AESTHETIC PIETY AND THE INFANT CHRIST: SEEING AND HEARING IN INFANCY TRADITIONS FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT TO ORIGEN



Thesis submitted for the D.Phil. in Theology
Trinity Term 2020

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For my parents,
Brian and Kristen Kozitza,
who first taught me to seek Christ
diligently and to find him

with my love and gratitude

Acknowledgments

This dissertation has been shaped not only by my own intellectual and creative labor, but by many people who have believed in me and in the formation of this project. Chief among these is my doctoral supervisor, Markus Bockmuehl. An early memory of Markus has stayed with me over the years: When I was wavering over whether to make the leap from my native USA to take up doctoral study at Oxford, he asked me to consider whether this was something I felt 'called' to do. It has been an absolute privilege to spend the past several years studying with a scholar who views the academic life not merely as a career, but as a vocation to seek truth with boldness. This thesis bears the marks of many conversations with Markus over the years, on points ranging from the structurally integral to the beautifully nuanced. He has been the best of mentors – giving generously when help was needed, yet allowing me space to see my own vision emerge with clarity. I am honored to have worked with him, and to consider him a friend.

Special thanks are also due to my two examiners, Carol Harrison and Jane Heath. In the early stages of planning this project, Carol's and Jane's respective works were particular sources of inspiration, and I was thrilled when they were appointed to assess the dissertation at its culmination. Their comments were engaged, thoughtful, and challenging – giving me much to reflect on as I look toward the further refining of my ideas. Multiple others who read portions of this thesis during various stages of its development at Oxford contributed insights that made their way into the final version; these include Nathan Eubank, Jennifer Strawbridge, Andrew Gregory, and Mateusz Kusio.

This project has been helped significantly by the scholarly community more broadly. The Clarendon Fund and Sloane Robinson Scholarship fully supported me during my years at Oxford, thus affording me the great gift of being able to focus on my studies without financial worry. Additional grants from Keble College and the Faculty of Theology and Religion allowed me to conduct research on early Christian artistic depictions of infancy scenes in Rome. Various seminars and conferences offered the joys of scholarly friendship and dynamic engagement with portions of my thesis. My thanks go to participants of the Oxford-Tel Aviv Programme in the Study of the Ancient World (Tel Aviv, 2017; Oxford, 2018); the Oxbridge Graduate Biblical Studies Conference (Cambridge, 2017); the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (Berlin, 2017); the Annual Meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association (Denver, 2018); and the Oxford New Testament Seminar throughout my time at Oxford.

In many ways, the origins of this project can be traced back years before I arrived in Oxford. At Baylor University, Alden Smith and David Lyle Jeffrey were unwavering champions of my intellectual life, giving me courage to take initial steps toward graduate work in Biblical Studies. Dr Jeffrey in particular first taught me to make connections between the Bible and the arts, and brilliantly advised my undergraduate thesis on the canticles of Luke's infancy narrative. At the University of Notre Dame, John Cavadini introduced me to Origen's beautiful *Homilies on Luke* – an important textual source of inspiration for the present project – and David Lincicum patiently and wisely guided me through my doctoral application and decision to come to Oxford.

My years of training in violin, piano, and ballet, alongside a lifelong love of the arts in general, have left indelible marks upon my imagination and creation of this work. I am incredibly grateful to all who have tended and encouraged this love of beauty in me over the years. While many of my experiences in the world of the arts remain imperceptibly (though fundamentally) under the surface of the present project, one in particular has a direct claim on inspiring a pivotal decision in the dissertation's early formation. Hilary Hahn's 2016 performance of Max Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1 in

London started me thinking about the *aurality* of the infancy narratives, in addition to the visual aspects I had already been considering.

The doctoral journey is often an arduous one, but I have been wonderfully supported in my labors by the love of many friends and family members, both in Oxford and abroad. In Oxford I have been blessed by a community of friends at the Oxford Oratory Catholic Church of St Aloysius Gonzaga, as well as by two particular D.Phil. companions-in-arms: Mateusz Kusio and Nicole Chen. Longstanding friendships from the USA have been a source of joy and stability; here I think especially of Madeline and Michael Bradley, Susannah Brister, Mie Millard, Rachel Sanders, Hillary and Ben Smith, and Kirsten Welch.

For my life and the deepest formation of who I am as a person – I am indebted to my family. I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Brian and Kristen Kozitza, who laid the very foundations of this work long ago. In particular, they taught me to seek Christ and to find him – as do many of the biblical figures I describe in this dissertation. My siblings, Harlan and Arianna Kozitza, have been my abiding companions since childhood, and have lovingly supported me in all my endeavors. I love and cherish you all.

Final, enduring thanks are due to my husband, Christopher Dean, whose love has been the greatest gift of my time in Oxford. Our marriage in 2020 coincided closely with the completion and examination of this thesis, and as I write this preface for final submission to the Bodleian Libraries, we joyfully await the birth of our own firstborn son.

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Feast of St Athanasius, 2021
Keble College
Oxford

Short Abstract

This study argues that the New Testament infancy narratives are notably attentive to the senses of seeing and hearing, specifically in relation to characters' perception of divine revelation and the infant Christ himself. Furthermore, this attention to 'aesthetic piety' invites further reflection on the visual and aural senses in several streams of pre-Nicene Christian literature devoted to the infancy of Jesus. Part I lays the foundation of this argument through analyzing conceptions of 'seeing' and 'hearing' in Matthew 1-2 (Chapter 2) and Luke 1-2 (Chapter 3). Matthew's infancy narrative provides a high concentration of auditory forms of revelation in invoking the voices of prophetic Scripture and the angelic messages of dreams, while achieving its chief aesthetic moment in the visual revelation of the infant Christ to the magi. Luke contrasts modes of listening to revelation in his characterizations of Zechariah and Mary, records multiple visual encounters with the Child, and employs the ancient technique of ἐνάργεια to bring his infancy scenes vividly 'before the eyes.' While each gospel writer thus negotiates these concepts differently, both extend a certain 'aesthetic invitation' to subsequent literary productions seeking to further imagine or understand human perception of the Incarnation. This is confirmed in Part II, which examines three representative case studies of textual engagement with the New Testament infancy traditions. The early apocryphal infancy gospels, notably exemplified in the *Protevangelium of James*, respond creatively to the pre-canonical infancy traditions by expanding the reader's visual and aural imagination of these events (Chapter 4). Irenaeus of Lyons demonstrates an aesthetic response in apologetic mode, interpreting visual witness of the Word made flesh against perceptual confusions of adoptionist and docetic interpretations (Chapter 5). Finally, Origen of Alexandria's works illustrate explicit homiletic appeal to the aesthetic aspects of the infancy narratives, drawing listeners into an inner and embodied participation in their visual and aural piety (Chapter 6). A concluding chapter examines what this range of 'aesthetic response' to impulses present within the infancy narratives themselves can contribute to the study of ancient aesthetic piety and the interpretation of the infancy of Jesus in early Christianity.

Long Abstract

Since antiquity, the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke have distinctively captivated the visual and aural senses of their readers; early examples include multiple third- and fourth-century frescoes of infancy scenes in the Roman Catacombs, and the fourth-century hymns of Prudentius and Ambrose. However, biblical scholarship to date has largely left this observation to the purview of art and music historians, with little regard for the aesthetic aspects of the texts themselves, and the ways in which the texts invite this sort of reflection. With a strongly text-focused approach that nevertheless incorporates recent notions of visuality and aurality, this study argues that the New Testament infancy narratives are notably attentive to the senses of seeing and hearing, specifically in relation to characters' perception of divine revelation and the infant Christ himself. Furthermore, this attention to 'aesthetic piety' invites further reflection on the visual and aural senses in several streams of pre-Nicene Christian literature devoted to the infancy of Jesus.

An introductory chapter first explains the need for this study, then defines its key terms, methodology, and parameters. Terminologically key to this study is the idea of 'aesthetic piety,' which I define with reference to the Greek αἴσθησις and the Latin *pietas*, showing briefly how notions of aesthetic piety were present in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman traditions out of which the gospels arose. I specifically define 'visual' and 'aural' forms of ancient aesthetic piety, which appear most frequently in the infancy traditions. Terminologies surrounding the infant Christ and the infancy genre more broadly are likewise teased out; I show that these traditions are key *loci* for examining the notion of aesthetic piety in early Christianity. I explain my methodology as one that unites a traditional historical approach with three more recent heuristic models: the study of ancient visuality and aurality (notably exemplified in the work of Jane Heath and Carol Harrison, respectively), and reception history. Finally, the basic parameters of the study are drawn, limiting my examination primarily to literary sources, and chronologically to the pre-Nicene period. By demonstrating evidence of a dynamic interest in conceptions of seeing and hearing within the earliest literary traditions surrounding the birth of Jesus, this study provides a textual-historical framework for understanding how the infancy narratives have in subsequent history been the subject of a proliferation of nonliterary reflections in visual art and music. Recursively, it establishes a basis for interpreting these later trajectories as themselves generated by aesthetic impulses already present in the biblical texts.

In order to ascertain the extent of these impulses in the New Testament, Part I lays the foundation of the study's argument through analyzing conceptions of 'seeing' and 'hearing' in Matthew 1-2 (Chapter 2) and Luke 1-2 (Chapter 3). Matthew's infancy narrative, punctuated by five fulfillment quotations and five dreams, provides a high concentration of auditory forms of revelation. In invoking these voices of prophetic Scripture and messages from the divine realm, Matthew draws from accepted notions of aural piety in antiquity: the physicality of divine and prophetic voices, the hearing of Scripture in liturgical contexts, and the oracular aspect of the dream genre. While these aspects invite Matthew's reader to 'hear,' I also argue that Matthew's infancy narrative achieves its chief aesthetic moment in the visual revelation of the infant Christ to the magi, which the gospel writer highlights through a lengthy exposition of the magi's visually-oriented pilgrimage toward the Child.

Luke's infancy narrative is profoundly concerned with what witnesses to the birth of Christ saw and heard – a concern which, I argue, follows from his interest in the 'eyewitnesses and ministers of the word' (1:1) more broadly. This manifests itself in how

he contrasts modes of listening in his characterizations of Zechariah and Mary (Luke 1), and records multiple visual encounters with the Child (Luke 2). The four canticles included in Luke's infancy narrative provide model responses to what has been heard and seen, and thus may be interpreted as extensions of aural and visual piety. Furthermore, we can observe that Luke – so aptly described as a painter in later tradition – employs the ancient technique of ἐνάργεια to bring his infancy scenes vividly 'before the eyes' of his readers, inviting them to become 'eyewitnesses' themselves.

While each gospel writer thus negotiates these concepts differently, both extend a certain 'aesthetic invitation' to subsequent literary productions seeking to further imagine or understand human perception of the Incarnation. On this basis, Part II examines three representative case studies of textual engagement with the Matthean and Lukan infancy traditions: the *Protevangelium of James* (Chapter 4), the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons (Chapter 5), and the works of Origen of Alexandria (Chapter 6).

The early apocryphal infancy gospels, notably exemplified in the *Protevangelium of James* (*PJ*), respond creatively to the pre-canonical infancy traditions by expanding the reader's visual and aural imagination of these events. Through an analysis of specific examples from *PJ*, I show that there are two main ways in which we see this happening: through an overall enhancement of visuality and aurality of setting, and an increased interest in characters' modes of seeing and hearing. The purpose of both features of the text is to draw the reader into a more vivid contemplation of the events described.

The apologetic writings of Irenaeus of Lyons, and particularly his *Adversus Haereses*, have been noted in past scholarship for their early contribution to the field of theological aesthetics. Irenaeus' interest in sense perception may be observed both in his hermeneutics, and in his theology of the Incarnation – two areas which saliently combine in his exegesis of the infancy narratives. This chapter examines Irenaeus' response to the aesthetic elements of the Matthean and Lukan texts, which is expressed in an apologetic mode against his opponents' aesthetic interpretations of the same texts.

Origen of Alexandria, like Irenaeus, has been treated in recent scholarship on the senses, especially the spiritual senses. A more neglected aspect of Origen's work is his theological interest in Jesus *qua* child, which also translates into a spiritual attitude of devotion to the infant Christ. In this chapter, I examine multiple passages in which his interests in sense perception and the infant Christ intersect, arguing that his 'aesthetic response' is most strikingly expressed in his explicit homiletic appeals to involve his congregation in the aesthetic pieties of the biblical texts.

Part II, then, confirms the argument begun in Part I – that the New Testament infancy narratives invite aesthetic reflection on the nature of the Incarnation – by showing how this plays out in early Christian texts concerned with expanding biblical imagination, formulating theology, and promoting spirituality. While these chapters focus around three significant points of contact with the aesthetic piety of the infancy narratives, a number of other ancient texts and images are brought into dialogue with them, demonstrating the wide-ranging effect of this phenomenon. Chapter 7 gathers together the two interlocking parts of the thesis, drawing attention both to the findings and contributions of this study.

As the first sustained analysis of visual and aural piety in early Christian devotion to the infant Christ, this study makes a number of contributions to biblical scholarship and related disciplines. Most significantly, it locates a dynamic visuality and aurality within the biblical accounts of Christ's infancy, concluding that the striking amount of aesthetic receptions to these texts is not incidental, but actively provoked by the texts themselves. This conclusion increases our understanding of the infancy narratives' discourse and aims, and opens a new avenue of research for other aesthetically-charged biblical texts. Moreover, the present study's conclusion holds significant implications for historians of

early Christian art, music, and liturgy, as the study of infancy motifs in artistic streams of interpretation must now take into greater account the aesthetic impulses of the biblical texts. Further implications arise for the study of patristics and early Christianity more broadly, as multiple spheres within these areas of study are shown to be responsive to the sense perceptions of biblical texts. Finally, this study makes a contribution to discussions of the Incarnation within the field of theological aesthetics, bolstering surface-level invocations of biblical material through employing the philological tools of exegesis to the New Testament narratives of Christ's birth and infancy.

CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

1.1. An Exegetical Dilemma and a Twofold Solution

Midway through his exegesis of Luke 2:22-40, the presentation of the infant Christ at the Temple, François Bovon pauses his commentary in an evocative reflection on the numerous interpretive avenues open to him in this text:

> Should one follow the course of the narrative, that is, a meeting of the generations that looks like a farewell, and thus perform a narrative and affective exegesis? Or should one focus on the paradigmatic structure of Simeon's blessing, which seems like a revelation, and thus attempt a theological and cognitive interpretation? Should one stress the parents' obedient behavior, or rather show its limitations because of the prophetic behavior of the old people? Should one consider this unit in form-critical isolation, or in its redactional context? These numerous possibilities explain the marked effect of this pericope in church history. To this passage, Origen dedicated no fewer than four sermons. Egeria attests a festival forty days after Epiphany at the end of the fourth century. Hesychius of Jerusalem also composed two sermons for the occasion. In Dionysius of Furna one can read how Byzantine painters must have fashioned the scene: 'Next to [Joseph] stands the prophetess Anna, who points to Christ and holds a tablet with this inscription: This baby created heaven and earth.'[1]

Far more than a momentary indulgence in rhetorical flourish, Bovon's words clarify his own exegetical dilemma in light of a significant observation about this pericope's multi-textured history of effects. His choice of historical examples reveals just a few of the varying forms these effects have taken: sermons, feast-day liturgies, art. Still more importantly for this study, I suggest that all four examples invoke a variety of *aesthetic* receptions of the biblical text – responses which are themselves stimulated by a significant interest in the senses of seeing and hearing within the text itself. This twofold statement requires further explanation. As a point of entry to the present study, I clarify this claim through briefly unpacking Bovon's examples and extending his reflection.

[1] Bovon 2002: 98-99.

The pilgrim Egeria's travel diary indicates that the feast of the Presentation (Candlemas) was a high point of the fourth-century Jerusalem liturgical calendar.[2] She describes a procession, the preaching of presbyters, and we can infer from other sections of Egeria's narrative that the celebration likely included psalm and hymn-singing, possibly with the assistance of a Jerusalem boys' choir.[3] We can well imagine how aesthetically focused this liturgy was. Ancient homilies – such as those by Origen in third-century Caesarea, and Hesychius in fifth-century Jerusalem – appealed to listeners' ears as well as their visual imagination.[4] Bovon's final example is the most explicitly visual of the four. In a 'painter's manual,' Dionysius of Furna utilized his access to Byzantine sources to instruct eighteenth-century artists in how they should capture scenes from biblical texts. His instructions for painting a Presentation scene begin with guidelines for the setting: 'a temple and a domed canopy; beneath the canopy is an altar on which is a golden censer.'[5] Dionysius then instructs his readers to paint four figures, a description which Bovon partially quotes: 'Saint Simeon the receiver of God holds the infant Christ in his arms, who gives him his blessing. The Virgin on the other side of the altar stretches out her arms to the child, and behind her Joseph carries two doves in his robe; near him the prophetess Anna points out Christ and holds a scroll with these words: "This child has created Heaven and Earth."'[6] The manual proceeds to instruct the painting of nine additional scenes taken from the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke.[7] Moreover, Dionysius takes as his source of inspiration, and artistic patron, the evangelist Luke himself, to whom he attributes the first painting of the virgin Mary's face, 'which he himself had seen.'[8]

[2] Egeria, *Itinerarium* 26. Cf. Wilkinson 1981: 128.
[3] Egeria, *Itinerarium* 24.5.
[4] See further Ch. 6 on Origen. For Hesychius' use of visual imagery, cf. Aubineau 1978: 10.
[5] Hetherington 1974: 32.
[6] Hetherington 1974: 32.
[7] Cf. Hetherington 1974 for paintings based on Matt 1:18; 2:1-8; 2:11-12; 2:13-15; 2:16-17; Luke 1:26-38; 1:39-45; 2:1-20; 2:41-52.
[8] Hetherington 1974: 1. See §3.1 for further discussion of this tradition.

While Bovon's examples are historically far-flung and varied, my first point in unpacking them is to highlight the way in which the stories of Jesus' infancy have generated *aesthetic response*. The exegetical impasse at which Bovon finds himself is essentially a question about how to read a text that has been read many times before. His four examples hint that his dilemma extends slightly beyond this, however, for they bear witness to the fact that this text, and the infancy narratives of Luke and Matthew more broadly, have from antiquity uniquely captivated readers' visual and aural senses.

Bovon's examples are only a beginning. Artistic depictions of Matthew's magi, Luke's annunciation and nativity, appear in ancient Christian frescoes, sarcophagus reliefs, and mosaics from the third and fourth centuries. Several of the most ancient liturgical feasts of the church – Christmas, Epiphany, and Candlemas – are drawn from the infancy accounts, and their celebration motivated the writing of hymns and carols, including those of Ambrose of Milan, Prudentius, and Ephrem the Syrian. Art, hymns, and feasts devoted to events in the life of Mary, drawn both from New Testament and apocryphal material, also became increasingly prevalent in antiquity. Furthermore, the four canticles found within the text of Luke's infancy narrative itself – the Magnificat, Benedictus, Gloria, and Nunc dimittis – were incorporated into Christian liturgical practice at least from the fourth and fifth centuries.

Of course, aesthetic response to the infancy narratives extends beyond antiquity. The scenes of the nativity have captured the artist's eye from frescoes in the Roman Catacombs to masterworks bearing the illustrious names of Fra Angelico, Van Eyck, Botticelli. The stories of the infant Christ have been heard and sung in a proliferation of liturgy and music from ancient hymns to the musical settings of Bach and medieval and modern Christmas carols. Again, such examples would indicate that Bovon's

hermeneutical quandary is provoked not merely by how these texts have been read, but how they have appeared to the eyes and resonated in the ears down through the centuries.

Biblical scholarship to date has largely left such observations as these to the purview of art, music, and liturgical historians, with little regard for potentially aesthetic aspects of the infancy accounts themselves. And yet, this evidence begs an exegetical question: What is it about the New Testament infancy accounts that has generated such enormous aesthetic response?

My second, more fundamental, point provides an answer: namely that such wide-ranging aesthetic response is itself stimulated by an interest in issues of seeing and hearing within the texts themselves. Here I gesture only briefly at themes which subsequent chapters of this study will more fully develop: Matthew's infancy narrative provides a high concentration of auditory forms of revelation in invoking the voices of prophetic Scripture and the angelic messages of dreams, while repeatedly featuring verbs of sight in the visual revelation of the infant Christ to the magi. Luke's infancy narrative, following from the gospel writer's interest in 'eyewitnesses and ministers of the word' (1:2), contrasts modes of listening in his characterizations of Zechariah and Mary, and records multiple visual encounters with the Child.

Extended reflection on Bovon's exegetical dilemma thus yields two *desiderata* for an exegesis of the New Testament infancy narratives: a critical analysis of concepts of seeing and hearing within the biblical texts, and a preliminary examination of how these concepts have been engaged by readers. These two constitute the essential tasks of the present study.

This study argues that the Matthean and Lukan infancy narratives are notably attentive to the senses of seeing and hearing, specifically in relation to characters' perception of divine revelation and devotion to the infant Christ himself. Furthermore, this

attention to 'aesthetic piety' (see §1.2) *invites* the further reflection of early readers. I demonstrate this phenomenon through three representative case studies of pre-Nicene textual engagement with the New Testament infancy traditions: the apocryphal *Protevangelium of James*' creative reworking and expansion of aesthetic details; Irenaeus of Lyons' apologetic mode of response within a milieu of speculation concerning perception of the infant Christ; and Origen of Alexandria's multifaceted homiletic appeals to involve his congregation in the aesthetic pieties of the infancy narratives. By demonstrating evidence of a dynamic interest in conceptions of seeing and hearing within the earliest literary traditions surrounding the birth of Jesus, this twofold argument provides a textual-historical framework for understanding how the infancy narratives have in subsequent history been the subject of a proliferation of nonliterary reflections in visual art and music. Recursively, it establishes grounds for understanding these later trajectories as themselves generated by aesthetic impulses already present in the biblical texts.

My approach in this study unites traditional historical exegesis with several more recent heuristic insights in the study of visuality, aurality, and reception history. This Introduction defines and locates these insights within my approach under the headings of 'Aesthetic Piety: Defining a Concept' (§1.2), 'The Infancy of Christ: The Textual Focus' (§1.3), and 'Text, Reader, Effect, and Reception' (§1.4), before defining the parameters (§1.5) and plan (§1.6) of the study.

1.2 Aesthetic Piety: Defining a Concept

1.2.1 Αἴσθησις and *Pietas*

In this study, 'aesthetic piety' is a multifaceted concept that requires clarification. Here, I explain my reasoning behind the selection of these two words, 'aesthetic,' and 'piety,' and how I employ them in this study.

It is only in the modern era, since Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's pivotal *Aesthetica* (1750), that the word 'aesthetic' has come to refer to the appreciation of beauty or subjective 'taste' in the philosophy of art.[9] Before Baumgarten, the word retained its etymological roots in the ancient Greek αἴσθησις, along with relatives αἰσθάνομαι and αἰσθητήριον. In antiquity this word group refers, most basically, to 'sense perception,' alongside related notions of spiritual and intellectual perception.[10] Instances of the word group in the New Testament reflect this range of meaning.[11]

In this study, I use the word 'aesthetic' when I am discussing sense perception more broadly than specifically 'visual' or 'aural' forms of perception.[12] For this task I have chosen to prioritize the word 'aesthetic' (both in the title of this study and throughout), rather than 'sensory' or 'sensuous,' for a couple of reasons. Primarily, my use of the term is meant to reflect the ancient meanings of the word, rather than its more narrowly defined modern usage. All of the ancient authors I engage in this study both thought and wrote in Greek, and I am concerned with how they understood and presented concepts of sense perception (αἴσθησις), emphasizing the physical, but also including spiritual and epistemological inflections of that term.[13]

On a secondary level, I employ the word 'aesthetic' because my work places itself in conversation with the field of theological aesthetics[14] – a modern derivative of the 'aesthetics' branch of philosophy begun by Baumgarten, though its topic can be traced back to ancient writers.[15] Theological aesthetics is concerned with questions about God in

[9] Cf. Classen 1993: 60. Scholars have, however, attempted to locate equivalent 'aesthetic' concepts in ancient writings. See, e.g., Bychkov and Sheppard 2010; Porter 2010; Warry 2013; Destrée and Murray 2015.
[10] Cf. Solmsen 1961; Delling 1964; BDAG: 29.
[11] Cf. Luke 9:45; Phil 1:9; Heb 5:14; and further discussion of these verses in §3.1.2; 4.3.1.
[12] Note Aristotle's similar use: οἷον ἢ ψόφον ἢ χρῶμα, τὸ μὲν ἰδὼν οὐ κοινόν, τὸ δ᾽αἰσθόμενος κοινόν ('In the case of sound and color, the word *seeing* is not common to them both, but *perceiving* is'; *Rhetor.* 3.5.1407b.20-21).
[13] See §1.2.5.
[14] Specific dialogue partners include Balthasar 1982-1989; Chrétien 2004; Sigurdson 2016.
[15] E.g. Irenaeus of Lyons (cf. §5.1.1).

relation to human sense perception, beauty, and the arts. My own project lends material for this discussion in its examination of ancient texts which speak of perceiving the infant Jesus, the reality of the Incarnation, and the divine more generally. The implications of this study – how such thoughts are taken up in visual art, music, and liturgy – also resonate with conversations in this field. My use of the word 'aesthetic,' then, unites both ancient and modern meanings of this word.

It is in fact in relation to this last point – that my study is concerned with perception of the divine – that the word 'piety' comes into play. As with my use of 'aesthetic,' with 'piety' I am consciously reflecting an ancient term, the Latin *pietas* (and Greek equivalents, εὐσέβεια and ὁσιότης). These terms reflect ancient concepts of duty and devotion toward one's own family, the state, God and the divine realm more broadly.[16] It is this last, religious inflection that I wish to stress in my use of the term 'piety.' Cicero expresses the concept succinctly: *est enim pietas iustitia adversus deos* ('Piety is justice toward the gods,' *Nat. d.* 1.41.116).[17] In certain interpretive streams of Jewish tradition, piety toward God forms an essential half of two core principles of the Law. Philo, in *Spec.* 2.63, exemplifies this thought when he defines the two foundational principles in the Jewish legal system as 'duty to God, shown through piety and holiness (δι᾽εὐσεβείας καὶ ὁσιότητος), and duty to men, shown through humanity and justice (διὰ φιλανθρωπίας καὶ δικαιοσύνης).' Josephus reports that John the Baptist likewise stressed these two principles in his ministry (*A.J.* 18.116-119), and Jesus, in the synoptic tradition (Mark 12:29-31 and parallels), makes a similar summary statement about love toward God and neighbor as encompassing the whole of the Law.

[16] On *pietas* in Latin literature, cf. Wagenvoort 1980. On ὁσίοτης and εὐσέβεια in classical Greek literature, cf. Peels 2016. On the use of these terms in Jewish and Christian literature, cf. Büchler 1922; Foerster 1971; Wurzburger 2007; Hoklotubbe 2017; Fredriksen 2017: 2-3.

[17] Cicero possibly copies the sentiment of Posidonius: ἔστιν ἡ ὁσίοτης δικαιοσύνη τις πρὸς θεούς (quoted in Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Phys*. 1.124). Cf. Wagenvoort 1980: 9-10.

My use of 'piety,' then, reflects this ancient sense of accomplishing what is justly due to God, out of a love that demands and involves one's whole self – heart, soul, mind, and body, as the gospels have it.

But how are 'aesthetic' and 'piety' to be taken together? It is necessary to acknowledge, first of all, that other theologians have paired these two words in ways both distinct from and similar to my own. For example, Schleiermacher refers to an aesthetic form of piety that is characterized by a receptiveness and passivity in relation to external divine forces, rather than a more active, dynamic piety that cooperates with divine agency.[18] Balthasar critiques Schleiermacher's concept when defining his own work on theological aesthetics, which places beauty in relation to goodness and truth in an explication of the 'glory' of God.[19] For Balthasar, the divine glory which encompasses the three transcendentals is most succinctly summed up by the notion that 'God is love' (1 John 4:8) – a love that both reveals itself to man (especially in the Incarnation), and calls humanity to participate in the drama of its unfolding. Although he does not use the terminology of 'aesthetic piety,' Balthasar's understanding of 'aesthetic' is thus a part of this drama of love between God and man. The present work has more in common with Balthasar's view of how aesthetics contributes to an understanding of divine-human relationships.

However, at a much more fundamental level this study defines 'aesthetic piety' in relation to the two ancient terms discussed above. If αἴσθησις reflects concepts of sense perception, and *pietas* notions of devotion toward God, then 'aesthetic piety' combines these ideas, specifically dealing with how sense perception is involved in piety. In short, 'aesthetic piety' encompasses the bodily practices and spiritual postures, both in

[18] Cf. Schleiermacher 2016 (orig. 1830-1831): 40-44. On this concept in Schleiermacher's work, cf. Roth 2001; Dierken and Scheliha 2017.
[19] Balthasar 2004: 11. Cf. Balthasar 1982-1989.

perceiving God and in devotion to him, which significantly engage the senses. Individual elements of this concept are teased out below.

1.2.2 Visuality: visual cultures, visual practices, visual piety

The visual sense is one of two that I focus on in my study of aesthetic piety. The study of visuality in antiquity is an area that has grown significantly in recent years, and has been approached from a variety of angles. Most influential on my own treatment is Jane Heath's 2013 monograph, *Paul's Visual Piety: The Metamorphosis of the Beholder*, which defines various interlocking terminology that I adapt for use in this study, and models an application of visuality's insights to an exegesis of biblical texts.

For Heath, the term 'visuality' designates an 'interest in the historically and culturally situated viewer and his modes of viewing.'[20] I would add to this, for the purposes of this study, an interest in the theologically situated viewer. As this joint description suggests, a study of visuality distinguishes itself from the more traditional concerns of art history to focus less on images in and of themselves, and more on the viewer and his relationship to the object of vision. It does this through analyzing 'visual cultures' (cultural assumptions that shape how one sees), 'visual practices,' (the concrete ways in which viewers interact with an image), and 'visual piety' (the ways in which sight is specifically engaged in expressions of relationship with – and devotion to – the divine).[21]

It is worth pausing on each of these three 'visual' concepts, to explain how they are understood and employed in the present study. In many ways understanding the 'visual piety' (as a subset of 'aesthetic piety,' see §1.2.1) of early infancy traditions is my primary

[20] Heath 2013: 43. My own work, and Heath's, are indebted to multiple theorists of visuality, including: Panofsky 1939; Panofsky 1955; Mitchell 1986; Foster 1988; Elkins 1996; Mirzoeff 1998; Mirzoeff 1999; Barnard 2001; Dikovitskaya 2006.
[21] See Heath 2013: 38-46 for further discussion of these terminologies.

interest in visual studies. However, this concept is illuminated through recourse to the more general and elemental 'visual cultures' and 'visual practices.'

'Visual cultures' are the images, ideas, and assumptions of one's culture(s) – ethnic, national, political, religious, professional, intellectual etc. – that shape what and how one sees. In this study, I am concerned with those visual cultures in which early infancy traditions arose and operated, especially Jewish and Graeco-Roman visual cultures. This involves, for the different and sometimes overlapping cases of ancient Jews, Greeks, and Romans: examining general ideas about the sense of sight and visual perception (including in relation to other senses);[22] studying the available evidence of material art and archaeology;[23] interrogating relationships between image and text;[24] probing individual literary portrayals of the sense of sight;[25] and examining literary strategies for mediating the visual through text.[26]

'Visual practices' are influenced by surrounding visual cultures; more specifically, they are the concrete actions one performs in interaction with images seen. For example, the act of travel or pilgrimage can be a visual practice insofar as one actively journeys to see a specific site, object or landscape.[27] Heath discusses a number of important Jewish and Graeco-Roman visual cultures and practices, several of which will surface in the present study.[28] I discuss these and other examples more fully as they come into the interpretation and argument of this study.

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[22] See especially Michaelis 1967; Elsner 2007; Avrahami 2012; Butler and Purves 2013; Toner 2014; Squire 2016; Goldman 2016.
[23] I employ the perspectives of multiple art historians and archaeologists on specific topics in this study. Helpful works of a more general nature include Mathews 1993; Finney 1994; Elsner 1998; and Jensen 2000 on Roman and early Christian art; Hachlili 2013 and Leibner and Hezser 2016 on ancient Jewish art.
[24] E.g. Goldhill and Osborne 1994; Elsner 1996; Weissenrieder, Wendt et al. 2005; Spier 2007; Edwards 2013. For Jewish sources, this conversation also touches questions of aniconism; see, e.g., Van der Toorn 1997; Pearce 2013.
[25] E.g. Smith 2005; Hartsock 2008; Neis 2013; Sutskover-Stadler 2013.
[26] E.g. Steiner 2001; Webb 2009; Lovatt and Vout 2013; Sheppard 2014; Whitaker 2015; Wang 2017; Leatherbury 2019.
[27] See, e.g. §2.4.3; §6.3.5; Frank 2000.
[28] Heath 2013: 71-142.

'Visual piety' may be understood within this study as a subset of 'aesthetic piety;' it is thus the engagement of the visual sense in one's devotion to God. Additionally, visual piety may be understood in relation to other visual concepts discussed in this section: it is influenced by certain 'visual cultures,' and is made up of certain 'visual practices.'

The terminology of 'visual piety' was originally employed by David Morgan in *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (1998), and subsequently taken up by Heath in her study of Pauline literature. In important ways my use of the terminology differs from Morgan's. He approaches the study of visual piety primarily through the lens of a cultural historian, whereas I study the concept primarily through a theologian's lens. By this I mean that my focus is on what this concept can tell us about the theology of a text – the way in which it orients a reader to the divine – rather than its surrounding culture (though its culture sometimes contributes to its theology). Furthermore, Morgan distinguishes between 'visual piety' on the popular level, and 'aesthetic contemplation,' which occurs on a higher, more narrow plane of artistic critique and disinterestedness.[29] His insights are commendably nuanced in this regard (e.g. he understands that 'visual piety' can be contemplative[30]); however, the present study resists terminologically separating 'visual piety' from the word 'aesthetic' in this way. Rather, 'aesthetic piety' (and its subset, 'visual piety'), as it is understood in this study, is something that is practiced by individuals of diverse strata of society – from shepherds to magi, Temple priests to pregnant women, a bishop theologian in Lyons to the laity of Caesarea, and more. It is something that is 'high' and contemplative, in that it is directed

[29] See Morgan 1998: 29-34 *et passim*.
[30] Morgan 1998: 31.

toward God himself; but it is also something that can be accomplished by all people, inasmuch as it involves the sense perceptions (αἰσθήσεις) basic to human experience.[31]

1.2.3 Aurality: aural cultures, aural practices, aural piety

The other perceptual faculty that I limit my attention to in this study is the aural, or auditory, sense.[32] As with visuality, the study of aurality in ancient texts has been approached from multiple perspectives. My own understanding is largely indebted to Carol Harrison's 2013 monograph on *The Art of Listening in the Early Church*, which brings a sense of balance to recent fascination with the visual in biblical and early Christian studies. Harrison draws our attention to the pervasiveness of aurality (the 'other side' of orality) in ancient culture generally, but more specifically to the high value early Christians placed on the cultivation of listening to the voice of God in the reading aloud of Scripture, preaching, liturgy, and prayer. Harrison argues that such cultivation of one's aural sense may properly be called an 'art' in that it is an opening up of oneself to the transcendent through regular and repetitive practice.[33]

My understanding and employment of 'aural' terminologies in this study flows from the discussion of aesthetic piety in §1.2.1, and mirrors the discussion of visuality in §1.2.2. Here, the study of 'aurality' indicates an interest in the historically, culturally, and theologically situated listener and her modes of hearing.[34] Importantly, this interest may be distinguished from recent attention to the 'soundscape,' insofar as that concept entails an

[31] I also do not mean to exclude the sensory disabled from the practice of 'aesthetic piety', although this study does not deal specifically with their experience (though cf. §3.2.2, 4). For further work in this regard, see, e.g., Lawrence 2013.
[32] I use 'aural' and 'auditory' interchangeably.
[33] See Harrison 2013: 15-22, 229-269 *et passim*.
[34] My work is indebted to multiple theorists of aurality, especially Ihde 1976; Corradi Fiumara 1990; Street 2015.

exclusive focus on sound itself as the object of study, rather than on listening persons and their engagement with sound or voice.[35]

'Aural cultures' are the ideas and assumptions of one's culture(s) that shape what and how one hears.[36] For the present study and its necessary attention to Jewish and Graeco-Roman cultures, this involves, similarly as above: examining ancient ideas about the sense of hearing and auditory perception (including in relation to other senses);[37] studying the available evidence of ancient music, hymnody, and liturgy;[38] considering aural/oral performances of texts;[39] probing individual literary portrayals of the sense of hearing;[40] and examining literary strategies for mediating the aural through text.[41]

'Aural practices' are influenced by surrounding aural cultures; more specifically, they are the concrete actions one performs in interaction with sounds or voices heard. For example, dancing could be considered an aural practice, as could liturgical movements that are cued, e.g., by the sound of bells or trumpets. Singing and musicmaking are aural practices insofar as they require inner listening, or listening within a group. More contemplative practices of attentive silence, storing what is heard in the memory, and

[35] This concept was popularized by R. Murray Schafer (Schafer 1993; Schafer 2003), who attributes the term to Southworth 1969. Recent applications to the study of ancient texts include Lawrence 2011; Gurd 2013; Gurd 2016; Graybill 2016.
[36] Cf. Harrison 2013: 23-83 for an introduction to the 'auditory culture' out of which Christianity arose.
[37] See especially Kittel 1964; Horst 1967; Betz 1974; Avrahami 2012; Butler and Purves 2013; Toner 2014.
[38] I employ the perspectives of multiple music and liturgical historians on specific topics in this study. More general introductions to ancient Greek musical practices include West 1992; Murray and Wilson 2004. On ancient Jewish musical practices cf. Werner 1959; Braun 2002; Smith 2011. On early Christian musical practices cf. Werner 1959; McKinnon 1987; Foley 1992; Smith 2011; Harrison 2019. Helpful anthologies and analyses of important hymnic and poetic corpora include Mearns 1914; Rahlfs 1931; Nitzan 1994; McGuckin 1995; Horst and Newman 2008; Lieber 2010; Cosgrove 2011; Gordley 2011; Walsh and Husch 2012; Harl 2014; Lieber 2018; Mihálykó 2019.
[39] E.g. Shiell 2004; Maxwell 2010; Le Donne and Thatcher 2011; Iversen 2015.
[40] E.g. Kalimi 2010; Dinkler 2013.
[41] Especially Butler 2015; MacKendrick 2016. To a certain extent, applications of the 'soundscape' concept (Lawrence 2011; Gurd 2013; Gurd 2016; Graybill 2016) also contribute to this discussion, though note the caveat above.

engaging in the listening 'conversation' of prayer, may also be considered under this heading.[42]

'Aural piety' may be understood within this study as another subset of 'aesthetic piety' (see §1.2.1); it is thus the engagement of the auditory sense in one's devotion to God. Additionally, aural piety is influenced by certain 'aural cultures,' and is made up of certain 'aural practices.'

A final note concerns the relationship between orality and aurality. We will find that voice and speech are often, and naturally, bound up with aurality in the ancient texts that we examine.[43] Aristotle considered orality to be a facet of aurality, considering the concept of 'voice' within his treatment of the sense of hearing and its object, sound (*De anima* 419b-421a): 'the voice is the sound produced by a creature possessing a soul.'[44] In biblical Hebrew texts, Avrahami identifies speech as a separate sense alongside hearing, while demonstrating a 'powerful associative link' between them.[45] In our study, the voices of prophets, angels, and the divine, etc. are often the objects of aural piety; moreover, orality is often the dynamic extension and expression *of* aural piety.

1.2.4 Visual and Aural Together

It is by no means immediately clear that visuality and aurality should be treated side by side. There certainly exist divisions between the two spheres in academic contexts, as comparison of Heath's and Harrison's rhetoric in their respective works illustrates. Both published in the same year by Oxford University Press, the two are fitting interlocutors. Heath states, regarding her discipline: 'Ears to hear and eyes to see were to be the mark of

[42] See Harrison 2013: 87-269 for further discussion of what I would call 'aural practices' in early Christianity.
[43] E.g. §2.2; §3.2; §6.3.3.
[44] Aristotle, *De anima* 420b (cf. 419b-421a). Trans. Hett 1957: 115.
[45] Cf. Avrahami 2012: 883-93, 109, 117-118 *et passim*.

a faithful, understanding Israel and of believers in Jesus, but Biblical Studies seems to have focused primarily on its ears.'[46] She details the history of this 'disciplinary blind spot,' tracing a word-image dichotomy in biblical scholarship since the Reformation and arguing that, for the most part, modern biblical scholars have focused on words.[47] On the other side of this issue, Harrison emphasizes a difference in the ordering of the senses at distinct periods of history, arguing that while the world of early Christianity prioritized auditory culture, later Western thought has prioritized visual culture – including written texts as opposed to oral speech.[48] This has led, she contends, to a neglect of attention to aurality. Thus, while Heath's work is an endeavor to make biblical and early Christian scholars more aware of the visual, Harrison tries to attune their ears to the aural.

As apt as both of these concerns may be, there are several good reasons for bringing visuality and aurality together in the present research. The primary reason is that their separation may hinder a more accurate interpretation of texts in which seeing and hearing actively interact, as is often the case in ancient Jewish and early Christian literature. The texts invoked by Heath's statement above demonstrate this visual-aural relationship clearly, as do narratives of Sinaitic theophany, prophetic and apostolic visions, Transfiguration, heavenly liturgies, and more. In all of these cases, images intermingle with sounds and voices in intricate ways, and the piety(ies) of listening and seeing often overlap.[49] In her study of the senses in the Hebrew Bible, Avrahami noted that the visual and aural senses were the two most prioritized, and the most commonly paired.[50] More pertinently for the present study, these two senses also strongly interact in

[46] Heath 2013: 13. See, e.g., Deut 29:4; 2 Kgs 19:16; Job 13:1; Isa 6:10; 32:3; Jer 5:21; Ezek 12:2; 40:4; 44:5; Matt 13:13-17 and parallels; Mark 8:18; Acts 28:27; Rom 11:8; 1 John 1:1, 3.
[47] Heath 2013: 13-37.
[48] Harrison 2013: 1-14, 26-30.
[49] See, e.g., the findings of Kraus 1972; Aitken 1993; Carasik 1999; Boustan 2004; Schimanowski 2004; Fraade 2008; Savran 2009; Miller 2010; Ryan 2012; Wilson 2016.
[50] Avrahami 2012: esp. 69-74, 157-163.

the infancy literature – as Luke's line about the shepherds, that they praised God for 'all that they had heard and seen' (2:20), reflects simply and explicitly.

This observation about the biblical literature is further contextualized by a concept that has captivated the academy recently, and which has been particularly helpful in interpreting ancient sources – that is, the concept of *synaesthesia* (συναίσθησις).[51] We are increasingly finding that ancients understood the senses as intricately interwoven – not only existing side by side but even blending into one another, i.e. in 'seeing a sound' or 'tasting a smell,' etc. This concept will continue to be useful in this study's examination of seeing and hearing in infancy traditions.

Even Heath's and Harrison's employment of similar textual sources illustrates the complex dynamics between seeing and hearing in ancient experience. Both, for example, draw from ancient rhetoricians in order to understand the ancient context of 'visual culture' and 'aural culture,' respectively. However, they focus on different aspects of ancient rhetorical techniques: Heath emphasizes the verbal *images* these rhetoricians were taught to construct in their speeches,[52] while Harrison highlights the fact that such images were conveyed through the audience's *ears*, creating 'literate listeners' who were then able to imagine, remember, and later improvise upon the images conveyed.[53] Both scholars end up talking about a relationship between seeing and hearing within ancient experience.

The cover of Harrison's book provides yet another example of this synaesthetic reality, with connections to my own topic. It features a third-century fresco at the Catacombs of Priscilla in Rome, which portrays a seated Mary facing the angel Gabriel, who has raised his arm as if in a gesture of speaking.[54] This image of the Annunciation has

[51] See especially Butler and Purves 2013. Other examples in the academy more broadly include Leppert 1993; Shephard and Leonard 2013; Boynton and Reilly 2015.
[52] Heath 2013: 87-92.
[53] Harrison 2013: 37-60.
[54] On this image, cf. Giuliani 2016: 31-33.

presumably been chosen in order to illustrate 'the art of listening,' reflecting Harrison's title. And yet it depicts Mary not only listening to Gabriel but also facing (thus viewing) him; moreover, the observer of the image sees their conversation, rather than hears it. This image thus offers a reflection on the complexities of the relationship between seeing and hearing – complexities that this study seeks to understand more fully.

Inevitably, the bringing together of visuality and aurality begs the question of why other senses are not included in this study. Is it legitimate to isolate seeing and hearing? Here I would further underline the point, stated above, that biblical traditions prioritize the visual and aural senses in descriptions of human perception of the divine. More specifically, however, my decision to focus on these two senses follows from a reading of the New Testament infancy narratives themselves. Whereas references to hearing and sight feature frequently in these accounts, the senses of smell, taste, or touch surface hardly or not at all. The haptic sense is explicitly invoked once, when Simeon takes the infant Christ into his arms (Luke 2:28); and the olfactory sense is possibly implicit in the magi's gifts of frankincense and myrrh (Matt 2:11), or in Zechariah's incense offering (Luke 1:9-11). The sense of taste, while alluded to in Gabriel's prophecy about John (Luke 1:15), is likewise not central. While later infancy traditions sometimes take up these senses more prominently,[55] this study remains focused on the aesthetic elements more clearly pertinent to the accounts in Matthew and Luke.

1.2.5 Senses of Body, Mind, and Spirit

The last element in defining the concept of 'aesthetic piety' for the present study was already implicit in our discussion of the ancient understanding of αἴσθησις (§1.2.1) –

[55] E.g. *Questions of Bartholomew* 2.15-21, which describes the Annunciation with Eucharistic imagery. Cf. Beeston 1975.

that this word encompassed physical, intellectual, and spiritual notions of sense perception. In this study, I examine two senses – visual and aural – in three different dimensions of the human person: the physical organs themselves (eyes and ears), the mind, and the spirit.

Admittedly, these three classes are often difficult to separate. For example, as Harrison puts it: 'Listening is a matter for both the physical body and the mind.'[56] She means that in the same physiological act, that which is heard by the ears must be captured by the mind for inspection and interpretation. Even more importantly for her own study, she seeks to 'examine listening as both sense perception and spiritual perception: hearing with the ears and listening to God's presence in wordless silence with the heart and mind.'[57] Here she takes note of two different types of listening, which can occur alongside one another, or mutually reinforce one another.

At the same time, these different classes have sometimes been pitted against one another historically. For example, Heath writes of a Platonizing approach to inward, spiritual sight which views this dimension as 'transcending' and even 'denigrating' physical sight.[58] Multiple ancient Christian writers have seemed to employ this understanding – including one who is prominent in the present study, Origen of Alexandria.[59]

Such associations and disassociations between classes of sense perception will be important to clarify in individual texts throughout this study. I persist in examining these different dimensions because I think that my source materials call for an integrative understanding of sense perception. For now, a few introductory comments about each class individually and in relation to each other will be useful.

[56] Harrison 2013: 15.
[57] Harrison 2013: 13.
[58] Heath 2013: 15-19.
[59] Cf. Ch. 6 for my critique of this commonly held binary in Origen's work.

Most basically, this study focuses on the physical senses. A crucial facet of my argument is that Matthew and Luke are each interested in the physical seeing and hearing of their characters. These physical encounters with the infant Christ are important in a the gospel writers' and later theologians' insistence on the physical reality of the Incarnation. Moreover, the physical senses form a basis to which both mental and spiritual senses are analogized.

The mind and its connections to sense perception are also treated in this study, in three main ways. Firstly, my study engages with ancient concepts of vivid imagination. In particular, I employ the notion of ἐνάργεια ('vividness') – a classical rhetorical device to help an audience/reader see or hear vividly in their mind – in explaining how several texts pose an 'aesthetic invitation' to their readers (see further §1.4.1; §1.6).[60] While this device is often related to the visual, ancients also had related concepts of bringing the multi-textured sonorities of voices to sound in the mind of readers.[61] Secondly, my discussion considers an epistemological facet of sense perception, in which 'knowing' is attained through 'seeing' or 'hearing.'[62] And thirdly, the concept of memory plays a role in my study, insofar as it stores and retains images and voices perceived.[63] This pertains to characters who utilize memory in this way; and to readers, for whom the visual or aural imagination might be ignited through memory.

Finally, I examine various spiritual notions of sense perception in this study.[64] This class is perhaps the most difficult to define, but two principles help to guide identifications of a 'spiritual' sense.[65] The first is that the experience of a spiritual sense is intrinsically

[60] On the imagination in antiquity, see Fishbane 1998; Sheppard 2014; Mroczek 2016. On ἐνάργεια and its applications, see Zanker 1981; Heath 2009; Steiner 2001; Webb 2009; Whitaker 2015; Nassauer 2016; Wang 2017.
[61] See, e.g., Butler 2015.
[62] See, e.g., §3.1.2; and further discussion in Alston 1991 on epistemology and sense perception in religious experience.
[63] See Carruthers 2008; Street 2015.
[64] On the spiritual senses, see especially Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2011.
[65] See further discussion of both in §6.1.

related – analogous – to the experience of a physical sense, and is not merely metaphorical. The second is that this sense is oriented to an immaterial, spiritual presence, especially God. It is not a vague feeling, but a directed turning, an intentional opening, of the soul's 'eyes' or 'ears' toward the divine. Sometimes this sense is called 'theological' – and it is precisely this orientation toward God that I think is meant by that term.

1.3 The Infancy of Christ: The Textual Focus

The texts that this study will illuminate through the concept of aesthetic piety are all concerned with the infancy of Christ. In particular, I consider the accounts of the evangelists Matthew and Luke, as well as their early reception in three representative case studies. This section introduces this textual focus and explains why the concept of aesthetic piety is particularly salient for its interpretation.

1.3.1 Infancy 'narratives,' 'gospels,' and 'traditions': A note on terminology

A recent conversation has arisen over terminology. Should we continue to call Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2 'infancy narratives,' as opposed to the apocryphal 'infancy gospels' of, e.g., James and Thomas?[66] This question often reflects a deeper concern about how to understand the relationship between canonical (or pre-canonical) texts and non-canonical texts in the early Christian period. Many wish to move beyond a paradigm which would strongly demarcate between the New Testament infancy narratives and apocryphal infancy gospels, with the aim of illuminating a more dynamic interaction between the two hitherto separate categories.[67]

[66] 'Infancy narrative' has become common in Anglophone scholarship, especially since Brown 1993 (orig. 1977); use of the German term *Kindheitsgeschichte* to identify Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2 can be traced back at least to Nebe 1893.
[67] See, e.g., Clivaz, Dettwiler et al. 2011.

In this study, I retain the traditional terminological distinctions for two reasons. Most basically, I think that employing both 'narratives' and 'gospels' helpfully differentiates between two types of texts. The New Testament infancy narratives are not self-contained texts like the infancy gospels of James or Thomas (which do not include the adult ministry, passion, and resurrection of Jesus), but exist within larger gospels that do include those narrative components of Jesus' life.[68]

With regard to the hermeneutical issue, I agree with the assessment that in this period of early Christian history, before any formally defined 'canon,' infancy traditions which we would now term 'canonical' or 'apocryphal' existed side by side in a complex milieu of oral and literary interrelationships. However, I also wish to hold this understanding of fluidity in balance with the acknowledgment that even in these earlier centuries one can find identifications of the fourfold gospel as uniquely authoritative (e.g. in the writings of both Irenaeus and Origen, two prominent figures in this study), and evidence of its uniquely pervasive textual transmission.[69] This acknowledgment might seem to be reflected in my terminological usage; more deeply, however, it holds implications for my approach to the 'effect' and 'reception' of biblical texts (see further in §1.4).

Alongside the distinction between infancy 'narratives' and 'gospels,' I also employ the terminology of 'traditions,' which is reflected in this study's title. This term encompasses a wider and more fluid range of elements, and is thus helpful in describing the complex nature of the period. Meaning literally to 'hand over' or 'transmit,' it encompasses the sources the gospel writers may have drawn upon to compose their texts,

[68] I assume the unity of both gospels (cf. Brown 1993: 48-50, 239-250). On the history of 'gospel' terminology with respect to the NT, as well as the awkwardness of genre classifications for many apocryphal texts, cf. Bockmuehl 2017: 1-53.
[69] Cf. Irenaeus, *Haer*. 3.11.8; Origen, *Hom. Luc*. 1.2. See further discussion in Bockmuehl 2017: 1-53 *et passim*.

and it stretches beyond the gospels to the diverse 'afterlives' of their texts and to reflection on Jesus' infancy more broadly.[70] One can refer to a distinctly Matthean or Lukan 'tradition' (e.g. the Bethlehem star, or the Bethlehem manger, respectively), as well as to 'traditions' that both share (e.g. Mary's virginal conception of Jesus through the Holy Spirit), or that appear in neither account but become prominent in early Christian reflection (e.g. that the birth happened in a cave). Traditional elements can be traced across textual and other modes of reception, where they are combined and expanded in new and diverse interpretive trajectories.

1.3.2 Infancy Traditions and Aesthetic Piety

Traditions about the human origins of Christ appear only sparsely in many of the earliest Christian writings. While certain non-narrative conceptions of Christ's birth resonate throughout the New Testament – such as his Davidic descent, and his manifestation of God in flesh – the only two gospels which narrate his birth and infancy are those of Matthew and Luke.[71]

As many have observed, the Matthean and Lukan traditions developed within cultural contexts that already contained numerous infancy and childhood stories of notable figures. The Hebrew Bible records the annunciations and births of multiple sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;[72] as well as childhood scenes from the lives of the prophets Moses (Exod 2:1-10) and Samuel (1 Samuel 1-3). In particular, the infancy and childhood of Moses received attention in Second Temple, early rabbinic, and early Christian

[70] My use of this terminology is indebted to the work of James Kugel and Hindy Najman, among others (see, e.g., Kugel 1990; Kugel 1998; Najman 2012).
[71] See Bockmuehl and Kozitza 2020 for further discussion of non-narrative conceptions of Christ's birth across NT writings. Cf. also Sebothoma 1994.
[72] Cf. Gen 15:1-18:15; 21:1-21; 22:1-18; 25:19-26; 30:1-24; 35:16-18.

interpretation.[73] In addition to this Jewish context, Greeks and Romans also transmitted stories of child gods and heroes.[74] A notable example is Virgil's fourth eclogue; the poem's nameless child figure attracted much speculation in both classical and Christian antiquity.[75] Recently, such ancient accounts of child heroes have been read against a wider backdrop of perceptions of children more generally.[76]

I mention this contextual framework for the New Testament infancy narratives because to some extent, it helps us to understand why these traditions are key *loci* for examining the notion of aesthetic piety in early Christianity. Many of the motifs we will consider in our analysis of the infancy narratives (e.g. angelic appearances to announce a birth; dreams foretelling birth; heavenly phenomena; visual descriptions of children themselves; etc.) are shared by other similar accounts in surrounding cultures. Spectacular sights and voices are not uncommon among these ancient stories of the birth and infancy of illustrious figures, and specific parallels will be noted as they become relevant to our discussion.

What perhaps most distinguishes the New Testament infancy narratives from many other birth and infancy accounts is the early Christian claim that this infant was both the Son of God (and not the son of a god in the pantheon, but of the one God of the Jews), *and* that he was the son of Mary, a human descendant of David. This combination proved controversial for many, as our discussion of Irenaeus will show,[77] but it also provided fertile ground for aesthetic piety.

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[73] See, e.g., Philo, *Mos*. 1.2-5; Josephus, *A.J*. 2.205-237; Ezekiel the Tragedian, *Exagoge*; Acts 7:20; Heb 11:23; *Exod. Rab*. 2. Cf. discussion in Bloch 1955: 102-118; Perrot 1967; Loader 2011.
[74] See, e.g., Pache 2004 on child heroes in Greek mythology. Historians such as Herodotus, Plutarch, and Suetonius recorded childhood scenes from the lives of great men; 'birth' was a common *topos* in rhetorical encomia. Justin Martyr discusses similarities between the Christian story of Jesus' birth, and the birth of the god Perseus; cf. *1 Apol*. 21-22, 54; *Dial*. 67-70.
[75] See further Bourne 1916; Houghton 2018.
[76] See, e.g., Oepke 1967; Kessler 2009; Grubbs and Parkin 2013; Aasgaard, Horn et al. 2017; Sivan 2018; Betsworth and Parker 2019.
[77] Cf. Ch. 5.

Nevertheless, critical biblical scholarship on the infancy narratives has largely neglected sustained analysis of visuality or aurality. Recent work on these texts has significantly derived from Brown's landmark commentary, originally published in 1977.[78] Since Brown, scholarship has moved in several new directions;[79] however, aesthetic issues have not been especially prominent. The exceptions that exist do not cover the breadth of the present study's investigation. The most important of these is Nassauer's recent German monograph, which analyzes the visuality of Luke's infancy narrative, but does not study Matthew 1-2 or the narratives' early reception.[80] Dinkler has also analyzed the aural/oral implications of the silencing of Zechariah within her treatment of speech and silence in Luke.[81] Less significantly, various articles have examined specific visual or aural motifs;[82] and Matthean or Lukan commentaries have included brief discussions of the reception of infancy episodes in art or music.[83] The present study, however, offers to biblical scholarship the first sustained analysis of visual and aural piety in both the exegesis and early reception of the infancy narratives.

A final clarification is worth mentioning. One could ask why the infancy of Christ has been selected as the textual focus of a study of aesthetic piety, rather than other aesthetically-charged gospel scenes such as the Transfiguration, or the Passion and Resurrection. My focus on infancy traditions, and my argument about their remarkable attentiveness to aesthetic issues, is not meant to prohibit other biblical texts from a similar analysis. Rather, my argument asserts only that aesthetic piety features in a uniquely prominent, though not exclusive, way in the infancy traditions.

[78] Notable previous works that dealt with these texts include Norden 1924; Bornhäuser 1930; Laurentin 1957; Daniélou 1963.
[79] See, for example, the essay collections of Corley 2009; Clivaz, Dettwiler et al. 2011.
[80] Cf. Nassauer 2016.
[81] Cf. Dinkler 2013: 50-84 (esp. 67-83).
[82] E.g. O'Kane 2005; Kuhn 2013.
[83] E.g. Luz 2007; Jeffrey 2012: 17-51; Parsons 2015: 37, 43, 50-52 (cf. Hornick and Parsons 2003).

1.4 Text, Reader, Effect, and Reception

Having established the conceptual framework of aesthetic piety (§1.2), and further defined this study's textual focus (§1.3), this section looks at a further cluster of issues that relate to both previous sections. Here, I clarify the ways in which this study engages issues of textuality and reception.

1.4.1 Textuality and Sense Perception in Antiquity

In using the concept of aesthetic piety to illuminate early Christian infancy traditions, this study also must negotiate the *textual* nature of the material under examination. An understanding of textuality proves particularly crucial for this study's interest in the earliest *readers* of the New Testament infancy narratives (see further in §1.4.2). Before getting to issues of effect and reception, however, we must first ask how texts relate more fundamentally to the senses of seeing and hearing. Here I explain several construals of the relationship between textuality and sense perception that are widely used throughout this study. For narrative texts such as Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2, these can be grouped under two major headings: sense perceptions of characters within the text; and sense perceptions of readers outside the text.

Most straightforwardly, narrative texts can portray sense perceptions of characters. Narratives can draw attention to characters' eyes or ears; contain information about what and how they perceive; and so on. But texts can also engage the senses of readers, and this requires more careful parsing.

There are, of course, the ways in which readers physically encounter the words of a text: physically seeing words on a page, or hearing a text read aloud. In the ancient world, where reading was hardly ever a private activity, these activities were often interrelated, as is illustrated by the following excerpt from *Sifre Deuteronomy* 161:

> ‘Let it [the Torah scroll] be with him and let him read in it all his life…so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God’ (Deut 17:19): This teaches that the sight [of it] leads to reading [*miqra*], reading leads to translation [*targum*], translation leads to oral teaching [*mishnah*], oral teaching leads to dialectical study [*talmud*], dialectical study leads to performance [*ma’aseh*], performance leads to reverence [of God].[84]

This rabbinic teaching operates with the understanding that a man’s sight of words in a scroll inevitably leads to various oral/aural activities: proclamation, teaching, and dialogue. Moreover, there is an aesthetic piety to this process; the seeing/speaking/hearing of texts leads ultimately to practicing the words of Scripture and thus reverencing God.

Here it is necessary to point out that not many people who encountered texts in antiquity were able to decipher visually the words of texts, as the rabbis could. Due to lacks both in literacy and in access to texts, most would hear a text in a public setting, read aloud. Moreover, even private reading was often spoken aloud, so that the reader both saw and heard the words he was speaking.[85]

Because the act of ‘reading’ was predominantly associated with ‘hearing,’ it was standard to use ἀκούω and ἀναγιγνώσκω interchangeably. An example is Plutarch’s ‘On Reading the Poets’ (Πῶς δεῖ τὸν νέον ποιημάτων ἀκούειν); throughout this work, perception through reading is consistently referred to in terms of ἀκοή and ὦτα.[86] Conversely, ancient authors often tried to capture the effect of a voice in their texts, making them more adaptable to an oral mode. Butler compares Edison’s phonograph to a phenomenon he observes in much ancient Greek and Latin literature, namely that it endeavors to ‘write (γράφειν) the voice (φωνή).’[87] For the ancients, texts were thus understood as mediators between human bodies who spoke and listened.

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[84] Trans. Finkelstein 1969: 212.
[85] See especially Gamble 1995 on practices of reading in antiquity.
[86] For more discussion of this phenomenon and many more ancient examples cf. Balogh 1927: 207; Hendrickson 1929: 188-191; Boomershine 1987; Achtemeier 1990: 15-16; Shiell 2004: 107; and especially Schenkeveld 1992, who argues that ἤκουσα…λέγοντος ‘is the proper Greek idiom for ‘I have read in (e.g.) Plato that…’, at least from the end of the Hellenistic period onwards’ (129).
[87] Cf. Butler 2015. Cf. also Achtemeier 1990; Porter 2010: 308-364; MacKendrick 2016.

That said, the aurality of public reading was sometimes accompanied by visual gestures that would perform the text.[88] This is somewhat akin to the phenomenon of images illustrating written texts, for example in illuminated Bibles that begin to appear in a later period: in both cases, visual images serve to interpret and illustrate words.

In addition to these ways of physically encountering texts with eyes or ears, texts can invite readers to 'see' and 'hear' alongside characters, appealing to mental imagination. We have already mentioned the rhetorical device ἐνάργεια (cf. §1.2.5), which has this 'mind's eye' as its primary aim. This will be discussed more thoroughly later in our study.[89] Butler's 'written voice' has a similar effect; through capturing different textures of sounds and voices, a text can ignite the aural imagination of listeners.

We will return to these preliminary observations about textuality and sense perception throughout this study, and further nuance them for specific cases. We turn now to focus on a wider set of issues concerning the relationship between texts and readers.

1.4.2 The Effect and Reception of Biblical Texts

The last several decades of biblical research have seen an increasing growth in the study of the Bible's 'history of effects' (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) or 'reception history' (*Rezeptionsgeschichte*). No longer is this the 'neglected field' lamented by Räisänen in 1992,[90] nor the 'largely *terra incognita*' observed by Bockmuehl in 1995.[91] Aided by the work of these scholars and others, in recent years biblical scholarship has seen a rise in academic literature dedicated to this approach.[92] Nevertheless, and unsurprisingly given

[88] See, e.g., Shiell 2004.
[89] Cf. §3.1.2.
[90] Räisänen 1992: 303.
[91] Bockmuehl 1995: 60. Cf. also Bockmuehl 2006.
[92] Note, e.g., De Gruyter's recent contributions to this field, with its *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*; two series, both *Handbooks* and *Studies of the Bible and its Reception*; and the *Journal of the Bible and its Reception*.

the longevity and range of the Bible's influence in a plurality of societal contexts, there remain more avenues for investigation. The infancy narratives' early reception – and in particular, the early reception of their visual and aural elements – is one of them. Here I briefly introduce the theoretical roots of this approach in the respective works of Gadamer and Jauss,[93] and explain how I use both the terminology and hermeneutical aims of 'effect' and 'reception' in this study.

The inquiry into *Wirkungsgeschichte* ('history of effects'), as originally conceived by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method* in 1960, is an open-ended hermeneutical conversation between a text and its historically-distanced interpreter.[94] This conversation probes the textures of a text's interpretation in history, textures which have themselves contributed to shaping the view of the interpreter. The hermeneutical dialogue thus encompasses a host of other dialogues: in order to unveil the historical textures of a particular text, the interpreter must engage in a posture of listening to multiple conversations between the primary text and its dialogue partners throughout history.[95] These historical dialogue partners, the 'effects' of the text, take diverse forms and use the text in diverse ways – including those which go beyond, or even contrary to, what we might call the original author's intent.[96] Gadamer does not discount the value of authorial intent in the construction of meaning, but he does think that a text's dialogue partners throughout its historical tradition cooperate alongside the meaning an author is trying to convey. After all, the ideal conversation always entails both listening and response; thus 'a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something,'[97] but he is also

[93] For further study of the distinctions and overlaps between Gadamer and Jauss, cf. Knight 2010; Evans 2014.
[94] Cf. Gadamer 2013: 278-318 *et passim*. In addition to the conversation metaphor, Gadamer also describes his approach as a 'fusion of horizons' (*Horizontverschmelzung*).
[95] Nicholls 2008 puts this idea slightly differently when she speaks of a 'three-way conversation between the 'effect', the present-day reader and the text (5).
[96] Cf. Gadamer 2013: 307; Bockmuehl 1995: 62-63.
[97] Gadamer 2013: 282.

himself 'participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated.'[98]

Gadamer's principles influenced the work of his student, Hans Robert Jauss, whose description of *Rezeptionsgeschichte* ('reception history') developed Gadamer's ideas into a more concrete methodology, a seven-step process for navigating between texts and historical stages of readers.[99] Of particular significance for the present study is Jauss's point that reconstructing a text's reception among its *earliest* readers helps to 'pose questions that the text gave an answer to.'[100] This suggests that examination of the earliest reception of a text can illuminate the text's own meaning and intent, specifically because of the cultural proximity between a text and its earliest readers.

As this discussion shows, there are deep continuities between Gadamer and Jauss, both of whom 'insist on a dialectic, a bi-directional operation between text and reader, neither of which is passive to the impulses of the other.'[101] However, the immediate connotations of the terms 'effect' and 'reception' have sometimes seemed to emphasize different types of textual motion: the influence that a text exerts upon its readers, or the influence of readerly interpretation upon a text's meaning. This becomes an issue of specific concern among biblical scholars, because of Scripture's uniquely authoritative place in Christian communities. For example Luz, in his commentary on Matthew, prefers Gadamer's term 'because *Rezeptionsgeschichte* connotes for me primarily the people who receive the text, while *Wirkungsgeschichte* suggests for me the effective power of the texts themselves.'[102] Others favor the term 'reception,' which seems to allow for more subjectivity of readers in early biblical interpretation and canon formation. The

[98] Gadamer 2013: 302.
[99] Jauss 1982: 20-45. Cf. Evans 2014: 10-13.
[100] Jauss 1982: 28.
[101] Evans 2014: 15.
[102] Luz 2007: 61.

terminology of 'reception history' has gained ascendancy in more recent biblical scholarship utilizing this approach.[103]

However, I think that to distinguish too sharply between 'effect' and 'reception' in this way is to overlook the text-reader dialectic that is present in the theories of both Gadamer and Jauss. In this study I therefore give attention to both aspects. We have already discussed the historical basis for taking Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2 as starting points because of their early authoritative influence as pre-canonical Scriptural texts (cf. §1.3.1). Part I of the study focuses on the ways in which these texts actively effect, or invite, response to their respective visual and aural elements; while Part II examines three case studies of dynamic interaction with those aesthetic elements (cf. §1.6 for a more detailed plan of the study).

Two additional points clarify my use of this approach. Firstly, in addition to the *Geschichte* of 'reception' and 'effect,' German scholarship has sometimes used the terminology of *Rezeptionsästhetik*[104]or, less commonly, *Wirkungsästhetik*.[105] These terms acknowledge that there is an 'aesthetic' element of textual effect and reception – an observation which certainly pertains to the present study. However, those who employ these terms focus more on a reader's subjective tastes and perception of beauty (a modern understanding of 'aesthetics'), rather than closely studying the dynamics of the senses (αἰσθήσεις) within texts and at play in their interpretation.[106]

Secondly, my use of a reception-historical approach does not exclude more traditional tools of historical-critical exegesis, which are utilized in Part I where they are relevant to the explication of aesthetic piety. In agreement with Hurtado,[107] I view the

[103] See, e.g., England and Lyons 2015.
[104] See, e.g., Jauss 1982, and multiple essays in Warning 1994.
[105] E.g. Turk 1976.
[106] Cf. §1.2.1 on my use of the term 'aesthetic.'
[107] Cf. Hurtado 2012: 361-362. Though see also a critique of Hurtado's position in Harding 2015.

reception-historical approach as a tool useful for biblical scholarship when it serves the primary aim of understanding the biblical texts themselves, within their historical context.

1.5 The Parameters of this Study: The Selection of Case Studies

I have used several criteria for the selection of representative case studies in the infancy narratives' early reception history. Parameters must inevitably be drawn in any study, but this is perhaps especially pertinent in reception-historical studies, which can too easily offer a mere catalog of 'effects' without any clear exegetical pay dirt.[108] Several key chronological and material limits to this study's investigation may already be inferred from the foregoing sections; here I provide more explicit rationale behind these decisions.

The first criterion is chronological. I have chosen to limit the range of my examination of infancy traditions to the period before the first major definition of doctrine on the Incarnation, which occurs at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. This historical marker has fruitfully been used by other scholars in reception-historical study,[109] and sets a clear boundary around the earliest period of the New Testament infancy narratives' reception, where the 'horizons' of readership are not so historically distant from those contemporaneous to the production of the texts themselves (cf. §1.4.2).

