

**M. Anthony Apodaca**  
**The Mythmaking Strategy of Jesus' Infancy Narrative:**  
**A Literary-Comparative Approach to Matthew 1-2**

**Thesis Abstract**

This study seeks to advance our understanding of Matthew's infancy narrative through the interpretive categories of myth and comparison. While Matthew 1-2 has certainly been compared to other miraculous birth narratives in antiquity, there is a serious deficiency in these comparisons, as they do not convey the need to produce, substantiate, or engage with methods and theories of comparison. Guided by the historical-critical method, Matthean scholarship has largely limited its comparative efforts to questions of historicity, direct dependence and borrowing. As a result, recent trends in interpretation are remarkably predictable and do not significantly contribute to our understanding of Matthew's infancy narrative in light of non-Christian literature. By contrast, this thesis utilizes contemporary theories of myth and comparison in order to establish parity between Matthew and non-Christian literature. Rather than comparing specific details of each story, this approach makes the object of comparison the mythic function of birth/origin stories as literary components of ancient biography. In this light, Matthew's retelling of biblical history, recalling of biblical prophecy and numinous events are not incorporated for their own sake, but they serve a mythological (ideological) agenda designed to legitimate an early Christian group deviating from an emerging formative Judaism. This mythmaking strategy legitimates Jesus and those associated with him, making the social argument that the Matthean community is not innovatory, but rather the new voice of revelation and the "true" reconstitution of Israel in the post-war age. Matthew's infancy narrative should therefore not be read historically, but rather rhetorically, as the propagation and legitimation of a new community inextricably bound the identity of Jesus as Christ.