

I

Luke's prologue promises that his account will be "orderly" (καθεξῆς, 1:3), and exegetes generally agree that Luke did not intend a strict chronological ordering to his work because Luke sometimes favored a topical arrangement.¹ An oft-cited example occurs in chapter 3. After introducing John the Baptist in the wilderness and his preaching to the crowds that gathered for baptism, Luke leaps forward to the Imprisonment of John the Baptist: "But Herod the tetrarch, criticized by him concerning Herodias his brother's wife and all the evil Herod did, also added this to all them: he locked John up in prison" (3:19-20). Then, the gospel rewinds the story back to John's baptizing activities and narrates his baptism of Jesus but in the passive voice (vv. 21-22).

When the indications of temporal displacement are less salient, however, there is a tendency for many commentators to fall back to the chronological reading, even at the expense of the narrative's logic. A good example is the Case of the Disappearing Mary in the infancy account. After carefully relating that Mary had traveled to visit Elizabeth her relative in her sixth month of pregnancy (1:26, 36, 39), Luke abruptly ends the visitation with: "But Mary stayed with her about three months, and she returned to her home" (v. 56). Mary disappears, at least explicitly, from the narrative, skipping the birth, naming, and circumcision of John, not to return until Caesar's decree at the beginning of chapter two.

Luke's time references, "about three months" and "in the sixth month" (v. 26) places Mary with Elizabeth at the full term of her pregnancy (v. 57). Because childbirth in antiquity

¹ E.g. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke. Volume 1: 1:1-9:50* (BECNT 3A; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994), 62.

was a dangerous, if not lethal, occasion for both the mother and child, Luke's audience would have naturally expected that a relative who stayed so close to the full term would have also remained to assist in the delivery or post-partum care. As Valerie French explains in her study of Greco-Roman midwifery and maternity care, childbirth was "an occasion of great anxiety for everyone concerned." French also describes various scenes of childbirth depicted on sculptural reliefs that show the presence of multiple birth attendants. Though rich women could afford midwives for their birth attendants, poorer women had to rely on their female relatives for help.²

The idea that Mary would disappear at this most inopportune time has therefore stimulated the imaginations of commentators across the centuries, some conjecturing that perhaps Mary returned home because the crowd that gathered for John's birth was too great for Mary to get through³ or that Mary herself started showing.⁴ Modern scholars, however, reject such solutions, for example, Raymond Brown:

The terse statement that Mary remained with Elizabeth about three months and then returned home (to Nazareth) has led to much speculation among those addicted to evaluating the scene as a historical narrative motivated by detected psychology. Can Luke really have meant that Mary left Elizabeth before the child was born and thus deserted her relative at the time of

² Valerie French, "Midwives and Maternity Care in the Roman World," in *Rescuing Creusa: New Methodological Approaches to Women in Antiquity* (Helios, n.s. 13(2); Lubbock, Tex.: Texas Tech University Press, 1987) [online: <http://www.indiana.edu/~ancmed/midwife.htm>]. Michele Klein, "Touch during Childbirth: Yesterday and Today," *IMAJ* 5 (Feb. 2003): 145-147, points out that two midwives of Exod 1:15 are given two different roles in the Talmud.

³ Catena Aureus quoting Theophylact. Also, Brown, *Birth*, 1:362.

⁴ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:362.

greatest need? . . . Less imagination and more fidelity to Lucan style suggests that it was Luke's intention to have Mary off the stage before he narrated JBap's birth. The nine months that he has counted off bring the narrative close to the final month of birth in a calculation of ten lunar months of pregnancy, and the visitation provides a good transition to the birth narratives. But the two birth narratives of JBap and of Jesus have their own balanced scenario. In each the two parents and the newborn child are featured, and it would destroy the careful balance to have Mary the parent of Jesus at the birth of JBap. This literary structure is far more important in the Lucan infancy narrative than the psychology of the characters involved⁵

Nonetheless, identifying a literary reason why Mary should be off the stage does not entirely resolve the problem in the narrative logic, particularly since Brown's own solution of a ten lunar month reckoning has been rejected.⁶ The natural expectation of Luke's audience is that Mary ought to be there. We should heed David Landry's warning that "it is not sufficient to say that Luke includes nonsense in his narrative for a larger theological or even narrative purpose. Luke is too good a storyteller to have done this. We must attempt to see if sense can be made . . . in terms of the logic of the story."⁷

In this regard, some exegetes, including Alfred Plummer and Joel Green, have proposed that Mary merely "disappear[s] from view" but not from the stage, appealing to John's ano-

⁵ Brown, *Birth*, 345-346.

