



New Perspectives on the Nativity

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The infancy narratives represent some of the most beautiful and intriguing passages in the Gospels. The stories they relate are also arguably the most well-known in the Christian tradition, from the child in the manger to the Magi paying homage to the infant Jesus. However there have been relatively few attempts to consider the stories of the Nativity from modern academic perspectives, examining them from feminist perspectives, political standpoints, in cinematic representations as well as more standard but up-to-date academic approaches. *New Perspectives on the Nativity* attempts to redress this providing a fresh insights on these crucial Christian texts from a cast of distinguished contributors.

At the outset, Henry Wansbrough surveys scholarship on the infancy narratives since Raymond Brown's landmark study, *The Birth of the Messiah* (2nd edition, 1993). Thereafter, four chapters deal with Luke's infancy story. Ian Boxall demonstrates how the narrative offers subtle foreshadowings of the passion and resurrection. Barbara Reid surveys Luke's portrayal of three female prophets (Elizabeth, Mary, and Anna), who prepare for the later presentation of Jesus as a prophet. Leonard Maluf suggests a new understanding of Zechariah's canticle (the Benedictus), by situating it firmly in its Jewish background. Finally, Nicholas King indicates how the "inn" of the nativity prefigures the later journey of the gospel message.

The next four contributions are concerned with Matthew's narrative. Warren Carter shows how the conflict between the infant Jesus and the ruling powers is repeated more dramatically in the life and death of the adult Christ. Benedict Viviano proposes that the three stages in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus belong within a grand scheme of seven ages of salvation history. Bernard Robinson investigates Matthew's nativity story within the context of biblical and Greco-Roman history-writing. Christopher Fuller highlights the carnivalesque approach to the Magi story in Pasolini's classic film, *The Gospel According to St Matthew*. Three final essays focus on the religious value of the infancy stories. Ann Loades reflects on late-20th-century poems dealing with the nativity. John Kaltner explores the references to Jesus' birth found in Islamic tradition. Finally, Thomas O'Loughlin argues that contemporary preoccupations with historical investigation can blind us to the mystery presented in the nativity stories.

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