


Joy at the Birth of Christ: A Study of Matthew 2:10 and Luke 2:10

József Nagy

Pápa Reformed Theological Seminary
nagyjozsef.sbg@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-6371-6271>

ABSTRACT: The infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke present a mix of similarities and differences, creating challenges for scholars investigating the origins of the Synoptic Gospels and conducting comparative studies. This paper contends that the parallels between the two accounts are not coincidental, proposing that, even under cautious assumptions, they likely stem from a shared source. Exegetes continue to debate the extent of these parallels between Matt 1–2 and Luke 1–2, including the potential connection between Matt 2:10 and Luke 2:10. This study argues that the unifying theme in these verses is joy. Additionally, some minor parallels can also be identified. These similarities can be justified by looking at the texts in their context. In recent years, some scholars have studied the phenomenon of joy in Luke-Acts. Besides relying on these works to explore Luke 2:10, this paper seeks to provide new insights. The analysis of joy in Matthew is itself a fresh approach, as it has received little attention. This is particularly evident in the case of Matt 2:10, which is often overlooked or mentioned only in passing by commentators.

KEYWORDS: infancy narrative, joy, magi, star of Bethlehem, angel

Among the Gospels, Matthew and Luke record the birth of Christ and related episodes. Between the two accounts, there are some differences and subtle variations in emphasis. Many of these differences are obvious on first reading. For example, Luke says that Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth before the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1–7), whereas Matthew makes no mention of this. In Matthew, the angel appears to Joseph in a dream. Luke, on the other hand, mentions the encounter between the angel Gabriel and Mary (Luke 1:26–28). In Matthew’s account, the magi are described as travelling when they saw the star that announced the birth (Matt 2:1–12). In contrast, Luke presents shepherds responding to the angel’s call (Luke 2:8–20). Furthermore, there are notable similarities between the two accounts. Some parallels are immediately apparent, including the conception by the Spirit (Matt 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35), the birth in Bethlehem (Matt 2:1; Luke 2:4–6), and even the Davidic descent of Joseph (Matt 1:16, 20; Luke 1:27, 32; 2:4). While these parallels could be extended, it is sometimes unclear or disputed whether certain verses should be considered parallels. This is evident from the differing number of parallels that exegetes have identified. For instance, Raymond E. Brown counts eleven matches in total,¹ while Joseph

¹ R.E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday 1997) 34–35.

Fitzmyer suggests twelve,² Philip L. Shuler presents a longer list of eighteen matches,³ and Robert K. MacEwen offers an even more extensive list of twenty-five.⁴ Notably, Shuler and MacEwen identify Matt 2:10 and Luke 2:10 as parallels, whereas Brown and Fitzmyer do not. Both verses depict the joy of the magi and the shepherds as a significant aspect of the narrative. This paper presents a detailed analysis of these verses and supports the hypothesis by Shuler and MacEwen, arguing that Matt 2:10 and Luke 2:10 share notable similarities.

Given the similarities and differences between the two infancy narratives, it is worth considering the sources from which they derive. Shuler's two-Gospel hypothesis posits that Luke was aware of and drew upon Matthew's text and, consequently, his infancy narrative.⁵ Moreover, this view is shared by other scholars who do not accept the two-Gospel hypothesis. According to Barbara Shellard, 'The birth narrative provides another occasion when Luke's text can be explained as a creative rewriting of Matthew.'⁶ Alternatively, another hypothesis proposes that Matthew used Luke's Gospel.⁷ The majority of scholars, however, suggest that Matthew and Luke were independent authors. Those who hold this view typically claim that the infancy narratives are Matthew's and Luke's original material. While this theory addresses the differences between the two narratives, it fails to explain the similarities. This has led to the suggestion that both infancy stories may originate from a common tradition.⁸ This perspective suggests that the evangelists were not aware of each other's work, but rather relied on a common tradition that included identical elements.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully address the Synoptic problem. However, it is reasonable to conclude that the similarities between Matt 1–2 and Luke 1–2 cannot be attributed to mere chance. The two accounts share numerous similarities, including parallels in minor details, such as the mention of joy in Matt 2:10 and Luke 2:10. Thus, this starting point also allows a comparison to be made between Matt 2:10 and Luke 2:10. However, a full comparison can only be made by examining how joy fits into the context and how it relates to the broader perspective of the Gospels.

As will be discussed, the theme of joy – and its analysis – is one of the most popular lines of research in Luke-Acts among contemporary scholars. The monographs that have been published on this topic have presented Luke 2:10 from a variety of perspectives. However, the specific focus of these writings does not allow for an in-depth study of this single verse.

2 J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX* (AB 28; New York: Doubleday 1982) 307.

3 P.L. Shuler, "The Rhetorical Character of Luke 1–2," *Literary Studies in Luke–Acts: Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson* (ed. J.B. Tyson) (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press 1998) 173–174.

4 R.K. MacEwen, *Matthean Posteriority: An Exploration of Matthew's Use of Mark and Luke as a Solution to the Synoptic Problem* (LNTS 501; London – New York: Bloomsbury – Clark 2018) 119–120. MacEwen lists not only twenty-five parallels, but also fifteen differences. One could argue with MacEwen's analysis, but it is clear that the similarities are not to be taken lightly (*ibidem*, 121–122).

5 Shuler, "The Rhetorical Character," 173–174.

6 B. Shellard, *New Light on Luke: Its Purpose, Sources, and Literary Context* (JSNT.SS 215; London: Sheffield Academic Press 2002) 79.

7 MacEwen, *Matthean Posteriority*, 27–74.

8 Brown, *The Birth*, 34; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 306; J. Marcus, *John the Baptist in History and Theology* (SPNT; Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press 2018) 133.

