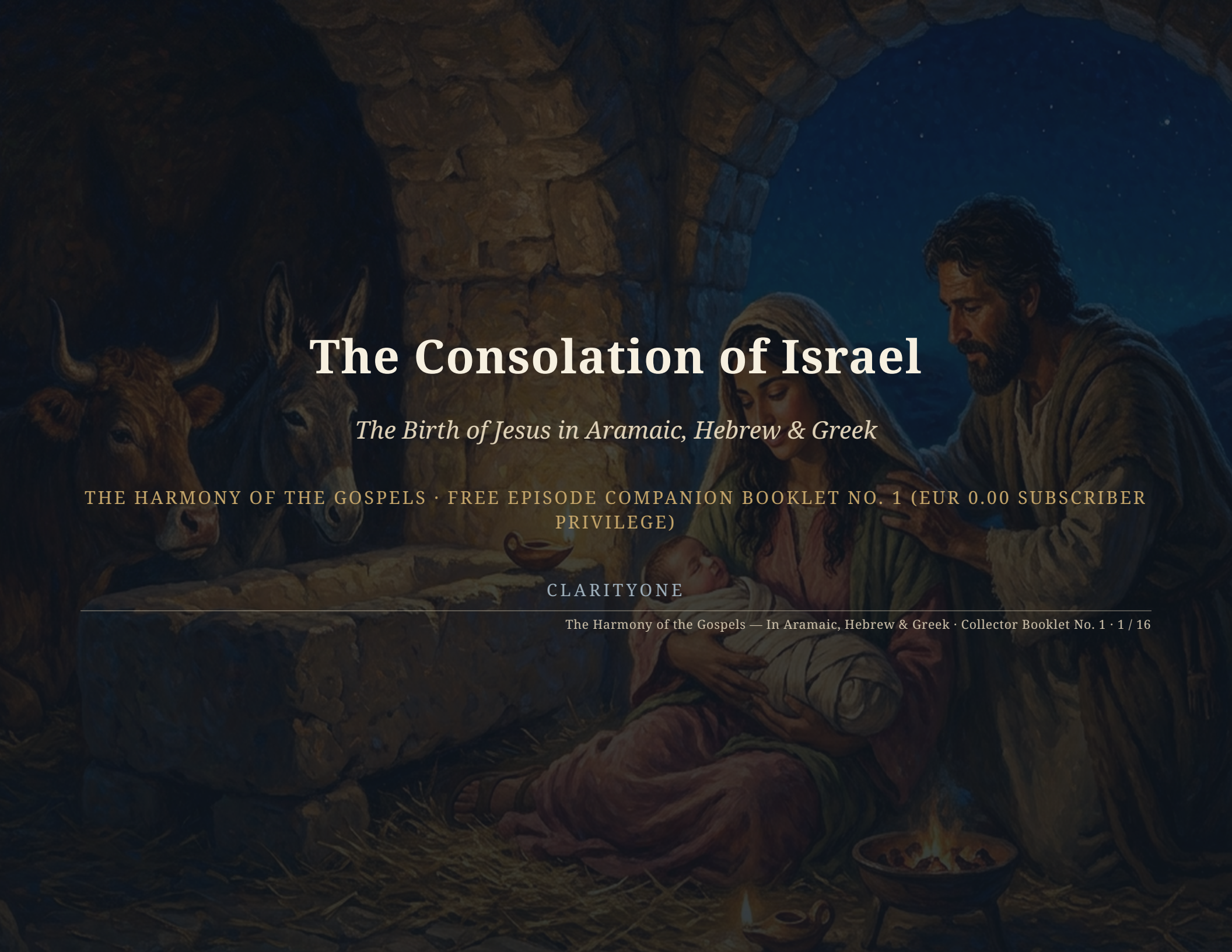


A detailed illustration of the Nativity scene. Mary is seated on the ground, holding the infant Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes. Joseph stands to the right, looking down at the child. To the left, a cow and a donkey are visible, looking towards the newborn. The scene is set in a stable with stone walls and a dark, starry night sky visible through an arched opening. A small fire burns in a brazier in the foreground, and a lantern sits on a stone ledge.

