

Julius Wellhausen, a famous leader in the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament, issued a commentary on the Gospels in which he simply omitted the first two chapters of Matthew and of Luke. But there is not the slightest warrant for his doing so, nor did he make any attempt to account for the omission. They are original parts of the books, and are found in all our copies, including the very earliest.

Someone may say: "How can you be sure that we have two different witnesses? Perhaps Matthew and Luke got their information from the same source, so that we really have only one witness". But God has amply provided for this objection. No one can honestly read the first two chapters of Matthew and the first two chapters of Luke and say that they are repetitions of the same witness. There is hardly a phrase in one that occurs in the other. Each contains a number of incidents but very few of these are in both accounts. Though they agree exactly in their central teaching, that God, the Holy Spirit, caused the Virgin Mary to conceive a son without human help, the selection of incidents in each account is so different from that in the other that you wonder for a moment how the stories can differ so greatly. Then you examine it closely and the reason becomes clear.

Matthew gives us the witness of Joseph. His whole story is from Joseph's viewpoint. It tells of Joseph's perplexity. He was espoused to a virgin and before they came together he found her to be "great with child" (Matt. 1:18). He was a kindly man, and did not wish to subject Mary to public scorn. Yet he could not see how he could marry an impure woman. "While he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream," and explained to him that Mary was not impure, but had been selected by the Lord to conceive a son through the Holy Spirit, in fulfillment of the prophecy given by Isaiah that the Messiah would be virgin born. When Joseph awoke he did as the angel had commanded, and took Mary to wife, but had no marital relations with her until after she had brought forth her first-born son.

The second chapter tells of another appearance of the angel of the Lord to Joseph, warning him to take the child and his mother and flee into Egypt before Herod should attempt to destroy the child. Verse 19 tells us that again an angel appeared to Joseph, after he had gone to Egypt, telling him that Herod had died and he should now return to the land of Israel. Thus everything is told from the viewpoint of Joseph. We can almost hear him speaking, as he tells Matthew his experiences of many years before, when God had graciously permitted him, with beautiful self-forgetfulness, to be the instrument of protecting the Christ.

We turn to Luke's Gospel and all is different. Joseph's fears, his dreams, and his actions, are passed over with hardly a mention. This is Mary's account, and she tells what she knows from personal experience. First she describes the experiences of her cousin Elisabeth, the mother of Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist. Then she tells how the angel told her the almost unbelievable news, that she would have a child who would be the promised Messiah. In astonishment, she asked how this could happen to her, since she was a virgin. The angel replied that the Holy Spirit would cause her miraculously to conceive. Humbly she said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy Word". Next she tells of her visit to her cousin Elisabeth. In the second chapter we are told how Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem for the census, how Jesus was born there, and how the shepherds came to see him. The account continues, "But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart", a statement which is repeated in verse 51: "But his mother kept all these sayings in her heart".

In Matthew we hear Joseph telling of his observations and his thoughts,