke 1:5-7

**5 There was in the day of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia...and his wife...and her name was Elisabeth.**

**6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.**

**7 And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.**

Like Abraham and Sarah, the righteousness of this couple did not extend to their being able to bear children. Both wives were passed the age of childbearing at this time. This, however, had not altered their faithfulness or obedience to God's commandments.

Bruce R. McConkie notes,

"Twice each year, in April and October, the priests of the course of Abia, named for Abijah, traveled from their village homes to the House of the Lord in Jerusalem, there to take their week-long turns at performing those sacred rites and ordinances, which for fifteen hundred years had been the center of Israel's worship.

"There was one service, favored above all others, that a priest to whose lot it fell might perform but once in a lifetime. It was the burning of incense on the altar of incense in the Holy Place, near the Holy of Holies where the very presence of Jehovah came on occasion...[T]his time the lot fell on Zacharias; He was chosen of the Lord to perform the great mediatorial service in which the smoke of the incense, ascending to heaven, would symbolize the prayers of all Israel ascending to the divine throne. That Zacharia was to be the central figure in the temple, through this service, all the assembled worshippers knew...What prayers did Zacharias make on this occasion? Certainly not, as so many have assumed, prayers that Elisabeth should bear a son...This was not the occasion for private, but public prayers. He was acting for and on behalf of all Israel, not for himself and Elizabeth alone."<sup>4</sup>

It is while Zacharias is in the midst of fulfilling his temple responsibility that an angel appears to him. It is important to note in the very moment this aged Priest was attending to his duty that heaven's divine blessing comes to him. He had gone to the temple to bless the lives of others, not his own agenda. On this day he received a great blessing from Heaven. He was selected to offer the prayers on behalf of Israel. It is when he is in the process of serving others, not when he is focused upon his own concerns and needs, that he receives an additional blessing. A blessing he and his wife may have believed would not come to them. In spite of the unseen burden he and his wife were carrying, he was fulfilling his responsibility to the Lord.

Luke 1:11-13, 15-16

**11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.**

**12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.**

**13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.**

**15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.**

**16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.**

Zacharias' response to the message from the angel is complete surprise and even doubt, not unlike Sarah who upon hearing of her pending pregnancy, "did laugh" (Genesis 18:13). I find this to be an understandable and natural response to information that is thought to be impossible. Zacharias response to the angel is to state the obvious.

Luke 1:18

**18 And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.**

With Sarah, the angel offered an important truth formed in a question, "Is any thing too hard for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:14). The angel appearing to Zacharias, introduced himself, along with his calling, and then answered his question "Whereby shall I know this?"

Luke 1:19-20

**19 And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.**

**20 And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.**

The sign that Zacharias was given in order to confirm the promised blessing appears to be in direct response to his lapse in faith in doubting the angel's message, but it was also a message unto others

for instantly he was unable to speak. We will see later that Zacharias speech is miraculously restored when there is a disputation at the time of the baby's circumcision regarding the baby's name.

Luke 1:21-22

**21 And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple.**

**22 And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.**

## 2.2. Angel Gabriel's Visit to Mary

James E. Talmage notes,

"It is not surprising that the annunciation of the immediate advent of the forerunner was speedily followed by that of the Messiah"<sup>5</sup>

Six months after Gabriel's visitation to Zacharias in the Temple in Jerusalem, and three months prior to John's birth, the same angel Gabriel [Noah] appeared to a young woman named Mary who lived at Nazareth, a town in Galilee. She was betrothed or engaged to a carpenter named Joseph.

Luke 1:26-27

**26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city in Galilee, named Nazareth.**

**27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.**

It is of interest to note that the same angel who appeared to Zacharias was sent from God, the Father with a message for Mary.

Joseph Smith states,

"Gabriel [is]...Noah who stands next in authority to Adam in the Priesthood."<sup>6</sup>

The Life and Teachings of Jesus and his Apostles (Institute) Student Manual states,

"Mary was espoused to Joseph (Luke 1:27). They were not married but were promised to each other under the strictest terms. Mary was virtually regarded as the wife of Joseph, and [sexual] unfaithfulness on her part during the [engagement] period was punishable by death."<sup>7</sup>

The message that Gabriel delivered to Mary was no less astonishing to her than was his message to Zacharias.

Luke 1:28-31

**28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that are highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.**

**29 And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.**

**30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.**

**31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.**

Mary's astonishment is that she is a virgin and while engaged to a man named Joseph, she is sexually pure. Her response to the angel is understandable.