The Consolation of Israel

The Birth of Jesus in Aramaic, Hebrew & Greek

THE HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS · FREE EPISODE COMPANION BOOKLET NO. 1 (EUR 0.00 SUBSCRIBER PRIVILEGE)

CLARITYONE

The Harmony of the Gospels — In Aramaic, Hebrew & Greek · Collector Booklet No. 1 · 1 / 16

Page 2 — Two doors into one house

Only two of the four Gospels tell how Jesus was born, and they come to the birth from opposite sides of the house. Matthew walks with Joseph: names, dreams, a star, a frightened king, a flight by night, a mother weeping in Ramah. Luke walks with Mary: an old priest struck silent, a girl who says *here I am*, two pregnant women and a song, shepherds at work in the dark, an old man in the Temple who has waited all his life. Where the two differ, we let each speak from where it stands.

We read every passage in three tongues. In Greek, the language in which the Gospels have come down to us. In Aramaic, through the Peshitta, the Bible of the Syriac-speaking churches of the East, close kin to the speech of Galilee. And in Hebrew: the Hebrew Bible itself, and the Hebrew New Testament of the nineteenth-century scholar Franz Delitzsch, who carried the Greek back into the tongue of the prophets.

Beside them sit three companions: the Targum, the old Aramaic translations of Scripture; the Talmud; and the Midrash, the sages' searching readings of the Bible. They do not speak about Jesus, and we do not make them. They let us hear the world of Hebrew prayer and longing in which these stories were first told.

One word runs through this booklet. You will meet it on a road near Bethlehem, in a mother's refusal, and again in the Temple, in an old man's arms. Read slowly, and read the lines aloud if you can, even if you stumble. They were made to be heard.

Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ. The book of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1)

ספר תולדת ישוע המשיח בן דוד בן אברהם *Sefer toledot Yeshua ha-Mashiah*. (Matthew 1:1, Delitzsch)

Sefer toledot, the book of the generations. In Genesis the same two words open the line of the first human being: *zeh sefer toledot Adam*, this is the book of the generations of Adam (Genesis 5:1). Heard in Hebrew, Matthew's first line sounds like the start of a new humanity.

Then Matthew does something a family record has no need to do. Among the fathers and sons he writes four women. Tamar, who had to disguise herself to be given justice by her own father-in-law (Genesis 38). Rahab of Jericho, whose house was in the city wall (Joshua 2:15). Ruth, the foreigner from Moab, who would not go home (Ruth 1:16). And a woman Matthew does not name at all: *the wife of Uriah* (Matthew 1:3–6).

Every one of them carries a story some reader would rather skip. They are written in, one by one, in the line that leads to him. The family of the Messiah keeps its wounds visible.



Page 4 — God remembered

Luke begins somewhere else: in the Temple in Jerusalem, with an old priest whose prayers have not been answered. Zechariah and Elisabeth are both righteous, both old, and they have no child (Luke 1:6–7). Later Elisabeth will name what that cost her: *my disgrace among people* (1:25).

Their names say more in Hebrew than in English. *Zechariah*: the LORD remembers. *Elisabeth*: God is an oath. For a lifetime they carried those names through an empty house.

אל תירא זכריהו כי נשמעה תפלתך ואלישבע אשתך תלד לך בן וקראת שמו יוחנן *Al tira, Zekharyahu, ki nishme'ah tefillatekha*. Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elisabeth will bear you a son, and you will call his name *John*, "the LORD has been gracious." (Luke 1:13, Delitzsch)

The prayer that was heard may be one he had stopped praying years ago. Heaven keeps a longer memory than we do.