A second criterion follows necessarily from the first. Because the historical period I have chosen contains minimal reception of the infancy narratives in material art – and indeed, minimal evidence of early Christian art in general – I focus primarily on literary evidence. This constraint proves immensely generative, however. Through a focus on aesthetic piety in the earliest *literary* traditions surrounding the birth and infancy of Jesus, we are able to observe lively streams of aesthetic reflection on these biblical scenes, before

[108] Note this caution in Bockmuehl 2006: 68; Nicholls 2008: 20-21.
[109] See, e.g., Strawbridge 2015.

more purely artistic forms of exegesis became prevalent within early Christianity, and which influence those later trajectories. This observation complements recent art-historical work, which has tended to view the emergence of early Christian art in the third century as a continuity, rather than a break from, earlier views on art and the visual.[110] Jensen cites a number of second- and third-century Christian texts which comment on the visual-theological significance of imagery within creation.[111] My own study extends this to the narrative world of Scripture, and the infancy narratives in particular, which provided fertile ground for the visual imaginations of early Christians.[112]

The final major criterion for my selection of case studies has been the *scope* of their individual and collective contributions to the topic at hand. In determining scope, I have considered several subsidiary factors: 1) the degree to which each engages visual and aural elements in the New Testament infancy narratives; 2) the significance of each case to subsequent trajectories of interpretation; and 3) the distinctiveness of each case, so as to cover a diverse range of receptions. With these factors in mind, I have chosen three early interlocutors: the apocryphal *Protevangelium of James*, and the writings of Irenaeus and Origen. Each case study contains a high level of interaction with the visuality or aurality of the infancy narratives in comparison with other texts of the period. It will be observed that the Irenaean corpus has less to offer on this front than either *PJ* or Origen; however, this case study is significant in that it provides a window into a theological controversy prompted by aesthetic interpretation of the infancy narratives, and of the Incarnation more broadly. Additionally, each of my three interlocutors exerted a deep influence in the

[110] Cf. Jensen 2008: 113-116. Earlier theories that the earliest Christians were aniconic have been largely abandoned due to new archaeological evidence casting doubt on the assumption that Hellenistic Jewish communities were aniconic (cf. Hachlili 2013; Pearce 2013).
[111] Cf. Jensen 2008: 114-115, citing Justin Martyr, *1 Apol*. 5, 55; *2 Apol*. 10, 13; *Dial*. 86; Hippolytus, *Antichr*. 59; *Ben. Is. Jac*. 25; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed*. 3.11; *Prot*. 6.11; *Strom*. 1.28.3; Tertullian, *Nat*. 1.4.
[112] Similarly, in the fifth century Cyril of Alexandria described the Scriptures as 'pictures fertile with truth' (*Epist.* 41.21-23). Cf. Kessler 1991/1992.

formation of ancient Christian imagination and exegesis, and their engagement with the aesthetic pieties of the infancy narratives thus enjoys a certain prominence in later trajectories of artistic interpretation. Moreover, each offers a distinctive response to the visual and aural elements of Matthew and Luke – a result of their differing modes of interpretation as narrative, apologetic, and exegetical homiletic, respectively.

Other pre-Nicene texts have been ruled out on the basis of one or more of these factors, especially their degree of engagement with the aesthetic pieties of the infancy narratives. The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, for example, is concerned with the visual spectacle of scenes from Jesus' childhood, but its interaction with specific visual or aural elements in Matthew 1-2 or Luke 1-2 is minimal. Moreover, the footprint of *IGT* in the early Christian imagination is significantly less prominent than that of *PJ*. Other apocryphal texts, and the writings of Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, and Tertullian, also engage individual aesthetic elements from the New Testament infancy traditions, but do so to a lesser extent than my three selected interlocutors. Such texts as these are brought into this study's discussion where relevant, and indeed they demonstrate that my three case studies are not the only interlocutors who engage the aesthetic prompts of the biblical texts in this period. The three focal studies are representative of a wider phenomenon of aesthetic response, rather than sole points of contact.

1.6 The Plan of this Study: Aesthetic Invitation and Response

Corresponding to the two *desiderata* prompted by Bovon's exegetical dilemma (cf. §1.1), this study proceeds in two main parts.

Part I lays the foundation of the study's argument through analyzing conceptions of 'seeing' and 'hearing' in Matthew 1-2 (Chapter 2) and Luke 1-2 (Chapter 3). Matthew's infancy narrative, punctuated by five fulfillment quotations and five dreams, provides a

high concentration of auditory forms of revelation. In invoking these voices of prophetic Scripture and messages from the divine realm, Matthew draws from accepted notions of aural piety in antiquity: the physicality of divine and prophetic voices, the hearing of Scripture in liturgical contexts, and the oracular aspect of the dream genre. While these aspects invite Matthew's reader to 'hear,' I also argue that Matthew's infancy narrative achieves its chief aesthetic moment in the visual revelation of the infant Christ to the magi, which the gospel writer highlights through a lengthy exposition of the magi's visually-oriented pilgrimage toward the Child.

Luke's infancy narrative is profoundly concerned with what witnesses to the birth of Christ saw and heard – a concern which, I argue, follows from his interest in the 'eyewitnesses and ministers of the word' (1:1) more broadly. This manifests itself in how he contrasts modes of listening in his characterizations of Zechariah and Mary (Luke 1), and records multiple visual encounters with the Child (Luke 2). The four canticles included in Luke's infancy narrative provide model responses to what has been heard and seen, and thus may be interpreted as extensions of aural and visual piety. Furthermore, we can observe that Luke – so aptly described as a painter in later tradition – employs the ancient technique of ἐνάργεια to bring his infancy scenes vividly 'before the eyes' of his readers, inviting them to become 'eyewitnesses' themselves.

While each gospel writer thus negotiates these concepts differently, both extend a certain 'aesthetic invitation' to subsequent literary productions seeking to further imagine or understand human perception of the Incarnation. On this basis, Part II examines three representative case studies of textual engagement with the Matthean and Lukan infancy traditions: the *Protevangelium of James* (Chapter 4), the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons (Chapter 5), and the works of Origen of Alexandria (Chapter 6).

The early apocryphal infancy gospels, notably exemplified in the *Protevangelium of James* (*PJ*), respond creatively to the pre-canonical infancy traditions by expanding the reader's visual and aural imagination of these events. Through an analysis of specific examples from *PJ*, I show that there are two main ways in which we see this happening: through an overall enhancement of visuality and aurality of setting, and an increased interest in characters' modes of seeing and hearing. The purpose of both features of the text is to draw the reader into a more vivid contemplation of the events described.

The apologetic writings of Irenaeus of Lyons, and particularly his *Adversus Haereses*, have been noted in past scholarship for their early contribution to the field of theological aesthetics. Irenaeus' interest in sense perception may be observed both in his hermeneutics, and in his theology of the Incarnation – two areas which saliently combine in his exegesis of the infancy narratives. This chapter examines Irenaeus' response to the aesthetic elements of the Matthean and Lukan texts, which is expressed in an apologetic mode against his opponents' aesthetic interpretations of the same texts.

Origen of Alexandria, like Irenaeus, has been treated in recent scholarship on the senses, especially the spiritual senses. A more neglected aspect of Origen's work is his theological interest in Jesus *qua* child, which also translates into a spiritual attitude of devotion to the infant Christ. In this chapter, I examine multiple passages in which his interests in sense perception and the infant Christ intersect, arguing that his 'aesthetic response' is most strikingly expressed in his explicit homiletic appeals to involve his congregation in the aesthetic pieties of the biblical texts.

Part II, then, confirms the argument begun in Part I – that the New Testament infancy narratives invite aesthetic reflection on the nature of the Incarnation – by showing how this plays out in early Christian texts concerned with expanding biblical imagination, formulating theology, and promoting spirituality. While these chapters focus around three

significant points of contact with the aesthetic piety of the infancy narratives, a number of other ancient texts and images are brought into dialogue with them, demonstrating the wide-ranging effect of this phenomenon. Chapter 7 gathers together the findings of the two interlocking parts of the thesis, drawing attention both to the major findings and contributions of this study.

PART I

CHAPTER TWO:
THE AESTHETIC INVITATION OF MATTHEW 1-2

2.1 Introduction: Seeing and Hearing in/of a βίβλος γενέσεως

Looking into the Cappella Graeca, a chapel nestled within the oldest part of the Roman Catacombe di Priscilla – the Cryptoportico (early third century) – one can see a prominent central archway. Painted upon the archway is a simple fresco of three magi approaching a seated Mary with the infant Christ in her arms.[1] While this is perhaps the earliest image of the magi for which we have evidence, the prevalence of the magi motif is a striking feature of early Christian art more broadly. They appear in frescoes, funerary plaques, sarcophagi, and early mosaics – in groups of two, three, four, and more.[2] Often a male figure, widely identified as the prophet Balaam, appears behind them, pointing to the star they journey toward. This motif reflects an exegetical reading of Num 24:17 into the Matthean account of a star appearing over the infant Christ.[3] Furthermore, although the adoration of the magi is by far the most prominent scene from Matthew's infancy narrative that appears in early Christian art, other scenes surface in early evidence as well: Joseph's first dream and his taking of Mary as his wife;[4] the flight to Egypt;[5] and the massacre of the innocents.[6]

Verbal forms of artistic expression also feature Matthean infancy motifs from an early date. For example, fourth-century hymn writers Ambrose and Prudentius each

[1] For further discussion of the 'Capella Graeca' and this particular image, cf. Davin 1892: 33-40; Tolotti 1970: 258ff.; Giuliani 2016: 37-48.
[2] See, e.g., Jensen 2001, and further discussion in §6.2.4.
[3] See further discussion in §2.2.7; §2.4.4; §6.2.4.
[4] Isolated cases, primarily from Gaul, feature variations of this scene: Joseph's dream appears on a sarcophagus lid in Arles; Joseph's dream, with the angel, and his taking of Mary into his home appears on a frieze fragment in Le Puy; a seated Joseph appears on a fragmentary double frieze in Arles. Cf. Koch 2000: 156.
[5] E.g. a limestone fragment from Constantinople (cf. Koch 2000: 160). This motif became more prominent in later art; cf. Bovon 2013.
[6] Rare examples include the lower zone of the Lot Sarcophagus (Catacombe di San Sebastiano, Rome); two lids of sarcophagi in Gaul. Cf. Kötzsche-Breitenbruch 1968/69; Koenen 1986; Koch 2000: 160; Ferrua 2017: 59-62.

composed a hymn for the feast of Epiphany, which in antiquity often celebrated Christ's nativity and manifestation to the magi, together with his baptism and first miracle at Cana.[7] Ambrose's 'Illuminans latissimus' reflects this combination, with the third stanza dedicated to the Matthean star, virgin birth, and magi.[8] The twelfth hymn in Prudentius' *Liber Cathemerinon*, 'Hymnus Epiphaniae,' dwells at length on the themes of Matthew's star, the adoration of the magi, and the massacre of the innocents.[9]

This evidence from the visual and verbal arts prompts a question pertinent to the chapter at hand. What is it about Matthew's infancy narrative – and particularly his account of the magi – that so captivated early Christian artists?

This question provides a springboard from which to address the chief aim of this chapter, which is to demonstrate the *aesthetic invitation* of Matthew 1-2. Here I argue specifically that Matthew's infancy narrative concerns itself with the visual and aural senses of witnesses to the birth of Christ, and furthermore, that it invites its reader also to see and to hear.

How can Mattthew's account be said to accomplish this? His gospel introduces itself as a 'book of origin (βίβλος γενέσεως) of Jesus the Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham' (1:1).[10] This opening heading,[11] βίβλος γενέσεως – echoing the only two other occurrences of the phrase in the Septuagint, at Gen 2:4 (a narrative of creation) and Gen

[7] Cf. Augé 2000: 199; Pfatteicher 2013: 111-113.
[8] Ambrose combines these motifs with the Lukan manger: 'Or if the star flashing in heaven / marked out the virgin's pangs of birth, / and led the Magi on this day / before the manger to adore.' Cf. Walsh and Husch 2012: 21.
[9] Cf. Thomson 1949: 102-115.
[10] All translations in this study are my own unless otherwise indicated. The Greek text of the New Testament is taken from Aland 2014 (NA 28).
[11] Famously, this verse is a *crux interpretum.* Does the expression βίβλος γενέσεως 1) constitute a title of Matthew's entire narrative (cf. Jerome, *Comm. Matt*. 1.1; Zahn 1903; Bonnard 1963; Klostermann 1971; Davies and Allison 2004; Luz 2007); 2) indicate only the beginnings of Jesus' earthly life (cf. Allen 1907; Plummer 1909; Krentz 1964; Vögtle 1971; Kingsbury 1975; Nolland 1996) or 3) refer solely to the genealogical record that immediately follows (cf. Schrenk 1964; Lohmeyer 1967; Stanton 1993; Brown 1993)? I favor option 1, although incline toward thinking that options 1 and 3 may not be mutually exclusive. On a potential double meaning, cf. Bonnard 1963: 16; Davies and Allison 2004: 153-154.

5:1 (an account of humanity descended from Adam) – positions Matthew's gospel among these biblical antecedents as one that likewise records a cosmic narrative of origins, here that of Jesus the Messiah. These two opening words offer material with which to unpack the twofold argument I have proposed.

First, βίβλος significantly implies textuality, but how does sense perception function in relation to this 'book'? We have treated the various layers of relationship between textuality and sense perception in antiquity in §1.4.1, and will here only make specific comments about Matthew's text. As with narratives more generally, with Matthew's gospel we can highlight perceiving subjects both within the text (characters) and outside the text (readers). The senses of seeing and hearing surface frequently *within* the gospel – Jesus himself sees,[12] others are exhorted to see or hear,[13] the blind and deaf are given their sight or hearing,[14] supernatural visions or voices are recorded,[15] Jesus has the power to reveal the Father,[16] and so on. Readers *outside* the gospel interacted with Matthew's text through sight or hearing in various ways (cf. §1.4.1); most fundamentally, they listened to the gospel read aloud.[17] In Matthew, the ancient correlation between reading/hearing is perhaps best expressed by Jesus' rebuke of the Sadducees: 'Have you not read (ἀνέγνωτε) what was spoken (ῥηθέν) to you by God' (22:31)? Matthew also ignited listeners' visual imagination in multiple ways examined throughout this chapter.

Second, Matthew indicates that his book is about the γένεσις of Jesus. While I take Matt 1:1 to refer to the gospel's full narrative of his earthly life – or the entire mystery of his 'incarnation,' in Jerome's interpretation[18] – the word also recurs, with a more narrow

[12] E.g. Matt 3:16; 4:8; 9:2-4, 9, 22, 36; 19:26.
[13] E.g. Matt 5:8, 21-22, 27-28, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44; 6:22-23; 7:24; 11:15; 13:10-17.
[14] E.g. Matt 9:27-31; 11:4-5; 12:22; 15:31; 20:29-34. Cf. Wilson 2015 for further analysis of this aspect.
[15] E.g. Matt 3:16-17; 17:1-13; 27:53-54; 28:3-4, 10, 17.
[16] Matt 11:27. This notion is taken up more explicitly in John's gospel.
[17] Cf. further discussion in §2.2.1.
[18] Jerome, *Comm. Matt*. 1.1.

meaning, in 1:18: 'The birth (γένεσις) of Jesus the Messiah happened in this way.'[19] Following from this, we might ask how the senses of seeing and hearing pertain to Matthew's purpose in disclosing this γένεσις – of Jesus' Incarnation more broadly, but also (and more pertinently for the present study) of the initial scenes of his incarnate life, his birth and infancy. As this chapter will show, Matthew's invocations of aural and visual senses in the infancy narratives each convey significant revelatory elements of the infant's identity and mission. Visuality and aurality are thus used by the gospel writer to express the γένεσις of Jesus to his audience – and to invite their participation in his narrative.

This chapter's analysis is divided into three main sections. In §2.2, I examine the five 'fulfillment quotations' of the infancy narrative as prophetic voices that invite a posture of listening, especially from the reader. In §2.3, I look closely at aesthetic language in the five dreams in Matthew 1-2, and analyze how dreams are perceived by Joseph or the magi as seeing and hearing subjects. Finally, in §2.4 I focus on what I take to be the chief aesthetic moment of Matthew's infancy narrative: the visual revelation of the infant Christ to the magi, which the gospel writer highlights through a lengthy exposition of the magi's visually-oriented pilgrimage toward the child. Following the analysis in these sections, I conclude in §2.5 that all three elements – fulfillment quotations, dreams, and the account of the magi – contribute to the 'aesthetic invitation' posed by Matthew to his audience.

[19] Most translators distinguish between the two usages of γένεσις: e.g. the NRSV has 'genealogy' and 'birth,' respectively; Luz 2007 has 'genesis' and 'origin.'

2.2. Fulfillment Quotations: The Aurality of Voices from Scripture

2.2.1 Introduction

In this section I propose that the five fulfillment quotations of Matthew's infancy narrative (1:22-23; 2:5b-6; 2:15b; 2:17-18; 2:23b) contribute to its overall aesthetic piety. Variously termed 'formula quotations' or 'fulfillment quotations,'[20] this distinctive exegetical feature of Matthew's gospel[21] occurs fourteen times throughout his text.[22] These quotations are strikingly concentrated, however, in Matthew 1-2; indeed, they have sometimes been said to structure the infancy narrative itself.[23] The fulfillment quotations have been studied to determine their original textual form and milieu,[24] their theological function in Matthew's gospel,[25] their indications of Matthew's hermeneutics,[26] as well as for the insights they can provide in constructing the compositional history of Matthew's gospel.[27] My analysis – restricted to the five in the infancy narrative – offers a new perspective on the fulfillment quotations by studying their distinctive *aural* features as spoken, prophetic words.

A brief look at the language of each infancy quotation's introductory formula will serve to introduce my approach:

> 1:22: τοῦτο δὲ ὅλον γέγονεν ἵνα πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος
> 2:5b: οὕτως γὰρ γέγραπται διὰ τοῦ προφήτου
> 2:15: ἵνα πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος

[20] 'Formula quotation' was apparently first used by Johnson 1943, while 'fulfillment citation' is the English rendering of *Erfüllungszitate* (Rothfuchs 1969). An earlier term, *Reflexionszitate* (appearing as early as Holtzmann 1889-1891), emphasizes the reflective nature of Matthew's additions, in contrast with those he takes over from Mark. For further discussion, cf. Soares Prabhu 1976: 18-23.
[21] Cf. Brown 1993: 97-98 on this 'almost Matthean peculiarity.'
[22] Identifying fourteen has been the matter of some debate; ten unquestionably fall into the formula quotation category, while four (including 2:5-6) appear on some lists but not others. Cf. Soares Prabhu 1976: 24-40.
[23] Accordingly Matthew 1-2 is divided into five scenes, each featuring a Scriptural citation. The infancy narrative has also been outlined in dual fashion following Stendahl 1995. Cf. Brown 1993: 51-54 for further discussion.
[24] Famously, Stendahl 1954. Cf. also Massebieau 1885; Metzger 1951; Gärtner 1954; Fitzmyer 1960. On the complex question of identifying 'Matthew's Bible,' see especially Menken 2004.
[25] E.g. Pesch 1967; Rothfuchs 1969.
[26] E.g. Gundry 1967.
[27] E.g. Soares Prabhu 1976.

2:17: τότε ἐπληρώθη τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ Ἰερεμίου τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος
2:23: ὅπως πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν

While scholars have rightly focused on the key verb πληρόω, other common words have not received as much attention. The aorist passive participle τὸ ῥηθὲν ('what was spoken') occurs in four of the formulas above, and the present active participle λέγοντος ('saying') occurs in three. The only formula that does not explicitly draw attention to the oral quality of its quotation is Matt 2:5b, which refers to a written text. Additionally, various voices are identified as speaking: most basically, ὁ προφήτης (or its plural, in 2:23). The prophet is given a name in 2:17 (Jeremiah), and the Lord himself is invoked as the originating voice twice (1:22; 2:15).

The question implied in this discussion, and driving this section's analysis, is the following: Who are the listeners on the other side of this prophetic speech sounding in Matthew's text, and how is their aural piety engaged by what is spoken?[28] I examine this question by looking at relationships between voices and listeners in each quotation, both in the context of the Scriptural source, and in the context of Matthew's interpretation.[29] As this analysis will show, while various listeners are identified within Matthew's text (e.g. Joseph) and within the texts he quotes (e.g. King Ahaz in Isa 7), often the primary listener addressed by Matthew's fulfillment quotations is his reader.

In engaging his listening reader,[30] Matthew's fulfillment quotations interact with several interlocking aspects of aural piety in antiquity: the heightened sonority of prophetic and divine voices; liturgical contexts for the oral proclamation and interpretation of Scripture; and the ways in which hearing engages both memory and imagination.

[28] Here I assume that orality implies aurality; cf. §1.2.3 for discussion of the oral/aural relationship in antiquity.
[29] This raises a host of questions about the nature of the text Matthew used in quoting Scripture, and what his compositional process was in doing so. I assume a continuous biblical text behind Matthew's quotations (rather than a so-called 'testimony book'), but leave open the question of the precise nature of this text. For further discussion of various views, cf. Soares Prabhu 1976: 67-77; Menken 2004.
[30] See introductory discussion of textuality and aurality in §1.4.1; §2.1.

In §1.4.1 we discussed the ancient notion that texts mediate physical voices; for Greek texts this is particularly salient in Butler's analysis of how authors sought to 'write (γράφειν) the voice (φωνή).'[31] Reciprocally, the ancient blurring between reading and hearing meant that the recipients of a text could listen physically to a voice (their own or another's), which in turn mediated the voice captured by the text.[32] Both of these aspects are engaged in specific ways in Matthew's fulfillment quotations.

Firstly, the voices that Matthew's text captures are particularly sonorous within the Jewish traditions that he inherits. In the Hebrew Bible, God's voice is compared to storms of thunder and lightning, fire and hail (e.g. Exod 19:16-19, 20:18-21; Job 37:4-5; Ps 29; Isa 30:30), a mighty roar (e.g. Jer 25:30), the rustling of cherubic wings (e.g. Ezek 10:5), as well as a soft whisper, wind, or silence (e.g. 1 Kgs 19:12-13; Job 26:14; Isa 50:4).[33] The prophetic voice that mediates it often expresses heightened emotions, for example the lamenting cries of Jeremiah.[34]

Secondly, Matthew's fulfillment quotations find their most immediate auditory context within the oral proclamation and interpretation of Scripture in liturgical settings. In such settings congregants could hear the prophetic texts that Matthew cites; and – at least from the mid-second century – Matthew's own text.

It is well-established that Scripture was read and interpreted orally in ancient synagogues, and that this practice included readings from the prophetic books.[35] Matthew's gospel seems to allude to this practice in the introductory formulas of Jesus' so-called 'antitheses' (5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43); Jesus' ἠκούσατε likely references not only the

[31] Butler 2015: 11. Cf. Porter 2010: 308-364; MacKendrick 2016.
[32] Cf. Gamble 1995; Balogh 1927; Hendrickson 1929; Boomershine 1987; Achtemeier 1990; Schenkeveld 1992; Shiell 2004; and discussion in §1.4.1.
[33] Cf. Betz 1974.
[34] Cf. Graybill 2016 and discussion in §2.2.5.
[35] See, e.g., Perrot 1973, esp. 175-204. Cf. also Luke 4:16-21; Acts 13:15-41.

reading out of Scriptural texts, but also their oral interpretation within public assemblies.[36] Furthermore, it is likely that Matthew's fulfillment formula reflects the language used in early Christian Scriptural interpretation, which was voiced in synagogues and other public spheres (note, e.g., the key word πληρόω in Acts 3:18; 13:27).[37]

Given the prevalence of oral/aural reading in antiquity generally, it is highly likely that Matthew's own text was also 'read' this way by its earliest recipients.[38] The question of when Matthew's gospel was orally proclaimed as Scripture in liturgical settings is a thornier issue. In the mid-second century Justin Martyr writes of the practice of reading out 'memoirs of the apostles' in Christian assemblies (*1 Apol*. 67), but although Justin certainly knows Matthew,[39] the specifics of his statement and earlier evidence are more difficult to interpret.[40]

Nevertheless, these two aspects of aural piety – the heightened sonority of divine and prophetic voices in Jewish traditions; and the practice of hearing Scriptural texts proclaimed and interpreted aloud in liturgical settings – deeply inform the aural dimensions of Matthew's fulfillment quotations. In later Christian conceptualization of the role of a lector, these aspects were sometimes combined; the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions*, for example, gives instructions to ordain lectors with a prayer that they might be endowed with 'the prophetic spirit' (*Apost. Con*. 8.22).[41] The connection of this particular constitution with the apostle Matthew is perhaps indicative of how this text conceives of Matthew's own relationship with prophetic Scripture.

[36] Recent study has compared these sayings to similar rabbinic formulations (esp. Daube 1973: 55-62); on Matthew and rabbinic culture more broadly, cf. Cohen 2016.
[37] So Dibelius 1933 (but see Stendahl 1954: 13-19); Gärtner 1954: 22-24; Rothfuchs 1969: 180ff.; Brown 1993: 103. Note that this tendency can be traced back to Jesus himself, who interprets his own mission with 'fulfillment' language.
[38] Note this assumption in other NT texts: Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27; Rev 1:3.
[39] See, e.g. Skarsaune 1987: 100-103 *et passim*.
[40] Cf. Gamble 1995: 206-208.
[41] Cf. Gamble 1995: 221-222.

In addition to these connections to physical experiences of aural piety, Matthew's fulfillment quotations also invoke mental sense perception in a couple of key respects.[42] Firstly, Matthew often relies upon his listener's memory to 'hear' the wider context of his quoted text; specific cases are treated below.[43] The listener's memory is particularly challenged by the quotation in Matt 2:23b, as the reference for its citation is particularly ambiguous – offering different options for aural memory (cf. §2.2.6). And furthermore, the aural memory of a listener to Matthew's gospel has another potential function in the cases of Scriptural texts that Matthew does *not* quote, but which nevertheless have been 'heard' by subsequent reception of his infancy account (esp. Num 24:17; Isa 60). My analysis addresses the aural implications of these unquoted 'fulfillment quotations' in §2.2.7.

Secondly, my examination of Matthew's fulfillment quotations unearths several examples of what Harrison has termed 'auditory images' – i.e. images that are conveyed through speech, to be interpreted and imagined in the listener's mind.[44] Arguably, all images described by texts are 'auditory images;' however, I distinguish between textual images that are portrayed as seen (e.g. the magi's star), and those that are presented through speech (e.g. the virgin conceiving a child, spoken by prophecy in Isa 7:14). This facet of my examination of the fulfillment quotations will be taken up again in §2.4, where I argue that Matthew works these 'auditory images' to effect in leading up to the culminating visual revelation of the infant Christ to the magi.

[42] See §1.2.5 on distinguishing between senses of body, mind, and spirit.
[43] Hays 2016 penetrates this notion of 'hearing echoes' of the Scriptures in the gospels more thoroughly; see his comments on the fulfillment quotations of Matthew's infancy narrative at 113-116, 146-147, 149, 162-166, 176, 178-179, 186-187.
[44] Harrison 2013: 248-252 *et passim*.

The aural piety of Matthew's fulfillment quotations, then, draws from physical experiences of aurality in antiquity, as well as notions of aural memory and imagination. With these introductory remarks aside, we turn to the specific quotations themselves.

2.2.2 Matt 1:22-23 (Isa 7:14)

The first fulfillment quotation lies at the heart of the opening scene of Matthew's infancy narrative, which offers the perspective of Joseph after his betrothed, Mary, is found to be with child. While he is considering what to do, an angel appears to him in a dream.[45] Matthew's quotation of Isa 7:14 is ambiguously voiced either by the angel, as part of the dream, or by the evangelist in an aside at the completion of the angel's message: 'All this has happened in order to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 'Behold, a virgin will carry in her womb and bear a son, and they will call his name Emmanuel,' which is translated 'God with us'' (1:22-23).

Isa 7:1-17 contains the prophecy of Isaiah to Ahaz, one of the Davidic kings featured in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:9). Facing imminent threat from an alliance of the kings of Aram and Ephraim, the hearts of Ahaz and his people are shaken (Isa 7:2). Two conversations then take place: the Lord calls upon Isaiah to confront Ahaz with a message (7:3-9), and the prophet delivers his message to Ahaz (7:10-17). In this text, the divine and prophetic voices explicitly converge. We read that 'the Lord came to speak with Ahaz' (7:10), even though the one physically speaking to Ahaz is identified as Isaiah (7:13).

If on the side of speaking the prophecy there is an inextricable connection between the Lord and prophet in Isaiah 7, on the side of listening there is also overlap between Ahaz and the 'house of David.' As the reigning Davidic king, Ahaz represents his familial

[45] Cf. discussion of dreams in §2.3.

house, a fact made clear by Isaiah's exasperated response directed to Ahaz in 7:13, 'Hear (שמעו / ἀκούσατε), house of David!'[46] However, the plural imperative of 'hear' indicates a collective sense that is perhaps more explicit in 7:2, when the hearts of both Ahaz *and* his people shake in fear after news of the alliance reaches 'the house of David.' There is then an unmistakable connection between the king and his people as listeners to the prophet's message, with the figure of Ahaz described synecdochally in relation to the whole Davidic house.

As a listener, it seems that Ahaz is somewhat lacking. When the Lord proposes that the king ask him for a sign (אות / σημεῖον) but Ahaz refuses (7:11-12), he is rebuked by Isaiah (7:13). The Septuagint version of 7:9b – 'and if you will not believe, you will not perceive' (συνῆτε) – indicates that the king's inability to perceive the gift God is offering may be the result of a lack of faith.[47] Despite Ahaz's faulty listening, the Lord gives him a sign anyway, bringing us to our key verse in 7:14.

Isaiah 7:14 combines the aurality of the message spoken with the visuality of the sign conveyed. After the 'house of David' is commanded to 'hear' (7:13), he is invited to 'behold' (הנה / ἰδού). The Hebrew word הנה has been designated a 'presentative;' according to Wildberger, the word is used such that 'the listener is supposed to see clearly what is coming, as if it were happening at that moment.'[48] The Greek ἰδού, which is actually the aorist middle imperative of εἶδον ('see') used as a demonstrative particle, functions in much the same way.[49] However, the picture offered to the reader differs slightly between the Hebrew and Septuagint texts: while הנה presents a 'young woman' (העלמה), ἰδού introduces more specifically a 'virgin' (παρθένος).[50] The fact that Matthew

[46] Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old Testament are taken from Elliger and Rudolph et al. 1997; and Rahlfs and Hanhart 2006, respectively.
[47] See §3.2 for discussion of belief linked to perception, and particularly hearing, in other biblical texts.
[48] Wildberger 1991: 128. Cf. also the dictionary entry for הנה in Gesenius, Strong et al. 1979.
[49] See the entries for ἰδού in BDAG and LSJ.
[50] Later Greek translations (Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion) use νεᾶνις, closer to the Hebrew.

uses παρθένος is one of the major indications of his acquaintance with a version of the Septuagint text.[51] Still, the picture in both texts outlines resonant contours. The image presented before the imagination of the 'house of David' shows a woman with a child at three successive stages: pregnancy, birth, and naming.

This image is classified as a 'sign.' In the Hebrew Bible, אות is always an object of sense perception, especially the visual sense.[52] It is used to impart knowledge or insight, to indicate something promised or something to be remembered, and to convey divine revelation. The Greek σημεῖον is a frequent translation of אות, and functions in a very similar way.[53] In the case of Isa 7:14, the sign of the woman with the child is meant to be a visible image of God's salvation from Ahaz's enemies. The child's name, which Ahaz himself is to bestow, gives an indication of this – 'Emmanuel' (עמנו אל), when spoken and heard, invokes the image of God's presence with his people. Furthermore, Isaiah prophesies, this child will not reach the age of accountability before Ahaz's enemies are destroyed (7:15-16). It is clear that the sign is meant to point to a visible reality that Ahaz will soon see with his own eyes; however, in our context it is an image that is conveyed to Ahaz aurally. It is thus one of the 'auditory images' that we defined above (§2.2.1); at the moment of its prophetic verbalization, it is a sight that Ahaz hears, and must imagine in his mind's eye.

Returning to the quotation of Isa 7:14 in Matt 1:22-23, we find similar and transformed elements. In this quotation, Matthew refers to what was 'spoken by the Lord through the prophet,' a formula he will repeat in 2:15.[54] This signals a similar

[51] For overviews of textual issues, see Rothfuchs 1969: 57-60; Soares Prabhu 1976: 229-253; Brown 1993: 145-153; Menken 2001.
[52] Cf. Rengstorf 1971, esp. 211-213. For references that relate אות specifically to seeing, cf. Gen 9:12-17; Exod 12:13; Num 14:11, 22; Deut 4:34; 7:19; 26:8; Ps 74:9; 86:17; Isa 66:19. For references that imply visibility in relation to אות, cf. Gen 1:14; 17:11; Num 2:2; 16:38; 17:10; Josh 4:6-7; Isa 19:19-20; Jer 10:2.
[53] Cf. Rengstorf 1971: 219-221.
[54] Cf. Pesch 1967.

understanding of the convergence of divine and prophetic voices that we noted in Isaiah. However, the formula's own speaker is ambiguous. While most commentators classify the quotation as an aside by the evangelist – thus making the reader its primary listener – it is also potentially a continuation of the angel's message to Joseph.[55] It is certainly noteworthy that the angel addresses Joseph as 'son of David' (1:20), just as Isaiah addressed Ahaz as 'house of David,' shortly before each hears the same prophetic message. Joseph, however, proves the better listener, acting immediately and faithfully on the words he has heard (1:24-25).[56]

Although Matthew does not carry over the word σημεῖον, his quotation conveys the same auditory image of a virgin with child at the three stages of pregnancy, birth, and naming. It is important to note that even within Matthew's text, the prophecy is conveyed as an 'auditory image' to a listening Joseph – one that is not fully revealed visually until later (implicitly in 1:25, but more explicitly in 2:11; cf. §2.4).

Finally, Matthew's quotation transforms a couple of elements with regard to the child's name. While Isaiah had spoken to Ahaz that 'you will call' (קראת / καλέσεις) the child Emmanuel, Matthew pluralizes the verb: 'They will call' (καλέσουσιν). Perhaps, as Origen did,[57] the listener to Matthew's text is meant to 'hear' the wider context of Isaiah 7, which speaks of Ahaz as the collective 'house of David.'[58] Additionally, Matthew associates the Hebrew name Emmanuel (which he glosses, 'God with us') with the name that Joseph is actually directed to give to Mary's child, Jesus ('for he will save his people from their sins;' 1:21, 25). Both of these names sound with oral and aural potency in

[55] Note especially the discussion of this possibility in Dodson 2009: 142-144; 152-154.
[56] See further discussion of Joseph's aural piety in §2.3.5.
[57] See §6.2.3 for discussion of Origen's reception of this verse.
[58] On this mental 'hearing' of the wider context of Isaiah 7 in Matthew's quotation, see further Carter 2000; Hays 2016: 163-164.

Matthew's text. Other NT texts attest to the salvific power of speaking and hearing Jesus' name;[59] the name Emmanuel, when it is proclaimed, invokes the very presence of God.[60]

2.2.3 Matt 2:5-6 (Mic 5:1 and 2 Sam 5:2)

A second fulfillment quotation is voiced by the chief priests and scribes, who report to Herod: 'For thus it has been written (γέγραπται) through the prophet, 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you will come forth a ruler, who will shepherd my people Israel'' (2:5b-6). This quotation differs from the others in several respects. Most strikingly, it lacks the key word πληρόω; however, the theological principle of fulfillment is arguably still present. The quotation is also unique in that it combines two Scriptural references: Mic 5:1 and 2 Sam 5:2 (cf. 1 Chron 11:2).[61] Potentially most pertinent to our inquiry, however, is the fact that γέγραπται has replaced ῥηθέν (see further below).[62]

Micah 5:1 is part of 'the word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth…which he saw (חזה / εἶδεν) concerning Samaria and Jerusalem' (Mic 1:1).[63] This title brings out both the aural and visual qualities of the prophetic revelation. In the Hebrew text, these two are fused: the prophetic word to Micah was also visible; Micah saw the word that came from the Lord. The Septuagint alters this picture slightly with the words ὑπὲρ ὧν εἶδεν ('concerning the things he saw'), which imply that the word of the Lord *interpreted* Micah's visions regarding Samaria and Jerusalem, and thus complements and accompanies them.[64]

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[59] See, e.g., Mark 9:39; John 20:31; Acts 2:38; 3:6, 16; 4:10, 30; 8:16; 10:48; 16:18; 19:5; 1 Cor 6:11; Phil 2:10.
[60] Cf. §6.2.3.
[61] For textual issues cf. Rothfuchs 1969: 60-61; Soares Prabhu 1976: 261-293; Brown 1993: 184-187.
[62] This form appears also in Matt 4:4, 6, 7, 10; 11:10; 21:31; 26:31.
[63] Cf. also Jer 26:18-19. For introductory issues to the book of Micah, see Hillers 1984: 1-10. For commentary on the LXX of Micah, see Glenny 2015.
[64] Cf. Glenny 2015: 39-41.

In Mic 5:1, a listener to the divinely authored prophetic speech is specifically invoked: 'And *you*, Bethlehem…' (italics mine). How does Bethlehem function as a listener? Both the Hebrew and Greek Scripture associate Bethlehem with Ephrathah, whereas Matthew changes the epithet to the 'land of Judah.' In addition to its designation as a place, these texts describe it as one of the many clans of Judah. The city of Bethlehem, birthplace of David, is thus conceived as both geographical entity and familial tribe. In invoking Bethlehem, therefore, the prophet does not merely converse with a piece of land, but with a people.

Bethlehem hears that she will be the bearer of the prophesied ruler; the verb εξέρχομαι ('come out'), includes the sense of offspring issuing from the womb. This metaphorical reading is reinforced by the very next verse of Micah's text, which speaks of the 'time when she who is in labor has brought forth' (5:2). In this way, the quasi-annunciatory address to a personified Bethlehem is supplemented by an 'auditory image' of a woman giving birth, similar to the one we examined from Isa 7:14.[65] Although this verse is not contained in the Matthean quotation, its specific relevance to the infancy narrative speaks strongly in favor of the view that Matthew intended for his audience to 'hear' its wider context.

The last bit of Matthew's quotation, 'who will shepherd my people Israel,' comes from 2 Sam 5:2.[66] This line transports the reader to the scene of David's anointing, and to a dialogue between the tribes of Israel and David. The declaration made to David that 'it is you who will shepherd' is spoken by the tribes of Israel, who locate the origin of the word in the mouth of the Lord himself.[67] In a manner comparable to that of the prophets, the leaders of Israel interpret and speak the words of the Lord. These words, imbued with

[65] See discussion of 'auditory images' in §2.2.1-2.
[66] Note its parallel in 1 Chron 11:2. Cf. also Ps 78:70-71.
[67] See the discussion in Auld 2011: 392-393.

divine authority and conferral of responsibility, are heard by David just before he is anointed king over Israel.

Returning to Matt 2:5-6, we find that Matthew has woven together the verse in Micah and the verse in 2 Samuel to form the quotation spoken by the chief priests and scribes to Herod. Indeed, the whole scene is precipitated by what Herod initially hears (ἀκούσας) in Matt 2:2-3.[68] Herod's disturbed hearing of the magi's inquiry propels him into an inquiry of his own, in which he must again listen – this time to the voices of Scripture. He is placed in the position of listening to the 'audio recordings' of a couple of ancient conversations he really did not want to replay; and the combination of the two results in the understanding that the child the magi search for is none other than the prophesied ruler, born in David's birthplace and destined to rule in Davidic terms.[69] Herod's response to what he hears is not to act in obedience to the divine voice, as does Joseph, but in subversion of it.[70]

Herod is not the only listener in this text. Although the chief priests and scribes are the voice of this prophecy to Herod, they are first also the readers of the Scriptural texts – and in that sense listeners to the prophetic voices of Scripture just as Herod is. Matthew is silent on the nature of their response to the Scriptures, but their role as Herod's trusted advisors indicates their complicity with him. Furthermore, although in the Matthean context they realize that they are speaking of the promised Messiah (cf. 2:4), there is no account of their desire to express devotion to him, nor of their protest against Herod's violent response to the prophecies. Those entrusted with the responsibility of reading and interpreting Israel's Scriptures for the people (note τοῦ λαοῦ, 2:4) ultimately fail in

[68] Cf. Davies and Allison 2004, who note that 'hearing is the cause of what follows' (237). On the use of hearing as a narrative device which transfers the plot between characters in biblical literature, see Kalimi 2010.
[69] On the effect of 'hearing' this context, see further Hays 2016: 146-147.
[70] See further discussion of Herod in §2.4.

Matthew's view to truly listen to the voices those Scriptures contain. Perhaps their use of γέγραπται, rather than ῥηθέν, reflects something of this inattention.

2.2.4 Matt 2:15 (Hos 11:1)

Matthew quotes Hos 11:1 with reference to the Holy Family's flight to Egypt, and subsequent journey out of it: 'in order that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'Out of Egypt I have called (ἐκάλεσα) my son'' (Matt 2:15b). There are several layers to this call of the divine Father to his son, as we shall see.

Beginning with Hosea's text, we find that once again, divine and prophetic voices converge. The text is announced as 'the word of the Lord that came to Hosea' (Hos 1:1). Moreover, the middle section of Hosea (chs. 4-11), within which our verse is located, begins with the admonishment, 'Hear (שמעו // ἀκούσατε) the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel!'[71] Most of this section of oracles is written in the first-person voice of the Lord himself, as we find in our quotation, so that the voice of the prophet becomes almost inaudible.

The primary listeners in the text of Hosea, the 'sons of Israel' (4:1), may be equated with the Hebrew 'my son' (בני), whom the Lord calls out of Egypt in 11:1. Matthew's text is famously closer to this Hebrew expression than to the Septuagintal 'their children' (τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ).[72] The 'call' of the Lord to the child (נער / νήπιος) Israel is placed within the context of the intimate relationship between a father and a young son (cf. 11:1-4); the Lord is to Israel 'like those who lift infants to their cheeks' (11:4, NRSV). The call is one of the ways in which the Lord expresses his love and care for the infant Israel, even when Israel does not listen (cf. 11:2). Through invoking this 'auditory

[71] It is standard to regard the oracles of Hosea 4-11 as a unit. Cf. Wolff 1974; Glenny 2013: 87.
[72] For textual issues, see Jerome, *Comm. Isa.* 3.6; *Epist.* 20; Soares Prabhu 1976: 216-228; Brown 1993: 219-221; Menken 1999; Davies and Allison 2004: 262.

image'[73] of the Lord as a loving father calling to his son, the relationship between the divine voice and listening Israel takes on a historical dimension in Hosea: the present act of speaking reminds listeners that they were spoken to in their past, in the childhood of their nation, as well.

Much has been written about Matthew's hermeneutics in changing the referent of 'my son' in this passage from Israel to Jesus.[74] It seems unlikely that Matthew was unaware of the original context; rather, the evangelist uses this context to make sense of an event in the life of the holy child. The infant Jesus' flight to Egypt and return is depicted as recapitulating the experience of the nation of Israel more broadly. This hermeneutical move inextricably links Jesus with Israel; for Matthew, the fate of Jesus is closely bound to the fate of his people.

Similarly, just as Hosea described the relationship between the Lord and Israel as that of a father calling to his son, so Matthew describes the relationship between the Lord and Jesus. It is significant that Matthew places the assertion that Jesus is God's 'son' in the mouth of the Lord himself, speaking through the prophet.[75] The infant Jesus is the listener to his loving Father's call 'out of Egypt.'

With regard to Matthew's quotation of Hosea, however, the only identifiable listener is his reader. Unlike with the previous two fulfillment quotations, there is no reference to characters listening *within* the text. Furthermore, as we have observed, the image conveyed aurally is not of a mother and a child, as in the previous two quotations, but an intimate portrait of a father and a son. Just as the 'sons of Israel' listening to the prophetic speech in Hosea 11 could identify themselves with the infant Israel and were reminded of a divine voice calling them in their past, so also perhaps the listeners to this

[73] Cf. §2.2.1.
[74] For further discussion, cf. Davies and Allison 2004: 263; Hays 2016: 113-114.
[75] Cf. Pesch 1967; Davies and Allison 2004: 263-264; Luz 2007: 120-121.

quotation in Matthew's gospel are to unite themselves spiritually to the child Jesus, and to heed the fatherly divine voice calling them 'out of Egypt.'

2.2.5 Matt 2:17-18 (Jer 31:15)

The massacre of the infants in the area in and around Bethlehem (2:16) is the scene against which Matthew sets the next fulfillment quotation, which is taken from Jer 31:15 (LXX 38:15): 'Then was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, saying, 'A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and much lamentation; Rachel wailing for her children, and she would not be comforted, because they are no more'' (2:17-18).

In a recent article, Graybill has applied R. Murray Schafer's concept of the 'soundscape' to the book of Jeremiah, arguing that this prophetic text 'uses sound – and not simply vocal sound – to constitute and communicate meaning.'[76] She defines the Hebrew word קול, which is central to our quotation, as both 'sound' and 'voice': 'קול describes the vocalizations of animals, the crash of thunder, human speech, the sound of musical instruments, general din or clamor, and the voice of Yahweh.'[77] But Graybill understands the voice of the prophet to be foremost, so that 'the soundscape of the book of Jeremiah is entirely filtered through the voice and body of the prophet.'[78] Jeremiah's voice is certainly distinctive among the prophets (note, e.g., his cries in 4:19; 5:14; 8:21); this is perhaps one of the reasons why he is one of only two prophets (along with Isaiah) to whom Matthew refers by name, and why Matthew only quotes him in scenes of tragedy.[79] In addition to the voice of Jeremiah, Graybill further comments on the divine voice, which is 'at once central to the text and often ellipsed within it. This is the case from the opening

[76] Graybill 2016: 469. Cf. Schafer 1993; Schafer 2003; as well as §1.2.3 for an important distinction between Schafer's work and my own.
[77] Graybill 2016: 473.
[78] Graybill 2016: 473.
[79] Along with 2:17-18, cf. Matt 16:14; 27:9; Davies and Allison 2004: 266-267. For a thorough study of Jeremiah in Matthew's gospel, cf. Knowles 2015.

lines of the book, which describe Jeremiah's prophetic calling. Jeremiah 1:9 describes Yahweh placing his words into the prophet's mouth, suggesting that the vocalizations of prophecy always carry traces of their divine origins.'[80] Graybill goes on to describe a phenomenon she calls 'sonic blurring' between the voices of God and prophet.[81]

Examination of the immediate context of our quotation within Jeremiah's text reveals this complex interplay between the voice of the Lord and of Jeremiah. The introduction to the quotation itself indicates that it is spoken by the Lord (31:15a). The text also may be understood as part of a unit of oracles (30:1-31:38) introduced as 'the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord' (30:1).[82] The prophet is instructed to write down what he hears in a scroll (ספר).[83] The scribal process is famously described in Jer 36:1-8, where it is recorded that Jeremiah dictated the words of the Lord to Baruch the scribe, so that they might be read publicly 'in the hearing (אזני) of the people.' This progression of words from the Lord himself, spoken to Jeremiah, who relates what he hears to Baruch, who writes down what he hears and then reads it in the hearing of the people, illustrates not only a close connection between aurality and textuality, but also the ability of a text to contain words heard from the voice of God, and to act as one of the mediating figures in the people's experience of hearing those words in their own ears.[84]

Framed within the text of our quotation exists another set of voice and listener: namely the famous 'voice' (קול) of Rachel, and the implied listener invoked by the Niphal 'heard' (נשמע). The sound of Rachel's weeping actually stands out tragically in a chapter that is replete with more joyous sounds: the taking up of tambourines (31:4), dancing (31:4, 13), calls to 'go up to Zion' (31:6), singing (31:7, 12). However, 31:16-17, not

[80] Graybill 2016: 485-486.
[81] Graybill 2016: 488-489.
[82] Cf. Holladay 1989 for this structuring of Jeremiah's text.
[83] Cf. Holladay 1989: 171 for discussion.
[84] Cf. also Najman 2010: 3-38; Van der Toorn 2007: 173-204.

quoted by Matthew, reconcile the tragedy of 31:15 with the rest of the chapter: 'Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord: they shall come back from the land of the enemy; there is hope for your future, says the Lord: your children shall come back to their own country' (NRSV). These verses reveal the implied listener to the 'voice' of Rachel's weeping to be the Lord himself, who hears her and consoles her with words of hope. Jeremiah 31, written at the outset of the Babylonian exile, prophesies a time when the tribes of Israel (Rachel's children) will return, and the sound of her weeping will be exchanged for sounds of joy.

This does not lessen the tragic sound of the voice in our text, however. Rachel's lament incorporates multiple sounds of sorrow in accordance with female practices of mourning in Near Eastern antiquity.[85] In general, '[w]hen mourning, women create a pattern of sounds that can be considered music or at least as having some degree of musicality. In addition to proper laments, there are also stylized sobbing and breathing, breathlessness and syllabic prolongation as emotional intensifiers.'[86] More specifically with regard to Jer 31:15, the Hebrew text notes her 'wailing' (נהי), and her 'bitter weeping' (בכי תמרורים). Smith describes נהי as a 'spontaneous expression of grief, perhaps in wordless ululation,' and he distinguishes this 'wail' from the more formal, stylized Hebrew 'lament' (קינה).[87] Both, however, have a musical or semi-musical quality, as the Mishnah makes clear when it describes a קינה as a collective song, and a נהי as a song which 'one begins by herself and all respond after her' (*m. Mo'ed Qaṭ.* 3.9).[88] Here the Mishnah is referencing the tradition of professional female mourners, drawing from

[85] On such practices see Smith 2011: 135-144; López-Bertran and Garcia-Ventura 2012; Hasan-Rokem 2014; Kozlova 2017.
[86] López-Bertran and Garcia-Ventura 2012: 402-403.
[87] Smith 2011: 135.
[88] Trans. Danby 1933: 211. Ancient tradition held that Jeremiah himself was a composer of laments; cf. 2 Chron 35:25; LXX Lam 1; Smith 2011: 139, 142.

Jeremiah's account of such women (9:17-20) to do so.[89] The Septuagintal version of Jer 31:15 (38:15) introduces more auditory terms: The 'voice' (Φωνή) of Ramah is heard 'wailing and weeping and lamenting' (θρήνου καὶ κλαυθμοῦ καὶ ὀδυρμοῦ); Rachel is 'weeping over' (ἀποκλαιομένη) her children.[90]

Not only does Jeremiah's text evoke sounds, but also a vivid *image*, as ritual practices of lament were highly performative: '[M]ourning materializes pain not only through the acoustics of screaming but also through bodily gestures. In many cases, women embody their pain with tears or by pulling at their hair or through other actions.'[91] Kozlova argues that in addition to wailing, Rachel is described as performing a funerary dance of 'circumambulating choreography' in Jer 31:22b.[92]

When we turn to Matthew' text, we find that the evangelist's quotation brings the resonance and imagery of Rachel's weeping to bear on Herod's massacre of the innocents (2:16).[93] Matthew's connection between Rachel and the children of Bethlehem is potentially reinforced by a tradition that Rachel's tomb was located just outside the city.[94] Indeed it is possible that Matthew interpreted this Scripture as Justin Martyr did, namely that Rachel figuratively 'weeps' in Bethlehem, but her voice is heard as far as Ramah.[95] Matthew's quotation of Jeremiah shares various elements in common with both the Hebrew and Septuagintal texts examined above: 'A voice was heard (Φωνὴ…ἠκούσθη) in Ramah, weeping and much lamentation (κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὀδυρμὸς πολύς); Rachel wailing

[89] Cf. Smith 2011: 137, 141.
[90] θρῆνος is a common translation for both נהי and קינה, according to Smith 2011: 136. Cf. also §4.2.
[91] López-Bertran and Garcia-Ventura 2012: 403. See also Shiell 2004: 71-74.
[92] Kozlova 2017: 157-196.
[93] For discussion of this tragedy in terms of theology and history, cf. Allison 2005; Albrecht 2015.
[94] Cf. Gen 35:16-20; Sered 1986. 1 Sam 10:2, however, locates Rachel's tomb in Benjaminite territory; Jer 31:15 itself associates Rachel with Ramah. See discussion in Cox and Ackerman 2009.
[95] Cf. Justin Martyr, *Dial*. 78.

(κλαίουσα) for her children, and she would not be comforted, because they are no more' (2:17-18).[96]

Who is the listener to Rachel's lament, voiced 'through the prophet Jeremiah,' in Matthew's text? The divine listener to Rachel's weeping, and the divine promise of return from exile (Jer 31:16-17) does not appear in Matthew's text. Rather, as with his Hos 11:1 quotation, the gospel writer's aside invokes his reader as the primary listener to this quotation. Perhaps the wider context of Jer 31:15 is meant to be 'heard' mentally by Matthew's listener, reminding him of the divine promise of restoration.[97] Nevertheless, Matthew's listener is presented with an 'auditory image' in decided contrast with the other three we have noted in previous fulfillment quotations: instead of a mother and child (Isa 7:14; Mic 5:1), or a father and infant son (Hos 11:1), the prophet Jeremiah presents a woman alone, grieving for the loss of her children. Instead of hearing the voices of naming (Isa 7:14) or of calling (Hos 11:1) a child, listeners to this quotation hear the voice of a lament. Thus, although the life of the infant Jesus is saved, Matthew does not pass over the deaths of the other children in silence. His reader is made to listen to a voice from Israel's past, sounding again in sorrow for the lives of Rachel's children.

2.2.6 Matt 2:23: Ambiguous Aurality

Matthew's quotation in 2:23 closes the scene in which Joseph settles his family in Nazareth following the death of Herod, and also concludes Matthew's infancy narrative: 'And he came and settled in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled: "For he will be called a Nazarene (Ναζωραῖος)."' The lack of a clear Scriptural source for this quotation, 'surely one of the best known *cruces* of

[96] For discussion of textual issues cf. Massebieau 1885: 10; Soares Prabhu 1976: 253-261; Brown 1993: 221-223; Menken 2000; Davies and Allison 2004: 267.
[97] Cf. Hays 2016: 114-116.

Synoptic exegesis,'[98] has generated several theories regarding the location of the intended text, and accordingly the identity of the prophets to whom Matthew appeals in the unexpected plural. One of the key issues is Matthew's puzzling Ναζωραῖος gentilic, instead of the more commonly used Ναζαρηνός (e.g. Mark 1:24) for a resident of Ναζαρέτ. The Hebrew or Greek origin of Matthew's term is difficult to decipher. The quotation in Matt 2:23 is, then, a case of ambiguous aurality – Matthew's reader might 'hear' through memory one of a number of different Scriptural echoes.[99]

This aural ambiguity existed for ancient listeners, as Jerome's exegesis attests.[100] In several writings,[101] Jerome takes the view that Matthew's Ναζωραῖος refers to the Davidic 'shoot' or 'branch' (נצר) from the stump of Jesse, most famously exemplified in Isa 11:1 – a passage which, in fact, was read messianically at Qumran, in rabbinic literature, and in Christian sources.[102] Later, however, in his *Comm. Isa*., Jerome 'hears' another Scriptural antecedent to Matthew's quotation: the terminology of 'Nazirite' (נזיר / ναζιραῖος), for example at the annunciation of the birth of Samson in Judges 13:5, 7 (cf. 16:17).[103] These two interpretive options remain the most prominent in modern scholarship, with multiple variations.[104]

Each of these options present different auditory experiences for the hearer of Matthew's text – and, as with the previous two quotations, it is primarily to Matthew's reader that this quotation is addressed.[105] The Davidic נצר of Isa 11:1 – offering the 'auditory image' of a branch shooting forth from a stump, harmonizes with Matthew's

[98] Soares Prabhu 1976: 193.
[99] On mental sense perception, memory, and aurality, cf. §1.2.5; 2.2.
[100] Cf. Lyonnet 1944.
[101] Cf. Jerome, *Epist*. 57; *Comm. Matt*. on Matt 2:23 (Scheck 2008: 67.); *Ruf*. 2.25.
[102] See, e.g., 4Q161 8-10; Tg. Ps.-J. on Isa 11:1; Rom 15:12; Rev 5:5; Justin Martyr, *1 Apol*. 32; *Dial*. 126; Irenaeus of Lyons, *Haer*. 3.9.3.
[103] Jerome, *Comm. Isa*. on Isa 11:1 (cf. Scheck 2015). Cf. the dating of Jerome's interpretations in Lyonnet 1944: 197.
[104] Cf. Soares Prabhu 1976; Brown 1993: 223-225; Menken 2001; Davies and Allison 2004: 274-281.
[105] Joseph's move to Nazareth is prompted, rather, by dreams (2:19-22). Cf. discussion in §2.3.

emphases on the infant Jesus' Davidic roots in the infancy narrative more broadly (e.g. 1:1, as well as in previous quotations in 1:20-23; 2:5-6 – see analysis in §2.2.2-3). It is important to note that this interpretation requires listeners to Matthew's Greek text to 'hear' a Hebrew term intoned behind it.

Conversely, the interpretation that Matthew's Ναζωραῖος plays on the terminology of נזיר / ναζιραῖος works in both Hebrew and Greek languages. If the account of Samson's birth in Judges (one of the texts of the 'former prophets'[106]) is Matthew's source for his word-play, this text contains resonances with Matthew 1-2 in its description of parents who receive in a dream the angelic announcement that their son will be a Nazirite (ὅτι…ναζιραῖον ἔσται, 13:5, 7), and deliver Israel from the Philistines.

These ambiguous aural echoes aside, it is clear that Matthew's point in bringing the 'voice' of this quotation into his infancy narrative is to identify Jesus with Nazareth. Indeed, it is the linguistic resonance of both נצר and נזיר / ναζιραῖος with Ναζαρέτ that suggests the connection. Interestingly, although there is a greater phonetic similarity between Ναζαρέτ and ναζιραῖος in the Greek language, the Hebrew spelling of 'Nazareth' may have been closer to נצר, as a Roman-era Hebrew inscription seems to attest.[107] Potentially, the Hebrew name of 'Nazareth' and its locale held messianic associations.[108]

2.2.7 Unspoken Quotations? (Num 24:17 and Isa 60)

Before concluding this section we should make a note of two Scriptural texts which Matthew does not quote within his infancy narrative, but which nevertheless have been 'heard' in the undertones of his text by readers since antiquity. Both texts 'sound' in the background of Matthew's account of the magi: Num 24:17, Balaam's prophecy of a

[106] On the category of 'former prophets' in Matthew's time, cf. Menken 2001: 466-467.
[107] Pixner 2010: 29. Cf. Kroll 2002: 82-83.
[108] Cf. Pixner 2010: 28-32; Riesner 2017.

star rising 'out of Jacob' and a scepter 'out of Israel', and Isa 60, which speaks of kings journeying toward the light of Israel, riding on camels and bringing gifts of gold and frankincense.

It is unclear why Matthew did not voice these quotations explicitly into his narrative;[109] his silence here has not prevented them from entering into the aural and visual imaginations of his readers, however. They certainly carry vivid 'auditory images,'[110] and these figures of an attuned Scriptural imagination, especially the figure of Balaam pointing to a star, also began to appear in many early visual representations of the magi.[111] In addition to this early prevalence of Num 24:17, the reading of Isa 60:1-6 has long been paired with Matt 2:1-12 in liturgical readings at Epiphany, and later iconography of the magi as 'kings' comes from this intertextual visualization.

2.2.8 Conclusion to §2.2

Through this section's analysis of the reverberating sounds of spoken voices (and even unspoken ones) in Matthew's fulfillment quotations, we conclude that these quotations contribute to the overall aesthetic piety of his infancy narrative. We have identified multiple listeners on the other side of the quoted prophetic speech, including Joseph and Herod within Matthew's text; and Ahaz, David, a personified Bethlehem, and the 'sons of Israel' within the original Scriptural texts. Moreover, the quotations invite the listening reader into the aesthetics of Matthew's infancy narrative through drawing on various interlocking notions of aural piety in antiquity: the heightened sonority of divine and prophetic voices; liturgical contexts for the oral proclamation and interpretation of

[109] Many believe them to be implicit in the evangelist's narrative; e.g. Brown 1993: 187-188, 190-196; Hays 2016: 176.
[110] Cf. §2.2.1.
[111] We will discuss examples of this phenomenon more thoroughly in relation to Origen's reception of Matt 2:1-12; cf. §6.2.4.

Scripture; and ways in which hearing engages both memory – so that the reader 'hears' the wider context of a quotation, or even unspoken quotations – and imagination.

On this last point, we have noted a number of 'auditory images' – images that are conveyed through speech, requiring the visual imagination of the listener. The most prominent of these images in Matthew's text are the virgin and child of Isa 7:14, and Rachel's weeping from Jer 31:15; however, other quotations also evoke images: Bethlehem as a mother giving birth (Mic 5:2-3), and the intimacy between a father and son (Hos 11:1-4). We will revisit these images in §2.4, where I argue that Matthew uses them to effect in presenting the culminating visual revelation of the infant Christ to the magi.

In summary, Matthew's fulfillment quotations appeal powerfully to the aural piety of listeners. We turn now to another, related way in which specifically *aural* piety is invoked by Matthew 1-2, and dwell especially on how this is exemplified in the figure of Joseph.

2.3 The Aesthetic Vocabulary of Dreams

2.3.1 Introduction

This section and the last strike an interesting parallel: in §2.2 we examined five invocations of prophetic voices in Matthew's infancy narrative; here, we analyze its five dreams. And, as with my analysis of the quotations, I propose in this section that the dreams of Matthew's infancy narrative contribute to its overall aesthetic piety.

Dreams are even more unique to Matthew than are the fulfillment quotations. He alone of the four evangelists includes them in his gospel.[112] In all, Matthew makes six

[112] Although cf. Acts 2:17; Jude 1:8. Visions, while often associated with dreams, are a different category (cf. further discussion in §2.3.2; 3.2.2).

references to dreams (cf. 27:19), though it is striking that five of these are concentrated in his infancy narrative (1:20-23; 2:12; 2:13; 2:19-20; 2:22).

Now, the topic of dreams in antiquity covers a vast terrain of ancient literature, and several studies have recently been devoted to locating the Matthean dreams within their ancient Jewish and Graeco-Roman contexts.[113] Dreams were a characteristic feature of birth narratives in antiquity;[114] they were recommended by rhetorical handbooks as important aspects of the birth *topos* in encomia,[115] and were employed by several ancient biographers in relating the infancies of their subjects.[116] More pertinently to Matthew's infancy narrative, for which connections to traditions about Moses have been well-documented,[117] several Second Temple and rabbinic Jewish texts record dreams foretelling Moses' birth.[118] Additionally, Matthew's portrayal of Joseph as a dreamer recalls the other dreaming and dream-interpreting Joseph of Genesis 37, 40-41.

In keeping with the aims of this chapter, however, my examination of the dreams in Matthew's infancy narrative focuses primarily on their aesthetic aspects. How is the aesthetic piety – visual or aural – of Matthew's dreamers engaged? And how does this contribute to the 'aesthetic invitation' posed to Matthew's reader?

The method of my approach to these questions is to probe the vocabulary Matthew uses to introduce each dream. The six dreams recorded in Matthew's gospel can be divided into two basic forms: a narrative of a dream that includes the appearance of an angel and his message (1:20-23; 2:13; 2:19-20), and a reference to a dream without

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[113] Cf. Gnuse 1990; Frenschkowski 1998; Dodson 2009; Subash 2012. On dreams more generally in Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian antiquity, see Ehrlich 1956; Hanson 1980; Miller 1994; Gnuse 1996; Renberg 2003; Flannery-Dailey 2004; Quick 2018.
[114] For more general remarks on the NT infancy narratives among other ancient birth accounts, cf. §1.3.2.
[115] E.g. Hermogenes of Tarsus, *Progymnasmata* 7.22-24; Nicolaus the Sophist, *Progymnasmata* 8; Menander the Rhetor, *Περὶ Ἐπιδεικτικῶν* 2.371. Texts found in Kennedy 2003; Russell and Wilson 1981. Cf. discussion in Dodson 2009: 59-61.
[116] E.g. Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.107-108; 6.131; Plutarch, *Pericles* 3.
[117] See, e.g., Brown 1993: 107-119; Davies and Allison 2004: 192-193.
[118] E.g. Josephus, *A.J.* 2.212-217; Pseudo-Philo, *LAB* 9.10; *Tg. Yer. I* on Exod 1:15; *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Exod 1:15; *Chronicle of Moses*.

narration of specific images or words it contains (2:12; 2:22; 27:19). The first type is introduced by slight variations on a similar formula:

> ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου κατ᾽ ὄναρ ἐφάνη αὐτῷ λέγων (1:20)
> ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ᾽ ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσὴφ λέγων (2:13)
> ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ᾽ ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσὴφ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ λέγων (2:19)

The second type, where it is found in the infancy narrative, follows another distinguishable pattern:

> καὶ χρηματισθέντες κατ᾽ ὄναρ (2:12)
> χρηματισθεὶς δὲ κατ᾽ ὄναρ (2:22)

In this section's analysis, I first discuss the phrase common in all five examples (κατ᾽ ὄναρ) and the ancient category of dream in general. I then examine the particular vocabulary of the first type (ἰδοὺ, ἄγγελος κυρίου, φαίνω, λέγω) and that of the second type (χρηματίζω). With each of these lexical items I focus on uncovering the ways in which they appeal to the senses of seeing or hearing, and contribute to the aesthetic piety of characters and readers. I reflect finally on the piety of the primary figure who perceives dreams in Matthew's infancy narrative, Joseph.

2.3.2 κατ᾽ὄναρ

All six Matthean dreams are indicated by the common phrase κατ᾽ ὄναρ ('in a dream'). This is true even for the dream of Pilate's wife in 27:19, which does not follow the same formulas that appear in the infancy narrative. First attested in literature around the turn of the first century, κατ᾽ ὄναρ is also the most widely represented formula in Greek inscriptions about divinely-sent dreams or visions.[119] Although common across

[119] Cf. Frenschkowski 1998: 14-21; Renberg 2003; and the BDAG entry for ὄναρ.

both literary and epigraphic evidence, the word ὄναρ occurs in no other writing of the New Testament.[120]

There is no evidence that ὄναρ carries any particular visual or aural connotations that might distinguish it from other common Greek words for dreams (e.g. ἐνύπνιον; ὄνειρος).[121] However, the category of 'dream' as a whole was clearly associated in Greek antiquity with images that one sees while sleeping.[122] The Septuagint, which prefers the term ἐνύπνιον to ὄναρ,[123] often translates the Hebrew verb חלם ('to dream') or the expression חלם חלום ('to dream a dream') into a combination of the verb ὁράω with ἐνύπνιον ('to see a dream').[124] Similarly, several examples from the intertestamental literature feature the expression found in Matthew, κατ' ὄναρ, with ὁράω ('to see in a dream').[125] In the second century, Artemidorus' lengthy tome on dream interpretation, the *Oneirocritica*, details the interpretation of multiple images, and even colors, that a dreamer might see in his sleep.[126]

While sight is prevalent in the general conceptualization of dreams, the hearing of voices occurs often in ancient dream accounts as well. Form critics have often categorized such accounts according to their visual or aural natures. According to Gnuse, in the Hebrew Bible 'there are two types of dream reports, one with a simple oral message (auditory message dream) and one wherein a scene appears before the dreamer (visual

[120] Acts 2:17 and Jude 1:8 both employ the verb ἐνυπνιάζομαι or noun form ἐνύπνιον. A 'vision' is referred to as ὀπτασία (Luke 1:22; 24:23; Acts 26:19; 2 Cor 12:1), ὅραμα (Matt 17:9; Acts 7:31; 9:10, 12; 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5; 12:9; 16:9, 10; 18:9), ὅρασις (Acts 2:17; Rev 9:17), or through forms of the verb ὁράω (e.g. ἑόρακεν in Col 2:18).
[121] Compare the LSJ and BDAG entries for ἐνύπνιον, ὄναρ, and ὄνειρος.
[122] Cf. Miller 1994: 14-38.
[123] Cf. Frenschkowski 1998: 14.
[124] Cf. Gen 37:9; 41:1, 11, 15; 42:9; Dan 2:3; 4:5; 8:2
[125] *Life of Adam and Eve* 2.2; *Testament of Abraham* 4.16; 7.4-5 (recensio B).
[126] On dream images in the *Oneirocritica*, see Miller 1994: 29-33. On colors in the *Oneirocritica*, see Reitzenstein 2016.

symbolic dream), often enigmatic in content and requiring interpretation.'[127] Gnuse places the Matthean dreams in his first, aural category.[128] Following a different approach, Hanson has divided the ancient dream-vision into three types: the visual (a symbolic scene is described and interpretation is required), the auditory (where only a message is heard), and the audio-visual (which features both the appearance of a dream figure and what the figure says).[129]

Modern scholars are not the first to classify dreams. The ancients also divided dreams into types, beginning with Homer, whose 'basic distinction between true (divinatory) and false (non-divinatory) dreams became the basis upon which subsequent classifications developed.'[130] This fundamental distinction between predictive and non-predictive dreams is carried forward even in Artemidorus' more complex five-class system of dreams, and Philo's three-class system. Artemidorus' two basic categories are ἐνύπνιον (which he understands to be without meaning and non-predictive), and ὄνειρος (which has meaning after sleep, is predictive, and requires interpretation). To the first category he also adds φάντασμα ('apparition'), and to the second category he adds ὅραμα ('vision') and χρηματισμός ('oracle').[131] The fact that Artemidorus goes on to focus solely on the interpretation of the enigmatic ὄνειροι would suggest that he understands the other two meaningful types of dreams (ὅραμα and χρηματισμός) as likewise predictive, but perhaps also more clearly expressed.[132]

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[127] Gnuse 1996: 70. Under the heading of 'auditory message dream' Gnuse classifies Gen 20:1-18; 18:10-22; 31:1-54; 46:1-7; Num 22:8-13, 19-21; 1 Kings 3:5-15; and 1 Sam 3:1-21. Under 'visual symbolic dream' he places Gen 37:5-11; 40:5-19; 41:1-36; Judg 7:13-15; and Dan 2:1-45; 4:4-27.
[128] Cf. Gnuse 1990.
[129] Cf. Hanson 1980.
[130] Dodson 2009: 44. Cf. Penelope's description of two classes of dreams in *Od*. 19.562-567. See Dodson 2009: 44-52 for a discussion of the dream classifications of Plato, Herophilus (preserved by Galen and Plutarch), Artemidorus, Posidonius (preserved by Cicero), Philo, and Tertullian.
[131] Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica* 1.1-2.
[132] This is reinforced by Macrobius' later comments on the same five types of dreams in his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 3.2-10.

Philo, in his three-volume treatise *De somniis* (only two volumes of which are extant), concerns himself only with a meaningful, predictive category of dream that he terms θεοπέμπτοι ὄνειροι ('God-sent dreams').[133] He divides this category into three classes: those in which God himself originates the movement of what is presented to those in sleep (1.1; 2.2), those in which the human mind (νοῦς) or (διανοία) moves out of itself and is capable of receiving divine knowledge (1.2; 2.2), and those in which the soul (ψυχή) is arrested with strange and obscure enigmas, which require interpretation (2.1; 2.4). These three classes of dreams range on a scale of lucidity (cf. 2.3-4), with the first being the most clear ('plain oracles' or χρησμοί),[134] the second to be only slightly enigmatic, and often involving divine intermediaries such as angels or the Logos,[135] and the third as the most obscure, requiring expert interpretation.[136] All three involve φαντασίαι ('appearances') that are presented to the dreamer in sleep.