Luke 1:34-35

**34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?**

**35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing [infant] which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.**

Mary's response to the angel is born of true faith and trust. She does not question or doubt. While she may not fully understand the process, she exhibits, in her response, her complete obedience to the will of God.

Luke 1:38

**38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.**

James E. Talmage states,

"Mary had doubtlessly contemplated with holy joy and ecstasy, the coming of the Messiah through the royal line; she knew that some Jewish maiden was yet to become the mother of the Christ. Was it possible that the angel's words to her had reference to this supreme expectation and hope of the nation?"<sup>8</sup>

As Mary contemplates upon the angel message these words may have rung in her ears.

Luke 1:32-33

**32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:**

**33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.**

This baby was to be no ordinary baby born into the world. His father was to be God the Father, the Highest of all and He was to reign over the house of Jacob. He was to be Israel's promised Messiah, and she was to be His mother. What joy and humility she must have felt to have been chosen to watch over Him and guide Him, but more importantly to love Him. Surely, she was the most blessed of women!

Alma, a prophet of the Book of Mormon expressed the how this process was to occur.

B/M, Alma 7:10

**10 And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem [Bethlehem] which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God.**

Why is it essential that Jesus be born of an immortal Father and a mortal mother? All this was prerequisite that the Son of God born on earth would inherit from His mortal mother the ability to die and from His immortal Father the power of life over death.

Following her time of prayerful contemplation and meditation, Mary recalled other words of the angel Gabriel during his visit with her.

Luke 1:36-37

**36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.  
37 For with God nothing shall be impossible.**

Mary determined that she would go and be with her cousin, Elisabeth, during her time of pregnancy. This would also give Joseph the opportunity to contemplate his decision in this important matter.

Bruce R. McConkie notes,

"Gabriel's announcement about Elisabeth was unspoken counsel to Mary to go and receive comfort and help from her cousin whom she no doubt loved and revered--the inference is that Mary's mother was dead--and who, being herself with child in a miraculous manner, could speak peace to the young virgin's heart as no other mortal could."<sup>9</sup>

### **2.3. Mary Visits Elisabeth**

W. Cleon Skousen notes,

"Zacharias and Elisabeth lived in the hill country of Judea, not far from Jerusalem (see Luke 1:39). However, from Nazareth, it was a difficult journey of nearly a hundred miles over treacherous roads."<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, Mary made the decision to make the journey to visit Elisabeth during her time of need.

Bruce R. McConkie adds,

“No doubt she walked; at least she was in poor circumstances and could have ill afforded other means of travel. Certainly, she was accompanied—a sister and brother and other family members, or relatives, perhaps; she would not, in wisdom, have gone alone, camping out, and facing the ever-present threat of thieves and robbers. But whatever the arrangements may have been, the journey was completed.”<sup>11</sup>

Finally, Mary arrived at the home of Zacharias and Elisabeth. She would have been happy, but tired from her long journey.

Luke 1:41-43

**41 ...when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:  
42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.  
43 ...the mother of my Lord...**

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"--the Holy Ghost came upon Elisabeth! She became a living witness, by revelation, of what Gabriel had said to Mary...The Lord had now revealed to Elisabeth--that Mary was the one who should bear the Son of God."<sup>12</sup>

Mary overcome, no doubt by Elisabeth's witness and declaration, responded with her own words of praise. This is often referred to as Mary's Psalm (see Luke 1:46-55). In the Psalm, she acknowledges her "low estate" and the "great blessing" God has bestowed upon her to be the mother of His Son. She acknowledges His greatness and the holiness of His name. He has shown mercy to Israel and remembers the covenant He made with Abraham. Her joy at having been chosen to be the mother of Jesus is great.

No doubt the extended visit with Elisabeth had been most comforting and supportive. Elisabeth had been like a mother to her during her time of need. Soon Elisabeth would deliver and it was time for Mary to return to Nazareth.

Luke 1:56

**56 And Mary abode with [Elisabeth] about three months, and returned to her own house.**

What about Joseph? It had been three months since she had seen him. Prior to her departure, since the angel's visit and her discussion with Joseph, their pending marriage had been put on hold.

## 2.4. Revelation to Joseph Regarding the Birth of Jesus

The record is unclear as to when Mary learned of Joseph's struggle as to how he was to emotionally process the information Mary had given him regarding her pending pregnancy and its effect upon their marriage commitment. It is my assumption that Joseph's struggle occurred during the three-month period when Mary was visiting Elisabeth, and he must have planned to make it known to her upon her return to Jerusalem.