The messenger is Gabriel. In the book of Daniel he comes while Daniel is still praying, *ke'et minḥat erev*, at the time of the evening offering (Daniel 9:21). Luke puts him in the sanctuary at the hour of incense, while the people pray outside (Luke 1:10–11, 19). He says the child will go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, *to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children* (1:17). Those are the last words of the prophets:

והשיב לב אבות על בנים ולב בנים על אבותם *Veheshiv lev avot al banim*. He will turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers. (Malachi 4:6; 3:24 in Hebrew Bibles)

Zechariah asks for a sign and is given silence. When the child is born he asks for a tablet and writes *Yoḥanan shemo*, his name is John (Luke 1:63), and his first words are a song. In it God has come *to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to Abraham our father* (1:72–73). Delitzsch writes *lizkor*, to remember, the root of Zechariah's name, and *ha-shevu'ah*, the oath, which sounds in Elisabeth's.

In this booklet's hearing, the old man is singing his own name and his wife's back to God, and finding that they were true.



Page 5 — Here I am

Χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη, ὁ κύριος μετὰ σοῦ. *Chaire, kecharitōmenē*. Rejoice, you who have been graced; the Lord is with you. (Luke 1:28)

שלום לך אשת חן יהוה עמך *Shalom lakh, eshet hen*. Peace to you, woman of grace; the LORD is with you. (Luke 1:28, Delitzsch)

She is troubled, Luke says, and wonders what kind of greeting this is (1:29). When she hears that she will bear a son named Jesus, she asks the obvious question: how can this be? (1:34). The angel does not rebuke her for asking. He answers her, and ends with a sentence a synagogue ear would know:

כי לא יפלא מאלהים כל דבר *Ki lo yippale me-Elohim kol davar*. For nothing will be too wondrous for God. (Luke 1:37, Delitzsch)

It is the question asked when Sarah laughed in her tent at a promise that came too late: *ha-yippale me-Adonai davar*? Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? (Genesis 18:14). In Delitzsch's Hebrew the angel turns Sarah's question into an answer, and gives it to a young woman whose life has barely begun.

Ἰδοὺ ἡ δούλη κυρίου· γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου. Here is the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word. (Luke 1:38)

הנני שפחת יהוה יהי לי כדברך *Hineni shifhat Adonai*. Here I am, the servant of the LORD. (Luke 1:38, Delitzsch)

Hineni is Abraham's answer when God calls him by name (Genesis 22:1), the boy Samuel's in the dark of the sanctuary (1 Samuel 3:4), and Isaiah's when he hears *Whom shall I send?* (Isaiah 6:8). Here it is on the lips of a young woman from a town the Hebrew Bible never mentions.

Some of us were taught to hear this scene as a lesson in compliance, and some were pressed into yeses we did not mean, in the name of God. Look at the order of things. She is greeted. She is troubled, and her trouble is allowed. She asks, and she is answered. Only then does she say *hineni*.



Page 6 — The song of the lowly

Mary goes in haste to the hill country, to Zechariah's house. When Elizabeth hears her greeting, the child leaps in her womb (Luke 1:39–41). Two women, one long past the age for children and one not yet married, meet in a doorway, and the older one blesses the younger. Then Mary sings.

Μεγαλύνει ἡ ψυχὴ μου τὸν κύριον My soul magnifies the Lord. (Luke 1:46)

יהוה רוממה נפשי את יהוה *Romemah nafshi et Adonai*. My soul lifts high the LORD. (Luke 1:46, Delitzsch)

The verb is Hannah's. When Hannah brought the son she had prayed for to the sanctuary at Shiloh, to give him back to God, she sang:

עלץ לבי ביהוה רמה קרני ביהוה *Alats libbi ba-Adonai, ramah karni ba-Adonai*. My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is lifted high in the LORD. (1 Samuel 2:1)

The same root, *rum*, to lift up, runs through both songs. At the centre of Mary's is a line thrones have never found comfortable:

καθεῖλεν δυνάστας ἀπὸ θρόνων καὶ ὑψωσεν ταπεινούς He has brought down rulers from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. (Luke 1:52)

Delitzsch has *va-yarem shefalim*, and he lifts up the low. Hannah had sung it first: *mashpil af meromem*, he brings low and he also lifts up; *meqim me-afar dal*, he raises the poor from the dust (1 Samuel 2:7–8).