This discussion of ὄναρ and the ancient category of dream in general is sufficient to establish that dreams offered occasions for seeing and hearing in a variety of different ways, in both the Jewish and Graeco-Roman traditions. In order to understand the aesthetic emphases of the dreams in Matthew's infancy narrative, we must look more closely at additional vocabulary used in each of the two types of Matthean dreams.

2.3.3 ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται… λέγων

Once again, in the first type of dream we find the following introduction to each angelic message:

ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου κατ' ὄναρ ἐφάνη αὐτῷ λέγων (1:20)

[133] However, Philo seems to allude to insignificant, non-predictive dreams in *Somn*. 2.105; 2.133; and 2.162. Note also that the semi-technical term θεοπέμπτοι may be found in the dream classifications of Herophilus and Artemidorus, and in Posidonius' synonymous classification, *deorum appulsu* (Cf. Dodson 2009: 49).
[134] The lost first volume of *Somn*. would have provided examples of this type of dream. Possibly the dreams of Abimelech (Gen 20:3-7) and Laban (Gen 31:24) were included in this volume.
[135] *Somn*., vol. 1 (orig. vol. 2) treats examples of this type (Gen 28:10-17; 31:10-13).
[136] *Somn*., vol. 2 (orig. vol. 3) treats examples of this type (Gen 37:5-11; 40; 41:1-36).

> ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ’ ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσὴφ λέγων (2:13)
> ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ’ ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσὴφ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ λέγων (2:19)

The presentative ἰδοὺ directs Matthew’s reader to visualize the scene.[137] In so doing the reader is drawn in to the perspective of the righteous Joseph (δίκαιος, 1:19), who is the seeing and listening subject to whom the angel’s appearance (φαίνω) and communication (λέγω) are directed. We shall observe that Matthew’s emphasis is on the aural message conveyed; however, various visual elements are also evoked.

First, while Matthew does not supply a physical description of the ἄγγελος κυρίου, it is possible that the figure’s presence *implies* certain visual or auditory attributes, which might have been understood within the milieu of Matthew’s gospel. Although most other references to angels in the gospel are descriptions of their actions or state of being, not of their visuality or aurality,[138] several Matthean passages do offer tools for thinking about how the gospel writer might have understood seeing and hearing in relation to the figure that materializes in his infancy narrative. For example, the expression ἄγγελος κυρίου occurs again in Matthew only at the empty tomb (28:2),[139] and here a description of his visual appearance *is* offered: ‘And his appearance (εἰδέα) was like lightning (ἀστραπή) and his garment was white (λευκόν) as snow’ (28:3). Elsewhere, Matthew associates angels with eschatological sights and sounds: they will accompany the Son of Man coming ‘in his glory (δόξα)’ or ‘in the glory of his Father,’ (16:27; 25:31; cf. Mark 8:38), a concept that references the radiant appearance of divine presence (כבוד),[140] and they will be sent out by the Son of Man ‘with a loud trumpet call’ (σάλπιγξ μέγας, 24:31; cf. Mark 13:27), an instrument associated in antiquity with its extremely high volume and shrieking

[137] Cf. discussion of ἰδοὺ in §2.2.2.
[138] Cf. Matt 4:11; 13:39, 41, 49; 22:30; 24:36; 25:41; 26:53.
[139] Cf. also Luke 1:11; 2:9; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 12:7, 11, 23. The phrase is also common in the LXX as a translation of מלאך יהוה; cf. esp. Gen 16:7-11; 22:11, 15; Exod 3:2; 4:24; Num 22:31, 34.
[140] Cf. Kittel and Von Rad 1964; and further discussion in §3.3.2-3.

sound.[141] While it is clear that we are not to imagine the full eschatological unveiling of the divine glory, or the highest pitch of trumpets, when the angel of the Lord visits Joseph in his dreams, these images and sounds do underscore a general Matthean understanding of angels, and particularly the ἄγγελος κυρίου, as emitting a unique aesthetic brilliance that is derived from the presence of God and stuns the human senses (cf. 28:3-4). This theological conception of angels mediating the divine presence is one that Matthew inherits from the developing angelology of ancient Judaism.[142]

Moreover, one text in Matthew offers a picture of the intermediary role angels play between the human and divine as in some way connected with their own viewing capabilities. Jesus warns his disciples not to despise little children, for 'in heaven their angels continually see (βλέπουσι) the face (πρόσωπον) of my Father in heaven' (18:10). Philo of Alexandria gives us one frame of reference for this idea.[143] Philo's extended interpretation of Gen 28:10-17 in *De somniis* includes a philosophical portrait of the angels that ascend and descend upon the ladder in Jacob's dream. He describes them as the 'ears (ἀκοαί) and eyes (ὄψεις)' of God, 'beholding (ἐφορῶσαι) and hearing (ἀκούουσαι) all things' and conveying what they see and hear as they traverse the dreaming souls of men (cf. *Somn*. 1.140-142).[144] A similar, although less philosophically developed, understanding exists in Matt 18:10; the implication of Jesus' statement is that angels see and hear human events (perhaps even in the role of 'guardian'[145]) just as they also hold court with God in heaven. Are we perhaps meant to understand the ἄγγελος κυρίου of Matthew's infancy narrative to be acting in a similar manner?

[141] Cf. West 1992: 118-121.
[142] Cf. Brown 1993: 129; Dodson 2009: 142, 153-154.
[143] See Luz 2001: 441 for a discussion of this verse in context with other Jewish texts.
[144] Trans. Colson 1934: 372-373.
[145] Most interpreters take this verse to be referring to some conception of 'guardian angel,' whether of children or believers more broadly. Cf. Luz 2001: 441; Davies and Allison 2004: 771-772; Koskenniemi 2010.

These potential implications for the ἄγγελος κυρίου's visuality and aurality aside, we return to what the gospel writer does relate explicitly, namely that the angel appears (φαίνω) and speaks (λέγω). The term φαίνω[146] clearly implies that the angel was made visible to Joseph (note the dative in each case: αὐτῷ or τῷ Ἰωσὴφ). Furthermore, that φαίνω is associated with light and can also mean 'to shine' (e.g. in the shining appearance of the star in Matt 2:7) is especially interesting given the visual description of the ἄγγελος κυρίου in 28:3, noted above. There the angel's physical appearance is analogized to the brightness of lightning. Perhaps likewise, the appearances of the ἄγγελος κυρίου in the infancy narrative are to be understood as visually bright events. Since the appearance happens in Joseph's dream, it would seem that Joseph perceives this sight mentally (i.e. one of Artemidorus' φαντάσματα or Philo's φαντασίαι; cf. §2.3.2), though it may be analogous to a physical experience.

It remains the case, however, that the emphasis of these dream accounts in Matthew's infancy narrative lies on what the angel says, rather than on how he appears. In each dream, the angel's words offer to a listening Joseph important directions which concern the lives of the holy child and his mother. In the first instance (1:20-23), the angel's words reveal the nature of Mary's conception by the Holy Spirit, and call upon Joseph to take responsibility for the child through taking his mother in marriage and naming him. In two subsequent dreams (2:13, 19-20), the angel's words guide Joseph in protecting the life (ψυχή) of the infant, and in ultimately bringing him back to live it among the people he was destined to save.

The divine origin of these messages, and the ultimately divine plan that they convey, exists subtly in the background. Here Philo's dream theory again offers a comparable portrait of the intermediary role of angels, for Philo connects angels and

[146] Cf. Bultmann and Lührmann 1974; the entry for φαίνω in BDAG.

divine words so closely that they become interchangeable in his dream interpretation.[147] He refers to angels themselves as mediating λόγοι, who descend and ascend the 'stairway' of the human soul (*Somn*. 1.142, 147-148). While no such philosophy exists in Matthew's narrative, his focus on the aural nature of the dreams reflects a similar understanding of angels as messengers, bearing the words of God.

2.3.4 χρηματίζω

The second type of dream in Matthew's infancy narrative features no angel appearance, but only an oracle:

> καὶ χρηματισθέντες κατ' ὄναρ (2:12)
> χρηματισθεὶς δὲ κατ' ὄναρ (2:22)

Both of these formulas employ the verb χρηματίζω, which refers to divine warnings or revelations received through oracles, and is typical vocabulary in ancient dream theory (e.g. Artemidorus' χρηματισμός and Philo's χρησμός; cf. §2.3.2). In the New Testament, the word is most often used in the context of divine-human communications, as is the case in Matthew.[148] In Matt 2:12, the magi are warned in a dream not to return to Herod, and in 2:22, a dream warning influences Joseph's decision to settle in Nazareth of Galilee, rather than return to his previous home in Bethlehem of Judea.

With regard to aesthetic aspects, we can be very brief. Χρηματίζω seems to reflect a primarily aural form of revelation; as a category of dream it is often held in distinction from more visual forms (note especially Artemidorus' division between χρηματισμός, 'oracle,' and ὅραμα, 'vision;' cf. §2.3.2). Matthew's use of χρηματίζω thus tallies well with our observation of his tendency with the first type of dream, namely to emphasize the

[147] Cf. Miller 1994: 61.
[148] In addition to the two cases in Matthew, cf. Luke 2:26; Acts 10:22; Rom 11:4; Heb 8:5; 11:7; 12:25. Cf. further discussion in §3.3.3.

aurality of the message even when visual aspects are also at play. Both types of dreams primarily invoke a listener.

2.3.5 Joseph's Aural Piety

Having examined the 'aesthetic vocabulary' that Matthew uses to describe his dreams, and observed that both types primarily invoke a listener, we turn briefly now to reflect more fully on the aural piety of the one to whom four of these dream-messages are spoken: St Joseph. While Luke's infancy narrative records a few narrative elements that include the figure of Joseph (1:27; 2:4-5, 22-51), Matthew's account is the only New Testament writing that features Joseph's individual experience. The foster father of Jesus is notably a silent figure in the New Testament, yet Matthew 1-2 lends partial insight into his inner life and character.[149]

Matthew's initial portrayal of Joseph in 1:19-20 is of a just, kind, and thoughtful man – one who 'ponders' (ἐνθυμηθέντος) within himself in a manner similar to Luke's portrayal of Mary.[150] The angel's first dream-appearance to Joseph interrupts these inner deliberations. The revelation of the angel's message sets Joseph on a different course, but he responds to it, and similar directions, with a quiet and obedient energy. It is in this silent, listening action that the aural piety of Joseph resides.[151]

Interestingly, the dreams that provoke Joseph's active, listening response also correspond closely with the voices of Scripture analyzed in §2.2. As we noted in that section, Matthew's fulfillment quotations primarily appeal to the listening reader. Thus while Joseph hears the angelic messages (including perhaps the citation of Isa 7:14; cf.

[149] Apocryphal narratives, notably the *Protevangelium of James*, will expand the characterization of Joseph. Interestingly, *PJ* adapts Matthew's portrayal of a listening Joseph to that of a visionary (cf. §4.4).
[150] Cf. Luke 1:29; 2:19, 51; and discussion in §3.2.3; 3.3.2, 4.
[151] Both Corradi Fiumara 1990 (esp. 95-112) and Harrison 2013 (13 *et passim*) have reflected on the generativity of silence in the act of attentive listening.

§2.2.2), the listening reader hears an added layer to Matthew's text, revealing the harmony between the prophetic voices of Israel's past, and the oracles that Joseph obeys. In this way Matthew reinforces the aural piety of Joseph, who likewise provides a model listener for his reader.

2.3.6 Conclusion to §2.3

In this section, we have analyzed the aesthetic vocabulary Matthew employs in describing the dreams of his infancy narrative, noting that, while visual aspects do emerge (notably in the 'appearance' of the angel in 1:20, 2:13, and 2:19), Matthew's focus is on the aurality of dreams, i.e. how and what they communicate to a listening subject. We then discussed Matthew's portrayal of Joseph's aural piety, and how this portrayal melds closely with his appeals to the listening reader through his fulfillment quotations. I conclude from this analysis that the five dreams of Matthew's infancy narrative contribute to its overall aesthetic piety, and work with the fulfillment quotations to appeal strongly to a listening reader.

2.4 Seeing the Child: Matt 2:1-12 as Aesthetic Culmination

2.4.1 Introduction

We turn our attention, lastly, to the most visually oriented pericope in Matthew's infancy narrative: the journey and adoration of the magi. Here I propose that in this account, Matthew's infancy narrative achieves its aesthetic culmination. We have already observed that of Matthew's infancy scenes, the account of the magi drew the most attention from early Christian artists.[152] Over against other theories about why the magi's

[152] Cf. §2.1. For further discussion of the magi in art, cf. Kehrer 1908; Marsh-Edwards 1956; Mathews 1993: 79-91; Koch 2000: 157-159; Jensen 2001; O'Kane 2005; O'Kane 2010.

story appeals so powerfully to the artist's eye,[153] my argument locates this visual impulse already within the biblical text. While early artistic evidence thus lends significant external support to my argument about the 'aesthetic culmination' of Matthew's infancy narrative, I make this proposal primarily on the basis of factors internal to the text.

First, this pericope is considerably more focused on issues of sense perception than either the fulfillment quotations, or the dreams. To probe the dimensions of this aesthetic attention I examine four facets of vision in the account: the magi themselves as viewing subjects (§2.4.2); their journey in terms of the concept of 'visual practice' (§2.4.3); the interrelated visual images of the star and the child, respectively (§2.4.4); and the magi's devotional response to seeing Jesus (§2.4.5). Admittedly, these four topics are not easily divisible; it is difficult to describe a viewing subject in isolation from his object of sight, or from what he does when he sees. My separation of four aspects seeks to clarify the event of 'seeing' in this text; however, they are in fact thoroughly integrated with one another.

Second, Matthew's text may be contextualized by a wider phenomenon in biblical literature in which 'seeing' is a more direct form of knowledge than 'hearing.'[154] We concluded in the previous sections that the fulfillment quotations and dreams were primarily aural in nature, conveying messages about the infant Christ to various listening subjects. These voices, particularly the fulfillment quotations, invoked several 'auditory images' which appealed to the listener's mental eye. However, within Matthew's account the most direct sensory encounter with the child himself is that of the magi. I suggest that the various 'auditory images' which conjure pictures of parenthood in the imagination –

[153] E.g. Mathews 1993 argues that the story appealed to early Christians because of its para-textual associations with magic and Christ as 'super-magician' (85-86). This topic surfaces in our discussion of Origen's reception of this text (cf. §6.2.4); however, there also Origen's interpretation is responding to a more fundamental, visual aspect of Matthew's text.
[154] See Avrahami 2012: 187-188; and further discussion in §3.1.2.

especially that of Isaiah's 'virgin with child' – lead up to and culminate in the magi's beholding of 'the child with Mary his mother' (2:11).

2.4.2 The Eyes of the Magi

Matt 2:1-12 contains four references to the magi's 'seeing' (εἶδον; 2:2, 9-11), an act which is striking in its repetition. Before probing these visual acts in further detail, here we focus on the magi themselves as viewing subjects, pursuing the question of how the magi's historical and cultural contexts might have shaped the ways they saw or conceptualized sight.

This inquiry is made difficult by the fact that Matthew's text reveals little about who the magi were or where they were supposed to have come from. The gospel writer conveys only vague cultural indicators: they are magi (μάγοι); they come 'from the east' (ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν); they exhibit knowledge of 'one born king of the Jews' but seem not to know the specifics of the Jewish Scriptures; and they bear gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, presumably brought from their own country.

Most commentators, from Justin Martyr to the present, have assumed that the magi were Gentiles, but even this is not positively disclosed.[155] Less clear still is the particular location from which they have come; the three frequently proposed theories remain Arabia,[156] Persia,[157] and Babylon.[158] Of these, Arabia and Persia provide perhaps the strongest cases for presumed localizations because of their attestation by ancient readers of Matthew's text. Bolstering ancient imaginations such as Justin's and Tertullian's was the

[155] Cf. Sim 1999. On astrology in a Jewish context see further von Stuckrad 2015; Jacobus 2015. Note however that the expression 'king of the Jews' only appears on the lips of Gentiles in the gospels. As a literary motif, at least, this evidence is striking.
[156] Cf. Brown 1993: 168-170; Maalouf 1999.
[157] Cf. Messina 1933; Brown 1993: 168-170; Kotansky 2007; van Kooten 2015.
[158] Cf. Brown 1993: 168-170; Ossendrijver 2015. For other depictions of μάγοι in a Babylonian context cf. Dan 1:20; 2:2; 4:4; 5:7.

fact that the gifts borne by the Matthean magi are associated in Isa 60:6 and Ps 72:15 with the desert camel trains coming from the Arabian lands of Midian and Sheba.[159] Multiple other Church Fathers proposed a Zoroastrian (i.e. Persian) background for the magi, and this became a prominent view.[160] Early Christian art often depicted the magi in Persian dress, a depiction that famously saved the Constantinian basilica at Bethlehem when Persian armies ravaged Palestine in 614.[161]

As we can see, gaps as to the cultural specifics of the magi were filled by the imaginations of early readers in multiple ways. In our analysis of Matthew's text, however, we are left with the question of how much we can say concerning the magi as culturally situated viewers. I base the following remarks not on a particular cultural region, but on a more general ancient culture of astronomy/astrology.[162]

Magi were known for various activities in the ancient world, including diverse forms of magic, religious rites, the interpretation of dreams and visions, and astrology.[163] That Matthew's μάγοι are meant to be astrologers can be deduced by several astronomical expressions in Matthew's text. The magi themselves say that they have seen the star ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ (2:2, 9), a phrase that has often been translated 'in the east' but has also been recognized as a technical astronomical expression of precision: 'at its rising.'[164] Additionally, 2:7, in which Herod 'ascertained (ἠκρίβωσεν) from them the exact time (χρόνον) of the star's appearance (φαινομένου),' contains astronomical vocabulary. Ἀκριβόω, 'to ascertain exactly' is a technical term used in astronomical observations,[165]

[159] Cf. Justin Martyr, *Dial.*78.1; Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.13 (cf. also Clement of Rome, *1 Cor*. 25.1-2). Note our discussion of a possible 'unquoted' fulfillment quotation such as Isa 60:6 in §2.2.7.
[160] See, e.g., Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.15; Origen, *Cat. Fr. Matt*. 24; the *Arabic Gospel of the Infancy* 7.1.
[161] As reported in a letter of 836, associated with the Synod of Jerusalem. Cf. Finegan 1992: 39-40.
[162] The two categories were more overlapping in antiquity; cf. Losev 2012.
[163] Cf. Dan 1:20; 2:2; 4:4; 5:7; Acts 8:9-24; 13:6-11; Herodotus, *Hist.* 1; Tacitus, *Annals* 2.27-33; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 36; Philo, *Abr*. 68-71; *Mos.* 1.50.276-277; *Spec.* 3.18.100-101; Josephus, *A.J.* 20.7.2.142.
[164] Cf. Brown 1993: 173; Davies and Allison 2004: 236; Luz 2007: 102 n 1.
[165] Cf. Brown 1993: 175.

and determining precise χρόνος would have been a major part of such investigations. More pertinently for the present investigation, φαινόμενα was a technical term for the observable phenomena of stars and planets.[166]

Volk has recently examined visual aspects of Aratus' *Phaenomena* (third century BCE), the 'famous Hellenistic poem about the constellations that throughout the Greco-Roman world came to be considered the classic treatment of the starry sky.'[167] Indeed, the pervasive influence of this work is even attested by the New Testament, when Paul cites it at the Areopagus (Acts 17:28). While Aratus was not an astronomer himself, his work did influence the way astronomy was conceived by non-experts in antiquity. Volk documents Aratus' strong focus on the sense of sight in describing human perception of stars, noting multiple vocabulary utilized to convey various facets of sight, including εἰσωπός; ἐπίοπτος; ἐπόψιος; περίσκεπτος; and πολύσκεπτος.[168] These terms reveal the directions of 'looking' that astronomy might entail: looking within, over, around, and from a distance.

The poetry of Aratus, combined with the astronomical vocabulary of Matt 2:1-12, helps us to think about the magi's modes of viewing within their occupational context. The magi's eyes are trained not merely to 'see' stars, but to inspect them carefully and to record their times and movements with accuracy. This visual skill developed within their astrological culture uniquely equips them for the acts of viewing described in Matthew.

2.4.3 The Visual Practice of Pilgrimage

We turn now to focus specifically on the magi's journey – 'from the east' to Jerusalem and finally Bethlehem – in light of the notion of 'visual practice.' As was discussed in §1.2.2, a 'visual practice' is an action performed in relation to the object of

[166] Cf. Volk 2013: 107.
[167] Volk 2013: 106.
[168] Volk 2013: 107-108. For the text of Aratus' *Phaenomena*, cf. Kidd 1997. Cf. also Volk 2012.

vision. For the magi, their pilgrimage toward Bethlehem is one such practice: these travels are significantly shaped by their sight (as well as the lack thereof).

We begin by tracing the magi's movements in Matthew's text. In 2:1 the reader is told that they 'came' (παρεγένοντο) to Jerusalem from the east. In the next verse they describe their own journey as they inquire about the specific whereabouts of the child: 'We have seen his star at its rising and have come (ἤλθομεν) to worship him' (2:2). At this point a nervous Herod also becomes invested in their journey, when he sends them on from Jerusalem to Bethlehem: 'Go, inquire carefully (πορευθέντες ἐξετάσατε ἀκριβῶς) about the child; and when you find him, bring news back to me, that I too may come and worship him.' Following their encounter with Herod, they 'set out' (ἐπορεύθησαν), and the movement of the star guides their travel as it 'went before them (προῆγεν αὐτούς), until it came to stand still (ἕως ἐλθὼν ἐστάθη) over the place where the child was' (2:9). In 2:11 they 'come' (ἐλθόντες) into the house, and in 2:12 they do not return (ἀνακάμψαι) to Herod but 'went back (ἀνεχώρησαν) to their country through another way (ὁδοῦ).'

This outline of the magi's travels reveals several pieces of information concerning the magi's sight in relation to their journey. In the first place, it is their initial sight of the star that prompts their journey, and their continued sight of it guides them to their ultimate destination. At the same time, it is clear that the purpose for their journey is not merely to see the star; rather, it is to see and to worship the one whom it signifies. The devotional drive of their pilgrimage is contrasted with Herod's own investment in their journey, and his desire to gain news of what he cannot go to see for himself. His words of devotion thinly veil his taking advantage of the magi's journey and powers of sight essentially to spy on a potential threat to his throne.

These various elements of the magi's visual practice of pilgrimage are illuminated by concepts of travel and sight in ancient Jewish and early Christian traditions. Avrahami

has observed that walking is associated with sight in contexts of personal, direct investigation: 'This idea is reflected in the expressions "walk and see" (לך וראה) and "go and see" (צא וראה).'[169] This powerful association between travel and sight continues in the Christian tradition, for example in late ancient accounts of pilgrimages to holy sites and desert saints.[170] A similar schematic applies to the magi's experience: their journey, thoroughly shaped by seeing, allows them to acquire firsthand knowledge of the child they seek, and subsequently to worship him.

As Avrahami notes, the connection of walking and sight in investigative contexts is also clearly illustrated in descriptions of spying, for example in Saul's directions for finding David's whereabouts (1 Sam 23:22-23).[171] In such cases, going and seeing can also put one in a position of power over the ones seen, as for example in Balak's assumption that Balaam's sight of the Israelites will enable his curse (Num 23:13).[172] These examples illuminate the role Herod plays in the magi's travels. He never sees the child as do the magi, but he tries to use their journey in order to spy on him, and their sight of him to exert power over him.

2.4.4 The Objects of Vision: ἀστήρ and παίδιον

We have touched on the visual images of the star (ἀστήρ) and the child (παίδιον) already, but here we study their status as objects of vision more closely. Here my concern is not with a description of physical appearance; indeed, Matthew himself does not detail

[169] Avrahami 2012: 77. For Avrahami, kinaesthesia (and walking as one of its major expressions) is itself one of the senses in the ancient Hebrew sensorium.
[170] See, e.g., Frank 2000, esp. 13-39; 102-189. Cf. also discussion in §3.3.2; 6.3.5.
[171] Cf. Avrahami 2012: 79. Cf. also 160-162.
[172] Cf. Avrahami 2012: 150.

the appearance of either the star,[173] or the child.[174] Rather, my focus is on how they function in the text as objects of the magi's sight.

Firstly, the close visual relationship between the star and the infant Christ is evident from the magi's initial words in 2:2: 'Where is the one born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in its rising and have come to worship him.' The magi have not merely seen *a* star; they have seen '*his* star' (εἴδομεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα), an expression that indicates that for the magi, the image of the star is defined in relation to another, sought image. In §2.4.2 we discussed the magi as viewers, culturally situated in an astrological mode of viewing that traced the movements of stars closely and with precision. Here we see that for the magi the star is more than a scientific phenomenon, but that it points to another image that they cannot see from their own land. The visible star signifies the still invisible 'one born king of the Jews,' and the whole point of their journey is to render this invisible one visible. Matthew does not explain how the magi have this knowledge about the star's image in relation to Jesus; later interpreters will attribute this insight to their reading of the prophecy of Balaam (Num 24:7; cf. §2.2.7).[175]

The image of the star appears once more in 2:9-10. In using the presentative ἰδού,[176] Matthew directs the reader's eyes, along with the magi's, to behold the star as it guides the magi to the child in a visually specific way: 'it came to stand still over the place where the child was.' The magi's final sight of the star (ἰδόντες δὲ τὸν ἀστέρα) is such that they 'rejoiced with an exceedingly great joy' (ἐχάρησαν χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα).

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[173] Ancient readers of Matthew's account interpret the star's appearance more specifically; see, e.g. Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph*. 19.2; *PJ* 21; Origen, *Cels*. 1.58, 60; *Cat. Fr. Matt*. 24; and discussion in §4.5; §6.2.4; Dorival 2003. Modern interpreters also speculate about the nature of the star; see esp. Barthel and van Kooten 2015; Nicholl 2015. Note also Allison 2005's proposal that the star was an angel.

[174] It is interesting that Matthew does not comment on the child's appearance, especially since his infancy account strongly parallels the infancy of Moses. Moses' infant 'beauty' (Exod 2:2) was often illuminated in ancient Jewish and Christian interpretation. See, e.g., Philo, *Mos*. 1.3; Josephus, *A.J*. 2.9.37; Acts 7:20; Heb 11:23; *Exod. Rab*. 2. Cf. discussion in Loader 2011.

[175] See, e.g., discussion of Origen's interpretation in §6.2.4.

[176] Cf. §2.2.2.

And yet, the star, having stopped its movement, gives way to another object of sight. Matt 2:11 presents the climactic moment: 'And coming into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother (εἶδον τὸ παιδίον μετὰ Μαρίας τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ). Here it is noteworthy that, although the sought after image is clearly the child, he does not appear to their eyes as a solitary figure, but 'with Mary his mother.' This is especially striking given our previous discussion of the 'auditory images' of motherhood evoked by several fulfillment quotations (especially Isa 7:14, but also Mic 5:1 and even Jer 31:15). Whereas those images were conveyed in words to the visual imagination of listeners, in Matt 2:11 the magi behold a mother and a child with their own eyes; here the infant Christ with his mother emerges as a textual icon unveiled by Matthew to the reader, as well.[177]

2.4.5 The Magi's Visual Piety

The verb προσκυνέω ('worship') appears three times in Matt 2:1-12: in the magi's intention to find the infant king and to worship him (2:2), in Herod's falsely expressed desire to worship Jesus (2:8), and climactically in the description of the magi's response to seeing the child in 2:11: 'and casting themselves down, they worshipped him, and opening their treasure chests, they brought out gifts for him, gold and frankincense and myrrh.' These actions – the bowing down, the worshipping, and the giving of gifts – all may be classed as 'visual practices' in that they are actions prompted directly by an object of sight. These actions – and especially that of worship – also help to clarify for Matthew's reader the magi's overall visual piety. Their pilgrimage is not merely a sightseeing excursion; their gaze is not disinterested but deeply invested – a beholding that tends toward devotion.

[177] Interestingly, an eleventh-century illuminated manuscript from Mount Athos associates the magi with commissioning a portrait of the Virgin and Child; cf. Cartlidge and Elliott 2001: 21-22.

In his typology of worship in Matthew's gospel, Powell has classified the magi's obeisance before the infant Christ as 'epiphanic worship,' which he distinguishes from types of worship that supplicate Jesus for something, or respond to something he has done. 'Epiphanic worship,' by contrast, is initiated by the worshipper's perception of Jesus himself, a recognition of some aspect of Jesus' identity.[178] Clearly, the magi recognize something in the child they behold, but what is it? They give no verbal expression to their worship when they see the child, and their only title for him recorded in Matthew's account was spoken previously to this encounter: 'the one born king of the Jews.' Are their practices of worship then merely in recognition of royalty, or, as Powell would have it, do they perceive a divine presence in the infant king as well?[179]

One clue potentially resides in the word προσκυνέω itself. While the term can refer to homage before human beings of high rank, as in a servant before his king in Matt 18:26 (though note the analogy to God in 18:35), Matthew also unambiguously associates it with God in 4:10. Outside Matthew's text, Whitaker has connected προσκυνέω to the visual beholding of both God and the Lamb in the book of Revelation.[180]

Another clue resides in literary context, for certainly the notion that the infant Christ is divine is not alien from Matthew's infancy narrative, which has previously declared him to be 'God with us' (1:23; cf. §2.2.2). With the fulfillment quotation from Isaiah ringing out mere sentences ahead of the magi's encounter, Matthew's audience is positioned to interpret the magi's action as visual piety before a divine child, even if the magi themselves do not explicitly state their knowledge of his divine identity. Early interpreters indeed pick up on this, reading an element of spiritual recognition into the

[178] Cf. Powell 1995. Under this heading Powell also classifies the descriptions of worship in Matt 14:33; 21:15-16; 28:9, 17.
[179] For Powell 1995, the element of divine revelation is key to the category of 'epiphanic worship' (14).
[180] Cf. Whitaker 2015: 207-213.

magi's physical vision.[181] This spiritual aspect is heightened by a context in which worship (and the leaving of gifts) before images of the divine was commonly practiced in pagan religions of antiquity. While Matthew reveals nothing of the magi's previous life in 'the east,' many early readers contrast their worship of the infant Christ with prior idolatrous practices.[182]

In summary, the magi's worship, prompted by their sight of the child, is the fullest expression of their visual piety. It is not incidental that it is this moment that is captured by artistic depictions of the magi from antiquity to the present. The aesthetic culmination of Matthew's infancy narrative ends in adoration.

2.4.6 Conclusion to §2.4

In this section, we have examined several facets of the magi's sight in Matt 2:1-12: the magi themselves as culturally situated viewers, their journey from the east as a 'visual practice,' their objects of vision, and their visual piety before 'the child with Mary his mother.' I conclude not only that this pericope contributes to the aesthetic invitation Matthew poses to his reader, but that it constitutes the climax of that invitation. Subsequent chapters will further prove the weight of this argument: Matthew's account of the star and the magi's visual adoration of the infant Christ will attract the 'aesthetic response' of early readers more widely than either fulfillment quotations or dreams.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that Matthew's infancy narrative is invested in the sense perceptions of witnesses to Christ's infancy, and poses an 'aesthetic invitation' to its

[181] See, e.g., Irenaeus, *Haer*. 3.16.4 (cf. §5.4); Origen, *Hom. Gen*. 14.3; *Cels*. 1.60 (cf. §6.2.4).
[182] Cf. discussion in §6.2.4.

audience, engaging their aural and visual senses in participation with the text. A brief survey of early artistic response to Matt 1-2 prompted our opening reflection on the nature of seeing and hearing in relation to Matthew's βίβλος γενέσεως, and our analysis proceeded to show more specifically how three elements of Matthew's text contribute to this aesthetic effect.

In §2.2 we identified multiple listeners on the other side of the prophetic speech Matthew captures in his infancy narrative, and examined how these five quotations engage their aural piety. Alongside listeners within Matthew's texts and his quoted Scriptural texts, the listening reader emerged as a significant recipient of the prophetic speech. Matthew's fulfillment quotations engage these listeners through several interlocking notions of aural piety in antiquity: the heightened physicality of divine and prophetic voices, the oral proclamation and interpretation of Scripture in public contexts, as well as auditory memory and imagination.

In §2.3, our analysis of aesthetic language in the infancy dreams identified both visual and aural features, but concluded that Matthew's focus is on the dreams' aurality. These dream messages harmonize with the prophetic speech voiced into Matthew's text, and their primary listener is Joseph, who models aural piety for the listening reader.

Finally, our examination of Matthew's account of the magi in §2.4 probed several dimensions of the magi's seeing: the astrological culture of viewing that they inhabit, their pilgrimage as a 'visual practice,' the interrelated images of star and child, and finally the expression of the magi's visual piety through their worship. This section offered an interpretation of this passage as the chief aesthetic moment of Matthew's infancy narrative, in which the magi's beholding of the 'child with Mary his mother' also invites the reader to view this textual icon.

We will have occasion to return to each of these elements of 'aesthetic invitation' throughout this study, as we demonstrate points of contact in early 'aesthetic response' to Matthew's infancy narrative. Perhaps the most prominent fulfillment quotation to surface in early interpretation is that of Matt 1:22-23 (Isa 7:14). We will observe Irenaeus' use of this quotation in his theological aesthetics (§5.3), and how Origen reads a listening and proclaiming Church into Matthew's text (§6.2.3). Matthew's characterization of a silent, listening Joseph is transformed in *PJ*'s depiction of the figure as a visionary who invites others to 'see' Jesus (§4.4). The account of the magi and star features in all three of our case studies, and is engaged aesthetically in multiple ways (cf. §4.5; §5.4; §6.2.4).

In conclusion, the 'aesthetic invitation' of Matthew's infancy narrative is expressed through varied and vibrant impulses within the biblical text, generating similarly multifaceted response in the earliest evidence of its interpretation.

CHAPTER THREE:
THE AESTHETIC INVITATION OF LUKE 1-2

3.1 Introduction: A Painting, a Preface, and Four Songs of Praise

In a side chapel of the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, there hangs a late ancient icon of the Virgin Mary and Child, recently restored. The Madonna looks out solemnly from her dark blue cloak embroidered with gold, and the child Jesus, nestled into her folded arms, holds a gospel book. This icon – associated with the title 'Salus Populi Romani' – is an important and early representative of multiple paintings attributed in legend to the artistic brush of the evangelist Luke himself.[1] The theme of St Luke as painter, which might easily be relegated to the realm of myth and fable, has a deep resonance in history that begs an exegetical question scarcely asked of the gospel we still ascribe to Luke. What is it about this text, particularly its infancy narrative, that has long provoked the idea of Luke as an artist?

This question provides an appropriate starting point for the primary concern of this chapter, which is to demonstrate the *aesthetic invitation* of Luke 1-2. In particular, I argue that Luke's infancy narrative, like Matthew's, concerns itself with the visual and aural senses of witnesses to the birth of Christ, and furthermore, that it invites aesthetic modes of response from its readers. The gospel writer's preface provides a helpful framework with which to begin our investigation of this dually focused argument.

Luke draws attention to the textual nature of his account from 1:1, ranking his own work among those of predecessors, as a διήγησις that he himself will write. The term διήγησις seems to be used in several ways in antiquity, ranging from highly technical usage in forensic rhetoric, to the more wide-ranging meaning of 'narrative' or 'account.'[2]

[1] On the 'Salus Populi Romani,' cf. Wolf 1990; Wolf 2005. On Luke as painter more broadly, see Theodorus the Lector, *Eccl. Hist*. 1.353; Henze 1948; Schaefer 1986; Bacci 1998; Bacci 2000; Försi 2003; Heldman 2005; Bockmuehl 2006: 13-25; Boeckl 2007; Pfeiffer 2008; Jeffrey 2012: 4; Raynor 2015; Backhaus 2019.
[2] Cf. Alexander 1993: 111 for more discussion and examples. Cf. esp. Lucian, *How to Write History* 28; 55.

Luke's gospel falls on the more general side of this scale;[3] his διήγησις announces a narration of events, a descriptive text.

How do eyes and ears figure in relation to such a text? I suggest that Luke's preface discloses two principles with which we may begin to assess this question. First, Luke's interest in αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται…τοῦ λόγου (1:2) would seem to divulge his investment in the visual and verbal perception of original actors or participants in the story he relates. As a historian,[4] he is dependent upon information that has been visually confirmed, or that has been passed along verbally. Second, in addressing Theophilus, ἵνα ἐπιγνῷς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν (1:4), Luke's purpose for writing reveals his interest in the sense perception of his gospel's audience – both in terms of how they have perceived words they have previously heard, and in terms of how their perception of his own gospel will be linked to knowledge, and ultimately, to truth.

In this introduction I clarify these two aesthetic-textual principles through close examination of the preface (§3.1.1-2). These principles are given preliminary testing in the unique case of the four canticles of Luke 1-2 (§3.1.3), before I explain their application to this chapter's study of Luke's infancy narrative more broadly (§3.1.4).

3.1.1 The Aesthetic Piety of Luke's Characters

The first principle involves an interpretation of the αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται…τοῦ λόγου in 1:2. Previous scholarship has debated several ways in which this phrase might be understood[5] – whether it refers to a single group of people or two;[6] whether eyewitnesses

[3] So Alexander 1993: 111.
[4] While some would debate the characterization of Luke as a 'historian,' I find it to be an appropriate description of his writing style. For further discussion see, e.g., Alexander 1993; Byrskog 2000; Aune 2002; Bauckham 2006.
[5] Cf. Kuhn 2003: 237-239 for a summary. Cf. also Hengel 2008; Bauckham 2006: 106.
[6] Recent scholarship has tended to take the phrase as referring to a single group.

'become' servants of the word at a later time;[7] and whether the phrase is limited to those who accompanied Jesus in his ministry, or is intended also to include his family and others who witnessed his early life, or those who continue Jesus' ministry after his death. Settling the interpretation of these issues largely depends on how one defines αὐτόπτης and ὑπηρέτης τοῦ λόγου, respectively.

An αὐτόπτης is literally one who 'sees for oneself.' Alexander's study of Luke's preface in light of ancient historiographical and technical writings provides us with several different images for how this term was used. The physician Galen, 'the largest single user in the whole of Greek literature,' uses it to describe the personal observation of medical practices. He especially advocates the pedagogical value of αὐτοψία for medical students; book-learning is no substitute for the experience of standing by the side of a master and watching him perform medical procedures with one's own eyes.[8] Among ancient Empiricists, the term αὐτοψία, alongside πεῖρα and ἐμπειρία, formed a 'nexus of words and ideas' that emphasized the epistemological value of the senses, particularly sight.[9] In ancient historiography, the object of an αὐτόπτης is generally geographical; in Herodotus the term is used in an investigative sense to describe the act of going to see distant lands for oneself, verifying information about a particular location.[10] On occasion, as in the examples of Polybius and Josephus, the term is used to signify the author's own sight of some of the events contained in his history.[11] Although these uses of the term are varied, they have in common a significant dependence the sense of sight.

[7] As argued most forcefully by Dillon 1981 (cf. Dillon 1978), and still followed by many. Cf. Kuhn 2003: 238.
[8] Alexander 1993: 121-122. See, e.g., Galen, *Meth. Med.* 14.16; *Temp. Med.* 6.Pref.; *Nat. Fac*. 1.6; *Comp. Med. Sec. Gen*. 3.21.
[9] Alexander 1993: 81. See also Frede 1987, esp. 249-250.
[10] Alexander 1993: 37ff. Cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.29.1; 3.115.1; 4.16.1.
[11] Polybius, *Hist.* 3.4.13 and Josephus *C. Ap.* 1.55. For discussion, cf. Cadbury 1922: 498-499; Alexander 1993: 38-41; Byrskog 2000: 48-49; Bauckham 2006: 104.

In addition to αὐτόπται, Luke is also concerned with ὑπηρέται τοῦ λόγου. This expression, likely derived from a Christian context,[12] encompasses several differently focused meanings. For Cadbury, λόγος refers to the active 'preaching of Christianity,'[13] while Bovon finds a double meaning intended by Luke: ''Word' means here both the word of God and the narrated story of his saving activity, which has been written down in two volumes, the first and second 'words' (λόγος, Acts 1:1).'[14] We might think of several layers in which 'words' are spoken and heard – in the sense of divine revelation, in the context of preaching and discourse, and in the context of a written narrative. The 'ministers' or 'servants of the word' are those individuals who are involved in the hearing and speaking in these different contexts.

Taken together, the αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται…τοῦ λόγου of 1:2 form a group of individuals whose visual and aural perceptions are a source of interest for Luke, namely those who see and who hear, and thus are able to 'hand over' those 'events that have been brought to fulfillment among us.'[15] One of the suggestions of this chapter, contrary to the views of many scholars, is that several figures in Luke's infancy narrative should be included in this group.[16] I argue this point primarily from a literary point of view, although the suggestion that Luke had access to sources within Jesus' family is a historical possibility implied within this discussion.[17]

[12] Alexander 1993: 123.
[13] Cadbury 1922: 500.
[14] Bovon 2002: 21.c
[15] Cf. 1 John 1:1-4 for a similar interest.
[16] This reinforces Kuhn 2003, which has been previously dismissed, e.g. in Bauckham 2006: 105.
[17] McHugh 1975 and Feuillet 1974, for example, represent an early suggestion that Mary might have been Luke's main source for the infancy narrative. More recently, scholarship has focused on the possibility of recourse to Jesus' relatives more broadly, e.g. Riesner 1994; Riesner 1999; Pixner 2010; Bauckham 2017.

3.1.2 The Aesthetic Piety of Luke's Audience

Not only is Luke interested in the sense perceptions of characters within his narrative, but he is also arguably attentive to the sense perceptions of his audience. In 1:4, Luke conveys his purpose for writing his gospel: ἵνα ἐπιγνῷς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν. Here Luke envisions his gospel as part of a two-stage process of reception of λόγοι. At each stage of reception, there are grounds for thinking about issues of sense perception.

First, at a previous stage Luke's audience have heard (κατηχήθης) certain words (λόγοι). Although the passive form of the verb κατηχέω is often translated as 'instructed' here (in the sense of the English *catechesis*), it is important to bear in mind that the root meaning of the word is 'to sound down/over/through' (κατά + τὸ ἦχος, 'the sound'), i.e. 'to let resound.'[18] Examples of this root meaning from Greek and Jewish literature include the sounds of poets addressing their hearers from a stage (thus 'sounding' down from above),[19] music resounding over the sea,[20] cymbals at the birth of Pindar,[21] the bells on a priest's garment,[22] and singers' voices at the Jerusalem Temple.[23] Although these examples indicate that the root meaning of κατηχέω is attested well into the third century CE, two other meanings also develop in common use from the first century: 'to inform/report' and 'to teach/instruct.'[24] Both continue to imply aurality; in antiquity, a 'report' or 'teaching' invokes a listener.[25]

[18] The latter translation is offered by Bovon 2002: 24.
[19] Lucian, *Jupiter Tragoedus*, 39. Cf. Beyer 1965: 638.
[20] Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* 1.19.
[21] Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* 2.12.
[22] *Letter of Aristeas* 96.
[23] Sirach 50:18.
[24] Cf. Beyer 1965: 638; Bovon 2002: 24.
[25] Note, e.g., Agrippa's letter to Josephus: 'But when you meet me, I will myself by word of mouth inform you' (Josephus, *Vita* 366; Thackeray 1926: 134-135). Cf. Beyer 1965: 638; Alexander 1993: 139.

Both latter usages of κατηχέω are found in the New Testament.[26] Scholars are divided over which meaning Luke intends in 1:4. Has Theophilus been told various reports about Jesus (inaccurate or accurate) that Luke now wants to correct or compile in written form,[27] or has he been instructed in specifically Christian teachings about Jesus' life that Luke wants to confirm?[28] In my view the latter is more likely; both, however, have in common a previous experience of hearing words in an oral setting. Perhaps the more neutral translation of 'heard,' suggested by Cadbury, is indeed safest.[29]

In light of this discussion, the λόγοι in 1:4 could refer to any number of reports, rumors, stories, or teachings that Luke's audience has heard. They may be in some way connected to singular λόγος of 1:2, which as we noted above, is also layered in meaning. While it may be impossible for us to know the content of the words to which Luke is referring, the point I wish to highlight here is that the oral setting implied by κατηχέω supports a translation of λόγοι in 1:4 indeed as spoken 'words,'[30] more specifically than 'things'[31] or 'events.'[32]

How then, does Luke relate this first stage of 'hearing words' to the experience that he expects his audience to have when they encounter his written gospel? For indeed, as we have discussed already,[33] evidence of practices of reading in antiquity would show that most of Luke's early readers should be described as 'hearers,' in the sense that they read through their ears by listening to the text voiced aloud. How does Luke distinguish such 'reading' from previous words that his audience have heard? His preface's statement of

[26] Cf. Beyer 1965; Alexander 1993: 139; and the entry for κατηχέω in BDAG. In addition Luke 1:4, cf. Acts 18:25; 21:21, 24; Rom 2:18; 1 Cor 14:19; Gal 6:6.
[27] E.g. Beyer 1965: 639-640; Bovon 2002: 24.
[28] E.g. Alexander 1993: 141-142.
[29] Cadbury 1922: 509.
[30] So also Strelan 2007.
[31] E.g. Alexander 1993: 139-140.
[32] Cadbury 1922 suggests an equivalence between the λόγοι and πράγματα of 1:1; however, my translation suggests a distinction.
[33] Cf. §1.4.1.

purpose, ἵνα ἐπιγνῷς…τὴν ἀσφάλειαν (1:4), would seem to offer our best evidence for evaluating this question.

The term ἀσφάλεια connotes a 'stability' or 'certainty' of facts (i.e. 'truth'), possibly even indicating a certain security of written over unwritten discourse.[34] The verb ἐπιγινώσκω appears often in Luke-Acts, and our author seems to use it to describe a precise form of knowledge, i.e. recognition, perception, or investigation.[35] Although we should distinguish between notions of knowledge and of sense perception, as between the Greek terms γινώσκω/γνῶσις and αἰσθάνομαι/αἴσθησις,[36] it is nevertheless the case that the senses were intimately linked with epistemology in many ancient contexts.[37] We have noted already that the ancient notion of αἴσθησις encompassed both mental and physical perception.[38] Luke himself correlates the verbs ἀγνοέω and αἰσθάνομαι in 9:45, while Paul parallels ἐπιγινώσκω and αἰσθάνομαι in Phil 1:9. Moreover, Luke explicitly connects the sense of sight with ἐπιγινώσκω in chapter 24 of his gospel,[39] where it is written of the disciples on the road to Emmaus that 'their eyes (ὀφθαλμοί) were kept from recognizing (ἐπιγνῶναι) [Jesus]' (24:16), and later that 'their eyes were opened and they recognized (ἐπέγνωσαν) him' (24:31; cf. v. 35). In other contexts throughout Luke-Acts, ἐπιγινώσκω is explicitly or implicitly related to seeing, as well as to hearing.[40]

One of the suggestions undergirding the argument of this chapter is that Luke helps his audience to 'know the truth' through the Graeco-Roman literary principle of ἐνάργεια,

[34] Cf. discussion in Cadbury 1922: 509-510; Alexander 1993: 140-141; Strelan 2007.
[35] In addition to Luke 1:4, cf. Luke 1:22; 5:22; 7:37; 23:7; 24:16, 31; Acts 3:10; 4:13; 9:30; 12:14; 19:34; 22:24, 29; 23:28; 24:8, 11; 25:10; 27:39; 28:1. Cf. discussion in Cadbury 1922: 508; Bultmann 1964: 703-704; Alexander 1993:137-138; Bovon 2002: 23.
[36] Cf. Bultmann 1964: 690.
[37] E.g. for the ancient Empiricists (cf. Frede 1987). The connection is also prevalent in ancient Jewish texts, cf. Avrahami 2012.
[38] Cf. §1.2.5.
[39] Cf. Dillon 1978 for a larger-scale connection between Luke's prologue and Luke 24.
[40] Cf. Luke 1:22; Acts 3:9-10; 4:13; 27:39 (where it is connected with sight); and Acts 12:14 (where it is connected to hearing). Acts 22:24 also describes knowledge through bodily experience. On the senses and epistemology in Luke-Acts more generally, cf. Darr 1994. On sight as a metaphor for spiritual insight in the gospel of Luke, cf. Hamm 1986.

a certain aesthetic 'vividness' that was a pillar of the technique of ἔκφρασις.[41] Nassauer has recently devoted an entire monograph to ἐνάργεια in Luke 1-2. While her approach and argument differ from mine, her overall insight about Luke's use of ἐνάργεια corroborates my own.[42]

The notion of using words to bring images 'before the eyes' goes back as far as Aristotle,[43] although the Hellenistic use of ἐνάργεια as a technical literary term perhaps has its roots in the philosophical writings of Epicurus.[44] In several places throughout his writings Epicurus uses ἐνάργεια to describe a particularly clear and believable type of evidence that comes through immediate empirical perception, and which is explicitly connected to the sense of sight.[45] Rhetoricians, literary critics, and historians seem to have borrowed the philosophical term (perhaps because of its clear relationship with sight) to describe the visual, or more broadly aesthetic, function of vivid words. A key description of this literary function may be found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' (first century BCE) comments on the style of the orator Lysias. According to Dionysius, Lysias' use of ἐνάργεια in his forensic cases 'consists in a certain power he has of conveying the things he is describing to the senses of his audience (ὑπὸ τὰς αἰσθήσεις ἄγουσα τὰ λεγόμενα).' Accordingly, Lysias' audience are able to mentally 'see the actions which are being described going on (ὑπολήψεται γινόμενα τὰ δηλούμενα ὁρᾶν)' and '[meet] face-to-face the characters in the orator's story (ὥσπερ παροῦσιν οἷς ἄν ὁ ῥήτωρ εἰσάγῃ προσώποις ὁμιλεῖν).'[46] As this excerpt from Dionysius relates it, Lysias' use of ἐνάργεια effectively

[41] Cf. §1.2.5; 1.4.1.
[42] Cf. Nassauer 2016. Nassauer's focus is on how ἐνάργεια contributes to Luke's Christology, which she defines in contrast with Jewish and Graeco-Roman motifs. For studies of ἐνάργεια elsewhere in the NT, cf. Heath 2009; Heath 2013; Whitaker 2015; Wang 2017.
[43] Cf. Aristotle, *Rhetor*. 3.11.1411b.1-4, where he discusses the meaning of the phrase 'before the eyes' (πρὸ ὀμμάτων) as the employment of rhetoric to express 'actuality' (ἐνέργεια; n.b. that this term is to be distinguished from ἐνάργεια).
[44] Cf. Zanker 1981, esp. 308-310.
[45] Cf. Epicurus, *Epist*. 1 (*Ad Herodotum*) 46-52.4; 82.3-7; *Sent*. 22 (4.146.5-7); *Vit*. 33-34.
[46] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Lysias* 7. Trans. Usher 1974: 32-33.

turned his listeners into eyewitnesses of the cases he presented. It is not difficult to see the connection between this rhetorical phenomenon and the use of the same term in Epicurean philosophy: both demonstrate a concern for evidence to be presented to the senses, particularly sight. While Epicurus asserts that knowledge is dependent upon one's own sense perceptions, Dionysius claims that language can achieve the equivalent to empirical evidence through the employment of ἐνάργεια.

Two more examples gleaned from comments on historical writing will round out our picture of this literary device, as well as connect us back to Luke's own aims. Longinus, in *De sublimitate* (first century CE), discusses the effect of the present tense on turning a narrative (διήγησις) into 'vivid reality' (ἐναγώνιον πρᾶγμα).[47] Citing an example from Herodotus' histories, Longinus writes of the effect on the reader: 'Observe how he leads you in imagination through the region and makes you see what you hear (τὴν ἀκοὴν ὄψιν ποιῶν).'[48] Similarly Lucian, in his treatise on *How to Write History* (second century CE), compares historical work to the labor of sculptors (such as Phidias), who do not manufacture their material but mold, shape, polish, and brighten it with color: 'The task of the historian (τὸ τοῦ συγγραφέως ἔργον) is similar: to give a fine arrangement to events and illuminate them as vividly as possible (ἐναργέστατα). And when a man who has heard him (ἀκροώμενος) thinks thereafter that he is actually seeing what is being described (ταῦτα ὁρᾶν τὰ λεγόμενα) and then praises him - then it is that the work of our Phidias of history is perfect and has received its proper praise.'[49] Both of these examples refer to written works of historical narrative (although note again that the act of reading is described in terms of hearing), and both commend the ability of a historian to help readers

[47] Longinus, *Subl.* 25.
[48] Longinus, *Subl.* 26.2. Trans. Hendrickson 1929: 189.
[49] Lucian, *How to Write History* 51. Trans. Kilburn 1959: 64-65.

to *see* the places and events that they hear described. Many other examples could be cited.[50]

Returning to our previous question about how Luke distinguishes his text from previously heard words, I suggest in this chapter that the gospel writer employs ἐνάργεια as one of the means by which he helps his readers to 'know the truth' (1:4). The connection between seeing and knowing (ἐπιγινώσκω), explicitly drawn by Luke in chapter 24, is one that the gospel writer allows his readers to access *through his text*, which vividly brings characters, places, and events 'before the eyes' and turns readers into eyewitnesses.

It is important to clarify that Luke's narrative artistry and use of 'vividness' is not limited to the visual, although the visual imagination is most commonly invoked in discussions of ἐνάργεια. The four canticles of his infancy narrative lend a certain *auditory* vividness to his account as well. These texts merit further introductory remarks as important intersections of the two principles outlined above.

3.1.3 The Case of Luke's Four Canticles

The four canticles of Luke 1-2 – the Magnificat (1:46-55); Benedictus (1:67-79); Gloria (2:14); and Nunc dimittis (2:29-32) – punctuate Luke's infancy narrative in a manner similar to Matthew's fulfillment quotations.[51] There are important differences, however. Luke's canticles are longer, and they draw creatively from both prophetic and psalmic traditions. They contain allusions to Scriptural voices rather than citing them explicitly. Moreover, Luke's canticles are voiced not by a narrator quoting Scriptural

[50] E.g. Theon, *Progymnasmata* 119.31-34; Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* 10.6; Demetrius, *De elocutione* 209-220; Plutarch, *Moralia* 347a-c (on Thucydides' use of ἐνάργεια in his histories, which Plutarch likens to painting); Cicero, *De oratore* 3.53.202; *De partitione oratoria* 6.20; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 8.3.61-71; 9.2.40.
[51] Cf. §2.2.

asides, but by figures within his account– Mary, Zechariah, angels of the heavenly host, and Simeon – who are responding to what they witness concerning the infant Christ.

At the same time, like Matthew's fulfillment quotations, they appeal powerfully to a listening reader – igniting the aural memory of Scriptural antecedents, the imagination through 'auditory images.' Even beyond the aural contexts of Matthew's quotations – the heightened orality of prophetic voices, and the liturgical context of Scripture read aloud – Luke's canticles also draw from liturgical poetic traditions which involve rhythm, melody, and instrumentation. They invite a similarly oral and even musical response from listening readers.

Modern critical scholarship on the Lukan canticles has focused mainly on three areas: understanding the origins and sources behind the hymns,[52] classifying their genre and style in comparison to Greek and Hebrew parallels,[53] and interpreting their theologies within the wider contexts of ancient Jewish reflection and the aims of Luke-Acts.[54] I have written at length on the last of these topics elsewhere, arguing that the canticles achieve a certain 'hermeneutical harmonic' for Luke's gospel, combining theological themes from Jewish poetry and themes that the evangelist continues to develop in his narrative.[55]

For the purposes of this study, I address these issues insofar as they aid my primary focus on the 'aesthetic invitation' of Luke's infancy narrative. In this chapter I interrogate the canticles as the oral and aural entities described above: as texts written for the voice and for the ears. The features that set the canticles apart from Matthew's quotations – in particular, their ability to work on two levels of aesthetic piety, that of Luke's characters

[52] E.g. Gunkel 1921; Harnack 1931; Sparks 1943; Winter 1954-1955; Turner 1955; Benoit 1956-1957; Fitzmyer 1958; Jones 1968; Gryglewicz 1974-1975; Flusser 1988; Breytenbach 1994; Wolters 1994; Brooke 2005: 268-281; Hultgren 2009; Klein 2014.
[53] On genre, cf. Simons 2009; Gordley 2011: 305-322. On poetic style, cf. Irigoin 1973; Tannehill 1974; Mínguez 1980; Buth 1984; Rousseau 1986; Lang 2010.
[54] E.g. Berger 1985; Farris 1985; Bemile 1986; Kaut 1990; Lohfink 1990; Mittmann-Richert 1996; Maluf 2000; Wüthrich 2003; Dillon 2013.
[55] Cf. Kozitza 2014.

and his audience – uniquely fit them to test the two principles outlined above. While individual canticles are analyzed more closely in §3.2 and §3.3, in this introduction I offer general remarks on this group of texts, and how my two aesthetic-textual principles apply to them.

First, the canticles are prompted by characters' witness to events surrounding the birth of Christ, and are thus intrinsic to the dynamics of sense perception within the narrative. They are not merely set pieces of theological commentary which could be excised from Luke's narrative without disrupting its development.[56] Rather, they contribute something essential to the narrative as vocal expressions of joy at the coming of the 'Lord's Messiah' (cf. Luke 2:26). Indeed, as Anderson has shown, songs of joy were understood within Judaism as cultic acts akin to sacrifice, and as ways of marking divine presence. Singing is one of the ways in which the Jewish people ritualized the command to 'rejoice' before their God.[57]

This begs a question: Were the canticles 'sung' by Luke's characters? That is, were they intended for vocal delivery at fixed pitches, whether those pitches should be described as semi-melodic chant or melodic song?[58] After all, the verbs that introduce each canticle are not strictly musical: Mary εἶπεν (1:46), Zechariah ἐπροφήτευσεν λέγων (1:67), the heavenly multitude were αἰνούντων τὸν θεὸν καὶ λεγόντων (2:13), and Simeon εὐλόγησεν τὸν θεὸν καὶ εἶπεν (2:28). While the verb common to all of these formulations, λέγω, does not exclude the possibility of singing, it certainly does not imply it.[59]

[56] This contradicts a common view that the canticles have been inserted into Luke's narrative, while remaining extrinsic to the thrust of the narrative itself. See, e.g., Farris 1985: 151ff; Brown 1993: 348-349; Smith 2011: 185.
[57] Cf. Anderson 1991. See, e.g., Ps 5:12; 9:2-3; 30:12-13; 32:11 34:3; 35:27; 40:17 (= 70:5); 64:11; 69:33; 92:2-5; *m. 'Arak*. 2.4; *b. 'Arak*. 11a; *m. Sukkah* 5.1; *b. Ber*. 7b.
[58] Here I depend on Smith 2011's definition of 'music.'
[59] Cf. Smith 2011: 30-31.

Historical considerations concerning original language and authorship are relevant here, since the determination of musicality is closely linked to the contexts in which the texts were composed. These issues famously divided Harnack, who posited that Luke himself composed the canticles in a Greek imitative of the Septuagint,[60] and Gunkel, who thought that they were originally Hebrew hymns used liturgically by Jewish Christians and adapted by Luke.[61] The multifaceted contours of this debate in the history of scholarship have been traced elsewhere.[62] I favor the view that the texts are pre-Lukan, transmitted either in Hebrew or a Hebraized form of Greek, and originating either as Jewish hymns adapted by early Christ followers, or as entirely composed by an early community close to the Jesus movement.[63] Several have sought to narrow this category, suggesting the canticles' origins in Maccabean battle hymns;[64] the group of 'anawim' ('poor ones'), referenced in the psalms;[65] Essene circles;[66] or the synagogue liturgy of mainstream Judaism.[67] It is striking that, at least in broad terms, such proposals bear a strong resemblance to the figures to whom Luke attributes the canticles in his gospel.[68]

Further insights from Smith's extensive study of music in ancient Judaism and early Christianity help to shape an argument for the canticles' musicality within their original contexts.[69] The Lukan canticles bear a close resemblance to other biblical texts that were in fact sung in cultic worship. They make frequent use of texts from the Psalter, the largest collection of hymnic texts in ancient Judaism, and several of their quotations

[60] Cf. Harnack 1931.
[61] Cf. Gunkel 1921.
[62] See, e.g., Farris 1985: 31-66.
[63] In addition to Gunkel, see, e.g., Benoit 1956-1957; Gnilka 1962; Jones 1968; Gryglewicz 1974-1975; Buth 1984; Wolters 1994; Brooke 2005: 268-281.
[64] Winter 1954-1955.
[65] Brown 1993: 346-355.
[66] Flusser 1988.
[67] Hultgren 2009.
[68] Cf. §3.1.1.
[69] Cf. Smith 2011.

are from psalms either known or likely to have been sung at the Second Temple.[70] Luke's canticles also have a close generic proximity to the Old Testament canticles, which are similar hymnic texts integrated into narrative contexts, and which were sung in ancient Jewish worship.[71] Furthermore, there is evidence of ancient Jewish and early Christian practices of singing to children, or at the occasion of a child's birth. For example, 4 Macc 18:15-19 records a father singing and teaching songs of David and Moses to his children (compare with Luke 1:76; cf. §3.2.4). The second-century *Protevangelium of James* offers evidence that utterances of joy over the birth of children, such as we find in Luke 1-2 and in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. 1 Sam 2:1-10), were delivered as song.[72]

It is thus highly likely that the canticles were understood to be sung by their respective vocalists within Luke's narrative, and possibly even used in worship in Jewish Christian communities from a time pre-dating Luke's gospel. Certainly, they were received as songs by many of Luke's early readers, and this leads us to our second point regarding their early appeal to the sense perceptions of Luke's audience.

All four canticles have held a prominent place in Christian liturgical practice from antiquity, as is demonstrated by several distinct bodies of evidence. Firstly, the Lukan hymns were variously excerpted for inclusion in collections of Biblical Odes. The first physical evidence of this exists in the fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus, though it is widely acknowledged that the use of various ode texts in liturgical contexts significantly

[70] For a discussion of the particular psalms known, or considered likely, to have been sung at the Second Temple (based mainly on evidence from the Mishnah, esp. *m.Tamid* 7.4), cf. Smith 1990; Smith 2011: 86-116. A comparison of psalm quotations in the Lukan canticles with the psalms discussed by Smith shows the following overlaps: Pss 100:5; 98:3 (quoted in the Magnificat); 41:13; 132:17; 18:1, 3, 18 (quoted in the Benedictus); 51:18 (quoted in the Gloria); 98:2; 67:2 (quoted in the Nunc dimittis).
[71] Cf. Smith 1998. In particular, the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1-18) and the Song of the Well (Num 21:17-18) are known to have been sung at the Second Temple (based on evidence from the Babylonian Talmud). Other OT canticles are likely to have been sung in cultic worship.
[72] Cf. Smith 2011: 147-149; and further discussion of Anna's song in *PJ* in §4.2.

pre-dates the manuscript evidence.[73] Interestingly, the codices themselves demonstrate the adaptation of the Lukan texts for liturgical use.[74] Secondly, the four canticles were incorporated into various liturgies of the hours. Evidence of this begins from the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions*, which incorporates the Gloria and Nunc dimittis for morning and evening prayer, respectively.[75] Thirdly, later evidence for the liturgical use of the canticles exists in Egyptian papyri and ostraca.[76]

The four canticles of Luke's infancy narrative thus provide an evocative preliminary case in which our two aesthetic-textual principles intersect. They operate both as vocal expressions of the aesthetic piety of Luke's characters, and they appeal to the aesthetic piety of Luke's audience. As vivid oral/aural texts they offer a means by which listeners can 'know (and liturgically hear/proclaim) the truth' of Luke's account.

3.1.4 Summary of the Argument

The primary aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the 'aesthetic invitation' of Luke's infancy narrative. Our discussion of Luke's preface has led to two theses which undergird this argument, and which are useful in conceptualizing visuality and aurality in relation to the Lukan text. First, we should attend to how Luke describes what characters within his narrative see and hear, as following from his interest in 'eyewitnesses and ministers of the word' (1:2). A second guiding principle is a focus on how Luke may be shaping his text in a way that enables his audience to 'see' or 'hear' in imagination the events recorded, as one of the methods by which he helps readers to 'know the truth' (1:4) through his gospel text.

[73] On Biblical Odes traditions, see esp. Mearns 1914; Schneider 1938, Schneider 1949, Schneider 1949, Schneider 1949, Schneider 1949; Miller 2006; Harl 2014; Knust and Wasserman 2014; Coogan 2019. For the texts of the Biblical Odes from the Codex Alexandrinus, cf. Rahlfs 1931.
[74] Cf. Knust and Wasserman 2014.
[75] For texts cf. Grisbrooke 1990: 52-61 (esp. 56-57). For discussion cf. Taft 1986: 44-45; Leikam 2000: 22.
[76] Cf. Knust and Wasserman 2014: 364-365; Mihálykó 2019.

As we have already begun to observe with the four canticles, Luke 1-2 offers rich material for the study of the two aesthetic-textual principles outlined above. Multiple characters within the infancy narrative see and hear revelation concerning the infant Christ, giving us ample opportunity to study Luke's understanding of the role of αὐτόπτης or ὑπηρέτης τοῦ λόγου. Furthermore, Luke's infancy narrative also uniquely testifies to how the senses of an audience might be engaged in a text through ἐνάργεια. A prime example is Luke's vivid description of the nativity scene, complete with visual details such as a manger and swaddling clothes, which has appealed to readers' sense of sight and appeared in countless visual representations for two millennia. Moreover, the four canticles included in Luke's infancy narrative add an auditory dimension to the aesthetic invitation of his account.

The chapter is divided into two main sections. In §3.2 I study Luke's portrayal of Zechariah and Mary as a contrast in modes of listening (1:5-80), and in §3.3 I examine three episodes in which the child is an object of characters' sight (2:1-52). In the debate about the priority of sight or hearing in Luke's writing,[77] the infancy narrative shows that answers might be more nuanced than has hitherto been claimed. While Luke 1:5-80 focuses on the theological value of *hearing* God's words (arguably prioritized over sight), Luke 2 emphasizes characters' *sight* of the child in climactic moments of revelation that are arguably prioritized over hearing. My examination of individual canticles works within these two main sections. Because my analysis suggests that these songs are not extrinsic theological commentary, but deeply intrinsic to the narrative as heightened vocalized responses to what has been seen and heard, I have decided not to excise the canticles from

[77] Moore 1992; Hamm 1986; Hartsock 2008; and others have focused on the sense of sight in Luke-Acts; however, Wilson 2016 has argued for Luke's prioritization of hearing over sight.

their narrative context, but to treat them as extensions of their respective vocalists' aesthetic piety.

Returning to the 'Salus Populi Romani' icon with which we began, we can assert that this later tradition of St Luke as painter is perhaps not as exegetically distant from the aims and techniques of Luke's text as might be supposed. Rather, this tradition recognizes something inherent in the text, which we will explore further in this chapter – an aesthetic invitation that prompts readers to witness the infant Christ alongside the characters of Luke 1- 2.

3.2 A Contrast in Modes of Listening in Luke 1:5-80

3.2.1 Introduction

Noting parallels between events in the lives of Zechariah and Mary in Luke 1 is well-trodden territory: both figures receive an announcement about the birth of a son, and both deliver a form of heightened speech that comments on the nature of those births. Their children, John and Jesus, are likewise paralleled by the narratives of their births, naming, and early reception in their infancy.[78] Along with this observation of parallels is an often-posed question about how Luke distinguishes the characters of Zechariah and Mary, specifically with regard to their respective annunciations. Why is Zechariah punished for his question, Κατὰ τί γνώσομαι τοῦτο (1:18), when only a few verses later Mary's very similar question, Πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο (1:34), meets with no critique? Why is Zechariah chastised, and Mary lauded?

What this section contributes to standard discussion about both parallels and contrasts between Zechariah and Mary is a detailed examination of the dynamics of sense perception in Luke's treatment of both figures, and a suggestion that the distinction he is

[78] See, e.g., Brown 1993: 248-252, 294-295.

making between the two be conceived as a contrast in modes of listening. Moreover, Zechariah's and Mary's respective aural pieties (or lack thereof) influence their subsequent orality: while Zechariah is temporarily silenced, Mary's words have an effect on two further witnesses: Elizabeth and the infant John.[79]

I have chosen to examine the material in Luke 1 as consisting of three main narrative movements: Zechariah's Temple vision and its consequences in §3.2.2, a sequence of events in the life of Mary in §3.2.3, and the conclusion of Zechariah's story with the birth of John in §3.2.4. Luke's portrayal of differing auditory modes contributes to his infancy narrative's overall 'aesthetic invitation.' Through depicting two important early listeners to divine revelation concerning the infant Christ and his forerunner, John, he invites readers both to learn from and imitate their respective aural pieties.

3.2.2 Zechariah and a Problematization of the Senses (1:5-25)

The episode of Zechariah's encounter with the angel Gabriel in the Temple and its immediate aftermath is often, and aptly, described in terms of vision. This is substantiated by the text in a number of ways that we will explore, perhaps most indicatively by Luke's statement concerning how the crowd gathered outside the Temple understood what had happened: 'They perceived that he had seen a vision (ὀπτασίαν ἑώρακεν) in the sanctuary' (1:22). However, it is also clear from the text that Zechariah's response to the encounter is problematic; though granted a vision, he has in some way failed to appreciate its insight. How has this failure occurred? Here I suggest that we can understand the issue of Zechariah's reception of Gabriel through becoming more attentive to the way in which

[79] Cf. Dinkler 2013: 67-83 for a similar analysis of Luke 1:5-80. While our approaches to this passage are different, our conclusions are comparable.

Luke is problematizing sense perception and epistemology via the visual and aural/oral senses in this episode.

The location of Zechariah's encounter with Gabriel, the sanctuary of the Jerusalem Temple,[80] plays a significant role in its visual aspect. The Temple was widely praised for its beauty in Second Temple and rabbinic texts,[81] a view that Luke himself also expresses.[82] Moreover, recent scholarship has shown that the Temple was thought to be a space of unique visual encounter with God himself. Because images of God were forbidden in Judaism, the furniture and decorations of the Temple building participated in mediating that divine appearance to worshippers.[83]

In fact, the Zechariah scene is the first of three Temple-set episodes in Luke 1-2, along with the infant Jesus' presentation at the Temple (2:22-40) and his interaction with the teachers in the Temple at the age of twelve (2:41-52). All three scenes, moreover, feature the sense of sight, a point which we will have occasion to discuss further in §3.3.3 and §3.3.4. In light of the foregoing remarks, I suggest that the Temple setting for each of these visual encounters is not incidental, but participates within a context of assumptions about cultic viewing already present within Judaism. In the case of 1:5-25, Luke blends a vivid account of physical features within the Temple with the visionary encounter Zechariah experiences with the angel; these two aspects mutually illuminate each other in the narrative.

