

# ‘Adam, Son of God’ (Luke 3.38): Another Jesus–Augustus Parallel in Luke’s Gospel

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... [T]he fact that the Lukan genealogy runs *backwards* from Jesus to God is significant since there is no known parallel in the OT or in Rabbinic texts for a genealogy to begin with or culminate with the naming of God.<sup>1</sup>

Reading Jesus’ conception and genealogy in the context of claims about Augustus brings clarity to the perplexing identification of Adam as God’s offspring (Luke 3.38). Jesus was fathered by God’s spirit (1.35), as was his ancestor Adam (through Joseph). Likewise, some claimed Augustus was fathered by Apollo and that his ancestor Aeneas (through adoption by Julius Caesar) was the offspring of Aphrodite/Venus. This comparison suggests that Jesus is comparable to Augustus and that Jesus’ kingdom of God is comparable to Augustus’ Golden Age. Moreover, the logical force of these parallels favours the inferring of Joseph’s adoption of Jesus in Luke.

**Keywords:** Adam, Augustus, Lukan infancy narrative, Lukan genealogy, Roman Empire, son of God

## 1. Introduction

The genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3.23–8 ends with a curious assertion. Beginning with Joseph – Jesus’ supposed father – Luke enumerates Jesus’ ancestors, listed in reverse chronological order. Seventy-five names later, Jesus’ genealogy culminates with the identification of Adam as God’s offspring (Ἀδὸμ τοῦ θεοῦ, 3.38). Although interpreters offer credible explanations for the extension of Jesus’ genealogy to Adam, many find the filial connection of Adam to God confounding.<sup>2</sup>

1 M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies, with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus* (SNTSMS 8; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) 237 (emphasis original).

2 On the inclusion of Adam, Luke Timothy Johnson’s evaluation is representative: tracing Jesus’ genealogy back to Adam ‘touches ... the note of universality sounded by 3:6’ (*The Gospel of Luke* (SP 3; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991) 72).

François Bovon calls it ‘perplexing’.<sup>3</sup> ‘It is not clear’, Raymond E. Brown admits, ‘how Luke understood Jesus as “the son of Adam, the son of God”’.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, John T. Carroll finds it ironic that Luke would reinforce Jesus’ divine sonship from the baptism scene (3.22) with a genealogy ‘of his “other father” Joseph’.<sup>5</sup>

One solution is offered by W. S. Kurz, who reads Luke’s depiction of Adam as God’s offspring as an analogy for Jesus’ divine conception.<sup>6</sup> Adam and Jesus are both ‘sons of God in a nonsexual sense’.<sup>7</sup> He also views Adam’s relationship to God as analogous to Jesus’ relationship to Joseph. He argues, ‘Besides ordinary generation there is also a creative fatherhood of God for Adam and Jesus, and a legal fatherhood (in terms of inheritance) of Joseph for Jesus and God for Adam.’<sup>8</sup> It may be more credible, however, to claim instead that the analogies drawn by Kurz explain the *Adam–God* relationship by reference to that of Jesus to God in Luke 1.35. Be that as it may, Kurz’s interpretation does not address the novelty of Luke’s identification of Adam as God’s offspring.

More frequently, however, scholars interpret Jesus’ genealogy by reference to the adjacent baptism account, where a voice from heaven declares, ‘You are my beloved son’ (3.22). In Rodney T. Hood’s form-critical reading of Jesus’ genealogy and its linking of Adam to God, he interprets ‘the entire genealogy as an attempt to elucidate the saying of the voice from heaven which was heard at the baptism’.<sup>9</sup> In support of this conclusion, he adduces that Gentile readers – who were ‘familiar with pedigrees by which leading families and individuals and religious figures such as heroes were traced to one of the gods’ – would have been curious to learn ‘in just what way Jesus was the son of God’.<sup>10</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson similarly states that Luke’s genealogy ‘points less to Jesus’ human ancestry and more to his status as “God’s son”’ due to its proximity to Jesus’s baptism.<sup>11</sup> Alfred

3 F. Bovon, *Luke* (3 vols.; ed. H. Koester; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002–13) 1.134. He considers the final element of Jesus’ genealogy – τοῦ θεοῦ – ‘most likely a redactional addition’ (1.136).

4 R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (ABRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, new updated edn 1993) 90 n. 68.

5 J. T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012) 97.

6 W. S. Kurz, ‘Luke 3:23–38 and Greco-Roman and Biblical Genealogies’, *Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the SBL Seminar* (ed. C. H. Talbert; New York: Crossroad, 1984) 169–87. Cf. M. Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium* (HNT 5; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 176–7.

7 Kurz, ‘Luke 3:23–38’, 179.

8 Kurz, ‘Luke 3:23–38’, 179; see also 171. He does not explain what legal inheritance Adam receives from God.

9 R. T. Hood, ‘The Genealogies of Jesus’, *Early Christian Origins: Studies in Honor of Harold R. Willoughby* (ed. A. Wikgren; Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961) 13.

10 Hood, ‘Genealogies of Jesus’, 13.

11 Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 72. See also Johnson, *Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, 239; J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (2 vols.; AB 28–28A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981–5) 1.504; J. Nolland, *Luke* (3 vols.; WBC 35;

Plummer rightly notes, however, that identifying Adam as God's offspring does little to establish 'the Divine Sonship of the Messiah' because it 'would place Him in this respect on a level with all mankind'.<sup>12</sup>

Other scholars have objected to the use of Greco-Roman comparanda. Marshall D. Johnson, for instance, allows that 'there is an external similarity between the Lukan genealogy and those Graeco-Roman pedigrees which attempted to connect an emperor or member of the nobility with a traditional mythical god or hero'. Nevertheless, he insists that the similarity is merely superficial, arguing in favour of Luke's 'awareness of esoteric Jewish haggadah which is deeply embedded within the genealogy in the Nathan tradition'.<sup>13</sup> Concurring with Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer similarly states that 'there are too many Jewish elements in the genealogy to call into question its Jewish provenience'.<sup>14</sup> Of course, the divide separating Jewish culture from its Greco-Roman environment was not as impassable as it can appear in the scholarly imagination.

In *The Son of God in the Roman World*, Michael Peppard challenges conventional interpretations of Jesus' baptism in the Gospel of Mark, and his approach may be useful as a model for interpreting Luke 3.38.<sup>15</sup> Without intending to reinforce the heuristic segregation of Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures, he asks: 'But how would a listener more attuned to Roman culture than the Jewish Scriptures have understood this short narrative [of Jesus' baptism]? What connections and conclusions might that listener have made concerning the identity of Jesus?'<sup>16</sup> In his brief analysis of the Gospel of Luke, Peppard interprets the identification of Adam as God's offspring as one among several ways through which Luke connects Jesus to the divine.<sup>17</sup> He insightfully compares Luke's presentation

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Dallas: Word, 1989–93) 1.170–4; Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 84 n. 50; J. B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 189–90.