Mary sings before anything has happened: pregnant, not yet married, in another woman's doorway, as if the overturning were already done. She does not sing of a God who keeps the order of things. She sings of a God who lifts the low, and she is one of them.

Matthew tells the same months from Joseph's side, and his account begins with a wound: the young woman Joseph is promised to is with child, and the child is not his.

Ἰωσήφ δὲ ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς, δίκαιος ὢν καὶ μὴ θέλων αὐτὴν δειγματίσαι Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not willing to make a public example of her... (Matthew 1:19)

ולא אבה לתתה לבז *Ve-lo avah letittah la-buz*. He was not willing to give her over to shame. (Matthew 1:19, Delitzsch)

In Matthew's first portrait of a righteous man, righteousness refuses to shame. Before any angel speaks, Joseph has decided that whatever happens, she will not be made a spectacle.

Then the angel comes to him in a dream and gives him the name:

τέξεται δὲ υἱὸν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν, αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21)

In Greek the *for* is a puzzle: why should the name *Iēsous* mean that he will save? In Hebrew the reason is heard at once:

וקראת את שמו ישוע כי הוא יושיע את עמו מעונותיהם *Ve-qarata et shemo Yeshua, ki hu yoshia et ammo me-avonoteihem*. You shall call his name *Jesus* [Hebrew: *Yeshua*], for he, *yoshia*, will save his people from their iniquities. (Matthew 1:21, Delitzsch)

The Peshitta keeps the name and changes the verb:

ܗܘ ܓܝܪ ܢܚܝܐ ܠܐܡܡܗ ܡܢ ܚܬܐܝܗܘܢ *Hū gēr nahēw lā'ammēh men ḥaṭāhayhon*. For he will give life to his people, out of their sins. (Matthew 1:21, Peshitta)

The Syriac verb means to give life, to keep alive, and so to save. Hebrew hears in his name a rescue. Aramaic hears that the rescue is a gift of life.

Matthew adds a second name, from Isaiah:

Ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ Behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they will call his name Emmanuel. (Matthew 1:23)

הנה העלמה הרה וילדת בן וקראת שמו עמנו אל *Hinneha ha-alma harah*. Behold, the young woman is with child, and will bear a son, and will call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

Matthew's Greek says *parthenos*, virgin. Isaiah's Hebrew says *almah*, a young woman of marriageable age. Christians and Jews have disputed this one word for nearly two thousand years, and too often the dispute has been used as a weapon. It remains unresolved between them, and we leave it there. What Matthew asks us to hear is the name: *Immanu El*, God with us.

Matthew keeps the promise of that name to the last line of his Gospel. On a mountain in Galilee the risen Jesus says:

ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας I am with you all the days. (Matthew 28:20)

In Greek one small word carries both ends: *meth' hēmōn ho theos*, God with us (1:23), and *egō meth' hymōn eimi*, I am with you (28:20).

Everything Matthew tells between those two sentences is held inside that *with*.

Joseph wakes and does as he was told, and it is Joseph who gives the child his name (Matthew 1:24–25).

Page 9 — The feeding trough

Luke sets the birth against the largest stage he knows: a decree of Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be registered (Luke 2:1). Far below that decree, Joseph walks to Bethlehem, the town of David, with Mary, who is pregnant (2:4–5).

καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον, καὶ ἐσπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν φάτνῃ, διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι.
And she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a feeding trough, because there was no place for them in the *katalyma*. (Luke 2:7)

Katalyma is usually translated *inn*. It means a lodging, a guest room. Luke uses the word once more, near the end of his Gospel, when Jesus sends his disciples to ask: *Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?* (Luke 22:11).

In this booklet's hearing, there was no room for him in the guest room at his birth, and at the end he asks for one, so that he can give himself away in it.