The first point to make with regard to the visuality of the Temple setting is the term Luke uses for the sanctuary of the Temple, ὁ ναός, which encompasses both the 'holy

[80] For more on the Temple's role in Luke-Acts, see Bachmann 1980; Head 2004; Smith 2017.
[81] See, e.g., Josephus, *A.J.* 15.412ff.; *B.J.* 5.200, 208, 216-218; *b. Sukkah* 51b; *b. Bava Batra* 4a.
[82] Cf. Luke 21:5. Luke's elaboration on the adornment (κοσμέω) of the Temple with beautiful stones (λίθοι καλοῖ) and ornaments (ἀναθήματα) goes beyond the other synoptic parallels (cf. Mark 13:1; Matt 24:1).
[83] Cf. Anderson 2009; Fraade 2009; Neis 2013 on biblical and postbiblical notions of sight in relation to the Temple. Examples include Deut 16:16 and parallels; Num 10:35-36; 1 Sam 4:5-8; Ps 24:7-10; 48:13-15; 4Q403 1 I 41, 43-44; *t. Ḥag.* 1.1; *y. Ḥag.* 3.8 (79d); *b. Ḥag.* 26b.

place' in which stand three pieces of furniture (the altar of incense, the lampstand, and the table of showbread), and the 'holy of holies' behind this area and separated by a veil (cf. Luke 23:45). Luke uses this term for the sanctuary to distinguish it from the larger Temple complex, for which he uses the term τὸ ἱερόν.[84] Luke rightly imagines that Zechariah, having drawn the lot to offer the daily incense, enters the sanctuary to complete this duty (1:9), while a praying assembly wait outside (1:10), presumably for the customary blessing spoken by the priest upon his emergence from the sanctuary following the incense offering. These details are in accord with the Mishnah's narrative of how the twice-daily whole offering was performed in the Second Temple period.[85]

The central visual feature that Luke points out inside the sanctuary is the altar of incense. Exodus 30:1-10, as part of its regulations concerning the making of the Tabernacle, provides the foundational text for a visual description of the altar of incense and its placement within the sanctuary.[86] The altar is made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold, and is to be placed 'in front of the curtain that is above the ark of the covenant, in front of the mercy seat that is over the covenant, where I will meet with you' (Exod 30:6). Aaron is to offer the incense 'before God' (ἔναντι τοῦ θεοῦ, LXX Exod 30:8), a phrase that is also used for Zechariah's priestly service in Luke 1:8. Zechariah faces the altar, and thus the presence of God himself. With the altar's position 'in front of the curtain,' a reader literate in Jewish traditions might imagine that from the viewpoint of the priest approaching it, this altar is visually set against a colorful backdrop, the veil made of 'blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen…with cherubim skillfully worked into it' (Exod. 26:31).[87] Second Temple writers also remarked on the appearance of the altar of incense. For example, Josephus describes it, along with the lampstand and

[84] As in, e.g., Luke 2:27, 37, 46.
[85] Cf. Exod 29:38-42; Num 28:1-8; *m. Tamid* 5.2; 6.3-7.4; Brown 1993: 260 n. 10; Hamm 2003: 221.
[86] Cf. also Exod 37:25-29; 40:26-27.
[87] Cf. further discussion of this curtain in §4.3.2 (on *PJ* 10-12.1).

table of showbread on either side of it, as 'three most wonderful works of art, universally renowned.'[88]

It is against this visual backdrop that Luke blends Zechariah's vision of the angel Gabriel, who is introduced in relation to the physical features of the sanctuary: 'And an angel of the Lord appeared (ὤφθη) to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense' (1:11). Luke draws attention here to the visual nature of this angelic appearance.[89] He uses the passive form of ὁράω for the appearance itself, provides a visual marker for the appearance (the 'right side' of the altar), and highlights Zechariah's own seeing (ἰδών; 1:12). There is some ambiguity as to which 'right side' of the altar is meant: is it the 'right side' from the perspective of Zechariah, who faces the altar, or from that of the divine presence residing behind it? On the one hand, the word δεξία indicates a place of authority, i.e. on the 'right hand' of a divinity.[90] However, I think it more likely that Luke intends Zechariah's perspective to be the focus here – especially given that the angel appears 'to him' (1:11). By painting such a vivid picture of Zechariah's vision of Gabriel, down to the visual detail marking precisely where the angel stood in the sanctuary, Luke employs the technique of ἐνάργεια: he engages his reader's senses in bringing the scene before the eyes.

From here, a transition from the visual to the aural occurs as Gabriel delivers his message announcing the birth of John (1:13-17). In our analysis of Zechariah's perception of the encounter, we pick up in 1:18 with the priest's incredulous question, 'How will I know this' (Κατὰ τί γνώσομαι τοῦτο)? This is an epistemological question in which personal sense perception of the facts is key. Specifically, Zechariah desires a visual sign by which he will know the validity of the message; this interpretation is corroborated by

[88] Josephus, *B.J.* 5.216 (trans. Thackeray 1928). Cf. also *A.J.* 3.147-148; and multiple passages from Philo in Hayward 1996: 120-123.
[89] Contrast with Matthew's more visually stark angelic appearances (cf. §2.3.3).
[90] Cf. Brown 1993 (260 n. 11); Bovon 2002 (35 n. 36).

its probable allusion to Gen 15:8. Zechariah finds himself in a very similar situation as that of Abram, to whom the Lord appeared in a vision (Gen 15:1), promising a son (15:4). When Abram asks how he will know (κατὰ τί γνώσομαι, 15:8) that he is to possess the land promised to him, God responds with a visual sign of the covenant between them.[91] Importantly, the Lord grants Abram's request after the patriarch has already expressed his belief in the promise (15:6), an element that, as Gabriel points out, is missing from Zechariah's own response. Rather, he points to his own body and that of his wife ('I am elderly and my wife is advanced in age') as a physical sign *against* what the angel has pronounced.

Gabriel's reply first clarifies his own purpose in appearing to Zechariah (1:19). He has been sent not to reveal a vision, but to testify with a message: 'and I was sent to speak (λαλῆσαι) to you and to bring to you this good news (εὐαγγελίσασθαί).' He then rebukes Zechariah for not receiving his testimony properly: 'And behold, you will be silent (σιωπῶν) and unable to speak (λαλῆσαι) until the day on which these things occur, because you did not believe my words (οὐκ ἐπίστευσας τοῖς λόγοις μου), which will be fulfilled in their time.' Both parts of Gabriel's response thus highlight an exchange of words and speech, or the lack thereof. Zechariah's sin is an issue of correctly perceiving words, and his punishment of silence likewise fittingly problematizes his own faculties of receiving and delivering speech.[92] The hearing that Luke wants to stress is not merely physical (clearly, Zechariah physically heard the angel's words), but also spiritually oriented: it is a particularly receptive kind of hearing that is linked with belief.[93] My interpretation is thus akin to one of the standard explanations for this passage, that the silencing of Zechariah is a punishment for a lack of faith;[94] however, it nuances this

[91] Cf. Brown 1993: 279; Bovon 2002. For discussion of the passage in Genesis, cf. Wenham 1987: 322-335.
[92] As will be revealed in 1:62, Luke understands Zechariah's condition to be deaf as well as mute.
[93] This concept is akin to the notion of 'spiritual senses.' Cf. §1.2.5; and discussion of Origen in Ch. 6.
[94] E.g. Berlingieri 1991: 142. See Gen 1989: 8-10 for a summary of previous interpretations.

explanation by underlining a connection between faith/belief and a posture of listening not previously stressed.

We do not have very far to turn for further elaboration on this connection between hearing and believing; Jesus' commentary on his parable of the sower in Luke 8 delineates several aspects of the aural faculty in relationship with belief. In 8:11-15, Jesus identifies four types of hearers (ἀκούσαντες), who listen to ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ. This typology of listeners yields several concepts with which we can think about a spiritual mode of hearing that is linked with belief. First, it gives a prominent place to the *heart* as the organ in which words are received, and then either snatched away or kept safe. The role of ears in the physical hearing is not negated from this picture (note 8:8: ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω[95]), but there is acknowledgment of an added dimension in which words heard penetrate the heart. Second, the quality of belief is described as requiring a 'good and worthy heart' in which the word of God may be safely preserved and carefully tended to, so that the words themselves bear fruit. Finally, this encouragement for the generativity of the word links hearing not only to believing, but also to concrete action, as is explicit in 8:21: 'My mother and brothers are those who hear and do the word of God.'[96] Jesus' injunction in 8:18, 'look therefore to how you listen' (βλέπετε οὖν πῶς ἀκούετε),[97] is rendered all the more crucial by his explicit connections between the four types of listening and the qualities of belief, unbelief, action, and inaction. Returning to the case of Zechariah, we can suggest that the priest's lack of belief (1:20) reveals a failure in the requisite conditions for belief: receptive ears, and even more pertinently, a receptive heart in which to store and tend the words heard.

[95] This refrain is repeated in 14:35.
[96] Cf. also 6:46-49. The aspect of 'keeping' or 'guarding' in one's heart the words one hears links these texts also to 11:27-28.
[97] For more on this interesting expression, cf. Darr 1994.

The immediate aftermath of Zechariah's encounter with Gabriel prolongs the irony of the punishment of silence. We know from the Mishnah and other Second Temple sources that the time directly following each twice-daily *tamid* sacrifice was a particularly auditory experience. Not only was the priest expected to emerge from the sanctuary to offer a blessing,[98] but the attending Levites were to sing various psalms assigned for the day, and the people were to prostrate themselves at each of several blasts of the trumpet.[99] It is probable that the crowd also joined with the priests and Levites in cultic shouts of 'Amen!' and 'Glory!'[100] The experience of Zechariah and the Temple worshippers recorded in 1:22, by contrast, is shrouded in silence and even relies on visual signs where oral/aural communication has failed: 'When he came out he was unable to speak (λαλῆσαι) with them, and they perceived (ἐπέγνωσαν) that he had seen a vision (ὀπτασίαν ἑώρακεν) in the sanctuary. And he was making signs (διανεύων) to them, and remained deaf/mute (κωφός).' Here is one example in which Luke uses ἐπιγινώσκω to describe knowledge through sense perception, especially through sight, for presumably the crowd would have perceived the situation through watching Zechariah make signs to them.[101] Specifically, διανεύω probably indicates a type of nodding motion.[102] Although the adjective Luke employs to describe Zechariah's disability, κωφός, is usually translated 'mute,' it is clear that the word also means 'deaf,' not only in broader Greek literature, but also in Luke's gospel and the other synoptics.[103] That Luke understands both inflections by his use of this term is made clear when Zechariah explicitly lacks the ability to hear in

[98] *m.Tamid* 7.2.
[99] *m.Tamid* 7.3-4. Cf. 2 Chr 7:3; 29:25-30; Sirach 50:16-21.
[100] Cf. 1 Chr 16:36 (cf. Ps 106:48b); Ps 29:9. For more on the role of the worshippers gathered at the Temple for the daily offering, cf. Smith 2011: 85-87.
[101] Cf. §3.1.2, where we discussed the relationship of sense perception to Luke's use of ἐπιγινώσκω.
[102] It is possible that in the performance of this text, gestures might have been used to illustrate Zechariah's nodding signs, so that an audience could visualize more clearly the ironic failure to communicate orally. Cf. Shiell 2004, especially on the nodding gesture associated with νεύω (151-153; cf. Acts 24:10).
[103] Cf. Luke 7:22; Matt 11:5; Mark 7:32, 37; 9:25; Laes 2011: 460-465.

1:62.[104] Here, Zechariah's punishment ironically renders him unable to orally convey the message he was supposed to have listened to, and required to resort to the inadequacy of visual signs such as he himself had demanded.

Interestingly, the punishment of silence uniquely sets Zechariah's Temple vision apart from biblical and post-biblical parallels. Commentators often cite the vision of Daniel 9-10 in relation to the Zechariah narrative because of the angel Gabriel's appearance in both texts.[105] While Daniel too is rendered speechless during his vision (10:15), it is not a punishment and immediately, 'one in human form' resolves the issue by touching Daniel's lips.[106] A more contemporary parallel is the story related by Josephus and in the Talmud about the voice heard by the high priest John Hyrcanus while he was offering incense in the Temple. Unlike Zechariah, this priest was immediately able to relate the message to the multitude gathered outside.[107]

To summarize, in this opening scene of his gospel, Luke problematizes issues of epistemology and sense perception in relation to words and images sent by God. While Zechariah is granted a divinely-sent vision of an angel (the visuality of which Luke enhances by attending to visual detail), his problem is ultimately a failure to listen properly to the message. His epistemological question, Κατὰ τί γνώσομαι τοῦτο, is the crux of the issue; he wants to know by seeing what he should have believed in hearing. All of this is contrasted by the fact that *God* has listened to *him*. The verb used for God's listening to Zechariah's prayer, εἰσακούω (1:13),[108] suggests an aural attentiveness that

[104] Cf. §3.2.4.
[105] See, e.g., Brown 1993: 270-271.
[106] Cf. also Isa 6:5-7.
[107] Cf. Josephus, *A.J.* 13.282-283; *y. Yoma* 42c; and discussion in Gnuse 1998. As a form-critical parallel to the 'temple theophanies' of Hyrcanus and Zechariah, Gnuse also cites Josephus' narrative about Jaddus in *A.J.* 11.326-328. However, in Jaddus' case the oracular revelation does not actually occur in the Temple, but in his sleep after he has offered sacrifice to God.
[108] Cf. Kittel 1964: 221-222, and the dictionary entry in BDAG.

Zechariah fails to reciprocate, even as he comes before the face of God in the temple. His punishment reflects his sin with irony.

3.2.3 Mary, Recipient of Words (1:26-56)

When the Lukan narrative shifts focus to the figure of Mary, we find a contrasting mode of listening and a much different result. Here I examine the dynamics of sense perception in three successive episodes in the life of Mary, traditionally called the Annunciation (1:26-38), the Visitation (1:39-45), and the Magnificat (1:46-56). The hermeneutical decision to assess these pericopes together as a unified whole serves to highlight the ways in which concepts of sense perception in the characterization of Mary are carried through and contrasted with that of Zechariah in the previous scene. Specifically, I suggest that Mary's mode of listening is revealed in the Annunciation, confirmed in the Visitation, and given oral expression in the Magnificat.

The account of the Annunciation to Mary, once introduced as 'die goldenen Verse des Lukasevangeliums,'[109] is, when compared with Zechariah's angelic encounter, surprisingly stark in its visuality. Luke does not employ ἐνάργεια to vividly describe the setting of the scene, nor does he use language about Gabriel's 'appearance' or Mary's sight of him. The aesthetic 'color' of these verses is found not in their visual detail, but in their attention to the dynamics of words and their effects.[110] Mary's experience should not be described in terms of 'vision;'[111] rather, it is focused around the delivery and reception of words.

[109] Bardenhewer 1905: 1.
[110] Note later artistic depictions of the Annunciation in which Gabriel's greeting is printed in gold lettering on the painting, flowing from the angel's mouth to Mary's ears. E.g. Martini and Memmi, *Annunciation with St. Margaret and St. Ansanus* (1333); Fra Angelico, *Annunciation of Cortona* (1433-1434).
[111] Contra Miller 2007: 123-132.

Gabriel's opening address is well-known, resonating through centuries of translation variants, theology, and devotional practice: Χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ὁ κύριος μετὰ σοῦ (1:28).[112] Luke tells us that Mary herself was the first to puzzle over the words contained in this greeting. In 1:29, instead of reacting to the angel's appearance, she is perplexed by his word (λόγος) and considers in inner dialogue (διαλογίζετο) 'what manner of greeting (ἀσπασμὸς) this was.' The verb διαλογίζομαι takes two meanings in the New Testament writings, which reflect broader Greek use: inner questioning or consideration; and open discussion, conversation, or debate.[113] In Luke's use of the term, the act of inner dialogue or open debate is neutral in and of itself, though it is often rendered negatively by its association with skepticism or other sinful motives.[114] The issue of whether the mode of Mary's initial listening will tend toward belief or unbelief is thus held in suspension by Luke's use of διαλογίζομαι to describe the conversation she has within her mind and heart. In 1:29 Mary wrestles with what she hears as will both Pharisees and disciples later in the gospel.[115]

The first half of Gabriel's message (1:30-33) informs Mary of her pregnancy and the name, identity, and inheritance of her son in words strikingly reminiscent of Matt 1:20-25.[116] Mary's question creates a narrative tension: 'How will this be (Πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο), since I do not know a man' (1:34)?[117] The question is undeniably similar to Zechariah's, and the reader is set up to wonder whether Mary will suffer a penalty comparable with that of her counterpart. Nevertheless, there is a difference in that Mary's question asks not for a

[112] For further discussion, cf. Bardenhewer 1905: 93-101; Buzzetti 1985; De La Potterie 1987a; De La Potterie 1987b; Brown 1993: 321-327.
[113] See Schrenk 1964: 96.
[114] In addition to 1:29, cf. Luke 2:35; 3:15; 5:21-22; 6:8; 9:46-47; 12:17; 20:14; 24:38.
[115] On the dialogical aspect of listening, see further Corradi Fiumara 1990: 113-126.
[116] Compare especially Matt 1:21 and Luke 1:31. For further discussion of Luke's possible knowledge of Matthew's infancy narrative, cf. Farrer 1955: 79-80; Drury 1976: 122-127; Franklin 1994: 353-364; Goodacre 2002: 55-58.
[117] There are multiple ways in which this question has been understood in the history of interpretation. See Bardenhewer 1905: 120-131; Lyonnet 1967; Brown 1993: 303-309; Landry 1995.

visual sign, as did Zechariah's, but for further verbal clarification. She interrogates her ability to conceive a child based on what she knows of her situation, but her question tends toward an openness in listening for a response rather than a demand for a sign against a perceived physical impossibility.

The narrative tension surrounding potential punishment is resolved when the second half of Gabriel's message (1:35-37) not only provides the answer to Mary's question, but also offers an unsought visual sign. The angel's presentative ἰδού points Mary to look for confirmation in the image of Elizabeth's similarly miraculous pregnancy. As Gabriel states in conclusion: ὅτι οὐκ ἀδυνατήσει παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πᾶν ῥῆμα. The translation of this line becomes interesting when studied from a perspective focused on Mary's listening and response. It is well-attested that Luke's use of ῥῆμα (and λόγος) reflects the theologically weighty Hebrew term דבר, which connects both the 'word' concerning a thing and the 'thing' itself.[118] However, many translations opt for a translation of ῥῆμα in 1:37 as 'thing' (so, 'for nothing will be impossible with God'), overlooking the fact that Mary's final consent in 1:38 directly responds to the angel's reference to ῥῆμα in this line, and is nearly always translated with 'word' because of the pronoun connecting it to the angel's speech ('your word'). In my view a better translation of 1:37 would not erase the repetition of this term, but also render it as 'word' (thus, 'for no word spoken by God will be impossible'). This translation would not thereby remove the connection between 'word' and 'thing' in ῥῆμα, because the phrase οὐκ ἀδυνατήσει itself attests to a certain material force or power that the word possesses to accomplish not only speech, but a concrete event in the life of the one who hears it.[119]

[118] Kittel 1967 refers to this as the dianoetic aspect of דבר. Cf. Brown 1993: 292; Bovon 2002: 53.
[119] Kittel 1967 refers to this as the dynamic aspect of דבר. On the dynamism of the divine 'word' in Luke-Acts more broadly, cf. Kodell 1974.

It is Mary, however, who is given the final word in this dialogue: 'Behold, the handmaiden of the Lord; may it be for me according to your word.' In this response, Mary's mode of listening is finally revealed to the reader. Her assent to Gabriel's message unveils the extent to which she has received, and believed, the spoken word of God. Returning to the typology of listeners from Luke 8 discussed in §3.2.2, we can suggest that Luke characterizes Mary as one who has listened to the words of God such that they have reached her heart, where she stores and tends them and where they generate fruitful action. This picture of Mary as a model recipient of words is one that Luke affirms elsewhere (cf. §3.3.2, 4), and this Lukan depiction of Mary's aural piety resonates strongly with Matthew's comparable portrayal of the aural piety of Joseph (cf. §2.3.5). Interestingly, it is in this moment in which Mary intentionally receives the divine words that she also conceives the child whom John's gospel will call the 'Word made flesh.'[120]

We began this section by noting that the Annunciation to Mary is less apparently visual than Zechariah's experience in the Temple. However, there is a way in which the figure of Mary listening, and assenting, is itself the image that Luke offers to the reader. Instead of finding in her physical body a visual sign against the angel's message, as did Zechariah, Mary presents herself (Ἰδοὺ) as a visual icon of servanthood (ἡ δούλη κυρίου), which is completely transformed by and oriented to the dynamic ῥῆμά spoken by God.

The scene of the Visitation (1:39-45) serves to confirm this interpretation of the Annunciation, most definitively by Elizabeth's final statement in 1:45: 'And happy is she who believed (πιστεύσασα) that what was spoken to her by the Lord (λελαλημένοις αὐτῇ παρὰ κυρίου) would be accomplished.' As in Luke 8, listening and believing are linked,

[120] Early reception often links John 1 with the infancy narratives; see e.g. §4.6; §5.2-4; §6.3.3. For philosophical discussion of a conceptual relationship between birth and listening, cf. Corradi Fiumara 1990: 143-168.

here in the case of Mary.[121] Moreover, we find in this scene that Mary has become a bearer of the word she has received, and that Elizabeth's own listening to Mary's voice takes on layers of significance.

The meeting between the two women is a thoroughly aural event that begins with the sound of Mary's greeting as she enters the house of the (still deaf/mute) Zechariah. The repercussions of the sound of Mary's voice are related twice, first by Luke as narrator and later by Elizabeth herself. We will analyze both, beginning with Luke's initial description of the event: 'And it happened that when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting (ὡς ἤκουσεν τὸν ἀσπασμὸν τῆς Μαρίας), the baby leaped (ἐσκίρτησεν) in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and sounded forth (ἀνεφώνησεν) with a loud cry (κραυγῇ μεγάλῃ)' (1:41-42a). Here Elizabeth is the direct recipient of Mary's speech, although her hearing affects both herself and her child in ways that link them both with prophetic activity. John the Baptist's leap in utero is described by the term σκιρτάω, which generally refers to the uninhibited movement of animals and very young children, and which appears in the New Testament only in Luke.[122]

What precisely does John's leap respond to? For many exegetes, John reacts to the presence of Christ in Mary's womb.[123] Luke has already implicitly defined this movement as an inspired act, through Gabriel's previous prophecy that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even in his mother's womb (1:15). This interpretation seems to be confirmed by Elizabeth's own Spirit-filled intuition about the fruit of Mary's womb. However, a further point about the mechanics of the duo's perception is largely uninvestigated. If it is the case that John responds with joy to the presence of Christ, as seems likely, it is clearly

[121] Note also Luke 8:21 and 11:27-28, where Jesus specifically addresses comments about his mother as one who heard the word of God and obeyed it.
[122] In addition to its use in 1:41, 44, cf. 6:23. Cf. Fitzer 1971: 402; Bovon 2002: 58-59.
[123] Cf. Nassauer 2012 for discussion of Christ's absence/presence in this text. Nassauer argues that the enwombed Christ is the focal point of the encounter.

also the case that such knowledge is prompted by hearing a particular sound: Mary's voice. Interestingly it is the engagement of his mother's aural senses that provokes John's response. Mary's voice, and the words that come out of her mouth, have a certain power that seems to extend beyond mere physical aurality.

The sound of Mary's greeting also has an effect on Elizabeth: upon hearing it she immediately is filled with the Holy Spirit, and she herself 'sounds forth; (ἀναφωνέω) with 'a loud cry' (κραυγή). The noun κραυγή and related verbs κράζω / κραυγάζω in the New Testament and related literature seem to convey a diversity of loud vocalizations, of varying emotional pitches.[124] Here, Elizabeth's κραυγή is associated with prophetic speech inspired by the Holy Spirit.[125]

It is at this point that Elizabeth blesses Mary, and also offers her own description of what happened to her aurally: 'For behold, when the sound (φωνή) of your greeting came into my ears (ὦτα), the baby in my womb leaped in exultation' (1:44). Elizabeth's account explains the physicality of the aural process with even more focused precision than the narration of 1:41. She explicitly links the physical sound of Mary's voice entering her ears with the leap she felt in her womb. Her connection between her own ears and John's movement begs a question about the baby's own sense perception within this process, which exegetes like Origen will pick up with enthusiasm.[126] On a literary-theological level, Luke's understanding of human agency within the womb, linked with an experience of the divine, has parallels elsewhere in ancient Judaism and early Christianity.[127]

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[124] See, e.g., Isa 26:17 (LXX); Matt 25:6; Acts 23:9; Eph 4:31; Heb 5:7; Rev 21:4; Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph.* 19.1. Cf. Grundmann 1965 and the entry in BDAG.

[125] The motif of a pregnant woman being given prophetic voice is found elsewhere in Second Temple Judaism, specifically in 4 Ezra. Cf. De Long 2012; Flannery-Dailey 2012.

[126] Cf. §6.3.3. The ambiguity in Luke's text possibly reflects ancient uncertainty about the physical development of children in the womb (cf. Dasen 2013).

[127] Cf. Kessler 2009; Playoust and Aitken 2009. Note, e.g., the tradition in *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, Shirata 1, that 'even embryos in their mother's wombs opened their mouths and uttered song before God' after the crossing of the Red Sea (Cf. Lauterbach 2004: 174-176).

I have argued so far that Mary, in the Annunciation, assumed a posture of listening that enabled her to receive the divinely spoken word and its dynamic power, which accomplishes real effects in the world into which it speaks. In the Visitation Mary's theologically-oriented posture of listening is affirmed by Elizabeth and, as I have suggested, made manifest in the effects that her own voice has over Elizabeth and John. Unlike Zechariah, Mary is equipped with a vocal power that is linked to her reception of the word she has heard. Full expression of this dynamic orality is given in her song of praise, the Magnificat.[128]

It is not by accident that the first canticle Luke records is that of Mary, whose mode of receiving words has enabled her to declare them herself, effectively and resoundingly, unlike her counterpart Zechariah. The voice with which Mary delivers her song of praise is undoubtedly a joyful one, as her first line proclaims: 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit exults (ἀγαλλιάω) in God my savior' (1:46-47). The verb of rejoicing that Mary uses here is also employed elsewhere in Luke's infancy narrative: in Gabriel's prediction of exultation at the birth of John (1:14), and in reference to the leap of John in utero (1:44). Mary's joyful song combines 'descriptive' praise for the blessing of her own particular situation with 'declarative' praise for what God has done for Israel as a people,[129] and the two concepts are inextricably united. Mary casts herself in the image of a lowly handmaiden whom the Lord has looked upon (1:48), an echo of her statement in 1:38, while also praising God for how he has interceded for the lowly in more general terms (1:51-53). Her response to what she has heard from Gabriel becomes a response to the divine voice Israel has heard for generations, 'just as he spoke (ἐλάλησεν) to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed unto eternity' (1:55).

[128] For applicable introductory discussion of the canticles, cf. §3.1.3.
[129] Here I am employing terminology from Westermann 1981: 15-35.

In summary, we have examined the dynamics of sense perception in the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Magnificat, arguing that Mary's contrast with Zechariah in the previous section is fundamentally tied to her theologically-oriented mode of listening in Luke's account. The Annunciation is focused around the delivery and reception of words, and Mary is presented as the ideal listener: one who, though initially wrestling with what is spoken, allows the divine word to enter her heart and to bear fruit of belief and action. As a result, unlike with the muted Zechariah, her own voice becomes an instrument of power, effecting inspired reactions from Elizabeth and John the Baptist and proclaiming what she has heard in a song of joy.

3.2.4 The Aesthetics of Tablet and Tongue (1:57-80)

We return now to Zechariah's story, and with it the conclusion of this first half of our investigation. Here I suggest that Luke continues the problematization of seeing and hearing begun in 1:5-25 through the episode of the naming of John, and brings it to completion in his account of a mediating text and a tongue released for song.

I want to begin with 1:62, which takes us to the scene of a dispute concerning the name of Elizabeth's and Zechariah's newborn son. Following a disagreement with the baby's mother, the gathering of neighbors and relatives turn to Zechariah: 'They made signs (ἐνένευον) to his father, to find out what he wanted him to be called.' As was noted in §3.2.2, Luke describes Zechariah's disability with the adjective κωφός (1:22), which can refer to the conditions of both muteness and deafness. In 1:22 (with reference to 1:20), the term is taken to designate the inability to speak, and in that context Zechariah himself utilizes bodily signs to communicate. Here, in 1:62, we discover that Zechariah is not only mute, but also deaf, as his friends and relatives must make signs to communicate with him. Given the semantic range of κωφός, and Luke's own explicit connection of the term to

deafness in 7:22, Zechariah's inability to hear should not be taken as an authorial mistake or inconsistency. Rather, the faculties of hearing and speech (and conversely, their respective disabilities) were commonly physiologically linked in Graeco-Roman antiquity.[130] Moreover, an ancient tendency to emphasize muteness over deafness as the worse of the two conditions suffered by deaf-mutes, perhaps due to the more significant effects an inability to speak would have on one's ability to function in a more oral culture, has been noted elsewhere.[131] Such a tendency might account for Luke's accent on the silencing of Zechariah, coupled with his understanding that the punishment implied an inability to hear, as well.[132]

In 1:63-64, however, the dynamics of Zechariah's sense perception are altered as he expresses agreement with his wife's pronouncement of their son's name: 'And asking for a writing tablet (πινακίδιον), he wrote, saying (ἔγραψεν λέγων), "His name is John." Immediately his mouth was opened, as well as his tongue, and he spoke, blessing God.' Here we note a couple of related elements at play in the restoration of Zechariah's voice. First, the reader is aware that Zechariah's choice of name not only echoes Elizabeth's statement, but also that of the angel Gabriel (1:13). In affirming the words that he heard in that initial encounter in the Temple, Zechariah demonstrates that his posture of listening to those words has changed. In the place of doubt and demands is a humble belief, a consent to what he has heard.

But Zechariah's inner affirmation of what he has heard is only one of the key facets in his transformation. The other is how he expresses that belief, i.e. in the act of writing. Throughout this study, we have had ample occasion to note both that the act of

[130] E.g. Aristotle, *Hist. Anim.* 4.9.536.b3-5; Pseudo-Aristotle, *Problems* 11.2.899.a4-8; 23.1.961.b14-16.
[131] See esp. Laes 2011, but also Lawrence 2013: 61-62.
[132] Note the contradictory view of Kuhn 2013: 487-488, which fails to consider the widespread use of κωφός as encompassing deafness and muteness, as well as the ancient tendency to highlight muteness, even where deafness is implied.

reading was described in terms of hearing, and that the act of writing was associated with speech.[133] Zechariah's tablet-writing was thus tantamount to vocalizing the statement from an ancient perspective. As Achtemeier puts it, 'When Luke describes Zechariah writing the name of his son on the tablet, Luke's Greek (1:63, ἔγραψεν λέγων) demonstrates that it was the act of writing that proved his speech had been restored!'[134] Zechariah's restorative act of writing – his written affirmation of Gabriel's message – is comparable with Mary's oral affirmation in 1:38. Now Zechariah, like Mary, has received the divinely-sent words such that he is entirely oriented to them and can now speak them himself, even if it is his hand that does the talking.

An additional point might be made concerning Zechariah's act of writing. In this pivotal scene, a text becomes a mediator not only between writing and speaking, but also between the modes of hearing and seeing, which Luke had already begun to problematize in the previous half of Zechariah's story. Luke details the visual aspect of the act by specifying that it is a πινακίδιον that Zechariah takes to write on. A πίναξ, according to Gamble, is the Greek equivalent of the Latin *caudex* (literally, 'block of wood;' thus, a wooden tablet used for writing).[135] The invocation of the writing-tablet lends a visuality to Zechariah's act: what he has heard he communicates in inscriptional images that can be seen by himself and those around him. Fittingly, the one who demanded a sign makes visual signs of his own; but this time, they are signs that speak to a room of listeners, and as they do his mouth is opened and his tongue freed. Once again, the words that originated with God possess a certain power that is made manifest in physical effects.

Now that Zechariah has recovered his voice, he is able to deliver a vocal expression of praise on par with Mary's Magnificat. Here once again I would emphasize

[133] See esp. §1.4.1; 2.2.1; 3.1.2.
[134] Achtemeier 1990: 15.
[135] Cf. Gamble 1995: 49-50.

that the Benedictus (1:67-79) is not extrinsic to Luke's narrative, but deeply intrinsic to its logical development.[136] This second of the four canticles in Luke's infancy narrative is a song of praise that gives voice to Gabriel's prophecy that John 'will be a joy and an exultation for you' (1:14), and is the culmination of Zechariah's perceptual transformation. Like his wife (1:41) and infant son (1:15) before him, Zechariah is filled with the Holy Spirit, so that his vocalization of the Benedictus is both inspired and prophetic (1:67).

The Benedictus is structured in two parts, where 1:68-75 bless God for what he has done, and 1:76-79 are spoken directly to the newborn John.[137] Zechariah's first line, Εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, is a liturgical formula of benediction with resonances in the Psalms and the Eighteen Benedictions of the Jewish liturgy.[138] This first part of the canticle continues themes from the Magnificat. God has looked upon (ἐπεσκέψατο, 1:68) his people in accomplishing salvation among them, fulfilling what he previously had spoken (ἐλάλησεν) 'through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old' (1:70) and remembering his covenant with Abraham (1:72-75).

Zechariah's address to his son John (καὶ σὺ δέ, παιδίον, 1:76) can perhaps be contextualized by the description in 4 Macc 18:15-19 of a father singing instruction to his children. He describes his child's future vocation as the 'prophet of the Highest' who will go before the Lord, preparing his ways and granting knowledge of salvation (1:76-77), and invokes visual language from Isaiah about a 'rising from on high [that] has looked upon us (ἐπισκέψεται ἡμᾶς ἀνατολὴ ἐξ ὕψους), appearing (ἐπιφᾶναι) to the ones sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace' (1:78-79).[139] This visual image of the coming Christ as a light that has shined in darkness anticipates visual motifs

[136] Cf. §3.1.3.
[137] For further discussion of the Benedictus, cf. Gunkel 1921; Benoit 1956-1957; Brown 1993: 377-392; Hultgren 2009.
[138] Cf. Pss 41:13; 72:18-19; 106:48; 144:1; *m. Ber*. 4-5. Cf. Bovon 2002: 72; Hultgren 2009.
[139] Cf. Isa 60:1; 9:1; and relevant discussion in §2.2.7; 3.3.3.

surrounding the infant in the immediately subsequent episodes of Luke's infancy narrative, which we analyze in §3.3.

3.2.5 Conclusion to §3.2

I have argued throughout §3.2 that the contrast between Zechariah and Mary in their respective Annunciations should be interpreted in terms of their different modes of listening to Gabriel's words of revelation. In the end, both figures demonstrate a theologically-oriented listening that entails belief. They become bearers of the words they have received, expressing their belief verbally (through oral consent and tablet-writing, respectively) and proclaiming songs of praise and prophecy. Their voices have a powerful effect on other listeners: on Elizabeth and John, in Mary's case; and on the 'whole hill country of Judea' (1:65), in Zechariah's.

I would suggest that these elements make Mary and Zechariah – and to certain extent Elizabeth and John also – strong candidates for the category of 'servants of the word' (ὑπηρέται τοῦ λόγου) from Luke's preface (1:2). In §3.1.1 we noted several frameworks with which to define this phrase; of these, that of divine revelation is the most foundational. In Luke 1, the evangelist attributes to both Zechariah and Mary a direct encounter with such revelation, delivered to them in the messages of Gabriel. Moreover, both figures are shown to have proclaimed, i.e. 'passed down,' what they have heard, which is a key feature of this category in Luke's preface. Elizabeth and John the Baptist are key recipients of their witness, who also make declarations of their own: Elizabeth in her prophetic speech at Mary's visit; and John in his later ministry.

We have also noted moments in which Luke seems to be employing the technique of ἐνάργεια, particularly in the Zechariah episodes. The gospel writer's attention to visual details in the sanctuary of the Temple, and in Zechariah's tablet-writing, helps the reader

to ‘see’ these scenes more vividly. These elements lend dramatic effect to the problematization of seeing and hearing that occurs in the Zechariah narrative, and further highlight the contrast with Mary’s Annunciation, where listening to words takes center stage. In Luke 2, to which we now turn, hearing about the coming Savior gives way to privileged moments of *sight* of the child himself.

3.3 The Visuality of the Infant in Luke 2:1-52

3.3.1 Introduction

As in the previous section, I undertake an exegesis of Luke 2 in three parts, corresponding to three main narrative movements: the birth and Jesus and witness of the shepherds in §3.3.2, the presentation in the Temple in §3.3.3, and the finding of the child Jesus at the Temple in §3.3.4. I suggest throughout this section that Luke’s attention to aesthetic piety in these scenes shifts to focus on the sense of sight. Specifically, he is interested in the infant himself as an object of vision; in each of the three episodes in Luke 2, a climactic moment is reached when characters *see* the child Jesus. The two canticles of this chapter – the Gloria and Nunc dimittis – form responses to the visual revelation of the infant.

These scenes contribute significantly to the ‘aesthetic invitation’ of Luke’s infancy narrative, especially appealing to the reader’s visual imagination. Through ἐνάργεια and visual language culled from Isaiah and other prophetic texts, Readers are invited to behold the infant Jesus alongside eyewitnesses such as the shepherds, Simeon, Mary and Joseph.

3.3.2 Beholding the Child in the Manger (2:1-20)

The visual focal point of our first episode (2:1-20) is one that is familiar to us through a long history of reception in art, traditional crèches, and nativity plays: the baby

Jesus in the manger. Our analysis here will demonstrate that this history of reception comes by no accident, but through the 'aesthetic invitation' extended by Luke's text to focus the eyes on this sight. The description of Jesus in the manger is related by Luke not once but three times throughout 2:1-21, and each repetition discloses a different aspect of its visuality. We will examine these aspects in detail.

Luke's first iteration of this motif is vivid in detail, a textbook example of ἐνάργεια. In the context of the Syrian census, Joseph and Mary travel from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea, where it becomes time for Mary to deliver: 'and she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes (ἐσπαργάνωσεν) and laid him in a manger (φάτνη), because there was no place for them in the inn' (2:7). Two elements here stand out.

First, the detail of the swaddling clothes is strongly visual, as a comparison with one of Philostratus the Younger's *Imagines* (third century) serves to highlight. The *Imagines* is one of several Graeco-Roman collections of Ἐικόνες (or *Imagines*), short ekphrastic descriptions of material works of art – particularly statues.[140] In his collection, Philostratus the Younger includes a piece on Ἡράκλεις ἐν σπαργάνοις ('Heracles in Swaddling Clothes'). The newborn garments are key to his description of this artwork, and in the picture that Philostratus presents rhetorically, the figure of Teiresias predicts 'what a hero the babe in swaddling clothes will become.'[141] This motif is striking given the context of Luke 2 within Luke's overall portrayal of Jesus as a redemptive, divine-human figure. While I am not positing a connection between the two texts (especially as Luke's gospel significantly pre-dates Philostratus), the similarity shows that Luke's employment of ἐνάργεια participates within a Graeco-Roman visual culture.

[140] Others include Lucian, *Imagines*; Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines*; Callistratus, *Descriptions*; Prudentius, *Dittochæon*. For more discussion of this phenomenon, cf. Steiner 2001; Bradley 2014.
[141] Philostratus the Younger, *Imagines* 5. Trans. Fairbanks 1931: 308-309. Cf. also Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* 1.26.

Similarly, Mary's use of a φάτνη to cradle her son, in juxtaposition with the vaguely lacking κατάλυμα, provides a powerful visual marker and kindles the imagination.[142] Although Luke does not mention animals in his description of Jesus' birth place, it is clear from his use of the term φάτνη in 13:15 that he imagines it to be a place where ox (βοῦς) and donkey (ὄνος) are kept.[143] In summary, with details such as the swaddling clothes and manger Luke helps his reader to 'see' with words the setting of the birth of Jesus.

An echo of this motif occurs in the context of the angels' speech to the shepherds. Indeed, from this point the shepherds become key witnesses to Christ's birth in Luke's narrative. Their experience is recorded in two main segments (2:8-14 and 15-20), each centered around a repetition of the nativity description in 2:7: first where this is received aurally (2:12), and finally in its visual culmination (2:16).

While the focus of 2:8-14 is on what the shepherds hear, a number of visual elements are also present in their encounter with the angels. First, after specifying a setting during the darkness of night (2:8) Luke relates that 'an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory (δόξα) of the Lord shone around (περιέλαμψεν) them' (2:9). This entrance of one angel is followed in 2:13 by the sudden appearance of the 'multitude of the army of heaven' (πλῆθος στρατιᾶς οὐρανίου). Each of these manifestations are dramatic visualizations – first of the shining brilliance of divine presence,[144] and then of a spectacle of celestial military might.[145]

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[142] The *Protevangelium of James* and other early Christian texts will fill in visual details, such as the birth in a cave (cf. §4.5). A specific site in Bethlehem – complete with manger – attracted the eyes of pilgrims at least from the third century (cf. §6.3.5).
[143] Early Christian interpretation and art will imagine these animals into the Lukan scene, via an interpretation of Isa 1:3 (cf. discussion in §6.3.5).
[144] Cf. Kittel and Von Rad 1964 and Oepke 1967, on δόξα and περιλάμπω respectively. Note also our previous discussion of luminous angelic appearances in Matthew (§2.3.3).
[145] Origen will combine these dramatic visualizations with Matthew's star; cf. §6.2.4.

The visuality of the scene provides a dramatic backdrop for the words the shepherds hear, which come in two main installments. The initial 'angel of the Lord' bears good news (εὐαγγελίζομαι), about the birth of a 'savior who is Christ the Lord' (2:10-11; cf. 1:19) – a wording that is striking given the evidence of the Calendar Inscription of Priene (9 BCE), which declares the εὐαγγέλιον that the birthday of Augustus Caesar will form the beginning of a new calendar system.[146] This angel also offers a sign (σημεῖον) containing the visual details from 2:7: 'And this will be a sign for you: you will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger' (2:12). This sign which is heard by the shepherds falls under our category of 'auditory image,' discussed in the previous chapter.[147] This is an image that the shepherds hear about and must imagine mentally; however, the angel's message also contains an invitation to find the child and to behold this 'sign' physically.

The second installment of words the shepherds hear in this encounter is the acclamation of the 'multitude of the army of heaven.' This third of the four Lukan canticles, the Gloria in excelsis (2:14), is distinct from the others in that it is vocalized chorally rather than individually, and in that it is a heavenly rather than a human response.[148] It is also much more brief: Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις θεῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας.[149] This acclamation of praise (αἰνούντων τὸν θεόν, 2:13) functions somewhat antiphonally in the narrative, as an immediate (ἐξαίφνης), cultic response to the birth of Christ just announced.

[146] For the text of this inscription, cf. Ehrenberg and Jones 1976: 81-84. Cf. further discussion in Evans 2000.
[147] See esp. §2.2. Note that the image of Isa 7:14 is also called a 'sign' (cf. §2.2.2).
[148] See §3.1.3 for applicable discussion of the Lukan canticles.
[149] This hymn text has been much debated, both in terms of possible Hebrew or Aramaic equivalents, and in variant translations and interpretations of its last two words. Cf. Jeremias 1929; Fitzmyer 1958; Kilpatrick 1988; Wolters 1994; Olsson 2004; Pfalzgraf 2007.

The second half of the shepherds' experience (2:15-20) culminates in their beholding the very image repeated twice already (2:7, 12). Indeed, their immediate impulse after hearing from the angels focuses on *seeing*: 'Let us go to Bethlehem and see this word (ἴδωμεν τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο) that has happened, which the Lord made known (ἐγνώρισεν) to us' (2:15). Two points may be made here. The first concerns the translation of ῥῆμα as 'word' and not the default 'thing.' As was noted above with our discussion of the Annunciation to Mary (§3.2.3), interpretations of ῥῆμα would do well to be more conscious of the dimensions of its meaning, and in this context there is a strong argument to be made that the shepherds encourage one another to indeed 'see this word,' because of its referral back to the angel's verbal message just analyzed.[150] At the same time, the shepherds are conscious that this word is something that has materialized, that has happened, and they want to see it. This is in accord with the dynamic aspect of ῥῆμα. Another point is that here again Luke links epistemology (γνωρίζω) with sense perception:[151] what the 'Lord has made known' is the word that the shepherds have heard from the angels, signifying the image they now go to see. This connection of knowledge with the aural and visual senses will occur again in 2:17.

The climactic moment, and the final iteration of the motif introduced in 2:7, comes next in 2:16, when the shepherds indeed find 'Mary and Joseph and the baby (βρέφος) lying in the manger.' We observed a very similar moment in the previous chapter, with the magi's sight of 'the child (παιδίον) with Mary his mother' (Matt 2:11). In both cases a group of individuals travel (albeit from a greater distance, in the magi's case) with the express purpose of *seeing* the infant Jesus. Both describe the sight beheld in stark, almost iconic terms: with Matthew it is the mother and child, for Luke it is the entire Holy Family

[150] Cf. Burchard 1985 for comparison of this translation of Luke 2:15 with *Joseph and Aseneth* 17.1.
[151] Cf. §3.1.2; 3.2.2.

centered around the baby in a manger.[152] Luke's repetition of the visuality of Jesus and his place of birth throughout this episode has prepared the reader to join with the shepherds in 'seeing' the child.

In the case of Luke's shepherds, this sight prompts immediate action: '*Seeing* (ἰδόντες) this, they made known the word that had been spoken to them (ἐγνώρισαν περὶ τοῦ ῥήματος τοῦ λαληθέντος αὐτοῖς) concerning this child' (2:17). We should note here the repetition of the terms ῥῆμα and γνωρίζω from just two verses before. The shepherds' visual encounter with the infant enables them to become part of an oral/aural process of conveying knowledge; whereas previously the word had been made known to them as hearing recipients (2:15), now they make known the word as speaking proclaimers.

Luke notes several listening recipients of the shepherds' words, in both general and specific terms. In 2:18 he records the general amazement of 'all who heard' (πάντες οἱ ἀκούσαντες) the shepherds' speech, and in 2:19 he focuses in on one listener in particular: 'Mary kept all these words (συνετήρει τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα), interpreting (συμβάλλουσα) them in her heart.' Luke's characterization of Mary as listener from her Annunciation scene deepens here, where he describes her act of receiving ῥήματα with two distinct verbs. The verb συντηρέω applies a kind of materiality to words, as if they can be gathered and preserved, or stored up in a container,[153] while συμβάλλω denotes a measured comparison or interpretation of words. The reference to the place in which Mary stores and interprets these words, 'in her heart,' anticipates the sentiment of Luke 8:15.[154]

Verse 20 concludes the pericope: 'And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God (δοξάζοντες καὶ αἰνοῦντες τὸν θεὸν) over all that they had heard and seen

[152] Once more we observe that neither gospel writer relates the physical features of the child himself, perhaps leaving this visual element to the reader's imagination.
[153] Note that the only two other uses of συντηρέω in the NT appear in the context of the preservation of wine in wineskins (Matt 9:17; Mark 6:20).
[154] Cf. discussion in §3.2.2-3.

(πᾶσιν οἷς ἤκουσαν καὶ εἶδον), just as it had been spoken to them.' This sentence nicely summarizes the two segments of the shepherds' experience as I have analyzed it here: as focused first on the aural, and finally on the visual sense.

3.3.3 Simeon and the Sight of Salvation (2:21-40)

Another highly climactic moment of seeing the child Jesus in Luke's infancy narrative is related in the Holy Family's encounter with Simeon in the Temple. This section centers around Simeon's statement in 2:30, 'My eyes have seen your salvation' (εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου τὸ σωτήριόν σου), and assesses in detail the dimensions of this assertion.

After contextualizing the scene through a record of the Holy Family's coming to the Temple to perform two legal rituals related to childbirth,[155] Luke records the entrance of Simeon, a righteous and steadfast man waiting for the consolation of Israel. Our attention will focus first on 2:26: 'and it had been revealed (κεχρηματισμένον) to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Messiah (μὴ ἰδεῖν θάνατον πρὶν ἢ ἂν ἴδῃ τὸν χριστὸν κυρίου).' In the previous chapter we discussed Matthew's use of the verb χρηματίζω to describe the revelatory nature of two dreams in his infancy narrative (cf. Matt 2:12, 22), and we noted that this term reflects a primarily aural form of revelation in ancient dream theory.[156] Here, in Luke's infancy narrative, no dream is mentioned in Simeon's case, and unlike in Matthew's use of the term, Luke identifies an agent of the oracle: the Holy Spirit.[157] The message related by the Holy Spirit in this revelation is the promise of two related sights, one physical and the other most

[155] Cf. Kozitza 2020 for discussion of Luke's portrayal of these rituals within the context of Second Temple and early rabbinic legal exegesis.
[156] Note again, e.g., Artemidorus' distinction between χρηματισμός, 'oracle,' and ὅραμα, 'vision.' Cf. Artemidorus, *Oneir.* 1.1-2; our discussion in §2.3.2, 4.
[157] Cf. also Acts 10:22, where Luke employs χρηματίζω to describe the instructions Cornelius receives from an angelic vision (10:3-6).

likely metaphorical. Simeon will physically see 'the Lord's Messiah,' and will only then experience death (with sight as a metaphor for that experience).[158] Simeon is thus characterized as a listener to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who waits for a particular, physical, promised sight.

Simeon's reaction upon seeing the newborn baby with his parents in the Temple is one of joy and tenderness as he takes the child in his arms (2:28). Luke thus allows his readers to imagine Simeon looking down at the baby in his arms as he delivers the final canticle of the infancy narrative, the Nunc dimittis: 'Now release your servant in peace, Lord, according to your word (κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου). For my eyes have seen your salvation (εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου τὸ σωτήριόν σου), which you have prepared before the face (κατὰ πρόσωπον) of all peoples, light for the revelation (φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν) of the nations and the glory (δόξα) of your people Israel' (2:29-31). Here I will first point out, once again, that this canticle should not be interpreted as extrinsic to the narrative, but as an integral vocal response to divine presence and salvation, which has now been made visible.[159]

Simeon's various visual references merit closer investigation. First, he draws attention to his own physical eyes that see the baby in his arms. Similar attention is drawn to ὀφθαλμοί later in Luke's gospel when Jesus says to his disciples, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see' (10:23). But as Luke records in the case of Simeon, the blessing of physically seeing the Messiah with one's eyes is not only present with reference to Jesus' adult ministry, but even when Jesus is merely a newborn babe in one's arms. This is a theological point worth underlining, for in the Nunc dimittis Simeon does not speak in the future tense, but is clear that 'now' his eyes 'have seen' the Messiah that had been

[158] Cf. also Ps 89:48; John 8:51. A similar phrase is that of 'tasting death' (cf. Matt 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27; John 8:52; Heb 2:9). Both of these are best taken as metaphors for the experience of death.
[159] Cf. §3.1.3.

promised him, and that this child he now looks at with his eyes is *already* the embodiment of that promise.

So what does Simeon 'see' in this child? He describes the infant himself in three distinct, and each highly visual, phrases.[160] First, the child is 'your salvation,' made visible 'before the face' of all. This phrase anticipates the quote from Isaiah in Luke 3:6, that 'all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'[161] Second, he is 'light for revelation.' Light is a motif closely connected with ancient theories of vision,[162] and here the infant embodies the light that enables all nations to see. Finally, he is the 'glory' of Israel, a term that carries biblical overtones of the manifestation of the divine presence that resides in the sanctuary not far from where Simeon stands with the child Jesus. Ezekiel's experience of this glory is indicative: 'Then he brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the Temple; and I looked, and lo! The glory of the Lord filled the Temple of the Lord; and I fell upon my face' (Ezek 44:4, NRSV).[163] Whereas Ezekiel's eyes could not bear the sight of the glory of the Lord himself, Simeon's eyes linger on the sight of this same glory in the childish flesh of the 'Lord's Messiah' (2:26).

In connection with this last point, Jewish traditions about 'seeing God' in the Temple might also shed light on Simeon's visual experience of 'the Lord's Messiah.' As was suggested in §3.2.2 with regard to Gabriel's appearance to Zechariah, the Temple setting for each of these visual encounters is not incidental, but participates within a context of assumptions about cultic viewing already present within Judaism. While Jewish theology strictly prohibits idolatry, and no statues or images of the deity resided in the Jewish Temple, in contrast with the practice of other ancient religions (cf. Luke's own

[160] It is well-established that these phrases are strongly derived from the language of Isaiah and other prophetic texts. Cf. Isa. 40:5; 42:6; 46:13; 49:6; 52:11; Ps 98:3; Baruch 4:24. For discussion cf. Brown 1993: 458-459.
[161] Cf. Isa 40:5.
[162] Cf. Simon 1988: 21-82; Park 1997: 3-150; Neis 2013: 28-29, 41.
[163] Cf. also 1 Kings 8:11.

acknowledgment of this in Acts 17:24, 29), Anderson and others have argued that Temple worship nevertheless had a prescribed visual component in the beauty of the Temple's structure and furniture.[164] The biblical and postbiblical texts surveyed by Anderson 'imagine that the furniture shares enough of the divine presence that seeing it constitutes a fulfillment of the command 'to see the face of God.''[165] Given the framework of such expectations, it is perhaps not incidental that the Messianic vision promised to Simeon occurs at the Temple, as directed by the Holy Spirit (2:27), and that he speaks of his sight of the child in terms of the glory of the Lord himself.

Following this climactic visual moment, Simeon directs his speech to the infant's parents, who express amazement at his words (2:33), and particularly to Mary (2:34-35). This second speech prophesies concerning future suffering in the life of the child and his mother, in cryptic metaphorical imagery: the child will cause division in Israel as a 'sign that will be spoken against' (σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον), and a sword (ῥομφαία) will pass through Mary's soul.[166] The purpose for such suffering is only vaguely gestured at: 'so that the inner thoughts (διαλογισμοί) of many hearts may be revealed (ἀποκαλυφθῶσιν).' We noted the verb form of the noun διαλογισμός earlier, with regard to Mary's inner dialogue in 1:29.[167] As was discussed there, the term in itself is neutral, so that inner thoughts might tend positively toward belief, or negatively toward doubt and sin. In the case of Mary, we saw that her διαλογισμοί were 'revealed' in her final consent to the words she had heard from Gabriel, in which she presented herself as an image of servanthood (1:38). Here, Simeon seems to speak of a similar process, that will be applied more widely to the hearts of many. The life of the child, and the division and suffering that

[164] Cf. Fraade 2009; Neis 2013; and especially Anderson 2009.
[165] Anderson 2009: 183. Cf. Deut 16:16 and parallels.
[166] For discussion of interpretive options, cf. Brown 1993: 460-466. Cf. also receptions of Luke 2:34 in *PJ* and Origen (§4.3.3; §6.3.6).
[167] Cf. §3.2.3.

his life will entail, will cause many to come to a similar time of decision in which inner belief or doubt will finally be revealed.

Although Simeon's visual encounter with the infant Christ is the focus of this episode, Luke also records another witness to the Holy Family's visit to the Temple: the prophetess Anna (2:36-38). The gospel writer goes into surprising detail about the life of this unique figure, and one wonders if the specifics of Anna's family descent, age, and manner of life are remnants of historical memory.[168] In any case, this elderly woman who spends the majority of her life in the Temple, 'worshipping with fasts and prayers night and day,' is a witness significant enough for Luke to highlight in some detail. He writes that she 'stood nearby,' implying her own physical perception of the infant and Simeon's encounter with him, and that her witness results in the expression of thanksgiving and vocal transmission of what she has perceived.

In summary, in 2:21-40 Luke once again offers an episode that hinges on *seeing* the infant Christ. The significance of Simeon's visual encounter becomes all the more striking in light of ancient Jewish traditions about 'seeing God' in the Temple, and in light of the multiple visual references from Scripture that Simeon uses to describe the experience. As in the previous pericope with the shepherds, a climactic moment of sight leads to oral proclamation: in the case of Simeon, this is actualized in a hymn and prophecy privately disclosed to the Holy Family, and in the case of Anna, the word spreads to 'all those waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem' (2:38).

3.3.4 Parents and Perception (2:41-52)

The concluding pericope of Luke's infancy narrative is the finding of the child Jesus in the Temple. This episode is not as dramatically visual as the two preceding scenes

[168] Cf. Brown 1993: 467.

of Luke 2, nor as the two preceding Temple-set scenes of Luke's infancy narrative. Still, it shares a striking feature in common with each of these episode groups through its reference to the sense of sight at its climactic moment. As in the stories of Zechariah and Simeon, seeing is related to the Temple setting, and as in the two preceding scenes of Luke 2, vision is directed toward the child Jesus himself. Here Jesus is presented from the visual perspective of his parents, who are astonished at seeing him sitting among the teachers of the Temple.

The parents' culminating vision of their son in the Temple is contextualized by their annual journey to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover (2:41-42), and their twelve-year-old son's troubling absence from them on their journey home, prompting a return to Jerusalem (2:43-45). These verses, as well as the conversation between Jesus and his parents in 2:48-49, are punctuated by the theme of searching (ζητέω). The tension of the passage hinges on Jesus' absence from his parents' sight.

When Mary and Joseph find the child, Luke relates that they see (ἰδόντες, 2:48) the following image: Jesus, 'in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. All who heard him were confounded at his comprehension and answers' (2:46-47). This sight provokes astonishment in his parents (2:48), and it is worth attending to the image in more detail. While Luke is not more specific about Jesus' location than his reference to τὸ ἱερόν (the Temple precinct, as distinct from ναός, 1:9, 21), Bovon imagines this encounter to have taken place in Solomon's portico, a colonnade on the eastern side of the women's court.[169] The suggestion is not far-fetched for several reasons. As Bovon points out, the connection to the wisdom of Solomon would be well-placed here (cf. 2:40, 46-47, 52), and Luke indicates this very location in Acts as the place of apostolic teaching (cf. Acts 3:11; 5:12,

[169] Cf. Bovon 2002: 112.

21, 25). Furthermore, it is a location that would be visible to the mother of Jesus, who could not venture beyond the women's court of the Temple complex.

The arrangement of figures within this setting fills out the image that Mary and Joseph behold. Bovon rightly points out that it is not a picture of a disciple with teachers, but of a young boy who 'sits among' the teachers (διδάσκαλοι) of Israel. It is not a static image but an animated one, in which Jesus both listens and engages in dialogue with scholars, who are likewise captivated by what he has to say. Given the Temple setting, and Luke's stress on Jesus as a teacher and interpreter of the Scriptures throughout his gospel, it is likely that the conversation between Jesus and the διδάσκαλοι involved a discussion of Scripture, possibly the Mosaic Law in particular.[170] This image of Jesus as διδάσκαλος in conversation with the intellectual heritage of Israel is a visual foreshadowing of his future ministry, here seen from the perspective of his human parents.

The dialogue between the parents and Jesus, prompted by this sight (2:48-50), potentially expose the human-divine tensions of Jesus' identity and vocation.[171] The first speech of Jesus recorded in Luke's gospel is his statement concerning 'my Father,' which has often been viewed as a Christological statement.[172] Luke is not hesitant to report a certain lack in the knowledge (οὐκ ᾔδειτε, 2:49) and understanding (οὐ συνῆκαν, 2:50) of Mary and Joseph concerning the word (ῥῆμα) that their son speaks in response to Mary's worried inquiry. This acknowledgment should not detract from Luke's portrait of Mary as model listener throughout his infancy narrative; in fact, he further develops this characterization in 2:51: 'and his mother observed (διατηρέω) all these words (ῥήματα) in

[170] Cf. Kilgallen 1985, who points out that Luke in particular stresses the role of Jesus as teacher (note that this is how he introduces Jesus' ministry, 4:15ff., in contrast with both Mark and Matthew), and that the term διδάσκαλος is most often used by Luke in reference to interpretation of the Law (cf. Luke 7:40; 10:25; 11:45; 12:13; 19:39; 20:39).
[171] The translation of 2:49 is a well-known *crux interpretum*; see the various options laid out in Brown 1993: 475-477; Bovon 2002: 114-115.
[172] Note, however, Winter 1954's comparison of Luke 2:49 with a tradition recorded in *Frg. Tg. on Exod* 15:2, about infants declaring 'He is our Father' to their parents at the Red Sea.

her heart.' The verb διατηρέω actually has a visual aspect, meaning to 'watch closely' or 'observe;' once again, Mary receives words into her heart and there watches over them. In Luke's view complete knowledge or understanding is not a prerequisite for such listening, nor for belief. Nothing appears to have changed substantively in Luke's depiction of Mary as 'she who believed' (1:45).[173]

3.3.5 Conclusion to §3.3

With this pericope, we conclude the second half of our investigation of Luke's infancy narrative. In §3.3 we have highlighted three visual encounters with the infant Jesus himself: the shepherds' beholding of the child in the manger, Simeon's sight of salvation in the form of an infant, and Mary's and Joseph's view of their adolescent son conversing with διδάσκαλοι in the Temple. Each of these visual experiences comes with its own distinct interpretive aspects, which we have analyzed. Moreover, the fact that in each of these three episodes, the climactic moment is reached when characters *see* the child Jesus, is in itself a point that merits attention. There seems to be something about the physical seeing of this child that Luke finds worth repeating in different contexts.

Certainly, these are not the only moments in which Jesus is an object of vision in Luke's gospel. Significant moments of seeing Jesus also occur, for example, in 9:32, where Peter, John, and James 'saw his glory' (εἶδον τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ) in the Transfiguration;[174] in 23:47-49, where the centurion, all the crowds, and Jesus' friends behold the spectacle (θεωρία) of Christ on the cross;[175] and in 24:31, where two disciples' eyes are opened to recognize their resurrected Lord.[176] Our analysis of the three episodes

[173] See Laurentin 1966 for more discussion of Mary in this passage.
[174] This verse is unique to Luke. Its striking similarity with John 1:14 (ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτου) is possible evidence that John knew Luke's gospel (for this insight I am indebted to Mark Goodacre's 2017 Speaker's Lectures in Biblical Studies on 'John's Knowledge of the Synoptics,' presented at Oxford).
[175] Cf. Söding 2007 for further elaboration on the visual vividness of Luke's crucifixion.
[176] Note our earlier discussion of this passage in §3.1.2.

of Luke 2 demonstrates that for Luke, the beholding of Jesus holds a certain transformative power even from his infancy and childhood. These visions of the child do not merely point ahead to future glory and humility, but they are in themselves powerful moments of visual encounter with one who is already, as a babe in a manger, 'Christ the Lord' (2:11); the 'Lord's Messiah' (2:26) in the arms of Simeon; and the Son of God in his Father's house (cf. 2:49).

This insight about revelatory witness 'from the beginning' (1:2) of Jesus' incarnate life lends support to the idea that the figures of Luke 2 – the shepherds, Simeon and Anna, Mary and Joseph – could be counted among the αὐτόπται and ὑπηρέται τοῦ λόγου of Luke's preface (cf. §3.1.1). The overarching point of this section has been that Luke portrays all of these figures as eyewitnesses; furthermore, we have noted several occasions where visual witness turns to verbal proclamation (2:17-18, 28-32, 38). An additional point concerns Luke's statements of Mary 'storing up' the events and words she has witnessed (2:19, 51), which have sometimes been interpreted as subtle indications that Mary (or someone near to her) was a source for Luke.

Alongside these figures in the narrative, we have observed how Luke's text invites the reader to become another eyewitness – particularly through its use of ἐνάργεια in the vivid details of the swaddled babe in a manger, and through the evocative canticles of the heavenly host and Simeon. Indeed, Luke 2 contributes much to the overall 'aesthetic invitation' of Luke's infancy narrative, as will be proven in subsequent chapters of this study.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that Luke's infancy narrative concerns itself with the sense perceptions of witnesses to Christ's infancy, and poses an 'aesthetic invitation' to its

audience, engaging their visual and aural senses in participation with the text. I began this chapter with reference to the long tradition of St Luke as a painter, asking how this tradition might shed light on an exegesis of the text itself. I proceeded to outline two aesthetic-textual principles derived from a reading of Luke's preface: first, that Luke indicates an interest in the aesthetic piety of characters in his narrative through his reference to 'eyewitnesses and ministers of the word' (§3.1.1); and second, that Luke shapes his text in a way that enables his audience to vividly see and hear the events recorded, as one of the methods by which he helps them to 'know the truth' through his gospel text (§3.1.2). These principles were preliminarily tested with recourse to the four canticles (§3.1.3). The canticles participate within the dynamics of characters' own aesthetic piety; they also lend auditory vividness to the Lukan text, and for this reason have effected a particularly strong aesthetic appeal in their reception history.

The subsequent sections of this chapter further assessed the two theses underpinning my argument. Section §3.2 centered around the contrasting modes of listening in Zechariah's and Mary's stories, and §3.3 focused on three climactic moments of sight. Within these analyses we encountered several individuals who might well be described as αὐτόπται, or ὑπηρέται τοῦ λογοῦ, or a combination of the two – challenging the majority view that the phrase 'from the beginning' (1:2) refers solely to the beginning of Jesus' adult ministry, not his earthly life. Additionally, we noted several places in which Luke seems to employ the technique of ἐνάργεια to bring scenes 'before the eyes' of his readers, allowing them to become eyewitnesses of, for example, Zechariah's vision in the Temple, or the swaddled baby Jesus in a manger. This effect increases and confirms the Lukan audience's knowledge of what they have previously heard (cf. 1:4).

The 'aesthetic invitation' of Luke's infancy narrative will be resoundingly corroborated in subsequent chapters of this study, as each of the episodes highlighted here

are taken up in imaginative and interpretive 'aesthetic response.' Zechariah's Temple vision is dramatically recast, and combined with Simeon's story, in *PJ* (§4.6), while Origen comments on the moral and spiritual dimensions of seeing and hearing, specifically confirming this chapter's interpretation of Zechariah's silencing as a result of his inability to listen (§6.3.3). The figure of Mary features prominently in all three reception-historical case studies. *PJ* expands upon the characterization of Mary's own aesthetic piety, enhances the visuality of her Annunciation scene, and draws a visual-theological link between Mary and Christ, highlighting her role in her son's visual revelation (§4.3). Irenaeus provides further definition for the idea that Mary contributes to rendering Christ visible (§5.3), and Origen comments on aesthetic aspects of the Annunciation, Visitation, and Magnificat (§6.3.3-4).

The episodes of witness to the birth and childhood of Jesus in Luke 2 provoke further aesthetic response. *PJ* expands and reworks visual elements from the Lukan birth scene (§4.5), and concludes its narrative with Simeon's visual encounter with Christ (§4.6). Over against second-century speculation about the physical reality of Christ's birth, Irenaeus particularly draws out the visual nature of the witness of the shepherds, Simeon, and Mary, which he harmonizes with that of the magi and even the patriarch Abraham (§5.4; cf. John 8:56). The multiple interpretations of Origen include, *inter alia*, attestation to early pilgrimage to behold the birthplace of Jesus (§6.3.5), and the homiletic encouragement to spiritually participate in the seeing of Simeon (§6.3.6), and of Mary and Joseph at the Temple (§6.3.7).

This thumbnail sketch of early reception of Luke 1-2, along with a similar sketch at the conclusion of our analysis of Matt 1-2 (§2.5), briefly previews the findings of Part II of this study. We turn now to examine more thoroughly these elements of 'aesthetic response' to the aesthetic impulses we have observed in the biblical texts.

Part II

CHAPTER 4:
CREATIVE AESTHETIC RESPONSE IN THE *PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES*

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The Category of 'Creative Aesthetic Response'

In this chapter I argue that the second-century apocryphal infancy gospel, the *Protevangelium of James* (*PJ*), is a representative example of an early text that responds creatively to the aesthetic impulses of the infancy accounts recorded in Matthew and Luke. The category that I have termed 'creative aesthetic response' may be defined through further elaboration on each of its three component parts. First, it constitutes a *response* to Matthew and Luke: it is in dialogue with canonical (or, more precisely, pre-canonical) infancy traditions,[1] and is indeed effected by them.[2] Second, the more specific category of *aesthetic* response indicates the ways in which a text responds to the aesthetic impulses in the Matthean and Lukan infancy narratives, examined in Part I of this study. That is, I am specifically concerned with *PJ*'s engagement of visual or aural elements described in Chapters 2 and 3, and how the apocryphal gospel interprets or re-imagines these elements. Following from this, the last component of the category is that it is *creative*. By this I mean that such a text is not statically copying aesthetic elements from pre-canonical sources, but is itself part of a dynamic process of interpretation in which those elements are developed imaginatively and new 'aesthetic invitations' are generated.[3]

In developing this category I build upon the work of several previous scholars, each of whom has discussed aspects of how the relationship between *PJ* and its textual precursors should be understood. These scholars have employed various terminologies to

[1] For discussion of issues of canon and apocrypha in relation to infancy traditions, cf. §1.3-4.
[2] On theories of 'effect' and 'reception,' and my approach to these issues, cf. §1.4.
[3] To clarify, both the receptions of Irenaeus and of Origen – examined in Chs. 5-6 – also could be classed as 'creative aesthetic response' to a certain extent. However, the narrative genre of *PJ* lends itself more freely to the 'creative' aspect, than do more focused exegetical texts.

define our text's process of reception. For example, *PJ* has long been characterized as a kind of 'Christian midrash' on the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. Here Cothenet's work is illustrative.[4] For him, the interpretive methods used in haggadic midrash on the infancies of biblical exemplars are comparable to those applied by the author of *PJ*. Several elements come together in Cothenet's understanding of *PJ*'s midrashic tendencies: a starting point in the Scriptures, the employment of various interpretive techniques (transposing of motifs, resolving issues in the text, gap-filling), the imaginative creation of a new text through these various interpretive methods, and an ultimate purpose in contributing to the ongoing vitality and accessibility of the Scriptural starting point. This rather broad definition of the genre of midrash certainly encompasses my notion of 'creative aesthetic response;' however, more recent scholarship on the nature of ancient midrash has stressed caution in applying that term widely.[5]

Others have used the more modern theory and terminology of intertextuality to describe the text's engagement with both sources and readers. A notable example is Vanden Eykel's recent monograph, which takes its starting point from Vorster's earlier essay on using this approach to analyze *PJ*.[6] Vanden Eykel advances Vorster's work considerably through expanding the scope of *PJ*'s intertextual purview to multiple texts outside the Christian canon as well as within it, and examining more attentively the role of *PJ*'s implied readers in detecting the resonances of intertexts. Vanden Eykel's study yields insights to which we will have occasion to return. It will be helpful to clarify, however, how this chapter differs in focus: while Vanden Eykel is primarily interested in early

[4] Cf. Cothenet 1988, who is heavily dependent on Bloch 1955; Perrot 1967. See also the judgments of Smid 1965: 8; Brown 1993: 559; Frey 1997: 75-76.
[5] See, e.g., Teugels 1998; Toepel 2014: 39.
[6] See Vorster 1988; Vanden Eykel 2016. Cf. also Van Oyen 2013: 283-288.

readers of *PJ*, I am more interested in the evidence *PJ* provides concerning early reading of Matthew and Luke.[7]

Two further recent analyses are influential in my own understanding of the textual dynamics at work in *PJ.* Bockmuehl has persuasively argued that non-canonical gospels, including *PJ*, can be understood as epiphenomenal to the gospel tradition that became canonical.[8] Furthermore, he affirms the highly generative nature of the gospel tradition, and illustrates *PJ*'s role in a dynamic process of Scriptural reception that lends itself to further generativity.[9] Similarly, Goodacre has recently explored *PJ*'s 'creative rewriting' of infancy traditions in Matthew and Luke. In so doing he delineates several ways in which *PJ* uses its gospel source material, noting a couple cases which evidence direct literary dependence, but arguing that most such uses may be described as a more creative reworking – 'adding, omitting, synthesizing, recasting and taking inspiration from accounts that the author knows intimately.'[10] These several and interrelating ideas – Bockmuehl's thesis of the epiphenomenal nature of *PJ*'s relationship to infancy traditions in Matthew and Luke, his emphasis on the generativity of the pre-canonical gospel tradition and the gap-filling impulse of *PJ*'s 'scriptural completion,' and Goodacre's close study of methods employed in *PJ*'s 'creative rewriting' – are the most influential precursors to my understanding of the category I have termed 'creative aesthetic response.'