There are several aspects of the birth story, and more specifically of Luke 2:10–11, that need to be explored in greater depth and that are currently under-discussed. In the case of Matthew, a deeper analysis of Matt 2:10 is also justified because there is much less discussion of joy in that Gospel. This analysis shows that joy is not an irrelevant element within the birth narratives, but their integral part.

1. Matthew 2:10

The interest in Matt 2:1–12 is generally focused on the verses about the magi and the star (Matt 2:1–2) or the OT passage predicting the birth of the Davidic heir (Matt 2:5–6). However, several passages receive little or no explanation. Matt 2:10 belongs to the latter group. Most scholars touch on this verse only briefly, often in a few lines, while some commentaries omit any explanation.⁹ This lack of interest is unfortunate because, as will be shown below, Matt 2:10 offers several interpretive angles and provides a better understanding of the unit.

First, it is worth considering the context. Matt 2:1–12 reveals how the magi found the infant. Upon seeing the star that signified the Messiah's birth, the magi journeyed to Jerusalem (Matt 2:1–8), expecting to find the infant there. After a brief interlude, it is revealed that, according to the Scriptures, the Davidic king was to be born in Bethlehem (Matt 2:5–6), which explains why Herod directed the magi there (Matt 2:8). The narrative indicates that Herod, upon learning of the birth, was troubled (Matt 2:3). According to the narrative, he tried to kill the child (Matt 2:16–18). It is somewhat unusual that he did not send his own men to Bethlehem, but instead relied on the foreign magi to report back to him. Matt 2:9–11 then describes the further journey of the magi and their meeting with Jesus. Finally, they returned home by another route to avoid Herod, who sought to kill Jesus (Matt 2:12).

The magi received two clues as to Jesus' whereabouts. First, Herod directed them to Bethlehem (Matt 2:8). Second, the star that they had first seen in the east reappeared and led them (Matt 2:9–10).¹⁰ While in Matt 2:1–2, the star is merely visible, in Matt 2:9 it takes on a more active role: it began to guide (προηγεν) the magi¹¹ and then stood (ἔστᾶθη) over the location of Jesus. Matt 2:9 then concludes that the magi reached their destination.

⁹ C.A. Evans, *Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012) 55; H.W. Basser – M.B. Cohen, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions: A Relevance-Based Commentary* (BRLJ 46; Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2015) 61; H.L. Strack – P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (München: Beck 1922) I, 83.

¹⁰ The star may be a comet or constellation. D.W. Hughes, "Astronomical Thoughts on the Star of Bethlehem," *The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Experts on the Ancient Near East, the Greco-Roman World* (eds. P. Barthel – G.H. van Kooten) (TBN 19; Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2015) 117.

¹¹ According to M.A. Moule, προηγεν denotes a beginning, so he suggests one of the translations 'began to go before' or 'started going before' (*An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1959] 9).

However, Matt 2:10 breaks the flow of the narrative: it again mentions the appearance of the star and the joy of the magi at seeing it. After the conclusion of Matt 2:9, the reader would expect Matt 2:10 to discuss the magi's meeting with Jesus but this does not happen until Matt 2:11. A smoother text could, therefore, be achieved by either omitting Matt 2:10 or integrating it into Matt 2:9. It is also unusual that the magi's joy is not associated with meeting Jesus, but rather with the reappearance of the star.

There is another example in Matt 2:1–12 where the narrative is interrupted by a comment on emotion. Without Matt 2:3, the transition between Matt 2:2 and Matt 2:4 would also be seamless. Matt 2:2 tells that the magi are looking for Christ in Jerusalem, while Matt 2:4 shows that as a result of this interest, Herod also begins a search. As in Matt 2:10, however, Matt 2:3 brings the narrative to a halt. After the question of the magi (Matt 2:2), there is an interjection: Herod, who had announced the birth of Christ, was troubled (*ἐταράχθη*), and with him all Jerusalem (Matt 2:3).¹² Explanations of Matt 2:10 often note that Matt 2:3 is another example of emotional involvement,¹³ similar to other remarks in the narrative (Matt 2:16–17). In Matt 2:3 and Matt 2:10, the narrative line is interrupted. In Matt 2:10 the break is more visible because the verse makes a greater departure. However, this interruption does not necessarily indicate interpolation but may reflect a deliberate focus on emotion.

After Matt 2:9 describes the magi's arrival at Jesus' place of birth, it adds that they were overjoyed upon seeing the star (Matt 2:10). The participle *ἰδόντες* (they saw) that opens Matt 2:10 can be translated 'when' and 'because of'.¹⁴ Translated as 'when', it makes clear that Matt 2:10 interrupts the train of thought that begins with the previous verse, while translated as 'because', it emphasises that the magi's joy stems from the star's reappearance. If a choice has to be made, the latter option more clearly conveys that the narrative pauses at Matt 2:10.

The magi's joy is viewed differently by the commentators. Craig S. Keener lists instances where joy is associated with the birth or accession of a ruler (1 Kgs 1:40; 2 Kgs 11:20). He also notes that joy is the natural response to encountering the kingdom of God (Matt 5:12; 13:44; 25:21–23).¹⁵ Other commentators, sticking to the literalism of Matt 2:10, explain the magi's joy at the reappearance of the star. According to this view, the magi rejoiced because their prediction was confirmed as the constellation reappeared.¹⁶ However, this theory involves several hypotheses that are difficult to prove. It is debatable whether this was a specific constellation or whether the magi's joy was linked to the confirmation of their prediction. It is not mentioned in the text, but it is more likely that their joy stemmed

12 *Ταράσσω* could refer to the fear of the disciples: in Matt 14:26 it is reported that the disciples, sailing on the stormy Sea of Galilee, did not recognise Jesus walking on the sea and thought they saw a ghost (cf. Mk 6:50).

13 M. Konradt, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus: Neubearbeitung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2023) 42.