- 12 A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke* (ICC 28; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901<sup>4</sup>) 105.
- 13 Johnson, *Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, 252. See also E. L. Abel. 'The Genealogies of Jesus O XPICTOC', *NTS* 20 (1974) 203–10.
- 14 Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke*, 1.491. Cf. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 90 n. 68.
- 15 M. Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in its Social and Political Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 16 Peppard, *Son of God*, 86; for his intentions, see 212 n. 4.
- 17 According to Peppard, '[t]he more sources of legitimacy that Luke could articulate for Jesus, the better' (*Son of God*, 135). Luke and Acts contain 'mixed images of divine sonship': (1) 'Adoptive divine sonship' (Luke 3.22; Acts 13.33); (2) 'proximate divine begetting' (Luke 1.35); and (3) 'distant divine genealogy' (Luke 3.23–38) (*ibid.*, 135; emphasis original). Peppard incorrectly identifies Acts 13.33 as a reference to Jesus' resurrection (as do many English-speaking commentators). Cf. Acts 13.34. See C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (2 vols.; ICC 34; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994–8) 1.645–6.

of Jesus with the divine sonship of Julio-Claudian emperors, even noting Augustus' multifarious claims to divine descent: 'Augustus was the son of the divine Apollo by begetting and son of the divine Julius by adoption; he traced ancestry to the divine Mars and styled himself as a new Romulus.'<sup>18</sup> For Peppard, such a comparison allows Luke 'to reach the widest possible audience' concerning Jesus' status as Son of God.<sup>19</sup> His analysis deserves elaboration, clarification and slight recalibration.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, this article will ask – to appropriate Peppard's programmatic questions – for readers of Luke's Gospel who were attuned to Roman culture, how might Adam's status as God's offspring in Jesus' genealogy have influenced their understanding of Jesus' identity? As I will argue, reading the genealogy within such a framework foregrounds the similarities between Jesus and Augustus and implies comparable import for both Jesus and the kingdom he inaugurates.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to affecting readers' perceptions of Jesus' significance, reading Luke's genealogy within an Augustan framework creates consistency among Luke's references to the paternity of Jesus. Identifying Jesus' ancestor – through (adoption by (?)) Joseph – as the offspring of God provides Jesus with a second parental link to the divine; Jesus' conception by God's spirit/power provides the first. This presentation mirrors Augustan claims: in addition to being fathered by Apollo, Augustus advertised his descent from Aeneas – through adoption by Julius – who was said to have been the offspring of Aphrodite/Venus. Because Luke is not explicit regarding Joseph's adoption of Jesus, some critical readers conclude that Luke has incorporated at least two irreconcilable traditions regarding Jesus' male parent. One tradition, they say, affirms Joseph as Jesus' biological father (e.g. Luke 2.27; 4.22), while a different tradition asserts Jesus' divine

18 Peppard, *Son of God*, 135.

19 Peppard, *Son of God*, 135.

20 In relation to Peppard's analysis, this article seeks to elaborate on the connection of Luke 1.26–38 to stories of Augustus' conception and to clarify aspects of Jesus' 'distant divine genealogy': (1) Augustus' descent from Aeneas is a more credible referent than that from Romulus with respect to Luke 3.38, and (2) Julius Caesar's adoption of Augustus is suggestive regarding Jesus' relationship to Joseph, a comparison that lends credibility to the interpretation that Luke implies Joseph's adoption of Jesus. This article will also explore further possibilities regarding how to interpret these comparisons.

21 For recent juxtapositions of Jesus with Augustus in Luke 1–2, see C. Blumenthal, 'Augustus' Erlass und Gottes Macht: Überlegungen zur Charakterisierung der Augustusfigur und ihrer erzählstrategischen Funktion in der lukanischen Erzählung', *NTS* 57 (2011) 1–30; S. Schreiber, *Weihnachtspolitik: Lukas 1–2 und das Goldene Zeitalter* (NTOA/SUNT 82; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009). See also T. E. Phillips, 'Why Did Mary Wrap the Newborn Jesus in "Swaddling Clothes"?' Luke 2.7 and 2.12 in the Context of Luke-Acts and First-century Literature', *Reading Acts Today: Essays in Honour of Loveday C.A. Alexander* (ed. S. Walton *et al.*; LNTS 427; London: T&T Clark, 2011) 29–42.

conception (e.g. Luke 1.35; 2.49; 3.23). A comparison with Augustus lends credibility to reading Joseph's adoption of Jesus as implied in Luke's narrative.

To argue that Luke's Gospel can be read this way does not address questions of authorial intent or the use of sources. Both issues are fraught with complications, especially in light of the questions surrounding the relationship of Luke 1–2 to the remainder of Luke's Gospel. It is my judgement that the inclusion of God within Jesus' genealogy – in part because it is unparalleled in Jewish literature – was probably fabricated by Luke (imitating Roman propaganda) in order to create a parallel to Augustus' pedigree. The argument of this article, however, does not depend on a particular source theory or on establishing authorial intention. I offer instead an interpretation of Luke's narrative – reconstructed text-critically – from the perspective of readers who are familiar with claims made about Augustus in Roman propaganda.

## 2. 'Empire without End': Establishing Comparanda

In Luke 1.31–3, Gabriel addresses Mary. 'Do not be afraid, Mary', he says, 'for you have found favour with God.'<sup>22</sup> He continues: 'And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David, and he will reign (βασιλεύσει) over the house of Jacob forever (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας), and of his kingdom (τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ), there will be no end (οὐκ ἔσται τέλος).'

Gabriel's announcement is itself pregnant with possible allusions to the Septuagint. His description of Jesus' reign over the house of Jacob echoes Micah's vision: 'In that day, says the Lord, I will assemble her who is shattered, and I will welcome her who is rejected and those whom I drove away. And I will make her who is shattered into a remnant, and her who is driven away into a strong nation, and the Lord will reign (βασιλεύσει) over them on Mount Zion from now until forever (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα)' (4.6–7 LXX). The potential influence of Mic 4 is intriguing. In addition to the verbal parallels, Mic 4.6–7 envisions God's inclusion of outcasts in the process of restoring Zion; in Luke's Gospel, Jesus inaugurates God's reign on earth and emphasises the inclusion of the socially and religiously marginalised (e.g. Luke 4.16–30).

Even more credible Septuagintal allusions exist in texts related to the Davidic dynasty. With good reason, most scholars direct their readers to 2 Sam 7.12–16 (LXX).<sup>23</sup> Nathan delivers a message from the Lord to David: 'And it will be when your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers that I will raise

<sup>22</sup> Translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>23</sup> See Schreiber, *Weihnachtspolitik*, 72; Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 91–2; Carroll, *Luke*, 41; Bovon, *Luke*, 1.51; Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 310–11; Johnson, *Gospel of Luke*, 37; R. C. Tannehill,

up your offspring after you ... and I will prepare his kingdom (βασιλείαν) ... I will restore his house forever (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα). I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me.' He continues: 'And his house and his kingdom (βασιλεία) will be made sure forever (ἕως αἰῶνος) before me, and his throne shall be restored forever (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα).' Similar hopes for an eternal Davidic kingdom appear in Isa 9.6–7 and Dan 7.14.<sup>24</sup> There is no question that Luke presents Jesus as fulfilling the expectations established in these biblical narratives.