Joseph's dilemma regarding their marriage contract was not how he would proceed with the marriage in spite of Mary's pregnancy, but how he would terminate it.

The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ and his Apostles (Institute) Student Manual states,

"...he had two alternatives: (1) he could demand that Mary submit to a public trial and judgment, which even at that late period in Jewish history may have resulted in Mary's death; or (2) he could privately sever the espousal contract before a witness. Joseph obviously chose the most merciful of the two alternatives."<sup>13</sup>

Matthew 1:19

**19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.**

Joseph had thought seriously regarding his decision and he had now made his decision. He would terminate their contract with the least amount of embarrassment for Mary. He would set aside his own feelings and do what was best for her. At this moment in Joseph's life, we catch a brief glimpse of who he is. Whatever pain he may be experiencing himself, his main thoughts are regarding the feelings of the other person. The world would truly be a better place, if each of us were to follow his example.

Joseph has made his decision. All that remained now was for one final meeting with Mary. Before he could act, however, his plans were altered.

Matthew 1:20-21

**20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.**  
**21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.**

It is important for us to note that it was not until after Joseph made his decision, after he had been tested, that the angel visited him in a "dream," and said, "fear not to take unto thee Mary (to be) thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is (by the power) of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 1:20).

What joy must have filled his heart as he reflected upon the angel's words! Mary, his beloved Mary, was to be the mother of the awaited Messiah, and he had been chosen to assist her in raising him!

The meeting with Mary was so different from what he had thought. He could hardly wait to speak with her and tell her of the angel's visit.

Matthew 1:24

**24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:**

Joseph made arrangements with Mary for the second part of the marriage ceremony to be performed. Joseph and Mary were to be married.

## **2.5. John is Born**

The time of Elisabeth's awaited delivery arrives. The babe is born amidst the joy and celebration of those who knew of Elizabeth miraculous pregnancy and also of her husband Zacharias being deaf and dumb for these nine long months. Eight days after his birth, in keeping with God's law, the babe was taken to the local priest to be circumcised and given a name. As was the custom, so would it be that their only son would be named after his father. Elisabeth, however, objected. Zacharias had earlier written when he had told her about the miraculous event that the angel had told him the babe was to be named John. The relatives in disbelief now thrust the tablet toward Zacharias to get his decision.

Luke 1:62-64, 67, 76-77, 79

**62 And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.**

**63 And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marveled all.**

**64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.**

**67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,**

**76 And thou, child, shall be called the prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;**

**77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,**

**79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.**

Zacharias knew, by the power of the Holy Ghost, that John's mission was to prepare the way for the Savior. He was also to teach the people the true principles of the Gospel even Faith, Repentance, and Baptism by immersion. This is the only way that the people could receive a full remission of their sins. As they heard the words of John and followed his directions, the light they received would bring them out of darkness and the spiritual death that results from following false concepts. It is the practice of true principles by individuals that brings them peace and personal joy.

## 2.6. The Birth of Jesus

The time had come for Mary to be delivered. God had provided by His providence the kind and sheltering arm of Joseph, her legal husband, to care for her. The prophets, however, had decreed that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, not Nazareth their present home. The Great Caesar Augustus had recently decreed that all the world was to be taxed. Roman law allowed this to be done in the present town of the family, but Jewish law was that the family must return to the tribal areas of their ancestors. (see McConkie, Bruce R. *The Mortal Messiah: Book 1*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, 340-341).

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"Joseph and Mary, both descendants of David, both of the tribe of Judah--must enroll in the land of Judah and in the City of David, in Bethlehem."<sup>14</sup>

Many have asked themselves, knowing that the city would be crowded with many from outside the city, why had Joseph and Mary waited so long to locate adequate housing, especially with Mary ready to deliver?

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"...we are left to assume that Divine Providence planned a late arrival, an arrival when there would be no room in the inns, when the new baby would be brought forth under the most humble circumstances."<sup>15</sup>

The record is brief regarding the details of the Savior's birth except to note,

Luke 2:7

**7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.**

Bruce R. McConkie continues,

"All we can now know--perhaps all we need to know--is that he was born in the lowest conceivable circumstances...[and] though he would one day come forth...in glorious immortality...for now, as the helpless infant of a peasant girl, he chose to begin the days of his [earthly] probation as none of Adam's race had ever done before."<sup>16</sup>

We learn from the Book of Mormon record that the night of the Savior's birth was known to the inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere by the fulfillment of the prophecy made by Samuel the Lamanite, given five years earlier. The sign was that the night of his birth would be marked by a day and a night and a day without any darkness (see Third Nephi 1:15-20). In the Old World, the message came in a different way.