Where this chapter further refines the work of these and the other scholars I have mentioned is in the 'aesthetic' aspect of the process described. I am focusing on one

[7] In describing *PJ* (or its author) as a 'reader,' I do not mean to restrict the use of this term to the reading of physical texts, although this is certainly a possibility by the time the author was writing. It is also possible that these traditions were 'read' by means of secondary orality. The semantic overlap between readers/hearers (cf. §1.4.1 *et passim*) also applies here.
[8] Cf. Bockmuehl 2017: 29, 232-234, *et passim*.
[9] See Bockmuehl 2017: 55-71; Bockmuehl 2018; and the analogous work of Najman 2012.
[10] Goodacre 2018: 57.

specific facet of the interpretive tendencies of our text, namely how it responds to the visual and aural impulses generated by the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. I suggest that there are two main ways in which this occurs: through an overall enhancement of visuality and aurality of setting, and a development of characters' modes of seeing and hearing.

In the first place, heightened visual and aural description of infancy settings in Matthew and Luke serve to bring these events even more vividly before the eyes and ears of a reader; once again, ancient concepts of ἐνάργεια and ἔκφρασις will again be useful to keep in mind here.[11] The Temple, a key setting for several of Luke's infancy scenes, figures even more expansively in the visual and aural imagination of *PJ*, both through its broader vocabulary for architectural spaces and decorative features, as well as its descriptive presentation of aesthetic details from the appearance of the high priest's vestments and Temple curtain to the sound of trumpets. In its attention to the sights and sounds of the Temple complex, *PJ* can be compared to a range of other Jewish texts, both pre- and post-70, which also offer detailed descriptions of the appearance of the sacred space and its various accoutrements. In addition, late ancient Jewish artifacts, specifically Palestinian synagogue mosaics, offer examples of how the Temple was imagined visually and symbolically to a post-Temple Jewish culture. Such literary and material evidence is used throughout this chapter as helpful comparative material.

Other settings from the canonical infancy traditions are likewise given richer visual expression in *PJ* – for example Joseph's and Mary's home, where the Annunciation takes place; the location of Jesus' birth, which *PJ* specifically portrays to be a cave; and the more rural topographies associated with the journey to Bethlehem and the flight to Egypt.

[11] Cf. §1.4.1; and our analysis of Luke 1-2 in Ch. 3.

Such visuality of setting is extended to material *PJ* does not inherit from Matthew and Luke – notably with regard to the home and garden of Joachim and Anna, Mary's parents.

Intersecting with this enhanced visuality and aurality of setting is the text's further development of characters' modes of seeing and hearing. In the previous two chapters we have shown the gospel writers' attentiveness to the visual and aural piety of characters in response to revelation about the infant Christ, and in devotion to him. *PJ* draws from several of these characterizations and develops them in interesting ways, for example with assertions about how Mary's eyes and ears have been formed by her time in the Temple, with a highly extraordinary visionary experience recounted by Joseph himself, and through combining the visual encounters of both Zechariah and Simeon in a climactic scene in the Temple. These and other cases where seeing and hearing subjects are a focus of the text, including for characters not derived from Matthew or Luke, often overlap with the heightened aesthetics of setting described above – further focusing the reader's contemplation of the images and sounds presented in the text, as through the characters' own eyes and ears.

This chapter's assessment of *PJ*'s 'creative aesthetic response' is organized by character. I examine the respective aesthetic pieties of Joachim and Anna (§4.2); Mary (§4.3); Joseph (§4.4); witnesses to the birth of Christ (§4.5); and the priests, Zechariah and Simeon (§4.6). In all of these cases, the focus is on how *PJ* is responsive to the portrayals of these characters (and the settings in which they find themselves) in the pre-canonical infancy traditions. Aesthetic elements of the Matthean or Lukan texts are woven even into *PJ*'s depictions of new characters, such as Mary's parents and the midwives.

PJ is not the only non-canonical infancy text that displays 'creative aesthetic response' such as I am describing here. Numerous other apocryphal infancy traditions might also be examined through this lens, from the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, to various

infancy scenes found within diverse documents such as the *Ascension of Isaiah* and *Questions of Bartholomew*, to later infancy apocrypha generated by *PJ* itself, such as the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, the *History of Joseph the Carpenter*, and multiple others. I have chosen to focus my analysis of 'creative aesthetic response' on *PJ* because I think it is a model example of the interpretive process I am describing, and because of this text's uniquely explosive effect within early (and medieval) Christianity.[12] However, I also want to provide a sketch of how 'creative aesthetic response' figures in other apocryphal infancy texts, in order to show that this phenomenon does not exist solely within *PJ*, but ranges widely across diverse apocrypha in early Christianity. While a sustained treatment of each of these documents would require several chapters rather than one, I offer brief remarks on several of these texts in §4.7, and cross-reference a few of them as is relevant within my discussion of *PJ*.

4.1.2 Points of Historical Orientation

Several points of historical orientation are relevant to this chapter. A look at the very end of the text, as it has been copied in our earliest extant manuscript, contained in Bodmer V (ca. 300 CE), provides an entrance into debated issues of dating, provenance, purpose, and manuscript tradition:

> Ἐγὼ δὲ Ἰάκωβος ὁ γράψας τὴν ἱστορίαν ταύτην ἐν Ἰεροσολύμοις θορύβου γεναμένου ὅτε ἐτελεύτησεν Ἡρώδης συνέστελλον ἐμαυτὸν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ἕως παύσηται ὁ θόρυβος Ἰερουσαλήμ δοξάσω δὲ τὸν δεσπότην τὸν δόντα μοι τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ γράψαι τὴν ἱστορίαν ταύτην καὶ ἔσται ἡ χάρις μετὰ πάντων τῶν φοβουμένων τὸν κύριον ἀμήν
>
> γένεσις Μαρίας
> ἀποκάλυψις
> Ἰακώβ
>
> εἰρήνη τῷ γράψαντι καὶ τῷ ἀναγινώσκοντι[13]

[12] See Table 2 in Bockmuehl 2017 (27), which shows the distinctive multiplicity of extant Greek manuscripts of PJ (over 150!) over against other apocrypha. Moreover, versions of *PJ* exist in numerous translations and derivatives, in at least eight ancient languages.
[13] *PJ* 25, from Bodmer V. See Testuz 1958.

Despite the claim of this postscript, which places the writing of the original text around the death of either Herod the Great in 4 BCE or Herod Agrippa I in 44 CE, *PJ* is generally dated to the mid-late second century. James, the half-brother of Jesus and the author most likely implied by the postscript, was martyred in 62 CE,[14] proving the ascription pseudonymous as the text's clear dependence on Matthean and Lukan traditions make it unlikely to have been written before the second century.[15] The evidence for the text's *terminus ante quem* likewise points to the second century: a probable reference to the infancy gospel in Origen's early third-century *Commentary on Matthew*,[16] as well as possible references to it in the works of Justin Martyr,[17] Clement of Alexandria,[18] and Tertullian.[19]

The postscript also makes a claim about the geographical and cultural milieu in which the text was composed. Depending on how one construes the author's syntax, he wrote the text either in Jerusalem (ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις) following the 'disturbance' at the death of Herod,[20] or in the nearby desert (ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ) while he waited for the Jerusalem disturbance to cease.[21] In either case, the authorial attribution itself connects the text to the early Christian community gathered around James in Jerusalem.[22] However, the idea that *PJ* could have originated within Palestine has largely fallen out of favor in modern scholarship,[23] because the text exhibits some confusion about basic Palestinian geography.

[14] Cf. Josephus, *A.J.* 20.9.1.
[15] Van Stempvoort 1964 proposes an additional *terminus post quem* in the writings of Celsus, although this is much less clear.
[16] Origen mentions a 'book of James' containing a tradition about brothers of Jesus from Joseph's previous marriage (*Comm. Matt.* 10.17). Cf. also *Cels.* 1.51; *Comm. ser. Matt*. 25.
[17] Cf. Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 78; and discussion in Zervos 1994.
[18] Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 7.16.
[19] Cf. Tertullian, *Scorp.* 8.
[20] E.g. De Strycker 1961; Ehrman and Pleše 2011.
[21] E.g. Smid 1965.
[22] Cf. Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:17-26; Gal 1:18-2:10.
[23] Exceptions are Lowe 1981; Toepel 2014: 42.

Instead, the two most popular recent candidates for the text's provenance are Syria[24] and Egypt.[25]

Often in tandem with the geographical arguments are debates about the text's relationship to Judaism, for in addition to the geographical confusion are several peculiarities in descriptions of Jewish ritual and legal praxis. Largely on this basis, some scholars have been skeptical about positing a connection between the text and a Jewish setting, much less a Jewish author;[26] along these lines *PJ* has been viewed as something akin to a Graeco-Roman novel or encomium, originating within a strongly Hellenized milieu.[27] By contrast, others have argued that the text should be thought of in terms of a Jewish or 'Jewish Christian' authorship and overall context, marshalling a number of other criteria for support. Earlier scholarship based this conviction largely on *PJ*'s use of Septuagintal and Hebraic expressions,[28] while more recent studies have focused on 'insider' representations of Jews within the text itself,[29] and comparison with early rabbinic traditions.[30] It has also been pointed out that the text demonstrates a significant *theological* interest in Christianity's Jewish origins through its descriptions of the Jerusalem Temple, the Jewish calendar, and the Jewish priesthood.[31] My own view of these issues is that while the text likely developed amid the complex and overlapping cultural settings of Hellenism, Judaism, and emerging Christianity in the late Roman period, the text is considerably more invested in Palestinian Jewish piety than exclusively Hellenistic motifs and genres. As for the author's specific locale, the evidence is not conclusive for any option.

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[24] See, e.g., Smid 1965: 20-22; Elliott 1993: 79; Zervos 1994; Vuong 2013: 26 *et passim*; Nicklas 2014: 192; Toepel 2014: 42.
[25] See, e.g., De Strycker 1961: 419-423; Cothenet 1988: 4267.
[26] See, e.g., Mach 1986; Cullmann 1991; Elliott 1993.
[27] See esp. Hock 1996.
[28] E.g. Van Stempvoort 1964; Smid 1965. Note Vuong 2013's critique of this as a sole criterion (46).
[29] Cf. Lowe 1981; Vorster 1986.
[30] Cf. Cothenet 1988; Horner 2004; Vuong 2013.
[31] Cf. Bockmuehl 2017: 62-65.

The postscript gives further information about the title of the work, which is here written as γένεσις Μαρίας, ἀποκάλυψις Ἰακώβ ('Birth of Mary, Revelation of James'). This title raises key questions about the nature of the work: what it is primarily about and what purpose it serves. As this title suggests, it is a text largely focused around the figure of Mary before the birth of Jesus. Is it therefore primarily Mariological? As Shoemaker has recently shown, a vibrant Marian piety existed in the early centuries of Christianity, both before and after the Council of Ephesus.[32] Beyond the theological reflections on Mary by early patristic writers such as Irenaeus and Origen,[33] such piety is evidenced in prayers and hymns,[34] inscriptions,[35] the development of Marian liturgical feasts,[36] and the building of churches in Mary's honor.[37] Moreover, for Shoemaker, *PJ* played a pivotal role at the beginnings of Marian piety.[38] We will return to this observation in §4.7.

Another way of looking at the Marian impulse of *PJ* is that it reflects a 'Marian theology in the service of Christology,'[39] which is demonstrably present in a number of places throughout the text (see, e.g., §4.3.4). This theological notion is also arguably behind the traditional title given by Postel in the sixteenth century: *Protevangelium Jacobi*. The text is concerned with events that occurred 'before the gospel,' and seen in that light, its interest in those events is dependent on its interest in the life of Jesus presented in canonical gospel traditions.

Finally, our postscript offers a glimpse into the role of scribes in the transmission of this text. In completing his or her work our copyist has written the blessing, 'peace to

[32] Shoemaker 2016. Cf. also Mercenier 1940; Brock 1982; Starowieyski 1989; Calabuig 2000; McDonnell 2000; Fassler 2001; Johnson 2008.
[33] Cf. discussion in §5.3; §6.3.4.
[34] E.g. *Odes of Solomon* 19; the Rylands Papyrus 470 (*Sub tuum praesidium*); the 'Psalmus Responsorius' hymn to the Virgin Mary (cf. Roca-Puig 1965; §4.7); multiple 'Hymns to the Blessed Virgin' by Ephrem the Syrian; the Akathistos hymn in Byzantine liturgy (cf. Wellesz 1956).
[35] Cf. Guarducci 1963; Emmi 1969; Calabuig 2000: 235-236.
[36] Cf. Fassler 2001; Calabuig 2000; Shoemaker 2016: 178-186; and discussion in §4.7.
[37] Cf. Calabuig 2000: 231-232; Shoemaker 2016: 178-186.
[38] Shoemaker 2016, esp. 47-63.
[39] Bockmuehl 2017: 66. Cf. also Toepel 2014.

the one who writes and the one who reads.' The scribe's insertion of himself into the manuscript, invoking peace both upon himself as its scribe and on the one who reads what he has written, allows us to think about the historical issues not only surrounding *PJ*'s composition, but also its transmission. Inevitably, the manuscript tradition we possess also bears upon how we interpret the text, especially since such interpretation is complicated by the fact that there is considerable variation among the extant 150-odd manuscripts. It seems that scribes exercised a bit more freedom in copying a text like *PJ*, in comparison with canonical texts.[40] For the modern reader, there are problems both with depending solely on our earliest manuscript, Bodmer V,[41] and with attempts to reconstruct the earliest form of the text based on comparison of several early and 'authoritative' manuscripts.[42] For the purposes of this chapter, I have decided to rely mainly on the reconstructed text of De Strycker, while remaining attentive to differences between manuscripts (with a special eye to Bodmer V) and noting these differences where it is relevant to the argument.

And with that blessing of peace upon readers, echoing from the pen of a fourth-century scribe, we turn to interpret the 'creative aesthetic response' of the *Protevangelium of James*.

4.2 The *Protevangelium*'s Prelude: What Joachim and Anna See and Sing

The *Protevangelium* begins with the longing of Joachim and Anna for a child, and these scenes – brimming with allusion to similar biblical stories[43] – provide several examples of the aesthetic piety of Mary's parents. However, *PJ*'s introduction of new

[40] Cf. Smid 1965: 6-7.
[41] As argued persuasively by De Strycker 1961: 13-20, 377-389.
[42] The most recent work to accomplish this is the critical edition of De Strycker 1961, which optimistically sets out to reconstruct *PJ*'s earliest form through a comparison of Bodmer V with the *editio altera* of Tischendorf and multiple fragments. Smid 1965, however, critiques De Strycker's method by pointing out that his edition neglects about 80 other manuscripts. Rather than seeking an original text, Smid examines various stages of *PJ*'s development (7).
[43] Others have documented these allusions thoroughly – see, e.g., Van Stempvoort 1964.

characters to pre-canonical infancy traditions immediately raises a question for the present analysis: In what ways can these depictions be considered 'creative aesthetic response?' We might think initially that this material tends more toward the *creative* than to the *responsive* side of that concept, since it introduces entirely new characters and aesthetic descriptions than are found in either Matthew or Luke.

In broad terms, this material is responsive to and effected by the canonical infancy accounts inasmuch as its interest in Mary's parents follows from its interest in both Mary and (perhaps ultimately) in Mary's son.[44] More specifically, however, *PJ*'s account of Joachim and Anna makes a particular connection with an aesthetic element from Luke's infancy narrative – the Magnificat canticle.[45] In order to retain our focus on *PJ*'s engagement with specific visual or aural elements from the pre-canonical infancy traditions, this section summarizes new elements of aesthetic piety, while examining the intersection with Luke's Magnificat in more detail.[46]

In the opening scenes of the text, both husband and wife are disposed to *look* at diverse images in the world around them, as they reflect upon their shame in not conceiving a child. Thus Joachim's response to his confrontation with Reuben at the Temple is to cast the eyes of his mind to biblical exemplars of the past: 'I will behold (θεάσομαι) the Twelve Tribes of Israel, [to see] if I alone have not produced offspring in Israel' (*PJ* 1.3).[47] While Joachim's beholding is on the one hand a mental contemplation of ancient biblical heroes, he is also likely visually consulting a book.[48] In beholding biblical icons, Joachim looks to find his own place among the narratives of the past.[49]

[44] Analogously, rabbinic midrash records new material about Moses' parents. Cf. Bloch 1955: 109-115.
[45] Cf. §3.1.3; 3.2.3.
[46] For detailed analysis of the Anna and Joachim scenes, see especially Marconi 2017.
[47] All translations of *PJ* are my own, unless otherwise noted.
[48] A now-missing βίβλον is often supplied to the text (cf. Van Stempvoort 1964: 415-416; Smid 1965: 28), translated in Ehrman and Pleše 2011 as 'the Book of the Twelve Tribes of Israel' (41).
[49] See further Marconi 2017: 19-23.

Finally he goes out into the desert for fasting and prayer, 'so that the Lord my God may look upon (ἐπισκέψεται) me,' as he did with Abraham (*PJ* 1.4).

In response to her own grief, Anna looks to the world of nature in the garden of her home: a laurel tree (εἶδεν δαφνιδέαν); the sky (ἀτενίσασα…οὐρανόν); a sparrows' nest in the laurel (εἶδεν καλιὰν στρουθῶν ἐν τῇ δαφνιδέᾳ). Her sight of these images leads to a lament contrasting her own childlessness with the fruitfulness she beholds in the birds of the sky, the speechless animals, the wild beasts of the earth, the nearby waters and the fish therein, even the earth itself (*PJ* 3.1-3).

Anna's sorrow reaches a higher pitch than Joachim's, in large part because she gives voice to it in song. The musical quality of her grief is apparent from the text's introduction of her into the narrative following Joachim's departure to the desert: 'And his wife Anna lamented a twofold lament (δύο θρήνους ἐθρήνει) and sounded a twofold sound of mourning (δύο κοπετοὺς ἐκόπτετο)' (*PJ* 2.1). A θρῆνος is a Greek musical genre of lamentation,[50] and a κοπετός is a beating of the breast or clapping of hands. Although she is rebuked for mourning by her maidservant Judith (*PJ* 2.2-3),[51] Anna continues to 'make lamentation' (ἐποιήσεν…θρῆνον, *PJ* 3.1), punctuating her song five times over with the alliterative refrain, Οἴμοι τίνι ὡμοιώθην ἐγώ ('Woe is me, what am I like?').[52] Her ritual θρῆνος parallels Joachim's own ritual action of fasting and prayer in the desert.[53]

Thus far, both figures' mode of viewing has been oriented to their longing for children, each looking toward comparative images in righteous ancestors of old, or in the visible vitality of creation. Furthermore, they each perform ritual acts intended to draw

[50] The genre reaches as far back as Homer, and develops into the classical period. Of particular note are the extant θρῆνοι of Pindar and Simonides. For further discussion of the term and its history, see Alexiou 2002: 102-103; Swift 2010: 299-366; Olivetti 2010: 108-140. The term was also taken up in Jewish literature to translate the Hebrew terms קינה and נהי, as we have noted previously (§2.2.5). Cf. Smith 2011: 142-143.
[51] Cf. *m. Mo'ed Qat*. 3.8-9, which regulates women's lamentations and clapping during feasts.
[52] This evokes Greek tragic voices; cf. Gurd 2016: 3.
[53] For detailed analysis of Anna's lament, cf. Marconi 2017: 67-91.

divine eyes and ears to their suffering; of particular interest to us is Anna's singing lament, her θρῆνος. Both aspects – the seeing and the singing – are turned on their head by the angelic appearances that confirm Joachim's and Anna's ritual acts to be effective (cf. *PJ* 4.1-2). After these visitations announcing the birth of a child, both parents' aesthetic orientations are altered.

On the part of Joachim, *PJ* 5.1 records a unique moment of visual piety at the Temple, when he goes to offer his gifts as he had in the opening scene of the text. As he goes up Joachim says to himself, 'If the Lord God is merciful (ἱλασθῇ) to me, the priest's leaf (τὸ πέταλον τοῦ ἱερέως) will make it visible (φανερόν) to me.' Sure enough, when he is standing in the Temple courts Joachim looks intently (προσεῖχε) at this curious object as the priest climbs the altar of the Lord, and he does not see sin in it (οὐκ εἶδεν ἁμαρτίαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ). Joachim infers from this that the Lord has indeed been merciful to him and forgiven his sins. He returns to his home from the Temple, justified (δεδικαιωμένος).

This scene is puzzling both in terms of historical comparison,[54] and in terms of its visual theology.[55] That the priest's πέταλον is a visual object that mediates a deeper visuality both of mercy and of sin (or rather sinlessness) is clear from the text; in including both of these aspects *PJ* is theologically dependent upon Exod 28:36-38, where we likewise find the object's dual tasks of taking away sin and effecting the Lord's favor when worn by the priest. How precisely it performs its visual mediation of these realities in *PJ* is hidden from readers, and in this way our text echoes the enigmatic nature of the πέταλον in Exodus.

[54] For historical comparison, cf. Exod 28:36-38; 29:6; 39:30; Lev 8:9; *Aristeas* 98; Philo, *Mos.* 2.132; Josephus, *B.J.* 5.235-236; *A.J.* 3.172-178; 3.214-218; *m. Pesaḥ* 7.7; *m. Zebaḥ* 8.12; *m. Menaḥ* 3.3. Cf. discussion in Hogg 1924; Burkitt 1925; Hogg 1927; Bammel 1954: 354; Smid 1965: 44-46; Propp 2006: 446-450; Marconi 2017: 122-129.

[55] On the one hand Joachim believes that the πέταλον will make visible God's mercy to him, and on the other he is satisfied that this has happened when he does *not* see sin in it.

Now, instead of looking to the fruitfulness of past heroes, Joachim looks to the priest's πέταλον and sees his own standing in the eyes of God. The promise of a child has effected a change in his circumstances, and in what/how he sees. The angel annunciations effect an aesthetic metamorphosis no less in the case of Anna, and here we come to *PJ*'s more specific engagement with an aesthetic element from Luke's infancy narrative.

Following the birth of Mary, Anna's θρῆνος becomes a song of joy modelled after Mary's Magnificat. The first strains of that song are recollected in Anna's words when the midwife announces that the child is a girl: 'My soul is magnified today' (Ἐμεγαλύνθη ἡ ψυχή μου τὴν ἡμέραν ταύτην, *PJ* 5.2). This line has clear resonances of the 'magnifying' and 'my soul' of Luke 1:48. However, *PJ* adapts the verb from the active to the passive: instead of 'my soul magnifies the Lord,' Anna's line renders her own soul magnified. The reason for this adaptation is unclear; interestingly, however, Origen will puzzle over this same Lukan line.[56]

One year later, on Mary's first birthday, the text records that Anna 'made a song (ἐποίησεν ᾆσμα) to the Lord God,' and that song's contents are recorded in full: 'I sing a holy song (Ἄισω ᾠδὴν ἁγίαν) to the Lord my God, for he has looked upon me and removed from me the reproach of my enemies, and the Lord my God has given to me the fruit of his righteousness, unique and abundant before him. Who will bear news to the sons of Reuben that Anna is nursing? Hear, hear, twelve tribes of Israel, that Anna is nursing!' (*PJ* 6.3). This song, like Mary's Magnificat, evokes Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2.

Thus, just as Joachim's viewing of the priest's πέταλον at the Temple shows an altered mode of seeing, so Anna's song shows an altered mode of singing. Interestingly, Anna's initial singing – her allusion to the Magnificat in *PJ* 5.2 – begins a motif that

[56] Cf. §6.3.4.

continues to sound throughout the narrative. As Goodacre has previously observed, this line from the Magnificat echoes three more times, adapted for different characters and different contexts.[57] A priest speaks it to Mary herself, at her presentation at the Temple (7.2) and shortly after the Annunciation (12.1-2), in both instances stating that the Lord has magnified Mary's name among all generations. Here, *PJ*'s adaptation of Luke 1:48 reverses the pre-canonical text: rather than Mary magnifying the Lord, the Lord has magnified Mary! The final echo of this motif occurs in the words of the midwife after the birth of Jesus (20.2). Here, the midwife uses Anna's phrasing ('my soul is magnified today'), and combines this with an echo of Simeon's Nunc dimittis (cf. §4.5).

In summary, PJ's portrayal of the aesthetic piety of Mary's parents contributes to this text's interest in both Mary and her son, inspired by the pre-canonical infancy texts. More specifically, *PJ*'s use of the Lukan Magnificat also responds directly to a key aesthetic feature of Luke's infancy narrative, and adapts it in new ways – a particularly cogent instance of 'creative aesthetic response.'

4.3 The Virgin Mary: She Who Makes Redemption Visible

The heart of the *Protevangelium of James* is the figure of Mary, and the scholarly literature on this text's portrait of the virgin mother of Jesus – and that portrait's influence on subsequent Christian piety and theology – is vast.[58] In this section, I deal with the particular question of how *PJ* offers a 'creative aesthetic response' to Luke's Mary – both in terms of how the text presents Mary as a viewer and a hearer within its narrative, and how it expands the aesthetic appeal, especially the visuality, of scenes in which Mary finds herself.

[57] Goodacre 2018: 66-67.
[58] Cf. discussion in §4.1.2.

Several points are made. Firstly, I suggest that while *PJ* is notably dependent upon Luke's characterization of a listening Mary, one with a heart uniquely receptive to divine words,[59] the apocryphal text develops this characterization above all by asserting that Mary's eyes and ears – and correlatively, her heart – were formed for theological reception by her childhood in the Temple (§4.3.1). Moreover, *PJ* dynamically increases the visuality of the Lukan Annunciation scene (§4.3.2), records an additional vision of Mary on the road to Bethlehem (§4.3.3), and suggests an underlying visual-theological connection between Mary and her Son within the narrative of *PJ*, such that she 'makes visible' his redemption (§4.3.4).

4.3.1 Aesthetic Piety Formed in the Temple

Well-established is *PJ*'s intimate interweaving of the life of Mary into the life of the Temple, and in particular the importance of this intersection for the topic of Mary's virginity and overall purity.[60] One aspect that has not been noted, however, is the text's several references to a certain *aesthetic* purity that she was encouraged to develop during her Temple upbringing. In essence, this guidance begins in the home of Anna and Joachim. When Mary is six months old, Anna makes a sanctuary (ἁγίασμα, *PJ* 6.1, 3) for her inside her bedroom, and 'did not permit anything common or impure to pass through (διέρχεσθαι) her' (*PJ* 6.1). This line is usually taken to refer to food, but its principle extends to other areas of Mary's life – including what passes through her senses of seeing and hearing. A similar concept exists in Heb 5:14, which references faculties of sense (αἰσθητήρια) that have been 'practiced' or 'trained' (γεγυμνασμένα) to discern between good and evil. A helpful fourth-century parallel is John Chrysostom's treatise on bringing

[59] Cf. §3.2.3.
[60] See, e.g., Vuong 2013; Vanden Eykel 2016: 65-100.

up children, which discusses the tongue, ears, nose, eyes, and bodily sense of touch as 'gates' which must be carefully guarded by parents.[61]

The concern for Mary's aesthetic piety comes into focus more clearly in *PJ* 7.2, when Joachim and Anna first bring her to the Temple. As they make preparations, Joachim expresses the following thought: 'Let us call the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews, and let them each take up a torch and set them ablaze, so that the child will not turn back and her heart be taken captive from the Temple of the Lord.' This thought articulates a concern that is rooted in understanding a connection between the eyes and the heart: that the images that capture one's attentive gaze have a direct influence on what one loves. Joachim does not want Mary to be distracted by the home she is leaving behind, so he deliberately guides her eyes to the blazing lamps of the virgins processing ahead of her – and this to ultimately turn her eyes and her heart toward the Temple of the Lord.

Two images preserved from early Christianity illustrate how a procession such as this was visualized. The prominent lower register of the mid third-century wall paintings in the Dura Europos baptistery shows a fragmentary procession of veiled, torch-bearing women approaching an ambiguous structure – possibly a tomb or a temple. Similarly, a fifth- or sixth-century fresco in the 'Exodus chapel' of a Christian necropolis in El-Bagawat, Egypt depicts seven women carrying lamps and processing toward a clear temple structure. Scholars debate the iconography of these images, and one possibility is that one or both refer to the scene described in *PJ* 7.2.[62] Whether or not *PJ* is the textual source for these paintings, they help us to appreciate the visual element in our text. These images, alongside the text of *PJ* 7.2, exhibit an ancient mode of viewing that Mathews terms 'processional visuality.'[63]

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[61] For the text, cf. Laistner 1951: 75-122.
[62] See Cartlidge and Elliott 2001: 34, 36-37; Peppard 2016: 111-154 (esp. 152-154).
[63] Cf. Mathews 1993: 150-176; Peppard 2016: 111-114. Cf. also the imagery of Prudentius' fourth-century poem, 'At the Lighting of the Lamps' from his *Liber Cathemerinon*.

The ultimate visual goal of the procession in *PJ* 7.2 is the ναός Κυρίου, the Temple of the Lord. The outward physical appearance of this impressive structure is not described in *PJ*, though we know from multiple other ancient texts that it was indeed a sight to behold. *PJ* does employ a varied vocabulary (if imprecise or unclear, at times) to describe the Temple spaces that Mary was supposed to have occupied during her childhood, and this at least allows us to sketch something of how this text imagines the sacred complex.

PJ's most frequent term for the Temple is ναός Κυρίου, which seems both to refer to the entire Temple precinct, encompassing all of its courts and holy spaces, and to 'the sacred edifice itself, the holy temple, in the central position, [which] was approached by a flight of twelve steps,' as Josephus puts it.[64] Our text records a number of different activities that take place in connection to the ναός. As we have already observed, it features strongly in the lives of Mary's parents before she is born: Joachim goes there to offer gifts (1.1-2; 5.1), and both he and Anna experience disconnect with the cultic life of the Temple as a result of their childlessness (1.1-2; 3.1). After Mary's birth, the ναός provides the primary setting of her early life: it is to the ναός that Joachim and Anna bring Mary in fulfillment of their vow (6.1; 7.1-2; cf. 4.1), it is where she remains as a child (8.1-2; cf. 19.1), and it is from the ναός that Joseph receives her as his betrothed (9.3; 13.1; 15.2; 16.1). Even after her betrothal and removal to Joseph's house, Mary continues to remain uniquely connected to the life of the ναός, making a trip back to the home of her childhood to participate in work on one of its veils (10.1-2). Joseph's own words to one of the midwives summarize the text's consistent identification of Mary in terms of the Temple: Μαρία ἐστίν, ἡ ἀνατραφεῖσα ἐν ναῷ Κυρίου ('She is Mary, the one brought up in the Temple of the Lord,' 19.1).

[64] Josephus, *B.J.* 5.207. Trans. Thackeray 1928: 64-65.

In the court of the Israelites, in front of the tall, white sanctuary itself, stood the altar of burnt offering.[65] This seems to be the altar that *PJ* refers to in 5.1 (where Joachim sees the priest with his πέταλον), and again in 7.3, just after the procession leading Mary to the Temple. When the child reaches her new home, the priest sets her on the 'third step of the altar' (τρίτος βαθμός τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου). The idea that there were steps leading up to the altar is possibly derived from Ezek 43:13-17;[66] this idea is contradicted by the command in Exod 20:26, and by other Second Temple writings which agree that priests mounted the altar by means of a ramp.[67]

PJ imagines Mary to have occupied two other holy spaces during her childhood. In 8.2, the priests are concerned that when Mary turns twelve, she will 'pollute the sanctuary (ἁγίασμα) of the Lord our God.' As is made clear by the description of this space in 24.2 (cf. §4.6), *PJ* understands this ἁγίασμα (as distinct from the one Anna makes in her bedroom, 6.1, 3) to be the inner sanctum which housed the altar of incense and other Temple furniture. Beyond this, and behind a veil, was the 'Holy of Holies' (ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων) – and here too *PJ* visualizes Mary. Both Joseph and the high priest address Mary as ἡ ἀνατραφεῖσα εἰς τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων (13.2; 15.3).

Historically inaccurate though these claims may be, in the world of *PJ*'s narrative Mary's childhood is spent among the sights and sounds of these most holy spaces.[68] It is toward the beauty of the Temple complex that Joachim wants to direct Mary's eyes

[65] Distinct from the altar of incense, located inside the sanctuary (cf. Luke 1:9-11; §3.2.2).
[66] Smid 1965: 61.
[67] See *Aristeas* 87; Josephus, *B.J.* 5.225; *m. Yoma* 2.1-2; *m. Tamid* 1.4; *m. Mid.* 3.3-4.
[68] This idea also seems to be captured in two examples from ancient art. The fourth-century Adelfia Sarcophagus depicts a sequence of Marian scenes; one shows two female figures leading Mary to a quasi-Temple structure, and another shows Mary seated with several women (potentially Temple virgins) gathered around her. Cf. Greco, Voza et al. 1998: 27-28; Koch 2000: 116. Additionally, a fifth-century stone carving of a veiled woman in the *orans* position may be seen in the crypt of the Basilica Sainte-Marie-Madeleine in Provence, accompanied by the inscription 'MARIA VIRGO MINESTER DE TEMPULO GEROSALE.' Cf. Cartlidge and Elliott 2001: 38.

through the blazing procession ahead of her, and furthermore, his tactic seems to have worked: *PJ* 8.1 records the marvel that Mary did not turn back once.

One other text in *PJ* seems to suggest this idea that Mary's aesthetic piety was formed by her time in the Temple. In *PJ* 15.3, after Mary is found to be pregnant, the high priest questions her actions with the following words: 'Mary, why have you done this? Why have you humiliated your soul and forgotten the Lord your God? You who were brought up in his Holy of Holies, and took food from the hand of an angel, and heard his hymns (ἀκούσασα τῶν ὕμνων αὐτοῦ[69]), and danced before him (χορεύσασα ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ)– why have you done this?'[70] The implication of the high priest's question is that Mary's participation in these activities – hearing hymns and dancing in the Temple – should have influenced her decisions and actions, here specifically in the preservation of her purity. The text is making an explicit connection between aural piety and moral action.

Of all the components of Mary's Temple life that the high priest mentions, her hearing of hymns is actually the most historically reliable. This claim may be contextualized by multiple texts in the Mishnah, which describe a Temple cult resounding with the singing of Levites; the blowing of shofars, trumpets, horns, pipes, and flutes; the strumming of harps, lyres, and viols; the clashing of cymbals; and congregational refrains.[71] Mary would have heard the music of the daily liturgy and high festival days, even from within the Women's Court (a position more likely by far than any of the holy spaces that *PJ* imagines her to occupy). Fifteen steps – symbolically corresponding to the fifteen Songs of Ascents (Pss 120-134) – connected the Court of the Women with the

[69] Bodmer V has τὸν ὕμνον αὐτῶν, which Smid 1965 interprets to refer to the singing of angels (108).
[70] The high priest's words echo Joseph's similar reprimand when he discovers Mary's pregnancy (*PJ* 13.2). Their interrogations potentially echo God's questioning of Eve in Gen 3:13. Cf. Smid 1965: 97.
[71] Cf. *m. Bik.* 3.3-4; *m. Sheqal*. 5.1; *m. Sukkah* 3.9-11; 4.1-5.1, 4-5; *m. Rosh Hash*. 3.2-4.9; *m. Mo'ed Qat*. 3.8-9; *m. Sotah* 5.4; *m. 'Arak*. 2.3-6; *m. Tamid* 3.8; 7.3-4; *m. Mid.* 2.5-6; *m. Qinnim* 3.6; *m. Kelim* 11.6-7; 15.6; 16.7-8; 24.14. Cf. also Sirach 50:16, 18-19; Josephus, *A.J.* 7.305-306; 8.94. For analysis cf. Smith 2011: 61-116.

higher Court of the Israelites, and this was the customary place for the Levites to sing and play their instruments (*m. Sukkah* 5.4; *m. Mid*. 2.5-6). Specific psalms were sung here during the daily whole offering (*m. Tamid* 7.3-4), and the music during this liturgy was said to be so loud that it was heard as far as Jericho (*m. Tamid* 3.8).

Dancing (χορεύσασα, *PJ* 15.3; cf. 7.3) is associated in the Mishnah with the celebration of special feasts, and seems to have been performed by both men and women (*m. Sukkah* 5.4; *m. Ta'an*. 4.8). *PJ*'s depiction of Mary dancing at the Temple may also intentionally link her to the dancing of David before the Ark (2 Samuel 6), especially since the text identifies her with the Davidic line (*PJ* 10.1). Such dancing was both a visual expression of one's praise, as well as thoroughly shaped by listening to musical accompaniment. It contributed to a synaesthetic spectacle for the observer, and was an act of synaesthetic piety for the dancer.

Against this context of vibrant worship in the Second Temple, we can appreciate the high priest's statement in *PJ* 15.3. In his view, the hearing of hymns and dancing in worship are activities that help to shape one's decision-making and moral action. There is an understanding here in which, as with the previous example of Joachim's guiding Mary's eyes toward the Temple, the things that one repeatedly sees and hears have a deep and lasting impact on one's heart. What the high priest does not know, of course, is that Mary's actions *have* remained pure; her heart, shaped by her Temple childhood, has willingly accepted the divine word. In its depiction of Mary's aesthetic purity, attained through a life oriented toward God in the Temple, *PJ* thus responds creatively to Luke's characterization of Mary's listening and pondering heart and offers a narrative about how this quality was formed in her.

4.3.2 The Annunciation in Color

In Chapter 3, we observed that, in contrast with the Lukan portrayal of Zechariah's encounter with Gabriel, visual language does not feature in Luke's rendering of the Annunciation to Mary at all. Luke does not describe the visual setting of the interaction, and Gabriel's visual 'appearance' is implicit rather than explicit (εἰσέρχομαι is used to describe his action rather than a form of ὁράω). Rather, Luke draws attention to what Mary *hears* when she primarily responds to Gabriel's word (λόγος) and 'manner of greeting' in 1:29, and again to his words in 1:38. This characterization of a listening Mary is retained in 2:19 and 2:51, which speak of her keeping and pondering 'all these words' (ῥήματα) in her heart.[72]

If the visual gaps in this biblical scene implicitly invite further visual reflection, *PJ* is eager to supply it. Our text retains the aural focus of Luke's annunciation (again, the visual appearance of the angel is left to the reader's imagination and Mary responds primarily to his words), but Mary's eyes are given slightly more importance as she 'looks around to the right and to the left' (περιέβλεπεν τὰ δεξιὰ καὶ τὰ ἀριστερὰ, *PJ* 11.1) for where the voice she hears is coming from. Moreover, the scene's setting has a visual fullness not present in Luke, placing Mary with her pitcher at a well when she first hears the voice, and then picturing her entering her home, sitting on a chair, and spinning cloth for the Temple curtain when the interaction continues. The account is much more visually detailed, even down to the vivid purple color (πορφύρα) of the cloth she is spinning; in fact, this is one of two colors (along with κόκκινος) that she spins for the Temple curtain. In this section, I concentrate on the question of how these vibrant details of color contribute to *PJ*'s 'creative aesthetic response' to Luke's Annunciation.[73]

[72] Cf. §3.2.3; 3.3.2, 4.
[73] On other aspects of *PJ*'s Annunciation, cf. Vorster 1986; Mimouni 2003: 32-37; Van der Horst 2005: 60-61.

We find the narrative context for Mary's spinning in the Annunciation in *PJ* 10.2, where the Jerusalem priests gather together a team of virgins from the tribe of David to make a new curtain (καταπέτασμα) for the Temple, casting lots to determine 'who will spin the gold (χρυσός), the white (ἀμίαντος), the linen, (βύσσος), the silk (σιρικόν), the blue (ὑακίνθινος), the scarlet (κόκκινος), and the true purple (ἀληθινὸς πορφύρα).' This passage may refer to any one of the many curtains adorning the Second Temple; the two most often cited are the curtain hanging in the doorway of the sanctuary, visible to onlookers from outside;[74] and the veil hanging inside the sanctuary, shielding the Holy of Holies from sight.[75] Mary, living in Joseph's house by this time, makes the journey back to the Temple and draws lots for the scarlet and the 'true purple.' She takes both home and immediately begins work on the scarlet (10.2), takes up the purple just before the angel interrupts her for a second time, in her home (11:1), and after the Annunciation she completes her spinning of the scarlet and purple and brings them to the Temple, where the priest gives her a blessing using language evocative of Luke's Magnificat (12.1).[76]

We can contextualize this narrative through a number of other ancient Jewish texts that reference the colors of the Temple curtains and their craftsmanship. Beginning in Exodus, we find the following description of the Tabernacle curtain: 'You shall make a curtain (פרכת / καταπέτασμα), of blue (תכלת / ὑακίνθος), purple (ארגמן / πορφύρα), and crimson yarns (תולעת שני / κόκκινος κεκλώσμενος), and fine twisted linen (שׁשׁ משׁזר / βύσσος νενήσμενος); it shall have a design of cherubim worked into it' (26:31). The association of the spinning of these yarns with the work of 'skillful women' also goes back as far as Exodus (35:25-26).

[74] See, e.g., Exod 37:5, 16; Num 3:26; *Aristeas* 86; Josephus, *B.J.* 5.212.
[75] See, e.g., Exod 26:31-37; 37:3; Lev 16:2.
[76] Cf. §4.2 for discussion of *PJ*'s creative use of the Magnificat throughout its narrative.

Nutzman has recently noted several postbiblical sources that corroborate *PJ*'s depiction of Temple virgin weavers.[77] The Mishnah states that the veil 'was made by eighty-two young girls, and they used to make two in every year.'[78] The Tosefta also speaks of 'women who weave the hangings.'[79] Even earlier, in the late first or early second century, 2 Baruch contains a line addressing 'virgins who spin fine linen, and silk with gold' in the context of the Temple cult (2 Bar 10:19),[80] and this team of young women continues to be assumed in the much later *Pesikta Rabbati* (26.6).

Although the Mishnah does not comment on the colors of the curtain, it does instruct that a new veil 'should be spread out on the roof of the portico that the people may see how fine is the craftsmanship thereof.'[81] This impulse to praise and to contemplate the visual beauty of the Temple curtain (as well as the significance of its colors) is evidenced even more specifically in other texts of this period. For example, the *Letter of Aristeas* notes that the movement of the curtain in the doorway of the sanctuary, billowing in the breeze, 'made a pleasing sight which it was difficult to drag oneself away from.'[82] Josephus, in *B.J.* 5.212-214, describes this same veil as a Babylonian tapestry, embroidered with 'blue (ὑακίνθινος) and fine linen (βύσσος), scarlet (κόκκος) also and purple (πορφύρα), wrought with marvelous skill (θαυμαστῶς μὲν εἰργασμένος).'[83] According to him, each material mystically represented a different element of the universe (scarlet – fire, linen – earth, blue – the air, purple – the sea); the whole tapestry was an icon (εἰκόνα) of the whole world. Clement of Alexandria corroborates this mystical reading of the four colors of the veil.[84] Finally, images sometimes were thought to be

[77] Nutzman 2013: 563-570. See also Manns 1977; Ilan 1995: 187.
[78] *m. Sheqal*. 8.5. Trans. Danby 1933: 161.
[79] *t. Sheqal*. 2.6.
[80] Trans. Charlesworth 1983: 624.
[81] *m. Sheqal*. 8.4. Trans. Danby 1933: 161.
[82] *Aristeas* 86. Trans. Hayward 1996: 27.
[83] Trans. Thackeray 1928: 66-67.
[84] Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.6. Trans. Wilson 1869: 240.

woven into the tapestry, as in the description of the cherubim in Exodus. Josephus writes of a depiction of a 'panorama of the heavens,' while a couple of rabbis in the Jerusalem Talmud discuss images of a lion and an eagle.[85]

As we may observe from comparison with the examples above, *PJ*'s list of seven materials adds three (gold, silk, and ἀμίαντος – literally 'undefiled' but often translated as 'white') to the traditional four (blue, purple, scarlet, and linen). Our text thus imagines a curtain that is more visually complex than other sources of the period would evidence, though lacking any mention of specific images.

The two colors that *PJ* associates with Mary appear on both lists – scarlet (κόκκινος) and purple (πορφύρα). Both the Greek κόκκινος and the Hebrew תולעת שני refer to the crimson or scarlet dye that is taken from several genera of scale insects, including kermes and cochineal.[86] Vuong, who has recently argued that *PJ* heavily emphasizes Mary's purity and even likens her to a sacrifice, finds in scarlet a fitting symbolic color: 'Scarlet is often used in the Hebrew Bible and NT writings to refer to blood atonement and sacrifice and is regularly cited in association with cleansing and purification (e.g., Lev 14:4, 52; Num 19:6; Isa 1:18; Heb 9:19). In Prov 31:21, scarlet is symbolically associated with a virtuous woman.'[87] According to Brenner, the Hebrew שני was 'second in value only to [purple].'[88]

The color featured in *PJ*'s Annunciation, πορφύρα (in Hebrew ארגמן), was the most highly sought after textile color in the ancient world, influencing visual perception and cultural ideas in the realms of religion, politics, and commerce.[89] Pliny the Elder testifies in his *Natural History* to a 'mad lust' (*purpurae…insania*) after the color.[90] As Pliny

[85] *y. Sheqal*. 8.5. Cf. Guggenheimer 2014: 199.
[86] Cf. Phipps 2013.
[87] Vuong 2013: 145.
[88] Brenner 1982: 144.
[89] Cf. Reinhold 1970; Bradley 2009: 189-211; Grand-Clement 2016.
[90] *Nat*. 9.60. Trans. Rackham 1940: 246-249.

notes, πορφύρα's dye came from the marine snail of the genus murex, found on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The murex purple was noted for its vivid radiance. It was a symbol of luxury (e.g. Luke 16:19), royalty, and the divine. There were most likely many different shades of πορφύρα, ranging from a bluish to a reddish purple, and there is also evidence of production of less expensive, imitation purples – thus possibly influencing our text's designation of 'true purple.' Mary's association in our text with the royal Davidic line, and her role as the mother of the 'son of the highest,' make her a fitting bearer of this color.

We have observed, then, that *PJ*'s account of the Annunciation to Mary significantly reimagines the Lukan scene. But what difference does this make? I suggest that we can understand *PJ*'s visual reimagining of Luke's Annunciation within several interlocking ancient frameworks for viewing color. Recent scholarship on ancient perceptions of color has emphasized the multi-sensory (even synaesthetic) experience of color in the ancient world.[91] Instead of conceiving of color in a solely visual way, ancient cultures perceived them as much more deeply connected to the natural world from which their dyes came, and thus also to their natural material qualities (their touch, their scent, etc.).[92]

Moreover, Bradley has alerted us to the ways in which color was used to express realism in classical sculpture, a phenomenon attested by Callistratus' *Descriptions*, a third-century text containing descriptions (*ekphrases*) of 14 different statues.[93] In his employment of color to embellish his textual portrayals of statues, Callistratus participated in a much wider tradition.[94] In Bradley's summary, 'color allowed the artist to bring an

[91] See Bradley 2009; Bradley 2013; Bering 2016; Grand-Clement 2016; Stager 2016.
[92] Note Pliny's connection of the color purple with the murex, and his distaste for its particularly pungent smell.
[93] Cf. Bradley 2014: 186-187; and our discussion in §3.3.2.
[94] E.g. Euripides, *Helen* 262-3; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 35.133; Lucian, *Imagines* 7-8.

otherwise monochrome figure, with white skin, hair and eyes, to life and so produce 'living images' (Greek *zoa* or Latin *spirantia signa*).'[95] In a similar way, *PJ* uses color to produce a 'living image' in its text about the Annunciation to Mary. This visual reimagining of Luke's text, especially the detail of the purple cloth Mary is spinning, renders the scene more realistic and lifelike to the reader's imagination.

This effect also operates within a developing history of Christian veneration of the saints, in which looking at pictures of them encourages devotion.[96] The complex of meanings in the colors scarlet and purple, especially with regard to their association with the Temple veil, allow *PJ*'s reader to become a viewer of a scene that comes to life visually as well as theologically. It invites a devotional response to Mary, whose role in salvation history – as announced in this very scene – is to bear the 'holy one' who is himself connected to the Temple veil in several biblical texts. Mary's activity of spinning purple thread is coincident with her conception of the 'son of the highest' in the flesh – a connection that has been suggested should be read in light of Heb 10:20, which seems to correlate Jesus' flesh (σάρξ) with the sanctuary curtain (καταπέτασμα).[97]

Perhaps unsurprisingly given this discussion, *PJ*'s visual reimagining of the Lukan text was the dominant image of the Annunciation event in iconography from antiquity through the pre-Carolingian period.[98] The proliferation of images of Mary spinning, themselves the products of a long history of reading our text, provides evidence that *PJ*'s reinvented Annunciation invites imagination and devotional response.

[95] Bradley 2014: 191.
[96] E.g. Gregory of Nyssa's remarks about color and pictures of saints: 'In Praise of Blessed Theodore the Great Martyr.' Cf. Bering 2016.
[97] Cf. Vanden Eykel 2016: 131-134.
[98] Early examples include a fourth-century Egyptian dyed linen at the Victoria & Albert Museum; and a fifth-century mosaic from Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. See Cartlidge and Elliott 2001: 78-87; Jensen 2015; Peppard 2016: 155-201; and especially Taylor 2018.

4.3.3 A Visual Recasting of Luke 2:34

Two brief episodes conclude our examination of *PJ*'s reimagining of Luke's Mary. Here, I look at PJ's account of Mary's vision on the road to Bethlehem (*PJ* 17.2) as a visual recasting of Luke 2:34.

In *PJ* 17.2, Mary and Joseph are travelling toward Bethlehem when Joseph, on observing that Mary is weeping one minute and laughing the next, asks her the reason why. She replies: 'Because I see in my eyes (βλέπω ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς μου) two peoples, one weeping and mourning and the other happy and rejoicing.' This vision is particularly difficult to interpret because no further comment is given within the text of *PJ*.[99] However, several observations may be made. Smid rightly views this text as a creative reworking of Simeon's words spoken specifically to Mary in Luke 2:34, that the infant Jesus 'is positioned for the falling and rising of many in Israel' – itself a similarly cryptic prophecy, but one that potentially helps to identify the 'two peoples' envisioned in *PJ* as both encompassed within Israel.[100] There is also a probable allusion to the oracle spoken by the Lord to Rebekah in Gen 25:23, that 'two peoples' struggle within her womb.[101] The distinctive element that *PJ* adds to these two biblical texts is its focalization of the prophecy through the eyes of Mary. In the apocryphal text, Mary is not a silent listener to Simeon; rather, she is a seer in her own right, who communicates and even embodies what she has seen concerning the dichotomous impact of the child within her.

4.3.4 What Mary Makes Visible

The final episode I will highlight is a particularly interesting statement made about Mary in *PJ* 7.2. When the three-year-old Mary's parents present her at the Temple, the

[99] This gap is filled by the prominent Latin infancy gospel based on *PJ*, the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*. There a 'beautiful child' (*puer speciosus*) appears before Mary and Joseph to interpret the vision (13.1).
[100] Cf. Smid 1965: 121-122; Playoust and Aitken 2009: 179-180.
[101] Cf. Playoust and Aitken 2009: 178.

priest pronounces the following blessing over her: 'Through you (ἐπὶ σοί) the Lord will make visible (φανερώσει) his redemption to the sons of Israel in the last days.' Here the text draws a visual-theological link between Mary and Christ, underlining her unique role in the Christological revelation. Through Mary would be made visible the child in the flesh, and thus also his future redemptive work. The text's reference to 'the last days' refers here to the time of Jesus' earthly life, as the expression is used elsewhere in the New Testament.[102]

This blessing nicely caps this section because we can revisit each of the ideas highlighted in this section through its lens. In §4.3.1 we observed that from her childhood Mary's visual and aural piety was formed through the sights and sounds of the Jerusalem Temple, and this *aesthetic* form of purity – so *PJ* implicitly claims – shaped her heart and her capacity for moral action. As with all forms of purity that this text claims for Mary, the interest is not in purity and of itself, but a defense of purity that has as its primary motivating idea the birth of the 'holy one' himself. Similarly, Mary's aesthetic purity uniquely qualifies her to 'make visible' the infant Christ. In §4.3.2 I suggested that *PJ*'s creative reimagining of the Lukan Annunciation, with its detail of symbolic colors from the Temple curtain, allows the reader to view Mary more vividly, in a way that unites her to her son's redemptive work. In §4.3.3 we noted that *PJ* describes Mary herself as a visionary, one who sees and makes known aspects of her son's future influence. In all of these ways – through how Mary sees, and how she is seen – *PJ* proclaims her as one who 'makes visible' the Lord's redemption.[103]

[102] Cf. Heb 1:2; 1 Pet 1:20.
[103] Irenaeus discusses Mary's role similarly; cf. §5.3.

4.4 Joseph of Nazareth: 'Come and See'

While the previous section focused on *PJ*'s 'creative aesthetic response' to the Lukan Mary, in this section we turn to examine our text's creative reimagining of the Matthean Joseph. The author of *PJ* is clearly familiar with the gospel of Matthew; as Goodacre has pointed out, the lengthiest verbatim agreement between *PJ* and a canonical text occurs in the annunciation to Joseph (Matt 1:19-21 // *PJ* 14.1, 4-8).[104] As we developed at length in Chapter 2, the Matthean depiction of Joseph's aesthetic modes is sparse, but centers around his aural attentiveness to the revelation he receives from angels in dreams.[105] As we find in this section, *PJ* markedly expands Matthew's characterization of Joseph, tracing a steady shift in attitude from reluctance at his betrothal to Mary to acceptance – and endorsement – of the divine plan. Joseph's aesthetic modes, particularly his sight, play a crucial role in this transformation. The introduction of Joseph into the narrative shows that his aesthetic modes are oriented toward the Temple, and features imagery that later iconography will associate with St Joseph (§4.4.1). *PJ* includes the Matthean turning point of an angelic dream, but adds another very distinctive visual experience that Joseph describes in first person, and which leads to his ability to invite others to 'come and see' the infant Christ (§4.4.2).

4.4.1 An Aural Cue and a Visual Sign

As with all of the characters we have examined so far, the carpenter and widower Joseph is shown to be responsive to the sights and sounds of the Jerusalem Temple. *PJ* cues the entrance of Joseph into its narrative by the 'sounding of a trumpet of the Lord' (ἤχησεν σάλπιγξ Κυρίου), blown by the Temple heralds throughout Judea and calling for

[104] Cf. Goodacre 2018: 58-59.
[105] Cf. §2.3, esp. §2.3.5.

the widowers of the land to gather for the selection of Mary's husband (*PJ* 8.3). While the specific circumstances surrounding this trumpet-sounding are unique to *PJ*, trumpets featured in a variety of ancient Jewish cultic events from a very early time.[106] Josephus writes that Solomon commissioned no less than two hundred thousand trumpets for use in the first Temple,[107] and the Mishnah mentions trumpets frequently in its descriptions of Second Temple proceedings.[108] Moreover, a stone slab dated to the first century, excavated from the southwestern corner of the Second Temple complex and currently housed at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, offers the following inscription:[109]

לבית התקיעה להכ[--]
To the place of trumpeting, for [announcing?]

The completion of the inscription is usually read with reference to Josephus' description of a '[tower] point where it was the custom for one of the priests to stand and to give notice, by sound of trumpet…announcing to the people the respective hours for ceasing work and for resuming their labors [on the Sabbath].'[110] Whatever its frame of reference, this inscription adds valuable testimony to the literary evidence for trumpets at the Second Temple.

In *PJ*, the trumpet of the Lord is sent out from the Temple and blown by heralds (κήρυκες) throughout the countryside of Judea. Smid thinks that the closest parallel to this dispersion of trumpet calls abroad is the announcement of the jubilee year described in Lev 25:9;[111] however, several more contemporaneous mishnaic texts also shed light on this portrayal. Not only is there mention of a certain 'Gabini the herald,' who occupied an official Temple position as such,[112] but there is also discussion of the sounding of the

[106] See, e.g., Exod 19:16; Lev 23:24; 25:9; Num 29:1; Josh 6:3-20.
[107] Josephus, *A.J.* 8.94.
[108] *m. Sukkah* 5.4-5; *m. Rosh Hash*. 3.4; *m. 'Arak*. 2.5; *m. Tamid* 7.3; *m. Qinnim* 3.6.
[109] Cf. Cotton and Ameling 2010: 49-50 and the bibliography cited there.
[110] Josephus, *B.J.* 4.582. Trans. Thackeray 1927: 326-329. Cf. also *m. Sukkah* 5.5.
[111] Smid 1965: 69.
[112] *m. Sheqal*. 5.1; *m. Tamid* 3.8. Cf. also m. *Sanh*. 6.1.

shofar in cities and provinces outside of Jerusalem on special occasions.[113] Though *PJ*'s own narrative reasoning for the trumpet sounding is almost certainly inaccurate historically, it does seem to draw from a vague knowledge of Second Temple practice.

In responding to the aural cue of the Temple's trumpet, Joseph is brought into the narrative space of the Temple itself, specifically before the sanctuary (ἱερόν).[114] Here he must respond to a miraculous visual sign in the manner of the blossoming rod of Aaron. In *PJ* 9.1, when the priest gathers the rods from Joseph and the other men, he takes them into the ἱερόν to pray over them, then returns to the men waiting outside, imitating Moses' movements in and out of the tent of covenant in Num 17:7-9. At first no sign (σημεῖον) appears; but when Joseph takes his rod, 'behold (ἰδού), a dove (περιστερά) came out of the rod and rested upon Joseph's head.'

Visually, this sign works in two ways. It draws firstly from the imagery of Aaron's rod, which designated him for the priesthood in ancient Israel, and in that way it operates within an ancient Jewish interpretive tradition. Ancient midrash featured multiple legends of Aaron's rod,[115] and this powerful visual symbol first appears in Jewish art in a mosaic at the Palestinian synagogue of Beth Alpha.[116] The rod of Aaron was also a powerful image in early Christianity (cf. Heb 9:4). Interestingly, *PJ*'s depiction of Joseph's miraculous dove-winged rod develops, particularly through the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* and the medieval *Golden Legend*, into the traditional artistic depiction of Joseph with a blossoming rod or lily (cf. Hos 14:5).[117]

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[113] *m. Rosh Hash*. 4.1-2.
[114] While ναός is *PJ*'s preferred term for the Temple, ἱερόν also appears once or twice, depending on the manuscript. The use of the term here clearly indicates the Temple sanctuary. However, in 15.2 of Bodmer V, ἱερόν also refers to the Temple precinct more generally, as the place where Mary is brought to appear in the κριτήριον. The term thus seems to be interchangeable with *PJ*'s use of both ἁγίασμα and ναός elsewhere.
[115] Cf. McCurdy and Ginzberg 1906.
[116] Cf. Revel-Neher 2000: 60-61.
[117] On later trajectories of St Joseph in art, cf. Hüttel 1997; Heublein 1998; Wilson 2001; Barbagallo 2014; Williams 2019.

Moreover, the visual sign can immediately be linked to Mary within *PJ*'s narrative iconography, for just prior to this scene Mary had been described in terms of a dove (ὡσεὶ περιστερὰ νεμομένη, *PJ* 8.1). This interpretation is confirmed by the priest's next words to Joseph: 'You have been chosen to take the virgin of the Lord into your safekeeping.'

Despite what the priest perceives to be strong visual proof of divine appointment, Joseph is shown to be initially reluctant for this task, which is part of *PJ*'s ongoing development of his character – culminating in his visual experience in *PJ* 18. It is only when Joseph is threatened with the fate of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num 16; cf. Deut 11:6) that he agrees to take Mary into his home.

4.4.2 Visual Transformation and Invitation in *PJ* 18

The next sight that Joseph sees in *PJ*'s narrative is the image of a six-month pregnant Mary; this sight meets Joseph's eyes when he returns from a long carpentry trip (*PJ* 13.1), and with it *PJ* takes up the portrayal of Joseph in Matthew. The sight launches an extended inner dialogue and conversation with Mary not to be found in Matthew (*PJ* 13.1-3), but which leads Joseph to the conclusion recorded in Matt 1:19 (*PJ* 14.1). *PJ* then includes Joseph's dream encounter with an angel in almost verbatim agreement with Matt 1:20-21. In these scenes our text is most directly responding to Matthew's infancy narrative, although its entire characterization of Joseph arguably flowers out of a Matthean reading.

The focus of this section, however, moves past these Matthean scenes to the high point of *PJ*'s characterization of Joseph, when he is the subject of the most unique visual experience of the entire document: his first-person testimony of watching the motion of creation halt at the birth of Christ. This centerpiece in our discussion of Joseph's aesthetic

modes occurs when Joseph is suddenly halted amid his search for a midwife for Mary (*PJ* 18.1), and is recounted by him as follows:

> And I, Joseph, was walking and yet not walking (Ἐγὼ δὲ Ἰωσὴφ περιεπάτουν καὶ οὐ περιεπάτουν). And I looked up (ἀνέβλεψα) into the vault of heaven and saw (εἶδον) it standing still, and into the air and saw (εἶδον) it seized with wonder and the winged of heaven at rest. And I looked upon (ἐπέβλεψα) the earth and saw (εἶδον) a basin lying there and workers reclining, and their hands were in the basin. And those who were chewing did not chew, and those who were lifting up [their hands] did not bring [them up], and those raising [food] to their mouths did not raise it, but the faces of all were looking up (πάντων ἦν τὰ πρόσωπα ἄνω βλέποντα). And I saw (εἶδον) flocks being driven, and yet the flocks stood still, and the shepherd lifted his hand to strike them, and yet his upraised hand was still. And I looked upon (ἐπέβλεψα) the torrent of the river and saw (εἶδον) kid goats and their mouths pressing upon the water and yet not drinking. And in a moment, all things were being driven along again according to their course (Καὶ πάντα θήξει ὑπὸ τοῦ δρόμου αὐτῶν ἀπηλαύνετο). (*PJ* 18.2-3)

One of the first things to strike the interpreter of this text is its departure from the third-person narration that characterizes the rest of the document. Joseph's first-person narration continues from here with a brief conversation with a midwife, before slipping inexplicably (and mid-conversation) back into third-person mode (*PJ* 19.1).[118] Harnack perceived the shifts to be redactional, positing a separate source for *PJ* 18; however, more recent interpreters have tended to see a greater unity of style throughout the text.[119]

Scholarship on the literary aspects of biblical narrative sheds further light on this issue. A crucial observation, for our purposes, is that the postexilic and Second Temple periods saw a steady emergence of first-person narration in Jewish texts. Two textual genres featuring the first person, the apocalypse and the testament, have been studied carefully;[120] more recently, Novick has drawn attention to a third category that he terms

[118] As with the rest of my analysis, I am following here the reconstructed text of De Strycker 1961. Bodmer V does not include Joseph's first-person account, and other versions record it in the third person (see Smid 1965: 127 for a list). The majority of manuscripts, however, include the first person account, and scholars generally regard this to be the oldest form (De Strycker 1961; Smid 1965; Bovon 1991; Ehrman and Pleše 2011).
[119] De Strycker 1961; Smid 1965; and most others since.
[120] See, e.g., Collins 1998; Kugler 2010.

the 'liturgical autobiography,' a first-person narrative that expresses praise for God's work in one's own life.[121] *PJ* fits slightly better into this category, though its liturgical aspect is more implicit than explicit. Furthermore, shifts between first- and third-person narration is a common feature of texts composed around the Babylonian exile, and in the Second Temple period – including in the birth narrative of Noah recorded in the Genesis Apocryphon (1Q20), where both Noah's father Lamech and Noah himself narrate in the first person at various points.[122] Such shifts may be the result of compositional choice in some cases, or of redactional weaving in others.

The history of interpretation on *PJ* 18 has largely seen theories about a number of literary parallels to the time suspension motif, which span a vast range of ancient literature from Homer to the rabbinic period.[123] Here the idea of 'time suspension' is applied very loosely; these texts tend to emphasize creation's stillness or silence in relation to divine encounter, without making specific claims about the suspension of 'time' itself. At a very basic level, such parallels establish the coherence of this theme in a variety of Graeco-Roman and ancient Jewish texts. However, for the most part, theories about textual relationships between such examples and *PJ* 18 have been inconclusive due to our text's quite unique improvisation on the motif. In what follows I address the distinctiveness of *PJ* 18's account, which uniquely intersects *two* themes – time suspension and visuality – and suggest that the interpretive aspect of this intersection has a stronger parallel in specific examples of ancient Jewish art.

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[121] See Novick 2012. Novick examines Tobit and Daniel 4 as examples of this genre, which he argues has its roots in the psalms.

[122] For analysis of the first-third person shifts in 1Q20, see Weigold 2010. Other examples of shifting person may be found in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Ezra-Nehemiah, 1 Enoch, Jubilees, Tobit, and Daniel (see Novick 2012: 274-275).

[123] Examples cited include Josh 10:12-14; 1 Kings 19:11-12; Pss 76:8; 107:9; Job 4:16; Isa 14:7; Ezek 31:15; Hab 2:20; 3:11; Zeph 1:7; Zech 2:13; Wis 18:14-15; Sir 46:4; Matt 8:26; Homer, *Od.* 6.42-46; Homeric Hymn No. 28 (to Athena); Euripides, *Bacchae* 1084-87; *Sifre Deut* 32.1 (piska 306); *Exod. Rab*. 29.9. See further Smid 1965: 128-130; Bovon 1991.

Turning to *PJ* 18's notion of time suspension, perhaps the first thing to notice is the fact that language about 'time' does not actually surface until the final line of *PJ* 18: 'And in a moment (θήξις), all things were being driven along again according to their course (δρόμος).' Θήξις is a rare word which at once denotes both a very tiny segment of time (a 'moment,' an 'instant') as well as the fast rate at which that tiny segment of time passes (one lexicographer defines it as an 'impulse,' a '[pin] prick,' or even 'speed' itself[124]). The word δρόμος, which means 'course' or 'race,' likewise conveys the *movement* of time, spurred on by the verb ἀπελαύνω, meaning 'to drive' or 'set in motion.' In this text, then, time is primarily conceived in relation to its movement. This understanding of time as motion helps us to make sense of how it is shown to be suspended in the rest of Joseph's account. For everywhere he looks, movement has ceased. Where he was once walking, suddenly he is not walking. The 'vault of heaven,' (πόλος τοὺ οὐρανοῦ), which refers to the whole celestial sphere, significantly implying the sun at its zenith, is standing still. Laborers' hands and mouths pause mid-movement as they take food; flocks of sheep and a shepherd's upraised hand are frozen in time; and kid goats are suspended over the water as they drink. And then, unlike in Josh 10:12-14 where the sun stands still for an entire day, in *PJ* 18 all movement resumes along its normal course in time within the space of a moment, a θήξις.

Previous interpretations of this text have tended to conclude their descriptions of the text here, with the *object* of Joseph's vision, namely time standing still through the cessation of various movements. What has not been fully considered is the significance of Joseph's *subjective* experience of this phenomenon, namely as one who *sees* it. The scene is strongly visual, a fact underlined by the frequent repetition of verbs of seeing: ἀναβλέπω (occurs 2x), ἐπιβλέπω (2x), εἶδον (5x) for a total of 9 mentions of Joseph's

[124] Cf. Bovon 1991: 396.

sight. In fact, I would argue that it is the highly visual nature of this text that separates it from other literary examples of the time suspension motif. Where other examples might narrate the stillness of creation in a brief and detached statement of fact, *PJ* relates it from the intimate perspective of a human viewer. Or where other texts might be more focused on the aural sense (e.g. *Exod. Rab*. 29.2 highlights a 'breathless silence'), *PJ* 18 features the visual.

How does this visual element work in intersection with the stillness of time? First, contrary to the common use of the word 'vision' to describe Joseph's experience here, it is quite clear that this is not a 'vision,' at least not in the way that we usually define that word in the biblical literature. It does not occur in a dream or prophesy future events, but is meant to describe Joseph's actual experience. This is clear from the first line, which incorporates the stilling of Joseph's own bodily motion into the stillness of the rest of creation: 'I was walking and yet not walking.' Although the 'emphatic "I"'[125] evokes the manner of apocalyptic writing, Joseph is not visually transported to heavenly realms but participates in the actual suspension of time on earth.

From this first line, we follow Joseph's gaze as it moves across the landscape. Interestingly, in a scene in which time construed as motion has stopped, as we saw above, Joseph's eyes are the only things that do in fact move. They first look into the sky and see the celestial bodies at rest. A little lower in the sky, Joseph's eyes notice the stillness of the air, the space between the heavens and the earth, and the birds frozen mid-flight. The text then 'lowers the eyes of Joseph...toward the earth'[126] as the verb ἀναβλέπω ('I looked up') is replaced with ἐπιβλέπω ('I look upon'). Resting now on the earth, Joseph's eyes move between the various domestic scenes noted earlier. In the midst of all of this this, he

[125] Bovon 1991: 400.
[126] Bovon 1991: 401.

particularly notices with regard to the laborers that, like his own, 'the faces of all were looking up.' The words ἄνω βλέποντα here indicate that their gaze is directed up toward the celestial vault, the location at which Joseph's own visual journey had begun.

Now we may turn to the interpretive aspect: *why* this visual depiction of time standing still? I suggest that stronger parallels to *PJ* 18's unique intersection of the time suspension motif and visuality exist in the world of visual art, rather than in other texts. Specifically, I think there is a similar visual-devotional function at work in the fourth- to sixth-century zodiac mosaics of ancient Palestinian synagogues, which, though chronologically distant from the composition of the *PJ*, arise out of a comparable Jewish Hellenistic milieu. I will take the mosaic at Sepphoris as a particular example.