Nevertheless, David was not the only ancient figure who was promised an eternal kingdom, and it is possible to read Luke's narrative as simultaneously imitating a different model: Aeneas. As narrated in Homer's *Iliad* and the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (*h.Hom.* 5) – and later appropriated by Virgil in the *Aeneid* – gods and goddesses prophesy that Aeneas will be the recipient of an empire without end. In book 20 of the *Iliad*, Poseidon justifies his rescue of Aeneas from harm on the battlefield: 'And now surely will the mighty Aeneas be king (ἀνάξει) among the Trojans, and his sons' sons who will be born in days to come' (*Il.* 20.307–8; trans. Wyatt, LCL).

The *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (*h.Hom.* 5) narrates Aeneas's conception.<sup>25</sup> In disguise as a simple 'unmarried girl (παρθένω ἀδμήτη)', Aphrodite seduces the shepherd Anchises (5.68–91). After they sleep together, Aphrodite relinquishes her disguise, provoking Anchises' horror (5.185–90). Aphrodite responds: 'Anchises, most glorious of mortal men, be of good courage, and let your heart not be too afraid. You need have no fear of suffering any harm from me or the other blessed ones, for you are dear to the gods indeed' (5.192–5; trans. West, LCL). The parallels with Gabriel's announcement are striking: a divine figure appears, tells the mortal not to be afraid, and affirms that the mortal is divinely favoured (cf. Luke 1.26–30).<sup>26</sup> Aphrodite continues by describing the child just

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*The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986–90) 1.25; Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke*, 1.348.

<sup>24</sup> Similar language also appears in texts from Qumran (4Q174; 4Q246).

<sup>25</sup> For the continued influence of *h.Hom.* 5 into the Roman era, see A. Faulkner, *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 50–2; S. D. Olson, *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite and Related Texts: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Texte und Kommentare 39; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012) 27.

For comparisons of *h.Hom.* 5 with Luke 1, see D. R. MacDonald, *Luke and Vergil: Imitations of Classical Greek Literature* (New Testament and Greek Literature 2; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) 132–8; R. J. Miller, *Born Divine: The Births of Jesus and Other Sons of God* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2003) 317–21.

<sup>26</sup> The elements so far identified are, of course, common in ancient stories. For this pattern in the Hebrew Bible, see S. M. Iglesias, 'El Evangelio de la Infancia en San Lucas y las infancias de los heroes biblicos', *EstBib* 16 (1957) 329–82.

It may be worth noting that although Luke is silent regarding Mary's location, early Christians thought that Gabriel met her outdoors. This inference is apparent in both literary

conceived by their union: 'You are to have a dear son who will rule (ἀνάξει) among the Trojans, as will the children born to his children continually; his name shall be Aeneas (*Aineias*), because an *ainon akhos* (terrible sorrow) took me, that I fell into a mortal man's bed' (5.196–9; trans. West, LCL). Again Luke's narrative parallels the *Homeric Hymn*: a child has been or will be conceived – with one divine parent and one mortal – and this child will establish a never-ending kingdom.<sup>27</sup>

These parallels might be considered innocuous were it not for the narrative propagated by Julius Caesar and Augustus, advertising the Julian family as descendants of Aeneas and heirs to an eternal kingdom.<sup>28</sup> The outcome of the scene from *h.Hom.* 5 is depicted visually, for instance, in a Roman-era relief in Aphrodisias featuring Aphrodite holding baby Aeneas on her lap, with Anchises looking on.<sup>29</sup> Other scenes on the Sebasteion feature key members of the Julian family. Virgil also appropriates the story from *h.Hom.* 5. In book 1 of the *Aeneid*, Jupiter assures Venus regarding her son Aeneas and his descendants, from Ascanius to Romulus and beyond. For the Romans, Jupiter has set 'no bounds in space or time; but [has] given empire without end' (1.278–9; trans. Goold, LCL).<sup>30</sup> Virgil leaves no ambiguity regarding the identity of Aeneas' descendants in the first century BCE. In book 6, Aeneas ventures down into the underworld to visit Anchises, who offers Aeneas a glimpse into the future. 'Here is Caesar', he says, 'and all the seed of Iulus destined to pass under heaven's spacious sphere. And this in truth is he whom you so often hear

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recreations (e.g., Prot. Jas. 11.1) and, possibly, in artistic representations (e.g., Dura-Europos). For an interpretation of the woman at a well in a wall-painting in Dura-Europos as Mary, see M. Peppard, *The World's Oldest Church: Bible, Art, and Ritual at Dura-Europos, Syria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016) 155–201. In *h.Hom.* 5, Anchises is outdoors when Aphrodite encounters him.

27 There are also parallels between *h.Hom.* 5 and two other Lukan infancy narratives: Luke 1.8–20 and 2.8–14. See MacDonald, *Luke and Vergil*, 134–41.

28 For an overview of the Roman and Julian connections to Aeneas, see M. Kochenash, 'You Can't Hear "Aeneas" without Thinking of Rome', *JBL* 136 (2017) 667–85. A few pertinent examples are outlined below.

29 See R. R. Smith, 'The Imperial Reliefs from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias', *JRS* 77 (1987) 95; D. C. Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul's Mission* (Paul in Critical Contexts; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008) 42–5. For an image of this relief, see C. Roueché and K. T. Erim, eds., *Aphrodisias Papers* (JRA Supplement 1; Ann Arbor: JRA, 1990) 98, Fig. 9. Some interpret the baby as Eros. The Sebasteion also includes a relief featuring Aeneas fleeing Troy.

30 With respect to Virgil's 'empire without end' and Luke 1.33, Blumenthal contrasts Jesus' prophesied reign with that of Augustus: whereas Augustus dies and is followed by a successor (made plain in Luke 3.1 with the mention of Tiberius), Jesus will reign forever, 'sodass es folglich einen Nachfolger auf dem Davidstron nicht mehr geben wird' ('Augustus' Erlass und Gottes Macht', 22; see also 21–3).

promised to you, Augustus Caesar, son of a god, who will again establish a golden age in Latium amid fields once ruled by Saturn' (6.789–994; trans. Goold, LCL). Anchises continues by describing the limitless expanse of Augustus' empire – 'Not even Hercules traversed so much of earth's extent' (6.801; trans. Goold, LCL).

Whereas the content of Luke's narrative appears to be informed by Septuagintal hopes for an eternal Davidic dynasty, the form of Luke's narrative appears to imitate the Greek and Roman stories about Aeneas and his never-ending empire (see Fig. 1). Even though the references to David are explicit, a reader attuned to Roman political rhetoric can nevertheless interpret Gabriel's message within an Augustan framework: the kingdom Jesus inaugurates will be comparable to the Golden Age of Augustan Rome.

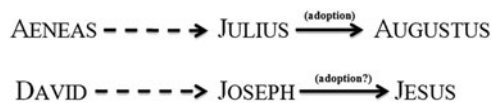


Figure 1. Heirs to royal prophecies.

