

**Bibliography:** ■ Walsh, R., “Paul and the Early Church in Film,” in *Bible in Motion* (ed. R. Burnette-Bletsch; HBR 2; Berlin 2016) 497–516.

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See also → Canon; → Luke-Acts; → Manuscripts, Biblical; → Paul of Tarsus; → Scripture, Scriptures

## Luke-Acts

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### I. Introduction

The similarities between their opening prefaces, general style and theological outlook, have convinced most readers that Luke’s Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles were written by the same person. In the following articles, they will be treated as two parts of the same work.

*Helen K. Bond*

### II. New Testament

**1. The Unity of Luke-Acts.** The Gospel of Luke (GLuke) is the third book in the NT and the Acts of the Apostles is the fifth book. Although separated by the Gospel of John, there is general consensus since the 2nd century, that both works were composed by the same author. It was not before the 20th century, however, that scholars have sought to read Luke and Acts as one unified work. This approach was initiated by H. J. Cadbury in his *The Making of Luke-Acts* (1927), who also inaugurated the now-common reference “Luke-Acts” (“lukanisches Doppelwerk” in German). The concept of a “double work” or a “twofold narrative” (K. Löning) has now become an unquestioned prerequisite for any introductory exegetical knowledge of the Lukan corpus. It is perhaps here that we find the most striking change in the modern perception of these two books.

However, the unity of Luke-Acts can be defined on different levels (e.g., authorship, genre, narrative, theology, etc.), some of which will be discussed below (cf. Spencer; Verheyden). For this entry we will adopt the dominant view that Luke and Acts are written by the same author (cf. Parsons/Pervo) and are likely one literary work.

**2. Author.** Both Luke and Acts are anonymous works. However, church tradition is unanimous in the view that Luke, the traveling companion of Paul mentioned by Paul himself in Phlm 24 as well as in pseudo-Pauline letters (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11), is the

author of both writings. The characterization as “Luke, the physician” in Colossians has provoked the discussion, whether the author of Luke and Acts was indeed a “physician” (a view, commonly held in the ancient church, but also in critical scholarship, e.g., by Adolf von Harnack and some others). The view that the author of Luke and Acts was a companion of Paul is based on the use of the first person plural (the so-called “We-passages”) in the latter half of Acts. These passages could imply that the author was a member of Paul’s missionary team. Although there is nothing in the NT that explicitly connects the Luke of Paul’s letters to the author of Luke-Acts, every early Christian writer who broaches this topic agrees that they are the same individual (cf. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.13.3; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.4.6; Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 7).

The quality of the Greek prose indicates that the author was educated in Greek literature, though there is a debate as to the extent of his knowledge. His preface (Luke 1:1–4) indicates that he was not an original eyewitness to the life and events of Jesus, but that he later became part of the Christian community.

**3. Structure and Contents.** Luke-Acts is divided into two books. Luke’s Gospel opens with a preface (1:1–4), which is immediately followed by the parallel birth narratives of Jesus and John the Baptist (1:5–2:40) and a single, emblematic episode recounting one of Jesus’ childhood events (2:41–52). Luke frames Jesus’ career by recalling his baptism by John and his temptation in the desert (3:1–4:13). After this Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee (4:14–9:50), where he proclaims his ministry programme (4:16–30), calls his disciples (5:1–11; 6:12–16), preaches to the crowds gathered on a plain (6:17–49), performs miracles (8:22–56; 9:10–17), and is transformed on the mountaintop (9:28–36).

The second half of Jesus’ ministry begins at 9:51 with his resolution to go to Jerusalem. This journey to Jerusalem provides the opportunity for Jesus to teach his followers the nature and characteristics of discipleship. Luke 13:10–17:10 is primarily concerned with the Kingdom of God and who its members might be. This is followed by a summary of the journey’s narrative (17:11–19:27), which highlights the main themes of Jesus’ ministry.