וַתִּשְׁכְּבֵהוּ בַּבּוֹס כִּי לֹא הָיָה לָהֶם מְקוֹם בַּמִּלּוֹן *Va-tashkivehu ba-evus*. And she laid him in the feeding trough, for there was no place for them in the lodging. (Luke 2:7, Delitzsch)

Delitzsch's word for the trough is *evus*, and a Hebrew ear catches the opening complaint of Isaiah: *yada shor qonehu, va-hamor evus be'alav*, the ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's trough, but my people do not know (Isaiah 1:3). The child is laid in the one place the animals already know how to find.



Page 10 — The tower of the flock

The first people to hear are at work, outdoors, in the dark: shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night (Luke 2:8). The angel says *do not be afraid*, and then, in Delitzsch's Hebrew, *hineni mevasser etkhem*: here I am, bringing you good news of great joy (2:10).

וְהִנֵּנִי מְבַשֵּׂר עִיכֶם הוּא הַמְּשִׁיחַ הָאֲדוֹן *Ki ha-yom yullad lakhem be-ir David moshia*. For today in the city of David a saviour has been born for you, who is Messiah, the Lord. (Luke 2:11, Delitzsch)

Moshia, saviour: the name sounds through the angel's words again. Then a multitude sings, and the Peshitta gives the song one more gift:

وَعَلَى الْأَرْضِ سَلَامٌ وَبِرَّ الْوَلَدِ نَافَا *Wə'al ar'ā šālāmā wəsabrā tābā labnay nāšā*. And on earth peace, and good hope to the children of humankind. (Luke 2:14, Peshitta)

Sabrā is hope, expectation. The song gives the shepherds peace, and something to wait for.

Where were these shepherds? Luke says only *in that region*. But the road to Bethlehem passes a place with a name. When Rachel died giving birth on that road, Jacob buried her by the way, and then he *pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder*, the tower of the flock (Genesis 35:19–21). The prophet Micah speaks to that tower by name:

וְאַתָּה מִגְדַּל עֵדֶר עַפְלָה בְּתִיּוֹן עֵדֶיךָ תָּאֵתָה וּבָאָה הַמְּמַשְׁלָה הָרִאשֹׁנָה *Ve-attah Migdal Eder*. And you, tower of the flock, hill of daughter Zion, to you it shall come; the former dominion shall come. (Micah 4:8)

The Aramaic translation called Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, a late text that gathers older traditions, explains the place in Genesis:

לְמִגְדַּלָּא דְעֵדֶר אֲתֵרָא דְמִתְמֵן עֵתִיד דְאַתְגִּיל מְלִכָא מְשִׁיחָא בְסוּף יוֹמֵיָא *To the tower of the flock: the place from which the King Messiah will be revealed at the end of days*. (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Genesis 35:21)

These translators are not speaking of Jesus. They kept a hope near the flocks of Bethlehem. Luke does not say the shepherds stood at that tower, and neither do we.

The shepherds go, and find the child as they were told, and everyone who hears them is astonished.

ἡ δὲ Μαρία πάντα συνετήρει τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα συμβάλλουσα ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς. But Mary kept all these words, *symbollousa*, putting them together in her heart. (Luke 2:19)

The verb means to throw together, then to compare, then to work out what something means. She sets the pieces side by side. She does not understand yet. She keeps them.



Page 11 — The star and the frightened king

Ποῦ ἐστὶν ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων; εἶδομεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ καὶ ἤλθομεν προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ. Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising, and have come to worship him. (Matthew 2:2)

The magi are foreigners, star-watchers from the east (2:1). They do not know where to look, and they come anyway. The Torah had told of another seer from the east: Balaam, summoned *me-hararei qedem*, from the mountains of the east, to curse Israel, who could only bless (Numbers 23:7). In his fourth oracle he sees something far off:

דַּרְךְ כּוֹכַב מִיַּעֲקֹב וְקֵם שְׂבֵט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל *Darakh kokhav mi-Ya'aqov*. A star shall step out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel. (Numbers 24:17)
כִּד יָקוּם מֶלֶכָא מִיַּעֲקֹב וַיִּתְרַבֵּא מְשִׁיחָא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל When a king shall rise from Jacob, and the Messiah be raised up from Israel. (Targum Onkelos, Numbers 24:17)

Matthew does not quote Balaam. The echo is there for anyone who knows the Torah.