### 3. One Divine Parent

Mary responds to Gabriel's announcement with curiosity: 'How will this be, since I do not know a man?' (Luke 1.34).<sup>31</sup> Gabriel explains: 'The spirit of holiness will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the holy one to be born will be called Son of God' (1.35).<sup>32</sup> Although Gabriel's description of Jesus' virginal conception in Luke 1.35 lacks an analogue in the Septuagint, a similar tradition surrounding the conception of Emperor Augustus was well known throughout the Roman Mediterranean world.<sup>33</sup>

31 This translation is, of course, a literal rendering of a sexual euphemism. She is protesting that she has not had sexual intercourse with a man.

32 Fitzmyer rightly identifies Gabriel's response as exhibiting *parallelismus membrorum*; thus it is 'the spirit of holiness' – parallel to 'the power of the Most high' – not 'the Holy Spirit' (*Gospel according to Luke*, 1.350).

Unlike the divine conceptions of most Greek and Roman figures, the conception of Jesus in Luke is non-sexual. M. David Litwa demonstrates that Plutarch exhibits a comparable sensibility regarding divine conceptions and physical sexuality: both Luke and Plutarch prefer *πνεῦμα* and *δύναμις* language (*Jesus Deus: The Early Christian Depiction of Jesus as a Mediterranean God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014) 37–67). Cf. C. H. Talbert, 'Miraculous Conceptions and Births in Mediterranean Antiquity', *The Historical Jesus in Context* (ed. A.-J. Levine, D. C. Allison, Jr and J. D. Crossan; Princeton Readings in Religion; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) 83–4.

33 Although no Septuagintal parallels exist, there are, however, a few parallels in Hellenistic Jewish literature: 2 En. 70.1–2, 30–1 (probably composed much later than Luke's Gospel and possibly dependent on it); Philo, *QG* 3.18, 56 (discussing Sarah); *Cher.* 40–52. See M.



Ovid writes that Augustus was not 'born of mortal seed' (*Metam.* 15.760; trans. Miller and Goold, LCL). Suetonius and Cassius Dio both elaborate on this claim, narrating a story about Augustus' mother, Atia, at the temple of Apollo:

Atia attended a solemn service of Apollo in the middle of the night. She had her litter set down in the temple and fell asleep, as did the other married women. A snake crawled up to her and left a little while later. When she woke up, she purified herself as if she had slept with her husband. A snake-colored mark immediately appeared on her body. She could never get rid of it and so stopped going to the public baths. When Augustus was born nine months later he was therefore considered to be the son of Apollo. Atia herself, before she gave birth to him, dreamed that her womb was carried up to the stars and spread over all lands and seas. His father Octavius dreamed that the sun rose from Atia's womb (Suetonius, *Div. Aug.* 94.4; trans. Miller, *Born Divine*, 142).

[Julius Caesar] was influenced largely by Attia's emphatic declaration that the youth had been engendered by Apollo; for while sleeping once in his temple, she said, she thought she had intercourse with a serpent, and it was this that caused her at the end of the allotted time to bear a son. Before he came to the light of day she saw in a dream her entrails lifted to the heavens and spreading out over all the earth; and the same night Octavius thought that the sun rose from her womb (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 45.1.2-3; trans. Cary and Foster, LCL).

Ancient narratives depicting divine conceptions exist for a litany of notable people.<sup>34</sup> Many classicists, in fact, read Suetonius' and Cassius Dio's presentations of Augustus' conception as imitations of the conception of Alexander the Great.<sup>35</sup>

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Dibelius, 'Jungfrauensohn und Krippenkind: Untersuchungen zur Geburtsgeschichte Jesu im Lukas-Evangelium', *Botschaft und Geschichte*, vol. 1: *Zur Evangelienforschung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1953) 30-5; D. Zeller, 'Konsolidierung in der 2./3. Generation', *Christentum 1: Von den Anfängen bis zur Konstantinischen Wende* (ed. D. Zeller; Die Religionen der Menschheit 28; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002) 132; H. Räisänen, 'Begotten by the Holy Spirit', *Sacred Marriages: The Divine-Human Sexual Metaphor from Sumer to Early Christianity* (ed. M. Nissinen and R. Uro; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008) 332-5. None of these Jewish parallels appears to have influenced Luke's narrative.

For a review of Greco-Roman parallels, see Talbert, 'Miraculous Conceptions', 79-86.

34 E.g. Theseus, reportedly fathered by Poseidon (Plutarch, *Thes.* 2.3.36); Romulus, reportedly fathered by Mars (Plutarch, *Rom.* 2-4); Alexander, reportedly fathered by Zeus (Plutarch, *Alex.* 2-3; Lucian, *Dial. mort.* 13; *Alex.* 7; Pausanias 4.14.4-7; Justin 11.11.3-6); Scipio Africanus, reportedly fathered by Apollo (Livy 26.19.6; Silius Italicus, *Punica* 13.634-44; Valerius Maximus 49.1-4; Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.4.19; Aulus Gellius, *Noct. Att.* 6.1-5); Plato, reportedly fathered by Apollo (Diogenes Laertius 3; Olympiodorus, *Vit. Phil.* 1); Apollonius of Tyana, reportedly fathered by Zeus (Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 1.6).

35 See E. Norden, *Die Geburt des Kindes: Geschichte einer religiösen Idee* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1924); E. Braun, 'Eine Alexanderlegende', *Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes in Wien* 39 (1952) 139-45; P. Treves, *Il mito di Alessandro e la Roma d'Augusto* (Milan/Naples:

Consistent with non-Platonic Greek logic, the divine status – as gods or sons of gods – of both Alexander and Augustus was closely linked to the benefactions they bestowed on their subjects.<sup>36</sup> The stories narrating their conceptions and births project the magnitude of their adult accomplishments into the past.

Classicists typically date the inception of the story about Atia at Apollo's temple to the period shortly after Antony's defeat at Actium, around 30 BCE.<sup>37</sup> They suggest that the story was initially circulated in Egypt, that it later spread throughout the Empire – including Rome – and that the story was concocted and promulgated as a part of Augustus' effort to gain support throughout the Mediterranean before consolidating power in 27 BCE. Robin S. Lorsch suggests the story could have plausibly been in circulation even earlier, before the defeat of Antony – anytime between 40 and 30 BCE – in order to advertise a comparison of Octavian to Alexander, Apollo and Scipio Africanus.<sup>38</sup> If these classicists are correct, then the story of Augustus' conception by Apollo circulated for more than a century before the composition of the Lukan infancy narratives.