From 19:28 onwards the narrative takes place at Jerusalem and its surrounding environs. This section begins with Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (19:29–44) and the incident at the Temple (19:45–48) and continues with Jesus’ teaching in the Temple courts (20:1–21:38). The narrative takes a downward turn when Judas agrees to betray Jesus (22:1–6). The last supper, Peter’s denials, Jesus’ arrest in the garden, trial, and crucifixion continue this anticlimax, which culminates with Jesus’ death and burial. GLuke, however, does not end on this negative note, but closes with a dramatic reversal: Jesus’

movement in the way that it uses Acts to support its distinctive teaching on a “second blessing” or second experience of the Holy Spirit, which is distinct from and takes place after conversion, is available to every believer, is often manifested in tongues, and empowers those so “baptized in the Spirit” for effective witness to their faith (Acts 1:8; 2:1–13). As leading Pentecostal biblical scholar Robert Menzies maintains, “The Pentecostal bestowal of the Spirit recorded in Acts 2 has given definition to the movement” (Menzies/Menzies: 9). Given the global rise of Pentecostalism, this example of the influence of Acts may perhaps be considered the most important evidence of its *Wirkungsgeschichte* or effective history in the modern world.

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#### IV. Literature

**1. Luke.** Readers have long admired the literary artistry of the Gospel according to Luke, and their prolific imitations and retellings reflect this admiration as well as this Gospel’s major influence on Christian calendars and worship. In one of the earliest Christian epic poems, written early in the 4th

century CE, the *Historiae evangelicae* – a composition devoted mostly to Matthew – the Spanish priest Juvenius still makes ample room (1.1–223, 278–306) for the narrator and characters to retell the entirety of Luke’s nativity and childhood (1:5–2:52) in epic hexameter.

Several decades later, Prudentius similarly recasts the Lukan nativity (*Apotheosis* 571–93) and genealogy (*Apotheosis* 1001–9) in epic form. This Spaniard is also deeply indebted to the Lukan parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus as his Christian basis guiding an involved poetic tour of the afterlife (*Hamartigenia* 852–930). Around the same time, in his seminal conversionary autobiography, the *Confessions*, Augustine repeatedly fashions himself a Lukan prodigal (Luke 15:11–32) who flees from and returns to himself and his parental faith (*Conf.* 1.18; 6.1.5.11; 8.3; 13.1).

The 9th-century *Heliand* (Songs 1–6, 10) dramatizes the Lukan birth narratives amidst a heroic, Old Saxon landscape of chieftains (rulers), horse-servants (shepherds), hill-forts (cities and towns), and a singular shrine (the Jerusalem temple). In a blend of exposition and hagiography, the 12th century *Golden Legend* of Jacob of Voragine expands on Lukan passages which correspond to holy days: the Nativity (6), the Circumcision (13), the Presentation at the Temple (37), the Annunciation (51), and the Birth of John the Baptist (86). Robert Grosseteste’s chivalric 13th century depiction of Mary as a castle of love (*Château d’Amour*) not only builds upon Luke’s introspective Marian character (Luke 2:19, 51), but also the unique mention of a *castellum* in Vulgate Luke 10:38. The Lukan interpretations of Voragine and Grosseteste both exert a major influence on the content of the ca. 1300 metrical Bible and universal history of 30,000 lines of rhyming couplets known as the *Cursor Mundi* (especially books 10–11).

The Lukan passage that figures largest in the frame and content of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* was almost certainly the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31), the scriptural *locus classicus* of afterlife beatitude and punishment. Yet in his treatise *On Monarchy* (esp. 3.9), Dante focuses chiefly on the legion of the “two swords” (Luke 22:38) so as to rebut contemporary theocratic interpretations.

Langland’s *Piers Plowman* plays the role of the wandering sheep and son of Luke 15, while those who refuse to join the pilgrimage take their excuses from the disrespectful guests of Luke 14:16–24. Langland’s Jesus bears a striking resemblance to the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37), a typological likeness perhaps borrowed from Augustine.

Some decades later, Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales* borrows a different Lukan frame (7:11–17) for his anti-Semitic yet satirical Prioress’s Tale about a widow’s boy whose devoted praise of Mary in Latin tongue continues flowing long after his throat is cut

by Jews. Chaucer's "Summoner's Tale" may even conflate the Rich Man and Lazarus into a single character, an avaricious friar who quotes this very passage for ultimately selfish ends.

