

## WHO AM I TO BE BLESSED? MARY AS BLESSED MOTHER IN THE PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES

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Scholarship has explored the relationship between the Protevangelium of James (PJ) and the canonical gospels, especially the Gospel of Luke.<sup>1</sup> Protevangelium of James demonstrates a close relationship to Luke, in terms of concepts and themes as well as verbal and syntactical agreement. It is relatively apparent that the author of PJ has made use of Luke as a source text and reconfigured it in places.<sup>2</sup>

This essay considers one such reconfiguration in PJ: Mary's visit to Elizabeth as found in PJ 12.2–3 and Luke 1:39–56. After a comparative exegesis of the two passages, I will explore the topos of “blessing” as it

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1. See, e.g., Mary F. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived: Mary and Classical Representations of Virginity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Vernon K. Robbins, *Who Do People Say I Am? Rewriting Gospel in Emerging Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 157–73; Pieter A. van Stempvoort, “The Protevangelium Jacobi: The Sources of Its Theme and Style and Their Bearing on Its Date,” in *Studia Evangelica III*, ed. F. L. Cross, TUGAL 88 (Berlin: Akademie, 1964), 410–26. Willem S. Vorster, “The Protevangelium of James and Intertextuality,” in *Text and Testimony: Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honour of A. F. J. Klijn*, ed. T. Baarda et al. (Kampen: Kok, 1988), 262–75, provides particular attention to the dynamic between “pretexts” and subsequent texts. For general introduction, see Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 31–38; J. K. Elliott, “The Protevangelium of James,” in *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*, ed. J. K. Elliott (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), 48–67; and Paul Foster, “The Protevangelium of James,” in *The Non-Canonical Gospels*, ed. Paul Foster (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 110–25.

2. “The main inspiration and sources behind PJ have been the birth stories in Matthew and Luke and the Old Testament. Like Luke 1–2 the language of PJ is heavenly influenced by the LXX” (Elliott, “Protevangelium of James,” 51).

appears in both of these passages and in the whole of each composition. My analysis will highlight the different role that blessing plays in the environment of prophetic discourse in Luke 1–2 compared to the role it plays in the environment of priestly discourse in PJ. Finally, I will seek to amplify particular use of the topos in PJ. Since Mary is almost the exclusive recipient of blessing, I will attempt to answer Mary's question in PJ 12.2, "Who am I, Lord, that all the women of the earth will bless me?"<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, I hope to show that the author of PJ draws attention to Mary's function as mother, in addition to her identity as pure virgin, which distinguishes her as blessed.

### 1. COMPARATIVE EXEGESIS OF LUKE 1:39–56 AND PROTEVANGELIUM OF JAMES 12.2–3

#### 1.1. Considering the Context

Before analyzing the two passages themselves, it will be helpful to place each within its respective narrative context. Mary's visit to Elizabeth in Luke 1:39–56 falls within Luke's treatment of the "prehistory" of Jesus's life and ministry (1:5–4:13). In Luke 1–2, Luke presents the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus in parallel to one another. I will highlight just a few details of Luke's parallel presentation: an angel foretells the birth of each in advance (John in 1:5–25; Jesus in 1:26–38); the birth of each child is described (John in 1:57–66; Jesus in 2:1–20); both infants are named and circumcised (John in 1:59–63; Jesus in 2:21); and, the development of both infants is mentioned (John in 1:80; Jesus in 2:40). Luke situates Mary's visit to Elizabeth in the midst of divine promises being fulfilled through the twin births of John and Jesus.

Luke's description of the births of John and Jesus is filled with poetic and hymnic language. In addition to Mary's hymn of praise in Luke 1:46–55, the narrative contains Elizabeth's blessing of Mary and her child (1:42–45), Zechariah's prophetic blessing of John in 1:67–79, Simeon's praise in 2:29–32, and Anna's praise in 2:38. These hymnic portions in particular demonstrate Luke's attempt to portray the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, and

3. Unless otherwise noted, translations and Greek text of PJ are from Ehrman and Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels* (hereafter designated E-P). English translations generally follow the NRSV, although modifications have been made in places, especially to highlight similarities between Luke and PJ.

the birth of John, the Messiah's forerunner, as fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.

Based on Vernon K. Robbins's work on "rhetorolects" in early Christianity, this section of Luke clearly demonstrates what he calls "prophetic discourse."<sup>4</sup> Beyond obvious motifs of prophecy such as the future orientation of divine messages delivered through angels (Luke 1:20) and the connections between John the Baptist and Israel's prophets of old (Luke 1:16–17), the logic of the narrative itself aligns with the pattern of thought characteristic of prophetic discourse. Robbins explains: "The goal of prophetic rhetorolect is to create a governed realm on earth where God's righteousness is enacted among all of God's people in the realm with the aid of God's specially transmitted word in the form of prophetic action and speech."<sup>5</sup> A few examples confirm the primacy of prophetic rhetorolect in Luke 1–2. Throughout, Jesus is depicted as the royal Messiah of God. He is promised the throne of David and is said to reign over the house of Jacob (1:32–33); he is described as the "Lord" in Mary's interaction with Elizabeth (1:43, see more below); he is Israel's "mighty savior" (1:69) who will save God's people from the power of their enemies (1:69, 74); the angels tell the shepherds of the birth of the Messiah Lord (2:11). God too is depicted in ways that align with the conceptual world of prophetic discourse: God is the "Mighty One" (1:49) characterized by the "strength of his arm" and his remembrance of his promises to Israel (1:54–55).

There are elements that resemble priestly discourse in Luke 1–2, such as Jesus's visit to the temple and the role of Simeon and Anna, but these are largely subsumed within prophetic discourse. Simeon, who is not explicitly identified as a priest in Luke (as in PJ),<sup>6</sup> blesses Mary and her child, but the motivation for his doing so appears in the form of prophetic discourse rather than priestly. He blesses Jesus because he sees God's salvation in Jesus (2:29); just a few verses earlier in Luke, Simeon is said to be waiting for "the consolation of Israel" (2:25), which comes to fruition

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4. For an overview of Robbins's work on rhetorolects, see Vernon K. Robbins, "Conceptual Blending and Early Christian Imagination," in *Explaining Christian Origins and Early Judaism: Contributions from Cognitive and Social Science*, ed. Petri Luomanen, Ilkka Pyysiäinen, and Risto Uro, BIS 89 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 161–95; and Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse*, vol. 1, RRA 1 (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo, 2009).

5. Robbins, "Conceptual Blending," 166.

6. Elliott says flatly, "Simeon was not a high priest" ("Protevangelium of James," 51).

when he sees Jesus. The “blessedness” of both Mary and Jesus is cast in prophetic overtones: for both, blessing concerns the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel related especially to a political kingdom. Even when the narrative takes place in or near the temple, the temple is not characterized by the activation of divine benefits. Rather, it is the platform for prophetic speech.<sup>7</sup> The dominance of prophetic discourse, even when the “first space”<sup>8</sup> of priestly discourse (the temple) is employed, can be seen more clearly when compared to the dominant mode of discourse in PJ.

Much of PJ, like Luke 1–4, concerns the prehistory of Jesus, but it extends the prehistory of Jesus back even further than the Gospel of Luke does. Rather than starting the narrative with the story of John’s birth, PJ describes the conception, birth, childhood, and betrothal of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The Protevangelium of James opens with Joachim and Anna who, though childless for many years, become the parents of Mary (PJ 1–4). The next major section of the composition concerns Mary: her birth (PJ 5), her childhood (PJ 6–7), her “betrothal”<sup>9</sup> to Joseph (PJ 8–10), her conception of Jesus (PJ 11–16), and the events surrounding his birth (PJ 17–21). The text ends with Herod’s slaughtering of the innocent children, Mary’s hiding Jesus in a manger, and Elizabeth’s flight to the hills (PJ 22); the death of Zechariah (PJ 23–24); and an epilogue by the author, “James” (PJ 25). In light of this broad outline, PJ 12.2–3 occurs in the middle of the middle section concerning Mary. Though not a perfect division, the middle section of PJ is essentially split in half by Mary’s conception of Jesus (PJ 11–12). As will become clear in what follows, Mary’s visit to Elizabeth itself functions as a hinge connecting the first and second parts of this major section concerning Mary.

Much of PJ acts as a reconfiguration of Luke 1:5–2:40. The author of PJ has expanded Luke’s narrative, though, by including the details of Mary’s parents, Joachim and Anna.<sup>10</sup> This addition not only expands the narrative

7. See Luke 1:5–24. Even though Zechariah is attending to his priestly duties, the emphasis of the pericope is on the appearance of the angel and his prophetic message. Likewise, in Luke 2:25–36 the temple is the site of Simeon’s prophetic praise of God.

8. For a discussion of “first space” in rhetorolects, see Robbins, “Conceptual Blending,” 164–66.

9. Compared to the Synoptic Gospels, PJ presents the relationship between Mary and Joseph in more ambiguous terms.

10. For example, Joachim’s religiosity in PJ 1.1 compared to that of Zechariah and Elizabeth in Luke 1; Anna likening herself to Sarah and Abraham (PJ 1.3; 2.4) compared to the old age of Zechariah and Elizabeth in Luke 1:5–7; and the hearing of

but also results in the removal of many of Luke's details about Zechariah, Elizabeth, and John.<sup>11</sup> As pointed out above, Luke presents the birth of John and Jesus in parallel to one another; as a result, John can properly be understood as Jesus's forerunner in Luke. In contrast, it is Mary, not John, who acts as the forerunner for Jesus in PJ. It is Mary's parents, not the parents of John, who receive a visit from a heavenly messenger (PJ 4; cf. Luke 1:8–20). It is Mary's birth, not John's, that precedes the birth of Jesus (PJ 5; cf. Luke 1:57–66).<sup>12</sup> The "prehistory" of Jesus found in PJ concerns not the birth of two prophets as it does in Luke, but the birth of two figures who are distinguished because of their blessedness and the blessings they bestow on others.

The reconfiguration of Luke's narrative by the author of PJ results in a major shift in the dominant rhetorolect employed: from prophetic discourse to priestly discourse. Robbins highlights the temple as the "first space" in priestly discourse, which "presupposes that ritual actions benefit God in a manner that activates divine benefits for humans on earth."<sup>13</sup> Priestly discourse is characterized by "thanksgiving, praise, prayer, and blessing."<sup>14</sup> The goal of priestly discourse is undergirded by the assumption

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Anna and Joachim's prayers (PJ 4.1–2) compared to the hearing of Zechariah's prayer in Luke 1:13.