In order to claim – with credibility – that illiterate inhabitants of the Roman Mediterranean knew this story, it is necessary to establish the means through

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Riccardo Ricciardi, 1953) 154–63; A. Heuss, 'Alexander der Große und die politische Ideologie des Altertums', *Antike und Abendland* 4 (1954) 65–104; A. R. Bellinger, 'The Immortality of Alexander and Augustus', *YCS* 15 (1957) 91–100; D. Kienast, 'Augustus und Alexander', *Gymnasium* 76 (1969) 430–56; O. Weippert, 'Alexander-Imitatio und römische Politik in republikanischer Zeit' (diss. Augsburg, 1972) 214–59; I. Becher, 'Atia, die Mutter des Augustus – Legende und Politik', *Griechenland und Rom: Vergleichende Untersuchungen zu Entwicklungstendenzen und -höhepunkten der antiken Geschichte, Kunst und Literatur* (ed. E. G. Schmidt; Tbilisi: Universitätsverlag, 1996) 95–116; R. S. Lorsch, 'Augustus' Conception and the Heroic Tradition', *Latomus* 56 (1997) 790–9; G. Weber, *Kaiser, Träume und Visionen in Prinzipat und Spätantike* (Historia, Einzelschriften 143; Stuttgart: Steiner, 2000) 149; D. Engels, 'Prodigies and Religious Propaganda: Seleucus and Augustus', *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 15 (ed. C. Deroux; Collection Latomus 323; Brussels: Éditions Latomus, 2010) 153–77.

36 See Bellinger, 'Immortality of Alexander and Augustus', 95–7. The situations of these two are analogous, Bellinger suggests, to those of Dionysus and Heracles.

37 See J. Gagé, *Apollon romain. Essai sur le culte d'Apollon et le développement du 'ritus Graecus' à Rome des origines à Auguste* (Paris: de Boccard, 1955) 571; P. Grandet, 'Les songes d'Atia et d'Octavius. Note sur les rapports d'Auguste et de l'Égypte', *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 203 (1986) 375–6.

38 Lorsch, 'Augustus' Conception', 797–9 (especially n. 20). The comparison with Scipio Africanus suggests that Augustus 'was the divinely chosen successor to the Republican hero's position as savior of Rome' (ibid., 799). Lorsch concludes that the story of Atia and Augustus' conception 'could not have been more inspired', connecting Augustus to 'the great Republican general who was credited with permanently rescuing Rome from the danger posed by its greatest enemy, Carthage', and to Alexander, 'a great hero, one who had increased Greek dominance and established a wide empire' (799).

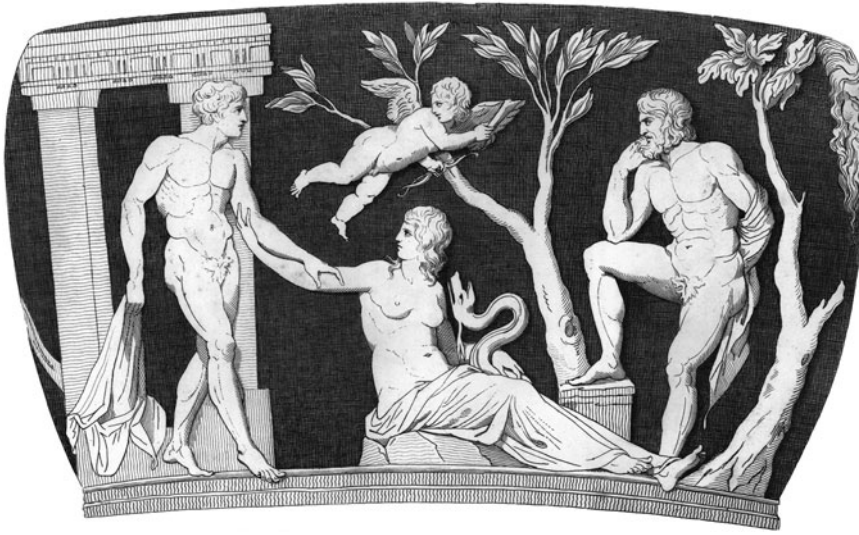


Figure 2. *Portland Vase*. © Corning Museum of Glass.

which it was popularised. Suetonius, for one, reports that his source was Asclepiades of Mendes (Egypt), who was probably active during the lifetime of Augustus.<sup>39</sup> Cassius Dio probably used Suetonius as his source.<sup>40</sup> Given Augustus' wide use of the epithet 'son of Apollo', it can be expected that the story of Atia and the serpent was more ubiquitous. One tantalising artefact in this regard is the enigmatic Portland Vase, housed in the British Museum (see Fig. 2). This cameo glass piece, dated variously between 25 BCE and 25 CE, depicts a nondescript woman in a reclining position with a serpent-like creature on her lap.<sup>41</sup> Some scholars identify this woman as Atia, the man to her right as Apollo, the creature as the serpent Apollo embodies in the legend, and the man to her left as Augustus (or Romulus).<sup>42</sup> According to Paul Zanker, however, the artist responsible for the Portland Vase 'failed to give his figures any identifying

39 Lorsch, 'Augustus' Conception', 798.

40 See D. Wardle, *Suetonius: Life of Augustus* (Clarendon Ancient History Series; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 512.

41 For a detailed discussion on artistic representations of serpents in the Roman world, see D. E. L. Haynes, 'The Portland Vase: A Reply', *JHS* 115 (1995) 146–52, especially 146–9. Haynes concludes that the creature in the Portland Vase is a *cetus* (sea monster).

42 See E. Simon, *Die Portlandvase* (Mainz: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum zu Mainz, 1957) 8–29; K. Painter and D. Whitehouse, 'The Interpretation of the Scenes', *Journal of Glass Studies* 32 (1990) 130–6.

attributes', leaving the scenes with a 'deliberate ambiguity'.<sup>43</sup> Scholars more often identify this scene instead as the marriage of Peleus to Thetis.<sup>44</sup> Such a conclusion is far from certain, however, a fact intimated by the volume of alternatives offered.<sup>45</sup> Because of the dating of the Portland Vase, the striking similarities it bears to the story told by Suetonius and Cassius Dio, and the fact that the vase was shattered into about 200 pieces in 1845 and subsequently endured multiple attempts at puzzling it back together, Augustan identities for these characters cannot be definitively ruled out. Even if the Portland Vase does not depict the scene of Augustus' conception, however, Zanker affirms that 'the story of the snake was widely repeated' and appeals to a different glass cameo – more symbolic in nature – that attests to its propagation.<sup>46</sup>

In Luke 1.30–3, Gabriel appears to Mary and announces that she will bear a son who will fulfil the promises made to David for an eternal kingdom. As discussed above, this announcement can be read as reconfiguring the Davidic prophecy in 2 Samuel and imitating Augustus' fulfilment of promises made about Aeneas' descendants. This second intertextual possibility is strengthened by comparing Gabriel's elaboration in Luke 1.35 with the stories surrounding the conception of Augustus. Just as Atia was impregnated by Apollo (taking the form of a serpent), so Mary was impregnated by God's spirit/power (see Fig. 3). Being fathered by Apollo was not Augustus' only link to the divine, however. Curiously, neither is Jesus' conception his only divine connection in Luke's Gospel.