⁶ For example, Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:369, who points out that the lunar month of 29.5 days is not short enough to work out.

⁷ David T. Landry, "Narrative Logic in the Annunciation to Mary (Luke 1:26-38)," *JBL* 114 (1995): 65-79, at 70-71.

nymous baptism of Jesus (3:21-22) as an analogous case.⁸ The difficulty here, however, is that Luke's treatment of the Baptism is sometimes considered to be, as John Kloppenborg once put it, an "elaborate expedient" to deal with "issues of Jesus' sinfulness and the status of Jesus vis-à-vis John."⁹ If Kloppenborg is correct that the proleptic imprisonment of John is an expedient, then the force of the analogy weakens.

What is needed is a solution to the case of the disappearing Mary that suits both the logic of the narrative and a more systematic understanding of Luke's literary technique.

II

Fifty years ago, Robert W. Funk in his study of a chronological problem in Acts argued that Luke will often subordinate chronological order to other kinds of order:

The development of the story in Acts, following the charge given to the disciples in 1:8, is in panels; the movement unfolds in rather well-defined stages from Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria, Antioch, Asia, Greece, and Rome.

Following his geographical orientation, Luke develops the narrative in blocks. It is a curious fact that he seldom mixes the account of work in a given locale, preferring on the whole to complete a panel once he has begun. . . . This tendency to block out his material turns up, moreover, in the way in which he treats his characters. He is concerned as a rule to introduce his heroes and

⁸ Joel Green, *Luke* 105-106. Also Plummer, *Luke* 34-35.

⁹ John S. Kloppenborg, "On Dispensing with Q?: Goodacre on the Relation of Luke to Matthew," *NTS* 49 (2003): 210-238, at 219-220.

complete his account of each before moving on. . . . Many lesser figures have a moment on the stage and then are lost to sight.¹⁰

Funk's insight can be further developed by examining what happens when two characters ought to be sharing the stage in the same panel. Luke's sense of order for his panel technique can be so strong that one of them will hog the limelight while the other fades into the background. Here, I will look at three situations with Paul and his interactions with Peter, Apollos, and Stephen.

By-and-large the first part of Acts focuses on Peter and the last part on Paul, but as Funk has noted, "it is probably an error to call these sections 'Acts of Peter' and 'Acts of Paul',"¹¹ tempting as it may be. Indeed, after Peter "went to another place" in 12:17, he is never heard from again except to give a speech at the Council of Jerusalem (15:7-11). This is also the only time Acts puts Peter and Paul at the same place at the same time. Luke's treatment of Peter and Paul exhibits his editorial tendency to focus on one major character at a time, notwithstanding those traditions of Paul and Peter being together more often than that, for example, the Antioch incident in Galatians. To be sure, Luke's irenic view of early Christianity motivates him to deemphasize such conflict, and his technique of assigning different players to different panels, with little overlap, facilitates the implementation of his goal.

Another example is Paul and Apollos. Both the Proto- and Deutero-Pauline traditions are aware that Paul and Apollos were working together. In 1 Corinthians (a letter known to Clement of Rome by the end of the first century) Paul discloses a conflict involving Apollos

¹⁰ "The Enigma of the Famine Visit," *JBL* 75 (1956): 130-136, at 134.