11. As a result of this reconfiguration, all three play a more muted role in PJ than they do in Luke. Zechariah appears first in the narrative in PJ 8.3 to determine which widower will become Mary's guardian. After mention of Zechariah's silence in PJ 10.2, Zechariah does not appear again until his death is described in PJ 23–24. Likewise, Elizabeth is not mentioned at all until the pericope under investigation (PJ 12.2–3) and is not mentioned again until PJ 22.3, which concerns Herod's pursuit of John. The narrative reveals later that Herod is pursuing John, and is angry with Zechariah, because Herod thinks that John will rule Israel (PJ 23.2). Most significantly, John is first mentioned in PJ 22.3, and it is only here that we learn of Elizabeth's bearing a child; it is not until 23.1 that Zechariah is identified as John's father.

12. Many details in PJ suggest that birth and life of Mary foreshadow the birth and life of Jesus in the canonical gospels: both grow stronger every day (PJ 6.1; cf. Luke 1:80; 2:52); both are presented in the temple (PJ 7.1–2; cf. Luke 2:22); both receive angelic care (PJ 8.1; cf. Mark 1:13); both have significant experiences at the temple at the age of twelve (PJ 8.2; cf. Luke 2:41–51); both are tried by Jewish religious leaders (PJ 14–15; cf. Luke 22:66–71); and both are seated on a donkey on their climactic journeys (PJ 17.2; cf. Luke 13:15).

13. Robbins, "Conceptual Blending," 170.

14. *Ibid.*

that “sacrificial actions by humans create an environment in which God acts redemptively among humans in the world.”<sup>15</sup>

One of the major results of PJ’s reconfiguration of Luke is that Jesus’s “prehistory” is told in PJ not in terms of a promised political kingdom, but in terms of the activation of divine benefits. Much of PJ revolves around the sacred space of the temple: the narrative begins with offerings in the temple and ends with the installation of a new high priest in the temple. Likewise, PJ demonstrates a great concern for the temple’s sacred personnel—priests and the high priest appear in nearly every part of the composition. Finally, the holiness of Mary, her entertainers, and her dwelling is also emphasized throughout the composition.<sup>16</sup>

The shape of priestly discourse in PJ, however, demonstrates its own focus in two important ways. First, PJ subtly calls into question the effectiveness or power of the temple and its priesthood to activate divine benefits. As I will point out below, Mary is depicted as a “moving temple” in PJ, which is distinct from the Jerusalem temple.<sup>17</sup> As such, her presence activates divine benefits for other characters in the story. Second, the author of PJ focuses the activation of divine benefits around the blessings of childbearing.

The opening chapters demonstrate the way in which childbearing activates divine benefits. Joachim is portrayed as an ideal character in the mode of priestly discourse: he not only makes offerings at the temple but also has the habit of offering double what is prescribed. As he explains, “The part of [the offering that is] my excess will be for all people and the part [of the offering that is] for forgiveness will be for the Lord God for my atonement” (PJ 1.1). His religious devotion is threatened, however, by an impediment in his life. This impediment is not cultic or even moral in nature; it is biological. Joachim does not have a child. As a result, Reuben

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15. Ibid.

16. For an excellent analysis of the role of purity and its various forms (ritual, menstrual, and sexual) in PJ, see Lily C. Vuong, *Gender and Purity in the Protevangelium of James*, WUNT 2/358 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), esp. 25–26. Many thanks to the reviewer who drew my attention to Vuong’s monograph as well as to the monograph of Jennifer A. Glancy and the earlier article of Shaye J. D. Cohen (see note 64 below).

17. Many thanks to Vernon Robbins for the image of Mary as a “moving temple.” Vuong also discerns PJ’s depiction of Mary as an instantiation of the temple, but suggests this only happens *after* she has been dismissed from the temple (see Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 133–36).

says, “It is not permitted for you to offer your gifts in the first place [πρώτῳ], because you have not produced an offspring in Israel” (PJ 1.2). Joachim’s failure to produce an heir threatens his ability to experience divine benefit, which in this case is forgiveness. One of the major consequences of Mary’s birth is that she becomes the instrument by which Joachim and Anna receive divine benefits.<sup>18</sup>

When one considers the larger narrative of PJ, it becomes evident how the author has added an additional parallel between Mary and Jesus. Just as Mary is Jesus’s forerunner in terms of his birth, she is also his forerunner in terms of the ability to activate divine benefits. In parallel to Mary, the birth of Jesus causes the midwife to recognize Mary’s child, Jesus, as the instrument by which divine benefits are restored to Israel (PJ 19.2). With this shift from prophetic to priestly discourse clearly in mind, we may proceed with a closer comparative exegetical analysis of the two accounts of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth.

## 1.2. Exegetical Analysis

### 1.2.1. OPENING<sup>19</sup>

PJ 12.2–3

2 Full of joy, Mary went off to her relative [συγγενίδα] Elizabeth.

Luke 1:39–56

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country,

The first thing to note is that determining where to start the opening of the pericope in PJ is more difficult than it is in the Gospel of Luke.<sup>20</sup> There

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18. Though she rightly calls attention to concerns for purity and the central place of the temple in this early section of PJ, Vuong underplays the inability of Joachim and Anna to receive divine benefits *prior* to the conception of Mary. She suggests instead that characters in PJ simply “misread” and “misunderstand” the state of Joachim and Anna vis-à-vis the temple (see Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 70–88). On my read, Joachim and Anna’s childlessness proves a significant impediment to the activation of divine benefits, which is only resolved through the conception of Mary.

19. Font guide: Greek in bold font = identical word agreement in the Greek; Greek with underline = similar word agreement in the Greek; English in bold font = repetitive word or theme in passage.

20. For a description of the analysis of “opening-middle-closing” (OMC) texture,

are several important reasons to think that PJ 12.1 should be read together with 12.2–3.<sup>21</sup> In 12.1, Mary brings her scarlet and purple thread and is blessed by the priest Samuel. The priest's blessing, "you will be blessed among all the generations of the earth," may be better understood as part of the opening of PJ's version of Mary's visit to Elizabeth. Modern editions have chosen to break chapter 12 and chapter 11 in such a way that suggests that 12.1 should be read with 12.2–3. Further, the threefold repetition of εὐλογέω in 12.1–3—priest, Elizabeth, Elizabeth's unborn child—suggests a persistent repetitive texture.<sup>22</sup> Finally, the mention of Elizabeth's scarlet in 12.2 connects to Mary's in 12.1.

For the purposes of this essay, I have decided to read Mary's visit to Elizabeth in 12.2–3 as separate from, but related to, the priest's blessing in 12.1. Since chapter and verse divisions are not original to the text, but have been suggested by modern editors, they should not entirely restrict exegetical analysis. In addition, there is a clear geographical shift between 12.1 and 12.2–3. Finally, opening with 12.2 rather than 12.1 highlights a close syntactical resemblance between the two "openings." Both accounts open with a participle followed by a finite verb; the main verb in PJ is in the imperfect tense, while the verb in Luke is in the aorist.<sup>23</sup>

The question of repetitive texture is more difficult. One can make an argument for the persistence of the repetitive texture of εὐλογέω in much of PJ 1–12. As I read PJ, the priest's blessing in 12.1 can be understood as the final blessing in a cycle of "priestly blessings" that stretch from PJ 6.2 until 12.1. The blessings in 12.2–3 suggest slight, but significant, differences from the blessings elsewhere in the composition. The blessing in 12.2–3 comes from the lips of Elizabeth—the first woman and nonpriest to bless Mary—and from "that which is inside of her." Also, the blessing more explicitly pertains to Mary's role as mother (PJ 12.2; cf. Luke 1:43). Finally, the priest's final blessing introduces irony into the narrative of PJ

see Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 19–21.

21. In the seminar, this was a topic of much debate. With Vernon K. Robbins's constructive questions in mind, I have retained the break at 12.2 for reasons that will be explained more fully below. It is my hope, though, that my larger analysis will prove cogent and helpful regardless of where one places 12.1.

22. For the notion of repetitive texture, see Robbins, *Exploring*, 8–9.

23. Luke 1:39: Ἀναστᾶσα δὲ Μαριάμ ... ἐπορεύθη....

PJ 12.2: χαρὰν δὲ λαβοῦσα Μαριάμ ἀπήγει....

because the same priest will become Mary's accuser in PJ 15. Though these differences are important, the proximity of the blessings in 12.2–3 to those in 12.1 demands that they not be understood independently of the preceding blessings.

On the whole, I have set out to compare a single event that occurs in the two compositions: Mary's visit to Elizabeth. This event, though, is highly contextualized in both compositions. A good case could be made for reading Gabriel's annunciation (Luke 1:26–38) as the "opening" for Mary's visit to Elizabeth in Luke; it is also equally possible, however, to treat the annunciation and Mary's visit as two distinct events with their own distinct "openings." In the narrative of both Luke and PJ, the "opening" of one section often functions as the "closing" of another. With the case of the priest's blessing in 12.1, the relationship between the "closing" of one part and the "opening" of another appear to overlap substantially.

With these caveats in mind, the opening of PJ appears to be shorter and omits several details found in Luke.<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting the addition of *συγγενίς* in PJ 12.2. In Luke's annunciation (Luke 1:26–38), the same lexeme is found in the angel's message to Mary; there, it indicates that her "relative" Elizabeth has also conceived a child (Luke 1:36). The angel's annunciation in PJ 11 contains no reference to Elizabeth or her conception.

### 1.2.2. Middle

PJ 12.2–3

**O:** 2 She knocked on the door; and when Elizabeth heard she cast aside the scarlet and ran to the door.

**M:** When she opened it

Luke 1:39–55

40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped [*ἔσκίρτησεν*] in her womb.

And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry,

24. E.g., the chronological setting of her journey (*ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις*); the manner in which she went (*μετὰ σπουδῆς*), and the destination of her journey (*εἰς πόλιν Ἰούδα*).

she **blessed** [εὐλόγησεν] Mary

and said,

“How is it [Πόθεν μοι τοῦτο] that the mother of my Lord should come to me [ἵνα ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ κυρίου μου ἔλθῃ πρὸς ἐμέ]?”