Somewhat unexpectedly, given their pagan roots, zodiac mosaics were actually quite commonly featured on the nave floors of ancient Palestinian synagogues.[127] At Sepphoris, the central circle of the mosaic depicts the sun, suspended in the middle of the sky, symbolically riding the chariot of the god Helios. This popular image was commonly adopted by Jews of this period and converted for their own purposes, partly through an allusion to Ps 19:6-7. Here we find a Greek understanding of time as a continually running course or race (a δρόμος), just as we also see in *PJ* 18. And although the horses running the course of time are depicted in such a way as to imply motion, the constraints of the mosaic itself cause them to be fixed in a particular moment, suspended just like the sun that drives them along. In the outer circle the twelve months are represented by the twelve signs of the zodiac, with many of the figures seemingly locked mid-motion (e.g. the centaur's bow and arrow is poised to release).

[127] Archaeologists have uncovered six: at the synagogues of Hammath Tiberias, Beth Alpha, Na'aran, Khirbet Susiya, Husaifa, and Sepphoris. For analysis, see Hachlili 1977; Englard 2003; Magness 2005. For discussion of the Sepphoris mosaic in particular, cf. Weiss and Netzer 1996.

Scholars largely agree that this synagogue mosaic and others like it were intended to be visual depictions of the centrality of God in time and creation, and reminders – in a kind of visual 'midrash' – of the eternal covenant established by God.[128] Something similar, I suggest, is at work in *PJ* 18. The Sepphoris zodiac invites the viewer to cast his gaze over a cosmological picture, beginning with the sun suspended in the sky. From the center of the image, the eyes travel outward and around the circle, catching glimpses of human figures, various animals to signify months, agricultural symbols to represent seasons. Guided by Joseph's eyes, as we saw above, the reader of *PJ* 18 similarly traverses a cosmic scene, beginning with the 'vault of heaven' and down and across the more local landscape below. The member of the synagogue who stops to look at its central floor mosaic also engages visually with time itself, which paradoxically seems both to move and stand still. On the one hand, the eternal movement of the course of time is certainly implied by the circular figure and the running of Helios' horses, while the fixed nature of the mosaic itself also suspends each season of the year in time, allowing the viewer to study them all at once. In *PJ* 18, time is likewise construed as movement, but these movements are suspended – mosaic-like – for an instant. Of course, there is a theological reason for this within *PJ*'s narrative: the stillness of time and movement is intended to convey the awe of creation at the miracle of Jesus' birth. The zodiac mosaic works to remind the viewer of the eternal covenant of God. Joseph's account works to remind *PJ*'s reader, who sees through Joseph's eyes, of the moment at which the eternal God entered the contingent world, a world ordered by time, and was born a human infant.

The experience is transformative not only for the reader, but for Joseph himself. We have traced *PJ*'s portrayal of Joseph from a reluctant viewer of a divine sign appointing him to care for Mary, to his sight of Mary's pregnancy and dream vision of the

[128] See, e.g., Englard 2003.

angel, to this privileged sight of the divine at work in the physical world. That these experiences have been transformative for Joseph is perhaps best exhibited by the fact that he himself now becomes an agent of sight for another. Following his visual experience with time suspension, Joseph tells a midwife he has met on his way to 'come and see' (δεῦρο καὶ ἴδε, *PJ* 19.1) that Mary has conceived a child of the Holy Spirit. These words of Joseph – the last words that he speaks in *PJ*'s text – culminate Joseph's aesthetic transformation, and invite the reader to turn from the visuality of time and creation to the visual revelation of the infant Christ himself.

4.5 Witnessing the Infant Christ in the *Protevangelium*

As we have observed in Chapters 2 and 3, the infancy narratives of both Matthew and Luke each contain a scene of visual witness to the birth of the infant Jesus. In Matthew, the magi see (εἶδον) 'the child with Mary his mother' and worship him (Matt 2:11).[129] In Luke, after the shepherds have seen (ἰδόντες) 'Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in the manger,' they proclaim the birth of the child they have seen (Luke 2:16-17).[130] The *Protevangelium*, also, contains a scene of visual revelation of the child himself, and in this section we will examine how our text responds creatively to this aesthetic motif in the Matthean and Lukan traditions.

One innovation of *PJ* is its presentation of Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph, each as agents of the ultimate visual revelation of the child, something we have noted already in §4.3.4 and §4.4.2. Our text asserts that Mary would 'make visible' the Lord's redemption (7.2), and Joseph also plays a mediating role in the text's portrayal of visual encounter with the infant (19.1). His injunction to 'come and see' leads the midwife – and the reader

[129] Cf. §2.4.4-5.
[130] Cf. §3.3.2.

– to eyewitness the infant Jesus presented in the text. Both Mary and Joseph, then, perform roles facilitating the ultimate visuality of Jesus' birth; the holy parents' agency in this revelation is fitting for a text that is preoccupied with each of their experiences prior to the Nativity.

The initial revealing of the infant himself (*PJ* 19.2) contains several distinct visual elements. The entire scene is focalized through the eyes of Joseph and the midwife, who stand at the entrance of a cave – looking in. The cave itself (σπήλαιον) is the first element in the visuality of the scene. The tradition of Jesus' birth in a cave captured the imagination of many ancient Christians;[131] and while *PJ* is sometimes posited as its earliest source, it is unclear where it originated. The tradition of pilgrimage to the perceived site of the cave in Bethlehem culminated in the building of the fourth-century Church of the Nativity over the site.[132]

The second visual element in *PJ*'s depiction of the scene is the 'bright cloud' (νεφέλη φωτεινή) that overshadows (ἐπισκιάζουσα) the cave. Here *PJ* echoes language from the gospel Transfiguration accounts (Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34; and especially Matt 17:5), and possibly also from Luke 1:35 with its reference to a divine overshadowing (cf. also *PJ* 11.3).[133] The midwife interprets this 'bright cloud' in words evocative both of Mary's Magnificat and Simeon's Nunc dimittis: 'My soul has been magnified today, for my eyes have seen a paradox (εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου παράδοξα), that salvation has been born to Israel.' We have already discussed *PJ*'s creative use of the Magnificat throughout its narrative (§4.2). Here it is joined in an adaptation of the Nunc dimittis, where the key alteration to Simeon's words is in the term παράδοξα. This term, which connotes

[131] See, e.g., Justin Martyr, *Dial.*78; Origen, *Cels.* 1.51; Jerome, *Epist.* 46.11; 58.3; 108.10; and further discussion in §6.3.5.
[132] On the Church of the Nativity, cf. Pixner 2010: 11-20. For further discussion of pilgrimage to the cave, cf. §6.3.5.
[133] Cf. Goodacre 2018: 75. On the notion of 'shadow' in ancient texts cf. Van der Horst 2005: 60-61.

something unexpected and bewildering, is distinctly divergent from the Lukan context where Simeon's sight of Jesus is a long-awaited event (cf. §3.3.3).

As the cloud departs from the cave, the third visual element comes into focus: 'a great light appeared (ἐφάνη φῶς μέγα) inside the cave, so that their eyes could not bear it (τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς μὴ φέρειν).' This light is reminiscent of that 'great light' (φῶς μέγα) of Isa 9:1, and certainly bears the visual radiance of divine glory and presence.[134] It is comparable with the Matthean tradition of the star resting over the child (Matt 2:9; cf. §2.4.4), and the Lukan Simeon's words about the child himself in terms of light and glory (Luke 2:32; cf. §3.3.3).

The final visual element in the gradually unfolding epiphany is Jesus himself: with the withdrawal of the light, 'a babe appeared' (ἐφάνη βρέφος). Rather than 'wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger,' as is the Lukan infant Jesus, *PJ*'s first intimate image of the baby is slightly more active – and inextricably connected with Mary, perhaps expanding on the Matthean magi's glimpse of the 'child with Mary his mother'. The infant takes hold of Mary's breast and begins to nurse. It is strikingly after this intimate image of a child nursing at his mother's breast that the midwife exclaims again: 'What a great day this is for me, for I have seen this new sight (εἶδον τὸ καινὸν θέαμα).' As is next revealed in the incident with Salome (19.3-20.3), not only is this child visualized in a manner ordinary to newborn babies, but he is also portrayed with miracle-working power, so that touching his small body enacts healing.

Interestingly, both of these images of Jesus – one homely and one wondrous – have their counterparts in the world of early Christian visual art. The artistic motif of *Virgo lactans* or *Madonna lactans* possibly appears as early as the earliest image of Mary and child. At the catacombs of Priscilla outside Rome, an early third-century fresco on the

[134] See further Conzelmann 1974.

vaulted ceiling of one of the corridors shows arguably the most ancient image of Mary, 'maternally bend[ing] towards the naked Baby who holds onto her bust as if he searched for her breast.'[135] Moreover, the portrait of Jesus as miracle worker was an extremely powerful visual image in the earliest Christian art; it is not surprising that this motif was also imagined in accounts of his infancy and childhood.[136]

Joining the ranks of Matthew's magi and Luke's shepherds, it is the two midwives who serve as the key eyewitnesses to Jesus' birth in *PJ*. It is primarily through their eyes that we see these two images of the infant. The first, unnamed midwife is one who looks through eyes of faith – who sees the 'bright cloud,' the 'great light,' and the breastfeeding infant emerge from the radiance – and makes verbal proclamations noted above, modeled primarily on Luke's Simeon. The second midwife, Salome, casts doubtful eyes on the validity of the virginal conception and birth and examines Mary in the manner of the Johannine Thomas (19.3-20.1; cf. John 20:25). In this way she, too, becomes an eyewitness, though a secretive one; after the disability and healing of her hand by the child she is told to keep silent about the παράδοξα she has seen (20.4).

Although *PJ*'s culminating visual epiphany of the infant Christ is decidedly different from Matthew's or Luke's, it still incorporates elements of their visual highpoints elsewhere. *PJ* 21 relates in full the story of the magi, and even elaborates on the visuality of the star. In conversation with Herod, the magi say that that they have seen 'a magnificent star (ἀστέρα παμμεγέθη) shining (λάμθαντα) among these stars and overshadowing (ἀμβλύναντα) them, so that no other stars appeared (ἀστέρας μὴ φαίνεσθαι).' This description resonates strongly with other early Christian interpretations

[135] Cf. Giuliani 2016: 33-36; Tolotti 1970. On the *Madonna lactans* motif in the history of art, cf. Bonani and Bonani 1995.
[136] See Mathews 1993: 54-91. Other infancy accounts – notably the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* – also make use of this image of Jesus.

of Matthew's star as outshining all the other stars in the sky.[137] In *PJ*, this star comes to rest over the entrance of the cave, and it is there that the magi find the child, as in Matthew, 'with Mary his mother.'

PJ also incorporates the prominent visual details of Luke's nativity: the swaddling clothes and manger (cf. Luke 2:7, 12, 16). However, in *PJ* these details are inserted into its account of the massacre of the innocents (Matt 2:16-18). In place of the flight to Egypt, in *PJ* Mary preserves Jesus' life by swaddling him and hiding him in a 'cattle trough' (πάθνη βοῶν, *PJ* 22.2). Here our text is more specific than Luke by naming the animals that used the manger. The tradition regarding these animals will be further defined by Origen, and appears in several early representations of the nativity in art.[138]

In this section, then, we have seen that *PJ* reworks Matthean and Lukan motifs of beholding the infant Christ, while creatively expanding on that tradition with its own version of this culminating aesthetic moment. All three textual traditions have had a strong influence on subsequent imagination of the nativity.

4.6 Zechariah and Simeon: Priestly Aesthetic Piety

The final piece in our analysis of *PJ*'s 'creative aesthetic response' to infancy traditions comes from our text's interweaving of the experiences of two Lukan figures, Zechariah and Simeon. The latter comes into the narrative only briefly, yet importantly, at the end of the text; however, Zechariah features in several parts of the narrative, each of which yields insights to our analysis. We have noted already that *PJ* is attentive to the aesthetics of setting, particularly with regard to the Temple. This is perhaps nowhere more prominent than in the scenes featuring Zechariah (*PJ* 8.2-3; 23.1-24.4), which blend a

[137] E.g. Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph*. 19.2; Origen, *Cels*. 1.60; *Cat. Fr. Matt*. 24. Cf. further discussion in §6.2.4.
[138] Cf. Origen, *Hom. Luc*. 13.7; and further discussion in §6.3.5.

strong visuality and aurality of setting with striking aesthetic experiences of revelation. Interestingly, *PJ* does not recount the Lukan blending of these same themes (Luke 1:8-23; cf. §3.2.2). *PJ* does reference this scene (10.2), but draws from it to create two new scenes: a previous angelic encounter in the Holy of Holies (8.2-3), and the murder of Zechariah in the sanctuary and its aftermath (23.1-24.4). Simeon's visual encounter with the infant Christ is woven into the narrative of this final scene.

Zechariah, the priest who opened Luke's infancy account, enters the apocryphal narrative in *PJ* 8.2-3, when the virgin Mary problematically reaches the age of twelve and the priests must decide how to preserve the sanctity of the Temple in light of her womanly maturity. In this text, Zechariah is described as the 'high priest,' who has 'stood upon the Lord's altar;' this status uniquely qualifies him to enter the 'holy of holies' (τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων) to inquire of the Lord about Mary.[139] *PJ*'s attention to Temple setting comes into focus as Zechariah enters this very specific space, wearing the δωδεκακώδονα, the high priestly vestment with alternating bells and pomegranates dangling from the hem.

Not only is this a striking visual detail, but it also adds a certain *aural* vividness. Several ancient Jewish texts provide comment on the meaning of the sound this robe made as the priest officiated, beginning with Exodus: 'its sound shall be heard when [Aaron] goes into the holy place before the Lord, and when he comes out, so that he may not die' (Exod 28:33-35). Sirach describes a different audience for this sound, writing that the bells and pomegranates 'send forth a sound as he walked, to make their ringing heard in the temple as a reminder to the people' (Sirach 45:9). The *Letter of Aristeas* expresses both the aural and visual beauty of this robe on the high priest Eleazar: 'For there were golden bells upon his ankle-length robe which gave out a particular sound of musical tone (μέλους ἦχον ἀνιέντες ἰδιάζοντα): on both sides of these were pomegranates with

[139] Certainly unhistorical, since the high priest only entered the holy of holies once a year, at Yom Kippur.

variegated flowers which possessed a marvelous colour.'[140] Other writers focus on symbolic interpretations of the aurality of the bells and pomegranates.[141]

This aesthetic detail of Zechariah's robe as he enters the Holy of Holies is combined with an experience of angelic appearance within the sacred space. This revelatory moment has been anticipated by the priests' words just prior: 'Go in and pray concerning [Mary]; and whatever the Lord God makes visible (φανερώσῃ) to you, this we will do' (*PJ* 8.2-3). The appearance of the angel in the Holy of Holies is thus not unexpected in the narrative logic, nor in light of *PJ*'s creative reworking of Luke 1:8-23. Interestingly, here Zechariah is not bewildered by the angelic presence nor unheeding of the message.

After this oblique reference to the Lukan episode, Zechariah next appears in the final scenes of *PJ*, as Herod's servants search for John the Baptist during the massacre of the innocents. When they approach the boy's father, Zechariah evades their questioning by expressing preoccupation with his priestly duties 'I exist as a minister (λειτουργὸς) of God and I serve continually in his Temple' (23.1). Zechariah's self-identification with the Temple and its cult is set in sharp relief when his physical life is taken within the Temple setting. Several architectural details of the Temple structure and decoration are employed by the text to enhance the visuality of the murder and the revelatory scene that follows.

First, Zechariah himself predicts that he will be murdered in the πρόθυρα of the Temple (23.3). This term refers to a threshold of some sort: a doorway, or a vestibule. While πρόθυρα denotes all kinds of thresholds throughout the Septuagint, the only other occurrence of the phrase πρόθυρα τοῦ ναοῦ κυρίου in the biblical literature is found in Ezek 8:16, which further describes the location as 'between the porch and the altar' (ἀνὰ

[140] *Aristeas* 96. Trans. Hayward 1996: 29.
[141] Cf. Philo, *Mos*. 2.119-120; *Spec*. 1.93; *Migr*. 102-105; Josephus, *B.J.* 5.231-232; cf. *A.J.* 3.160-161; Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 42; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.6.

μέσον τῶν αιλαμ καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου). This phrase may refer either to the forecourt of the priests (an area just outside the sanctuary), or in the doorway of the sanctuary, depending on which altar is meant – the altar of burnt offering outside, or the altar of incense within. Since Ezekiel is describing his vision of men standing at the πρόθυρα with their backs to the ναός, from his own viewpoint in the 'inner court,' both interpretations are possible though perhaps the former is more likely. The content of the narrative of Zechariah's death seems to be loosely connected to a tradition related in Matt 23:35, in which Jesus – in an expression similar to that of Ezekiel – accuses the scribes and Pharisees of murdering Zechariah son of Barachiah 'between the sanctuary and the altar' (μεταξὺ τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου).[142] This expression seems certainly to refer to the altar of burnt offering, located outside the ναός. However, when Zechariah in *PJ* predicts that Herod's men will murder him εἰς τὰ πρόθυρα τοῦ ναοῦ κυρίου, the text seems not to imagine the outer priestly forecourt,[143] but the doorway of the ναός, and indeed inside the ἁγίασμα itself. This becomes clear in the subsequent scene (24.1-3), which describes the priests waiting for Zechariah outside, unsuspecting of the murder, and only discovering it upon entering into the sanctuary.

The scene of *PJ* 24.1-3, although certainly different from that which is related in Luke 1:8-23, is also (like *PJ* 8.2-3) quite markedly patterned after that Lukan scene. Just as the people waited for Zechariah outside the sanctuary and wondered at his delay in Luke 1:21, here the priests also wait for Zechariah to emerge and give his blessing, this time without any appearance at all. When one unnamed priest ventures inside the sanctuary alone, retracing Zechariah's steps, he sees (εἶδεν) dried blood (αἷμα πεπηγός) in

[142] This is a possible reference to the Zechariah of 2 Chron 24:20-22; cf. Luz 2005: 154-155. For more on the several traditions surrounding the death of Zechariah in ancient Jewish and early Christian sources, cf. Berendts 1895; Berendts 1904: 1-66; Blank 1937; von Campenhausen 1958; Smid 1965: 178-180; Dubois 1994.
[143] This is the impression of Smid 1965: 160-161.

almost exactly the same position in which Zechariah saw the angel Gabriel appear in Luke 1:11: 'beside the altar of the Lord' (παρὰ τὸ Θυσιαστήριον Κυρίου). Not only does this priest visually encounter the murder of Zechariah, but he also hears a voice commenting on what he has seen: 'Zechariah has been murdered, and his blood will not be washed away until the avenger comes.' While the text references the aural effect of this voice as something that the priest hears (ἀκούσας, 24.2), the sound is also described as something that he sees, as a direct object of his sight alongside the blood (εἶδεν…αἷμα πεπηγός καὶ φωνὴν, 24.2). Here we observe the overlapping of visual and aural sense perceptions, a concept not uncommon in ancient literature.[144]

This synaesthetic moment is so powerful for the priest that he immediately rushes out of the sanctuary to report what he has seen and heard (ἀνήγγειλεν…ἃ εἶδεν καὶ ἤκουσεν, 24.2). At his word, the rest of the priests likewise enter the sanctuary to see what has happened, and their visual and aural senses are uniquely engaged when the physical features of the Temple seem to come alive and start shouting (τὰ παθνώματα τοῦ ναοῦ ὠλόλυξαν).[145] The term πάθνωμα is an alternate form of the term φάτνωμα, which refers to some kind of paneling or coffered work. The image of this decorative feature crying out in *PJ* 24 echoes the same description in Septuagintal Amos 8:3, which describes death and wailing on the day of the Lord's judgment: 'And the coffered paneling of the Temple will cry out (καὶ ὀλολύξει τὰ φατνώματα τοῦ ναοῦ). In that day, says the Lord, many will be the dead in every place. I will inflict silence.'[146] It seems that this coffered paneling might refer to the ceiling of the sanctuary; in writing about the Temple Josephus uses the same word to describe the cedar-paneled roof above the marble columns of the porticoes,[147] and

[144] See, e.g., discussion of Exod 20:18 and its early interpretation in §6.3.2. Further on synaesthesia in antiquity, cf. Butler and Purves 2013; and discussion in §1.2.4.
[145] Note a similar animation of the Temple in the *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*.
[146] On this verse and its differences from Hebrew versions, cf. Glenny 2009: 93.
[147] Josephus, *B.J.* 5.191; *A.J.* 8.98.

the ceilings of various chambers that were overlaid with gold.[148] It likewise seems to refer to a coffered ceiling in several places in the Septuagint besides Amos,[149] although in Ezekiel's 'Temple tour' vision it is also used in relation to the paneled walls of the sanctuary, which are carved with a pattern of cherubim and palm trees all the way around the nave (Ezek 41:15-20). It is unclear whether *PJ* imagines a coffered ceiling or paneled walls decorated with cherubim and palm trees – or perhaps both – to be crying out after the murder of Zechariah. Either way, the contrast in Amos between the loud wailing of the Temple's physical features and the silence of the dead is also present in *PJ*. Mysteriously, the priests do not even find Zechariah's body, but only his blood strangely turned to stone.

While *PJ* 24.1-3 thus evokes Zechariah's vision in the Temple (particularly through the group gathered outside the sanctuary, waiting, and one priest's sight of the blood beside the altar), it also creatively improvises on that Lukan scene in its powerful portrayals of aurality in the Temple, each of which also overlaps with the visual: a seen voice speaking into the discovery of Zechariah's death, and the materiality of the Temple itself mourning in loud volume. As with the scene in Luke, this episode likewise draws from a fundamental Jewish idea of divine presence within the holy place (and even inextricably integrated into that place's physicality), which manifests itself in uniquely piercing experiences of sight and sound.[150]

The closing of *PJ*'s narrative, the appointing of Simeon to serve as high priest in Zechariah's place (24.4), is a synthesis of themes we have been describing throughout this chapter, and a fitting place with which to end our analysis. In the first place, it is clearly drawn from the Lukan tradition about Simeon, showing particular familiarity with the text of Luke 2:26. Secondly, *PJ* creatively reworks the Simeon tradition in a number of ways,

[148] Josephus, *A.J.* 8.68
[149] Cf. 2 Macc. 1:16; Song 1:17; Zeph. 2:14.
[150] Cf. Anderson 2009; and discussion in §3.2.2; 3.3.3.

most basically through making Simeon a priestly figure (something not explicit in Luke) and integrating his story into Zechariah's. But finally, and most relevant to the purposes of this study, are the ways in which *PJ* heightens the visual aspect of Luke 2:26, even as it reads it nearly word for word. A comparison of the two texts will illustrate this point:

> καὶ ἦν αὐτῷ κεχρηματισμένον ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου μὴ ἰδεῖν θάνατον πρὶν ἢ ἂν ἴδῃ τὸν χριστὸν κυρίου (Luke 2:26)
>
> οὗτος γὰρ ἦν ὁ χρηματισθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος μὴ ἰδεῖν θάνατον ἕως ἄν τὸν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἴδῃ. (*PJ* 24.4)

Here I want to point out two differences between *PJ*'s text and Luke's. First, *PJ* inserts the words 'in the flesh,' a phrase that heightens the visual vibrancy of the sentence in Luke. We might make a number of interpretive observations about this insertion: the possibility that *PJ* is consciously joining the Lukan tradition with the emphasis on incarnational 'flesh' in John 1:14 or the potential apologetic motivations behind this move within a second-century context,[151] not to mention the interesting narrative juxtaposition this phrase makes with the absence of Zechariah's flesh in the account just before it. Whatever the initial thought behind this adaptation of the Lukan text, it intensifies the physicality – and with it, the visuality – of this description of Simeon's encounter with the infant Christ. Second, *PJ* moves the verb 'to see' to the end of the sentence, again punctuating the visual nature of Simeon's encounter with Christ, and simultaneously culminating its entire narrative with this moment of sight.[152]

Looking back on various aspects of *PJ*'s narrative that we have noted already, this concluding note of witnessing the infant Christ is fitting. Section §4.5 examined the way in which *PJ,* like Matthew and Luke, is profoundly concerned with witnesses to the birth of Christ, and even goes beyond the canonical gospel accounts in describing an

[151] Cf. discussion of second-century debates surrounding the Incarnation in Ch. 5.
[152] Note that these adaptations are not found in all manuscripts, but are in Bodmer V and De Strycker's reconstruction of the earliest text.

increasingly vivid revelation of the infant to the eyes. We also noted in §4.5 that *PJ*'s focus on the 'gospel before the gospel' – notably in the figures of Mary and Joseph – allows these important characters to function as agents of this ultimate visual revelation. Mary is she who makes redemption visible (*PJ* 7.2), and Joseph invites the midwife – and the reader – to 'come and see' (*PJ* 19.1). Regarded from this angle, our text's interest in the aesthetic piety of Mary and Joseph (and arguably also that of Joachim and Anna) has as its culminating goal the revelation of the infant Christ to the senses of characters and readers alike. The final incorporation of Simeon's visual encounter with the child reinforces and seals this theme.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined the *Protevangelium of James* as an instance of 'creative aesthetic response' to the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. Taking this analysis in five sections, focused around the major characters of our text, we have shown multiple points of contact with visual and aural elements from the pre-canonical infancy traditions and demonstrated how *PJ* reworks, reimagines, and expands upon these aesthetic moments.

For example, we have noted how *PJ* weaves the Lukan Magnificat into its narrative, sounding first in a song by Anna, the grandmother of Christ (§4.2). Luke's listening Mary is developed into a figure whose aesthetic piety, and thus her heart, have been formed by her childhood in the Temple; and one who uniquely makes visible divine redemption. The visuality of her Annunciation is also enhanced by details such as the colors of the Temple curtain she is weaving, and description of her home (§4.3). Matthew's dreaming Joseph is reimagined with a particularly significant visual experience of the stillness of creation at the birth of Christ (§4.4). The Matthean and Lukan interest in

the visual revelation of the infant Christ (to the magi, and to the shepherds, respectively) is retained in *PJ* and given even lengthier description, with midwives as witnesses and parents as agents of that witness (§4.5). The vision of Zechariah in the Temple is not explicitly recounted, though it serves as a template for two additional aesthetically-charged scenes: the high priest's angelic encounter in the Holy of Holies, and the finding of his body in the sanctuary. Finally, the figure of Simeon – integrated into the narrative as the priestly replacement for Zechariah – fittingly closes the text with his eyes beholding the infant Christ ἐν σαρκί (§4.6). In these and other examples, the *Protevangelium* both develops the visual and aural pieties of canonical characters, and heightens the visuality and aurality of canonical settings.

This *creative* aspect of the category 'creative aesthetic response' is itself generative for further aesthetic response, a fact confirmed by the huge effect this text has had in the aesthetic aspects of later textual productions, in liturgy, and in art. Multiple apocrypha generated from *PJ*'s influence – including the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*,[153] the *Latin Infancy Gospels* (Arundel form),[154] the *History of Joseph the Carpenter*,[155] the *Armenian Infancy Gospel*,[156] the *Syriac Infancy Gospel* and its later Arabic version, which in turn influenced portions of the Qur'an[157] – might be studied through this lens, although such study exceeds the scope of the present analysis. We noted in §4.1.2 the significant influence *PJ* had on developing Marian piety. Indeed, the liturgical feasts of the Nativity of Mary, the Presentation of Mary, Joachim and Anna, and the Immaculate Conception are all due to *PJ*'s influence.[158] Even before the establishment of such feasts in the liturgical

[153] Cf. Ehrman and Pleše 2011: 62-91.
[154] Cf. Ehrman and Pleše 2011: 92-118.
[155] Cf. Ehrman and Pleše 2011: 119-142.
[156] Cf. Terian 2008.
[157] Cf. Horn 2006; Horn 2007.
[158] Cf. Calabuig 2000.

calendar, however, scenes of Mary's life from *PJ* feature in early hymn texts,[159] and visual art.[160] The text's 'creative aesthetic response' to Matthew and Luke thus played a role in the shaping of Marian piety and the interpretation of the canonical texts.

Moreover, other apocryphal infancy traditions that develop separately from *PJ* might also be studied as 'creative aesthetic response,' and these include the *Questions of Bartholomew* (*Quest. Bart.*) 2.15-21,[161] the *Ascension of Isaiah* (*Asc. Isa.*) 11.1-17,[162] the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas (IGT)*,[163] and the *Revelation of the Magi*.[164] *Quest. Bart*. and *Asc. Isa*. each present a visionary reading of an infancy scene – the Annunciation to Mary, and birth of Christ, respectively. The second-century *IGT* is especially interested in the spectacle of miracles Jesus performs as a young child, and thus develops the visuality of a childhood period on which Matthew and Luke leave no comment. A later text, the *Revelation of the Magi* (fourth century), is particularly unique in its pseudonymous claim to be the magi's own testimony, and its visual depictions of the star transforming into the Christ child. These examples illustrate the point that other early apocryphal literature aside from *PJ* demonstrate interest in seeing and hearing among witnesses to the birth and childhood of Jesus, and that within a diverse variety of theological orientations.

In summary, this chapter has analyzed an early and uniquely successful representative of a wider phenomenon I have called 'creative aesthetic response' to the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. In the next chapter, we examine an example of a different form of aesthetic response in the theological apologetics of Irenaeus of Lyons.

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[159] E.g. the fourth-century 'Psalmus Responsorius' hymn to the Virgin Mary contained in the Barcelona Papyrus, which features stanzas of different stages of Mary's life (cf. Roca-Puig 1965).
[160] Several examples are noted in §4.3.1-2; e.g. the Adelfia Sarcophagus, and the artistic motif of Mary spinning.
[161] Cf. Beeston 1975; Kaestli and Chérix 1993; Bovon 2009: 295-296.
[162] Cf. Norelli 1994; Norelli 2003; and discussion in §5.2-4.
[163] Cf. Burke 2010; and discussion in §5.2.
[164] Cf. Landau 2010.

CHAPTER 5:
AESTHETIC RESPONSE AS SCRIPTURAL APOLOGETIC IN IRENAEUS OF LYONS

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we examined the *Protevangelium of James* as a particularly salient representative of a wider phenomenon of 'creative aesthetic response' to the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. In this chapter, we turn our attention from apocryphal narrative to another second-century textual genre – theological apologetics – and specifically to the corpus of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons. The extant writings of Irenaeus – his *Demonstration (Epideixis) of the Apostolic Preaching* (*Epid.*), his 'Letter to Florinus' preserved by Eusebius, and especially his monumental *Adversus Haereses* (*Haer.*) – provide significant material for the present study. While Irenaeus engages with specific visual or aural prompts from the infancy narratives to a lesser extent than what we have observed in *PJ*, or will observe in Origen, still his writings provide a window into an important cluster of aesthetic issues prompted by the biblical texts and debated in the second century. This introduction first explains why Irenaeus is the next key player in our examination of early aesthetic response to the infancy narratives (§5.1.1), and then outlines the key elements in the argument of this chapter (§5.1.2).

5.1.1 Irenaeus' Theological Aesthetics

Largely influenced by the Balthasar's interpretation of Irenaeus within his multi-volume work, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*,[1] scholarship has increasingly acknowledged Irenaeus' early contribution to the field now known as theological aesthetics.[2] In Balthasar's view, Irenaeus' theological aesthetics was largely

[1] Cf. Balthasar 1984-1986: 31-94.
[2] See, e.g., Andia 1986; Osborn 2001; Behr 2013: 9 *et passim*; Edwards 2013: 93-96; Sigurdson 2016: 71ff.; Bushur 2017.

derived from his apologetic interest in refuting the 'aesthetic myth'[3] of Valentinus and his school. The Valentinians are often associated with the wider – and difficult to define – category of Gnosticism,[4] and are widely understood to be Irenaeus' primary opponents in *Haer*.[5] The mythological narratives of cosmological drama taught by the Valentinians and related groups were vivid and appealing to the mental imagination; as Dawson has stated in a more recent treatment of Valentinian Christianity, the school presented a faith that depended on personal vision, an 'apocalypse of the mind.'[6]

In large part prompted by such 'aesthetic myths' and other apologetic concerns, Irenaeus' own interest in sense perception and aesthetics features in two broad areas of his work: his Scriptural hermeneutics, and his theology of the Incarnation. Here I outline the basic contours of both of these areas, analyse a passage in which they intersect, and show how that intersection is particularly relevant to this study.

Irenaeus' hermeneutical interest in the senses is derived, ultimately, from his concern for how human beings can perceive the truth of the Christian faith. In developing his apologetic he establishes *physical* visual and aural links to the ministry of Jesus, eyewitnesses, and apostles; and employs a number of visual and aural *metaphors* in distinguishing his Scriptural hermeneutics from that of his opponents.

In a way that recalls the preface to the gospel of Luke,[7] it is clear that for Irenaeus, physical seeing and hearing are crucial modes of connection to a stable and living tradition passed down from Christ himself. Irenaeus' 'Letter to Florinus,' an extract of which is preserved in Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 5.20), illustrates this concept most vividly.[8] Florinus, a

[3] Balthasar 1984-1986: 33-44; Osborn 2001.
[4] On the Gnostics, see especially Grant 1961; Layton 1987; Williams 1996; Edwards 2009: 11-33; Brakke 2010.
[5] Cf. *Haer*. 1.Pref.2. On the Valentinians, see, e.g. Dawson 1992: 127-182; Markschies 1992; Williams 1996: 14-18; Lampe 2003: 292-318; Dunderberg 2005.
[6] Cf. Dawson 1992: 127-182.
[7] Cf. §3.1.1-2.
[8] For the Greek text and translation, respectively, cf. Bardy 1955: 61-63; Deferrari 1953: 329-330.

Roman presbyter whom Irenaeus had known since his youth, seems to have been attracted to a heretical theology – possibly of Marcion,[9] or of Valentinus.[10] In response, Irenaeus writes that the teachings held by Florinus are 'inharmonious' (ἀσύμφωνά) with those of the Church. His argument works backwards through a chain of concrete visual and aural experiences, beginning with the memory that both he and Florinus share: that of seeing and hearing the bishop Polycarp in Smyrna. Indeed, Irenaeus reinforces the memory by recalling that as a boy he beheld Florinus with Polycarp. Irenaeus' memory paints a vivid portrait: visually he remembers the precise location where the bishop sat, and how he appeared to the eyes; aurally he recalls the words of the bishop's discourse with the public. Irenaeus' listening to these words was such that they penetrated deeply into his heart, where he made notes of them as if on paper and continues to ponder them in memory.

The next link in the chain is Polycarp's own aural experiences with John and other apostles and eyewitnesses – hearing from them specific accounts of the Lord's works and teachings. Indeed, Polycarp's listening was so focused on these accounts that Irenaeus believes he would have 'stuffed his ears' upon hearing anything that did not align with what had been reported by these select individuals. And so finally, this collection of those 'who had seen the Lord' (variously termed ἑορακότες and αὐτόπται) establishes the last crucial link connecting Irenaeus and Florinus with direct visual and aural perception of Christ himself. Irenaeus reiterates this concept of linking visual and aural memories elsewhere in his corpus.[11]

In addition to these hermeneutical appeals to the physical senses, Irenaeus also employs a number of striking metaphors for seeing and hearing as he distinguishes his Scriptural hermeneutics from that of his opponents, and sets out to correct them. For

[9] Cf. Behr 2013: 50-52.
[10] Cf. Lampe 2003: 389-390; Marjanen and Luomanen 2005: 95.
[11] See, e.g., *Haer*. 3.3.1-4.

example, two visual metaphors at the beginning and end of *Haer*. Book 1 – a counterfeit jewel (*Haer*. 1.Pref.2), and a hidden, prowling beast (*Haer*. 1.31.4) – serve to underline Irenaeus' point about the deceptive 'appearance' of ideas, and the necessity for someone skilled to 'see' the difference between error and truth.

Irenaeus' famous mosaic metaphor (*Haer*. 1.8.1) further elaborates on this theme.[12] There, Irenaeus illustrates how his opponents take various parts of Scripture – words, lines, verses, pericopes, and narratives – and rearrange them hermeneutically into their own 'hypothesis' (ὑποθεσις) or 'fabrication' (πλάσμα), while simultaneously obscuring the original coherent whole. In the metaphor, Scriptural words are 'precious stones' (ψηφίδες) which have been crafted by a 'skillful artist' (σοφὸς τεχνίτης) into a 'beautiful portrait' (εἰκὼν καλή) of a 'man's figure' (ἀνθρώπου ἰδέα) – a king. But a second artist has come along, taken apart the mosaic and rearranged the stones into a badly composed image (μορφή) of a dog or fox – which he then tries to advertise as the original itself. Irenaeus' metaphorical σοφὸς τεχνίτης and εἰκὼν βασιλέως gesture toward two key concepts in his Scriptural hermeneutics: God as the divine artist, shaping the words of Scripture like a beautiful mosaic;[13] and Christ as the royal figure that all the 'precious stones' of Scripture make visible when viewed as a whole.[14] Irenaeus continues his mosaic metaphor in *Haer.* 1.9.4, where he gives his readers a key for recognizing the true image in Scripture: ὁ κανῶν τῆς ἀληθείας ('canon of truth'). In creed-like tones, Irenaeus lays out the contents of this canon: the basic narrative of the Christian faith in God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Behr calls this 'an attempt to articulate the hypothesis of

[12] Irenaeus himself was extremely well-travelled (cf. Secord 2012) – having lived in such widespread locales as Smyrna, Rome, and Lyons – and could have drawn upon his memory of seeing similar mosaics in any of these places. Cf. especially Fabia 1923, which analyses a number of Roman mosaics from Lyons.
[13] Elsewhere, Irenaeus also refers to Christ as 'artist' (e.g. *Haer.* 3.11.8).
[14] Cf. also *Haer*. 4.26.1.

the Christian faith' over against the ὑποθεσις of heretics, who have rearranged and confused its basic elements.[15]

Relatedly, Irenaeus employs another metaphor – this time an aural one. The metaphor of the συμφωνία ('harmony' or 'symphony')[16] is one that Irenaeus uses throughout his work in a variety of contexts.[17] We saw above that in his 'Letter to Florinus,' Irenaeus remarks that his friend's new beliefs are ἀσύμφωνά with the Church; in *Haer*.1.10.2, he uses the word again to express the unity of teaching within the Church. The metaphor explains how the 'canon of truth' is transmitted univocally by the churches and remains unchanging in the ears of believers, allowing them to discern anything that is out of harmony with what they have heard.[18]

Elsewhere, Irenaeus employs the musical metaphor to underscore harmony in the realms of creation, Scripture, and salvation history. He thus describes God's creation of diverse elements in the physical world in terms of the varying tones of a harp (*Haer.* 2.25.2); the texts of Scripture in terms of polyphony and consonance (*Haer.* 2.28.3); and the divine blending of various epochs in the history of mankind – the election of the Patriarchs, the formation of the people Israel, the era of the prophets, etc. – in a 'symphony (συμφωνία) of salvation' (*Haer.* 4.14.2; cf. 4.20.7).

Irenaeus' hermeneutical interest in the senses thus follows from his concern for how human beings can perceive the truth of the Christian faith. The physical senses of sight and hearing are crucial links to the ministry of Jesus, eyewitnesses, and apostles; and a number of visual and aural metaphors serve to illustrate the process of discerning truth in

[15] Cf. Behr 2013: 113-114.
[16] For discussion of the term in antiquity more broadly, cf. Betz 1974: 304-309; Bélis 1988.
[17] It is discussed as one of the 'key themes of Irenaeus' theology' in Behr 2013: 9, 52, 114, 125, 129, 189-192, 207.
[18] On the auditory nature of such 'rules of faith,' see further Harrison 2013: 96-102.

Scripture and in the created world more broadly – over against the deceptive appearances of heretical teachings, and in accord with the faith proclaimed by the church.

Besides his hermeneutics, the other key area in which aesthetics surfaces in Irenaeus' writings is in his theology of the Incarnation, which is profoundly visual.[19] Andia's terminology of a 'double visibilité'[20] is particularly useful in summarizing the dual aspects of the visuality of Christ revealing both God and man in Irenaeus' thought. Christ appears in flesh in order both to make God visible to human beings, and to show how human flesh – created in the image and likeness of God – is to conform to him who is the true image of God, as from the first Adam to the second.

Several key biblical texts underpin this theological statement. The first half of the statement, that the incarnate Christ renders the invisible God visible, is a fundamentally Johannine idea, put most succinctly in Jesus' own words: 'The one who sees (θεωρῶν) me sees (θεωρεῖ) the one who sent me' (John 12:45), and again, 'The one who sees (ἑωρακώς) me has seen (ἑώρακεν) the Father' (14:9). These statements are contextualized by John's prologue, which asserts both that 'we have beheld' (ἐθεασάμεθα) the glory of the Word made flesh (1:14), and that 'no one has ever seen (ἑώρακεν) God,' but the Son of God 'reveals' or 'exegetes' (ἐξηγήσατο) him (1:18).[21]

The second half of the statement brings together two biblical interpretations of the terminology 'image of God' – both as this applies to all created human beings, and as it applies to Christ. So in Genesis we read that humanity was created in God's image (צלם / εἰκών) and likeness (דמות / ὁμοίωσις) (Gen 1:26-27; 9:6); in the New Testament, Christ is declared to be the 'image' (εἰκών) of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15) and the 'imprint'

[19] On the Incarnation in Irenaeus' thought, cf. Wingren 1959; Balthasar 1984-1986: 70-90; Andia 1986; Osborn 2001; Steenberg 2009: 16-54; Cartwright 2012; Edwards 2013: 93-96; Presley 2015; Papandrea 2016: 96-97; Briggman 2018: 105-204; Daley 2018: 65-83.
[20] Andia 1986: 69 *et passim*. Cf. Cartwright 2012.
[21] Cf. also John 5:37; 1 Tim 1:17; 1 John 4:12 on the invisibility of God. For similar statements about Jesus' revelation of the Father, put in terms of 'knowing' rather than 'seeing,' cf. Matt 11:27; 1 John 5:20.

(χαρακτήρ) of his being (Heb 1:3). Irenaeus connects these two ideas in saying that Christ's Incarnation reveals the image that human beings are to steadily conform to in an ongoing process of becoming more fully who they were created to be in the first place.

This concept of continuing conformity to the image of God in Christ finds its antecedents in the New Testament as well. Paul describes it in terms of transformation (2 Cor 3:18), and renewal (Col 3:10). Relatedly, Paul portrays Christian sufferings as the death and life of Jesus 'made visible' (φανερωθῆ) in human bodies and human flesh (2 Cor 4:10-11). Irenaeus underscores the relationship between the image of God in created humanity and the image of God in Christ through reemphasizing the typological connection between Adam and the 'last Adam' – a connection he derives from Paul's statements in Rom 5:12-21 and 1 Cor 15:22, 45-49. The Pauline assertion that 'just as we have born the image (εἰκών) of the man of dust, we will also bear the image (εἰκών) of the man of heaven' (1 Cor 15:49) is especially significant.[22]

These aspects of Irenaeus' theology of the 'double visibilité' revealed in the Incarnation permeate his writings.[23] *Haer.* 4.20.7 is just one powerful example. Here, in Johannine fashion Irenaeus calls Christ the 'exegete' (Ἐξηγητής) of the Father, who through his Incarnation 'showed God to man and man to God…For the glory of God is the living man, and the life of man is the vision of God.'[24]

Having outlined these two broad areas of Irenaeus' theological aesthetics – his hermeneutics and his theology of the Incarnation – we can see that they intersect at a crucial point for the present study, the perception of Christ. In his hermeneutics, Irenaeus is concerned to link the Church's teachings back to those who were physical eyewitnesses of Jesus, and his mosaic metaphor powerfully illustrates his approach to Scriptural words

[22] For more on Paul's theology of image, cf. Rowe 2005; Heath 2013.
[23] See, e.g., *Haer.* 3.18.1; 3.20.2; 4.6.3, 5-7; 4.17.6; 4.20.1-2, 4-7; 5.6.1; 5.16.1-2; 5.36.3; *Epid.* 22; 47 *et passim*.
[24] Trans. Grant 1997: 153. Grk: Rousseau and Doutreleau 1965: 647-649.

as the 'precious stones' that are skilfully arranged to reveal the image of Christ. In his theology of the Incarnation, Irenaeus declares Christ as the visual mediator between God and man.

The intersection between these two areas comes distinctly into focus in *Haer.* 3.11.8,[25] a passage that famously figures in discussions of early Christian gospels and canon formation,[26] and provides the earliest attestation of identifying the four evangelists with the symbolic images derived from Ezekiel and Revelation.[27] Here Irenaeus presents a complex interpretation – explained through interlocking and multi-layered images – of the fourfold gospel, the τετράμορφον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον (Lat. *quadriforme Evangelium*). He begins with describing this fourfold gospel through the image of a four-pillared structure, supporting the whole church throughout the four regions of the world; its numerology is thus linked to the nature of ἐκκλησία and of κόσμος. His interpretive lens then moves to focus on Christ and the Cherubim around Christ's throne, and it is this section of the passage that is of interest here.

The figure of Christ first emerges in this description as Τεχνίτης Λόγος (Lat. *Artifex Verbum*), the one sitting 'upon the Cherubim' and appearing to human beings, the one who gave the fourfold gospel. Irenaeus underlines this description with an invocation of the voice of David in Septuagintal Psalm 79:2, praying for the advent (Lat. *adventus*) of Christ, 'You who sit upon the Cherubim, appear (ἐμφάνηθι / *appare*)!' Here David

[25] My reading of this passage is deeply influenced by Jane Heath's essay 'Picturing the Scriptures with Irenaeus,' presented at the Oxford New Testament seminar in 2017.
[26] See, e.g., Skeat 1992; Stanton 1997; Reed 2002; Watson 2013: 553-554.
[27] Cf. Ezek 1; 10; Rev 4; Neuss 1912. Countless iconographical examples could be cited here; the illuminated pages of the four evangelists from two different early gospel books prove illustrative. Folio 2r from the Book of Durrow (TCD MS 57) accords with Irenaeus' assignation of the lion symbol to the gospel of John and eagle to the gospel of Mark (rather than the eagle for John, lion for Mark that became traditional). Cf. Werner 1969; Nees 1978. More famously, folio 27v of the Book of Kells (TCD MS 58) exemplifies the traditional iconography. Cf. Meehan 2012.

petitions in place of Irenaeus' reader,[28] who now looks into the throne room with David and invites Christ to appear.[29]

What immediately appears before the eyes of Irenaeus' reader, however, is not a visual description of Christ, but of the four faces of the Cherubim – the lion, ox, man, and eagle – each of which images reveal something about the person and work of Christ: 'For the Cherubim are four-faced (τετραπρόσωπα), and their faces are images (εἰκόνες) of the disposition (πραγματείας) of the Son of God.' The lion is thus an image of Christ's royal power, the ox of his role as a priest performing sacrifices, the man of his human advent, and the eagle of his giving of the Spirit.

Irenaeus next connects these four images of the Cherubim with the four gospels, through their mutual gathering around the person of Christ: 'And the gospels therefore are in accord (σύμφωνα) with these, among whom sit Christ Jesus.' In Irenaeus' visual argumentation, Christ 'sits among' the four gospels, just as he sits among the Cherubim in his throne room.[30] Therefore, like the Cherubim, each of the gospels also possesses an image that discloses something about Christ. Irenaeus fleshes this out through citing the beginning lines of each gospel and linking each with one of the images previously described. Thus, as the image of the lion demonstrated Christ's power and primacy, so also does the gospel of John, beginning with 1:1, 3.[31] As the image of the ox revealed Christ's sacerdotal character, so also does the gospel of Luke, whose 'priestly' aspect begins with an account of Zechariah the priest (1:9). As the image of the man exhibited Christ's human descent, so also does the gospel of Matthew, who begins with Jesus' genealogy from David and Abraham (1:1). And as the image of the eagle disclosed

[28] I am indebted to Jane Heath for this observation.
[29] One might wonder what kind of space Irenaeus imagines here: the Ark of the tabernacle known by David, the Temple throne room described in Ezekiel, or the heavenly one in Revelation? The passage seems to combine the liturgical space of all three.
[30] There is some slippage here between the four 'faces' of each angel, and the Cherubim themselves.
[31] In later iconography, Irenaeus' symbols for Mark and John were switched.

Christ's gift of the Spirit, so also does the gospel of Mark, whose 'prophetic' character begins with invoking the prophet Isaiah (1:1-2). Irenaeus summarizes: 'Of what quality the disposition (πραγματεία) of the Son of God is, therefore, such is the form (μορφή) of the animals; and of what quality the form of the animals, such is the character (χαρακτὴρ) of the gospel. For the animals are four-formed (τετράμορφα), the gospel is four-formed, and four-formed is the disposition of the Lord.'

It is important to remember here that Irenaeus' powerful claim – that the sight of Christ can be attained through reading gospel texts – gains further potency through complex intertextual associations with other throne room visions in Jewish and Christian literature. We have observed in other sections of this study that the Temple was understood to be a place of unique visual encounter with God;[32] an important aspect of this tradition was the genre of prophetic and apocalyptic visions of God within the Temple, as within a throne room (e.g. Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1, 10). These Scriptural texts speak of the overpowering visuality of the divine presence amid three-dimensional details such as the four-faced cherubim, spinning wheels, flapping wings, and sparkling jewels (cf. Ezek 1). Irenaeus' interpretation powerfully evokes such traditions while making the innovative assertion that the gospels themselves mediate the experience of seeing God.[33]

Haer. 3.11.8 thus intricately interlocks Scriptural hermeneutics, sense perception, and the Incarnation. Visuality is operative both in hermeneutical terms, in the four images of the gospels; and in Incarnational terms, beginning with the psalmist inviting Christ to 'appear.' Moreover, these two realms are linked via the sense of sight: it is precisely in

[32] Cf. §3.2.2; §3.3.3; §4.6.

[33] Of course, these Scriptural traditions have multiple additional and overlapping interpretive trajectories in Jewish and Christian mystical and apocalyptic literature. On the interpretation of Ezekiel 1 in particular, cf. Halperin 1988; Christman 2005. On Hekhalot literature cf. Boustan, Himmelfarb et al. 2013; and on Merkabah mysticism cf. Eskola 2019. On overlaps between Jewish mystical and gnostic readings, cf. Quispel 1980; Deutsch 1995.

viewing the four images of the gospels that the psalmist's appeal is answered and the four-formed 'disposition' of Christ begins to appear.

It is Irenaeus' theological aesthetics, and more precisely, this intersection of his aesthetics between the realms of Scriptural hermeneutics and Incarnational theology, that distinguishes him as a crucial next case study in our examination of early aesthetic response to the infancy narratives. Indeed, these two areas of Irenaeus' aesthetics also saliently combine, I suggest, in Irenaeus' exegesis of the New Testament infancy narratives, which works apologetically within a milieu in which perception of Christ at his birth was a point of critical debate. We turn now to outline the further particulars of that argument.

5.1.2 The Argument of this Chapter

With this wider framework of Irenaeus' theological aesthetics in mind, we can begin to make several points about his more particular 'aesthetic response' to the infancy narratives in relation to it. Firstly, as I have just stated, this aesthetic response operates within wider aesthetic concerns about hermeneutics and Incarnational theology. Secondly, and conversely, Irenaeus' reception of infancy material significantly *contributes to* his wider theological aesthetics, as this chapter will show. And thirdly, as we have observed with his aesthetic comments more broadly, Irenaeus' interpretation of visual and aural elements in the infancy narratives is strikingly motivated by apologetic interests. This final point forms the basis for this chapter's primary argument.

I argue in this chapter that Irenaeus' 'aesthetic response' to the infancy narratives is cast in a decidedly apologetic mode that responds not only to the Matthean and Lukan texts, but also to various heretical interpretations of the aesthetic elements in those texts. Irenaeus writes within a milieu of intense Christological speculations that coalesce around

what Hannah has called the 'three lightning rods' of controversy: Christ's birth, death, and resurrection.[34] Here we are concerned primarily with the first of these 'lightning rods,' which took ancient readers to the heart of questions about Christ's Incarnation: *How* did the 'Word become flesh,' as John's gospel proclaims? Did God really enter Mary's womb and undergo birth as a human infant, as Matthew and Luke seem to attest, or did he only appear to do so? For such questions, interpretation of the infancy narratives, and specifically issues of perception within the infancy narratives, became key to the debates. Various groups provided different answers to these questions, which this chapter will explore.

The argument proceeds in three sections. In §5.2 I position Irenaeus' general approach to the infancy narratives within a milieu of speculation concerning appearance and reality at the birth of Christ. In the next two sections, I focus more specifically on two ways in which Irenaeus deals with the perceptual confusion of opposing interpretations: first through his interpretation of Mary's role in the visual revelation of the infant Christ (§5.3), and second through his interpretation of various visual witnesses to the birth of Christ (§5.4).

A final note remains to be made about the main primary source for this chapter's discussion. Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* is preserved in its entirety only in Latin; however, for portions of the text we possess Greek fragments that help to reconstruct the (likely) Greek original.[35] In this chapter I give priority to the Greek where we have fragmentary evidence to construct it, and cite the Latin for sections lacking this evidence. At various points both Greek and Latin are provided together.

[34] Hannah 1999: 167. Hannah is speaking specifically about Docetism, but this description could characterize the controversy with other christologies as well.
[35] Cf. Rousseau and Doutreleau's multi-volume critical edition (SC).

5.2 Positioning Irenaeus' Approach to the Infancy Narratives among Others

At one point in *Haer*., Irenaeus makes the assertion that the common denominator of all heresy is a denial of the Incarnation. This passage, which features various interpretations of the birth of Christ in particular, provides a point of entry for the discussion in this section:

> As to the Incarnation and Passion, some attribute them to that Jesus who was made by special economy, who they say passed through (διοδευσαι) Mary, as water through a pipe; others again to the son of the Demiurge, on whom (they say) descended (κατελθεῖν) that Jesus who is made by economy: others again say that Jesus indeed was born (γεγεννῆσθαι) of Joseph and Mary, and that Christ descended (κατεληλυθέναι) upon Him, the Christ from the higher aeons, being without flesh (ἄσαρκον) and incapable of sufferings (ἀπαθῆ). *However, by no rule of the heretics was the Word of God made flesh*. For should any one examine the rules of them all, he will find that they all bring in the Word of God as without flesh, and incapable of suffering; as also the Christ who is in the higher regions. For some think that He was manifested (πεφηνέναι) as a human being transfigured (μεταμορφωθέντα), while they deny both His birth (γεγεννῆσθαι) and His Incarnation (σεσαρκῶσθαι): others again, that He assumed (ἀνειληφέναι) not even the figure (μορφήν) of a man, but as a dove came down upon (καταληλυθέναι) that Jesus who was born of Mary. To show then that all these are false witnesses, the Lord's disciple says, 'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' (*Haer.* 3.11.3)[36]

In this passage, Irenaeus contends with numerous interpretations of Jesus' origins. Moreover, he contends with issues of sense perception, specifically with regard to perceived contrasts between appearance and reality. Various visual terms in the passage above make this point clear: Christ 'passed through' Mary and thus merely 'manifested (πεφηνέναι) as a human being transfigured (μεταμορφωθέντα),' or he descended upon the man Jesus, never taking human form (μορφήν). In these interpretations, the appearance of Jesus is a deception; a hiding of a transcendent being who does not deign to take on flesh.

In order to understand Irenaeus' aesthetic response to the infancy narratives, it is necessary first to appreciate his opponents' own interpretations of aesthetic issues at the

[36] Slightly adapted from Keble 1872: 231-232. Italics mine. Grk: Rousseau and Doutreleau 1974: 147-149.

birth of Christ, and to set out the reasons why Irenaeus thought it was necessary to refute them. In this section, I tackle both issues. First I examine four heretical Christologies attested in the second century, specifically with regard to how they interpret the birth of Christ. Next, I interrogate Irenaeus' writings to discover several reasons why Irenaeus thought that the physical birth of Christ – and the witness of the New Testament infancy narratives – was worth defending. This will pave the way for more specific examples of Irenaeus' exegesis of the infancy narratives in §5.3 and §5.4.

Papandrea's recent treatment of early Christologies provides a helpful framework for understanding the different conceptualizations of Christ that Irenaeus encountered.[37] He describes four major positions that diverged from the Logos Christology of Irenaeus and other orthodox writers, each of which conceptualized Christ with varying imagery: as angel (one form of Adoptionism), as spirit (another, more prominent, form of Adoptionism), as phantom (Docetism/docetic Gnosticism), and as cosmic mind (other 'quasi-docetic' Gnostic groups, including Valentinians). The difficulties with precisely defining the nature of such groups aside, these four images provide a helpful starting point in our investigation.

Papandrea begins with the Christology he terms 'angel Adoptionism.' In general, adoptionists separate the human Jesus from a spiritual Christ who dwells in him temporarily, but Papandrea further defines two schools of thought within this position: 'one that accepted the virgin birth of Jesus, and one that did not.'[38] Angel Adoptionism constitutes the former: '[W]hile most adoptionists would say that the indwelling took place at Jesus' baptism, these adoptionists apparently believed that the indwelling took place proactively at his conception, the result of divine foreknowledge. Thus they could

[37] Cf. Papandrea 2016.
[38] Cf. Papandrea 2016: 23-24. Cf. Origen, *Cels*. 5.61, which describes a 'twofold sect of Ebionites' along these lines.

accept the mainstream Christian doctrine of the virgin birth without ascribing divinity to the person of Jesus.'[39] In this narrative of the event of Jesus' birth, Mary's son is not divine, and not an angel himself; rather, he is a human being indwelt by a separate angelic entity.[40] Papandrea suggests a number of groups and sources that seem to have assented to this form of Adoptionism, including a minority of the Ebionites;[41] the Elkasite sect; *Sibylline Oracle* 8; The *Shepherd of Hermas*; and Lucian of Antioch.[42]

The more prominent form of Adoptionism Papandrea terms 'spirit Adoptionism.' This version of Adoptionism denied the virgin birth, asserting that Jesus was the natural son of Mary and Joseph. It held that the moment of indwelling occurred at Jesus' baptism, when he is descended upon by the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. One prominent group to espouse this Christology in the second century were the Ebionites, whom Irenaeus engages at a number of places.[43] He groups their Christology with that of Carpocrates and Cerinthus.[44] A Christian sect with strong Jewish tendencies, the Ebionites used only Matthew's (or a version of Matthew) out of all the gospels, but were well-known to have dispensed with Matthew's infancy narrative because of their disbelief in the virgin birth.[45] Interestingly, when Irenaeus himself discusses the Ebionites' use of Matthew, he does not mention this excision (cf. *Haer*. 1.26.2). Papandrea suggests the possibility that Irenaeus knew of some Ebionites who retained Matthew 1-2 – i.e. a minority of the sect who espoused the slightly altered version of Adoptionism described above.[46]

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[39] Papandrea 2016: 26.
[40] See, e.g., Tertullian, *Carn. Chr*. 14, which describes an Ebionite Christology where Jesus is a man and an angel indwells him.
[41] While most Ebionites denied the virgin birth, others appear to have accepted it. Cf. Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 16.12; *Cels*. 5.61; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.27.2-3; Häkkinen 2005: 266-267.
[42] Cf. Papandrea 2016: 28-30.
[43] E.g. *Haer*. 1.26.2; 3.21.1; 5.1.3.
[44] Cf. *Haer*. 1.25.1; 1.26.1-2; Häkkinen 2005: 266-267. Note, however, that Papandrea 2016 groups Carpocrates and Cerinthus under a Gnostic, 'cosmic mind' Christology (72-73). Cf. Papandrea 2016: 36-41 for discussion of other figures who held a 'spirit Adoptionist' Christology.
[45] Cf. Papandrea 2016: 38-40.
[46] Cf. Papandrea 2016: 27.

A very different conceptualization of Christ was held by so-called docetics and docetic gnostics. In this Christology, Jesus was not the natural born son of Mary or Joseph. He was not a human at all, but a 'phantom,' to use Papandrea's terminology. Two Greek terms are important in understanding docetic Christologies: φάντασμα (phantasm, or phantom), and δοκέω ('to seem' or 'appear'). Jesus was a ghost-like phantasm, who only appeared to be human. Within this category Papandrea further defines two slightly different positions: for 'pure' docetics, the phantom Jesus was incorporeal and intangible; while for 'quasi-docetics,' Jesus had a tangible body (though it was not a human body). The 'pure' docetic position seems to have arisen very early, as arguments for Jesus' corporeal tangibility appear already in 1 John, Ignatius of Antioch, and the *Epistula Apostolorum*.[47] Papandrea lists numerous sources that seem to have espoused a purely docetic Christology to varying levels of extent in the second century,[48] including multiple apocryphal and Nag Hammadi texts;[49] Cerdo;[50] Cerdo's student, Marcion;[51] and Saturninus.[52]

With regard to the birth of Christ, 'pure' docetics often argued that there was no birth at all, but that Jesus simply 'appeared' on earth as an illusory fully grown man at the time of his baptism. This was famously the view of Marcion, who cut out the infancy narrative from his own reconstructed Lukan gospel.[53] Irenaeus summarizes Saturninus' view of Christ as 'without birth, without body, and without figure' (*Haer*. 1.24.2).

The 'quasi-docetic' position is attested by a diverse variety of texts and figures in antiquity, and is especially characteristic of many so-called 'gnostic' groups, according to

[47] Cf. Hannah 1999: 167; Papandrea 2016: 45-46.
[48] Cf. Papandrea 2016: 51-62.
[49] E.g. *Gospel of Thomas*; *Acts of Thomas*; *Acts of John*; *Acts of Andrew*; *Concept of our Great Power*; *Sophia of Jesus Christ*; *Testimony of Truth*.
[50] Cf. Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.27.1; 3.4.3.
[51] Cf. Irenaeus, *Haer* 1.27.2-4; 3.4.3.
[52] Cf. Irenaeus, *Haer* 1.24.1-2.
[53] Cf. Irenaeus; *Haer*. 3.14.3-4; Hippolytus, *Haer*. 7.19; 10.15; Tertullian, *Marc*. 3.8; 4.7; 4.21; *Carn. Chr*. 2ff.

Papandrea. This Christology still denies that Jesus was a human being, but concedes that he had something of a tangible body – this body was 'luminous' or 'ethereal,' made of spiritual matter. In taking this middle ground position, quasi-docetic gnostic groups look very similar to adoptionist groups who separate the man Jesus from a spiritual, indwelt Christ – the difference being that while adoptionists assign humanity to half of this composite entity, docetics would not allow humanity in any aspect of their conceptualization of Christ. The various gnostic mythologies displaying this form of 'quasi-Docetism' would assign different names to their philosophizing versions of Christ – Christ, Son, Savior, Λόγος, Νοῦς, etc. – which Papandrea summarizes under the general concept of a 'cosmic mind.'[54]

The 'quasi-docetic' Christology appears in various second-century accounts of Jesus' birth and infancy. Papandrea takes the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* as an example in which the child Jesus possesses a tangible body that could be bumped into or struck (e.g. *IGT* 14.2), but which is not altogether human (e.g. *IGT* 7, 17).[55] Many have also found Isaiah's vision of the birth scene in the *Ascension of Isaiah* to espouse a docetic Christology,[56] which perhaps is more 'quasi-docetic' in Papandrea's categorization. This text is worth examining in more detail:

> It came to pass that when [Joseph and Mary] were alone that Mary straightway looked with her eyes and saw a small babe, and she was astonished. And after she had been astonished, her womb was found as formerly before she had conceived. And when her husband Joseph said unto her: 'What has astonished you?' his eyes were opened and he saw the infant and praised God…And many said: 'She has not borne a child, nor has a midwife gone up (to her), nor have we heard the cries of (labour) pains.' And they were all blinded respecting Him and they all knew regarding Him, though they knew not whence He was.…And I [Isaiah] saw…that this has escaped all the heavens and all the princes and all the gods of this world. And I saw: In Nazareth He sucked the breast as a babe and as is customary in order that He might not be recognized.[57]

[54] Cf. Papandrea 2016: 67-70.
[55] Cf. Papandrea 2016: 68.
[56] E.g. Charles 1900; Norelli 1994; Knight 1996; Knight 2002. See, however, Hannah 1999.
[57] *Asc. Isa*. 11.8-10, 14, 16-17. Trans. Charles 1900: 76-78, with slight modifications.

In this text, the birth is strongly visual, as both parents suddenly 'see' the babe appear before them. Mary is understood to have gone through conception and pregnancy, but does not feel the pains of labor, nor seems to undergo labor at all. However, the infant does take nourishment from Mary's breast – a sign, perhaps, of a 'quasi-docetic' concession to some form of corporeality. This, however, is also stated to be a kind of disguise to bar 'recognition.' Indeed, the passage clarifies before this that all were 'blinded' to who he really was; he even escaped the notice of 'all the gods of this world.' This line or a related tradition is sometimes thought to be the focus of Ignatius of Antioch's anti-docetic rhetoric, particularly in *Eph*. 19.1: 'Now the virginity of Mary and her giving birth were hidden (ἔλαθεν) from the ruler of this age, as was also the death of the Lord – three mysteries to be loudly proclaimed, yet which were accomplished in the silence (ἡσυχία) of God.'[58] In Ignatius' reading, the hiddenness and silence surrounding Christ's birth were not deceptions, but worked according to divine plan.[59]

Various gnostic groups use the 'quasi-docetic' position in their mythological narratives about how Christ's true identity was disguised – much as we see in *Asc. Isa*. Irenaeus, as we have observed, knows of those who assert that Jesus passed through Mary 'as water through a pipe.' Both he and Hippolytus identify this teaching with the Valentinians, who taught that Christ was a composite of corporeal (though un-human) and spiritual elements brought together in a complicated mythology.[60] Similarly, for Basilides, Christ is the disguised Νοῦς (cf. *Haer*. 1.24.3-4);[61] for the Sethians, he is the disguised 'seed of Seth' born from a virgin womb.[62] These figures and groups represent a diversity

[58] Trans. Holmes 2007: 196-199. Cf. Schoedel 1985: 89; Knight 2002: 100. Cf. also Ignatius, *Magn*. 11; *Trall* 9-10; *Smyrn*. 1-3.
[59] Cf. further discussion in §6.3.4.
[60] Cf. Irenaeus, *Haer*. 1.7.2; 3.11.3; Hippolytus, *Haer*. 6.35.5-7. Cf. Dunderberg 2005: 76.
[61] See further Pearson 2005.
[62] See analysis of a birth narrative in a Sethian document, *The Holy Book of the Invisible Spirit* (or *Gospel of the Egyptians*) in Williams 2005: 41-42.

of expression in their accounts of Jesus' origins. However, they all contain a birth narrative of some kind, and they all deny his humanity while allowing some form of corporeality. Such accounts differ from the 'pure' docetism of Marcion, for example, who denies any birth or childhood at all.

This discussion of four different Christological positions helps to flesh out Irenaeus' statement in *Haer*. 3.11.3, with which we started this section. Clearly, the second century brimmed with speculation concerning the appearance, corporeality, tangibility, and nature of who Christ was at his birth. And indeed, various sects wanted to do away with the infancy narratives altogether: the Ebionites utilized the gospel of Matthew but cut out Matt 1-2, while Marcion dispensed with Luke 1-2 in his reconstructed Lukan gospel. For Irenaeus, however, the episodes of Jesus' conception, birth, and childhood are vital components of the gospel narrative (see, e.g., his comments about Luke's infancy narrative against Marcion in *Haer.* 3.14.3). Moreover, against those heretical Christologies which retained an infancy account, Irenaeus read in Matthew and Luke a very different understanding of physical birth, and witness to the divine. But why, for Irenaeus, are these episodes 'essential parts of the gospel'? And why in particular is the physical birth of Christ as both God and man, the 'Word made flesh,' worth defending? In what remains of this section, I point to three reasons why Irenaeus' interpretation of the infancy narratives is so integral to his theology as a whole, and thus crucial to defend.

Firstly, Irenaeus takes Christ's physical birth and infancy as reflections of God's solidarity with mankind, both in terms of natural and spiritual growth. On this solidarity with natural human growth, *Haer.* 2.22.4 is the key text:

> [Christ] neither rejected nor went beyond the human condition and did not abolish in his person the law of human growth, but he sanctified every age by the resemblance (*similitudinem*) we have with him. In fact, he came to save all men through himself: all, I mean, who through him are reborn into God, infants and children and boys and young men and elders. Therefore he passed through every age, and among infants was an infant, sanctifying

> infants; among children a child, sanctifying those who have this age and likewise becoming for them a model of piety and justice and submission (Luke 2:41-52); among young men a young man, becoming a model to young men and sanctifying them for the Lord. Thus also he was an elder among elders,[63] in order to be a perfect master in all, not only in his interpretation of the truth but also in his age, at the same time sanctifying the elders and becoming a model for them.[64]

That Christ did not merely appear on earth as a fully grown man, but underwent normal human processes of growth from birth is significant for Irenaeus because Christ's salvation of mankind is deeply connected to 'the resemblance we have with him.' In using this visual term, *similitudinem,* he alludes to the mutual likeness between humanity and Christ as 'image of God' (cf. §5.1.1). For Irenaeus this is no mere figure of speech, but a physical reality.

In *Haer.* 4.38.1-2, Irenaeus similarly appeals to Christ's infancy in solidarity with mankind – this time not in terms of natural human growth, but in terms of man's spiritual 'childishness' as a created being. To the question, 'Could God not render man perfect from the beginning?' Irenaeus responds by analogizing the relationship between creator and creature to that between a mother and her infant child: 'As then the Mother is able indeed to bestow perfect nourishment on her babe (βρέφει), but the babe is as yet incapable of receiving the nourishment which is too old for itself: so God also was indeed able Himself to bestow on man perfection from the beginning, but man was incapable of receiving it: for he was a child (νήπιος).'[65] This passage coheres with several others throughout Irenaeus' corpus that speak of Adam and Eve as 'children' (νήπιοι) in the Garden of Eden.[66] Here, in describing Christ's recapitulative activity, Irenaeus writes that God could have come to mankind in 'incorruptible glory,' but chose to communicate himself to men as milk to infants, so that we would receive him: 'And for this cause the

[63] In *Haer.* 2.22.5-6, Irenaeus argues that Jesus was approaching age fifty when he died.
[64] Trans. Grant 1997: 114. Lat: Rousseau and Doutreleau 1982: 220.
[65] Slightly adapted from Keble 1872: 436. Grk: Rousseau and Doutreleau 1965: 949.
[66] Cf. *Haer.* 3.22.4; 3.23.5; *Epid.* 12; 14. For discussion, cf. Steenberg 2004.