14 Cf. R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2007) 74.

15 C.S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1990) 104.

16 Hughes, "Astronomical Thoughts," 123.

from God's guidance rather than from their own calculations. The star can be understood as a sign pointing to the one it signifies, Christ, the newborn king. It is reasonable to see this joy as foreshadowing the joy of meeting Christ, aligning with the broader interpretation suggested by Keener. Later in this paper, it will be argued that Luke 2:10 can be understood in a similar light.

In Matt 2:10, when the magi saw the star, they 'rejoiced with great joy' ('ἐχάρησαν χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα'). After ἐχάρησαν, three words intensify the joy's greatness. First, 'ἐχάρησαν χαρὰν' is a *figura etymologica*, a construction often used for emphasis. Where *figura etymologica* occurs in the NT or the LXX, the verb is followed by a noun in accusative or dative case. Wallace argues that the dative form is the more emphatic (cf. Matt 6:29; 22:3; Luke 2:8–9; Col 2:19 etc.).¹⁷ The NT provides other examples of this phenomenon. There are also cases where the greatness of joy is expressed in this way. In John 3:29, the friend of the bridegroom 'rejoices with joy' ('χαρᾶ χαίρει') at the bridegroom's arrival (cf. Isa 66:10). There are examples of this feature apart from the χαρ- root: for instance, in 1 Kgs 1:40, where the phrase 'εὐφραϊνόμενοι εὐφροσύνην μεγάλην' also expresses intense joy (cf. Isa 61:10). As in Matt 2:10, the phrase includes the *figura etymologica*, and the additions μεγάλην and σφόδρα intensify the joy. Although this level of intensification is rare, it is not entirely unique. There are several instances where χαρὰ (joy) and χαίρω (to rejoice) are joined by μέγας (great) (Isa 39:2; Jonah 4:6, *Jos. Asen.* 3:4; 4:2; 7:10; 15:12; 24:5). There are also cases where σφόδρα is added to χαίρω (1 Kgs 5:21; Zeph 3:14; 9:9). Two extra-biblical passages combine χαρὰ and χαίρω with both μέγας and σφόδρα, just as Matt 2:10 does. In *Ascen. Isa.* 1:4, 'ἐχάρη χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα' describes Hezekiah's joy when Isaiah arrived in Jerusalem. In *Jos. Asen.* 9:1, the structure 'καὶ ἐχάρη Ασενέθ ἐπὶ τῇ εὐλογίᾳ τοῦ Ἰωσήφ χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα' is found. In this case, χαίρω is followed by additional words that are omitted from the rest of the structure. These words attempt to illustrate a crucial turning point in the work. It sets the stage for Asaneth's rejection of pagan gods. In summary, several examples can be cited which recall, in part or in full, the formula in Matt 2:10. Great joy can come from an encounter (*Ascen. Isa.* 1:4) or a major life change (*Jos. Asen.* 9:1). The phrase in Matt 2:10 has a Jewish background. This is consistent with Matthew's repeated use of Jewish stylistic elements (e.g. ἰδοὺ; Matt 1:20, 23; 2:1) and quotations from the OT.

As the paper will discuss, joy is well represented in Luke, but less so in Matthew (Matt 2:10; 5:12; 13:18–23, 44; 18:13; 28:8).¹⁸ However, as in the case of Luke, there is a suggestion that joy frames the Gospel.¹⁹ This possibility is more uncertain here since

17 D.B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1996) 189–190.

18 According to R.H. Gundry, both χαρὰ and μέγας are Mattheanisms, although, as the next chapter of this paper will show, these words are much more common in Luke (*Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1994] 590).

19 J. Newberry, *Lukan Joy and the Life of Discipleship: A Narrative Analysis of the Conditions that Lead to Joy according to Luke* (WUNT II.583; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2023) 452.

Luke actually ends with a mention of joy (Luke 24:52), but Matthew does not, since after the news of the resurrection (Matt 28:1–10) there is mention of the bribes to the guards (Matt 28:11–15) and the commissioning of the apostles (Matt 28:16–20). Since joy is a less prominent theme in Matthew, it is all the more significant that Matt 2:10 presents the joy of the magi through such an overemphasised construction.

2. Luke 2:10

Joy is a recurring theme in Luke-Acts. The study of this theme has received considerable attention in recent years, with a number of studies and monographs on the concept of joy in Luke-Acts.²⁰ Several aspects underline the joy's prominent role in Luke's *Doppelwerk*. First of all, there are many words for joy in the Luke-Acts, including ἀγαλλιάω (Luke 1:47; 10:21), ἀγαλλιασις (Luke 1:14, 44), εὐφραίνω (Luke 12:19; 15:23, 34 etc.), χαρά (Luke 1:14; 2:10; 8:13 etc.), χαίρω (Luke 1:14, 28; 6:23), συγχαίρω (Luke 1:58; 15:6, 9) and εὐφροσύνη (Acts 2:28; 14:17).²¹ Additionally, the concept of joy can be identified in passages without these terms, especially in Luke's *Sondergut*.