For see [ἰδοὺ γάρ], the child in me [τὸ ἐν ἐμοί] leapt up [ἔσκήρτησεν]

and **blessed** [εὐλόγησέν] you.”

C: But Mary forgot the mysteries that the archangel Gabriel had spoken to her, and gazed at the sky

and said,

“Who am I, Lord, that all the women of earth [πάσαι αἱ γυναῖκες τῆς γῆς] will **bless me** [μακαριοῦσίν με]?”

“**blessed** [εὐλογημένη] are you among women, and **blessed** [εὐλογημένος] is the fruit of your womb.

43 And

how is it [πόθεν μοι τοῦτο] that the mother of my Lord comes to me [ἵνα ἔλθῃ ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ κυρίου μου πρὸς ἐμέ]?”

44 For see [ἰδοὺ γάρ] as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb [τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ μου] leapt up [ἔσκήρτησεν] for joy.

45 And **blessed** [μακαρία] is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

46 And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations [πάσαι αἱ γενεαί] will **bless me** [μακαριοῦσίν με]; 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 His mercy is for those who fear him from genera-

tion to generation. 51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. 52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

(1) Opening of the Middle: The narrative in both compositions describes the initial interaction between Mary and Elizabeth. Here, PJ adds details that relate to the response of Elizabeth. In Luke, there is no reference to Elizabeth’s actions before blessing Mary in Luke 1:42. In comparison, PJ adds that Elizabeth heard, dropped her scarlet thread, ran to the door, and opened it. In addition to this, PJ makes no mention of the οἶκος Ζαχαρίου as in Luke 1:40. Here, and elsewhere in PJ, Elizabeth and Zechariah are depicted separately from one another. Finally, PJ does not include a reference to the response of Elizabeth’s βρέφος to Mary’s greeting as found in Luke 1:41.

(2) Middle of the Middle: This section contains Elizabeth’s blessing of Mary and the description of her unborn child’s response to Mary. The two accounts display strong verbal similarity in reference to Elizabeth’s question, “And why has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord has come to me?” The only differences between the two accounts are the omission of καί in PJ and the variant location of the verb ἔλθῃ. At the end of this section the reference to Mary’s being “blessed” (μακαρία) because she believed completely does not appear in PJ. Though a small detail, this omission reflects the change in rhetorolect describe above. Emphasis on complete belief is more appropriate for prophetic discourse than for priestly discourse. In addition to these general observations, several important elements in the two accounts deserve further comment.

*Elizabeth's blessing:* One of the first notable differences in PJ is that it contains no reference to Elizabeth's being filled with the Holy Spirit. This omission also aligns with the switch from prophetic to priestly rhetorolect in PJ. Likewise, PJ does not attribute direct speech to Elizabeth in her blessing of Mary as in Luke. While Luke 1:42 has Elizabeth exclaim "with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women,'" PJ has "she [Elizabeth] blessed Mary." In addition, Elizabeth's blessing in PJ applies only to Mary, and does not include the "fruit" of her womb as in Luke.

*The unborn child's response:* There is some verbal similarity in how the two accounts report the response of Elizabeth's unborn child, such as the identical verbal form ἐσκήρτησεν; but the two differ in important ways. First, the subject of ἐσκήρτησεν is more ambiguous in PJ than it is in Luke. In Luke, the subject can fairly be described as an embryo or fetus—it is τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ μου that leaps. In PJ, however, the subject of the verb is less clear: τὸ ἐν ἐμοί. In addition, there is no reference to Mary's greeting being connected to or the cause of the unborn child's response. Luke 1:44 has Elizabeth say, "For see as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting"; in contrast, Elizabeth only mentions the "leaping" of the unborn child in PJ 12.2. Finally, and most importantly, the unborn child is said to join with its mother in blessing Mary. As noted above, the blessing of a nonpriestly woman and her unborn child distinguish this blessing from the previous blessings in the composition.

*The significance of blessing:* PJ adds εὐλόγησέν σε for Luke's ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει ("in gladness"). The verb εὐλογέω occurs sixteen times in PJ (compared to thirteen times in Luke) and will be discussed more fully below. In PJ, Mary and her mother are almost always the objects of blessing. The only use of εὐλογέω that does not apply to Mary or her mother applies to the offspring of Joseph (PJ 15.4). In this case, the priest implies that Joseph's offspring will not be blessed because of Mary's apparently illicit conception.

(3) Closing of the Middle: Here we read of Mary's response. The two accounts differ greatly in terms of length and in terms of the tone of her response. Protevangelium of James 12.2 states that Mary forgets what has been spoken to her by Gabriel, which is referred to as τῶν μυστηρίων.<sup>25</sup>

25. The lexeme μυστήριον occurs two times in PJ (12.2, 3). The frequency with which μυστήριον occurs in PJ is significant in comparison to the singular occurrence in each of the Synoptic Gospels and the twenty-eight total occurrences in the NT. "Mysteries" refer exclusively to Mary's virgin birth in PJ. This use of "mystery" does

Mary's forgetfulness in PJ stands in contrast to her exalted response in Luke 1:46–54. Mary speaks of her soul and spirit magnifying God (μεγαλύνει), for looking “with favor” on Mary, God's humble servant (Luke 1:46–48).<sup>26</sup> In addition, the Lukan version contains an emphatic claim to Mary's blessedness: “Surely, from now on all generations [πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί] will call me blessed [μακαριοῦσίν με]” (Luke 1:48). PJ contains no such laudatory response, and instead of an emphatic statement about Mary's blessedness, PJ reconfigures the Lukan version as a question—“Who am I, Lord, that all the women of earth [πᾶσαι αἱ γυναῖκες τῆς γῆς] will bless me [μακαριοῦσίν με]?” (PJ 12.2).<sup>27</sup> The rest of Mary's famous “Magnificat” (Luke 1:49–54) is omitted entirely in the account found in PJ.<sup>28</sup>

Overall, the middle section closes with a very different feel in each. In Luke, Mary's response is confident and full of praise. In PJ, the middle ends with a question. The author's reconfiguration of the closing—especially Mary's forgetfulness and the significance of her question—is puzzling for many reasons. It seems to me that Mary's question represents the “turn” in the narrative that results from the angel's annunciation in chapter 11.<sup>29</sup> Her question ultimately relates to the question of this essay: Why, indeed, is Mary to be blessed by all the women of the earth?

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not align with the use of the term in the shared saying of Jesus concerning the “mystery/mysteries” of the kingdom (Matt 13:11 // Mark 4:11 // Luke 8:10). Rather, the usage sounds more Pauline (see esp. 1 Cor 2:1; Eph 1:9; Col 1:26; 1 Tim 3:16), but the emphasis is slightly different. In the Pauline writings, “mystery” applies more to the Christ-event than it does to Jesus's miraculous conception and birth (but cf. 1 Tim 3:16).

26. In PJ, the fact that God looks on Mary with favor has already been underscored in PJ 7, when Mary dances on the steps of the altar in the temple, and in PJ 11 in the voice's greeting of Mary.

27. It is worth noting that PJ 12.1 retains the laudatory response of “all generations,” but there it comes on the lips of the priest and employs the verb εὐλογέω, not μακαρίζω. This is the singular usage of μακαρίζω in both PJ and Luke (cf. μακάριος, which occurs fifteen times in Luke and never in PJ).

28. Foskett notes the significance of this speech for the characterization of Mary in Luke-Acts: “As the first speech in Luke-Acts and the only such form ascribed to Mary, its importance for understanding the Lukan portrayal of Mary cannot be overestimated” (Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived*, 14). The omission of this speech not surprisingly alters the characterization of Mary in PJ.

29. Mary's ambivalence at this point in the narrative could reflect her (even overwhelmed) response to the task God has given her. Mary has already learned that she will conceive and give birth to the “son of the Most High” (PJ 11.2). The exact same

## 1.2.3. Closing

PJ 12.3

O: 3 She stayed with Elizabeth for three months [τρεις μῆνας].

M: Day by day her own belly grew.

C: Mary then returned home [ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτῆς] in fear, and hid herself from the sons of Israel.

She was sixteen when these mysteries happened to her.

Luke 1:56

56 And Mary remained with her about three months [μῆνας τρεῖς]

and then returned to her home [εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτῆς].

The two accounts close in similar ways. They both mention that Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months and then returned home. The account in PJ is significantly longer, however, because it adds details not found in the Lukan account: reference to Mary's growing stomach, her fear,<sup>30</sup> and her hiding herself from the sons of Israel. The reference to Mary's belly growing is consistent with attempts elsewhere in PJ (cf. 13.1) to add details to her pregnancy; in Luke, in contrast, the annunciation (Luke 1:26–38) leads to the birth of Jesus (2:1–7) without any further reference to her pregnancy. The account of PJ adds an epilogue to the account that provides Mary's age at the time of these events.

## 2. INTERPRETATION

On the whole, the account of Mary's visit to Elizabeth in PJ is shorter than its counterpart in the Gospel of Luke. The general outline, though,

verbal phrase (τίς εἶμι) in Mary's question occurs also in LXX Exod 3:11, where Moses questions his ability to carry out the tasks of speaking to Pharaoh and leading the people of Israel to freedom. The same phrase occurs also in 2 Sam 7:18 (= 1 Chr 17:16); 9:8; 1 Chr 29:14; Jdt 12:14; 1 Macc 10:72). The exact verbal phrase does not appear in the NT.

30. "Fear" and "hiding" are connected with the sons of Israel also in PJ 14.1. The "sons of Israel" appear elsewhere as the cause of consternation for the protagonists in PJ: of Anna (PJ 3.1; 6.3); of Joseph (9.2; 15.2, 4); and of Mary (12.3; 14.1).

is very similar in both: Mary travels to see Elizabeth, receives a blessing from her, stays with her for three months, and then returns home. Despite this similarity, PJ has thoroughly reconfigured the account. In Luke, the mood is one of joyful doxology throughout, on the part of both Mary and Elizabeth. Although PJ begins with a reference to Mary's joy (PJ 12.2), it ends with Mary's doubtful question about her worthiness (12.2) and her hiding herself in fear (12.3). In addition to filling out the stages of her physical pregnancy (i.e., her belly growing day by day and reference to the sixth month), PJ adds intensity to the suspense and fear brought about by Mary's supernatural conception and role as mother.<sup>31</sup>

For the purposes of this essay, however, the preceding comparison of PJ 12.2–3 and Luke 1:39–56 calls attention to the nature of Mary's blessedness. The state of Mary's blessedness,<sup>32</sup> which has been emphasized in the narrative of PJ to this point, begins for the first time to be doubted or disputed. Mary's question—"Who am I?"—gives voice to a reconsideration of the cause or significance of her blessedness that began in PJ 7. Earlier in the narrative, her proximity to and service in the temple appear to be the cause of her blessedness (see PJ 6.2; 7.2; 12.1). In PJ 12.2 and earlier in PJ 11.1–2, Mary's blessedness is connected with her identity as mother. In an attempt to highlight and understand this shift, it is necessary to analyze the topos of "blessing" in each composition more fully.

