A HARMONY OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS — CHAPTER ONE

Matthew 1, Mark 1, and Luke 1 Woven Into One Continuous Narrative

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Table of Contents

Preface: On This Harmony....2
- What Is a Gospel Harmony?....2
- Translation Used....2
- Method and Source Notation....2

A Harmony of Chapter One....3
- Section 1 — Luke's Dedication to Theophilus [Luke 1:1–4]....3
- Section 2 — The Angel Appears to Zechariah [Luke 1:5–25]....3
- Section 3 — The Angel Gabriel Appears to Mary [Luke 1:26–38]....4
- Section 4 — The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah [Matt 1:1–17]....4
- Section 5 — The Birth of Jesus Announced to Joseph [Matt 1:18–25]....5
- Section 6 — Mary Visits Elisabeth [Luke 1:39–56]....5
- Section 7 — The Birth of John the Baptist [Luke 1:57–80]....6
- Section 8 — The Beginning of the Gospel [Mark 1:1]....7
- Section 9 — The Word of the Lord and the Wilderness Prophet [Mark 1:2–8 / Luke 1:76–77]....7
- Section 10 — The Baptism of Jesus [Mark 1:9–11 / Luke 1:21–22 expanded]....7
- Section 11 — The Temptation in the Wilderness [Mark 1:12–13]....7
- Section 12 — Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee [Mark 1:14–15]....8

Appendix: Notes on the Harmony....8
- On the Ordering....8
- On the Three Evangelists....8
- On the American Standard Version (ASV, 1901)....9

Scripture Index....9

Preface: On This Harmony

What Is a Gospel Harmony?

A Gospel harmony — in Greek, *Diatessaron* (διὰ τεσσάρων, "through four") — weaves the accounts of two or more Gospels into a single continuous narrative, eliminating needless repetition while preserving the distinctive contribution of each evangelist. The most famous ancient harmony was produced by Tatian of Syria around 170 C.E. The greatest modern scholarly harmony is A.T. Robertson's *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ* (1922). This work follows that tradition, harmonizing the opening chapters of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Translation Used

All text is drawn from the **American Standard Version (ASV, 1901)**, a major English revision of the King James Bible undertaken by American and British scholars and published in 1901. The ASV is the direct ancestor of the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the Revised Standard Version (RSV), and the English Standard Version (ESV). It is in the public domain and may be freely reproduced without restriction. Its language is formal, accurate, and close to the underlying Greek text.

Method and Source Notation

Each passage is introduced by its source Gospel in brackets:

- **[Matt]** = Matthew
- **[Mark]** = Mark
- **[Luke]** = Luke
- **[Matt / Luke]** = passage appears in both; the fuller or more characteristic account is used

Where accounts are substantially parallel, the fullest text is used as the base, with unique material from the other evangelists woven in. No words are invented or paraphrased. The chronological order follows the scholarly consensus found in Robertson, Kurt Aland's *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, and Orville Daniel's *A Harmony of the Four Gospels* (2nd ed., 1996).

A Harmony of Chapter One

Section 1 — Luke's Dedication to Theophilus [Luke 1:1–4]

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent

Theophilus; that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed.

Section 2 — The Angel Appears to Zechariah [Luke 1:5–25]

There was in the days of Herod, king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abijah: and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

Now it came to pass, while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to enter into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the hour of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.

But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: because thy supplication is heard, and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn unto the Lord their God. And he shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to walk in the wisdom of the just; to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for him.

And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak unto thee, and to bring thee these good tidings. And behold, thou shalt be silent and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall come to pass, because thou believedst not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

And the people were waiting for Zacharias, and they marvelled while he tarried in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he continued making signs unto them, and remained dumb. And it came to pass, when the days of his ministration were fulfilled, he departed unto his house.

And after these days Elisabeth his wife conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord done unto me in the days wherein he looked upon me, to take away my reproach among men.

Section 3 — The Angel Gabriel Appears to Mary [Luke 1:26–38]

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the

virgin's name was Mary. And he came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee.