The distribution of instances of joy in Luke-Acts is uneven. In some larger units, there are hardly any examples of joy, while in others, it appears frequently. Most of these occurrences are grouped together in Luke 15 (Luke 15:5–7, 9, 10, 23, 24, 29, 32 [2x]), where the joy of being found is often expressed. The second highest concentration is in the opening chapters, which recount the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 1–2). Besides, the frequent use of words that express joy (Luke 1:14 [3x], 28, 44, 47, 58; 2:10), there are other references to joy, for example in the hymns (Luke 1:46–55, 67–79; 2:14, 29–32),²² and narrative hints also enrich this pattern (e.g. Luke 2:20, 38).²³ Some scholars argue that Luke 1–2 is not an integral part of the Gospel,²⁴ but the recurring references to joy suggest that it is indeed consistent with the rest of the work, where joy is similarly prominent.²⁵

Luke 1–2 records three instances of an angel announcing a birth. First, Gabriel tells Zechariah that his son will be born (Luke 1:11–20), and then Gabriel announces to Mary that she will be the mother of Christ (Luke 1:26–38). For the third time, the shepherds are addressed (Luke 2:10–14).²⁶ Joy is present in all three angelic visits. There are many

20 Newberry, *Lukan Joy*; A. Inselmann, *Die Freude im Lukasevangelium: Ein Beitrag zur psychologischen Exegese* (WUNT II.322; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2012); D.H. Wenkel, *Joy in Luke-Acts* (PBM; Milton Keynes: Paternoster 2015); A. Janzen, *Der Friede im lukanischen Doppelwerk vor dem Hintergrund der Pax Romana* (Europäische Hochschulschriften 752; Frankfurt: Lang 2002).

21 C. Böttrich, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (THKNT 3; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2024) 581.

22 W.G. Morris, *Joy in the New Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster 1984) 92.

23 Newberry, *Lukan Joy*, 43.

24 H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of Luke* (San Francisco, CA: Harper 1961) 118, 172.

25 There are many who claim that Luke 1–2 fits into the framework of the Luke-Acts, but these chapters were inserted after these works were formulated. Cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 311.

26 A table comparing the three stories can be found here: Inselmann, *Die Freude*, 183.

words of joy (Luke 1:14, 28; 2:10),²⁷ as well as the songs of joy that follow the news of the birth (Luke 1:46–55, 67–79; 2:14). The announcement of the birth of a son by an angel is a recurring theme in the OT. There are many similarities between these passages and the stories in Luke 1–2. For example, the angelic appearance causes fear (Judg 13:6), and it is also common for the messenger to announce the name of the child to be born (Gen 16:11; 17:19). However, there is no OT narrative in which an angel speaks of joy associated with birth.²⁸ Anna, although she did not receive an angelic revelation before Samuel's birth, sang a song of praise after her son's arrival (1 Sam 2:1–10; cf. Gen 30:23; Luke 1:46–55, 67–79; 2:14, 29–32).²⁹

In Luke 1, the closest relatives are informed of the birth of their son (Zechariah, John's father, and Mary, Jesus' mother). Besides the news, the angel prepares the parents for their child's unique ministry. In Luke 2:10–14, on the other hand, the angel's announcement comes after the birth, and the angel addresses the outsiders, the shepherds. The sensitivity of the Gospel to the marginalised is evident here since it is the shepherds, those on the margins of society, who are the first to hear of the birth. The fact that the shepherds are addressed makes it clear that the birth of Christ is good news for a wider audience. According to the angel, the birth of Christ will be a great joy for 'all the people' ('ἔσται παντὶ τῷ λαῷ'), not only for the shepherds (Luke 2:10). This recalls Luke 1:14, where Gabriel tells Zechariah that his son will be born. It is also said that the birth of John will be welcomed by many (πολλοί) others. The narrative flow confirms the angel's word: after the birth of John the relatives and neighbours rejoiced (συνέχαιρον) with Elizabeth (Luke 1:58). These references are certainly in keeping with the salvation-historical pattern that runs through Luke-Acts. In Francois Bovon's view, those who are joyful are aware of the development of salvation history.³⁰

Luke 2:10 is an example of Jesus' birth being the joy of many. As already mentioned, the angel speaks of the joy of the people (λαός) as well as of the shepherds. It is probable that λαός here does not include the Gentiles, but refers exclusively to Israel. Λαός is a common word in Luke-Acts, and in most cases, it undoubtedly points to Israel. In the case of Luke's infancy narrative, the framing of λαός is uncertain in only one place (Luke 2:31), but in the remaining cases, it is clear that the reference is to the Jews (Luke 1:10, 16, 21: 68, 77; 2:10, 32).³¹ This is in line with Gabriel's statement that Christ will sit on

27 In Luke 1:28 the angel greets Mary with χαίρε. Although χαίρε is also a greeting, it allows for a broader framing. On the one hand, the verb occurs as part of the phrase 'χαίρε, κεχαριτωμένη' ('rejoice, one who has been favoured'). On the other hand, χαίρω could recall the pronoun χαίρις. Especially since joy is a recurring theme in Luke 1–2.

28 Genesis 21:6 says that the Lord made Sarah a laughing stock, but the context here is different, and it is not Sarah's joy that is the issue here.

29 In 1 Sam 2:1, the first word of Anna's song is ἡδύ, which expresses joy, followed shortly afterwards by πᾶν, which is also meant in this way. As in Luke 2:10–11, in 1 Sam 2:1, there is a combination of joy and a reference to God's salvation (σωτηρία; 1 Sam 2:1^{LXX}; σωτήρ; Luke 2:11). Cf. S. Harris, *The Davidic Shepherd King in the Lukan Narrative* (LNTS 558; London: Bloomsbury – Clark 2016) 42, 50.

30 F. Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas (Lk 1, 1–9, 50)* (EKK 3.1; Zürich – Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger – Neukirchener 1989) 100.

31 J.P. Smith, *Luke Was Not a Christian: Reading the Third Gospel and Acts within Judaism* (BI 218; Leiden: Brill 2023) 264.

the throne of David and rule over the house of Jacob (Luke 1:32–33). Of course, the theological vision of Luke-Acts shows that the Gentiles also share in the joy of Christ (Acts 13:52), but as Luke 1–2 indicates, the Jews are the main beneficiaries. Although Luke 2 introduces several people on society's margins, their Jewish origin is always assumed (Luke 2:8–20; 25–35; 36–38).