## 2.1. Praise and Blessing in Luke and Protevangelium of James

The attempt to analyze the topos of blessing in Luke and PJ requires one to think beyond individual words to related words and concepts. The table below presents several of the more important "synonyms" that may help outline the topos of blessing in the compositions.

Lexeme	Number in PJ	Number in Luke	Number in NT*
αἰνέω	1	3	8
αἶνος	0	1	2
δόξα	1	13	166

31. Vernon K. Robbins, *Who Do People Say I Am*, 163.

32. On Mary's blessedness, see Foster, "Protevangelium of James," 122; and E-P 34–35.

δοξάζω	5	9	61
ἐπιβλέπω	1	2	3
εὐλογέω	15	11	41
εὐλογία	2	0	16
μακαρίζω	1	1	2
μακάριος	0	15	50
μεγαλύνω	4	2	8

\* This table is based roughly on Louw and Nida's lexicon based on semantic analysis. See "Praise" (33.354–33.364) in Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. Accordance electronic edition, version 4.0 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989).

References for praise and blessing language in PJ: αἰνέω: 8.1; δόξα: 25.2; δοξάζω: 6.3; 14.2; 16.3; 24.1; 25.1; ἐπιβλέπω: 6.2; εὐλογέω: 2.4 (bis); 3.3; 4.4; 6.2 (3×); 7.2; 11.1; 12.1 (bis); 12.2; 15.4; εὐλογία: 6.2; 24.1; μεγαλύνω: 5.2; 7.2; 12.1; 19.2.

References for praise and blessing language in Luke: αἰνέω: 2:13, 20; 19:37; αἶνος: 18:43; δόξα: 2:9, 14, 32; 4:6; 9:26, 31, 32; 12:27; 14:10; 17:18; 19:38; 21:27; 24:26; δοξάζω: 2:10; 4:15; 5:25, 26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15; 18:43; 23:47; ἐπιβλέπω: 1:48; 9:38; εὐλογέω: 1:42, 64; 2:28, 34; 6:28; 9:16; 13:35; 19:38; 24:30, 50, 51, 53; μακαρίζω: 1:48; μακάριος: 1:45; 6:20, 21, 22; 7:23; 10:23; 11:27, 28; 12:37, 38, 43; 14:14, 15; μεγαλύνω: 1:46, 58.

A few general comments about the table are in order. First, words related to praise and blessing occur thirty times in PJ and fifty-seven times in the Gospel of Luke. Second, the two compositions share a group of frequently occurring words: δοξάζω, εὐλογέω, and μεγαλύνω. Third, each composition employs words with more frequency than the other. For example, αἰνέω/αἶνος is more prominent in Luke; εὐλογία occurs only in PJ; and μακάριος does not occur in PJ at all (though μακαρίζω occurs once in both compositions).

The concentration of the words is also revealing. Although εὐλογέω and μεγαλύνω occur nearly the same number of times in the two compositions, PJ employs both more frequently since PJ is only one-fourth the length of Luke.<sup>33</sup> In addition, the number of occurrences of μεγαλύνω in PJ would account for half of the total occurrences in the New Testament, and the number of occurrences of εὐλογέω would account for more than one-third of the total New Testament occurrences. This prevalence of lau-

33. According to Accordance software, Luke has 19,495 words and PJ has 5,175 words; PJ is thus 26.5 percent as long as Luke.

datory language in PJ arises from the mode of priestly discourse in the composition. Although the two compositions demonstrate some similarities in their use of language related to praise and blessing, PJ presents its own “lexicon” of praise and blessing.

One aspect of this divergence is the use of *μεγαλύνω*. In Luke, the verb is always related to God—it either describes a response to God (Luke 1:46) or an act of God (Luke 1:58). In PJ 5.2 and 19.2, *μεγαλύνω* is used with reference to God, specifically as an act of praise to God (similar to *δοξάζω* or *αἰνέω*). Nevertheless, it also attains a “special” sense in reference to making the name of Mary great. Although *μεγαλύνω* does not attain this sense in the New Testament, there are important instances in the LXX in which the name of a biblical character is made great (e.g., Gen. 12:2); these will be discussed in the section concerning Mary’s blessedness in PJ below.

With these general comments in mind, I will analyze more fully the topos of praise (*αἰνέω/αἴνος* and *δοξάζω*) and the topos of blessing (*εὐλογέω/εὐλογία* and *μακαρίζω/μακάριος*) in order to ascertain more clearly the similarities and differences between the two compositions.

## 2.2. The Topos of Praise in Luke and Protevangelium of James

As the word frequency table above suggests, the Gospel of Luke contains a higher frequency of language related to praise. In Luke, glory (*δόξα*) and praise (*αἴνος*), and their related verbal forms are nearly synonymous.<sup>34</sup> For example, the crowd is said to give praise to God (*ἔδωκεν αἴνον τῷ θεῷ*) in Luke 18:43; similarly, the healed person in Luke 17:18 gives God glory (*δοῦναι δόξαν τῷ θεῷ*). The overlap of verbal forms appears clearly in Luke 2:20: “And the shepherds returned, giving glory [*δοξάζοντες*] to and praising [*αἰνοῦντες*] God for all the things that they heard and saw just as it was spoken to them.” With only one exception, the object of both praise and glory is always God (*θεός*);<sup>35</sup> in Luke 4:15, the singular exception, it is Jesus who is glorified (*δοξάζω*) by “everyone” who hears his teaching in the synagogues. In Luke, the praise of God frequently comes from those who have been healed by Jesus (5:25; 13:13; 17:15, 18; 18:43) or those who wit-

34. *Δόξα* frequently denotes “glory” in the sense of “fame” or “reputation” (see BDAG, s.v. *δόξα*). The “fame” of various individuals and entities is mentioned in Luke: Israel (2:32), the nations (4:6), Israel’s leaders (9:31; 12:27), the Son of Man (9:26; 21:27), and the Messiah (24:26). These fall outside of the semantic range of “praise.”

35. Luke 2:13, 14, 20, 28; 5:25, 26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15, 18; 18:43; 19:37; 23:47; 24:53.

nessed the healing (5:26; 7:16; 18:43); in addition, angels (2:13), shepherds (2:20), and a centurion (23:47) praise God.

This brief survey suggests a few observations about the nature of praise language in Luke. First, praise is almost entirely *theocentric*: God is the object of praise and glory in nearly every occasion. Second, Jesus is the *instrument* that brings about God's praise: the act of praise is prompted by the advent or activity of Jesus. Jesus's miraculous birth, healing power, and innocent death all lead characters in Luke to praise God.

Turning to consider the use and nature of praise language in PJ, one notices an intriguing reconfiguration: while the object of praise is the same in PJ, the means or instrument is often Mary, not Jesus. In PJ 6.3, the religious leaders give the God of Israel glory (ἐδόξασαν τὸν θεὸν Ἰσραὴλ) after they leave the feast at Joachim's house. Given the context of their blessing Mary in 6.2, it's very likely that their giving God glory is caused by Mary. Mary as the instrument of God's praise can be seen more clearly when her parents entrust her to the temple. After leaving her at the temple, Mary's parents return "praising" (ἐπαινοῦντες<sup>36</sup>) and "glorifying" (δοξάζοντες) God because she did not turn back (PJ 8.1). Likewise, in 14.2, Joseph is said to glorify the God of Israel (ἐδόξασεν τὸν θεὸν τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ) because of the favor (χάρις) given to him; the immediate context suggests that this "favor" is Mary's betrothal to him. In each case, Mary is the cause of God's praise. The author of PJ has reconfigured the notion of praise as found in the Gospel of Luke. In Luke, praise is *theocentric* and is caused by *Jesus*; in PJ, praise is also *theocentric*, but it is caused by *Mary*.

The final two occurrences of δοξάζω differ from those above. The epilogue to the composition ends with the author "James" saying that he returned to Jerusalem safely and there glorified God (δοξάζων τὸν Δεσπότην θεόν) after Herod's slaughter of the children (PJ 25.1). This adds little to our analysis. The final occurrence, however, is more helpful. In 24.1, the narrative describes the priests who are awaiting Zechariah's blessing. Unbeknownst to them, Zechariah has been murdered and they will receive no blessing. Contingent upon Zechariah's blessing, the priests hope to glorify God (δοξάσαι τὸν ... θεόν). As the narrative moves forward, however, it becomes clear that this hope will not be fulfilled. They receive

36. Some manuscripts have αἰνοῦντες rather than ἐπαινοῦντες. Compared to αἰνέω, the lexeme ἐπαινέω occurs less frequently in the NT (6x total) as well as in Luke (1x). In Luke 16:8, Jesus's parable speaks of the master's "commending" (NRSV) the shrewdness of his manager.

no blessing and do not glorify God. Instead, they become afraid (24.2), eventually enter into the sanctuary to find Zechariah murdered (24.3), and then leave in fear (24.3). In other words, the narrative of PJ ends with the priests lacking the power to activate divine benefits and thus unable to respond appropriately to God. Though subtle, this confirms the shifting role of the temple elsewhere in PJ: the activation of divine benefits occurs in proximity to Mary, not the temple or its personnel.