¹¹ Funk, 134.

over baptism in Corinth (e.g. 3:6, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused it to grow.")¹² and that he encouraged Apollos to visit the Corinthians (16:12). Further attesting to the currency of the tradition at around the time Acts was written that Paul worked with Apollos is Titus 3:13, which describes Paul's arrangement of Apollos's travels. It is therefore striking that, in Acts, Paul and Apollos pass each other by, without actually encountering one another. When Apollos is introduced in Ephesus at 18:24, Paul had already left, visited Jerusalem and Antioch, and was going through the region of Galatia and Phrygia (vv. 20-23). Paul did not come back to Ephesus until Apollos had already gone to Corinth (19:1).

The next episode in Ephesus nevertheless betrays an awareness over a conflict between Paul and Apollos. At Acts 19:1-3, Paul encounters some disciples who were baptized into John's baptism but did not know of a baptism in the name of Jesus that involves the reception of the Holy Spirit. Like these disciples, Apollos "knew only the baptism of John" (18:25), and exegetes see this as an indirect criticism of Apollos,¹³ and some such as Wettstein have inferred that they are the disciples Apollos had taught.¹⁴ To be sure, Luke has apologetic motives in playing down the conflict between Paul and Apollos in Corinth. Yet the way in which Luke furthers this tendency by relating an encounter between Paul and some disciples in Ephesus instead fits his panel technique: Apollos already had his panel, so, in Paul's panel, he so completely fades from view that his name is not mentioned, even in connection with the disciples Paul encounters.

¹² Note that Paul connects partisanship (1 Cor 1:12 ἐγὼ μὲν εἰμι Παύλου, ἐγὼ δὲ Ἀπολλῶ) with baptism (v. 13, εἰς τὸ ὄνομα Παύλου ἐβαπτίσθη).

¹³ Gerd Lüdemann, *Early Christianity according to the Traditions in Acts: A Commentary* (trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1989), 211.

¹⁴ So C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 1998): 896.

Paul and Stephen barely overlap. In fact, Paul is introduced for the first time at the end of Stephen's panel (Acts 6:4-8:3) as the person at whose feet those stoning Stephen laid their cloaks (7:58). But evidence elsewhere in Acts indicates that Paul was no mere coat-check boy. When Paul recalled this event for his Jerusalem defense, he put it the context of his being active in persecuting Christians: "And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And while the blood of your witness Stephen was shed, I myself was standing by, approving and keeping the coats of those who killed him.'" (22:19-20)¹⁵ Then, when Paul recapitulated these events at his second defense to Agrippa, a Jew, he further explained that his activities in the synagogues involved "forcing them to blaspheme" (26:11). As Mark Goodacre has recently pointed out, this does not mean making them malign Christ but refers to a "pre-conversion perspective from which Luke's Paul is speaking."¹⁶ Such a pre-conversion perspective is found at the beginning of the Stephen panel when witnesses were suborned to testify that Stephen spoke "blasphemous words against Moses and God" (6:11).¹⁷ It is thus hardly a coincidence that Acts mentions the people who had argued with Stephen and instigated his trial include "some from Cilicia" (v. 9), the region of Paul's birth (e.g. 21:39). But this is Stephen's panel, so the spotlight shines on Stephen, not Paul. Paul's complicity in Stephen's martyrdom is in the shadows, with Paul stepping out of the background and into the light right when Stephen himself exits the stage.

¹⁵ (NRSV) This reverses the narrated order of Stephen's execution (7:58-60) and Paul's ravishing the church (8:3).

¹⁶ "Were the Galatians already circumcised? I," *NT Gateway Weblog* (Nov. 3, 2006; online: <http://ntgateway.com/weblog/2006/11/were-galatians-already-circumcised-i.html>). See also, Danker, *BDAG*, s.v. βλασφημέω, construing Acts 26:11 as applying to "God in Israelite/Christian tradition," but acknowledging that it "may be interpreted as not referring exclusively to God." Against this view include C. K. Barrett, *Acts*, 1156; Beyrer, "βλασφημία," *TDNT* 1:624.

¹⁷ See also v. 13 ("This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law").

The panel concludes by summarizing Paul's persecution of Christians in "fast forward" (8:1-3), a state of affairs that lasts until his road to Damascus experience in chapter 9. If the Stephen panel ends by fast forwarding the chronology through Paul's persecuting activities, then it should be no surprise that the ensuing panel, 8:4-40, which belongs to Philip, begins by rewinding the chronology (v. 4, "Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word." NRSV).