After discussing the participants in joy, it is worth looking at its manifestation. To take a slightly more distant view, Luke 2:9–10 reveals several mutually exclusive feelings. First, the shepherds were frightened by the appearance of the angel. The shepherds' mood is also signalled by the phrase 'φόβος μέγας' ('great fear' cf. Luke 7:16; 8:37; Acts 5:5–11) and by the angel's words 'do not be afraid' (Luke 2:9–10; cf. Luke 1:13, 30).³² Regarding the former, Luke 2:9 uses the construction 'ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν'. This is the opposite of the phrase 'ἐχάρησαν χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα' in Matt 2:10. In both cases, it can be seen that the repetition of the word is accompanied by a further addition. In Luke, however, the *figura etymologica* and its further extension do not refer to joy but to fear. The great fear in Luke 2:9 can be framed in terms of the Gospel. It is clear that the angel who appears here does not want to create a 'neutral' emotional state, since he has come to announce great joy. It is remarkable that the words 'great fear' ('φόβος μέγας') and 'great joy' ('χαρὰ μεγάλη') are read in the same context (Luke 2:9–10). It is certainly no coincidence that 'μέγας' is added to these two emotions, making the contrast more visible. According to the narrative, the sudden internal fear is then reversed, and instead of fear, the shepherds are overcome by liberation (cf. Luke 2:20).

It is also evidence of the emotional intensity that the angels are similarly filled with joy. After the angel announced the birth of Jesus, a multitude of angels appeared and sang together (Luke 2:13–14). It is not unusual for Luke to associate joy with angels, at least in the heavenly realm. For example, in Luke 15:7 there is joy in heaven at the conversion of a sinner. Although *συγχαίρω* (to rejoice together) is not used in Luke 2:10 (cf. Luke 1:58; 15:6, 9), it is clear that Luke 2:8–20 gives many examples of corporate rejoicing, both explicit and implicit. The angelic host sings with one accord (Luke 2:13–14), the angels and the shepherds rejoice together (Luke 2:10), so do the shepherds and the holy family (Luke 2:16–20), and finally, according to Luke 2:10, it is the joy of many. The greatness and communal nature of the joy of Luke 2:10 is shown by the fact that it is shared in heaven and on earth. It can even be seen in terms of shared joy that the angel came to the shepherds to announce the good news (*εὐαγγελίζω*; Luke 2:10). It is also worth noting that *εὐαγγελίζω* had previously signified the news of the birth of John the Baptist, which had also been announced by the angel to Zacharias his father (Luke 1:19).³³

As discussed above, there are many parallels between John's and Jesus' birth in Luke 1–2. However, the similarities do not equate the two characters. Fitzmyer, after

³² Inselmann, *Die Freude*, 183.

³³ In Luke 1–2 the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus is the good news, but in subsequent passages they become the proclaimers of the good news (Luke 3:18; Luke 4:18, 43; 8:1; 20:1).

examining the parallels, concludes that 'the Jesus-side always comes off better.' He understands this to mean that while Zacharias and Elizabeth were old, John was born naturally (Luke 1:24–25). At the birth of Jesus, however, Mary was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). John is promised that he will be great before the Lord (Luke 1:15) and Jesus will be great (Luke 1:32), the latter description also being significant. John walks before the Lord (Luke 1:16–17), but Jesus is the Lord (Luke 2:11).³⁴ Finally, the theme of joy and rejoicing also fits this pattern. At the birth of John, relatives and immediate neighbours came to visit and rejoice with Zacharias and Elizabeth (Luke 1:58) but after the birth of Jesus, unknown shepherds came to rejoice (Luke 2:15–20). It is also significant that the angel who announced the good news did not appear until after the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:9–13).

The phrase 'χαρὰ μεγάλη' is also found at the end of Luke 2:10. It has been noted that 'χαρὰ μεγάλη' frames the Gospel. Finally, the disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy and happiness after the encounter with the Risen Christ and the Ascension (Luke 24:52).³⁵ This parallel is remarkable because 'χαρὰ μεγάλη' is found only in these scenes in Luke. In addition, there are other references that connect the story of the shepherds and the conclusion of the Gospel. In particular, ὑποστρέφω (to return) also appears in Luke 2:20 and Luke 24:52. In Luke 2:20, the shepherds returned to their flocks after meeting Jesus, and in Luke 24:52–53 the disciples returned to Jerusalem after the Ascension. Both accounts suggest a strange dichotomy: despite no longer being in Jesus' immediate presence, both the shepherds and the disciples experienced enduring joy. The shepherds returned 'glorifying and praising God' ('δοξάζοντες καὶ αἰνοῦντες τὸν θεόν'; Luke 2:20), and the disciples were 'blessing God' ('εὐλογοῦντες τὸν θεόν'; Luke 24:53). These two narratives testify to the permanence of joy. The shepherds, unlike the disciples, did not return to the temple, a place that represents the very presence of God, but went back to their sheep and resumed their daily routine. According to Luke, however, their joy remained because they had met the newborn Christ.

Returning to the framework of the Gospel, joy is also evident as one moves towards its conclusion. Luke 24:41 speaks of the joy of meeting the risen Christ (Luke 24:41; cf. John 16:22; 20:20). As in Luke 2:9–10, there is a tension of fear and joy (Luke 24:37), but at the end there is no more fear, only joy (Luke 24:52). In summary, most commentators argue that the reference to Jerusalem, and more specifically to the temple, frames the Gospel (Luke 1:5–22; 24:52–53).³⁶ This does not, of course, exclude the possibility that the motif of joy may also be seen in this context, since the joy that is often manifested in the infancy narratives is realised at the end of the Gospel.

Many have suggested that the joy here has a realised eschatological undertone. There is no doubt that the birth of John is an eschatological turning point (Luke 1:14; 16:16), and

³⁴ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 315.

³⁵ Bovon, *Lukas*, 125; Newberry, *Lukan Joy*, 452.