### 2.3. The Topos of Blessing in Luke

The Gospel of Luke employs two word groups to denote blessing: μακαρίζω/μακάριος and εὐλογέω/εὐλογία. The verb μακαρίζω is quite rare in the New Testament. It occurs only in Luke 1:48 and in Jas 5:11. The occurrence in Luke appears in Mary's Magnificat. Mary exclaims, "For behold, from now on, all generations will bless me [μακαριοῦσιν με πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί]." James 5:11 says, "Behold, we bless [μακαρίζομεν] those who endured."<sup>37</sup> Both Luke 1:48 and Jas 5:11, then, employ μακαρίζω to denote one person or group of people regarding another person or group as blessed or fortunate.<sup>38</sup>

The word μακάριος itself is used most often in biblical tradition to describe fortunate people, locations, and events. The term occurs fifteen times in Luke, and four of these occur in the Sermon on the Plain.<sup>39</sup> In general, the use of μακάριος in Luke aligns with the use of μακαρίζω described above: the term is employed to describe those whom the audience should

37. N.B., the NRSV glosses the verbal form in each with "to call blessed."

38. Because it occurs somewhat rarely in the NT, a brief survey of the use of μακαρίζω in the LXX is in order. Μακαρίζω occurs twenty-four times in the LXX: Gen 30:13; Num 24:17; 4 Macc 1:10; 16:9; 18:13; Pss 40:3; 71:17; 143:15; Song 6:9; Job 29:10; Wis 2:16; 18:1; Sir 11:28; 25:7, 23; 31:9; 37:24; 45:7; Mal 3:12, 15; Isa 3:12; 9:16. The verb also carries the sense of human regard or judgment on another. Gen 30:13 employs language that is very close to that of Luke 1:48. At news of her conception, Leah says, "Fortunate am I [μακαρία ἐγώ] because the women will bless [μακαρίζουσιν] me." See further Ps 143:15 and Mal 3:12. This human perception of μακάριος, though, can be distorted. For example, Isa 3:12 says, "My people, those who bless you [οἱ μακαρίζοντες], mislead you." The only time that God is the subject of μακαρίζω (i.e., the one who perceives or bestows μακάριος on another) is in Sir 45:7.

39. Cf. Matthew's use of μακάριος. It occurs thirteen times, nine of which appear in the Sermon on the Mount.

regard as fortunate.<sup>40</sup> In the Sermon on the Plain, those whom Jesus deems fortunate contrasts with those whom others might think fortunate: he calls fortunate the poor (6:20), the hungry (6:21), those who weep (6:21), and those who are hated (6:22).<sup>41</sup> Elsewhere, the fortunate denote those who properly recognize Jesus (7:23; 10:23) as well as those who hear and obey God's word (11:28).<sup>42</sup>

Mary is called μακαρία twice in the Gospel of Luke. In the first instance, Elizabeth says of Mary, "And fortunate [μακαρία] is the one who believed that the things that have been spoken to her by the Lord will come to fruition" (Luke 1:45). In the second, a woman interrupts Jesus's teaching by saying, "Fortunate [μακαρία] is the womb [κοιλία] that bore you and the breasts [μαστοί] that nursed you!" (Luke 11:27). Something about Jesus—most likely his teaching, but possibly his reputation—leads the woman in the crowd to regard Mary as fortunate to have Jesus as a son. Jesus redirects her perception of who is fortunate: "On the contrary, fortunate [μακάριοι] are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (11:28).

Luke also narrates the performance of blessings on other people and objects. These blessings in Luke are frequently denoted by the verb εὐλογέω, which occurs thirteen times.<sup>43</sup> The character who most frequently bestows blessings in Luke is Jesus—he blesses bread in the miraculous feeding (9:16) and in his meal after the resurrection (24:30), and he blesses the disciples (24:50–51). Jesus is also the beneficiary of pronounced blessings—first by Elizabeth (1:42) and then by Simeon (2:34). The blessing of Jesus is often tied to the blessing of Mary (by Elizabeth in 1:42) and the blessing of both his parents (by Simeon in 2:34). Finally, Simeon (2:28), Zechariah (1:64), and the disciples are all said to bestow

40. Μακάριος occurs sixty-eight times in the LXX. Like the use of the term in Luke, μακάριος in the LXX plays a descriptive function, especially in the wisdom literature.

41. Jesus's parables confirm and expand on the description of those described as fortunate elsewhere in Luke. See, e.g., Luke 12:37–38, 43; 14:14. In the context of Luke's rendering of the "Synoptic Apocalypse," the distress caused by the geopolitical turmoil has the power to reverse typical notions of blessedness: barren women, who would normally not be regarded as "fortunate," are deemed μακάριαι because of the swiftness with which they are able to avert the coming disaster.

42. Cf. Luke 14:15: "After hearing these things, one of the fellow diners said to him, 'Blessed [μακάριος] is whoever eats bread in the kingdom of God.'"

43. Three of these occurrences resemble the use of μακάριος discussed above: Luke 6:28; 13:15; 19:38. It is possible to understand εὐλογέω here as indicating a divine favor in contrast to a human interpretation of another person as μακάριος.

“blessing” on God. This use of εὐλογέω denotes a response to God, which is caused by actions or events in the narrative context.

Before turning to PJ, it will be helpful to note the way in which the topos of blessing functions within the prophetic rhetorolect of Luke 1–2. First, the blessings often take place in the first space of priestly rhetorolect and are spoken by people of priestly descent.<sup>44</sup> As I mentioned above, even the apparently priestly language in Luke is blended, if not subsumed, within the more dominant mode of prophetic discourse. Elizabeth’s blessing of Mary in Luke 1:39–45 highlights this: Mary is blessed because she *believes* in God’s *future* promises declared by God’s appointed *messenger*. All of these features align more with prophetic discourse than with priestly discourse.<sup>45</sup>

#### 2.4. The Topos of Blessing in Protevangelium of James

As mentioned above, the topos of blessing in PJ differs from that of the Gospel of Luke, at least lexically, in two clear ways. First, PJ employs εὐλογέω/εὐλογία exclusively to denote blessing; μακάριος does not occur in PJ, and μακαρίζω appears only once in Mary’s question in PJ 12.2–3. Second, there are more occurrences of both verbal and nominal forms of the εὐλογ- root in PJ than in the Gospel of Luke. As the following analysis of each instance of εὐλογέω/εὐλογία will demonstrate, the author of PJ has significantly reconfigured the topos of blessing, not only by extracting it from prophetic discourse and embedding it in priestly discourse, but also in the particular way he employs the topos in relationship to Mary.

##### 2.4.1. The Blessing of Anna: Barrenness Turned to Bounty

The first occurrences of εὐλογέω in PJ allude to the first blessings in the LXX: “And God blessed [ἠὐλόγησεν] them, saying ‘Increase and multiply...’” (Gen 1:22, 28). The first instance of the bestowal of divine favor in the LXX is indicated by the ability to “increase and multiply.” In PJ 2–4, εὐλογέω occurs four times, and the topos of blessing is tied closely with

44. For Elizabeth’s priestly descent, see Luke 1:5. As mentioned above, Simeon is not explicitly described as a priest in Luke’s Gospel.

45. See further Vernon K. Robbins, “Bodies and Politics in Luke 1–2 and Sirach 44–50: Men, Women, and Boys,” *Scriptura* 90 (2005): 824–38, reprinted in updated form in this volume, pages 41–63.

producing offspring. As discussed above, the fact that Joachim does not have a child seems to prohibit his full participation in the first space of priestly discourse. Likewise, in PJ 2.4, Anna prays, “God of my fathers, bless [εὐλόγησον] me and attend to my prayer, just like when you blessed [εὐλόγησας] the womb [μήτραν] of Sarah and gave her a son, Isaac.” While mourning her barrenness, she contrasts herself and her infertility with both the earth and the fish, who bless (εὐλογεῖ) God by producing offspring and fruit (PJ 3.3). Finally, in PJ 4.4, the author relates the praise of Anna at the fulfillment of her prayer in PJ 2.4: “Now I know that the Lord God blessed [εὐλόγησεν] me greatly. For behold, the widow is no longer a widow, and see, the childless [ἄτεκνος] has conceived [ἐν γαστρὶ εἴληφα<sup>46</sup>].” In PJ 2–4, the topos of blessing concerns reproduction: Anna’s conception of a child demonstrates her blessedness and results in the activation of divine benefits for her and Joachim.

#### 2.4.2. The Blessed Mary in Protevangelium of James 6–12

The topos of blessing plays a significant role also in PJ 6–12. Here, Mary is the sole recipient or object of blessing. These blessings of Mary occur in key places in the narrative of PJ: in the feast celebrating Mary’s first birthday (PJ 6), in the presentation of the three-year-old Mary to the temple (PJ 7), in the annunciation of Mary’s conception (PJ 11), in Mary’s presentation of her purple and scarlet fabric (PJ 12.1), and in the blessing of Elizabeth and “that which is inside” of her (PJ 12.2). The characters who utter the blessings on Mary are mostly of priestly status: priests in PJ 6.2, 7.2, and 12.1, and the high priest in 6.2. In contrast, there is no hint that the blessings of a “voice” in PJ 11 and of Elizabeth and her unborn child in 12.2 are of a priestly nature. We will discuss each of these in turn.

##### 2.4.2.1. Mary Blessed at One: A Name and the Ultimate Blessing

Mary is blessed twice in PJ 6. The first comes on the lips of a group of priests; the second is spoken by the high priest. The context provides important clues to the meaning of εὐλογέω in this chapter. In 6.1, the author describes the first year of Mary’s life, including her ability to stand and walk at six months of age. Mary’s precociousness prompts Anna to build a sanctuary

46. In place of the perfect form of λαμβάνω, some manuscripts read the future, λήψομαι.

(ἐποίησεν ἅγιασμα)<sup>47</sup> in the infant girl's bedroom (κοιτών) until she is of an appropriate age to be taken to the temple (ναός). Mary's ritual purity is emphasized, as is the purity of her "entertainers," the "undefiled daughters of the Hebrews."