Accordingly, an appreciation of Luke's panel technique allows us to see that Luke prefers to shine the spotlight on one major character at a time, even to the point that others wind up in the anonymous shadows. Also, Luke ends his panels by "fast forwarding" the panel's chronology ahead and begins the ensuing panel by resetting the chronology.

III

Luke's panel technique is also visible in his earlier work, especially the spotlight effect. In particular, commentators have noticed that the spotlight alternates between John the Baptist and Jesus at the beginning of the gospel. For example, both Raymond Brown and Thomas Brodie have outlined an arrangement of two diptychs for the infancy narrative, each with respective panels for John the Baptist and Jesus.¹⁸ I have set these out in my handout, with the diptychs labeled with capital letters and the panels with appended numerals. The first diptych comprises a panel A1 for the Annunciation of John (1:5-25) and a subsequent panel A2 for the Annunciation of Jesus (1:26-56). The second diptych has a panel B1 for John's birth (1:57-80)

¹⁸ Brown, *Birth*, 250-253, and Thomas L. Brodie, "The Unity of Proto-Luke," 632-635. See also Brown, *Introduction*, 230-231. Brown proposes a two-stage composition for the Lukan infancy narrative that includes additions to what Brown identifies for the original diptych panels. Likewise, Brodie has analysis that is tied to his proposal of a Proto-Luke, which was augmented to produce our Third Gospel. Because the additional material does not affect the focus on the main character of the panels, it is not necessary to assent to either of their source theories in order to benefit from their analyses of the narrational structure.

followed by a panel B2 for Jesus's birth (2:1-52). I agree with Brown that the alternating parallelism between John and Jesus continues into the main part of the gospel, so that panel C1 of a third diptych covers John's appearance and imprisonment (3:1-20). As for the ending of the last Jesus panel C2, I follow Michael Goulder who identifies the ending of this section of Luke as the Rejection at Nazareth (3:21-30).¹⁹

Luke's "fast forwarding" summary technique is found at the end of all six panels. For example, the end of the first John panel A1 states that "Elizabeth ... secluded herself for five months" (1:24), a summation that moves the action forward until the beginning of the next panel A2, where Gabriel speaks to Mary (v. 26). Here, the chronology of these two panels are sequential, but the transition from the next John panel is different. At the end of chapter 1, panel B1 concludes with a summary of John's growing "strong in the spirit . . . until the days of his appearance to Israel" (v. 80), a summary that fast forwards through John's life from his circumcision to his time in the wilderness in the reign of Tiberius (3:1). The following panel B2 (2:1-52), however, covers the birth and childhood of Jesus. Since the activities of this panel run concurrently with the fast forwarded summary of the previous panel, Luke begins panel B2 by rewinding the chronology into the reign of Augustus (2:1).

The third transition from John to Jesus, between panels C1 and C2, overlaps not only in their chronology but also in their protagonists. Panel C1 concerns the appearance and preaching of John the Baptist, and it concludes by fast forwarding through John's career until his imprisonment (3:19). John's career overlaps that of Jesus, so the subsequent panel C2, devoted to

¹⁹ Michael Goulder, *Luke*, 197. Brown sets the terminus at 4:43 (*Birth*, 250 n.44), while Brodie has it at 4:22a ("Unity," 632).

Jesus's appearance, begins by rewinding the chronology back to the baptism (v. 21, "when all the people were baptized"). The overlapping of the protagonists, on the other hand, is subject to Luke's spotlight effect. In the Jesus panel C2, the spotlight shines on Jesus so much that John himself fades into anonymity. Accordingly, the proleptic narration of John's imprisonment and the subsequent passivization of his baptizing Jesus do not constitute an "elaborate expedient" but, rather, a regular Lukan tactic for managing competing protagonists in his panels. Whatever theological problems Luke may have felt about Jesus's being baptized for the forgiveness of sins (3:3), Matthew's solution using dialogue would not have commended itself to Luke, even if he had known it, because then both John and Jesus would have to share the spotlight. Luke's sense of an orderly account is different from Matthew's.