³⁶ Cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 165.

Jesus' declaration that he has power over evil (Luke 10:21) can be seen in this light. From this point of view, it is also understandable that the disciples returned to Jerusalem with joy after the Ascension (Luke 24:52–53), and that joy also became a characteristic of the early church (cf. Acts 2:46).³⁷ The emphasis on realised eschatology is also evident in Luke 2:10. As already noted, Luke 2:10 speaks of events that have already taken place, in contrast to the promises in Luke 1:14. While this is clear from the narrative, the word *σήμερον* (today) gives special emphasis to the orientation towards the present (Luke 2:11; cf. Luke 4:21; 5:26; 19:9; 23:43).³⁸

Another example is that Luke 19:6, 9 also speaks of salvation and present joy (*σήμερον*) in the same context. This is in line with Harris's observation that where salvation is mentioned in Luke-Acts,³⁹ it is often linked with either *χαρά* or *χαίρω*.⁴⁰ The message of Luke 2:10–11, where the angels speak of both 'great joy' (*χαρά μεγάλη*) and the birth of the Saviour (*σωτήρ*), fits perfectly with this line of the Gospel. The combination of salvation and joy appears in the same context in other places in the NT. It is not unusual to speak of a salvation that has already been received (1 Pet 1:8–9). So, it is clear that the emphasis of Luke-Acts is not unique within the NT, but there is no doubt that the theme receives special attention in these writings.

In addition to the narrative implications, the historical context of the joy in Luke 1–2 is worth considering, as the narrative reflects a contemporary situation. Before the shepherds are mentioned, reference is made to the census of Augustus. It is clear from the terminology that the census is a key theme, as *ἀπογραφή* (census) is used in Luke 2:2 and *ἀπογράψω* (to take a census) in Luke 2:1, 3, 5. The census reminded the Jews of Rome's rule over Judea and their submission to the emperor. The census took place at a time when many were waiting for the deliverance of Israel (cf. Luke 2:25, 38). It is not surprising that the announcement of a new Davidic king caused great joy. The novelty of the Gospels is that they do not present this king as a political saviour.⁴¹ As the above overview shows, Luke's joy is not political (e.g. Acts 1:6–7).

3. Comparison of Matthew 2:10 and Luke 2:10

There are some fundamental differences between Matt 2:1–12 and Luke 2:1–20. In Matthew, the magi visited Jesus and in Luke, the shepherds (cf. Matt 2:10; Luke 2:10). It is not

37 M. Korn, *Die Geschichte Jesu in veränderter Zeit: Studien zur bleibenden Bedeutung Jesu im lukanischen Doppelwerk* (WUNT II.51; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1993) 40–41.

38 J.B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1997) 132.

39 Typically the words *σωτηρία* (salvation), *σώζω* (to save), *σωτήρ* (saviour) are used to indicate this.

40 Harris lists the following cases: Luke 1:14; 2:10; 8:13; 10:17, 20; 13:17; 15:5, 7, 10, 32; 19:6, 37; 24:52; Acts 5:41; 8:39; 11:23; 13:48, 52 (*The Davidic Shepherd*, 100).

41 Cf. J.B. Green, *Luke as Narrative Theologian: Texts and Topics* (WUNT I.446; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2020) 235–237.

clear to what distant region ‘the east’ (ἡ ἀνατολή) in Matt 2:1 refers, but it is certain that the magi came from outside Judah. The shepherds, on the other hand, were probably staying fairly close to the place of his birth. According to Luke 2:8, they were ‘in the region’ (ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τῆ ἀὐτῆ) where Jesus was born. It is also a difference that in Matthew a star, and in Luke an angel announced the birth. This is significant because joy is closely linked to both mediators: the magi rejoiced when the star reappeared and the shepherds received the good news from the angel.

The two accounts are brought closer together by the fact that the angel also plays an important role in Matthew’s birth story. There are passages in the context of Matt 2:1–12 where angels are also given a mission (Matt 1:18–25; 2:13–15, 19–23). It is even possible that there are hidden references to angels in Matt 2:1–12. According to Matt 2:12, the magi did not return to Jerusalem because they had been told in a dream to take a different route. It is noteworthy that revelations through dreams are found in other places in Matthew. Moreover, Matt 1:20 adds that the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Although Matt 2:12 is silent on this point, it cannot be ruled out, as in the previous case.⁴²

The theory that the magi from the East were led to Bethlehem not by a star but by an angel (Matt 2:9) deserves comment. Allison, one of the most prominent proponents of this theory, offers a number of arguments. First, it can be seen in several texts that the words for star and angel in Matt 2:9–10 are interchangeable (Dan 8:10; Rev 1:20; 1 *Hen* 43:1–4). Star and angel can also be associated with shining (Matt 28:3; 2 Cor 11:14; Acts 6:15; 1QS 3:20; 1QM 13:9–10). The angel is also associated with guidance (Exod 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2), as is the star (Matt 2:10).⁴³ According to Allison, the storyline of Matt 2:9–10 contradicts the idea that there is an actual star. These verses say that the star guides the magi and, moreover, stops over the specific house. Dale C. Allison says it is problematic to imagine how a celestial body could help in this way. Later commentators, such as Allison, raise this possibility. For example, in the (Arab.) *Gos. Inf.* 7, an angel in the form of a star guided the magi.⁴⁴ Chrysostom thinks that the star descended (κατέβη) from the heights to show the specific place where Christ was (*Chrys. Hom. Matt.* 6:2–3 [PG 57:64–65], cf. *Prot. Jas.* 21:3; *Iren. Dem.* 58; *Orig. Hom. Num.* 18:3).⁴⁵ There is no doubt that Allison’s reading answers many problems, but it also creates new difficulties. First of all, there is no mention of the star first appearing in the east and on the magi’s journey to Jerusalem (Matt 2:2). In the case of Matt 2:2, the interpretation of the star as an angel is even less plausible. It is difficult to imagine Matt 2:2 and Matt 2:10 interpreting the star in a different way. As noted above, angels are frequently mentioned in Matt 1–2. If Matt 2:1–12 were intended to speak of angels, it would be logical to mention them in this passage as well. This makes the idea of the magi being led by a different kind of guide in Matt 2:9–10 unlikely,

⁴² Cf. D.H. Wenkel, “The Angel of the Lord Aids the Son of David in Matthew 1–2,” *BSac* 177 (2020) 57.