Anna's actions represent the relocation of God's ἅγιασμα, or "holy precinct."<sup>48</sup> In the LXX, the phrase ποιέω ἅγιασμα occurs in Exod 25:8 and 1 Chr 22:19. In Exod 25:8, this holy precinct is the locus of God's revelation—God says, "and I shall appear [ὀφθήσομαι] among you." In 1 Chr. 22:19, the holy precinct is the place where the ark of the covenant and the holy vessels are to be kept. In 1 Chr. 28:10, Solomon is selected to build a house (οἶκος) for a holy precinct (εἰς ἅγιασμα). In other places, such as 1 Maccabees, the ἅγιασμα is functionally equivalent to the temple (ναός). By saying that Anna has built a "holy precinct" in which Mary dwells, the author of PJ likens Mary to an object or vessel of the temple, although not the temple located in Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup>

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47. There is ambiguity in how to properly understand the reference to the ἅγιασμα in PJ 6.1 (καὶ ἐποίησεν ἅγιασμα ἐν τῷ κοιτῶνι αὐτῆς) and 6.3 (ἐν τῷ ἁγιάσματι τοῦ κοιτῶνος). It is not clear if Anna's effort results in the construction of a sanctuary in Mary's bedroom or if it transforms Mary's bedroom into a sanctuary entirely. Ehrman and Pleše render both instances as if the sanctuary is in her bedroom (E-P, 47). Hock translates both as though Mary's bedroom has been converted into a sanctuary: "And so she turned her bedroom into a sanctuary," and "Her mother then took her up to the sanctuary—the bedroom" (PJ 6.4, 10; Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas: With Introduction, Notes, and Original Text Featuring the New Scholars Version Translation*, ScholBib 3 [Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1995], 43). Neither version supplies a note supporting the translation. Smid notes a variant reading in 6.3 that "indicates a very close agreement between the sleeping apartment and the sanctuary." He concludes, "In any case it is the author's aim to stress that Mary spends the first years of her life in holy seclusion" (Harm Reinder Smid, *Protevangeliium Jacobi: A Commentary* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965], 50).

48. The NETS renders ἅγιασμα as "holy precinct" forty-three of the sixty-five times it occurs.

49. Cf. Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived*, 164: "By retaining her virginity *ante partum*, *in partum*, and *post partum*, Mary is transformed from being a *parthenos* in the cult to being a cult object." This in particular emphasizes Mary's passivity: "From the day that she is born, Mary functions less as an active subject and more as an object of exchange and offering" (ibid., 160). Vuong suggests that the depiction of Mary in her early years is analogous to that of a sacred gift prepared for the temple (see Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 88–106).

Turning now to the blessings themselves, there are several important things to note. First, the blessings are uttered by a group of priests and then by the high priest. In this way, the blessings in chapter 6 differ from how the topos of blessing appears in the Anna cycle discussed above. The relocation of the temple and these “priestly blessings” that are applied to Mary intensify the priestly rhetorolect of PJ. Second, the blessings of the priests and high priest are intended to bestow divine benefit upon Mary:

God of our fathers, bless [εὐλόγησον] this child and give [δός] to her an illustrious [ὀνομαστός] name forever, in all generations.

God of the heights, look upon [ἐπιβλεψον] this child and bless [εὐλόγησον] her with an ultimate blessing, which is unsurpassable.<sup>50</sup>

Though the priests or high priest utter the blessing, God is ultimately responsible for fulfilling it. Third, and finally, the imperatives (εὐλόγησον [bis], δός, and ἐπιβλεψον) emphasize the performative nature of these blessings (cf. the perfect form [εὐλογημένη] in Luke 1:42).

Two questions remain to be answered concerning the priests’ blessing in PJ 6.2: What is the motivation or cause of the priests’ and high priest’s blessings of Mary, and what is the nature or intention of their blessings? The answer to the first question—the motivation or cause of the priests’ blessing—is not entirely clear from the immediate context, which gives us little reason to think that the priests know of Mary’s premature walking or Anna’s construction of the ἀγίασμα in Mary’s bedroom.

The blessing here may be related to the portrait of Mary earlier in the composition. With Anna’s construction of the ἀγίασμα, the author of PJ has depicted Mary as a sacred vessel or even a sacred space. She is surrounded by holy, pure people, even though she is not physically at the temple in Jerusalem. In similar fashion, the blessings of the priests can be understood as the passing-on of their priestly function to Mary. The LXX contains many examples in which a father blesses his son just before he dies,<sup>51</sup> which may be applied to the priestly blessings of Mary here. As a father’s final blessing on his son bestows an inheritance in the form of continuing the father’s legacy, so also the blessing of the priests represents Mary’s inheritance of the legacy of the priests. As a priestly personage,

50. For this translation of ἥτις διαδοχὴν οὐκ ἔχει, see BDAG, s.v. διαδοχή.

51. H. Beyer, “εὐλογέω, εὐλογητός, εὐλογία, ἐνευλογέω,” *TDNT* 2:754–65, esp. 756.

Mary has already been the instrument that activates divine benefit in her parents' lives, and the angel's message later in the narrative suggests that she will be used to bring about the benefit of the forgiveness of sins for others (see PJ 11.3). In these important details, PJ has displaced the Jerusalem temple as first space of priestly discourse and has centered it on Mary.

The nature of blessings bestowed on Mary is clearer. The priests ask that God give Mary an "illustrious name, everlasting in all generations," and the high priests ask God to bless Mary with an ultimate and unsurpassable blessing.

*An illustrious, everlasting name.* The adjective "illustrious" (ὀνομαστός) does not occur in the New Testament, but it appears twenty-one times in the LXX.<sup>52</sup> There are three related uses of the adjective in the LXX: it denotes (1) fame based on action, especially related to political or martial superiority;<sup>53</sup> (2) fame based on one's identity, especially the identity indicated by Israel's special relationship with God; and (3) the fame of one's name.<sup>54</sup>

One example of a "famous name" from the LXX may help clarify the nature of the priests' blessing here. In Gen 12:2, Abraham's name is directly tied to God's blessing. God says to Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless [εὐλογῆσω] you and I will exalt your name [μεγαλυνῶ τὸ ὄνομα σου], and you will be blessed [ἔσῃ εὐλογητός]." Genesis 12:2 offers a compelling parallel to the blessing of Mary here for two reasons. First, God's blessing of Abram includes the promise of progeny—God promises to make him into a "great nation" that consists of innumerable offspring. This connects with the notion of blessing as procreation in PJ 2–4. Second, and more importantly, God promises to make Abram's name great. In PJ 7.2 and 12.1, the same phrase (μεγαλύνω τὸ ὄνομα σου) is applied to Mary in a priestly blessing. Likewise, in PJ 12.1, the priest

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52. The usage in the LXX does not appear to diverge significantly from the use in classical Greek; cf. LSJ. s.v. ὀνομαστός.

53. For fame, see, e.g., Ezek 22:5: "Your fame [ἡ ὀνομαστή] is unclean and great in lawless acts" (NETS); cf. Ezek 23:3. For men of renown (οἱ ἄνθρωποι οἱ ὀνομαστοί), see, e.g., Gen 6:4; cf. ἄνδρες ὀνομαστοί in, e.g., Num 16:2. Judith is said to be famous beyond the whole earth (παρὰ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν) because of her beauty and wisdom (cf. Jdt 11:21) and presence in Nebuchadnezzar's court (Jdt 11:23).

54. In Isa 56:5, "fame" is connected with one's "name." God speaks of righteous eunuchs: "I will give to them, in my house and within my wall, an esteemed place [τόπον ὀνομαστόν], better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name [ὄνομα αἰώνιον], and it shall not fail" (NETS).

declares, “You will be blessed [ἔση εὐλογημένη],” which bears strong verbal similarity to God’s promise to Abram in Gen 12:2 (ἔση εὐλογητός). On the whole, the priestly blessing in PJ 6.2, in light of the blessings in 7.2 and 12.1, suggests the possibility that the author of PJ has reconfigured the Abramic blessing of Gen 12 and applied it to Mary.<sup>55</sup> Just as Abram activates divine benefit for “all the nations” of the earth (cf. Gen 22:18) as father, Mary similarly activates divine benefit as mother.

*An ultimate, unsurpassable blessing.* The blessing of the high priest not only repeats aspects of the blessing of the priests earlier in the narrative but also intensifies it in two ways. First, it intensifies the status of the one who utters the blessing: it is said by the high priest, not a group of priests. Second, the nature of the blessing itself is intensified by calling for an “ultimate, unsurpassable” blessing.

The language of the high priest’s blessing is rare. The precise meaning of ἔσχατος here is not entirely clear, but it seems to differ from the dominant sense of ἔσχατος in the New Testament, which pertains to the “last” or “end” of something in sequence. The exact phrase ἔσχατη εὐλογία does not occur in the New Testament or the LXX. For the purposes of this essay, I accept the suggestion that ἔσχατος here means “to furthest extremity in rank, value, or situation.”<sup>56</sup> This leads to the translation “ultimate” in the sense that Mary’s blessing is “to the furthest extremity” of any possible blessing.

In addition to imploring God for Mary’s “ultimate” blessing, the high priest asks for a blessing that is literally “without successor.” The feminine noun διαδοχή does not occur in either the New Testament or the LXX; the masculine noun διάδοχος occurs one time in the New Testament (Acts 24:27) and seven times<sup>57</sup> in the LXX. In both the New Testament and the LXX, it refers to a political or religious successor. That Mary’s blessing “does not have a successor” suggests that the two modifiers should be understood together to emphasize the utter singularity of the blessing spoken upon Mary. It is the highest “rank” of those blessings that precede it, and there will be no equivalent blessing in the future.

55. Exegetically, this is not far from Paul’s reading of Gen 12 in Gal 3. Just as Paul restricts the meaning of Abraham’s seed to Jesus (Gal 3:15–16), the reconfiguration of the Abramic blessing to Mary makes her unique offspring the source of blessing to all nations.

56. BDAG, s.v. ἔσχατος.

57. 1 Chr 18:17; 2 Chr 26:11; 28:7; 2 Macc 4:29; 14:26; Sir 46:1; 48:8.

#### 2.4.2.2. Mary Blessed at Three: The Revelation of God's Redemption

The third scene in which Mary is blessed occurs in PJ 7.2. In this chapter, Mary's parents fulfill the promise they had made to dedicate Mary to the temple. Though they originally intend to do so when she is two years old, they decide to wait until she is three lest she "be homesick for her father and mother" and leave the temple (7.1). At three, Anna and Joachim deploy the "undefiled daughters of the Hebrews" with lit torches to prevent the heart of the three-year-old Mary from being enticed (αἰχμαλωτισθήσεται)<sup>58</sup> away from the temple (7.2). It is important to remember that Mary has already been "housed" in God's "holy precinct." Although the location of Mary's dwelling place changes and does so in a significant way, Mary's role as a sacred vessel or sacred space has already been established in PJ 6 by Anna's construction of the ἀγίασμα and by the blessing of the priests.