Starting in the 14th century, Middle English dramas start to stage many of Luke's distinctive scenes, often adding dialogues and apocryphal cast members, all the while expanding the stories with emotion, worship, and sometimes even humor. The four best known cycles (York, N-Town, Chester, and Towneley) all recount the Annunciation, Visitation, Adoration of the Shepherds, Presentation of Jesus, Boy Jesus among the Doctors, Emmaus Pilgrims, and the Ascension. The Nativity is directly recounted in all but the Towneley cycle, where it appears implicitly in the two markedly different Shepherd Plays of the Wakefield Master. Luke's distinctive Trial before Herod (23:6–13) and dialogue with the crucified criminals (23:39–43) only appear in the York and N-Town cycles, but not in those of Chester and Towneley. MS Digby's standalone conversion-tale about the *Magdalene* fuses many traditions, including those from the canonical gospels. Digby notably conflates the tale of the anonymous penitent (Luke 7:36–50) with the brief mention of the Magdalene's exorcism (Luke 8:2; added in later MSS of Mark 16:9), making it into a vivid, cosmic scene of conversion in which the seven demons depart, together with the "Bad Angyll," into "hell wyth thondyr" (cf. Luke 10:18). The N-Town cycle, despite its prior conflation of Lazarus' sister Mary with the Magdalene (play 25), similarly amplifies her exorcism while locating this event in the middle of the Last Supper (play 27). The morality play *Wisdom*, also included in MS Digby 133, takes cues from this tradition to narrate the exorcism of seven demons from *Anima*, the (feminine) human soul.

Another morality play, the 15th century *Everyman*, relies on Luke's Prodigal Son both for its overall structure of an *exitus-reditus* journey, as well as certain details (e.g., penance as the investment of new garments). In the 16th century, Prodigal Son plays begin to flourish, warning against the reckless extremes of childhood rebellion and adding new characters (e.g., a rebellious daughter or a devoted mother) along with other improvisations. These plays are usually thought to commence with Ravius Textor's *Juvenis Pater et Uxor*, and certainly include Wever's *Lusty Juventus*, Ingeland's *Disobedient Child*, the anonymous *Nice Wanton*, among many others. Their popularity accounts for why the Prodigal Son appears more in Shakespeare than any other New Testament parable as well as this dramatist's artistic freedom to invert roles (e.g., Cordelia welcoming back her father as the exile in *King Lear*). Ben Jonson shares Shakespeare's proclivity for the Prodigal, allegorizing it anew in the figure of Aso-tus (Latin for "debauched") in *Cynthia's Revels*, and also in *The Staple of News*. We should also note that

the parable of the rich man and Lazarus figures prominently in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I* and *Part II*, as well as *Henry V*, in which the immoral, fat, yet good-humored Falstaff is repeatedly characterized as a blessed Lazarus, while Bardolph plays the damned Dives.

Luke's distinctive stories and parables resound not only in drama, but also poetry and prose as well, from the Reformation to the modern day, often reflecting contemporaneous political issues, ideological currents, and theological debates. Pre-Reformation poetry and hymns on the Nativity tend to focus on Mary, her lullabies to or dialogues with the infant Christ, or else her intertextual role as the Bride and Rose of the Song of Songs. The Jesuit Robert Southwell's late 16th century poems picture with stark and even religiously combative tones the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Childhood of Christ, and even the Prodigal Son. The early 17th century Anglican Donne sees the Immaculate Conception as unnecessary, even while describing Mary's womb as an unopened prison (maintaining her virginity *in partu* and *post partum*) in his poems on the Annunciation and Nativity. The Anglican Francis Quarles still shows a reverent curiosity for the relationship of the Madonna and Child in his poem *On the Infancy of Our Savior*, and some of his other poems are devoted to the Lukan parables of the Lost Sheep and Prodigal. Luke's (and the Catholic) Mary is absent from the poems of George Herbert, who focuses his "Christmas" instead on his poetic persona as a pilgrim seeking the Christ child. He gives far more devotion to the "Marie Magdalene" with whom he deeply identifies as a penitent sinner. The Puritan-turned-Catholic Richard Chashaw identifies intensely with several models of penitence in Luke, including Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and even Lazarus (of the parable).