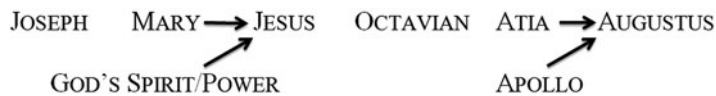


Figure 3. *Divine conceptions.*

#### 4. An Ancestor with One Divine Parent

Only after Jesus' baptism does Luke present Jesus' genealogy (Luke 3.23–38). Luke notes that Jesus was 'about thirty years old' when he began, 'being the son – as

43 P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Jerome Lectures, 16th series; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988) 253–4. Cf. Becher, 'Atia, die Mutter des Augustus', 101–2.

44 D. E. L. Haynes, 'The Portland Vase Again', *JHS* 88 (1968) 58–72; J. Hind, 'The Portland Vase: New Clues towards Old Solutions', *JHS* 115 (1995) 153–5. Cf. K. Painter and D. Whitehouse, 'Earlier Interpretations of the Scenes', *Journal of Glass Studies* 32 (1990) 172–6.

45 S. L. Tuck recently counted fifty-five (*A History of Roman Art* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015) 139–40).

46 Zanker, *Power of Images*, 50 (see 51 Fig. 39). See also Becher, 'Atia, die Mutter des Augustus'.

was thought (ὡς ἐνομιζέτο) – of Joseph'.<sup>47</sup> Through Joseph, then, Luke traces Jesus' descent from David (3.31), the Patriarchs (3.34) and ultimately 'Adam, son of God' (3.38).<sup>48</sup> No known Jewish genealogy predating Luke 3.23–38 includes God, and I am unaware of Adam otherwise being identified so straightforwardly as God's offspring.<sup>49</sup>

Since Luke has already described Jesus' divine conception (1.35), the genealogy in chapter 3 issues Jesus a second connection to God, through his ancestor Adam, son of God. Readers who are versed in Roman propaganda can read Luke's construction of Jesus' conception and ancestry as comparable – again – to that of Augustus. In addition to the story about Atia, Apollo and Augustus' divine conception, residents of the Roman Mediterranean were well aware of another Augustan connection to a deity: his ancestor Aeneas was the son of Aphrodite/Venus.

That Aphrodite was Aeneas' mother is a firmly canonical claim in classical Greek literature. Homer affirms it no fewer than four times and Hesiod once.<sup>50</sup> As discussed above, Aphrodite's seduction of Anchises – and the consequent

47 Discussing νομιζέω in Luke 3.23, Andrew T. Lincoln concludes that it is a Lukan redaction to bring the genealogy into line with the virginal conception of Luke 1–2 and that the 'supposition' is a necessarily correct one – that Joseph is Jesus' biological father – because otherwise the genealogy loses its force ('Luke and Jesus' Conception: A Case of Double Paternity?', *JBL* 132 (2013) 646–7). He says it reflects two traditions concerning Jesus' parentage that Luke was not concerned to harmonise. It is not clear how the insertion of νομιζέω both aligns the genealogy with Luke 1–2 while also asserting something contrary to Luke 1–2. Bovon, conversely, interprets νομιζέω as an affirmation of Joseph's adoption of Jesus: "He was rightfully declared to be Joseph's son" (and I, Luke, agree with this) (Bovon, *Luke*, 1.136). Lincoln balks at this interpretation ('Luke and Jesus' Conception', 646 n. 15).

48 Commentators observe that Jesus' genealogy does not go through David's royal line, through Solomon, but through Nathan (e.g. Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke*, 1.501). It may be worth noting that Aeneas – whose connection to Augustus is the subject of this section – was not, according to the *Iliad*, 'from the reigning branch of the royal family' (i.e. Ilus' branch, including Priam and Hector) but rather the branch descending from Assaracus (Olson, *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, 3; cf. Homer, *Il.* 20.180–1).

49 The closest parallel, as some commentators note, comes from Philo's treatise *On the Virtues*: the father of the first man 'was no mortal but the eternal God, whose image he was in a sense in virtue of the ruling mind within the soul' (204–5; trans. Colson, LCL). See Nolland, *Luke*, 1.173; Wolter, *Lukasevangelium*, 177. Philo appears to be speaking metaphorically, however; he earlier explains that Adam had been 'moulded with consummate skill into the figure of the human body by the hand of God' and that he received his soul 'through the breath of God imparting his own power' (203; trans. Colson, LCL). While it may be interesting to read Luke 3.23–4.13 as evoking a comparison of Jesus and Adam as sons of God, there are reasons to doubt the credibility of such a reading; namely, Luke-Acts lacks the Pauline 'Jesus as a second Adam' theme. For an argument in favour of such a reading, see J. Jeremias, 'Ἀδάμ', *TDNT* 1.141–3. For arguments against such a reading, see Johnson, *Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies*, 234–5; Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke*, 1.498.

50 Homer, *Il.* 2.820–1; 5.247–8, 312–13; 20.208–9; Hesiod, *Th.* 1008–12.

conception of Aeneas – is the subject of the fifth *Homeric Hymn*. Virgil frequently refers to Venus as Aeneas' mother and even gives Aeneas the epithet 'goddess-born (*nate dea*)'.<sup>51</sup> Augustus attained descent from Aeneas through adoption by Julius Caesar, through whose insistence Aeneas became known as the 'author of the whole Julian line'.<sup>52</sup> Suetonius reports that Julius Caesar – while eulogising his deceased Aunt Julia – boasted of his family's pedigree, that 'the Julii, the family of which ours is a branch, [goes back] to Venus' (*Jul.* 6.1; trans. Rolfe, LCL).<sup>53</sup> Julius' advertised ancestry was so well known that Caelius Rufus, writing to Cicero, can refer to him simply as 'our scion of Venus' (*Fam.* 8.15; trans. Shackleton Bailey, LCL). Octavian, according to Appian, claimed that being adopted by Julius involves accepting 'kinship with the family of Aeneas' (*Bell. civ.* 3.16; trans. White, LCL). Poets such as Virgil, Horace, Ovid and Varro advertised Augustus' descent from goddess-born Aeneas. For instance, Virgil identifies Augustus among Aeneas' descendants and specifies that he will establish Rome's *saecula aurea* (*Aen.* 6.792–3, quoted above). Through literature, images and lore, Augustus' claims of a double-divine parentage spread throughout the Empire.<sup>54</sup>

Luke's presentation of Jesus is comparable to the emergent image of Augustus and his pedigree. Jesus was conceived by God's spirit/power, and Octavius was fathered by Apollo; Jesus' ancestor Adam was the offspring of Israel's God, and

51 Virgil, *Aen.* 3.435; 8.59; cf. 6.125. See also Ovid, *Metam.* 14.586–90.

52 See e.g. Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.2.9. For a discussion of Julius' and Augustus' advertisements of their connection to Aeneas, see J. D. Evans, *The Art of Persuasion: Political Propaganda from Aeneas to Brutus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) 39–42 (Julius) and 42–52 (Augustus).