After Mary's reception into the temple, the narrative recounts the blessing of Mary:

And the priest received her [ἐδέξατο] her and, after kissing her, he blessed her and said, "The Lord God has begun to make your name great [ἐμεγάλυνεν]<sup>59</sup> in all generations. By you [ἐπὶ σοί]<sup>60</sup> at the end of days, the Lord will reveal [φανερώσει] his redemption [τὸ λύτρον αὐτοῦ] to the sons of Israel." (PJ 7.2)

The blessing here demonstrates both points of convergence and divergence from the blessings in PJ 6. Most obviously, this blessing, like those in chapter 6, is uttered by a priestly personage. Like the blessing of the priest in PJ 6, the blessing in PJ 7 also concerns the "name" of Mary and its importance "in all generations." The priest's speech contains both a recognition of Mary's blessedness in the present as well as a degree of future orientation, conveyed by the future tense of φανερώω.

The blessing in chapter 7 also contains unique details. This is the only blessing of Mary that includes the priest "kissing" (φιλέω) Mary. Likewise, the location of the blessing has changed—it takes place not in Joachim

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58. For this translation of αἰχμαλωτισθῆ ἡ καρδία αὐτῆς ἐκ ναοῦ κυρίου, see BDAG, s.v. αἰχμαλωτίζω.

59. N.B., the form of ἐμεγάλυνεν used here can be translated as either an aorist or an imperfect. An inceptive imperfect ("to begin to...") may be the most appropriate translation given the repetitive nature of εὐλογέω and μεγαλύνω in PJ.

60. For an "instrumental" sense of ἐπὶ + dative, see Matt 4:4; Mark 10:24; Luke 1:29.

and Anna's house, but in the temple in Jerusalem. The speech itself builds on the blessing of the priest in chapter 6. The tense of *μεγαλύνω* suggests that the priest's blessing in chapter 6 has been "fulfilled" at least in part—Mary has been given a "famous" name, which is indicated by the fact that the priest here recognizes that it has begun to be "made great." Finally, the priest's blessing indicates that Mary is the instrument by which God's redemption (*λύτρον*) will be revealed at the end of days.

On the whole, this scene shows that the author of PJ has reconfigured a number of *topoi* from the New Testament. First, the priest's "reception" of Mary appears to be a reconfiguration of Simeon's "reception" of Jesus in Luke 2:28:

Luke 2:28: αὐτὸς ἐδέξατο αὐτὸ εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας καὶ εὐλόγησεν τὸν θεὸν καὶ εἶπεν.

PJ 7.2: καὶ ἐδέξατο αὐτὴν ὁ ἱερεὺς, καὶ φιλήσας εὐλόγησεν αὐτὴν καὶ εἶπεν.

Whereas Simeon has seen God's salvation (*εἶδον ... τὸ σωτήριον σου*) in the infant Jesus, the priest in PJ recognizes the blessing of "redemption" that will be seen through Mary. Here again the author of PJ creates a parallel between the "prehistory" of Jesus—as it emerges in Luke—and that of Mary. Finally, the author of PJ reconfigures the "audience" of this revelation. In Luke, it is directed toward both the gentiles and God's people Israel (Luke 2:32). In PJ, the revelation is exclusively for the sons of Israel.

Next, the priest declares that redemption (*λύτρον*) will be revealed through Mary. This suggests the reconfiguration of tradition in the New Testament as well. The noun *λύτρον* occurs only two times in the New Testament and twenty times in the LXX. In the LXX, *λύτρον* appears most frequently in the legal material: seventeen of the twenty occurrences appear in Exodus, Leviticus, or Numbers. The two occurrences in the New Testament derive from a shared saying in Matt 20:28 and Mark 10:45. In the saying, Jesus states, "The son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give himself [*τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ*] as a ransom [*λύτρον*] for many." Though the precise meaning of *λύτρον* here may be debated, it likely pertains to the salvific power of Jesus's offering himself for others.<sup>61</sup> Given the likely reconfiguration of Luke 2:28 noted above, it is plau-

61. See discussion in M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 302–4; and W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Criti-*

sible to read λύτρον in PJ with the same sense, almost as a replacement for σωτήρια in Simeon's speech.<sup>62</sup> The priest declares that God's saving redemption is revealed "by Mary." His prediction is confirmed later in the narrative when the midwife declares in PJ 19.2, "My soul has been magnified today, because my eyes have seen a paradox, because salvation has been born [ἐγεννήθη] to Israel." In other words, Mary is portrayed as the instrument by which divine benefit is activated for Israel.

Finally, the revelation of God's saving redemption through Mary takes place "at the end of days" (ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν). Though this may denote the "end of days" as the time when God's salvation is revealed as in prophetic-apocalyptic discourse,<sup>63</sup> it is also possible to take it as a decisive point in history (e.g., Heb 1:2). In either case, the larger narrative of PJ suggests that the salvation that will be revealed through Mary does not take place at some time in the eschaton, but rather takes place at the end of her pregnancy. Thus the midwife witnesses God's salvation as a present reality (PJ 19.2); the priest's prediction in PJ 7.2, then, comes to fruition and is "seen" by the midwife.

#### 2.4.2.3. Mary's Blessing as a Young Woman: Recognizing Mary's Name

The scene in PJ 7 ends with God casting his grace (χάρις) upon Mary and her dancing on the steps of the altar. The author adds that "all of the house of Israel loved her" (7.3). This in many ways is the high point of Mary's childhood as the object of blessing by priestly personages. The set-apart and multiply blessed "vessel" of God has been relocated from the "holy precinct" of her parent's house to her "proper" place at the steps of the altar in the Lord's house. The fortune of Mary, however, begins to change in PJ 8.2. With the onset of puberty and the inevitable impurity that follows, the priestly personages must find another "house" for Mary.<sup>64</sup> Mary's "guard-

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*cal and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988–1997), 3:94–100.

62. See similarly, Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived*, 146: "Just as Luke's Simeon proclaimed the dawning of God's salvation when he beheld Jesus in the temple (Lk 2.30), so does PJ's priest immediately recognize that in Mary the deity will reveal redemption to Israel."

63. E.g., Jer 23:20; Dan 10:14.

64. For a discussion of the purity issues associated with the onset of puberty, specifically associated with menstruation, see Vuong, *Gender and Purity*, 119–47. Her conclusion about the literary significance of the onset of Mary's menstruation aligns with the overall force of my argument: "Most notably, as we shall see, Mary's departure

ian" is selected by miraculous sign, and she is given to Joseph (8.3–9.3). Abandoned (καταλείπω) in Joseph's house, she is nonetheless under the special protection of God: Joseph rightly says to her, "The Lord will guard [διαφυλάξει] you" (9.3). Mary's physical distance from the temple in Jerusalem solidifies her function as the "roving temple" that stands in distinction to the Jerusalem temple.

The next section of PJ (10.1–12.1) concerns the spinning of a curtain for the temple. This section extends the change in Mary's fortune intimated above. Up to this point in the narrative, Mary has been singled out by the priests. In this section, however, her individuality in the eyes of the priests is diminished. Mary, who was blessed with an "ultimate" and "unsurpassable" blessing, fades to near anonymity with the other "undefiled virgins" of Davidic heritage (10.1). The holy vessel of the temple is demoted to one of its many servants. She is selected to spin the purple, not because of her special identity or exceptional blessedness, but rather by the decision of casting lots (10.2).<sup>65</sup>

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from the Temple allows her to take on her new role as a potential mother" (129). While Vuong derives evidence for her suggestion mostly from biblical and Jewish sources, Jennifer A. Glancy (*Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies* [Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010]) doubts the plausibility of exclusively Jewish interests in this incident. Rather, she calls attention to the broader concerns over menstruation in the ancient Mediterranean world, especially the virulent view of menses: "Mary's body is clean and dry in the *Protevangelium of James* because the effluvia associated with pregnancy and childbirth were thought to converge" (Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge*, 112). *Protevangelium of James's* overall portrait of Mary relates to her sacred role: "The text implies that Mary's body is a sacred space. Mary's womb is Jesus' prenatal sanctuary. It should not be sullied by the usual sordid byproducts of femininity" (109). Given this cultural script, Glancy insists that Mary in PJ never experiences menstruation, but conceives Jesus shortly after leaving the temple. Glancy's position stands in contrast to the earlier position of Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity," in *Women's History and Ancient History*, ed. Sarah Pomeroy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 273–99. He insists, rather, that it "was not paganism but Judaism (and/or Leviticus) that taught early Christianity to regard the menstruant as impure" (287). He adds that excluding menstruating women from sacred space occurs in early Christianity long before it does in rabbinic Judaism (ibid.). See also Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived*, 149.

65. That Mary's task is actually determined by lot stands in contrast to Joseph's selection as her guardian. The "lot" to determine her guardian was ultimately unsuccessful. It was only after this initial failure that Joseph was selected by a miraculous sign.

It is important to note, then, the way that Mary's identity has changed, especially as it relates to her virginity and purity. Even in Matthew and Luke, Mary is portrayed as a singular virgin—even *the singular* virgin of Isa 7:14. Here, however, she is one among many virgins, one in the company of other undefiled young women. The child who stood at the center of the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews and who was illuminated by their torches in PJ 7 has been subsumed into their midst, barely distinguishable. This has important ramifications for understanding the nature of Mary as a sacred vessel or sacred space. As a virgin, Mary is just one among many before conception.

In the midst of this apparent diminishing in the importance of Mary, a voice reaffirms Mary's blessedness and unique identity. Mary's hearing of the voice and the angel's visit in PJ 11 reconfigures the annunciation found in Luke 1:26–38, and to a degree, the baptism of Jesus as found in Matthew.

First, Mary's hearing of a voice that declares her true identity resembles the baptism of Jesus in the Synoptic tradition, especially in Matthew. In PJ 11, a voice speaks (ἰδοὺ φωνὴ λέγουσα) to Mary and reveals her identity as the one who will conceive by the power of God (11.1, 3). Likewise, in Matthew, a voice speaks (ἰδοὺ φωνὴ ... λέγουσα) of Jesus's true identity as God's Son (Matt 3:17). Though not as immediate in PJ, the declaration in each composition leads the protagonist into the wilderness for testing. In Matt 4:1–11, Jesus faces an adversary in the wilderness whose tests confirm the manner in which he is God's Son (i.e., the refrain, "If you are God's son ..."). Similarly, the drink test in PJ 16, which drives Mary into the wilderness, confirms the manner in which she has conceived (i.e., she is declared innocent of any illegal sexual activity).