In Jerusalem a king hears the visitors' question and is afraid:

ἀκούσας δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἡρώδης ἐταράχθη καὶ πᾶσα Ἱερουσόλυμα μετ' αὐτοῦ When King Herod heard this he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (Matthew 2:3)

The most powerful man in the land is frightened of a baby. The scribes find the place for him in Micah, who had called Bethlehem *tsa'ir*, little among the clans of Judah (Micah 5:2; 5:1 in Hebrew Bibles). The Targum reads his promise *minakh qodamai yippoq meshiha*: from you shall come forth before me the Messiah. Matthew, quoting Micah, says the opposite of *little*:

Καὶ σύ, Βηθλέεμ γῆ Ἰούδα, οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη εἶ ἐν τοῖς ἡγεμόσιν Ἰούδα And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah. (Matthew 2:6)

They find the child with Mary his mother and open their treasures: gold, frankincense and myrrh (2:11). Isaiah had seen the nations coming to Zion's light, bringing *zahav u-levonah*, gold and frankincense (Isaiah 60:3, 6). He does not mention myrrh. Myrrh comes back at the end of the story, when Nicodemus carries about a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes to the tomb (John 19:39). Then, warned in a dream, the visitors go home *by another way* (Matthew 2:12).



Page 12 — Rachel would not be comforted

Joseph is warned again, and by night he takes the child and his mother to Egypt. Matthew hears Hosea in it, and Hosea's sentence begins with love (Matthew 2:14-15):

לְבָנִי *Ki na'ar Yisrael va-ohavehu*. When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. (Hosea 11:1)

Then Herod sends men to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its region, two years old and under (Matthew 2:16). Matthew does not explain it and does not soften it. He hears Jeremiah:

Φωνὴ ἐν Ῥαμὰ ἠκούσθη, κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὀδυρμὸς πολὺς· Ῥαχὴλ κλαίουσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, καὶ οὐκ ἤθελεν παρακληθῆναι ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν. A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning: Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be comforted, because they are no more. (Matthew 2:18)

Matthew stops there. Some of us were hurried through grief by people who quoted Scripture at us. Matthew quotes Scripture and then falls silent beside her. Why Rachel? She died on that road near Bethlehem, giving birth, and was buried by the way (Genesis 35:19). The great midrash on Genesis asks why, and answers:

צָפָה יַעֲקֹב אֲבִינוּ שֶׁהַגְּלוּיֹת עֵתִידוֹת לַעֲבוֹר שֶׁם לִפְיֶכֶךְ קִבְרָהּ שֶׁם כְּדִי שֶׁתְּהָא מִבְּקֶשֶׁת עֲלֵיהֶם רַחֲמִים Jacob our father foresaw that the exiles would one day pass that way, so he buried her there, so that she would ask mercy for them. (Bereshit Rabbah 82:10)

Another midrash, on Lamentations, imagines the day Jerusalem fell. Abraham pleads for his children, then Isaac, then Jacob, then Moses. Then Rachel speaks. Her father had planned to give her sister to Jacob in her place, and she taught her sister the signs Jacob would ask for, so that her sister would not be exposed:

וְלֹא הוּצְאתִיהָ לְחֶרֶף I was not jealous of her, and I did not bring her to shame. (Eikhah Rabbah, Petichta 24)

If she, flesh and blood, was not jealous of her rival, she asks, why should the living and merciful King be jealous of idols that are nothing, and send her children into exile? At her words, the midrash says, God's mercy was stirred:

בְּשִׁבְלֶךָ רַחֵל אֲנִי מְחַזֵּיר אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִקְוָמָן For your sake, Rachel, I will bring Israel back to their place. (Eikhah Rabbah, Petichta 24)

Herpah, shame, is also the word Delitzsch gives Elizabeth for the disgrace God took away from her (Luke 1:25). Joseph would not give Mary over to shame; Rachel would not bring her sister to it.