## 2.7. The Witness of the Shepherds

There were in the hills around Bethlehem, certain shepherds who watched over a special herd of sheep.

Bruce R. McConkie notes,

"[T]hese sheep...were destined for sacrifice on the altar in the Lord's House, in similitude of the eternal sacrifice of Him who that wondrous night lay in a stable...so while there were many shepherds in Palestine, but only to those who watched over the temple flocks did the herald angel come; only they heard the heavenly choir."<sup>17</sup>

First to Mary, then Elisabeth and Zacharias, followed by Joseph, now to these humble shepherds who were "keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8), came the angelic witness.

Luke 2:9-12

**9 And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.**  
**10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people**  
**11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.**  
**12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.**

Upon receiving the message from the angel, the shepherds responded accordingly.

Luke 2:15-17

**15 ...the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass...**  
**16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.**  
**17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.**

The shepherds found the place where the baby Jesus laid but the scriptures do not tell us how. We are left to the imagination of another, that has somehow continued throughout the years; that there was a star to guide them. What we do know is that having found the manger and the newborn infant, they went forth and shared their experience with others.

## 2.8. Jesus is Circumcised and Given a Name.

James E. Talmage states,

"When eight days old He was circumcised, as was required of every male born in Israel; and at the same time, He received as an earthly bestowal the name that had been prescribed at the annunciation.

He was called Jesus, which, being interpreted is Savior; the name was rightfully His for He came to save the people from their sins."<sup>18</sup>

The footnote of the King James Bible published in 1979 by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints states,

“The Greek title ‘Christ’ and the Hebrew title ‘Messiah’ are synonymous, meaning ‘Anointed One.’”<sup>19</sup>

## **2.9. Jesus Presented at Temple: Witness of Simeon and Anna**

James E. Talmage states,

"Part of the law given through Moses to the Israelites in the wilderness and continued in force down through the centuries, related to the procedure prescribed for women after childbirth. In compliance therewith, Mary remained in retirement forty days following the birth of her Son; then she and her husband brought their [infant] for presentation before the Lord as prescribed for the male firstborn of every family...it was the rule...that parents should present their children in the temple when possible. Jesus was born within five or six miles from the [temple in] Jerusalem, He was accordingly taken to the temple for the ceremonial of redemption from the requirement applying to the firstborn of all Israelites except Levites."<sup>20</sup>

James E. Talmage continues,

“[In remembrance of the Lord's deliverance from the Pharaoh in Egypt when the firstborn of the Egyptians had been killed]... the Israelites were required to dedicate their firstborn sons [for service in the temple.]...the oldest son was still claimed as particularly the Lord's own, and had to be formally exempted from the earlier requirement of service by the paying of a ransom...The least costly offering consisted of two doves or pigeons instead of one bird and a lamb [which was the offering of Joseph and Mary indicative of their humble circumstances].”<sup>21</sup>

While Mary and Joseph were at the temple in order to offer their ransom on behalf of their son, Jesus, Simeon and then Anna were provided by God to receive and bear witness of the divine birth of His Son on earth. We learn the following regarding Simeon from the scriptures.

Luke 2:25-27

**25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.**

**26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.**

**27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child, Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law.**

Simeon is not at the temple by accident on the day that Mary and Joseph bring Jesus in order to fulfill the law. He is there to add his name to the list of those who will bear witness of God's own son upon the earth.

Luke 2:29-32, 34-35

**29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, ...**  
**30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,**  
**31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;**  
**32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.**

**34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against;**  
**35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.**

James E. Talmage notes,

“Prompted by the Spirit he repaired to the temple on the day of the presentation of Jesus, and recognized in the Babe the promised Messiah...under the spirit of prophecy, Simeon told of the greatness of the Child’s mission, and of the anguish that the mother, would be called to endure because of Him, which would be even like unto that of a sword piercing her soul.”<sup>22</sup>

The next witness to add her name to the list was Anna. She had also been directed to be at the temple on this most special day.

Luke 2:37-38

**37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, [84 years], which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.**  
**38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.**

While we do not have the details, we can be assured that she also recognized Jesus as the Savior and promised Messiah and this is the witness that she gave “of him to all them that looked for redemption” (Luke 2:38).