In his feast-day poem "Upon the Circumcision," the Puritan John Milton notably positions this ritual as the start of Christ's life-long, redemptive passion. His epic *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* owes at least some of its foundational angelology to Luke's Nativity, and some of its mythological framework to Luke's unique references to the fall of Satan (10:18) and the promise of paradise (23:43). Among NT texts, the temptation certainly constitutes Milton's main source, and Milton follows Luke's order instead of Matthew's. Even Milton's hymn "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" highlights the epic role of *Christus victor*. The theme of cosmic victory also characterizes the Nativity hymns of the 18th century, most notably the highly popular English hymns "Joy to the World" by Isaac Watts and "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" by Charles Wesley. For other popular hymnists, such as John Newton or William Cowper, of all Lukan passages it is the Prodigal Son that most defines the poet's life and aspirations.

But not all Lukan interpretations were so epic, nor so orthodox. Alexander Pope, for example, in his *Rape of the Lock* (canto I), parodies the annunciation by having Ariel (a guardian spirit) predict to Belinda (the sleeping protagonist) an impending catastrophe (of cosmetic proportion). In his “Everlasting Gospel,” written in the early 19th century, William Blake opines that Mary Magdalene – as a once-possessed harlot – would have made a fitting mother for a Jesus who wanted to take on the sins of the world. In the *Ghost of Abel*, Blake even turns Milton’s epic reference to the fall of Satan (Luke 10:18) into a repeatable, existential occurrence. The Scottish novelist James Hogg has the characters of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* engage in an extended intra-Calvinist debate with frequent reference to Lukan texts and themes.

Prodigal characters can serve moral and/or satirical ends for 19th century authors such as Wordsworth, Byron, Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot, Kipling, Ruskin, and Gidé. Even so, the writings of Yeats, Chesterton, T. S. Eliot, C. S. Lewis, and W. H. Auden show that, while modern improvisations on Lukan episodes (such as the Nativity) can be more shocking and raw than those of their predecessors, they are not for that reason necessarily less devotional. Even the diminutive protagonist of John Irving’s recent *A Prayer for Owen Meany* replays the Nativity in a way that seems simultaneously unorthodox yet awe-inspiring.

**2. Acts.** While not found explicitly in literature nearly as much as its Gospel counterpart, the Acts of the Apostles has enjoyed a rich literary afterlife, sometimes more indirectly than directly so, i.e., in references more intertextual than textual. For example, Acts only briefly mentions the presence of Mary in the post-resurrection apostolic assembly (1:14), a gathering often understood as continuing on to the birth of the church at Pentecost. Though infrequently visible on its own, this narrative detail did enhance the composite picture of Mary as the Mother of the church, of the soul, and of humanity more generally – all highly common literary tropes. The angelic deliverance from prison in Acts 5:18–23 stands as yet another example. In later literature, this scene implicitly provides background for the narrative staging of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus, including the harrowing of hell, as a cosmic prison break. John Donne’s depiction of the Nativity in his *Holy Sonnets* is illustrative of this subtle, yet important intertextuality. Though the Lukan narrative remains at the forefront, the prison break of Acts – especially its detail about the prison doors remaining closed – may account for his comfortable description of Mary’s womb as a prison and his concurrent belief in Mary’s virginity *in partu* and *post partum*.

