



A) 'Explain how redaction criticism and harmonisation maintain consistency and credibility for the birth narratives' (20)

The Birth Narratives are the stories referring to Jesus' birth as found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Within these narratives there appears to be contradictions regarding the birth story ranging from the where Jesus was born, who visited him and whether or not Mary and Joseph were married. These contradictions can sometimes make people question the veracity of the accounts.

One way in which the accounts can still be credible and consistent is through harmonisation. Harmonisation literally means 'the act of making two things suitable to each other' and in this context refers to the idea that both of the accounts focus on different elements of the same story. In this sense, Matthew may have had access to information that Luke didn't and vice versa. This is particularly strengthened when we learn that Luke most probably knew Mary and was therefore more likely to focus on her account of events. For example, whilst Luke focusses on Mary having a dream of the angel Gabriel, and Matthew focusses on Joseph's dreams from the Angel of the Lord, what's not to say that both Mary and Joseph had dreams?

Harmonisation also explains why there are so many similarities in the story which again proves that they can remain credible and consistent. There are actually no contradictions within the account; in both Matthew and Luke Mary is a virgin, and Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, in both stories Jesus had visitors as a new-born, and the King of the time was Herod in Judea. These similarities can therefore explain the consistency within the texts and the stories remain credible if we consider that both the accounts may have been harmonised.

Redaction criticism is another view that the birth narratives can remain credible and consistent. Redaction criticism is the suggestion that the New Testament writers altered existing material about Jesus to suit their own agenda to make a Theological point. In this sense, the writers can be trusted as they are writing as a product of history, but their main focus was on separate theologies for separate audiences keeping their Theology credible. It is clear in Matthew's Gospel that he was writing to a Jewish audience (hence the reference to the Old Testament minor prophets throughout and the lineage from King David) and that Luke was writing to a gentile audience (with a focus on women and the lower classes). For example, in Matthew's Gospel he refers to the visit from the Magi which would attract a more aspirational audience than those who are appealed to Luke's account of a visit from some Shepherds. Therefore, the narratives remain consistent as both writers clearly agree that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Old Testament revelation of God, but Luke's Gospel has a Greek flavour, whereas Matthew's Gospel is more focussed on accurate Jewish theology and lineage.