Bruce R. McConkie adds this note regarding Anna,

She was referred to as ‘a prophetess’ (Luke 2:35), because she “received revelation from the Holy Ghost certifying that Jesus is the Christ.”<sup>23</sup>

Bruce R. McConkie gives this note regarding witnesses,

“Not to all men everywhere, but to a devout few--chosen vessels who prepared themselves by obedience, fasting, and prayer--was the Holy Spirit revealing sacred truths about the Christ and his mission. Such had been, was, and is the Lord's method of sending forth the truths of salvation to mankind generally.”<sup>24</sup>

Luke 2:39

**39 And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.**

Bruce R. McConkie offers a note regarding the chronology,

“They [Mary and Joseph] having 'performed all things according to the law of the Lord,' went immediately to Nazareth (Luke 2:39). Obviously, the wise men had not yet come to worship their King, because following their visit comes the flight to Egypt.”<sup>25</sup>

## **2.10. Visit of Wise Men and Flight to Egypt**

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"In contrast to the lowly shepherds and to the devout Simeon and Anna, who had become witnesses of our Lord, divine providence now provided witnesses from the great and mighty of the earth, witnesses who could bring gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh, witnesses who could command audience with kings, and who could boldly inquire: 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews?' So, they came from unnamed eastern lands--perhaps, Persia, Arabia, Mesopotamia, perhaps elsewhere--an unspecified number of wise men."<sup>26</sup>

The wise men, having had a star to guide them from their distant land to Judea, begin their inquiry at the palace of King Herod.

Matthew 2:2-5, 7-9 compared to JST, Matthew 3:2-5, 7-9

Matthew 2:2-5, 7-9	JST, Matthew 3:2-5, 7-9
<b>2 ...Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.</b>	<b>2 Saying, Where is the child that is born, <u>the Messiah</u> of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him.</b>
<b>3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.</b>	<b>3 When Herod the king had heard of the child, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.</b>
<b>4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.</b>	<b>4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests, and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them, saying Where is the place that is written of by the prophets, in which Christ shall be born? <u>For he greatly feared, yet he believed not the prophets.</u></b>
<b>5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of</b>	<b>5 And they said unto him, It is written by the prophets, that he should be born in</b>

<p><b>Judaea, for thus it is written by the prophet, [Micah 5:2].</b></p> <p><b>6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judaea, are not the least among the princes of Judea: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. [see Micah 5:2]</b></p> <p><b>7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.</b></p> <p><b>8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.</b></p> <p><b>9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.</b></p>	<p><b>Bethlehem of Judea, for thus have they said.</b></p> <p><b>6 The word of the Lord came unto us, saying, And thou Bethlehem, which lieth in the land of Judea, in thee shall <u>be born a prince, which are not the least among the princes of Judea, for out of thee shall come the Messiah, who shall save my people Israel.</u></b></p> <p><b>7 Then Herod, when he had called the wise men privily, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.</b></p> <p><b>8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found the child, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.</b></p> <p><b>9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and lo, the star which they saw in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the young child was.</b></p>
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The wise men now added their name to the list of witnesses, for they had just born their witness to those in the Royal Palace, including King Herod himself, that the babe they sought was the Messiah. The words of the Old Testament prophet Micah have been confirmed, the “ruler of Israel (will come forth from) Bethlehem Ephratah” (Micah 5:2). Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 3:6, “for out of thee (Bethlehem) shall come the Messiah.” It is important also to note the Messiah is not come to “rule my people Israel” (Matthew 2:6, but (to) “save my people Israel” (JST, Matthew 3:6). Having learned the city of the Savior’s birth, the wise men were ready to depart. However, fearful that the new king would usurp his power and control, Herod sought to learn from the wise men when they saw the star in the East, thereby providing him an approximate date for his birth.

The wise men left the King’s royal palace and traveled the short distance to Bethlehem continuing to be guided by the new star. They located the house where Joseph, Mary and the young child were now living. The new family were now in a house, having relocated from their previous home in Nazareth to Bethlehem, near Jerusalem.

Matthew 2:11

**11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasure, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.**

The wise men “fell down and worshipped him” and then presented to Him the earthly treasures which they had brought with them to honor Him.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"...it would appear they were true prophets, righteous persons like Simeon, Anna, and the shepherds, to whom Deity revealed that the promised Messiah had been born among men. Obviously, they were in possession of ancient prophecies telling of the rise of a new star at his birth. That they did receive personal guidance is seen from the inspired dream in which they were warned not to return to Herod after they had found and worshipped the Son of Mary (see Matthew 2:12)."<sup>27</sup>

Not long after the departure of the wise men, Joseph had a dream.