In the Roman Republic, elites regularly claimed that they descended from a god. As Olivier Hekster observes, however, 'After Augustus came to power ... the trend is much less well attested' ('Descendants of Gods: Legendary Genealogies in the Roman Empire', *The Impact of Imperial Rome on Religions, Ritual, and Religious Life in the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the Fifth International Network, Münster, June 30–July 4, 2004* (ed. L. de Blois, P. Funke, and J. Hahn (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 24). In particular, the Flavian emperors eschewed claims to divine ancestors. They preferred to enhance their status by comparison with Augustus or, in the case of Domitian, by reference to succession from apotheosized Flavians ('Descendants of Gods', 31–2).

On the adoption of Augustus, see Nicolaus of Damascus, *Vit. Caes.* 8, 11, 13, 17–18, 29–30; Livy, *Per.* 116.5; Appian, *Bell. civ.* 3.11–14; Suetonius, *Jul.* 83.2; *Aug.* 7.2, 94.11.

53 Similarly, according to Cassius Dio, Julius claimed to be 'sprung from Aeneas and Iulus' (*Roman History*, 41.34.1; trans. Cary and Foster, LCL); and according to Velleius Paterculus, Julius claimed for the Julii family 'descent from Venus and Anchises, a claim conceded by all investigators of antiquity' (2.41.1; trans. Shipley, LCL).

54 Of course, one can find more connections to the divine in Augustus' advertised descent – for instance, Zeus fathering Aeneas' ancestor Dardanus (Homer, *Il.* 20.203–41, 303–5) and Mars fathering Romulus, Aeneas' descendant and Augustus' ancestor – but the connections with Aeneas and Apollo were particularly prominent in the art and literature disseminated by Rome. For this reason, I am foregrounding only these two connections in my interpretation of Luke's presentation of Jesus.

Augustus' ancestor Aeneas was the son of Aphrodite/Venus.<sup>55</sup> Some readers will remark that these similarities obtain with respect to a number of other ancient figures, most notably Alexander the Great (son of Zeus, descendant of Heracles). Two considerations suggest that it is credible to foreground the comparison with Augustus. First, the image of Augustus was ubiquitous in the Roman Mediterranean world, casting a shadow that stretched beyond the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties, even overshadowing Alexander.<sup>56</sup> Second, Augustus was only able to claim descent from Aeneas because he had been adopted by Julius Caesar. Understanding Joseph's relationship with Jesus as that of an adoptive parent – not explicit in Luke's Gospel – may bring resolution to a persistent question within scholarship: is Luke consistent with respect to Jesus' fathering?

### 5. The Adoption of Jesus

As demonstrated above, some passages in Luke's Gospel indicate that Joseph did not father Jesus. Others, however, suggest that Joseph *was* Jesus' biological father.<sup>57</sup> Scholars often reconcile these passages through an adoption framework: Joseph is not Jesus' biological father, but through adoption Jesus becomes Joseph's legal heir and a legitimate descendant of David.<sup>58</sup> Where Matthew is clear (Matt 1.25), they say, Luke is opaque. This position has been challenged recently by Andrew T. Lincoln.<sup>59</sup> Lincoln writes, 'If Joseph had no part in his betrothed's pregnancy, then all this stress on Jesus' Davidic ancestry

55 C. H. Talbert understands these circumstances as genre conventions within the pre-public life portion of ancient biographies (*Reading Luke-Acts in its Mediterranean Milieu* (NovTSup 107; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 76, 81). I suggest, however, that the novelty of the claim about Adam combined with the prominence of Augustus' proximate and distant divine parentages allows for a more specific reading than Talbert's. Moreover, the identification of a text's genre does not preclude its use of specific models – Virgil's *Aeneid*, for instance, *both* (1) is an epic poem and (2) imitates the works of Homer, Euripides, Apollonius of Rhodes and others.

56 See Zanker, *Power of Images*.

57 Luke 1.27, 32; 2.27, 33, 41–51; 3.23–31; 4.22 (cf. Mark 6.3); Acts 2.30 (David's loins (ὀσφύς)); 13.23 (David's seed (σπέρματος)).

58 See Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke*, 1.499; Nolland, *Luke*, 1.174; J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (5 vols. (to date); AYBRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991–) 1.217; Brown, *Birth of the Messiah, passim*; M. L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology* (JSNTSup 10; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 126–9; Bovon, *Luke*, I.136–7; Y. Levin, 'Jesus, "Son of God" and "Son of David": The "Adoption" of Jesus into the Davidic Line', *JSNT* 28 (2006) 415–42; Carroll, *Luke*, 99. Some scholars have resolved this tension in the opposite direction, arguing that Luke only affirms Joseph as Jesus' father. See e.g. G. Parrinder, *Son of Joseph: The Parentage of Jesus* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992).

59 A. T. Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin? Reconceiving Jesus in the Bible, Tradition, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013) 99–124; *idem*, 'Luke and Jesus' Conception', 639–58. See also

would make little sense.<sup>60</sup> He therefore argues that Luke's narrative includes two distinct traditions about Jesus' parentage, creating a tension for his readers to resolve.

The credibility of Lincoln's argument depends primarily on two considerations: scribal anxiety and biographical comparanda. The transmission history of Luke 2.33, 41 and 48 contains a number of textual variants.<sup>61</sup> Because these verses can be read as inconsistent with Jesus' virginal conception – so goes a likely explanation – certain scribes removed the offending language. Where most manuscripts read 'his father' (2.33), 'his parents' (2.41) and 'your father and I' (2.48, Mary speaking), a handful of witnesses attest to corrections that do not call the virginal conception into question: 'Joseph' (2.33), 'Joseph and Mary' (2.41) and 'we' (2.48, Mary speaking).<sup>62</sup> These text-critical considerations are suggestive concerning scribal interpretations of Luke's language, but they do not preclude readings that reconcile Luke's statements regarding Jesus' parents.

More important to Lincoln's argument are analogous accounts of double-paternity in Greco-Roman literature.<sup>63</sup> Lincoln frequently refers to the writings of Plutarch, a Greek biographer nearly contemporary with Luke. Plutarch's discussion of Romulus' parentage is typical. On the question of the source of Rome's name, Plutarch writes: 'Moreover, even those writers who declare, in accordance with the most authentic tradition, that it was Romulus who gave his name to the city, do not agree about his lineage' (*Rom.* 2.2; trans. Perrin, LCL).<sup>64</sup> Plutarch continues by relating various explanations for Romulus' parentage: Aeneas and Dexithea (2.2), Latinus (son of Telemachus) and Roma, Mars and Aemilia (daughter of Aeneas and Lavinia) (2.3), 'and others still rehearse what is altogether fabulous concerning his origin' (2.3; trans. Perrin, LCL). Plutarch proceeds to rehearse two such stories (2.3–4.2). The one 'which has the widest credence and the greatest number of vouchers' (3.1; trans. Perrin, LCL) claims that Romulus is the child of Rhea Silvia and Mars; nevertheless, towards the end of this account, Plutarch notes that some claim that Rhea Silvia was impregnated

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Räisänen, 'Begotten by the Holy Spirit', 326–9; C. Gordon, 'Paternity at Two Levels', *JBL* 96 (1977) 101.