The retellings of the most famous stories in Acts can vary from implicit to explicit. Chief among

these stories is the account of the conversion of Paul (Acts 9:3–19), along with its retellings in the same book (22:6–21; 26:12–18). The 15th-century Digby play, *The Conversion of St. Paul*, draws explicitly and thoroughly on Acts, even while expanding and dramatizing its narrative. Whether in literary classics or pietistic folk literature, non-fictional autobiographies and biographies often cast the main character in the role of a Saul turned Paul. For example, Augustine of Hippo, in his famous *Confessions*, pictures himself as a rebel similarly converted by divine initiative and grace. Izaak Walton’s *Life of Dr. John Donne* finds a Saul character lurking even in Donne’s mere youthful neglect of Christianity, only to have Donne later transformed into a Paul who preached “salvation to his brethren.” In Victorian and modern autobiographies, the journey of Paul to Damascus sometimes morphs into a journey from atheism to belief, as in C. S. Lewis’ *Surprised by Joy*, or from slave-trading to abolitionism, as in the hymns and stories of John Newton (especially his *Authentic Narrative*), or from Protestantism to Catholicism, as in John Henry Newman’s *Apologia pro Vita Sua*.

Similar autobiographical echoes of Paul’s conversion appear in the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Wordsworth, Francis Thompson, William Cowper, James Hogg, Edmund Gosse, G. M. Hopkins, T. S. Eliot, and Margaret Avison, among many others. Fictional retellings of the conversion of Paul are likewise notable for their number, creativity and cultural impact. In such a list we may include Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and Dickens’ *Christmas Carol*. Flannery O’Connor offers one of the closest retellings in *Wise Blood*, whose main character (Hazel Motes) relives many aspects of Paul’s conversion (persecution/murder, asceticism, blindness) as he transforms from an atheistic, pseudo-religious charlatan into a persecuted penitent.

The Pentecost narrative also echoes widely in the history of drama, prose, and poetry. The early 15th century Chester Mystery Cycle includes a Pentecost play entitled “The Fishmongers Playe,” probably staged on Whitsunday. The play borrows not only the calendrical setting, but also the day’s liturgical elements, such as the *Veni, Creator Spiritus* and the Apostles’ Creed. God the Father, an angel, and various apostles all play expanded voice parts to explain and expand the Pentecost narrative as a public, liturgical event to commemorate the birth of the Church. Allegorical and fictional retellings often stage important events, especially the start of epic journeys, on the day of Pentecost. Such is Piers in *Piers Plowman* (B-text, Book 19), who is prepared for his journey through the descent of the Spirit on Pentecost. Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* uses Pentecost as the backdrop for numerous events of consequence: the unsuccessful attempts to remove Excalibur from the rock (1.7), feasts and tournaments (1.8;

3.15; 6.1), and the start of the quest for the holy grail (13.7).

The formation of the fellowship in Tolkien's *Rings* trilogy also echoes Pentecost as the start of an epic journey with religious overtones. Occasionally Pentecost recurs in real-life journeys (such as Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*) or later missionary reports as the miraculous capacity to read or speak previously unknown foreign languages. At other times Pentecost furnishes a conceit of literary inspiration, as in John Donne's praise of Sir Philip Sidney's translation of the Psalms. In Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, Pentecost similarly explains the minister Dimmesdale's inspired oratory (as something distinct from educational or mystical qualifications) and provides the setting (fifty days after Easter) for an election day sermon. Some poets, such as Shakespeare, mention Pentecost mainly to recount a springtime of public festivities and weddings. For George Herbert, Robert Herrick, and T. S. Eliot, Pentecost describes a personal, aspirational, and/or liturgical religious experience, a trope taken up and broadly expanded in Pentecostal devotional narratives of the last century. Pentecost poems also abound, most notably Charles Wesley's hymn, "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing," which not only recounts Pentecost, but also an evangelistic reading of the sermons and miracles of Acts.

Less influential but still highly notable is the Ascension, told in a slightly different fashion in Luke, but often blended into a single textual event in literary reception. Early plays (the York *Play of the Tailors* and the Wakefield *Ascension of the Lord*), recalling contemporaneous artistic depictions of the scene, emphasize Mary's role and emotions over her son's departure. Another stream of interpretation, reflected notably in *Piers Plowman* and much later in Robert Lowell's "After the Surprising Conversions," equates the Ascension with doom and judgment. The continuities between the Resurrection and Ascension occupy the efforts of other authors, such as that of the epic versified Biblical retelling *Cursor Mundi* (ca. 1300), which elaborately describes the Ascension as the pinnacle of the Resurrection. In authors from the Renaissance forward (Donne, Vaughan, Milton, Blake, James Joyce, Dylan Thomas), the stress often rests on the Ascension as a glorious reflection and joyful pledge of humanity's apotheosis, whether in this world or the next. Dylan Thomas' poem itself echoes in science-fiction portrayals of humanity's ascent into space, such as those of James Blish in his *Cities in Flight* tetralogy.