Matthew 2:13-15

**13 And when they [wise men] had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.**

**14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:**

**15 And was there until the death of Herod [the Great]: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son [see Hosea 11:1].**

We learn what only the angel knew then; that Herod the Great was planning, based upon the information he had gathered from the visit of the wise men, to put all the children in the area of Bethlehem to death! His edict, based upon his paranoia, was that the babe born in Bethlehem would usurp the royal power and authority of his family. His internal fear was manifest as a personal threat to him!

Matthew 2:16-18

**16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.**

**17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy [Jeremiah] the prophet, saying, 18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not [Jeremiah 31:15].**

While this scripture infers that it was due to failure of the wise men to return to tell him the location of the babe and his family that triggered the disturbed edict of the king, our current understanding suggests that the homicidal feelings had been present even during the original meeting. You will note

at that time he inquired of the wise men as to the timing of the babe's birth. This information would later serve to provide him with an approximate age range when his fearful thoughts become actions.

The results of his diabolical action had been made known to the Prophet Jeremiah hundreds of years previously. His plan, had divine intervention not occurred, would have also ended the lives of both Jesus and John the Baptist. Their lives were spared as their parents were warned. Jesus had been taken to Egypt, and John had been sent to the mountains where he would be safe.

Joseph Smith states,

"When Herod's edict went forth to destroy the young children, John was about six months older than Jesus, and came under this hellish edict, and Zacharias caused his mother to take him into the mountains, where he was raised on locusts and wild honey. When his father refused to disclose his hiding place, and being the officiating high priest at the Temple that year, was slain by Herod's order, between the porch and the altar, as Jesus said [Matthew 23:35]."<sup>28</sup>

## **2.11. Return from Egypt to Nazareth**

Following the death of Herod, the Great, an angel appeared, as previously promised, to Joseph in a dream.

Matthew 2:19-21

**19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt.**

**20 Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.**

**21 And he arose, and took the young child and his mother and came into the land of Israel.**

It would seem natural that Joseph would return to Bethlehem where they had lived prior to going to Egypt. And it appears this was his original plan except for at least two reasons.

Matthew 2:22-23

**22 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of the Galilee:**

**23 And he come and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.**

The two reasons were that Archelaus was now the king of Judaea and he was thought to be as ruthless and wicked as his father, Herod the Great, had been. Also, Joseph was warned of God not to return to Judaea, but to settle in the Galilee region which was ruled by another son, Herod Antipas, who was less feared. Joseph's choice of Nazareth was also divinely guided for it was in fulfillment of previous prophecy, the source unknown, that "He shall be called a Nazarene".

## 2.12. Jesus' Development and Appearance

The scriptures are limited regarding the period of Jesus' development and childhood.

The Prophet Isaiah, having seen Jesus Christ in vision hundreds of years previously, offered these words regarding his appearance.

Isaiah 53:2

**2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.**

Isaiah is observing there is nothing in Jesus' physical appearance that would cause him to stand out from others his age. He had no seeming striking characteristics that set him apart from others in the crowd. He looked and appeared just like everyone else around him. As we shall learn, it is not His appearance that draws people to Him, it is the spirit that emanates (flow) from His words.

Luke 2:40 (JST, Luke 2:40 word added)

**40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, being filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.**

The additional two verses are found in the JST, Matthew which would follow Matthew 2:23 in the King James Bible.

JST, Matthew 3:24-26

**24 And it came to pass that Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come.  
25 And he served under his father, and he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him.  
26 And after many years the hour of his ministry drew nigh.**

In these preceding verses we learn that Jesus grew normally with the exception that He enjoyed a strong spiritual tutoring. He grew up with step-siblings; He being the oldest child in the family. During His growing up years, He learned the skills of carpentry from Joseph who acted as His father. There were, however, many things He seemed to already know, for He benefited from being taught by His Father in Heaven who naturally would watch over His growth and development. While He may have appeared ordinary in appearance compared with other children, as the Only Begotten Son of His Heavenly Father, He was not ordinary.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"[W]e are left to suppose that every law of mortal life applied to the mortal Son of the mortal Mary...and as a babe he began to grow, normally and naturally, and there was nothing supernatural about it...he was hungry, weary, and sorrowful; that his eyes were keen, his ears alert, and his tongue

fluent...He learned to speak, to read, to write; he memorized passages of scripture, and he pondered their deep and hidden meanings."<sup>29</sup>

The Life and Teachings of Jesus and his Apostles (Institute) Student Manual states,

“...although his capacity was greater than that of any other, and he was designated to become the Only Begotten Son, still he was meek and humble; and he condescended to have a veil cast over him and to have the knowledge of his glory and power in premortality blocked from his mind at birth.”<sup>30</sup>