But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

And Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God. And behold, Elisabeth thy kinswoman, she also hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that was called barren. For no word from God shall be void of power.

And Mary said, Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

Section 4 — The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah [Matt 1:1–17]

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judah and his brethren; and Judah begat Perez and Zerah of Tamar; and Perez begat Hezron; and Hezron begat Ram; and Ram begat Amminadab; and Amminadab begat Nahshon; and Nahshon begat Salmon; and Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab; and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David the king.

And David begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah; and Solomon begat Rehoboam; and Rehoboam begat Abijah; and Abijah begat Asa; and Asa begat Jehoshaphat; and Jehoshaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Uzziah; and Uzziah begat Jotham; and Jotham begat Ahaz; and Ahaz begat Hezekiah; and Hezekiah begat Manasseh; and Manasseh begat Amon; and Amon begat Josiah; and Josiah begat Jechoniah and his brethren, at the time of the carrying away to Babylon.

And after the carrying away to Babylon, Jechoniah begat Shealtiel; and Shealtiel begat Zerubbabel; and Zerubbabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; and Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; and Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

So all the generations from Abraham unto David are fourteen generations; and from David unto the carrying away to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the carrying away to Babylon unto the Christ fourteen generations.

Section 5 — The Birth of Jesus Announced to Joseph [Matt 1:18–25]

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But when he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins.

Now all this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying,

Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, And they shall call his name Immanuel;

which is, being interpreted, God with us.

And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife; and knew her not till she had brought forth a son: and he called his name JESUS.

Section 6 — Mary Visits Elisabeth [Luke 1:39–56]

And Mary arose in these days and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah; and entered into the house of Zacharias and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit; and she lifted up her voice with a loud cry, and said,

Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come unto me? For behold, when the voice of thy salutation came into mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a fulfilment of the things which have been spoken to her from the Lord.

And Mary said,

My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath looked upon the low estate of his handmaid: For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; And holy is his name. And his mercy is unto generations and generations On them that fear him. He hath showed strength with his arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart. He hath put down princes from their thrones, And hath exalted them of low degree. The hungry he hath filled with good things; And the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath given help to Israel his servant, That he might remember mercy (As he spake unto our fathers) Toward Abraham and his seed for ever.

And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned unto her house.

Section 7 — The Birth of John the Baptist [Luke 1:57–80]

Now Elisabeth's time was fulfilled that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbors and her kinsfolk heard that the Lord had magnified his mercy towards her; and they rejoiced with her.

And it came to pass on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father, what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.

And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, blessing God. And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea. And all that heard them laid them up in their heart, saying, What then shall this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him.

And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying,

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; For he hath visited and wrought redemption for his people, And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of his servant David (As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets that have been from of old), Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To show mercy towards our fathers, And to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware unto Abraham our father, To grant unto us that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies Should serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him all our days. Yea and thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Most High: For thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to make ready his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people In the remission of their sins, Because of the tender mercy of our God, Whereby the dayspring from on high shall visit us, To shine upon them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death; To guide our feet into the way of peace.

And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.

Section 8 — The Beginning of the Gospel [Mark 1:1]

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Section 9 — The Word of the Lord and the Wilderness Prophet [Mark 1:2–8 / Luke 1:76–77]

Even as it is written in Isaiah the prophet,

Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, Who shall prepare thy way. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ye ready the way of the Lord, Make his paths straight.

John came, who baptized in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the country of Judaea, and all they of Jerusalem; and they were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

And John was clothed with camel's hair, and had a leathern girdle about his loins, and did eat locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, There cometh after me he that is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I baptized you in water; but he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit.

Section 10 — The Baptism of Jesus [Mark 1:9–11 / Luke 1:21–22 expanded]

And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in the Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens rent asunder, and the Spirit as a dove descending upon him: and a voice came out of the heavens,

Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased.

Section 11 — The Temptation in the Wilderness [Mark 1:12–13]

And straightway the Spirit driveth him forth into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.

Section 12 — Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee [Mark 1:14–15]

Now after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying,

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel.