In Jeremiah the comfort comes in the very next lines, after the weeping has been heard, and it is spoken to her: *min'i qolekh mi-bekhi*, keep your voice from weeping; *ve-yesh tiqvah le-aharitekh*, there is hope for your future; your children shall come back to their own border (Jeremiah 31:16-17; 31:15-16 in Hebrew Bibles).



Page 13 — One word, three tongues

When the days of purification are over, forty days after a son's birth by the Torah's count (Leviticus 12:2–4), Mary and Joseph bring the child to the Temple with the offering the Torah allows a mother who cannot afford a lamb: a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons (Luke 2:22–24; Leviticus 12:8). The family is poor, and Luke lets us see it. In Jerusalem there is an old man named Simeon, waiting for the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25).

Source	Rachel, Matthew 2:18	Simeon, Luke 2:25
Greek	οὐκ ἤθελεν παρακληθῆναι: <i>she would not be comforted</i>	προσδεχόμενος παράκλησιν τοῦ Ἰσραήλ: <i>waiting for the comfort of Israel</i>
Hebrew (Delitzsch)	מאנה להנחם: <i>me'anah le-hinnaḥem</i> , she refused to be comforted	מחכה לנחמת ישראל: <i>meḥakkeh le-neḥamat Yisrael</i> , waiting for the comfort of Israel
Aramaic (Peshitta)	ܐܠܐ ܠܗܢܚܡܐ: <i>wəlā šābyā ləmetbayyāwu</i> , she did not want to be comforted	ܐܠܐ ܠܚܒܝܐܗ ܕܝܫܪܐܝܠ: <i>wamsakke wā ləbūyāēh dīsrāyel</i> , he was waiting for the comfort of Israel

Read each row across. In each of the three languages, one root joins the mother who would not be comforted to the old man who waited for comfort. In Greek it is *parakl-*; in the Peshitta, the root ܠܐ, to console; in Hebrew, *n-ḥ-m*, the word of Isaiah's great opening:

נחמו נחמו עמי יאמר אלהיכם *Naḥamu, naḥamu ammi*. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. (Isaiah 40:1)

Two birth stories that seldom touch, and the same word lies at both ends of them. Matthew lets a mother refuse comfort. Luke lets an old man spend his life waiting for it.

The Spirit had told Simeon that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. He takes the child in his arms and blesses God:

עֵתָּה תַפְטֹר אֶת עַבְדְּךָ כְּדַבְרְךָ אֲדֹנָי בְּשָׁלוֹם כִּי רָאוּ עֵינַי אֶת יֵשׁוּעַתְךָ *Attah tefatter et avdekha... ki ra'u einai et yeshu'atekha*. Now, Master, you let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation. (Luke 2:29–30, Delitzsch)

He is holding the child whose name is Jesus when he says *yeshu'ah*. The Peshitta has him say something gentler:

ܕܗܐ ܗܝܙܝ ܐܝܢܝ ܗܢܢܐܢܐܟ, *Dəhā ḥazay 'aynay ḥanānāk*. For my eyes have seen your compassion. (Luke 2:30, Peshitta)

Then he turns to Mary: *a sword will pass through your own soul too* (Luke 2:35). The comfort he holds does not cancel the grief that is coming. He tells her both, together.

In the Jerusalem Talmud the sages ask what the Messiah's name will be. One says *Tzemaḥ*, the Branch; another, *Menaḥem*, the one who comforts. Then they tell of a Jew ploughing when his ox lows, and an Arab passing by who says: unyoke your ox, for the Temple has been destroyed. The ox lows a second time, and he says:

קטור תוריד וקטור קנקניך דהא יליד מלכא משיחא *Yoke your oxen and fix your plough, for the King Messiah has been born*. (Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 2:4)

What is his name? *Menaḥem*. From where? From the royal fortress of Bethlehem of Judah. It is the sages' own story about their own grief, and it is not about Jesus. It holds together what Simeon held: the day of the greatest loss, and a child in Bethlehem whose name is comfort.