### 2.13. Young Jesus in the Temple

Bruce R. McConkie observes,

“Under Jewish law, Jesus, now twelve, became "a son of the law"--one subject to its obligations. Now he rated a position in the congregation and stood forth as a recognized member of his home community. His religious and secular studies entered an advanced stage; his vocational preparations were intensified.”<sup>31</sup>

Luke 2:42

**42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.**

Jesus, now being of age, accompanied His mother, Joseph, and others of the Nazareth community to Jerusalem to participate in the yearly Feast of the Passover. All religious Israelites came to Jerusalem from near and far at this time of the year to celebrate this special time of remembrance and celebration. The city would have been crowded with the influx of people.

Luke 2:43-46

**43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.**

**44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.**

**45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.**

**46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, ...**

This must have been a most difficult time for Joseph and Mary. After they realized that Jesus was not amongst their travel group, or amongst the other children, they immediately return to Jerusalem. They search for Him for three days, three long and most difficult days, before they finally found Him, and to their joy, He was unharmed! Their anxiety and longing to find their lost son must have been great. Now they had finally found Him. What had He been doing?

Luke 2:46-47 compared to JST, Luke 2:46-47

Luke 2:46-47	JST, Luke 2:46-47
<p><b>46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions.</b></p>	<p><b>46 And it came to pass after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, <u>and they were hearing him and asking him questions.</u></b></p>
<p><b>47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.</b></p>	<p><b>47 And all <u>who</u> heard him were astonished at his understanding, and answers.</b></p>

In these verses, we learn that Jesus had gone to the temple, where over the past three days, He has been conversing with the learned doctors of the scriptures who had gathered at the temple during the feast. What is most unusual is that Jesus, at the age of twelve, is enlightening the educated leaders, rather than He being taught by them as we might expect. This is yet evidence of the spiritual tutoring He has already received from His Divine Father that will set Him yet further apart from the learned during His ministry.

Joseph Smith notes,

“When still a boy He had all the intelligence necessary to enable Him to rule and govern the kingdom of the Jews, and could reason with the wisest and most profound doctors of law and divinity, and make their theories and practices to appear like folly compared with the wisdom He possessed; but He was a boy only, and lacked physical strength even to defend His own person; and was subject to cold, to hunger and to death.”<sup>32</sup>

Luke 2: 48-50 compared to JST, Luke 2:48-49

Luke 2:48-50	JST, Luke 2:48-49
<p><b>48 And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.</b></p>	<p><b>48 And when his parents saw him, they were amazed; and his mother said unto him: Son, why hast thou dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.</b></p>
<p><b>49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?</b></p>	<p><b>49 and he said unto them, Why is it that ye sought me? <u>Knew</u> ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?</b></p>
<p><b>50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.</b></p>	

While Jesus’ answer to His grieving parents may seem curt to our ears, it is important to understand its meaning. Jesus had been anxiously awaiting the day when He would be able to accompany His

family to Jerusalem. He had diligently prepared Himself for the occasion when He could share with the learned of the day, the divine truths that He had been taught by His Divine Father. He had come to earth in order to glorify His Name and to prepare the people for the sacrifice that He had come to perform. He had not meant to cause his family distress, but fulfilling the mission to which He had been foreordained “to bring about the immortality and eternal life of man” (PGP, Moses 1:39), took precedence. Had they so soon forgotten the purpose of His birth?

Luke 2:51

**51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but [JST. And] his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.**

Bruce R. McConkie states,

"His knowledge came to him quickly and easily, because he was building--as is the case with all men--upon the foundations laid in pre-existence. He brought with him from that eternal world the talents and capacities, the inclinations to conform and obey, and the ability to recognize truth that he had there acquired. Mozart had musical ability at the age of six that only a handful of men have ever gained in a whole lifetime. Jesus, when yet a child, had spiritual talents that no other man in a hundred life-times could obtain."<sup>33</sup>

### **3. Conclusions**

We have examined the announcement, birth, and early years of John the Baptist who will serve as the forerunner of Jesus as well as the annunciation and birth of Jesus Christ. We have noted the witness of Jesus' birth to Mary, Elisabeth, Joseph, the Shepherds, Simeon, Anna, and even to King Herod as given by the Wise Men.

We have reviewed the experience of Jesus at age twelve in the Temple in Jerusalem as He met with the learned doctors of the scriptures and taught them eternal truths.

