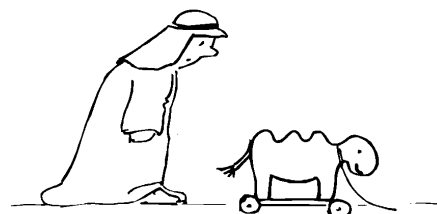




BIRTH STORIES OF JESUS

1. Only two Gospels contain accounts of the birth of Jesus, Matthew and Luke. If Mark and John knew about the infancy narratives, they did not think they were important. *How important are they?*
2. Matthew and Luke's accounts are very different in character. Matthew gives a lot of Old Testament references and seems to want to show that Jesus is the expected Messiah. Luke interweaves the story of Jesus birth with that of John the Baptist. Despite a visit to the Temple at Jerusalem Luke is keen to show the relevance of Jesus to Gentiles (non-Jews).
3. The background to the stories is different. In Matthew it is Joseph who receives the information from God and he makes decisions about where they should go. Some scholars think Matthew gained his information from Joseph. Certainly he is the main character. Luke shows that it is Mary who hears the directions from God. Luke's story is certainly told from her point of view.
4. The details of the story are quite different in the two Gospels. Matthew does not say that the couple made a journey to go to Bethlehem. Wise men come and visit the child and Mary and Joseph flee to Egypt to escape Herod's evil plan to kill all the young children. Luke describes the home of Mary and Joseph as being in Nazareth. They make a journey to Bethlehem because of a census. The newly born child is visited by shepherds not wise men and the couple take the child to Jerusalem when they leave Bethlehem to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving.
5. The two stories have very little in common. In both Mary is said to be a virgin, although the significance of this is seen quite differently. In both the birth takes place in Bethlehem.
6. Many popular myths have grown up around the story. The stable, the donkey, jolly innkeepers, presents brought by shepherds etc. None of these is found in the gospel accounts of the birth.



The Camel for the Nativity Play
did not turn out too well