Anna, a prophet of the tribe of Asher, a widow of eighty-four, never leaves the Temple. She comes up at that hour and speaks about the child to all who are waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:36–38). Delitzsch calls them *ha-meḥakkim*, the ones who wait.

Twelve years later the boy is found in the Temple among the teachers, listening and asking questions (2:46). He goes home to Nazareth with his parents, and his mother keeps all these words in her heart (2:51).

וִישׁוּעַ הָלַךְ וּגְדַל בַּחֲכָמָה וּמִקוּמָה וּבָחַן עִם אֱלֹהִים וְעִם אָנָשִׁים *Ve-Yeshua halakh ve-gadal*. And Jesus kept growing, in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and with people. (Luke 2:52, Delitzsch)

It is what the book of Samuel says of the boy Hannah prayed for: *ve-ha-na'ar Shmuel holekh ve-gadel*, and the boy Samuel kept growing, and was good with the LORD and with people (1 Samuel 2:26). Hannah's song opened Mary's mouth, and Hannah's son closes the story of the childhood.

נחמה (*neḥamah*) · παράκλησις (*paraklēsis*) · בֹּאֵן (*buyā'ā*): comfort, consolation; the word that joins Rachel and Simeon.

מנחם (*Menaḥem*): "the one who comforts"; one of the names the sages give the Messiah.

ספר תולדות (*sefer toledot*): "the book of the generations"; Genesis 5:1, and Matthew 1:1 in Delitzsch.

זכר (*zakhar*) · שבועה (*shevu'ah*): to remember; oath. Zechariah's name and Elizabeth's, sung back in Luke 1:72–73.

הנני (*hineni*): here I am; Abraham, Samuel, Isaiah, and Mary in Delitzsch.

רום (*rum*): to lift up; Hannah's verb and Mary's.

ישוע (*Yeshua*) · יושיע (*yoshia*) · מושיע (*moshia*) · ישועה (*yeshu'ah*): the name, and the saving it carries.

לַא (*hyā*): to live; in its causative form, to give life, keep alive, save. The Peshitta's verb in Matthew 1:21.

κατάλυμα (*katalyma*): lodging, guest room; Luke 2:7 and 22:11.

אבוס (*evus*) · φάτνη (*phatnē*): feeding trough.

מגדל עדר (*Migdal Eder*): the tower of the flock, near Bethlehem.

סְבִירָא (*sabrā*): hope, expectation.

חַנּוּנָא (*ḥnānā*): compassion, mercy, grace.

חרפה (*herpah*): shame, disgrace; Elizabeth's word in Delitzsch, and Rachel's in the midrash.

Page 16 — Comfort small enough to carry

Matthew lets a mother refuse comfort, and he does not argue with her. Luke lets an old man hold comfort in his arms and, in the same breath, warn a young mother of a sword. Neither Gospel hurries anyone.

If you came to these pages carrying a grief that people tried to talk you out of, Rachel's refusal stands in the Gospel, and in Jeremiah God's answer is spoken to her, not around her. If you have waited so long that you no longer say what you are waiting for, Simeon waited too, and Anna, and all the people Delitzsch calls *the ones who wait*.

The comfort in these chapters does not arrive as an argument. It arrives small enough to be carried, in the arms of a poor family with two birds for an offering, and an old man asks to hold it.

The Harmony of the Gospels continues with Episode 2: The Word, the River and the Voice: the prologue of John and the baptism of Jesus. Texts, questions and wounds you would like us to read together are welcome at clarityone.org.

This 16-page companion is free (€0.00). The Harmony of the Gospels, Volume I is in preparation. Continue reading with Resting in Grace, the complete English book (€3.99 EPUB):

<https://www.clarityone.org/books/resting-in-grace/en>

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