60 Lincoln, 'Luke and Jesus' Conception', 641.

61 Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin*, 33; Räisänen, 'Begotten by the Holy Spirit', 329. Moreover, as Lincoln observes, 'a number of second-century writers' felt it necessary to assert 'that Jesus' Davidic descent had to be seen as coming from Mary' (*Born of a Virgin*, 33); he cites Ignatius of Antioch (*Eph.* 18; *Trall.* 9), Justin (*Dial.* 100), Irenaeus (*Haer.* 3.9.2; 3.21.5), Protevangelium of James (10.1) and Tertullian (*Carn. Chr.* 20, 22) (*Born of a Virgin*, 33 n. 24).

62 Additionally, one manuscript omits 'parents' in Luke 2.27.

63 Lincoln, *Born of a Virgin*, 118–24; *idem*, 'Luke and Jesus' Conception', 653–6.

64 Plutarch, to this point, has been explicit about reporting information from various sources: 'some say' (1.1), 'others say' (1.2), 'they say' (1.4), 'others again say' and 'some tell us' (2.1).



by her uncle, Amulius (4.2).<sup>65</sup> Biographers such as Plutarch and Suetonius are content to leave contrary claims about certain individuals' parentage unreconciled within their writings.<sup>66</sup> Lincoln reads Luke's narrative as participating in such a literary tradition.

Plutarch's historiographic tone, however, differs markedly from that of Luke's novelistic narrative.<sup>67</sup> In addition to explicitly relating various reports, Plutarch sometimes evaluates their credibility. For instance, he insists that Alexander's descent from Heracles on his father's side 'is accepted without any question' (*Alex.* 2.1; trans. Perrin, LCL). Luke does not acknowledge any discrepancies, much less evaluate the relative credibility of individual traditions. While these differences in narrative tone do not exclude Plutarch's writings as comparanda for Luke, they do weigh against their significance for the interpretive issue at hand.

Conversely, when the similarities between Augustus and Luke's Jesus are brought to the foreground – both were divinely conceived, both descended from a divine offspring, and both fulfil royal prophecies given by deities to their ancestors – then reading Jesus as Joseph's adopted son in Luke becomes more credible.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the narrative logic of Luke 1.27, 31–5 already favours an adoptionist – so to speak – reading of Luke's Gospel: Mary's divinely conceived child will be a descendant of David through adoption by her fiancé.<sup>69</sup> It is significant, then, that it was through Julius Caesar's adoption of Octavian that he was able to claim descent from Aeneas and thereby inaugurate the promised 'empire without end'. The logical force of the comparison suggests that, similarly, it is through Joseph's adoption of Jesus that he was able to claim descent from David and establish his never-ending kingdom (see Fig. 4).

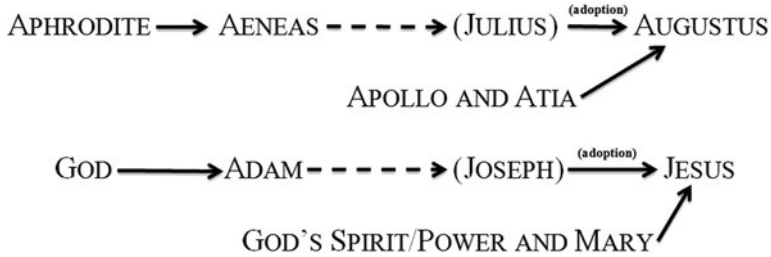
65 Comparing Romulus and Theseus, Plutarch writes: 'For both were of uncertain and obscure parentage, and got the reputation of descent from gods' (*Thes.* 2.1; trans. Perrin, LCL). For Theseus, see Plutarch, *Thes.* 3–6.

66 Lincoln, 'Luke and Jesus' Conception', 655.

67 For the 'novelistic-historiographical' distinction, see e.g. D. Konstan and R. Walsh, 'Civic and Subversive Biography in Antiquity', *Writing Biography in Greece and Rome: Narrative Technique and Fictionalization* (ed. K. De Temmerman and K. Demoen; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) 26–43. Konstan and Walsh distinguish civic biographies that emphasise character and achievements (e.g. those written by Suetonius or Plutarch) from subversive biographies that emphasise wit and resourcefulness (e.g. the Gospels, the *Alexander Romance* or the *Life of Aesop*).

68 Such a reading coheres with the work of Yigal Levin ('Jesus, "Son of God" and "Son of David"'), who reads Luke's infancy narratives through a Roman framework. Levin observes, on the one hand, that there are no parallels in the Hebrew Bible or rabbinic literature, and the writings from the Jewish Diaspora are silent on the issue (*ibid.*, 421–5 and 428–31). On the other hand, adoption was prominent in Roman law, and Roman adoption was practised 'most famously by the Julio-Claudian family' (*ibid.*, 427 (425–8)).

69 See Blumenthal, 'Augustus' *Erllass und Gottes Macht*', 16.



*Figure 4. Adoptions enabling divine ancestry alongside divine conceptions.*

## 6. Conclusion

By interpreting the beginning of Luke's Gospel within an Augustan framework, readers can both make sense of Luke's novel identification of Adam as God's offspring (Luke 3.38) and find consistency among Luke's statements about Jesus' fathering. Augustus was regarded as the descendant of Aeneas who finally enacted the prophecies of Poseidon, Aphrodite and Jupiter by inaugurating Rome's Golden Age; Luke presents Jesus as a descendant of David who will inaugurate the prophesied kingdom without end. Augustus was conceived – so the story goes – when Apollo took the form of a snake and impregnated Atia; Luke presents Jesus being conceived when God's spirit/power comes over/overshadows Mary. Augustus claimed that he was a descendant of Aeneas, son of Aphrodite/Venus; Luke presents Jesus as a descendant of Adam, son of God. Augustus was only able to claim descent from Aeneas through his adoption by Julius Caesar; Luke – so the close comparison suggests – is likewise only able to present Jesus as a descendant of Adam through Joseph, his (implied) adoptive father.

So what conclusions might a reader who is versed in Roman imperial propaganda reach about Jesus in Luke's Gospel? Certainly Jesus' significance would thus be interpreted as analogous to that of Augustus, in terms of their accomplishments and status.<sup>70</sup> Given the attention to ancient prophecies about eternal empires, the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus in Luke's Gospel can likewise be read as comparable to Rome's Golden Age under Augustus. Within this Lukan comparison, Jesus and his kingdom surpass Augustus and his empire: whereas Augustus died (cf. Luke 3.1) – and the Julio-Claudian dynasty later ended – God raised Jesus from the dead.<sup>71</sup> Luke 3.38 makes an unprecedented claim about Adam: that God is his non-metaphorical father. This claim establishes Jesus' second genealogical connection to God in Luke's narrative, both of which parallel prominent claims made about Augustus. There is, thus, good

70 See Talbert, 'Miraculous Conceptions', 84–5.

71 See Blumenthal, 'Augustus' Erlass und Gottes Macht', 21–3.

reason to read Luke 3.38 as a narrative prompt to consider its implications and perhaps to compare Jesus' double-divine pedigree with that of Rome's first emperor, whom Luke identifies by name at the beginning of the previous chapter (2.1).