⁴³ Matthew 2 draws from the exodus tradition on several occasions.

⁴⁴ Cf. D.C. Allison, “What Was the Star that Guided the Magi?,” *BRev* 9 (1993) 20–24.

⁴⁵ D.C. Allison, “The Magi’s Angel,” *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2005) 18–19.

so one should agree with those who maintain that the Matthew and Luke accounts differ in this respect.

With this clarification, attention turns to the angels' message of joy. In Matt 2:10 the magi who saw the star were filled with joy, whereas in Luke 2:10, the shepherds heard about the joy of the birth. In the former, the construction is 'ἐχάρησαν χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα', in the latter, the phrase 'χαρὰν μεγάλην' is used. Matthew uses a slightly longer structure, but in both cases, the phrase 'χαρὰν μεγάλην' is included. This is remarkable because of the fifty-nine occurrences of χαρά in the NT,⁴⁶ only a few others have χαρά and μεγάλη together (Matt 28:8; Luke 24:52; Acts 15:3). The use of the two words together is not common outside the NT either: for example, only a few occurrences can be taken into account in the LXX (e.g. Jonah 4:6; Isa 39:2). In the introduction to this paper, a comparison was made between the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. Since 'χαρὰν μεγάλην' is not a typical or commonly used expression, it serves as a notable similarity between Matt 2:10 and Luke 2:10.

Building on this point, it is necessary to see what other similarities, if any, link the two sections. Some of these are more closely related to joy, others more loosely. It is also necessary to explore these further parallels in order to see that it is no coincidence that the structure 'χαρὰν μεγάλην' is found in both Matt 2:10 and Luke 2:10. (1) Both passages describe events after the birth of Jesus. (2) The shepherds as well as the magi had to move to meet Jesus. (3) Both times Bethlehem is the destination of the pilgrimage. (4) Both the magi and the shepherds worshipped the child who had been born (Matt 2:2, 11; Luke 2:20). (5) Neither the shepherds nor the magi were family members. Moreover, both groups were marginalised: the shepherds because of their profession and the magi because of their gentile origin, possibly because of their position as magi. (6) In both cases the night plays a role. According to Luke 2:8, this is when the shepherds met the angel. Matthew does not mention the night, but it is plausible that the magi saw the star at night. (7) In addition to night, light is also mentioned. According to Luke 2:9, the angel who appeared shone around (περιέλαμψεν) the shepherds (cf. Acts 26:13). In this context, the δόξα (glory) mentioned in Luke 2:9 could also imply light. Although light is not mentioned in Matt 2:1–12, the appearance of the star can be taken into account here.⁴⁷ (8) Both the magi and the shepherds departed after meeting with Jesus (Matt 2:12; Luke 2:20). (9) As discussed, in Luke, joy frames the Gospel (e.g. Luke 2:10; 24:52). Joy is also used in Luke 24:41, where the joy of the disciples at seeing the Risen One is recorded. This joy is the basis for the disciples' joyful return to Jerusalem (Luke 24:52–53). According to Bovon, this framework suggests that Luke is linking the birth narrative to the idea of Jesus being reborn in the resurrection.⁴⁸ Bovon's observation can be extended to Matthew, where joy is also associated with both birth and resurrection (Matt 2:10; 28:8). This parallel is another similarity between the

46 K. Berger, "χαρά," *EDNT* III, 454–455.

47 The list of similarities can be extended by the angelic address 'do not be afraid' in both Luke 2:10 and Matt 1:20.

48 Bovon, *Lukas*, 125.

two Gospels. Its significance is heightened by the fact that joy appears less frequently in Matthew than in Luke so the fact that joy is mentioned in connection with both the birth and the resurrection cannot be a mere coincidence.

Conclusions

The infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke have both parallels and differences. This presents a significant challenge to both the Synoptic problem and to the study of the infancy narratives. This paper does not attempt to present hypotheses on the origins of the Gospels. However, it is proposed that the similarities are not accidental and the infancy narratives share a common origin.

It has not been decided how many parallels can be found between Luke 1–2 and Matt 1–2. Although there are many suggestions, it is common that no arguments for or against a possible parallel are developed. This is unfortunate because only a thorough discussion of individual cases can produce convincing results. This article presents a case study to illustrate this observation. It examines Matt 2:10 and Luke 2:10 and argues that these verses should be treated as parallels. These verses were chosen because several influential monographs, including Brown's, do not include them among the parallels between Matthew's and Luke's birth narratives.⁴⁹

The main connection between Matt 2:10 and Luke 2:10 is 'χαρὰν μεγάλην'. Χαρά occurs fifty-nine times in the NT,⁵⁰ but only three other times is χαρά combined with μεγάλη (Matt 28:8; Luke 24:52; Acts 15:3). Aside from this similarity, there are parallels that justify linking the two texts. This paper lists nine such common elements. These parallels are remarkable, although Matthew focuses on the joy of the magi, while Luke discusses the joy of the shepherds.