Appendix: Notes on the Harmony

On the Ordering

The sections in this harmony follow this rationale:

Sections 1–2 give Luke's preface and the announcement of John's birth — the chronological starting point of the Gospel story, placed by Luke before any announcement to Mary.

Section 3 gives the Annunciation to Mary — Luke's account, presented after Zechariah's encounter since the angel's visit to Mary occurs "in the sixth month" of Elisabeth's pregnancy (Luke 1:26).

Sections 4–5 give Matthew's genealogy and the announcement to Joseph — Matthew's opening chapter, which approaches the birth narrative from Joseph's perspective rather than Mary's.

Section 6 returns to Luke's narrative with the Visitation — Mary's journey to Elisabeth, which would have occurred after the Annunciation (Luke 1:39).

Section 7 gives the birth of John, Zechariah's song (the *Benedictus*), and John's early years in the wilderness — completing Luke 1's main narrative arc.

Section 8 introduces Mark's opening verse — his entire "prologue" is a single sentence: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Mark has no birth narrative whatsoever; his Gospel begins directly with John's ministry.

Sections 9–12 harmonize Mark 1:2–15 with Luke's broader narrative context: the ministry of John, Jesus's baptism, the temptation, and the opening of Jesus's public ministry in Galilee. These events are presented at the end of the Chapter 1 harmony because, chronologically, they follow all the birth and infancy material in Matthew 1 and Luke 1.

On the Three Evangelists

Matthew writes for a Jewish audience, opening with a genealogy that roots Jesus in the lineage of Abraham and David — the two great covenant figures of Israel's history. His chapter one is concerned with Joseph, with legal descent, and with the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (quoting Isaiah 7:14). Matthew's Jesus is the promised Messiah of Israel.

Mark has no birth narrative at all. His Gospel opens as if from a standing start: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." He moves immediately to John the Baptist, then to baptism, temptation, and ministry — without pausing for genealogy, angels, or infancy stories. Mark's Jesus is above all a man of action; the word *euthys* (εὐθύς, "straightway" or "immediately") appears approximately 41 times in Mark's Gospel. His Chapter 1 is the most narrative-dense of the three Synoptics.

Luke is the most literary and the most concerned with the poor, the marginalized, and the role of women. His prologue is modeled on Hellenistic historical writing (compare Thucydides and Josephus). He alone preserves the *Magnificat* of Mary, the *Benedictus* of Zechariah, and the story of Elisabeth's pregnancy. Luke addresses "most excellent Theophilus" — a Greco-Roman patron — and writes the most carefully constructed of the three Synoptic openings.

Together, these three accounts are not in conflict but in concert: Matthew provides legal and prophetic legitimacy; Luke provides historical narrative and human detail; Mark provides urgency and action. The harmony presented here attempts to let all three voices be heard in a single reading.

On the American Standard Version (ASV, 1901)

The ASV was the product of a joint American and British scholarly committee revising the King James Bible using the best Greek and Hebrew manuscripts then available, including the Westcott-Hort critical text of the New Testament. It is considered one of the most formally accurate English translations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It entered the public domain immediately upon publication in 1901. Its archaic "thee/thou" forms and formal word

order preserve the solemnity of the original text while remaining accessible to modern English readers. All quotations in this harmony are taken from the ASV without alteration.

Scripture Index

Section	Matthew	Mark	Luke
1 — Luke's Preface	—	—	1:1–4
2 — Angel to Zechariah	—	—	1:5–25
3 — Annunciation to Mary	—	—	1:26–38
4 — Genealogy	1:1–17	—	—
5 — Birth Announcement to Joseph	1:18–25	—	—
6 — Mary Visits Elisabeth	—	—	1:39–56
7 — Birth of John; Benedictus	—	—	1:57–80
8 — Mark's Opening	—	1:1	—
9 — John's Ministry and Preaching	—	1:2–8	—
10 — Baptism of Jesus	—	1:9–11	—
11 — Temptation in the Wilderness	—	1:12–13	—
12 — Jesus Opens His Ministry	—	1:14–15	—