Son of God *became a babe with man* (συνενηπίασεν / *coinfantiatum*), perfect as He was: not on His own account, but because of man's childishness, being so comprehended, as man was able to comprehend Him.'[67] For Irenaeus, Christ's infancy significantly recapitulates the 'childishness' of Adam, in a parallel that does not clearly differentiate between the metaphorical and the physical.[68]

The second reason why Irenaeus attaches theological significance to the physical birth of Christ is because of its necessity, in his mind, for a credible account of Christ's redemptive death and resurrection. In *Epid.* 38-39, he asks rhetorically, 'For he who took not the beginning of man, how could he receive his end? Now, if He was not born, neither did He die; and, if He died not, neither did He rise from the dead; and, if He rose not from the dead, neither did He vanquish death and bring its reign to nought.'[69] This passage underlines the integral place of Christ's birth in Irenaeus' theology, as the crucial starting point of his redemptive work in the Incarnation.

A third fundamental principle underlies Irenaeus' defense of the infancy narratives. This reason deals more specifically with the perceptual aspect of various heretical interpretations of the birth of Christ, and has to do with the very trustworthiness of God. Irenaeus insists that God did not deceive men's eyes when the Word became flesh: 'But if, not being made flesh, He [only] showed (*parebat*) Himself as flesh, His work was not true. However *what He appeared, that indeed He was* (*Quod autem parebat, hoc et erat*), God summing up anew in Himself the old formation of man' (*Haer.* 3.18.7).[70] For Irenaeus, whose Incarnational theology is expressed as the invisible God becoming visible, and as a demonstration of the true image of God in man (cf. §5.1.1), there is a fundamental

[67] Trans. Keble 1872: 437. Italics mine. Grk/Lat: Rousseau and Doutreleau 1965: 950.
[68] It is unclear whether Irenaeus' understood Adam and Eve as 'children' in a metaphorical or truly physical sense. Still, Steenberg rightly underlines the fact that 'if Adam was never an infant, was never a child, the parallelism behind Christ's recapitulative activity is substantially hindered.' (2004: 12).'
[69] Trans. MacKenzie and Robinson 2002: 12.
[70] Trans. Keble 1872: 281. Italics mine. Lat: Rousseau and Doutreleau 1974: 370.

correspondence between the appearance of Christ, and the reality of his being – that is, both divine and human. Both aspects were perceivable by witnesses to his birth.

We began this section with Irenaeus' assertion that the common denominator of all heresy is a denial of the Incarnation – a statement that specifically highlighted his opponents' perceptual confusions surrounding the birth of Christ (*Haer*. 3.11.3). We examined more closely four different heretical positions, and then outlined three reasons why Irenaeus felt so strongly about defending the witness of the infancy narratives, and the theological understanding of Christ's physical birth as both God and man. In the next two sections, we turn to examine more closely how Irenaeus makes exegetical use of the infancy narratives to combat the perceptual confusions of his opponents: through elucidating the role of Mary (§5.3), and interpreting various witnesses to the birth of Christ (§5.4).

5.3 Mary's Role in the Visual Revelation of the Infant Christ

As our discussion in §5.2 indicates, the figure of Mary was invoked in multiple heretical discussions about Christ's birth in the second century, and these fall under two basic categories.[71] Adoptionists argued that Mary gave birth to a purely human son on whom a spiritual being descended – either at conception (thus preserving the virgin birth), or much later at his baptism (denying the virgin birth, and claiming Joseph as the father). Those docetics who retained a birth narrative contended, on the other hand, that Mary was merely a vessel through which a spiritual being flowed like water, and consequently that the infant she delivered received none of her humanity, but was human in appearance only. Each position involves a contrast between *appearance* on the one hand, and divine

[71] See also Steenberg 2004: 119-125.

or human *presence*, on the other. Mary herself is coopted to contribute to a deception in either case.

For Irenaeus, neither option is sustainable: Mary gave birth to the Word of God made flesh. Irenaeus' responses to these views interpret Mary's role instead as actively contributing to the visual revelation of her Son's identity – a stance resonant with *PJ* 7.2, discussed in §4.3.4. This interpretation constitutes his 'aesthetic response' to two infancy passages: Matthew's quotation of Isa 7:14, which Irenaeus deploys against adoptionists; and Luke's account of the Annunciation, which he marshals against docetics. This section examines both aspects.

In §2.2.2, we analyzed the dimensions of the 'auditory image' of virgin and child conveyed first as a 'sign' to King Ahaz (Isa 7:14), and then spoken into Matthew's text in Matt 1:22-23. Irenaeus invokes this Matthean connection specifically in his arguments against adoptionists who deny the divinity of Christ.[72] Several aspects of his interpretation of this 'sign' are worth highlighting. Noting Ahaz's hesitancy to 'ask a sign of the Lord' (Isa 7:11-12), Irenaeus points out that this sign is entirely a divine gift: on the part of mankind, it is unasked for (*non postulavit*; *Haer*. 3.19.3), and unlooked for (*inopinatum*; *Haer*. 3.21.6). The Isaian message prophesies both human and divine attributes in the future Son (*Haer*. 3.21.4), but it is the name Emmanuel, 'God with us,' that Irenaeus finds especially potent against adoptionists, interweaving the account in Matthew with Luke's account of the divine overshadowing of Mary, and Elizabeth's blessing of the fruit in Mary's womb (*Haer*. 3.21.4-5). In a different move from that of Matthew (though potentially resonant with Luke 1:27), Irenaeus also links Isaiah's exasperated address to the 'house of David' (Isa 7:13) with Mary's own Davidic lineage – adding further

[72] Cf. *Haer*. 3.19.1-3; 3.20.3; 3.21.1-6; 4.23.1; 4.33.11. Previously, Justin Martyr had highlighted this same text in his apologetics; cf. *Dial*. 43.8; 67.1-2; 68.6; 71.3; 84.1; *1 Apol*. 33.

effectiveness to the prophetic fulfillment (*Haer*. 3.21.5).[73] Joseph, for his part, was convinced by the prophetic message spoken to him, and was obedient to it; Irenaeus asserts that it is only those who do not know the Scriptures who call Joseph the child's father (*Haer*. 4.23.1).

These various components of Irenaeus' interpretation of Isa 7:14 // Matt 1:22-23 coalesce around the unveiling of the infant Christ's identity. The aesthetic impulses of Irenaeus' hermeneutics allow him to make these connections: the divine artist who arranges the mosaic stones of Scripture (cf. §5.1.1) was the originator of the sign that points to the figures of Mary and the infant Christ – Emmanuel. Against adoptionists who deny Christ's divinity and specifically the virgin birth, Irenaeus relies on a view of Scripture as a mosaic, a harmony, pointing to Christ. In that reading, it is precisely Mary's virginity – prophesied centuries before by Isaiah to her Davidic ancestor – that participates in the visual revelation of the divine nature of her Son.

Mary also plays a role in Irenaeus' arguments against docetics' perceptual confusions about the infant Christ's humanity. We have already discussed Irenaeus' Incarnational theology, which involves the concept of the 'image of God' in mankind, and Christ's solidarity with mankind in his thorough recapitulation of Adam (cf. §5.1.1; §5.2). For Irenaeus this means there must be a resemblance between Adam's formation out of dust, and the formation of Christ. He finds that resemblance in the virgin womb of Mary:

> But if the first Adam was taken from the earth and fashioned by the Word of God, it was necessary that the Word himself, working in himself the recapitulation of Adam, possessed a like origin. One might object, why did God not take dust anew and why did he make what he fashioned proceed from Mary? So that there would not be another fashioning nor another work fashioned to be saved but that the same being might be recapitulated, with the likeness (ὁμοιότητος) preserved (*Haer*. 3.21.10).[74]

[73] See further Bockmuehl 2011.
[74] Trans. Grant 1997: 139. Grk.: Rousseau and Doutreleau 1974: 430-431.

The term ὁμοιότης often conveys a likeness in visual appearance or form, though it encompasses many more elements of resemblance.[75] For Irenaeus, the 'likeness' between Christ and Adam is preserved in how each came into being, an idea he develops later in drawing an analogy between the 'virgin earth' out of which Adam was formed, and the virgin womb of Mary (*Epid*. 32). Docetics who deny the humanity of Christ through Mary also 'reject that likeness (ὁμοιότητα)' (*Haer*. 3.22.1).[76] From Mary, Jesus receives characteristically human attributes: bodily needs such as hunger, human emotions, and the capacity for suffering (*Haer*. 3.22.2). In Irenaeus' view Mary thus contributes significantly to the revelation of the human likeness between Adam and Christ.

Mary's key role in the revelation of her Son's human identity and in his redemptive work on behalf of humanity is further highlighted through Irenaeus' exegesis of Luke's Annunciation. Mary's active obedience to Gabriel's words (cf. 1:38) is presented as a recapitulative parallel to the disobedience of Eve.[77] Justin Martyr had previously drawn this connection (cf. *Dial*. 100), but Irenaeus' interpretation introduces a strikingly visual motif: that Mary's obedience 'unties' the knot effected through Eve (*Haer*. 3.22.4).[78] Both women's actions, he elaborates, follow from their auditory orientations: whereas Eve listened to a fallen angel instead of the word of God, Mary listened to God's messenger and was persuaded to obedience. Irenaeus thus takes Luke's presentation of a listening Mary further theologically, asserting that her listening and obedience provided the impetus for the salvation of the human race (*Haer*. 5.19.1).[79]

For Irenaeus, then, Mary contributes significantly to his defense of the correspondence between appearance and reality in the Incarnation, both in terms of

[75] Cf. Schneider 1967.
[76] Trans. Keble 1872: 294. Grk: Rousseau and Doutreleau 1974: 431.
[77] Cf. *Haer*. 3.22.4; 5.19.1; *Epid.* 33. For discussion, cf. Pelikan 1996: 39-53; Steenberg 2004; Shoemaker 2016: 43-47.
[78] The image is interpreted in art, e.g. Johann Georg Schmidtner's painting (ca. 1700). Cf. also Dunlop 1997.
[79] Cf. our discussion of Luke's listening Mary in §3.2.3.

Christ's humanity and divinity. Applying his theological aesthetics to an exegesis of the infancy narratives, Irenaeus particularly draws out details from Matt 1:22-23 and Luke 1:26-38 that serve to underline Mary's unique role in the revelation of her Son's identity against both adoptionists and docetics. In spending time on Mary's role in Scripture and salvation history, Irenaeus is able to assert that the human and divine aspects of the infant Christ's identity are not deceptions, but realities visible in in the Scriptural sign given by God, and in his human likeness from a human mother.

5.4 Interpreting Visual Witnesses to the Infant Christ

In confronting second-century confusions of appearance and reality in the Incarnation, Irenaeus also is concerned with interpreting the biblical accounts of visual witnesses to the birth and infancy of Christ. As we began to observe already in §5.2, Irenaeus' opponents had their own interpretations of those who beheld the infant Jesus. In the *Ascension of Isaiah*, for example, Mary and Joseph suddenly 'see' the infant appear, without the physicality of birth; other witnesses are said to be 'blinded' to his real identity by his appearance, and indeed the infant's nursing is described as a disguise to keep from being 'recognized.'[80] The 'quasi-docetic' Christology of this text is comparable with what Irenaeus describes of the Valentinians: Christ passing through Mary 'as water through a pipe' (e.g. *Haer*. 1.7.2; 3.11.3). In this section, we probe more deeply into the Valentinians' versions of witnessing the infant Christ (as portrayed by Irenaeus), and then examine Irenaeus' own interpretations of the infancy narratives' witnesses.

While the Valentinians seem to have held that the infant Christ's appearance on earth was a disguise, the origin of the composite spiritual being *under* the disguise was a spectacle to behold. Indeed the 'aesthetic myth'[81] of the Valentinian school displays its

[80] Cf. §5.2.
[81] Balthasar 1984-1986: 33-44. Cf. §5.1.1.

appeal to both visual and aural beauty perhaps nowhere more powerfully than in an account of the production of Christ by and among the aeons, as described by Irenaeus:[82]

> And it is added, that hereupon all things being confirmed and come to perfect rest (ἀναπαυσάμενα τελέως), with great joy say hymns (φασιν ὑμνῆσαι) to the first father, taking their share in high festal gladness. And that on account of this benefit, with one will and mind, the whole pleroma of aeons…each, I say of the aeons severally contributed whatever he had most beautiful and blooming (κάλλιστον καὶ ἀνθηρότατον) in himself: and having put in each his share, and fitly (ἁρμοδίως) combined the same, and harmoniously (ἐμμελῶς) united them, they produced a most perfect emanation…the most perfect beauty and star (τελειότατον κάλλος τι καὶ ἄστρον) of their Pleroma, even their perfect fruit, Jesus; who was also called Saviour, and Christ, and the Word, as a son is called after his father; and All, because he is of them all. (*Haer.* 1.2.6)[83]

This is an account of aesthetic harmony and perfection in the heavens, wherein amidst the singing of hymns all the aeons contribute to the emanation of the most visually beautiful and perfect among them. Indeed the multi-Christologically titled being that the aeons produce is so beautiful, that at one point the disgraced Achamoth is drawn toward him when she beholds (ἰδοῦσαν) him with her gaze, 'receiving power to do so, by his manifestation (ἐπιφανείας)' (*Haer*. 1.4.5).[84]

When the Valentinians turn to the infancy narratives, they interpret the biblical texts according to their mythology about who Christ really is, versus who he appears to be.[85] One example is a Valentinian exegesis of Simeon's and Anna's sight of the infant Jesus in Luke 2:22-38. In Irenaeus' description:

> They say that Simeon…is a figure (τύπον) of the Demiurge, who at the Savior's coming learned about his change of abode and gave thanks to the Abyss. As for the prophetess Anna, who in the Gospel is said to have lived seven years with her husband and the rest of her life as a widow, until she saw (ἰδοῦσα) the Savior, recognized him, and spoke of him to all, she obviously signifies (φανερώτατα…μηνύεσθαι) Achamoth, who saw

[82] Irenaeus' summary of Valentinian mythology seems to have derived from one of Valentinus' disciples, Ptolemy. Cf. *Haer*. 1.Pref.2; Williams 1996: 14.
[83] Slightly adapted from Keble 1872: 8. Grk: Rousseau and Doutreleau 1979: 47-48.
[84] Trans. Keble 1872: 14-15. Grk: Rousseau and Doutreleau 1979: 73. Achamoth later conceives more spiritual beings 'after the image' of the angels that surround Christ.
[85] See, e.g., *Haer*. 1.3.2 (cf. Luke 2:41-52); 1.3.4 (cf. Luke 2:23); 1.8.4 (cf. Luke 2:22-38); 1.15.3 (cf. Luke 1:26-38); 3.10.4 (cf. Luke 2:9-14).

> (ἰδοῦσα) the Lord with his companions for a moment and then remained in the Middle for the whole later period, waiting for him to come back and establish her in her pair. (*Haer.* 1.8.4)[86]

In the Valentinian reading of Scripture, Simeon and Anna represent spiritual beings who recognize another spiritual being; they are not human beings who perceive with their physical eyes the physical manifestation of divine salvation. For Irenaeus, this is one of many cases in which his opponents 'rearrange the precious stones' of the Scriptural 'mosaic' according to their own hypotheses.[87]

Interestingly, Hippolytus – a contemporary of Irenaeus, and another heresiologist – records a tradition about Valentinus' own vision of the infant Christ, which was foundational for his subsequent teachings:

> Valentinus claims that he saw (ἑωρακέναι) a child, an infant recently born (παῖδα νήπιον ἀρτιγέννητον). When he inquired to find out who he was, the child replied that he was the Word (Λόγος). Then, by adding a tragic myth (τραγικόν…μῦθον), Valentinus wanted to establish from it his own trumped up heresy. (*Ref.* 6.42.2)[88]

While Hippolytus does not detail precisely how Valentinus interpreted his vision, or indeed how he developed his 'tragic myth' from it, that he was thought to have done so is a point worth underlining. Clearly, the experience of beholding the infant Christ in a personal vision – as well as being let in on the infant's identity as Word – was a moment of significance for Valentinus. Perhaps, we can speculate further that Valentinus used such a vision to validate himself as one who could recognize a mythical reality beyond appearance, like Simeon and Anna in the interpretation quoted above.[89] Indeed, Dawson

[86] Trans. Grant 1997: 68. Grk: Rousseau and Doutreleau 1979: 126-128.
[87] Cf. *Haer*. 1.8.1; 1.9.4; discussion in §5.1.1.
[88] Greek text and translation: Litwa 2016: 454-455. This text constitutes Layton's 'fragment A' in his collection of 'gnostic' writings (Layton 1987: 231).
[89] Hippolytus notes that Valentinus' student, Markus, tried to imitate his teacher with a similar vision in an attempt at validation.

discusses the passage as part of his argument that the Valentinian 'apocalypse of the mind' was predicated on experiences of personal vision.[90]

From this discussion of Valentinian versions of beholding the infant Christ, several points may be summarized. The first is a point about *recognition*: for Valentinians and other 'quasi-docetics,' true 'sight' of Christ entails perceiving a spiritual being, and entirely discounting the humanity that his corporeal appearance disguises. Second, this recognition requires prior knowledge about a mythical reality which lies beyond mere appearance; the myth, and personal knowledge/vision of that myth, is the starting point. Third, it is the mythical account of Christ's production by the aeons – rather than the Incarnation – that is the aesthetic high point of Christ's origins.

Irenaeus counters each of these points in *Adversus Haereses*, beginning with the issue of a starting point. As we observed in §5.1.1, Irenaeus' principal attacks against his opponents' hermeneutics are that they are inharmonious with the teaching of Christ passed down through the apostles, and that they rearrange the words and narratives of Scripture according to their own hypotheses. Irenaeus' own starting point – rather than any individual vision or myth – is the revelation of God in his Son and in Scripture. Irenaeus believes God to be the master artist who arranges and harmonizes the various parts of Scripture in a coherent 'mosaic', or 'symphony' (cf. §5.1.1); moreover, God's revelation in his Son is ultimately trustworthy: 'What he appeared, that indeed he was' (*Haer*. 3.18.7; cf. §5.2).

When Irenaeus thus interprets visual witnesses of the infant Christ, he highlights a notion of recognition that must be distinguished from a Valentinian or otherwise docetic 'recognition.' Rather than interpreting in these witnesses' beholding a recognition that

[90] Cf. Dawson 1992: 168.

discounts human appearance and physicality, Irenaeus emphasizes a recognition that integrates the human with the divine. We can see this beginning in *Haer.* 3.16.4:

> [Simeon confessed] the infant (βρέφος) whom he had in his arms, Jesus, born of Mary, to be the very Christ, the Son of God…Christ therefore Himself it was, whom Simeon bearing, blessed the Most High; at sight (ἰδόντες) of whom the shepherds glorified God; whom John being yet in his mother's womb, and the other in Mary's, recognized (ἐπιγνούς) as his Lord, and saluted him, leaping up; whom the wise men saw (ἰδόντες) and adored…casting themselves down to the eternal King.[91]

Here, Irenaeus harmonizes the Matthean and Lukan accounts of various witnesses to the infant Christ – Simeon; the shepherds; John the Baptist in Elizabeth's womb; and the magi. According to Irenaeus, these witnesses indeed recognized in their beholding that the infant was divine: Son of God, the Lord, the eternal King. Another passage, *Haer*. 4.7.1, further serves to underline their recognition of the infant's humanity, uniting their witness with that of the patriarch Abraham:

> And being taught by vision, that the Son of God would be a man among men, by whose advent his seed should become as the stars of heaven, [Abraham] desired to see (ἰδεῖν) that day, that he also himself might take Christ in his arms: and beholding (ἰδών) it by the Spirit of prophecy, he rejoiced. For which cause Simeon likewise, being of his seed, fulfilled anew the joy of the patriarch…And the angels too told news of great joy to the shepherds watching by night. Yea, and Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.' The joy of Abraham, on the one hand, descending on those who were of his seed, watching and beholding (γρηγοροῦντας καὶ βλέποντας) Christ, and believing Him: and joy on the other hand mutually returning from the children back towards Abraham, even as he had desired to see (ἰδεῖν) the day of Christ's advent. Well therefore did our Lord give testimony to him saying, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad' (John 8:56).[92]

Through a particular exegesis of John 8:56, Irenaeus here vividly blends the foresight of Abraham, 'beholding by the Spirit of prophecy,' into the physical beholding of Simeon, the shepherds, and Mary.[93] Through Irenaeus' hermeneutical approach to Scripture as a

[91] Trans. Keble 1872: 265-266. Grk: Rousseau and Doutreleau 1974: 303-305.
[92] Slightly adapted from Keble 1872: 325. Grk: Rousseau and Doutreleau 1965: 455-459.
[93] Elsewhere, Irenaeus similarly speaks of the prophets as receiving a previous 'sight' of Christ (*Haer.* 4.20.5-12). This specifically visual aspect of prophetic foresight coheres with Irenaeus' use of prophecy

unity – a mosaic revealing the figure of Christ, and a symphony of the stages of salvation – Abraham can be said to 'see' through the eyes of his descendants; and their joy upon the day of Christ's advent is reciprocal. In an important differentiation from docetic interpretations, the lynchpin here is that the infant Christ is Abraham's own seed, a 'man among men' – a fact which indeed prompts Abraham's desire to see him.

In interpreting visual witnesses to Christ from the infancy narratives (and elsewhere in the mosaic of Scripture), Irenaeus is thus squarely at odds with Valentinian and other docetic interpretations. For him, the chief aesthetic moment of Christ's origins is not a spectacular myth of emanation, but the Incarnation – the event at which God became visible and tangible to men as a man, a human infant. This point underpins his entire theological aesthetics, and concludes his five volume treatise against heresies: 'For God wanted his firstborn Word to descend into his creation and be held by it, and in turn for the creation to hold the Word and ascend to him, thus surpassing the angels and coming to be in the image and likeness of God' (*Haer.* 5.36.3).[94]

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that Irenaeus expresses his 'aesthetic response' to the New Testament infancy narratives through Scriptural apologetic. His exegesis of aesthetic elements in Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2 works *within* his wider aesthetic concerns for hermeneutics and Incarnational theology, and *against* opposing interpretations of perceptual issues in the biblical texts. In §5.2, we surveyed, in a general way, the second-century milieu of speculation concerning appearance and reality at the birth of Christ, within which Irenaeus found himself. The next two sections focused more specifically on

more generally in elucidating the infancy narratives; see, e.g., *Haer.* 3.9.2; 3.10.1-5; *Epid.* 53-59; 63-64; 66; 86.

[94] Trans. Grant 1997: 141.

two commonly-invoked aspects of perceptual confusion, and Irenaeus' own 'aesthetic response' to them: Mary's role in the birth of Christ (§5.3), and various visual witnesses to the infant Christ (§5.4).

This chapter's findings add new dimensions to our examination of early aesthetic response to the infancy narratives in Part II of this study. In the previous chapter we looked at the creative reception and reworking of aesthetic elements in an apocryphal gospel that was highly influential in early Christian popular piety. Our case study of Irenaeus further widens the scope of response: not only is Irenaeus himself a pivotal early theologian who is concerned with issues of sense perception in the infancy narratives, but his work brings us into contact with a range of other 'aesthetic responses' to the New Testament infancy accounts that both he and the wider church deemed heretical. This case study has shown that aesthetic aspects of Matt 1-2 and Luke 1-2 impress themselves upon an area of critical theological debate in the second century.

If Irenaeus' 'aesthetic response' to the infancy narratives was directed primarily to those outside the church (or to those church leaders who would take them on[95]), we turn now in our final case study to examine an aesthetic response with more explicit appeal for laity within ecclesial walls.

[95] Cf. *Haer*. 1.Pref.2-3.

CHAPTER SIX:
AESTHETIC RESPONSE AS HOMILETIC APPEAL IN ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA

6.1. Introduction

For our final case study in early Christian response to the aesthetic pieties of the New Testament infancy narratives, we turn to the writings of Origen of Alexandria. Origen's corpus is a natural next touchstone and end point for our analysis, for a number of reasons which fall under two main headings.

Firstly, within the plethora of his exegetical works – praised both by his ancient counterparts[1] and by modern scholarship[2] – we find ample material dedicated to close interpretation of the infancy accounts of Matthew and Luke. Origen's exegesis of the infancy narratives across multiple writings has never been closely analyzed – though the topic of Jesus' birth and infancy clearly held a sustained, and often poignant, interest for him throughout his life. At the beginning of his scholarly career[3] he exclaims with wonder at 'how the wisdom of God can have entered into a woman's womb and been born as a little child and uttered noises like those of crying children' (*Princ.* 2.6.2),[4] while near its end he underlines a similar point with recourse to Matthew's infancy narrative: 'For even he himself, 'although he was in the form of God'…became a child' (*Comm. Matt.* 15.7).[5]

This theological interest in Jesus *qua* child also translates into a more spiritual attitude of devotion to the infant Jesus, for example in *Hom. Luc.* 15.3-5, where Origen entreats his audience to 'embrace' the little Child and 'pray' to him.[6] Origen's fascination

[1] Cf. Eusebius' account of his life in *Hist. eccl.* 6.2-4, 8, 16, 19, 21, 23-27, 30, 32, 36, 39; and Jerome's *Epist.* 84.8, praising Origen's Scripture study. Many of Origen's exegetical works are preserved in Latin through translations by Jerome and Rufinus of Aquileia.
[2] Beginning with de Lubac 2007 (orig. 1950), scholarship has seen multiple monographs on Origen's biblical exegesis, e.g. Hanson 1959; Torjesen 1986; Neuschäfer 1987; Vogt 1999; Dively Lauro 2005; Martens 2012.
[3] For a chronology of Origen's life and works, I follow Heine 2010.
[4] Trans. Butterworth 2013: 137.
[5] Trans. Heine 2018: 197.
[6] Cf. Lienhard 1996: 63-64 and further discussion in §6.3.6.

with the beginnings of Jesus' life may have been encouraged by his mid-life move to Caesarea in Palestine and closer proximity to the physical remains of the holy sites in Bethlehem. His (perhaps firsthand) knowledge of the birthplace is evidenced in his late work, *Contra Celsum*, written in Caesarea.[7] Such passages, which briefly demonstrate Origen's interest in the theological significance, physical reality, and devotional aspects of Jesus' birth and infancy, will be revisited later in the chapter alongside many other close readings of the biblical texts.[8]

Origen's works are helpful for our purposes, secondly, because they have much to offer to the study of sense perception. Indeed, they have been the focus of a number of studies on the 'spiritual senses' in the last century.[9] The expression *sensus spiritales* is first attested in Latin translations of Origen's works (cf. *Comm. Rom*. 4.5; *Comm. Cant.* 1.4; *Hom. Exod*. 1.4), with αἴσθησις πνευματική or an equivalent as the possible underlying Greek. However, multiple other expressions for this concept abound – both in Origen and more broadly – as one recent volume's definition shows:

> 'Spiritual senses' is an umbrella term covering a variety of overlapping, yet distinct, expressions in which 'sense' in general or a particular sensory modality (vision, audition, olfaction, touch or taste) is typically qualified by reference to spirit (e.g. 'eyes of the spirit', 'spiritual touch'), heart (e.g. 'ears of the heart'), soul (e.g. 'eyes of the soul', 'hands of the soul'), mind or intellect (e.g. 'mind's eye', 'intellectual touch'), inner [man] (e.g. 'inner', 'interior' or 'inward' eyes, ears, etc.) or faith (e.g. 'eyes of faith', 'ears of faith'). Taking Origen's idiosyncratic rendering of Proverbs 2:5 ('thou shalt acquire a divine sense') as their point of departure, some authors also refer to this perceptual capacity as a 'divine sense' (αἴσθησις θεία) or a 'sense of divinity' (*sensus divinitatis*). The above-mentioned

[7] Cf. *Cels*. 1.51 and further discussion in §6.3.5 below. Similarly, in the catena fragments on Origen's *Commentary on Matthew*, we find a connection between Matt 2:18 and knowledge of the location of Rachel's tomb in Bethlehem (*Cat. Fr. Matt*. 34).

[8] Origen's writings also disclose his knowledge of various non-canonical traditions about Jesus' birth and infancy. These include certain traditions that appear in *PJ* (cf. *Cels*. 1.51, 60; *Comm. Matt*. 10.17; *Comm. ser. Matt*. 25; *Cat. Fr. Matt*. 24) and those that are associated with Celsus' Jewish source (cf. *Cels*.1.28-29, 32-39).

[9] See Rahner 1979 (orig. 1932); Harl 1975; Dillon 1986; Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2011; McInroy 2011. In his thematic anthology of Origen's writings, Balthasar included an entire section on what he termed the 'inner senses;' cf. Balthasar 1984: 218-257.

> expressions by no means exhaust a rich vocabulary of spiritual perception, but rather serve as points of reference.[10]

As this passage suggests, scholars often take Origen as a starting point in tracing the long and multifaceted history of the 'spiritual senses' within the Christian tradition; Origen himself, however, does not use this terminology with precision, and his meaning(s) in employing such language continues to be a matter open to debate. The Origenian texts most commonly invoked in this discussion include *Princ.* 1.1.9; *Cels*. 1.48; and multiple passages in his exegetical writings on the Song of Songs. However, issues of sense perception are extremely wide ranging throughout his corpus, and appear frequently in his discussion of infancy material, as this chapter will show.

The interpretive potential for the combination of both aspects of Origen's work – his exegesis of the infancy narratives, and his attention to sense perception – make him an invaluable resource for the present study. It must be stated at the outset that Origen's 'aesthetic response' to the infancy narratives is particularly wide-ranging, as his exegeses probe deeply into the sense perceptions – both physical and spiritual – of biblical characters. Moreover, his insights about the biblical texts and methods of 'response' intersect at various points with each of the previous chapters in this study.

However, Origen also offers something distinctive in his 'aesthetic response,' which enriches and completes our study. Whereas Chapter 4 offered a case study in the creative reworking of visual and aural elements in a highly influential apocryphal infancy gospel, and Chapter 5 focused on aesthetic response in an apologetic mode, this chapter allows us the opportunity to observe how the New Testament infancy narratives' aesthetic pieties were received in yet another significant stream within early Christianity: homiletics. More specifically, I am interested in the ways in which Origen's exegetical

[10] Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2011: 2.

writings (often homiletic in nature) appeal to the inner and embodied spirituality of his listeners.

In this chapter, I argue that Origen's 'response' to the aesthetic invitations of Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2 is most distinctively expressed in the connections he draws between the aesthetic aspects of the texts and the spiritual experience or practice of the Christians he addresses in his writings. Repeatedly, his explications of the text seek to *involve* his audience in the aesthetic experiences of characters within the narrative, often advocating postures of inner spirituality or embodied devotional practices that *imitate* the aesthetic piety of those characters. This aspect of Origen's exegetical project is multifaceted, and can be described through a number of differently focused adjectives – devotional, spiritual, participatory, experiential, imitative, even liturgical.

Furthermore, Origen's homiletic appeals to involve his audience in the biblical texts are often *explicit*. This point is important to underline from the perspective of the overall argument of the present study. In Part I, I argued that Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2 extended implicit invitations to their readers to see and hear alongside characters. In the foregoing chapters of Part II, we examined two case studies of early response to those implicit invitations. In this final case study, however, we will find that Origen often renders the implicit invitation *explicit* – appealing to his audience to see and hear alongside the characters of the infancy narratives in just the ways we have been describing.

A brief historical description of Origen's homilies will add context to this chapter's argument.[11] Origen delivered homilies to the church at Caesarea in Palestine ca. 239-254 CE, and at some point during this time they were transcribed in Greek.[12] These homilies

[11] Cf. Lienhard 1989, Junod 1994 on Origen's homiletics; Cunningham and Allen 1998 on ancient homiletics more generally.
[12] On dating cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.36. Some scholars accept Eusebius' testimony (e.g. Crouzel 1989); others revise it (notably Nautin 1977). For discussion cf. Lienhard 1989: 40.

were offered in correspondence with a three-year cycle of Scriptural readings, and in three weekly liturgical contexts: a Eucharistic assembly on Sunday (with readings from the Old Testament, apostolic writings, and Gospels); Eucharistic assemblies on Wednesday and Friday afternoons (each with a Gospel reading); and an early morning, non-Eucharistic assembly Monday-Saturday (each with a lengthy OT reading). Catechumens, not yet introduced to the Eucharist or the study of the New Testament, were restricted to this latter assembly for three years; fully professed Christians, however, were expected to attend all meetings on a regular basis. On each of these occasions, a homily was given to explain and illuminate the reading for the day. Within a span of three years, the congregation would hear readings and homilies covering the entirety of the Old Testament and the four gospels.[13]

The liturgical setting just described is highly evocative for this chapter's argument. The aurality of Scripture readings and homilies delivered vocally allows us to think about how a congregation's aural senses were actively engaged.[14] We can also begin to sketch a few visual elements that likely were present during these assemblies: the Eucharist,[15] the figure(s) of priest/homilist/lector, liturgical books,[16] as well as the structure and potential ornamentation of the church itself – although such evidence for Origen's church in Caesarea is limited.[17] The presence of these images enables us to ask how they might have been invoked by a homily and explicitly used as illustration, or how their visuality might have interacted with what the audience heard more implicitly. Most fundamentally, however, homilies capture the immediacy and intimacy of Origen's speech with his

[13] This paragraph summarizes the highly influential reconstruction of Nautin 1977: 389-409, accepted, e.g., by Torjesen 1986, Lienhard 1989; Junod 1994; Heine 2010.
[14] Cf. Harrison 2013 (esp. 134-169) for an introduction to this avenue of investigation.
[15] See discussion in §6.3.6.
[16] For more on early Christian books and their public reading, see Gamble 1995.
[17] We possess only late evidence of churches in Caesarea, cf. Levine 1975: 113-134; Kaegi 1978; Patrich 2011: 102-105, 249-258.

congregation – providing the fertile ground for his appeals to their aesthetic participation in the biblical texts.

This chapter's argument situates itself in relation to a number of previous insights from scholarly discussions both of Origen's biblical exegesis, and of his understanding of sense perception. Indeed, it combines two such insights, one from each area of scholarly conversation. The first was articulated by Torjesen, who argued that 'the essential task of exegesis has been decisively organized around the figure of the hearer/reader.'[18] Particularly in his writings on the New Testament, Origen's exegetical task consists in drawing his audience closer to the presence of Christ through moving from the 'sensible gospel' (αἰσθητὸν εὐαγγέλιον, i.e. the literal words and historical events they embody) to the 'spiritual and intelligible gospel' (εὐαγγέλιον νοητοῦ καὶ πνευματικοῦ, i.e. the revelation of the mysteries of Christ, and our encounter with Him).[19] As Torjesen understands it, all of Origen's exegetical work is oriented toward bringing his hearer into this experience of God in Christ.[20] His Old Testament exegesis is meant to prepare the reader for this experience, while his New Testament exegesis in a more direct way invites the reader spiritually to stand in the presence of Christ.[21] Torjesen points out that this methodological framework correlates well with the format of liturgical services that Origen would have conducted in Caesarea, where catechumens were instructed first in Old Testament texts, before participating in Eucharistic services in which the gospels were read and interpreted.[22]

[18] Torjesen 1986: 12. Cf. further 49-69, 105-107.
[19] Cf. Torjesen 1986: 66-69.
[20] This argument is extended by Martens 2012, who argues that Origen included himself in this vision for the exegetical task.
[21] Note especially Torjesen's delineation of the relationships between text, hearer, and divine presence in 124-138.
[22] Torjesen 1986: 107.

In a separate discussion on the spiritual senses in Origen, scholars have been preoccupied with the question of how to distinguish *analogical* references to the spiritual senses (i.e. where they bear a close resemblance to their corporeal counterparts), from merely *metaphorical* ones. Responding to the arguments of Rahner[23] and Dillon,[24] McInroy defines the spiritual senses as analogical to their physical counterparts through the concept of *presence*: 'The spiritual senses resemble their corporeal counterparts in that they discern a presence, be it of God or other "spiritual" realities. It is, therefore, precisely when an author speaks of detecting an immaterial presence that he or she is using sensory language in a 'non-metaphorical' manner.'[25]

The respective insights of Torjesen and McInroy are complementary in that they both involve an understanding of spiritual presence – accessed via text, and sense perception, respectively. For Torjesen, Origen's exegesis is a significant mediator of divine presence, facilitating the journey of the soul toward God. For McInroy, Origen's language of spiritual senses rises above the level of metaphor precisely when he uses it to signify the perception of an immaterial presence.

The argument of this chapter joins together and lends further substance to both insights through a particular focus on sense perception in Origen's exegesis of the infancy narratives. The dynamics of visuality and aurality in these biblical scenes are used by Origen to draw the hearer above all into closer spiritual intimacy with the child Jesus,[26] as well as to involve them in the perception of other immaterial actors (God, angels) in the story of Jesus' birth and infancy. Through expounding upon the visual and aural cues of the gospel accounts, Origen allows his audience to participate spiritually – even somewhat

[23] Cf. Rahner 1979.
[24] Cf. Dillon 1986.
[25] McInroy 2011: 26. In making this argument, McInroy draws from Poulain 1950: 64-113 (esp. 88); Alston 1991: 51-54; McGinn 1992: xviii-xx, 278-279.
[26] There is potentially a more physical understanding of divine presence in a quasi-Eucharistic description of the child Jesus in *Hom. Luc*. 15, discussed in §6.3.6 below.

liturgically – alongside characters in the narrative, further enlivening their own journey toward God in the revelation of his Son.

In addition to joining these two areas of scholarly discussion, this chapter also significantly expands current understanding of sense perception in Origen's work. As the discussion above shows, Origen is well-known for his writing on the spiritual senses; however, in my view a nearly exclusive focus on defining this category in opposition to the physical body and material world has obscured other aspects of sense perception that are also meaningful to Origen. Here, I echo the insight of Dawson, who reconsiders Origen's category of the human body in relation to the figural reading of Scripture.[27] In critique of Boyarin's analysis of Origen on the spiritual senses,[28] Dawson argues that a human being's exercise of the spiritual senses in the reading of Scripture significantly involves his bodily disposition, and is transformative for it. The physical and spiritual senses, while distinct realities, are intrinsically related in Origen's understanding.

This chapter lends further substance to Dawson's insight. For example, there are instances in which Origen's 'spiritual' interpretations of the senses in the infancy narratives also involve the encouragement of embodied practices (cf. §6.3.6-7). Moreover, in juxtaposition with well-known passages in which Origen seems to prefer the spiritual over the physical senses, there are others in which the physical senses are decidedly prioritized (e.g. *Comm. Jn.* 10.301-306; cf. §6.3.6). Finally, in a manner that recalls the *Protevangelium*'s creative impulse, Origen sometimes expands visual details of the infancy texts – though within an exegetical, rather than a narrative mode. On several such occasions, his imaginative expansions anticipate motifs that are evidenced later in early Christian art (cf. §6.2.4; §6.3.4-5) – an insight that opens up an interesting question

[27] Cf. Dawson 2002: 47-80.
[28] Cf. Boyarin 1990.

regarding Origen's appreciation for material art and physical sight in the formation of spirituality.

In summary, this chapter presents Origen's multifaceted 'aesthetic response' to the infancy narrative, focusing specifically on his distinctive contribution to this study: his homiletic appeals to involve his audience in the aesthetic aspects of the texts. The primary sources that undergird the chapter's argument form a cross-section of Origenian texts that are 1) focused on the infancy narratives *and* 2) concerned with the visual or aural senses, whether physical or spiritual. Here it is important to clarify that homilies are not the only sources I engage in this chapter. Origen's 'aesthetic response' to the infancy narratives is attested across his commentaries and theological or apologetic writings as well. While explicit homiletic appeals do not feature as strongly in these writings, they add important dimension to our understanding of Origen's aesthetic response.

Examination of this primary material proceeds in two main sections, which analyze Origen's exegesis of Matthew 1-2 (§6.2) and Luke 1-2 (§6.3), respectively. The ordering of these sections follows the contours of each biblical narrative, and thus ranges widely across Origen's own writings, though anchoring naturally around his *Commentary on Matthew* and *Homilies on Luke*.

6.2 The Senses in Origen's Exegesis of Matthew 1-2

6.2.1 Introduction

In this section, I examine several instances in which Origen's exegesis of Matthew's infancy narrative interprets the visual or aural senses invoked by that account. Specifically, I look at his linking of visuality, textuality, and Incarnation prompted by a reading of Matt 1:1, 18 (§6.2.2); his homiletic comments on the aural/oral implications of

the fulfillment quotation in Matt 1:23-35 (§6.2.3); and several visual interpretations of Matt 2:1-12 (§6.2.4).

A brief note on the nature of the primary sources I am considering in this section will be helpful. Unlike for the Lukan infancy narrative (cf. §6.3.1), no sustained treatment of Matthew's infancy narrative by Origen has survived (though it must have existed in the lost early books of his *Commentary on Matthew*[29]). The passages under consideration here are thus culled from some preserved sections of *Comm. Matt.*, as well as a range of other sources that invoke Matthew's infancy account within different exegetical and topical discussions.

What is extant of Origen's *Commentary on Matthew* has been preserved in three main ways. Books 10-17, which contain continuous commentary on Matt 13:36-22:33, remain almost fully in Greek.[30] One passage from these books, *Comm. Matt.* 15.7, has interested us already (cf. §6.1). While this passage does not deal with aesthetic themes, it does highlight Origen's interest in Jesus' childhood – both in the historical sense (κατὰ τὴν ἱστορίαν), and the figural sense (κατὰ τὴν ἀναγωγὴν).[31] There are also a number of Greek fragments of the commentary, found in various ancient catenae, which have been attributed to Origen with a reasonably high degree of certainty.[32] These fragments preserve comments on portions of Matt 1:1-13:33, 28:1-18; two such passages on the infancy narrative have been utilized below (cf. §6.2.2, 4). Finally, the commentary has been

[29] The original consisted of 25 books that covered the entire gospel. Cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.36.2; Jerome, *Comm. Matt.*, prologue; *Epist.* 33.4; Heine 2018: 28-29.
[30] The Greek text of these 8 books has been preserved in the thirteenth-century codex Monacensis 191 in Munich, with some minor lacunae. The best modern critical edition of the Greek text, with suggestions for emendation, is contained in Klostermann and Benz 1935. Cf. Heine 2018: 29.
[31] Cf. Heine 2018: 197. Grk: Klostermann and Benz 1935: 368-369.
[32] Klostermann and Benz 1941 contains the critical Greek text of 572 of these. I follow Heine 2018 (cf. 319-360), who preserves Klostermann's numbering but reduces this number to the most reliable fragments.

(somewhat less reliably) preserved in Latin, in the ancient *Vetus Interpretatio* and *Series Commentariorum*.[33]

In addition to preserved portions of Origen's *Commentary on Matthew*, several other writings that invoke Matthew's infancy account have been utilized in this section. These include his *Hom. Gen.* (§6.2.4), *Hom. Num.* (§6.2.4), *Hom. Isa.* (§6.2.3), *Hom. Ezek.* (§6.2.3), and *Cels.* (§6.2.4). Relevant textual information specific to each of these works will be addressed as they come into the following discussion.

6.2.2 Visuality and Textuality in Interpreting Matt 1:1, 18

Back in Chapter 2, we began our analysis of Matthew's infancy narrative with a reflection on the place of sense perception within its explicit textuality (Matt 1:1), and that textuality's inscription of the beginnings of Jesus' life (Matt 1:1, 18).[34] Here, we find that Origen also is contemplating these matters. Origen's interpretation of the very beginning of Matthew's account, contained in a catena fragment of his *Comm. Matt.*, interrogates the difference between two related yet distinct lexemes he reads in Matt 1:18 (γέννησις) and 1:1 (γένεσις).[35] This question prompts a comment on visual sense perception in relation both to text and to Incarnation:

> [H]ere [i.e. Matt 1:18] the evangelist has mentioned the birth, but at the beginning of the Gospel [i.e. Matt 1:1] he mentioned the generation. For here he says, 'The birth (γέννησις) of Jesus Christ was as follows', but there, 'the book of the generation (βίβλος γενέσεως)'. What, then, is the difference between the birth and the generation, and how are both understood in relation to Christ? Just as this uttered speech (ὁ λόγος οὗτος ὁ προφορικός) is intangible (ἀναφής) and invisible (ἀόρατος) in its own nature, but when it is written down in a book and given bodily form (σωματωθῇ) as it were then it is both visible (ὁρᾶται) and capable of being

[33] See Heine 2018: 29-31 for discussion. The Latin text of *Vetus Interpretatio*, as far as it goes, runs parallel to the Greek text in Klostermann and Benz 1935. The Latin text of *Series Commentariorum* is contained in Klostermann, Benz et al. 1976 (orig. 1955).
[34] See §2.1.
[35] NA 28 prints the form γένεσις in both instances; however, the manuscript tradition is divided between γένεσις and γέννησις in Matt 1:18 (Origen clearly had access to a text that preserved the latter). Cf. Metzger 1975: 8 for discussion.

> touched (ψηλαφᾶται), in the same way the Logos of God who is without both flesh (ἄσαρκος) and body (ἀσώματος), being neither seen (ὁρώμενος) nor described (γραφόμενος) in his deity (κατὰ τὴν θεότητα), is both seen (ὁρᾶται) and described (γράφηται) when he is made flesh (ἐσαρκώθη). Because he was made flesh (σαρκωθέντος), therefore, there is also a 'book' (βίβλος) of his 'generation' (γενέσεως). But why Matthew said 'book' and not 'vision' (ὅρασις) or 'word' (λόγος) (for this has been said) has not been investigated here. (*Cat. Fr. Matt*. 11)[36]

Origen continues to more precisely define the difference between γένεσις and γέννησις, but we are more concerned with what he has said in the meantime. He has set side by side two concepts – that of a book, and that of Christ's body, becoming flesh at his birth – and has related the two through their shared quality of visuality.

It is illuminating to follow the logic of the analogy, and specifically to track how Origen pairs visual terminology with other terms. He begins by pairing the visual and the tactile, contrasting the invisibility/intangibility of uttered speech with the visibility/tangibility of speech's 'bodily form,' a book. In the same way, Origen says, we should imagine the birth of Christ. And yet, he uses a different pair of terms to describe the contrast: the Logos of God, before his taking of flesh, is unseen and *unwritten*; at his birth, he is both seen and written. Thus, the visual terminology has been retained, but the quality of tangibility is now interchangeable with the quality of textuality. Origen can thus conclude that the narrative of Jesus' life, inscribed in text, is integrally dependent upon his Incarnation ('Because he was made flesh, there is also a book'). At the same time, the visual component is also intrinsic to Origen's understanding of the Incarnation, demonstrated by its retained pairing throughout the passage. He even makes the tantalizing remark that he has heard it said that Matthew's βίβλος could be replaced by ὅρασις – an option that would cast the beginning of the first gospel in a decidedly different tone. While Origen does not comment further on this, the very fact that it was an interpretive question

[36] Trans. Heine 2018: 325. Grk: Klostermann and Benz 1941: 19.

puts even more emphasis on the potency of the visual sense in ancient understandings of how one perceives Jesus in the flesh.

This passage is evocative of debates surrounding the visibility and tangibility of the Incarnation, examined in the previous chapter. Irenaeus, as we observed, also links visuality with textuality in reflection on the Incarnation (e.g. *Haer.* 3.11.8).[37]
For the purposes of the present chapter, the passage is noteworthy in that it offers an initial glimpse of the significance of physical sight in Origen's interpretation of Christ's appearance in flesh. Other passages discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter will both extend and nuance this point with more specific data from the infancy narratives.

6.2.3 Matt 1:23-25: Invitation to Hear and Proclaim Emmanuel

We turn now to focus on Origen's interpretation of Matt 1:23-25 – specifically his comments on hearing and speaking the name, Emmanuel. Our sources are two different homiletic passages, both of which are preserved in Jerome's Latin translations.[38] In the first, *Hom. Isa.* 2.1, Origen puzzles over the verb he reads in Isaiah 7:14, versus its quotation in Matt 1:23:

> The truth of the original copies of this prophet says, '*You* shall call' (*vocabis*). In Matthew, on the other hand, we know that it reads, 'And *they* shall call (*vocabunt*) his name Emmanuel' [Matt 1:23]. We cannot say that one should make something less out of the prophet. How in fact does the Gospel preserve this reading of Scripture?...I know that a certain reader (*quendam legentem*)…said to himself (*dixisse intra semet ipsum*), what is this '*you* shall call'? Who shall call? Ahaz? But how can Ahaz hear (*audire*) about the Savior who came after many generations…And so, in place of this, '*You* shall call,' he wrote, '*they* shall call.' But notice that it is not to Ahaz that it is said, 'And you shall call his name Emmanuel,' but to the 'house of David.' Notice that it is clearly stated, 'Hear now, O house of David (*audite nunc, domus David*)'…What is the 'house of David'? If David is Christ, as I have repeatedly shown, we are the 'house of David,' the church of God; and the statement above this is being said to us who are

[37] Cf. §5.1.1. For further discussion of Irenaeus' and Origen's shared 'Christology of manifestation,' cf. Daley 2018: 66-94.
[38] Cf. Scheck 2015: 3; Scheck 2010: 881.

> the church (*dicitur nobis, qui ecclesia sumus*): we are not to 'contend with the Lord,' but when the Lord gives the 'sign,' we are to receive (*suscipiamus*) it. This is being said to us, not to the 'house of David.' And it is prophesied that if someone is the 'house of David,' 'he shall call (*vocabit*) his name Emmanuel.' For at the coming of Christ our church alone says (*sola ecclesia nostra…dicit*) of Christ, 'God is with us.'[39]

Much as in our analysis of Matthew's fulfillment quotations in §2.2, Origen is concerned here with the identity of the listener to the prophetic message. This concern is set in motion by a textual question. Noting the difference between Isaiah's *vocabis* (LXX καλέσεις) and Matthew's *vocabunt* (καλέσουσιν), Origen imagines the experience of a 'certain reader' (Matthew himself, perhaps?) who interrogates Isaiah's text while desiring to preserve its meaning. This reader, questioning how Ahaz could have heard about Jesus and called him Emmanuel centuries prior to his birth, changes the singular verb to the plural. Origen reconciles the discrepancy by noting that the prophecy is addressed not to Ahaz specifically but to the 'house of David' – a singular noun containing a collective identity. He then draws his listening audience into his interpretation by asserting that 'we' – the church – are the 'house of David' that is meant. It is the church on the receiving end of the prophet's *audite*; and it is the church that calls (*vocabit*) Jesus by the name Emmanuel.

The tone of Origen's words here have a liturgical resonance, potentially heightened by the setting in which he spoke them. The homily would have followed the reading from Isaiah that he speaks of, so that the prophet's words quite literally would have addressed the congregating church. Reciprocally, Origen's homily invites his audience to oral proclamation of the name Emmanuel, to a creed-like confession of 'God is with us' that responds antiphonally to Isaiah's prophecy.

[39] Trans. Scheck 2015: 891-892. Lat (Jerome): Baehrens 1925: 250.

Elsewhere, in *Hom. Ezech*. 1.4.2, Origen emphasizes the weightiness of meaning during an oral confession of this precise kind: 'To say "Emmanuel" is not to pronounce an empty name, but it signifies a reality (*Hoc, quod dicitur Emmanuel, non vanum nomen sonat, sed rem significat*). For since Jesus has come, we say: "God is with us" (*adveniente quippe Iesu dicimus: nobiscum Deus*).'[40] This brief passage echoes *Hom. Isa*. 2.1, in that it invites an ecclesial audience to read themselves into the hearing and speaking of the name Emmanuel, alluded to by Matt 1:23. It is possible that Origen's comments also invoke specific settings in which his audience would have spoken the words 'nobiscum Deus' (or equivalents) – in the liturgy perhaps, or in private prayer. There is evidence in late antiquity that the words were employed as a Christian battle cry and chant, as was the *Kyrie eleison*.[41]

These homiletic passages together offer our first glimpse into the devotional mode that I argue characterizes Origen's 'response' to the aesthetic aspects of the infancy narratives: in that his interpretations often explicitly draw his audience into a spiritual or physical enactment of the sensory elements of the texts. Here, he identifies the church as the primary listener to Isaiah's prophecy, and the primary proclaimer of Emmanuel. In both cases, he seems to connect with physical sensory experiences – the hearing of Isaiah's text read aloud; the oral confession of 'God with us.' His interpretation thus has the effect of inviting his congregation to participate in the aurality and orality of the text.

6.2.4 Visual Interpretations of Matt 2:1-12

Scattered throughout Origen's works are a number of exegeses of the magi's journey, recorded in Matt 2:1-12. Here we will survey several such passages that also

[40] Slightly altered from Scheck 2010: 33. Lat (Jerome): Baehrens 1925: 328.
[41] Cf. Whitby 1998.

speak powerfully of the visual sense evoked by Matthew's account: figural connections between Gen 26 and Matt 2, and Balaam and the magi, which hinge on characters' sense of sight (and significantly parallel early Christian artistic traditions); as well as visual explanations of the star's movement, shape, and brilliance.

In *Hom. Gen*. 14.3, Origen connects three men of Genesis 26 to Matthew's magi – precisely through their shared experience of sight and divine presence. In the Genesis passage, the Philistine king Abimelech, his advisor, and his general approach Isaac to make a covenant, saying: 'We certainly saw that the Lord is with you (*videntes vidimus quia est Dominus tecum*) and we said: 'Let there be an oath between us and you and let us establish a covenant with you.'[42] From this verse Origen makes a couple of figurative links. First, he describes a union between the three parts of philosophy (rational, natural, and moral) with the Scriptures.[43] He then makes the link with the magi:

> Those three (*isti tres*), who seek peace from the Word of God and desire to anticipate his fellowship with a covenant, can indeed represent the magi (*figuram tenere magorum*) who come from parts of the East learned in the books of their fathers and in the instruction of their ancestors and say: 'We certainly saw' (*videntes vidimus*, Gen 26:28) 'the one born king,' (*natum regem*, Matt 2:2) 'and we have seen that God is with him' (*et vidimus quia Deus est cum ipso*, Gen 26:28) 'and we have come to worship him' (*et venimus adorare eum*, Matt 2:2).[44]

In this exegesis, Origen finds two key elements that he thinks unite the experience of the three men of Gen 26, with the experience of the magi. First is the centrality of physical sight, which he finds both in the Matthean account (2:2, 9-11), as well as in its punctuation in Gen 26:28: 'Seeing, we saw.' Rufinus' translation of *videntes vidimus* probably reflects a Greek phrase close or identical to the Septuagint's ἰδόντες ἑωράκαμεν (itself translating the Hebrew ראו ראינו). The phrase, while conveying the three men's knowledge of Isaac's situation, emphatically expresses this as a knowledge attained through sight (referencing,

[42] Origen's quotation of Gen 26:28, trans. Heine 1982: 200. Lat (Rufinus): Baehrens 1920: 125.
[43] This continues a motif introduced in *Hom. Gen.* 6.2, where Abimelech represents philosophy and Isaac represents the Word of God.
[44] Trans. Heine 1982: 200. Lat (Rufinus): Baehrens 1920: 125.

perhaps, the visible increase of Isaac's wealth, cf. Gen 26:12-14). The second uniting element is an acknowledgment of divine presence, which also functions as the object of sight in both cases. The three men who approach Isaac have 'seen that God is with you,' while Origen takes the magi's adoration of the Christ child as a sign that they have 'seen that God is with him.' In Matthew's account, of course, these words are not explicitly spoken by the magi;[45] they do, however, bear a strong resemblance to the gospel writer's note in Matt 1:23 about Emmanuel, 'God with us.' In his exegetical layering of the two passages of Scripture, Origen portrays these two unifying elements in the magi's voices, as if in an echo of the statement of Gen 26:28.

For his figural reading to work, Origen assumes that the magi are three in number – a piece of information not provided by Matthew, and indeed not taken for granted by some early iconography.[46] Over time, however, the tradition of three magi emerged as the most prevalent in interpretation. Origen's early attestation of this tradition, with his keen eye for a corresponding group of three in Abimelech, Ochozath, and Philcol, calls to mind a similar figural reading that developed in early Christian art. Multiple frescoes and sarcophagi depict the magi iconographically paired with the three Hebrew youths of Daniel 3.[47] In that parallel, the link is made between Eastern setting (both groups are usually depicted in Persian dress), and a renunciation of idolatrous practices (a popular ancient interpretation of Matthew's account). Both of these elements are prominent in Origen's imagination as well, as we will see from other texts. His figural reading here in *Hom. Gen.* 14.3, while not identical to that which developed in art, reflects a similar

[45] Cf. discussion in §2.4.5.
[46] Note, e.g., an early fourth-century lunette fresco in the Roman Catacombe di SS. Marcellino e Pietro, depicting two magi (cf. Giuliani 2015: 39-40); and another fourth-century fresco in the Catacombe di Domitilla, depicting four (cf. Fasola 2011: 63-64).
[47] See, e.g., the corresponding fourth-century paintings of the three Hebrew youths and the three magi in the Catacombe di Marcus e Marcellianus; and a conflation of the two groups in a fourth-century sarcophagus relief from Arles. Cf. Jensen 2001 for more discussion.

impulse of interpretation – finding a parallel in groups of three – with strong aesthetic appeal. And in Origen's interpretation, it is the crucial element of sight that forges the link.

Another way in which Origen's exegesis of Matt 2:1-12 parallels the world of early Christian art may be found in his interpretations of the prophet Balaam as an operative figure within the magi's story (*Hom. Num*. 13.7.4; 15.4.2; 18.4; *Cat. Fr. Matt*. 24; *Cels*. 1.58-60). Utilizing a preexisting reading of Num 24:17 as prophecy of Matthew's star,[48] Origen imaginatively fleshes out a cultural biography of the magi as in some way descended from the *magos*, Balaam.[49] He pictures them flourishing within a large community of magi in the East,[50] with access to an immense number of prophetic and magical books, including the prophecies of Balaam that were recorded by 'disciples of his art' (*Hom. Num*. 13.7.4).[51] The lineage from Balaam to the magi is cemented, for Origen, in his interpretation of Num 23:10: the magi can be considered Balaam's 'seed,' whether 'by physical descent or by traditional instruction' (*Hom. Num*. 15.4.2).[52] And because they possessed a copy of his prophecy of the star in Num 24:17, the magi 'recognized' that star when it appeared.[53] As Origen imagines the magi moving their eyes from their texts to the star and onward to the one it prophesies, he thus reads Balaam into their story (and their vision) in a prominent way.

The visual aspect of this picture comes to the fore in *Hom. Num*. 18.4.1, where Origen is again interrogating a lexical discrepancy between manuscripts, this time of Num 24:17.[54] Origen notes that in some copies, Balaam's prophecy reads, 'I will point to

[48] E.g. Justin Martyr, *1 Apol*. 32; Irenaeus, *Haer*. 3.9.2; *Epid.* 58 (cf. Philo, *Mos.* 1.50.276-277). For more on Origen's particular contribution to this widespread tradition, cf. Baskin 1983. Cf. also §2.2.7.
[49] Cf. discussion in §2.4.2.
[50] Origen's most common indicator of the magi's cultural location is 'parts of the east' (e.g. *Hom. Gen*. 14.3; *Hom. Num*. 13.7.4). Sometimes he is more specific: in *Cat. Fr. Matt*. 24 he identifies them as Persian; in *Cels*. 1.58 he distinguishes them from Chaldeans, which he associates with astrology (cf. *Cels*. 6.80). *Hom. Num*. 13.7.4 references disciples of Balaam in Mesopotamia.
[51] Trans. Scheck 2009: 78-79.
[52] Trans. Scheck 2009: 90.
[53] *Hom. Num*. 13.7.4; 15.4.2. Cf. Scheck 2009: 78-79, 90.
[54] Translations in this paragraph from Scheck 2009: 114. Lat (Rufinus): Baehrens 1921: 172-173

(*ostendam*) him, and not now; I bless, and he does not draw near. A star will arise from Jacob, and a man will arise from Israel;' while in other copies it reads, 'I will see (*videbo*) him, but not now, etc.' Rufinus' Latin *ostendam* translates δείξω, which is what we find in the Septuagint, and in another of Origen's quotations of this verse remaining in Greek (e.g. *Cels*. 1.60). The *videbo* reflects either the ὄψομαι of Aquila's Greek translation of the OT, or the ὁρῶ of Symmachus' translation (both of which are also closer to the Hebrew אראנו).[55] Both terms are visual; while the former directs the eyes of the prophecy's listener on its object (directly, 'him;' indirectly 'a star' and 'a man'), the latter would seem to focus the speaker's own eyes on these images. Origen finds the latter reading easier to understand, interpreting it to mean that Christ would be seen (*videndum*), not in Balaam's lifetime, but later in the Incarnation. Balaam's own sight ('I will see') is realized in the experience of those who do see Christ in the flesh, e.g. those pedagogical descendants of his, the magi.[56] Origen struggles more with the *ostendam*, settling on the interpretation that this refers not to Balaam himself, but to the scribes and Pharisees. These will point to Christ, and acknowledge him as the one prophesied in their texts, at the time of the future salvation of Israel (cf. Rom 11:25). In both cases, then, Balaam's visual acts (seeing, pointing) are realized in those of future figures.

It is illustrative to compare Origen's interpretation of this verse with another reading that developed in early Christian art: the image of Balaam, pointing to the star. This motif possibly appears in an early catacomb fresco of the Virgin Mary and Child (a figure stands to their left, and points to a star above their heads),[57] and often in the background of depictions of the magi (so that the magi are central, with the star before

[55] Cf. Wevers 1998: 412 n 24. Both Aquila's and Symmachus' translations were utilized by Origen in formulating his *Hexapla*.
[56] This kind of interpretation is comparable to that of Irenaeus, *Haer*. 4.7.1 (cf. §5.4).
[57] See the early third-century *Madonna lactans* fresco in the Catacombe di Priscilla, discussed previously in §4.5. The pointing figure was early identified as Balaam (e.g. Lowrie 1947: 61; Du Bourguet 1965: 18) though Moffitt 1997 has posited Isaiah. Additional possibilities are listed in Giuliani 2016: 33-37.

them and a pointing Balaam behind them).[58] While Origen grapples with taking Balaam at his word, since the prophet could not physically see or point to Christ, the artistic tradition is able to meld different time periods into one depiction: Balaam points to the very same star that stands above the Virgin and Child, or that is seen by the magi. The artistic and Origenian interpretations are resonant with one another, however, in that both involve a reading of Balaam's contribution to a narrative of sight – a beholding of Christ – which finds its most immediate reference in the account of Matt 2:1-12.

Finally, several of the same texts we have been discussing also feature Origen's speculations about the visual appearance of the star itself. In the very next segment of *Hom. Num*. 18.4, for example, Origen wonders about the gospel writer's silence about the star's movement after it stands still over the child. After proceeding before the magi, and stopping, did it then depart from there, or disappear? Origen thinks it might have stood over him throughout his life, as did the 'Spirit of God' which 'remained' over him at his baptism.[59] Furthermore, Origen is interested in the star's astronomical classification and shape; in *Cels*. 1.58 he posits that it 'was a new star and not like any of the ordinary ones, neither of those in the fixed sphere nor of those in the lower spheres, but it is to be classed with the comets (κομῆται) which occasionally occur, or meteors (δοκίδες), or bearded (πωγωνίαι) or jar-shaped (πίθοι) stars.'[60] Well aware of the common observance among Greeks that such comets often appeared at great events in history, he finds it unsurprising that such a phenomenon should have occurred at the birth of Jesus (*Cels*. 1.59).

In *Cat. Fr. Matt*. 24, and more elaborately in *Cels*. 1.60, Origen imagines background details to the magi's story in which the star's incredible and unique brilliance

[58] See, e.g., the late third-/early fourth-century 'Severa' funerary plaque, found at the cemetery of Priscilla in Rome, currently housed at the Museo Pio Cristiano. Cf. Jensen 2001.
[59] Cf. Scheck 2009: 114.
[60] Trans. Chadwick 1986: 53. Grk: Koetschau 1899: 109.

plays a central role. He assumes, following a similar line taken by earlier writers,[61] that the magi's occupation previous to Matthew's account involved the invocation of demons for magical rites and spells. When Jesus was born, the power of these demons was weakened by the greater power that had come into the world. Origen describes this clash of powers in quite visual terms: 'But if anything more divine were to appear (θειοτέρα…ἐπιφάνεια), the powers of the daemons would be destroyed, since they would be unable to withstand (ἀντιβλέψαι) the light of the divine power (θειότητος φωτί)' (*Cels*. 1.60).[62] In this picture, the 'divine power' is presented visually as blinding light, that the demons are unable to look straight in the face. Origen finds a couple of locations for this power: first, bringing in Luke's account of the heavenly army that appeared with their acclamation of praise, and second, in 'the soul of Jesus and the divine power in him' (*Cels*. 1.60).

Meanwhile the magi, finding that their spells are ineffective and remembering Balaam's prophecy, see in the star a visual confirmation of the new power that has come into the world. According to this narrative, the appearance of the star is so brilliant that it parallels, and almost seems to participate in, the divine power of Jesus himself. In *Cat. Fr. Matt*. 24 Origen describes the star's appearance as 'incredible' (παράδοξος),[63] and in *Cels*. 1.60 it is a 'sign from God' (θεοσήμιαν).[64]

Such details resonate with earlier traditions in Ignatius and *PJ*. As we have observed already (cf. §4.5), these sources speak of the Bethlehem star as outshining all the other stars in the sky, with a light that is 'magnificent' (παμμεγέθη),[65] 'indescribable' (ἀνεκλάλητον) and with a strangeness (καινότης) that causes 'amazement' (ξενισμόν).[66] In

[61] E.g. Justin Martyr, *Dial*. 78; Tertullian, *Idol.* 9; *Marc.* 3.13; Clement of Alexandria, *Exc. Theod*. 74. Cf. also Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph.* 19.3.
[62] Trans. Chadwick 1986: 54. Grk: Koetschau 1899: 110.
[63] Cf. Heine 2018: 326. Grk: Klostermann and Benz 1941: 26.
[64] Cf. Chadwick 1986: 55. Grk: Koetschau 1899: 111.
[65] *PJ* 21.2.
[66] Ignatius, *Eph*. 19.2. Cf. Holmes 2007: 198-199.

Ignatius' poetic rendering, the sun, moon, and other stars form a chorus (χορός) around the unique phenomenon of the Bethlehem star. Furthermore, Ignatius connects the incredible appearance of the star which outshone other stars with the dissolving of magic 'when God appeared in human form' (θεοῦ ἀνθρωπίνως φανερουμένου).[67] His analogy between the power of the star and the power of the Incarnation has much in common with Origen's narrative, and it is highly probable that Origen's imagination was influenced by traditions such as these.[68]

In summary, we have considered two ways in which Origen figuratively connects the magi through their visual experience – with the three men of Gen 26, and with Balaam in Num 24; and other passages which seek to expand the reader's visual imagination of the star itself. Moreover, we have observed that in the first two instances, Origen's interpretations parallel the impulses of ancient artistic depiction of the magi. While these passages do not display the same *explicit* homiletic appeal to involve listeners in the texts, as we observed in §6.2.3 and will continue to note in §6.3, they nevertheless have a similar effect in their expansion of visualization and resonances with art.

6.2.5 Conclusion to §6.2

In this section, we have examined several instances in which Origen's exegesis of Matthew 1-2 features the visual or aural senses. Our findings have rendered a preliminary understanding of Origen's multifaceted 'aesthetic response' to the infancy narratives.

In §6.2.2, we looked at a passage interpreting Matt 1:1, 18, which speaks of the Incarnation in relation to a book: both make visible/tangible what is invisible/intangible

[67] Ignatius, *Eph*. 19.3. Trans. Holmes 2007: 198-199.
[68] Cf. esp. *Hom. Luc*. 6.3-6, where Origen explicitly cites Ignatius, *Eph*. 19.1.

(*Cat. Fr. Matt*. 11). This fragment supplies preliminary evidence for the importance of the physical and material in Origen's engagement with sense perception.

In §6.2.3, we considered two homiletic passages (*Hom. Isa*. 2.1; *Hom. Ezech*. 1.4.2) which involve Origen's audience in the aurality and orality of Matt 1:23-25: as hearers of the Isaian prophecy, and proclaimers of the name Emmanuel and its translation, 'God with us.' Origen's interpretation confirms our previous discussion in §2.2 of readers as implied listeners of Matthew's fulfillment quotations. Moreover, these homiletic passages exemplify the explicit participatory mode that characterizes Origen's 'aesthetic response,' which we will develop further in §6.3.

Finally, in §6.2.4, we examined Origen's engagement with the strong visuality of Matt 2:1-12. His figural readings of the three men of Gen 26 (*Hom. Gen*. 14.3) and Balaam (in multiple passages, esp. *Hom. Num*. 18.4) into the visual experience of the magi, add interpretive dimensionality to the magi's seeing in the Matthean text. These figural readings each resonate with impulses for depicting the magi in ancient visual art: in groups of three, and often with the figure of Balaam pointing in the background. Moreover, Origen's exegetical speculations in *Hom. Num*. 18.4; *Cat. Fr. Matt.* 24; and *Cels*. 1.58-61 about the star's movement, appearance, and power have the function of expanding the reader's visual imagination of the motif.

While these observations are diverse, they each contribute to forming a preliminary understanding of the facets of Origen's approach to the visual and aural elements of the New Testament infancy narratives. The significance of physical senses; explicit appeals to participate in the aesthetic piety of a narrative; expansive visualization; and exegesis that parallels or anticipates the impulses of visual art – all are facets of Origen's interpretation of these texts. We will continue to note these and other aspects of Origen's aesthetic response in §6.3, and draw our findings together in §6.4.

6.3. The Senses in Origen's Exegesis of Luke 1-2

6.3.1 Introduction

In this section, we turn to Origen's interpretations of the visual and aural senses invoked by Luke 1-2. The section proceeds through Origen's interpretations of roughly consecutive scenes of Luke's infancy narrative: Luke's preface (§6.3.2), interrelated episodes of Zechariah's vision, Mary's visit to Elizabeth, and the birth of John the Baptist (§6.3.3), the Annunciation to Mary (§6.3.4), the Nativity (§6.3.5), Presentation (§6.3.6), and finding of Jesus in the Temple (§6.3.7).

Because more of Origen's exegesis of Luke's infancy narrative has survived, this section significantly expands upon the preliminary findings of §6.2. We again note the significance of physical senses for Origen(see esp. §6.3.6), but also have many more opportunities to engage his understanding of spiritual sense perception (§6.3.2 *et passim*). We observe further examples of Origen's exegesis anticipating trajectories in visual art (§6.3.4-5), while also attending to his complex exegesis of the auditory dynamics at play in Luke's infancy narrative (§6.3.3). Most significantly, this section also contributes more fully to this chapter's argument concerning Origen's *explicit* homiletic appeals to involve his listeners in the aesthetic piety of the narrative, which we see at work in §6.3.4-7.