In addition, the scene in PJ 11 represents the reconfiguration of the Lukan annunciation scene. The beginning of the voice's greeting in PJ 11.1 is identical to Gabriel's greeting in Luke 1:28: "Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you."<sup>66</sup> Then, the angel adds, "You have been blessed [εὐλογημένη] among women." The perfect form of εὐλογέω reminds Mary (and the reader) of the numerous blessings that have been bestowed on her up to this point in the narrative. It may be significant to note as well that the angel declares that she is blessed "among women" not "among virgins."

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66. Unlike Luke, the author has already indicated that Mary is the object of God's favor (χάρις) and protective presence in PJ 7.

Unlike the version in Luke, Mary does not ponder the meaning of the greeting (Luke 1:29). Instead, she returns to her house in fear and takes up her spinning project again (11.2). Shortly after, an angel appears to her inside of her house.

The narrative of PJ at this point more closely aligns with that of Luke 1:30–38, albeit it with important reconfigurations. Many of these reconfigurations move beyond the scope of this essay, but the reconfiguration of Mary's question is of utmost importance. In Luke 1:34, after news of that she will conceive, Mary asks, "How will this be, since I have not known [i.e., had sexual relations with] a man?" Mary's question in Luke relates to her virginity. In PJ 11.2, she asks, "Will I conceive from the living Lord God, and will I give birth to a child [γεννήσω] as every woman bears children [ὡς πᾶσα γυνὴ γεννᾷ]?" Mary does not ask about the state of her virginity but about the manner of her conception and delivery.<sup>67</sup> In other words, Mary's question concerns the manner in which she will be a mother.<sup>68</sup> In like fashion, the angel's answer conveys how she will become the mother of the "son of the Most High." The angel answers, "Not really, Mary. For the power of the Lord will overshadow you. For this reason, indeed, that set-apart thing [ἅγιον] which is born from you will be called the son of the Most High" (PJ 11.3)<sup>69</sup>

At this point, the author of PJ relocates the angel's saying found in Matt 1:21, which is addressed to Joseph, and applies it to Mary's role as mother: "And you will call his name Jesus; for he will save his people from their sins." The author's relocation of tradition concerning Jesus's birth and purpose aligns with Mary's blessed "instrumentality" elsewhere in PJ, especially in the priest's prediction in 7.2. The priest's prediction, which anticipates the midwife's declaration in 19.2, is here validated by God's heavenly messenger. Mary is blessed with the "ultimate" blessing as mother because she will bear the "ultimate" son, the son of the Most High who is the saving redemption of God's people. With this, the narrative

67. Cf. Edouard Cothenet, "Le Protévangile de Jacques: origine, genre et signification d'un premier midrash chrétien sur la Nativité de Marie," *ANRW* 25.6:4265: "Il no sera question du voeu de virginité de Marie qu'à partir du IVE s., ici la question semble porter sur le mode de l'enfantement et prépare le récit relatif à la *virginitas in partu*."

68. In her otherwise excellent attention to the character development of Mary in PJ, Foscett undervalues the way in which Mary's question in PJ differs from her question in Luke (see Foscett, *A Virgin Conceived*, 151–53).

69. Once again, the account in PJ bears a strong verbal relationship to Luke 1:35.

again resembles Luke's text, in which Mary accepts the angel's message and declares, "Behold, the slave of the Lord who is before him. Let it be to me according to your word" (PJ 11.3; cf. Luke 1:38).<sup>70</sup>

On the heels of Mary's acceptance of the angel's message comes the final "priestly blessing" in both the cycle concerning Mary's blessedness in PJ 6–12 and in the composition as a whole. This final blessing functions as an *inclusio* around the "priestly blessings" of Mary: PJ 6.2 contains the first blessing of Mary uttered by a priest; PJ 12.1 contains the last. The text reads,

And she made the purple and the scarlet, and brought<sup>71</sup> [them] up to the priest. And, having received [them], the priest blessed [εὐλόγησεν] her and said, "Mary, the Lord God has begun to make your name great [ἔμεγάλυνεν ... τὸ ὄνομά σου], and you will be blessed [ἔση εὐλογημένη] by all the generations of the earth."

In dramatic irony, the astute reader knows that Mary's "great name" pertains not to the material created by her hands for the temple; her great name is not the result of her "work" as one of the undefiled virgins. Rather, her great name pertains to that creation which results from God's power growing inside of her; her great name is due to her "work" as a mother. The language of the second half of the blessing (ἔση εὐλογημένη) bears strong verbal similarity to God's promise to Abram in Gen 12:2 (ἔση εὐλογητός), confirming the suggestion above that the author of PJ has reconfigured God's blessing of Abraham and applied it to Mary.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In this essay I have given sustained attention to the meaning of the *topos* of blessing in PJ. By comparing the depiction of Mary's visit to Elizabeth in PJ with the similar depiction in Luke, I have made several suggestions about the nature of Mary's blessing.

70. PJ adds the word *κατενώπιον* to the Lukan text.

71. Though it lies beyond the scope of this essay, it is interesting to note that in the Synoptics, the verb *ἀνάγω* is used in reference to Jesus's being brought up before the Jewish religious elite and up to his crucifixion (see Matt 27:2, 31; Mark 14:44, 53; 15:16; Luke 22:66; 23:26. Cf. Luke 21:12, where the verb is used to describe the followers of Jesus being brought up before a variety of accusers.

First, I have emphasized the importance of priestly discourse for understanding not only Mary's visit to Elizabeth, but the whole *topos* of blessing in PJ. Though at first glance the *topoi* of praise and blessing appear to be similar in Luke and PJ, the dominant mode of discourse in each creates a unique trajectory for each. In Luke 1–2, praise and blessing come as a result to the fulfillment of God's promises to the nation of Israel in the birth of two prophets, John the Baptist and Jesus. In PJ, praise and blessing result in the activation of divine benefit in the birth of two blessed personages, Mary and Jesus.

Second, I have highlighted the changing nature of Mary's character, especially in the eyes of the priests. In the cycle of "priestly blessings" that begins in 6.2 and extends to 12.1, Mary is depicted as an instrument that leads the priests to praise and glorify God (6.3). With the onset of puberty (8.2), however, the priests' regard for Mary begins to change. She is physically separated from the temple in Jerusalem and is entrusted to another caregiver. Though the priest blesses her in 12.1, he does so not for her singularity, but for her role as one of the many holy virgins of Israel. By PJ 15–16, the priests' regard for Mary has changed completely: she is no longer worthy of blessing, but fit for a curse because of her apparent illicit pregnancy. Though she is absolved of any wrongdoing, she nevertheless falls completely from the attention of the priests.

Third, I have hinted at the ways in which the author of PJ refocuses priestly discourse on Mary. With Anna's construction of the *ἀγίασμα* for her, Mary inhabits a sacred space and to some degree displaces the Jerusalem temple as a result. Likewise, as a priestly instrument, she supplants the function of the Jerusalem priesthood. She, not the priests, activates divine benefits for other characters in the story. It is not surprising, then, that the narrative ends with priests awaiting the activation of divine benefit, which they do not ultimately receive. They do not receive divine benefit, because they refuse to accept the manner in which Mary is a priestly instrument after she leaves the temple.

Finally, I have suggested that Mary's function as an instrument of God's presence is tied in particular to her role as mother. My argument rests on the particular way in which the *topos* of blessing has been reconfigured in PJ around conception and childbearing. Anna and Joachim are "blessed"—that is, divine benefits are activated for them—through the conception and birth of Mary. Likewise, Mary is blessed with an ultimate and unsurpassable blessing through conceiving and giving birth to Jesus. I have made the suggestion that the magnification of Mary's name

represents a reconfiguration of the Abramic blessing of Gen 12. Just as Abraham's function as father results in the blessing of all people, so Mary's function as mother results in the blessing of all people. In sum, Mary is the ultimate priestly instrument by which God's "saving redemption" is extended to Israel.<sup>72</sup>

The emphasis on Mary's role as mother is related to her role as virgin. As previous scholars have pointed out, one function of PJ as a whole may have been motivated by apologetic concerns about Jesus's identity as the Son of God.<sup>73</sup> I am not denying that Mary's purity and virginity are major emphases in PJ. By calling attention to Mary's role as mother, however, I am suggesting an additional purpose: PJ casts Mary's role as mother in a positive light. By tying Mary's blessedness to her role as mother, PJ suggests that her sanctity does not extract her from "traditional" social norms of childbearing;<sup>74</sup> rather, she is embedded within them, even as she remains a virgin. In this sense, the midwife's response to the virgin birth highlights the significance of Mary's blessing. The midwife has indeed seen a "paradox" (παράδοξος): she has witnessed a virgin be blessed by becoming a mother (PJ 19.2).<sup>75</sup> Her declaration that "salvation has been born to Israel" (PJ 19.2) solidifies the reconfiguration of priestly material from Luke. This statement, spoken by Simeon in the temple, is relocated to the desert, and it comes from the lips of a Hebrew midwife. Mary is a priestly vessel—she is the one who will be blessed by all women—insofar as she is the vessel of God's saving presence, Jesus.

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72. Elliott comments that Mary "is seen in PJ as an instrument of divine salvation in her own right" (Elliott, "Protevangelium of James," 51).

73. See the pithy summary of the apologetic motives in E-P, 34–45. See further Foskett, *A Virgin Conceived*, 141–64.

74. See, e.g., Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 5–9, 53–64. From the perspective of Brown, the emphasis in PJ on childbearing as a source of blessing, in contrast with radical sexual renunciation, may align with the outlook of the Pauline school: "It is striking how many of these [later writers in Pauline tradition] wished to present Paul, an apostle notably fired by the ideal of an 'undistracted' life in Christ, as a man concerned to validate the structures of the married household" (57).

75. "L'insistance du Ps-Jacques à affirmer la virginité dans l'enfantement lui-même est particulièrement déconcertante" (Cothenet, "Le Protévangile de Jacques," 4265). Cothenet suggests the "disconcerting" element may resemble a nascent form of doceticism (cf. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.7.2).

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