We may safely conclude the birth of Jesus Christ and the events that surrounded it would qualify as the most fully and completely orchestrated event presided over by Our Heavenly Father since the creation and fall. The birth of Jesus Christ as the Son of God upon the earth was a key event in the plan Father had presented in our pre-mortal existence. Without the mortal birth of the One who had willingly volunteered to be the Savior of all mankind, the plan would have been null and void. Only One, who had achieved the attributes of Godhood as a result of His pre-mortal progression, was willing to condescend from His throne on high in order to experience the vicissitudes of mortal life, and was without sin Himself, could qualify to perform the necessary Atonement on behalf of all mankind. These truths are also taught in the Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Christ.

B/M, 2 Nephi 9:5-7

**5 ...for it is expedient that...[he] should be among them; for it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto men in the flesh, and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him.**

**6 ...the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord.**

**7 Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement...**

B/M, Alma 34:12, 14

**12 ...therefore there can be nothing short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world.**

**14 ...that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal.**

The Creation, the Fall, and now the birth of the Son of God which will culminate in the most singular and final event ever to occur upon this earth, the Atonement, are now in place. The Creation and Fall have occurred as has the mortal birth of Jesus Christ. Now begins His ministry of teaching and healing as He travels the dusty path that will conclude with His suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection, thereby fulfilling the purpose of His birth, the Atonement of all mankind.

Let us together proceed as we vicariously travel with Him as one who also wishes to experience and be taught the eternal truths He has to offer.

## Footnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> *The Mission of Jesus The Messiah*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990, 19.
- <sup>2</sup> *The Mission of Jesus The Messiah*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990, 19.
- <sup>3</sup> *Doctrinal Commentary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965, [11<sup>th</sup> Printing, 1976], 78.
- <sup>4</sup> *The Mortal Messiah: Book 1*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, 305-307.
- <sup>5</sup> *Jesus The Christ*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915, [Thirty-fifth Edition, 1963], 75.
- <sup>6</sup> *Teaching of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976, [1977], 157.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Life and Teachings of Jesus and his Apostles (Institute) Student Manual*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978, [Second Edition Revised, 1979], 22.
- <sup>8</sup> *Jesus The Christ*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915, [Thirty-fifth Edition, 1963], 80.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Mortal Messiah: Book 1*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, 319.
- <sup>10</sup> *Days of the Living Christ*, Vol. 1. Salt Lake City: Ensign Publishing Co., 1992, [4<sup>th</sup> Printing, May 1997], 10.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Mortal Messiah: Book 1*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, 322-323.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Mortal Messiah: Book 1*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, 322-325.
- <sup>13</sup> *The Life and Teachings of Jesus and his Apostles (Institute) Student Manual*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978, [Second Edition Revised, 1979], 22.
- <sup>14</sup> *The Mortal Messiah: Book 1*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, 341.
- <sup>15</sup> *The Mortal Messiah: Book 1*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, 341.
- <sup>16</sup> *The Mortal Messiah: Book 1*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, 345.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Mortal Messiah: Book 1*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, 347.
- <sup>18</sup> *Jesus The Christ*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915, [Thirty-fifth Edition, 1963], 95.
- <sup>19</sup> St. Matthew, Chapter 1, 16e. *Holy Bible*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979, 1187.
- <sup>20</sup> *Jesus The Christ*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915, [Thirty-fifth Edition, 1963], 95.
- <sup>21</sup> *Jesus The Christ*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915, [Thirty-fifth Edition, 1963], 95-96.
- <sup>22</sup> *Jesus The Christ*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915, [Thirty-fifth Edition, 1963], 96-97.
- <sup>23</sup> *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 1. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965, [11<sup>th</sup> Printing, 1976], 101.
- <sup>24</sup> *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 1. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965, [11<sup>th</sup> Printing, 1976], 100.
- <sup>25</sup> *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 1. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965, [11<sup>th</sup> Printing, 1976], 108.
- <sup>26</sup> *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 1. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965, [11<sup>th</sup> Printing, 1976], 102-103.
- <sup>27</sup> *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 1. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965, [11<sup>th</sup> Printing, 1976], 103
- <sup>28</sup> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976, [1977], 261.
- <sup>29</sup> *The Mortal Messiah: Book 1*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, 367-368.
- <sup>30</sup> *The Life and Teachings of Jesus and his Apostles (Institute) Student Manual*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978, [Second Edition Revised, 1979], 24.
- <sup>31</sup> *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 1. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965, [11<sup>th</sup> Printing, 1976], 109-110.
- <sup>32</sup> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976, [1977], 392.
- <sup>33</sup> *The Mortal Messiah: Book 1*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, 369.