Our leading source for this section is Origen's extant collection of *Homilies on Luke*, the first twenty of which are dedicated to the infancy narrative. These survive in Jerome's Latin translation, as well as in Greek fragments derived from various ancient catenae. In my study of the homilies I have depended primarily on the Latin, which is more continuous and reliable, but make note of Greek possibilities where they are available and relevant.[69] In addition to the Lukan homilies, multiple other sources from

[69] All modern translations of the homilies have relied on Rauer's critical edition (orig. 1930, rev. 1959) of the Latin and Greek texts (cf. Lienhard 1996: xxxviii-xxxix), and I have used his text in the present study as well. For the extant homilies, Rauer prints two columns of text: Jerome's continuous Latin, and some Greek fragments that he thinks correspond closely to the Latin or otherwise seem to fit within the homily (though

Origen's corpus will be drawn into conversation with them. Most commonly invoked is *Comm. Jn.* (cf. §6.3.2-3, 6); others include *Hom. Cant.* (§6.3.4), *Comm. ser. Matt.* (§6.3.5), *Cels.* (§6.3.5), and *Comm. Rom.* (§6.3.6).

6.3.2 The Spiritual Sight of Luke's αὐτόπται

Origen's first homily on Luke is well-known for its contribution to discussions of the fourfold gospel, gospel writing, and non-canonical gospels (cf. *Hom. Luc.* 1.1-2); our attention is focused, however, on its interpretation of the αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται…τοῦ λόγου of Luke's preface. In Origen's reflection on this line we encounter this chapter's first example of his interest in what might be called a 'spiritual sense.' Beyond the physical seeing of the αὐτόπται – which we discussed in §3.1.1 – Origen elevates this group's sight into the more narrowly-defined experience of beholding the divine.

A hint of this appears in his description of Luke's own steadfastness in faith as author; such certitude, for Origen, does not depend on physical sight: 'We should not think that steadfastness in faith comes to us through our carnal eyes (*oculis…carnalibus*); mind and reason have imparted it.'[70] This seems to set up a simple dichotomy between sense perception and intellect. However, Origen's interpretation of the αὐτόπται in the paragraph to follow reveals a more nuanced view of the visual sense in the case of those beholders of the Word:

> 'Just as those who from the beginning saw and were ministers of the Word (*sermo*) handed it down to us' (Luke 1:2). Scripture says, in Exodus, 'The people saw the voice (*vox*) of the Lord' (Exod 20:18). Obviously a voice (*vox*) is heard (*auditur*) rather than seen (*videtur*). But the Scripture says this to show us that those who deserve to 'see God's voice' (*videre vocem Dei*) see it with different eyes (*aliis oculis*). In the Gospel, however, it is not a voice that is seen but a word (*sermo*), which is more excellent than a

these insertions must be read with caution). His apparatuses also give helpful Greek variants (cf. Rauer 1930: lix-lx for further explanation).

[70] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 7. Lat (Jerome): Rauer 1930: 6. Origen's description of the gospel writer resonates with how he describes the spiritual perception of other Scriptural authors. Cf. *Comm. Jn.* 2.10; *Princ.* 2.4.3; and comments in Dawson 2002: 57.

> voice…The apostles themselves saw the Word (*viderunt sermonem*), not because they had beheld the body (*adspexerant corpus*) of our Lord and Savior, but because they had seen the Word (*Verbum viderant*). If seeing Jesus' body (*corpus vidisse*) meant seeing God's Word (*vidisse sermonem*), then Pilate, who condemned Jesus, saw God's Word (*sermo*); so did Judas the traitor and all those who cried out, 'Crucify him, crucify him, remove such a one from the earth.' But far be it that any unbeliever should see God's Word (*sermo*). Seeing God's Word (*sermo*) means what the Savior says: 'He who has seen me has also seen the Father who sent me' (John 14:9).[71]

Origen begins his discussion by setting Luke 1:2 beside the account in Exod 20:18 of those who 'saw the voice' of God.[72] For him, the paradoxical synaesthesia of the statement is meant to show that these viewers saw the divine with 'different eyes,' extraordinary eyes. Origen next applies this idea to the gospel; here, the αὐτόπται saw not a voice (*vox*, translating φωνή), but even better – a word (*sermo* / *Verbum*, translating λόγος).[73] The connection with the extraordinary vision recounted in Exodus, however, remains. Luke references the αὐτόπται not because they have seen Jesus' body – as any ordinary person, believer or unbeliever, might have done – but because they have 'seen the Word.' Origen does not explain precisely what he means by this until the last line of the quotation above. Invoking John 14:9, Origen clarifies that 'seeing the Word' means perceiving the Father in/through the Son.

A passage from the *Commentary on John*, where Origen again pairs Luke's preface with Johannine statements about sight, helps to fill out this definition. In *Comm. Jn*. 20.46, Origen is explicating John 8:38. In comparing the αὐτόπται of Luke 1:2 with Jesus' own

[71] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 7-8. Lat (Jerome): Rauer 1930: 7-8

[72] This synaesthetic Scripture has a long and varied interpretive tradition in ancient Jewish exegesis. See, e.g., the Deuteronomic reworking in Deut. 4:12; the rendering of the verse in the Samaritan Pentateuch; Philo, *Decal*. 32-49; *Migr*. 47-49; Josephus, *A.J*. 3.81; *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, Baḥodesh 9; *Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai*, Baḥodesh 56. See discussion in Carasik 1999; Fraade 2008.

[73] As Lienhard notes, Jerome expands Origen's λόγος to both *sermo* and *Verbum*: 'Words are superior to mere sound, and the Word is superior to word (Lienhard 1996: 7 n 19). Originally, however, this differentiation would have been less pronounced.

experience as an 'eyewitness (αὐτόπτης) of the things with the Father,' he speaks of seeing in two different modes:

> On the one hand, insofar as he who has seen (ἑωρακώς) the Son has seen (ἑώρακε) the Father who sent him, one sees (ὁρᾷ) the Father in the Son, but there will be a time when one will see (ὄψεται) the Father and the things with the Father as the Son sees (ὁρᾷ) them. Then he will be an eyewitness (αὐτόπτης), as it were, of the Father and of the Father's things in a manner similar to the Son, and will no longer conceive (ἐννοῶν) of the things concerning God, of whom the Son is the image (εἰκών), from the image.[74]

Here Origen speaks of a present mode and a future mode of beholding the Father: seeing him through his image, the Son; and seeing him as the Son himself sees him. It is a contrast between indirect (or mediated) and direct (immediate) perception.

It is Origen's description of the mediated mode of seeing that is illustrative for our understanding of the αὐτόπται in *Hom. Luc*. 1. For Origen, Luke's eyewitnesses do experience an immediate, physical sight of Jesus (similar to that which Jesus has of his Father[75]); additionally, they have a mediated sight of the Father. There is an epistemological facet to this mediated sight (ἐννοῶν); at the same time, their mental conception of the Father is rooted in their visual encounter with the Son's image. We can posit that Origen's description of the αὐτόπται's vision of the Word arrives at what might be called a 'spiritual sense.' They comprehend the immaterial presence of the Father in their sight of the Son, and their sight transcends the physical, but is analogous to it.

As we continue to examine Origen's treatment of sight in Luke's infancy narrative – that of characters beholding the infant Christ, and that of Origen's audience in participation with those characters, we will return to this section's observations about the physical and spiritual sight of the αὐτόπται.

[74] Trans. Heine 1993: 215. Grk: Preuschen 1903: 334. Origen is an early contributor to the history of Christion thought on the *visio Dei*, or beatific vision. See further Boersma 2018.
[75] The Son's sight of the Father is best not described as 'physical'; though it certainly is more immediate, direct, and complete.

6.3.3 The Birth of 'Voice' and 'Word': Auditory Dynamics in Luke 1

In our study of Luke 1 in §3.2, we focused on its crucial auditory dynamics: the messages delivered to Zechariah and Mary, their respective aural pieties, the silencing of Zechariah and the dynamic orality of Mary's voice. When Origen reads these scenes, he too picks up on their aural impulses, probing deeply into how these aural/oral dynamics work in the Lukan text. Moreover, his keen exegetical eye connects these aspects to the (especially Johannine) designations of John the Baptist as a 'voice' (φωνή), and Jesus himself as the 'Word' (λόγος). In this section, we examine Origen's interpretations of these auditory dynamics in Luke 1:5-25 (Zechariah's vision and silencing), 39-45 (the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth), and 57-80 (the birth of John).

Hom. Luc. 2-5 are devoted to the narrative of Zechariah's encounter with the angel Gabriel in the Temple. Following a reflection on Zechariah's sight of the angel in Luke 1:11 – in which Origen makes the point that supernatural will and human merit unite where visual encounter with a spiritual being occurs (*Hom. Luc*. 3.1-4)[76] – Origen focuses on Zechariah's punishment of silence and his use of visual gestures in *Hom. Luc*. 5. Here Origen reads these motifs figuratively (and rather sharply) in relation to the Jewish people. Zechariah's muteness stands for the current silence of Jewish prophets, and his gestures are the 'empty signs' of Jewish practices, such as the rite of circumcision and various feasts. For Origen, there is a simple reason behind the inexpressiveness of Judaism: the Jewish people has rejected the Λόγος of God.[77] He compares their current situation with their past, before they received the Law; in Moses' words, they are ἄλογος (cf. Exod 4:10).[78] While the specifics of Origen's figurative interpretation are not of use to us here,

[76] In Origen's reading, Gabriel willed to be seen, and Zechariah's heart was judged worthy to see (cf. Luke 1:6).
[77] It is clear that Jerome struggles in translating the Greek word λόγος (cf. *Hom. Luc*. 5.3), which he awkwardly renders 'word and reason' (*sermo et ratio*) throughout the homily. Cf. Rauer 1930: 30-33.
[78] Here Jerome retains the Greek word. Cf. Rauer 1930: 32.

the underlying connection he draws – an unwillingness to hear the Word – is strikingly resonant with our discussion in §3.2.2 of Zechariah's punishment in relation to his inability to *listen*.

Origen conveys a similar interpretation of the Lukan passage – under a different exegetical guise than that of *Hom. Luc*. 5 – in *Comm. Jn* . In commenting on John the Baptist's self-designation as a 'voice' (cf. John 1:23 and parallels), Origen reflects on the differences between John, the 'voice' (φωνή), and Christ, the 'Word' (λόγος) – which in turn leads him to an interpretation of Zechariah's predicament:

> Now we think that, just as sound (φωνή) and speech (λόγος) differ in us, meaningless sound sometimes indeed being able to be brought forth without speech, and speech also being able to be proclaimed to the mind without sound, as when we meditate in ourselves, so John, who is like sound in relation (πρὸς τὴν ἀναλογίαν) to Christ who is speech, differs from the Savior who according to one aspect (κατά τινα επίνοιαν) is speech. John himself suggests this view since he once said in answer to inquirers, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight his paths.'' And perhaps it is because Zachary disbelieved in the birth of the voice which makes known the Word of God that he loses his voice and regains it when the voice which is the forerunner of the Word is born. For a voice must be listened to (ἐνωτίσασθαι) so that the mind can afterwards receive the word revealed by the voice. (*Comm. Jn*. 2.193-194)[79]

Here Origen reads the Lukan portrayal of Zechariah's silencing alongside the aural descriptors of John 1, elegantly connecting the loss/restoration of voice with the birth of the 'voice.' For Origen, Zechariah's punishment is reflective of his disbelief in that voice (and the word it proclaims); moreover, he urges that a voice must be 'listened to' in order to receive its word. The concepts of belief and attentive listening are thus held in parallel in Origen's reflection.[80]

These categories of 'voice' and 'word' feature again in Origen's interpretations of the Visitation scene (Luke 1:39-45), where comments on sense perception arise in relation

[79] Trans. Heine 1989: 147-148. Grk: Preuschen 1903: 89-90. Cf. also *Comm. Jn*. 6.97; 6.164.
[80] Cf. §3.2.2 for discussion of these related concepts in Luke.

to his keen interest in the experience of John the Baptist in utero. Here again, we turn to material in *Hom. Luc*. and *Comm. Jn*. In the Lukan homilies, Origen employs multiple terms to describe John's perceptive faculty within Elizabeth's womb. Thus in *Hom. Luc*. 4.4, John's perception of Jesus is contrasted with the Jewish people's not seeing (*videbat*);[81] in *Hom. Luc*. 7.5 it is described in terms of knowledge (*sciebat* / ἔγνω) and sense (*senserat* / ᾔσθετο);[82] in *Hom. Luc*. 10.6 Origen states that 'John heard (*audivit*) Jesus while he was still enclosed in his mother's womb;'[83] and in *Hom. Luc*. 11.4 a terminology of recognition (*recognovit* / ἐπιγινώσκων) is used.[84] From this collection of terms it is difficult to postulate a uniform interpretation for how perception occurred in John. Origen understands it both in terms of epistemological and sensory recognition, particularly hearing.

Discussion of Luke 1:39-45 in *Comm. Jn*. yields even more reflection on John's perceptual issues.[85] In *Comm. Jn*. 1.237, Origen wonders how John the Baptist can say that he 'did not know' Jesus (οὐκ ᾔδει, John 1:31) in light of the account in Luke.[86] In *Comm. Jn*. 2.224, he writes that John's leap in utero 'was testifying to the divinity of Christ's conception and birth,'[87] a result he links elsewhere with the spiritual senses.[88]

But his fullest reflection on sense perception in the Visitation scene comes in *Comm. Jn*. 6.252-256, which takes its starting point from John 1:29, the moment when the adult John the Baptist sees Jesus walking toward him. Here Origen presents an exegetical 'flashback' between this moment and the two figures' first encounter as infants in Luke 1:39-45. He makes a number of points relevant to the present discussion, beginning with

[81] Cf. Rauer 1930: 27.
[82] Cf. Rauer 1930: 51.
[83] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 42. Lat (Jerome): Rauer 1930: 75.
[84] Cf. Rauer 1930: 80.
[85] See *Comm. Jn*. 1.237; 2.180, 187, 224; 6.252-256.
[86] Cf. Preuschen 1903: 42.
[87] Trans. Heine 1989: 155.
[88] Cf. §6.3.2.

the claim that the infants Jesus and John bore a common physical resemblance (*Comm. Jn.* 6.252): 'At this time the one infant who was being formed (μορφούμενος) granted his semblance (μόρφωσιν) very precisely to the other infant who was being formed (μορφουμένῳ), causing him to be conformed (σύμμορφον) to his glory.' Origen uses this notion of the two boys' common appearance (κοινὸν τῆς μορφῆς) to explain why they were often confused when they grew up 'by those who do not distinguish the image (εἰκόνα) from the one according to the image (κατὰ τὴν εἰκόνα).'[89]

His next point focuses on the different sensory faculties that are at play between the infant encounter and the adult encounter. Noting that 'on that first occasion the infant John leaped in his mother's womb because of the sound (φωνή) of Mary's greeting which reached Elizabeth's ears,' while on the second occasion, 'John sees (βλέπει) Jesus coming to him, and says, 'Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,'' Origen summarizes: 'One is instructed first by hearing (ἀκοῇ) about higher things; after this he becomes an eyewitness (αὐτόπτης) of them' (*Comm. Jn.* 6.253).[90] With this statement Origen thus seems to define the infant John's perception of Jesus squarely in terms of hearing.

This point begs the question of how it is John who hears, when it is Elizabeth's ears that are the direct recipients of Mary's greeting in the Lukan account. Origen explains by drawing together his previous theories concerning the formative resemblance between the two infants, as well as their figurative descriptions as 'voice' and 'Word':

> Nevertheless, that John was benefited in his formation (μόρφωσιν) by the infant still being formed (μορφουμένου) when the Lord came to Elizabeth in his mother, will be clear to one who has understood the comments we have made about John being the voice (φωνή), but Jesus the Word (λόγος). For there is a loud voice (μεγάλη φωνή) in Elizabeth when she is filled with the Holy Spirit because of Mary's greeting, as the text itself shows…When the sound (φωνή) of Mary's greeting reached Elizabeth's ears it filled her

[89] Trans. Heine 1989: 237. Grk: Preuschen 1903: 157-158.
[90] Trans. Heine 1989: 237. Grk: Preuschen 1903: 158.

> own John. This is why John leaps, and the mother becomes the mouth (στόμα), as it were, and prophetess of the son. (*Comm. Jn.* 6. 254-255)[91]

Here Origen brilliantly connects the dots between the 'sound' (φωνή) of Mary's greeting (cf. Luke 1:44), and the 'voice' (φωνή) that erupts out of Elizabeth (cf. Luke 1:42) – with John the Baptist himself (the figurative φωνή) as the crucial link. The sound of Mary's greeting passes through Elizabeth's ears to 'fill' the infant John; it is his own prophetic 'voice' which is proclaimed through his mother's mouth. This description resonates with Origen's interpretation of Zechariah's loss of voice connected with John's designation as 'voice' (*Comm. Jn*. 2. 194), examined above. For both parents, their experience of orality is linked to their son's description as φωνή.

Furthermore, this passage is interesting from the perspective of our analysis of Luke's Mary in §3.2.3. There we discussed the figure of Mary as a model listener, a recipient of the divine word, which leads to her dynamic proclamation of words. Origen's interpretation confirms this aspect of the power of Mary's voice, and the word that she proclaimed, as a substantive and effective reality: 'For all these things occurred that Mary might share with John, who was still in his mother's womb, some of the power (δύναμις) she had after she conceived, and that he might share some of the prophetic grace he received with his mother' (*Comm. Jn*. 6.256).[92]

Origen returns to the story of Zechariah – his regaining of his voice at the naming of John, and his prophetic speech, the Benedictus – in *Hom. Luc*. 9-10. Origen does not elaborate on Zechariah's restored voice, but notes merely that unbelief had bound Zechariah's tongue; and that when it was loosed, he spoke with a super-human eloquence (9.4). Origen makes an additional point in relation to sense perception in *Hom. Luc*. 10. Interpreting Zechariah's address to his infant son within his Benedictus (Luke 1:76, 'And

[91] Trans. Heine 1989: 237-238. Grk: Preuschen 1903: 158.
[92] Trans. Heine 1989: 238. Grk: Preuschen 1903: 158.

you, child…'), Origen claims that the newborn John both heard (*audire*) and understood (*scire* / *intellegere*) his father's words to him, just as he had heard Mary's greeting and understood Jesus' presence previously (10.5-7).[93] These points reiterate the heightened sensory experiences that Origen associates with the miraculous circumstances surrounding the birth of John.

In summary, we have considered here Origen's exegetical response to the auditory dynamics in Luke 1. Origen interprets Zechariah's silencing as a result of his inability to listen, his disbelief in the birth of the 'voice' that would make known the 'Word.' (*Hom. Luc*. 5; *Comm. Jn*. 2.193-194). Moreover, at a number of places in *Hom. Luc*. and *Comm. Jn*., Origen carefully investigates the intricate auditory layers of the Visitation scene: John's perception of the presence of Christ and voice of Mary in both epistemological and sensory (specifically aural) terms; John's own identity as φωνή in relation to Christ as λόγος (as well as their physical resemblance); the dynamic aurality of Mary's voice that reaches John in the womb; and his deep connection to the voice of his own mother, Elizabeth, whose vocalization expresses his own. Underlying Origen's reflections on both of these scenes is his exegetical connection to the symbolic designations of John as 'voice' and Jesus as 'Word.'

6.3.4 Hiddenness and Visuality in the Annunciation

We have already commented on Origen's interpretation of Mary's dynamic orality in relation to John and Elizabeth in the Visitation scene (§6.3.3). Here, however, we back track slightly to examine Origen's reading of the *visual* aesthetics of the Annunciation, and of the figure of Mary herself. We observed in §3.2.3 that the Lukan Annunciation scene is stark in its visuality, while our examination in §4.3.2 showed that *PJ* responded to

[93] Cf. Rauer 1930: 74-75.

the biblical text by creatively enhancing its visual quality. Origen, in his various exegeses of this scene, seems to hold these approaches in balance. He invites his audience into the shadowy mystery surrounding the conception of Jesus, while also expanding hearers' visual imagination of Mary within this scene, and the visual theology of her role in the Incarnation.

Thus on the one hand, Origen takes his cue from Luke's account and comments to even greater lengths on the visual mystery at play in the Annunciation. In *Hom. Luc*. 6.3-6, explicitly citing Ignatius' possibly anti-docetic passage in *Eph*. 19,[94] he highlights the *hiddenness* of Mary's virginity and Jesus' conception. Both visual and aural mystery (concealment, silence) are described by Ignatius, and Origen's interpretation of Ignatius emphasizes visual concealment: Through Mary's state of virginity, her conception of Jesus 'escaped the notice' of the devil. While *PJ* attempts to fill a visual gap in the Lukan narrative, this Ignatian/Origenian reading asserts that its *lack* of spectacle – its invisibility, so to speak – serves a divine purpose.[95]

Along similar lines, Origen elsewhere interprets the conception of Jesus in relation to the motif of a 'shadow,' often connecting the 'overshadowing' described by Gabriel in Luke 1:35 with other Scriptural passages that speak of shadows.[96] One example is *Hom. Cant*. 2.6, which takes its initial cue from Song of Songs 2:3 ('Beneath his shadow I desired and sat'):

> The birth of Christ took its inception from the shadow (*Nativitas Christi ab umbra sumpsit exordium*); yet not in Mary only did His nativity begin with overshadowing; in you too, if you are worthy, the Word of God is born. See, then, that you may be able to receive His shadow; and when you have been made worthy of the shadow, His body, from which the shadow is born, will in a manner of speaking come to you.[97]

[94] Cf. discussion in §5.2.
[95] Note that Origen's reading of *Eph*. 19.1 marks a first signpost in a trajectory of interpretation on the Ignatian text, which continues in Ambrose, Jerome, and Thomas Aquinas (cf. Kuhner 2017).
[96] See, e.g., *Princ*. 2.6.7; *Hom. Num*. 27.12.11; *Hom. Josh*. 8.4; *Hom. Cant*. 2.6; *Comm. Cant*. 3.5.
[97] Trans. Lawson 1957: 293-294. Lat (Jerome): Baehrens 1925: 51.

The imagery of the overshadowing of Mary is somewhat akin to Origen's comments on hiddenness, or the divine concealment of Jesus' conception, examined above. However, in passages such as this one, Origen uses the image homiletically, to invite his audience into that shadowy mystery and to describe how the Word is spiritually 'conceived' in them. The divine 'overshadows' the meritorious reader so that he receives Jesus' presence in a way analogous to Mary. Such spiritual reenactment of a biblical scene within the soul is a homiletic device that Origen often returns to; we will observe this again in §6.3.5.

Alongside these interpretations of a hidden, or shadowy, visuality in the Annunciation, Origen also expands his audience's visual imagination of Mary within this scene. One such element is not explicitly visual in his discussion, but parallels – and indeed, significantly anticipates – a prominent motif in later artistic depiction of this scene. In his discussion of the *hapax legomena* of Luke 1:28, κεχαριτωμένη, Origen imagines the following scenario behind the record of Mary's disturbance in Luke 1:29: 'Mary knew the Law; she was holy, and had learned the writings of the prophets by meditating on them daily. If Mary had known that someone else had been greeted by words like these, she would never have been frightened by this strange greeting' (*Hom. Luc.* 6.7).[98] Origen's theory that Mary was a student of the Scriptures, keen enough to realize the singularity of the term addressed to her, may attract scorn from modern scholars; however, it anticipates a later artistic tradition that pictures Mary occupied in Scriptural study at the moment of Gabriel's entrance.[99] A recent study of the origins of this motif credits Ambrose of Milan with the first literary portrayal of a reading Mary. He acclaims Mary as a model reader, and describes Gabriel finding Mary alone at home, surrounded by books;[100] and later

[98] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 26.
[99] See, notably, the center painting on Robert Campin's *Mérode Altarpiece* (ca. 1427-1432); this motif was popular in multiple Flemish paintings of the Annunciation at this time. According to Miles 2014, the Brunswick Casket (ca. 860-870) represents the earliest image of the Annunciate Reading motif.
[100] Ambrose of Milan, *De virginibus ad Marcellinam* 2.2.7, 10-11. Cf. Miles 2014: 639-640.

asserts that Mary had read the prophecy recorded in Isaiah 7:14.[101] However, while Ambrose may be the first to explicitly describe Mary immersed in study at the moment of the Annunciation – a visual alternative to *PJ*'s spinning Annunciate,[102] and one that would leave a similarly prominent iconographic legacy – he is *not* the first to link the Virgin with biblical study. Origen was making this connection in *Hom. Luc.* 6.7 about a century prior to Ambrose; moreover, it is highly possible that Ambrose was influenced by Origen's account.[103] Origen's brief description, therefore, is the first extant witness in a trajectory of interpretation that would visually imagine the Lukan scene in this way.

A final passage, *Hom. Luc.* 8.2, presents Mary as a model 'image' in an *imago Dei* theology derived from Gen 1:26-27 and Col 1:15, and comparable to that of Irenaeus.[104] In reading the first line of Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46), Origen asks an exegetical question about how a soul can literally 'magnify' the Lord. He then leads his congregation into a discussion of images, utilizing the Genesis and Colossians passages to assert that human souls are images of the Image – that is, Christ. Like painters who copy the image of a king from a single painted exemplar, we can increase or diminish the image of Christ in our souls through our words and actions.[105] While drawing his congregation into this metaphor, Origen implicitly presents Mary to them as one who has successfully imitated Christ: Mary can say that her soul 'magnifies' the Lord because she has increased his image in her soul through her words and actions.

In summary, Origen's response to the visual aesthetics of the Annunciation is multifaceted. Origen comments on its hiddenness (*Hom. Luc.* 6.3-6), and draws his listener into its shadowy mystery (e.g. *Hom. Cant.* 2.6). At the same time, his description

[101] Ambrose of Milan, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 2.15. Cf. Miles 2014: 640-641.
[102] Cf. §4.3.2. Note that the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, a seventh-century Latin reception of *PJ*, also introduces motifs of a literate Mary while retaining the spinning Annunciation scene. Cf. Miles 2014: 638.
[103] Cf. Tissot 1956: 16-17 for discussion of Ambrose's use of Origen's Lukan homilies.
[104] Cf. §5.1.1.
[105] Note similar metaphors in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.8.1; 4.17.6.

of Mary's biblical study (*Hom. Luc.* 6.7) expands his audience's imagination of the scene and anticipates a subsequent artistic motif. Finally, Origen's exegesis of the first line of Mary's Magnificat (*Hom. Luc.* 8.2) further expands the hearer's understanding of Mary within a visual theology of images, and presents her as a model in the process of conforming the image of one's soul to Christ.

6.3.5 Aesthetic Participation in the Nativity: Interpreting Luke 2:1-20

'My Lord Jesus has been born,' begins Origen in *Hom. Luc.* 12, opening with a sign of his personal devotion to the Christ child.[106] In this and the next several homilies, Origen's reflections take on a markedly devotional tone, as he begins to draw his audience even more intimately into the scenes of Jesus' birth and infancy. The focus of the present section is the account of the Bethlehem birth and angelic announcement to the shepherds (Luke 2:1-20), which is interpreted by Origen in *Hom. Luc.* 12-13, as well as in several other texts. Passages that are particularly salient for our analysis include a homiletic application of the angels' speech to present-day listeners; an early imagining of ox and ass at the Bethlehem manger; spiritual interpretations of the birth of Christ within the human soul; and a deictic description of Jesus' birthplace as a pilgrimage site.

In the midst of a reflection on angelology and ecclesiology in *Hom. Luc.* 12-13 – prompted by the angelic and shepherding figures in Luke 2:1-20 – Origen brings listening church leaders into the moment of angelic speech to the shepherds: 'Listen (*audite*), shepherds of churches! Listen, God's shepherds! His angel always comes down from heaven and proclaims to you, "Today a Savior is born for you, who is Christ the Lord"' (*Hom. Luc.* 12.2).[107] Origen's interpretation capitalizes on the word 'today,' utilizing it to

[106] The expression is echoed in *Hom. Luc.* 18.1; 22.4.
[107] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 48.

emphasize the immediacy of Christ's birth for his own audience. This sentiment is echoed in *Hom. Luc*. 13.5: 'The angels spoke these words to the shepherds. They spoke (*loquebantur*) not only at that time, but in the present day also.'[108] These statements thus relate the experience of Origen's audience to that of the shepherds, encouraging them to hear the proclamation alongside the Lukan characters, and to encounter the infant Christ with them.

When Origen comes to describing what the shepherds found when they went to Bethlehem to see the child proclaimed to them, his interpretation entails an imagination of the scene that once again seems to anticipate artistic tradition. Commenting on the child's manger in *Hom. Luc*. 13.7, he writes: 'That was the manger of which the inspired prophet said, "The ox (*bos* / βοῦς) knows his owner and the ass (*asinus* / ὄνος) his master's manger" (Isa 1:3a).'[109] As Lienhard notes, Origen's homily is the first extant Christian text to relate the Isaian verse about the ox and the ass to the Bethlehem manger.[110] This connection is taken up in multiple subsequent textual traditions about the nativity, for example in Ambrose's commentary (2.42-43), and in the apocryphal *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* 14.1, a Latin translation and expansion of *PJ*, which was extremely influential in the West.[111] The visual motif also appeared in artistic depictions of the nativity from at least the fourth century.[112] Once again, Origen's interpretation of a New Testament nativity scene contains a visual motif that anticipates later artistic depiction.

Moving beyond the Lukan homilies, we find two examples of Origen's impulse to spiritualize Luke's nativity scene.[113] In *Comm. ser. Matt*. 38, within an interpretation of

[108] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 54.
[109] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 55. Cf. Rauer 1930: 93-94.
[110] Lienhard 1996: 55 n 19. Like Origen, earlier writers cited it in relation to Jewish ignorance of Christ (e.g. Justin Martyr, *1 Apol* 37, 63; Tertullian, *Adv. Jud*. 13; *Marc*. 3.6, 23; 4.25; 5.14), but did not link it specifically to Luke's infancy narrative.
[111] Cf. Ehrman and Pleše 2011: 84-85.
[112] See, e.g., the fourth-century Sarcofago di Stilicone, located under a pulpit in the Basilica di Sant'Ambrogio in Milan.
[113] Cf. a similar example of such reenactment within the soul in §6.3.4.

Matt 24:7-8, which describes the 'birth pains' of eschatological disasters, Origen writes of the advent of Christ within the human soul. The one who wishes 'to see the glorious advent (*videre…glorisum adventum*) of Christ in [his] soul' will undergo various trials and sufferings, 'enduring which he will bring forth what he has conceived and formed in himself (*pariet quod concepit et formavit in se*), Christ the Word, so that he may say at his birth, "Behold, I bring you good news of great joy", and "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth."'[114] Origen's description imagines his subject as both a spectator and proclaimer of Christ's 'advent' in his soul, specifically invoking the angels' speech to the shepherds. Similarly, in another passage (*Hom. Ezech*. 6.6.2), Origen uses the visual motif of the infant Jesus' swaddling clothes to describe the figurative 'swaddling' of a soul that is reborn in Christ through baptism.[115]

At the same time, it is clear that Origen did not interpret the birth of Christ in a solely spiritual manner. In *Cels*. 1.51 he underlines the truthfulness of the infancy accounts, as well as the physicality of the birthplace:

> If anyone wants further proof to convince him that Jesus was born in Bethlehem besides the prophecy of Micah and the story recorded in the gospel about his birth, the cave at Bethlehem is shown (δεικνυται) where he was born and the manger in the cave where he was wrapped in swaddling-clothes. What is shown (δεικνύμενον) there is famous (διαβόητόν) in these parts even among people alien to the faith, since it was in this cave (ἐν τῷ σπηλαιῳ τούτῳ) that the Jesus who is worshipped and admired by Christians was born.[116]

This passage uses deictic terminology to evoke the visuality of pilgrimage to the holy site. Later accounts of witnessing Jesus' birthplace, including the experiences of Jerome and his friend Paula (*Epist*. 46.11; 58.3; 108.10), the Bordeaux pilgrim, and Egeria (*Itinerarium* 42), will expand even more dramatically on the visual vividness of the

[114] Trans. Heine 2018: 599-600. Lat: Klostermann, Benz et al. 1976: 73-74.
[115] Cf. Scheck 2010: 92.
[116] Trans. Chadwick 1986: 47-48. Grk: Koetschau 1899: 102.

sights.[117] But a century before the emperor Constantine was encouraging such pilgrimages through his building of the Church of the Nativity (327 CE),[118] Origen was already interested in the visual specifics of the venerated cave, and even further, the manger within the cave. The tradition of a σπήλαιον as the birthplace, as we have seen, is not found in Matthew or Luke but pre-dates Origen, appearing in Justin (*Dial*. 78) as well as *PJ* (cf. §4.5). Already in the mid-third century, when Origen was writing, 'this cave' was attracting the eyes not only of Christians, but also of non-Christians who had heard of it. Origen's account is the first textual witness of a phenomenon in which crowds of people entered into the experience of Luke's shepherds, who desired to 'go and see' the child in the manger for themselves (cf. Luke 2:15-16).

This section, in summary, has considered several interrelated ways in which Origen engages with aesthetic aspects of Luke 2:1-20. His homiletic application of the angels' speech to listeners within his congregation (*Hom. Luc*. 12.2; 13.5) has the effect of drawing them into the text as addressees of the angel's message. His interpretive imagining of ox and ass at the Bethlehem manger (*Hom. Luc*. 13.7) once again anticipates a prominent artistic motif. His spiritual interpretation of the birth of Christ within the human soul casts the believer in the roles of spectator and proclaimer of the infant Christ as he witnesses to his own spiritual transformation (*Comm. ser. Matt*. 38), while the image of swaddling clothes symbolizes the garments of baptism (*Hom. Ezech*. 6.6.2). Finally, Origen's description of the cave as a pilgrimage site (*Cels*. 1.51) indicates his support of pilgrims' physical witnessing of the visual remains of Jesus' birth as a devotional practice.

[117] Cf. Cain 2010: 108-116 for further discussion of pilgrimage to Bethlehem in this period.
[118] Cf. Pixner 2010: 11-20.

6.3.6 Seeing with Simeon: Interpreting Luke 2:21-40

Luke's account of the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, and specifically his sketch of the figure of Simeon, affords Origen further opportunity to draw his audience into a devotional experience of the infancy narrative through the spiritual senses. Perhaps the most potent example of this phenomenon is Origen's leading of his listeners through the encounter of Simeon with the infant Christ, inviting them to imagine themselves in his place as he sees and holds the child in his arms (*Hom. Luc*. 15.1-5). Paired with our examination of this homily is a passage on Simeon's physical sight in relation to our own mental 'sight' of Scriptural events (*Comm. Jn*. 10.301-306). Finally, we discuss Origen's various comments on spiritual vision prompted by Luke 2:34-35, both within *Hom. Luc*. 16-17 and in *Comm. Rom*. 4.2.5.

Origen turns to the figure of Simeon in *Hom. Luc*. 15.1, beginning with a question: 'What did he gain from seeing (*videre*) Christ?'[119] Origen is probing the concrete effect of Simeon's sight, assuming that the physical beholding of Christ must entail some benefit – either physical or spiritual – for the beholder. In answer to his own question Origen gives the following answer, derived from Simeon's own words in the Nunc dimittis: 'He saw (*videns*) that the little child he was carrying had come to release captives and to free Simeon himself from the bonds of the body.'[120] Framed in this manner, Origen interprets Simeon's bodily release as resulting directly from his sight, and subsequent touching, of Christ.

From here, Origen turns to his listeners, initiating an invitation to imitate Simeon: 'But this is true not only of Simeon, but of the whole human race. Anyone who departs from this world, anyone who is released from prison and the house of those in chains, to

[119] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 62. Lat (Jerome): Rauer 1930: 102.
[120] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 62. Lat (Jerome): Rauer 1930: 103.

go forth and reign, should take Jesus in his hands (*sumat Jesum in manibus suis*). He should enfold him with his arms (*circumdet…brachiis suis*), and fully grasp him in his bosom (*totum habeat in sinu suo*)' (*Hom. Luc.* 15.2).[121] Origen's language here highlights three times over Simeon's act of lovingly embracing the child Jesus, letting his audience imagine how it would feel to bear the child in their arms as he did. Commenting on Simeon's coming into the Temple through the Holy Spirit's guidance, Origen sketches this imitative spirituality in further detail:

> If you wish to hold (*tenere*) Jesus, and to embrace him with your hands (*amplexari manibus*), and to be made worthy of leaving prison, you too must struggle with every effort to possess the guiding Spirit and come to God's temple. See, you stand now (*Ecce, nunc stas*) in the temple of the Lord Jesus – that is, in his Church. This is the temple 'built from living stones.'…If you come 'to the temple in the Spirit,' you will find (*invenies*) the child Jesus. You will lift him up in your arms (*levabis…brachiis*) and say, 'Now you dismiss your servant, Lord, in peace, according to your word' (*Hom. Luc.* 15.3-4).[122]

In this passage, Origen invites his audience to look around them at the church they are standing in, to imagine it analogously with the setting of Simeon's encounter with Christ, and then to apply Simeon's experience directly to their own. They are encouraged to find the infant Jesus within their own church, and to lift him up in their arms as did Simeon, to speak finally in Simeon's own words. In closing his homily, Origen reiterates this invitation: 'Let us pray that we too might stand in the temple, hold the Son of God, and embrace him…Let us pray to Almighty God, and let us pray to Jesus himself, the little child. We long to speak to him and hold him in our arms' (*Hom. Luc.* 15.5).[123]

This homily is remarkable in a number of ways. Lienhard notes that it is among the earliest witnesses to Christian devotion addressed specifically to the *infant* Jesus, most concretely in advocating prayer to the 'little child.' Among the texts we have examined in

[121] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 62-63. Lat (Jerome): Rauer 1930: 103.
[122] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 63. Lat (Jerome): Rauer 1930: 103-104.
[123] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 64.

this study, it is perhaps the most explicit in this regard. Earlier texts – from Matthew's depiction of the adoration of the magi, to *PJ*'s description of the infant's healing power in the case of Salome – certainly offer narratives in which the child is worshipped, and supplicated. I have argued throughout this study that such narratives extend an implicit invitation to their readers to encounter the child Jesus alongside characters – specifically through their engagement of the visual and aural senses. Origen's *Hom. Luc*. 15, however, provides something beyond the implicit; here, we can observe a shift from implicit narrative to explicit homiletic appeal. It is an instance in which Origen interprets Luke's text in precisely the way I have been arguing it should be interpreted. Observing the invitation inherent in Luke's text, he draws it out and extends it to his listeners – explicitly inviting them into an experience of devotion to the infant Christ.

How are we to interpret this 'experience of devotion' that Origen is advocating? Is it meant to be embodied in concrete, physical actions? Or is it more imaginatively or spiritually focused? Origen's only direct reference to his audience's physicality is his mention of the church in which they are presently standing; calls for 'finding' and 'embracing' the child Jesus are more opaque.

One possibility for a more embodied interpretation of these actions is that Origen's language carries subtle Eucharistic undertones: his references to 'taking' and 'holding' the infant Jesus allude to the receiving of Christ in the Eucharist. This suggestion might well be an instance of seeing 'eucharistic allusions in places where others might hesitate to suggest them;'[124] but several points in its favor are worth consideration.

In a lengthy article on Eucharistic practice and piety in Origen's works, Buchinger notes the possibility that Eucharistic celebration followed the delivery of the Lukan homilies. A couple of Origen's closing addresses to his congregation, who have 'come to

[124] Bradshaw 2004: 107, quoted to effect in Buchinger 2015: 6.

God's house in celebration (*festivi*)' (*Hom. Luc*. 7.8), or who should 'rise up and pray to God to be worthy of offering him gifts' (*Hom. Luc*. 39.7), perhaps indicate this.[125] If indeed it was the practice within the Caesarean congregation that the Eucharist was offered after each Lukan homily, it strengthens the effect that Eucharistic allusion might have had on the listener.

Another point is that Origen's vocabulary elsewhere for the act of receiving the Eucharist is similar to his description of taking the infant Jesus into one's hands in Church. In *Hom. Exod*. 13.3, for example, he seems to envision the receiving (*suscipitis*) of the Eucharist in the hands, because he notes congregants' care not to let crumbs fall to the ground.[126] In *Hom. Num*. 5.1 we find the verb *geritur* ('bear,' 'carry') to describe reception of the Eucharist,[127] and in *Comm. ser. Matt*. 86, we find a line that strikingly recalls a moment in *Hom. Luc*. 15: 'If…we too wish to receive (*accipere*) the 'bread' of blessing from Jesus…let us go 'into the city' to the house…where Jesus is celebrating the Pasch.'[128] This line parallels Origen's injunction in *Hom. Luc*. that if his audience wishes to hold the infant Jesus, they must come into the Temple (the Church). The parallel may simply reflect a rhetorical pattern, or it may indicate more deeply a shared allusion to the Eucharistic rite.

Finally, it is worth noting that Origen's Eucharistic theology connects the receiving of Christ's body and blood to the whole Christ event, including the nativity.[129]

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[125] Cf. Buchinger 2015: 15-18 for discussion.
[126] Cf. Baehrens 1920: 274. Note that Bradshaw 2004 interprets this passage to mean receiving in the hands (108). Other ancient sources (e.g. Tertullian, *Idol*. 7; possibly *Cor*.. 3; a letter of Pope Dionysius of Alexandria, preserved in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.9.4; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech. Myst*. 5.21; Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Sermones catech*. 6; Augustine, *Contra ep. Parmen*. 2.7.13) more explicitly attest to the practice of receiving communion in the hands (cf. more discussion in Jungmann 2012: 378-381), though these cannot be used with certainty to reconstruct the practice in Origen's church.
[127] Cf. Baehrens 1921: 26.
[128] Trans. Heine 2018: 693. Lat: Klostermann, Benz et al. 1976: 199.
[129] This point is discussed in Buchinger 2015: 56-58. See, e.g., *Comm. ser. Matt*. 85.

Consequentially, a view of the infant Christ in Eucharistic imagery might not be entirely foreign to his thought.

These factors aside, Origen may be referring solely to an inner imitation of Simeon, an imaginative or spiritual 'seeing' and 'receiving' of the infant. In *Comm. Jn.* 10.301-306, written previously to the Lukan homilies, Origen indeed contrasts the experience of Simeon with that of those who have not seen Jesus physically. This discussion comes under Origen's rebuttal of the view that 'those who have not seen (μὴ ἰδόντας) and have believed are more blessed than those who have seen (ἑωρακότων) and have believed,'[130] an interpretation that Origen argues is a misunderstanding of Jesus' words to Thomas in John 20:29. In Origen's view it is ridiculous that 'those who come after the apostles are more blessed than the apostles;' rather than having their privilege of physical sight, the one who comes after them 'must see with his mind (ἰδεῖν δὲ τῷ νῷ) the things believed' in order to be blessed as they were.[131] As Origen observes, Jesus also blessed the eyes that saw his works (e.g. Matt 13:16-17); his words about those who have not seen is, for Origen, 'inferior blessing.' At this point, Simeon is invoked as an example of one whose beholding (θεασάμενος) of the infant Jesus is more blessed than 'those who have not attained the vision of such things (μὴ φθασάνων ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν τοιούντων θέαν).'[132] In closing this argument Origen writes frankly, 'Faith which comes through sight (διὰ εἴδους) is much better, if I may put it this way, than faith 'through a mirror and in a riddle' like our present knowledge.'[133]

This passage is interesting, first of all, as a counter balance to a scholarly emphasis on the spiritual senses in Origen's work, [134] and to other passages within Origen's corpus

[130] Trans. Heine 1989: 322-323. Grk: Preuschen 1903: 221.
[131] Trans. Heine 1989: 323. Grk: Preuschen 1903: 221-222.
[132] Trans. Heine 1989: 323. Grk: Preuschen 1903: 222.
[133] Trans. Heine 1989: 324. Grk: Preuschen 1903: 222.
[134] Cf. §6.1.

that indeed seem to prioritize the spiritual over the physical, one of which we will examine in a moment. Here Origen states unequivocally that those who physically saw Christ achieved a higher good. It also proves illustrative for our discussion of the imitative spirituality Origen is advocating in *Hom. Luc*. 15. Whether or not an embodied interpretation through Eucharistic allusion is at play in this homily, it seems likely that Origen is instructing his audience in a way of 'seeing with the mind' the scene described in the gospel. Through imagining themselves in Simeon's place, beholding the child and taking him up in their arms, Origen's listeners inhabit a spirituality that endeavors to see as Simeon saw, even if the same physicality of that event cannot be attained.

In *Hom. Luc*. 16-17, spiritual vision again becomes a topic for discussion, prompted by Simeon's prophecy in Luke 2:34. Origen interprets Simeon's phrases about 'the falling and the rising of many in Israel,' and the 'sign that will be contradicted' in light of Jesus' words in John 9:39 about sight and blindness. What those who 'fall and rise' both lose and gain, respectively, is true vision: 'There is a corporeal eye (*oculus corporis*), by which we see (*conspicimus*) earthly things, an eye according to the sense of the flesh (*sensum carnis*)…We have another eye, opposed to this one. It is better, and perceives divine things (*divina sapientem*)' (*Hom. Luc*. 16.8).[135] Those who 'can see with full acuteness and reason' (*qui plena possunt acie et ratione conspicere*) – Origen's interpretation of the word 'Israel'[136]– can also interpret 'signs' in Scriptural writings about Jesus (*Hom. Luc*. 17.4-5).[137] Similarly, in *Comm. Rom*. 4.2.5, the 'sign' in Lk 2:34 is the recognition of God in the visual appearance in flesh: 'Flesh was perceived (*cernebatur*), and God was believed (*credebatur*).'[138]

[135] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 68-69. Lat (Jerome): Rauer 1930: 110.
[136] Origen's interpretation of 'Israel' in terms of sight likely follows Philo; see, e.g., *Ebr*. 82; *Her*. 78; *QG* 3.49.
[137] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 72. Lat (Jerome): Rauer 1930: 115.
[138] Trans. Scheck 2001: 248-249. Lat (Rufinus): Brésard, Fédou et al. 2010: 208.

These passages connect us back with Origen's notion of the spiritual sight of the eyewitnesses (Luke 1:2), discussed above in §6.3.2. There, as here in his interpretation of Simeon's prophecy of a 'sign,' Origen describes a visual recognition of the divine that beyond the physical and even supersedes it in value. This interpretation may seem to contradict the view Origen takes in *Comm. Jn*. 10.301-306, examined just above, where he firmly states that the experience of those who saw Jesus in the flesh is preferable to those who must 'see with the mind.' But are these passages necessarily opposed? Perhaps, rather, eyewitnesses' physical seeing is not opposed to their spiritual recognition, but integrally participates in it and aids it.[139] Those who believe after Jesus' earthly life must achieve the same spiritual recognition, without the benefit of physical beholding. Origen's *Hom. Luc*. 15, then, aids his audience in attaining the spiritual recognition of Simeon, via an imitative 'seeing with the mind' that takes the place of his physical experience and potentially involves another (the embodied act of receiving the Eucharist). This integrative reading allows us to appreciate the nuances of Origen's thought on sense perception.

6.3.7 Finding Jesus with Mary and Joseph: Interpreting Luke 2:41-52

When in his series of Lukan homilies Origen reaches the last of Luke's infancy scenes, one of the themes he develops at length is the experience of Mary and Joseph seeking and finding Jesus. As in his discussion of the experience of Simeon, Origen similarly leads his audience through this parental drama, explicitly inviting them into its narrative to imitate Jesus' parents in seeking him. As we noted in §3.3.4, the gospel scene is punctuated by the theme of searching (ζητέω); its tension hinges on Jesus' absence from his parents' sight. At the culminating moment of their finding (εὗρον) him among teachers at the Temple, listening to them and asking them questions, the parents' sight (ἰδόντες) of

[139] This reading of Origen is comparable to that of Dawson 2002.

Jesus provokes their astonishment. Origen, in the following passages, uses the language of seeking and finding – significantly implying the engagement of spiritual senses – in relating the experience of Mary and Joseph to that of his listeners.

The first instance of Origen's turning to his audience to incite their participation in the narrative appears in *Hom. Luc*. 18.3:

> Learn where they who seek him find him (*eum quaerentes reperiant*). Then you too, when you seek (*quaerens*) him along with Joseph and Mary, might be able to find (*reperias*) him. They sought him and, Scripture says, 'they found (*invenerunt*) him in the temple': not in any other place, but 'in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.' You too, therefore, seek (*quaere*) Jesus 'in the temple' of God. Seek him in the Church. Seek him among the teachers who are 'in the temple' and do not leave it. For, if you seek him in this way, you will find (*invenies*) him…Jesus is present now (*nunc praesens*) as well. He interrogates us and hears us speaking.[140]

This passage aligns nicely with Origen's similar imitative approach in *Hom. Luc*. 15, discussed above. In both cases, Origen encourages his audience to find Jesus – as did Simeon, Mary and Joseph – in 'the temple,' i.e., the Church. Jerome's use of *quaero* and *reperio*/*invenio* no doubt reflect a Latin translation of ζητέω and εὑρίσκω, respectively. Origen's employment of these verbs in this passage goes beyond a mere intellectual seeking, to reflect something of the parents' perception of Jesus' bodily presence. This becomes evident in the last line of the passage, where Origen asserts that 'Jesus is present now,' i.e. in the church where he is delivering his homily. Though he stops just short of saying so, this significantly implies a spiritual seeing that imitates Jesus' parents own sight of their son.

Having invoked Jesus' presence 'now,' Origen fills out this picture by applying the child Jesus' actions in the Lukan scene to his own ecclesial setting. Jesus hears, interrogates, and provides exegetical answers for questions within Origen's own

[140] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 77-78. Lat (Jerome): Rauer 1930: 123-124.

congregation, just as he did with the teachers in Jerusalem. For this reason, Origen continues in *Hom. Luc*. 18.4: 'Let us implore (*obsecremus*) him and beg (*quaeramus*) him with great earnestness and sorrow to allow us to hear (*audiamus*) him, and to ask us questions that he himself would solve. Then we shall be able to find him whom we seek.'[141] Here, Origen advocates the posture of prayer (as he did above in *Hom. Luc*. 15.5), as well as a spiritual hearing of Jesus. With this point, he has the congregation's imitative spirituality shift between the experience of Mary and Joseph, and the experience of the Jerusalem teachers.

Another aspect that Origen draws out of the Lukan passage is that of the suffering of Jesus' parents as they searched for him. In Mary's words, 'Child, why have you done this to us? Behold, your father and I have been suffering (ὀδυνώμενοι), searching for you' (Luke 2:48). Origen implores his audience to seek Jesus in just such a posture of earnest labor (*Hom. Luc*. 18.5), and he expands upon this motif in *Hom. Luc*. 19.5, where he likens it to the task of searching the Scriptures for truth:

> Sometimes you read (*legis*) the Scriptures and in them seek (*quaeris*) their meaning (*sensum*) with a certain sorrow, and even pain. This is not because you think the Scriptures erred, or contain something wrong. Rather, they contain within themselves an expression and account of the truth (*veritatis sermonem atque rationem*). You cannot discover (*nequeas invenire*) what is true.[142] In just this way his parents sought (*quaerebant*) Jesus…When they sought him, they did not find him 'among their relatives.' For, a human relationship could not contain the Son of God. They did not find him 'among their acquaintances,' because divine power is greater than mortal acquaintance and knowledge. Where, then, did they find him? 'In the temple.' For, it is there that the Son of God is found. If you ever seek the Son of God, look first in the temple; hasten thither. There you will find Christ, the Word and Wisdom (*sermonem atque sapientiam*) – that is, the Son of God.[143]

[141] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 78. Lat (Jerome): Rauer 1930: 124.
[142] A Greek fragment that Rauer presents side by side with the Latin here renders this slightly differently: the truth has 'not yet appeared to you' (μήπω δε σοι πεφανερωμένην).
[143] Trans. Lienhard 1996: 82. Lat (Jerome): Rauer 1930: 127-128.

For Origen, the search for Scriptural truth and the search for the Son of God go hand in hand – significantly because Christ *is* the Λόγος (Jerome's *sermo et ratio*) that is sought in the Scriptures. In the act of reading Scripture, Origen says, there is a certain truth that must be found. In order render this truth visible, the reader labors with a certain sorrow or pain. Origen then analogizes this description to the search of Mary and Joseph, who labor to find Jesus among relatives and acquaintances before finally finding him in the Temple – which, as we have observed already, Origen likens to the Church. Within the ecclesial setting, Origen encourages his audience, they will find Jesus, who is also the 'word and wisdom' they seek in the Scriptures.[144] These three – Scriptural truth, Christ, and the Church – are woven together inextricably in the description so that each forms a crucial part in the imitative act of 'finding Jesus,' alongside Mary and Joseph.

In summary, then, with this final Lukan infancy scene Origen invites his congregants both to seek Jesus, with Mary and Joseph, and to listen to him, with the Jerusalem rabbis. Both Scripture and Church coalesce around the finding of Jesus, and they provide concrete locations for Origen's audience to seek the child with spiritual eyes and ears.

6.3.8 Conclusion to §6.3

This section has examined the ways in which the visual and aural senses figure in Origen's exegesis of Luke's infancy narrative, and our findings have both confirmed and further expanded our understanding of Origen's 'aesthetic response,' begun in §6.2.

The spiritual senses have played a prominent role in the passages we have examined in this section (cf. §6.3.2 *et passim*); at the same time, we have also noted places

[144] Origen is clear, furthermore, that finding Jesus in the 'temple' means finding him within the orthodox Church, not among heresies or false teachers (*Hom. Luc*. 20.1-3; cf. 18.3, 5 and Origen's famous personal statement in 16.6).

where Origen elevates the physical senses (esp. *Comm. Jn.* 10.301-306 in §6.3.6). We have continued to observe how Origen's exegetical imagination anticipates artistic motifs in the examples of Mary as a Scriptural student (§6.3.4), and the ox and ass at the Bethlehem manger (§6.3.5). Moreover, his thorough exegesis of the auditory dynamics of Luke 1 confirmed our own insights about the aural-oral modes of Lukan characters in §3.2, while drawing symbolic value from the designations of φωνή and λόγος in relation to infants John and Jesus (§6.3.3).

Most significantly, this section has lent further material in support of this chapter's argument that the distinctive characteristic of Origen's 'aesthetic response,' among the other case studies we have examined, is in his explicit homiletic appeals through which he draws his audience into visual and aural experiences alongside biblical characters (§6.3.4-7). Homiletic passages such as these seem to strike a balance between the spiritual and the physical senses: on the one hand, Origen encourages an inner posture of imitation (inasmuch as his audience cannot physically encounter the infant Christ in the flesh); on the other hand, this imitative spirituality often involves the body (pilgrimage to physical remains; coming into Church; reading and listening to Scripture; possibly even Eucharistic devotion). Our discussion showed that, far from discounting the physical senses of his listeners, Origen's homiletic appeals to an imitative spirituality thoroughly integrated physical eyes and ears.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter has carefully examined multiple texts from the Origenian corpus in order to understand and define Origen's unique 'aesthetic response' to the New Testament infancy narratives. For detailed conclusions from the analyses of his Matthean and Lukan exegeses, respectively, I refer the reader to §6.2.5 and §6.3.8 above. Here, I aim to draw

the findings of these sections together to make several broad concluding statements regarding the chapter's contribution to this study as a whole.

We have noted throughout this chapter various ways in which Origen's 'aesthetic response' to the infancy narratives resonates with observations we have made in previous chapters. Not only does he pick up on many of the visual and aural cues from the gospel texts that we documented in Chapters 2 and 3, but his mode of response sometimes merges with responsorial modes discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. For example, his interpretive expansions of aesthetic details in narrative setting and character description, though more exegetically than literarily motivated, recall the *Protevangelium of James*; while his theological and metaphorical discussions of image, text, and Incarnation evoke Irenaeus. What, then, is distinctive about Origen's response?

While it is not the only facet to consider, I have argued that what distinguishes Origen's 'aesthetic response' among our three case studies is the explicit, homiletic engagement of his audience in the visual and aural experiences of New Testament characters, which is characteristic of his homilies. These passages encourage an imitative posture that is sometimes reflected inwardly in the exercise of spiritual senses, sometimes physically in concrete bodily practices, and often in a combination of both. Importantly for the present study, this facet of Origen's response gives explicit expression to the implicit 'aesthetic invitations' of the infancy narratives.

This argument significantly unites previous insights about Origen's exegetical method (Torjesen) and the spiritual senses (McInroy), which were discussed in §6.1. Origen's homiletic appeals draw his audience into the presence of the infant Christ – both through textual exegesis, and through his audience's senses. Moreover, this chapter has questioned scholarly preoccupation with the spiritual senses in Origen, suggesting that a focus on this narrowly defined category has limited our appreciation for a number of other

factors in Origen's thought on sense perception. We have examined texts that prioritize the physical senses over the spiritual, that suggest embodied practices as significant aids to 'spiritual' interpretation, and that indicate Origen's engagement with material culture and visual art. Indeed, we have observed that Origen's exegetical imagination sometimes parallels or anticipates similar motifs in early Christian art. All of these avenues merit further study within Origen's corpus more broadly.

This chapter's analysis stands as the end point to our study, which limits itself to textual, pre-Nicene receptions of the New Testament infancy accounts. Origen himself died about 70 years prior to the assembly of that first Christologically-focused council. While the history of my theme can be traced through many more authors and texts, each of the three case studies chosen is a significant early point of contact with the visual and aural aspects I have highlighted within the biblical texts. Each additionally, and in its own way, has influenced the subsequent reception of these aspects in Christian thought and artistic expression. In Origen's case, we have observed a multifaceted response to the aesthetic invitation posed by Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2, distinctive in its early contribution to a tradition of spiritual and embodied devotion to the infant Christ.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
CONCLUSION

7.1 Revisiting an Exegetical Dilemma

This study began by drawing from Bovon's exegetical dilemma two *desiderata* for a study of the New Testament infancy narratives (cf. §1.1). As Bovon indicated in a preliminary way, these narratives of Christ's birth and infancy have been the subject of a striking amount of visual and aural reflection throughout their interpretive history. The present study offers to biblical scholarship, in the first place, an answer for *why* this is so, through examining the 'aesthetic invitations' inherent in the texts themselves. Reciprocally, it offers a preliminary analysis of *how* it became so in the texts' earliest reception history. This conclusion gathers together the two interlocking parts of the thesis, providing an account of its major findings and contributions.

7.2 The Findings of this Study

Part I of this study argued that both Matthew and Luke draw significant attention to the visual and aural senses of characters within their infancy narratives, and that each extends an 'aesthetic invitation' to readers. The analysis of Part II allows us to revisit and test this claim. How successful were these 'invitations'? Which visual or aural elements highlighted by Matthew and Luke effected the greatest, or the least, response in our case studies? In what *ways* were these elements received, and why? Admittedly, our judgment of the 'success' of the aesthetic invitations can only be partial, as this study offers only a sliver of interpretive response to these texts. However, in light of the early date and prominence of our three case studies, we can make a number of significant observations.

Within Matthew's infancy narrative, the account of the magi achieves by far the most widespread 'aesthetic response' in early Christian literature. This confirms our initial

reading of the text as the aesthetic culmination of Matthew's infancy narrative, and is also indicated by the prominence of the magi in early Christian art from the third century. Between those two poles, however, we can see that the Matthean text provoked the visual interpretations of readers in the second and early third centuries. This is potentially already the case in Ignatius of Antioch's highly visual description of a star which outshone all other stars in *Eph.* 19.1-3, a text which resonates with more explicit interpretations of the magi and star in *PJ* and Origen. Both Irenaeus and Origen interpret the magi's sight of the child as a recognition of divine presence. In Origen's multiple passages on the magi, we find exegetical impulses that anticipate particular aspects of the motif in early Christian art: their grouping of three, and the reading of Balaam's foresight into the magi's own visual pilgrimage.

The more auditory features of Matthew's account – the fulfillment quotations and angelic dream messages – also attract response in our three case studies, but in more subtle ways. Perhaps the most prominent specific element is Matthew's quotation of Isa 7:14, which surfaces in Irenaeus' appeal to the 'auditory image' of virgin and child; and in Origen's appeal to the oral/aural practice of proclaiming the name 'Emmanuel' as a statement of faith. *PJ* is indebted to Matthew's characterization of the aural piety of Joseph in listening to dream messages, but significantly transforms this characterization into a predominantly *visual* piety. Another aesthetic response seems to result from Matthew's silence; the early connecting of Balaam to the magi is derived from an unspoken, possibly implicit, 'fulfillment quotation' from Num 24:17.

What about the outcomes of Luke's 'aesthetic invitation'? As significant as the aesthetic piety of Matthew's infancy narrative was in the early Christian imagination, Luke's was more so. Aptly associated with the painting trade in late antiquity and the middle ages, analysis of Luke's text suggests his use of the ancient technique ἐνάργεια –

'painting' by means of verbal description. Moreover, Luke's infancy narrative resounds with the aurality of four canticles, each of which is excerpted and adapted into ancient liturgies. And even more fundamentally than these ways of drawing the eyes and ears of his readers, Luke's preface also conveys his interest in original visual and aural witnesses to the Word – an interest which we examined in his portrayal of contrasting modes of listening in Luke 1, and three episodes of visual encounter with the infant Christ in Luke 2.

All of these elements of Luke's aesthetic invitation appeared in our examination of early aesthetic response. The scenes that surfaced most widely in our three case studies were the Annunciation to Mary, and the Nativity – an observation which is perhaps unsurprising given the theological importance of both. Luke's portrayal of Mary as ideal listener was important for all of our case studies – *PJ* extends this characterization by asserting that Mary's aesthetic piety was formed through her time in the Temple; for Irenaeus, Mary's listening to Gabriel is contrasted with Eve's listening to a serpent; Origen draws symbolic significance from the Word that Mary receives into her womb. In each, simultaneously, there was also an impulse to fill in the *visual* gaps of Luke's Annunciation. *PJ* does this perhaps most dramatically in its vivid description of Mary spinning purple thread during the encounter with Gabriel – a passage which heavily influenced ancient and medieval artistic depictions of the Annunciation. Irenaeus introduces the visual motif of Mary figuratively untying the knot of Eve. Origen both draws attention to the visual hiddenness of this event, and to Mary herself as a student of Scripture (another prominent later artistic motif) and model of *imitatio Christi*. Indeed, we have seen that aesthetic aspects of defining Mary's role – specifically that her obedience contributed to the visual revelation of her Son – participates in a steadily increasing Mariology in antiquity.

Luke's nativity is a similarly prominent *locus* for early aesthetic response. *PJ*, as is its tendency, transforms this scene with its famous cave motif, an account which merged with Luke's nativity in early Christian pilgrimage to the 'manger' at a cave in Bethlehem – a practice attested by Origen. For Irenaeus, visual witnesses of the Word made flesh are important in his opposition to contrary claims that sight of Christ at his birth was deceptive. He merges the shepherds' witness at the nativity with other visual witnesses – Simeon, Mary, the magi, and even Abraham.

Other Lukan scenes also surfaced at least once in our three case studies. Zechariah's visual encounter with Gabriel at the Temple is creatively adapted by *PJ* into the scene of his murder during the massacre of the innocents, thus paving the way for Simeon's priestly encounter with the infant Christ. The silencing of Zechariah, and the continuing auditory dynamics of Luke 1 in the Visitation and birth of John, are carefully interpreted by Origen as related to the designations of John and Jesus as 'voice' and 'Word.' Furthermore, Origen explicitly invites his congregation into Simeon's experience of sight of the infant, and into Mary and Joseph's experience of visually finding the twelve-year-old Jesus at the Temple.

It is thus apparent from our study that the aesthetic pieties of the New Testament infancy narratives effected widespread response from an early date. But in addition to our findings with regard to the outcomes of Matthew's and Luke's 'aesthetic invitations,' viewing the thesis as a whole also allows us to appreciate the diverse interpretive modes that were applied to the visual and aural aspects of the texts in the second and early third centuries. Interest in these aesthetic aspects was not exclusive to one specific genre of interpretation, but was pervasive in multiple spheres of early Christian thought. Our first case study demonstrated this interest in apocryphal narrative – a genre prone to interpretive gap-filling, adapting, reworking, and expanding the pre-canonical narratives

of Matthew and Luke. This case study also indicated that these modes of 'aesthetic response' are attested in multiple other ancient apocryphal reworkings of the infancy narratives beyond the highly influential *Protevangelium of James*. Our second case study discovered an interest in the aesthetic aspects of the infancy narratives in the apologetic writings of bishop and theologian Irenaeus of Lyons – for whom issues of perception were key to establishing the Church's emerging theology of the Incarnation. Moreover, Irenaeus' writings provide a partial window into the very different 'aesthetic responses' of his opponents – showing that the aesthetic aspects of the infancy texts were of interest to a diverse range of theological orientations. Finally, our third case study emphasized the homiletic mode of 'aesthetic response' in the writings of exegete and preacher Origen of Alexandria, showing that the visual and aural aspects of the infancy narratives were explicitly invoked in the practices and spiritual lives of early Christians. That all of these different interpretive modes and aims – in the creation of new narratives; theological debate and controversy; the practice of Christian life – were motivated by the aesthetic invitations of Matthew and Luke, is a point that further supports the potency of visual and aural aspects in the biblical texts.

7.3 The Contributions of this Study

This study shows, above all, that visual and aural aspects of the biblical accounts of Christ's infancy are dynamic to an extent that they *compel* aesthetic response from readers. This is the most significant contribution of the present study, and it merits unpacking.

It is not incidental that the early readers we have observed in this study engaged aesthetic issues within the biblical texts in their respective interpretive modes. It is not incidental that the aesthetic aspects of Christian imagination, theology and doctrine, liturgy

and spirituality – not to mention the mediums of art and music – continued to be fueled powerfully by these texts throughout their reception history. Nor are the New Testament infancy narratives merely antecedent and passive to these receptions. Rather, this study's careful analysis of visual and aural aspects in the Matthean and Lukan texts suggests the conclusion that these aesthetic features actively *provoke* response – an observation that is corroborated by our three reception-historical case studies. The biblical texts impressed themselves powerfully upon the senses of these readers, *moving* them to further expand aesthetic imagination of infancy scenes; to debate the crucial theological implications of their aesthetic aspects; and to incorporate their aesthetic pieties into the practice of Christian life.

This new understanding of the aesthetic dynamics of the infancy narratives holds a number of implications for several fields of study. Most directly, it provides resolution to an exegetical question significantly overlooked within biblical scholarship, which we flagged at the beginning of this study: What is it about the New Testament infancy narratives that has generated such enormous aesthetic response? The answer, so this study argues, lies within the visual and aural aspects of the texts themselves. Moreover, our analysis suggests *why* aesthetic piety mattered to these texts. For the infancy narratives, 'seeing' and 'hearing' are important because these senses are the vehicles through which human beings encounter divine revelation – in prophetic voices, angelic messages, and finally in the birth of the Son of God himself. The visual and aural senses matter because they help to illuminate the human-divine encounters these texts are trying to convey – and even, so this study suggests, to mediate for their readers.

New horizons in biblical scholarship open up from the conclusion of this study. If the New Testament infancy narratives' aesthetic pieties impinge on the senses of readers, might other biblical narratives, or even non-narrative material, operate in a similar way?

To some extent, elements of this idea have surfaced already in studies of sense perception in biblical texts; and in studies of the Bible's *Wirkungs*- or *Rezeptionsgeschichte*. The present study brings the insights of both areas decisively together, arguing that sense perception (αἴσθησις) is significantly involved in the process of effective history – an idea hinted at, but not typically developed, in the term *Rezeptionsästhetik* (cf. §1.4.2). Multiple other aesthetically-charged biblical traditions could usefully be approached in this way. A partial list for future research includes gospel traditions such as the baptism, transfiguration, passion and resurrection of Christ; other NT material such as the conversion of Paul or the heavenly visions and liturgies of Revelation; as well as narrative and poetic material in the Hebrew Bible. In what ways do these biblical texts invite the sense perceptions of readers, and for what reasons? What is their aesthetic effect in early interpretation, art, liturgy, or music? The application of this approach to infancy traditions in the present study provides a model against which other biblical texts might be compared.

Beyond biblical studies proper, the conclusion of this study makes contributions to other academic disciplines including art history, music and liturgical history, patristics and early Christianity, and theological aesthetics.

For historians of art, music, and liturgy – especially in antiquity, but also to a certain extent beyond antiquity – the study of artistic renderings of infancy motifs must now take into account the indebtedness of such renderings to the aesthetic aspects of the biblical narratives. Taking the present study as a basis on which to expand, future work could examine more closely how the aesthetic elements engaged in early literary sources emerged in ancient artistic expression. Evidence might include multiple visual mediums (e.g. catacomb frescoes, sarcophagi and funerary plaques, mosaics, pottery and devotional artifacts), and poetic corpora (e.g. hymns by such authors as Ambrose of Milan,

Prudentius, Ephrem the Syrian, and Romanos the Melodist; as well as liturgical and hymnic papyri). Furthermore, the idea that artistic representations may be generated by textual indicators of visuality or aurality is one that could be further applied to other cases beyond the infancy material.

For scholars of patristics and of early Christianity more broadly, this study's conclusion holds several implications. It offers the general understanding that the various spheres of ancient Christianity I have highlighted – the production of apocryphal narrative, second-century Christological speculation, and the embodied or spiritual practice of Christian life – were effected to some degree by the aesthetic elements within the New Testament infancy narratives. There is of course nothing new in the assertion that these spheres were profoundly influenced by the Bible and biblical exegesis. However, this study adds two specifics to that assertion: the specific dynamics of sense perception in early biblical interpretation; and the specific influence of the infancy narratives. This study has combined those two areas, but each could be further investigated individually in other patristic and early Christian sources. Additionally, this study contributes new insights for continuing scholarship on *PJ*, Irenaeus, or Origen (see Chapters 4-6 for more detail).

Finally, and further afield because of the common separation of biblical studies from theology in academic contexts, this research makes a contribution to the study of theological aesthetics. While biblical material is often invoked in a general way in scholarship on theological aesthetics, this study bolsters such appeals by providing a close, philological reading of aesthetic aspects within a section of the biblical literature concerned with the perception of God in the Incarnation. This study paves the way for similar research on other biblical texts, in work that would join the concerns of theological aesthetics with the exegetical tools of biblical scholarship.

In short, this thesis fills gaps in biblical studies and related disciplines with a contribution to knowledge that should come perhaps as no surprise. The argument that the visual and aural senses are key to understanding the earliest literary reflections on the birth of the infant Christ is deeply resonant with longstanding perceptions of the Incarnation – an event which has from the early Christian period been described both in terms of God becoming visible in human flesh, and in terms of the eternal Word, spoken by God into a listening creation. These perceptions are no mere abstractions, but deeply rooted in the gospel writers' concern both to portray and to mediate for readers the experiences of those who first saw and heard the revelation of God in Christ. One of our opening examples was Dionysius of Furna's manual for instructing painters in how to depict biblical scenes (cf. §1.1). This study demonstrates that the biblical accounts of Christ's infancy act as manuals for the senses in and of themselves; in a manner comparable with Dionysius' description of the prophetess Anna, they visually point their readers to Christ and proclaim in words that resound from a page: 'This baby created heaven and earth.'

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