Having fast forwarded through the John panels, I will now reverse direction and rewind through the Jesus panels. The third Jesus panel C2 ends with the Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). Like the ending pericope of the third John panel C1, the Rejection at Nazareth is proleptic. Luke has moved forward this incident from his source, Mark 6:1-6, from a location that should otherwise belong between the Healing of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:21-43 // Luke 8:40) and the Sending of the Twelve (Mark 6:13 // Luke 9:1-6). As Rowlingson has noticed, Luke even includes a clue to its proper Markan chronology: "he introduces the recognition on the part of the audience of Jesus' previous work in Capernaum (4:23), even though, contrary to Mark, he does not describe it in detail until after the visit (4:31ff. corresponding to Mark 1:21ff.)."²⁰ The comment about Jesus's activities in Capernaum of v. 23 has no corresponding

²⁰ Donald T. Rowlingson, "The Jerusalem Conference and Jesus' Nazareth Visit: A Study in Pauline Chronology," *JBL* 71 (1952): 69-74, at 70.

text in Mark (or Matthew), so this piece of Lukan redaction constitutes a clue corroborating the pericope's logical chronology.²¹

Like the other panels, the second Jesus panel B2 at 2:52 concludes with a fast forward-ing summary: "And Jesus progressed in wisdom and stature and in favor from God and people." The chronological overlap with the following John panel C1 is minimal, but Luke nonetheless resets the chronology with an elaborate synchronization to the reign of Tiberius and various local officials (3:1-2).

Turning now to our final panel, the first Jesus panel A2 for the Annunciation of Jesus, the summary statement at 1:56a includes a fast-forwarding component, "But Mary stayed with her about three months." The second part of the summary statement is "and she returned to her home" (v. 56b). As previously discussed, Luke's end-of-panel behavior in other summaries permit (but need not require) this act to overlap in time with the action of the subsequent panel. For the case of the panels B1 and C1, the chronological order is dictated by the subject matter: John must have grown up (1:80) after Jesus was born (2:6), and John must have been imprisoned (3:20) after Jesus was baptized (v. 21). What are the indications that the summary action of Mary's returning home occurred some time after the birth of John?

Three clues in the text corroborate the natural expectation that Mary would have stayed to help her relative. First, v. 57 rewinds the chronology: "Now Elizabeth's date for giving birth became due." Second, v. 58 refers to Elizabeth's relatives (οἱ συγγενεῖς) being present for the birth, a set of people that includes Mary herself. Third, v. 66 states that "all who heard

²¹ Some clues for a pericope's chronology can be inadvertent; see, for example, Mark Goodacre, "Fatigue in the Synoptics," *NTS* 44 (1998): 45-58.

these things put them in their heart" (ἔθεντο πάντες οἱ ἀκούσαντες ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῶν), a description that is twice repeated later in the infancy narrative specifically for Mary herself at 2:19 (συμβάλλουσα ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς, "pondering them in her heart") and v. 51 (καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ διετήρει πάντα τὰ ῥήματα ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς, "and his mother kept all these things in her heart").

That Mary is unnamed in the panel of John's birth is not an argument against her expected presence. Luke's descriptions of the participants as "relatives" and "those who heard" do not actually exclude Mary herself and may in fact be deliberately phrased to include her, albeit anonymously. Luke often focuses the spotlight on a single major character to point of plunging other characters into darkness, even when they play major roles in the action. Thus, Joel Green had the solution to the Case of the Disappearing Mary correct: Mary disappears from view, but not the stage.

Accordingly, the chronology of Luke's ordered account should be understood as subordinated to the topical ordering of Luke's panels, often dedicated to one major character at a time, even if other figures remain anonymous. While each panel is narrated with attention to chronological order, successive panels may overlap in their chronology. To coordinate the timing at panel boundaries, Luke fast forwards the chronology at the end of one panel and rewinds it at the beginning of the next. If this imagery is too anachronistic, then envision Luke's rolling and unrolling not a videotape but a scroll back and forth as he tells his own story.