In addition to a comparative analysis, both verses have been thoroughly examined. The analysis of joy in Matthew is itself a novel approach, as heretofore it has received little attention. This is particularly evident in the case of Matt 2:10, which is often overlooked or mentioned only in passing by commentators. Matthew employs the hyperbolic structure to describe the joy of the magi. While the phrase 'ἐχάρησαν χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα' is uncommon, parallels in other texts, both canonical and non-canonical, have been identified (*Ascen. Isa.* 1:4; *Jos. Asen.* 9:1). Without Matt 2:10, Matt 2:9 and Matt 2:11 would connect smoothly. However, this is not unique, as the passage alludes to emotions (Matt 2:3). Furthermore, there may be another explanation for this phenomenon, given that joy is a prominent element of the tradition (Luke 2:10).

Recently, scholars have been studying the theme of joy in Luke-Acts. This paper presents the findings of previous studies and offers new or underemphasised insights. It is a common observation that the joy in the infancy narratives (e.g. Luke 2:10) and at the end of the

⁴⁹ Brown, *The Birth*, 34–35.

⁵⁰ K. Berger, "χαρά," *EDNT* III, 454–455.

Gospel (Luke 24:52) frames the whole account. There are other parallels between the story of the shepherds and that of the disciples returning to Jerusalem. First, ὑποστρέφω appears in Luke 2:20 and Luke 24:52. Second, the shepherds returned ‘glorifying and praising God’ (δοξάζοντες καὶ αἰνοῦντες τὸν θεόν; Luke 2:20), and similarly, the disciples were ‘blessing God’ (εὐλογοῦντες τὸν θεόν; Luke 24:53). The shared joy in Luke 1–2 has received little attention. At the birth of John, the relatives and neighbours rejoiced with Elizabeth (Luke 1:58). The angel was not only the bearer of the joyful message but also rejoiced with other angels in the presence of the shepherds (Luke 2:10–14). Thus, through shared joy, heaven and earth are united. While some have suggested that Luke 1–2 is not an integral part of the Gospel,⁵¹ the repeated mention of joy suggests that it is indeed consistent with the rest of the work, where joy is similarly prominent.

Bibliography

- Allison, D.C., “What Was the Star that Guided the Magi?,” *Bible Review* 9 (1993) 20–24.
- Allison, D.C., “The Magi’s Angel,” *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2005).
- Basser, H.W. – Cohen, M.B., *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions: A Relevance-Based Commentary* (Brill Reference Library of Judaism 46; Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2015).
- Berger, K., “χαρά,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (eds. H. Balz – G. Schneider) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1990) III, 42–45.
- Bovon, F., *Das Evangelium nach Lukas (Lk 1,1–9,50)* (Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 3.1; Zürich – Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger – Neukirchener 1989).
- Böttrich, C., *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament 3; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2024).
- Brown, R.E., *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday 1997).
- Conzelmann, H., *The Theology of Luke* (San Francisco, CA: Harper 1961).
- Evans, C.A., *Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012).
- Fitzmyer, J.A., *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX* (Anchor Bible 28; New York: Doubleday 1982).
- France, R.T., *The Gospel of Matthew* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2007).
- Green, J.B., *The Gospel of Luke* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1997).
- Green, J.B., *Luke as Narrative Theologian: Texts and Topics* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament I.446; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2020).
- Gundry, R.H., *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1994).
- Harris, S., *The Davidic Shepherd King in the Lukan Narrative* (Library of New Testament Studies 558; London: Bloomsbury – Clark 2016).

51 Conzelmann, *Luke*, 118, 172.

- Hughes, D.W., "Astronomical Thoughts on the Star of Bethlehem," *The Star of Bethlehem and the Magi: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Experts on the Ancient Near East, the Greco-Roman World* (eds. P. Barthel – G.H. Van Kooten) (Themes in Biblical Narrative 19; Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2015) 103–137.
- Inselmann, A., *Die Freude im Lukasevangelium: Ein Beitrag zur psychologischen Exegese* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II.322; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2012).
- Janzen, A., *Der Friede im lukanischen Doppelwerk vor dem Hintergrund der Pax Romana* (Europäische Hochschulschriften 752; Frankfurt: Lang 2002).
- Keener, C.S., *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1990).
- Konradt, M., *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus: Neubearbeitung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2023).
- Korn, M., *Die Geschichte Jesu in veränderter Zeit: Studien zur bleibenden Bedeutung Jesu im lukanischen Doppelwerk* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II.51; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1993).
- MacEwen, R.K., *Matthean Posteriority: An Exploration of Matthew's Use of Mark and Luke as a Solution to the Synoptic Problem* (Library of New Testament Studies 501; London – New York: Bloomsbury – Clark 2018).
- Marcus, J., *John the Baptist in History and Theology* (Studies on Personalities of the New Testament; Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press 2018).
- Morris, W.G., *Joy in the New Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster 1984).
- Moule, M.A., *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1959).
- Newberry, J., *Lukan Joy and the Life of Discipleship: A Narrative Analysis of the Conditions that Lead to Joy according to Luke* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II.583; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2023).
- Shellard, B., *New Light on Luke: Its Purpose, Sources, and Literary Context* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Supplement Series 215; London: Sheffield Academic Press 2002).
- Shuler, P.L., "The Rhetorical Character of Luke 1–2," *Literary Studies in Luke–Acts: Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson* (ed. J.B. Tyson) (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press 1998) 173–189.
- Smith, J.P., *Luke Was Not a Christian: Reading the Third Gospel and Acts within Judaism* (Biblical Interpretation 218; Leiden: Brill 2023).
- Strack, H.L. – Billerbeck, P., *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (München: Beck 1922) I.
- Wallace, D.B., *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1996).
- Wenkel, D.H., *Joy in Luke–Acts* (Paternoster Biblical Monographs; Milton Keynes: Paternoster 2015).
- Wenkel, D.H., "The Angel of the Lord Aids the Son of David in Matthew 1–2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 177 (2020) 56–69.