While certain episodes stand out for their expansive literary influence, the diverse scenes and turns of phrase in Acts have played their own roles throughout literary history, and each author has his or her own emphases. The language of visions and dreams in Acts 2:17 (par. Joel 2:28) allows Washington Irving to invoke the dream-inducing

landscape of "The Legend of Sleepy Hallow." The etymology of Barnabas (Acts 4:36, "son of encouragement") appears in the 15th or 16th century drama *Nice Wanton* in reference to a son who comforts his foolish mother. The story of Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1–11) expands in the late medieval *Cursor Mundi* (lines 19236–262) into a story of divine judgment on apathy and evidence of a stricter standard laid upon the earliest church. The same episode furnishes Ben Jonson (*The Alchemist*) with a name for his Puritan Anabaptist character ("Ananias") who foolishly and failingly attempts to counterfeit Dutch currency. The healing power of Peter's shadow in Acts 5:15 supplies the Catholic convert Richard Crashaw ("Umbra S. Petri") with evidence of the authority of apostolic succession. The story of Simon Magus (Acts 8:14–24) plays a role similar to that of Ananias and Saphira – as a cautionary tale. For Dante in *Inferno* 19, this episode stood at the heart of his critique of simony and his depiction of Nicholas III as an antipope whose values stood opposite to those of the avowed poverty (Acts 3:6, also quoted in *Paradiso* 22) and righteous appointments (Acts 1:21–22) of Peter as the first pope. Following Dante's lead, authors such as Bunyan and Milton (*The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*) issue similar warnings about simony as greed.

For James Joyce (*Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), the priesthood's secret knowledge and magical power is the essence of the temptation of simony. More recent authors occasionally invert the Magus into a positive magical figure or inspiration. Sir John Suckling and C. S. Lewis take up the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:59–60) for devotional and intertextual purposes. The "Baptized Ethiopian" (Acts 8:26–31) is the name and subject of a poem of Richard Crashaw that plays up themes of color and conversion. Peter's threefold vision in Acts 10 echoes in Lancelot's threefold one in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, and also in Tennyson's *Becket* in reference to a banquet held by King Henry. That God is "no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34) underlines the divine dignity of every person in Emerson's transcendentalist vision ("Spiritual Laws") and in John Stuart Mill's treatise *On the Subjection of Women*. In his treatises *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church* and *On Christian Doctrine*, Milton finds in the commissioning of Barnabas for Antioch (Acts 11:22–26) a model of ecclesiastical and financial arrangements.

For Emily Dickenson ("Of Paul and Silas It Is Said"), the imprisonment and liberation of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:22–34) underscores vain aspirations of mortals for security. The Areopagus setting and speech of Paul (Acts 17:16–34) supplies Milton with a conceit for his own *Areopagitica*, a defense of the unlicensed publication of his pamphlet on divorce. The speech's reference to an "Unknown God" (Acts 17:23) echoes in Shelley's promotion of Greek inde-

pendence in *Hellas* and in Ruskin's critique of industrialism in *Sesame and Lilies*, which contrasts human-built altars with mountains as divinely-made ones. In a somewhat similar way, Steinbeck explores the harsh sovereignty of the land for California homesteaders in his novel *To a God Unknown*. Rudyard Kipling ("Gallio's Song") finds in the story of Gallio's dismissal of Paul's case (Acts 18:12–17) an inspired account of civic duty and the separation of church and state. Shakespeare may recall Paul's shipwreck (Acts 27:1–28:18) in his depiction of a providential shipwreck in *The Tempest*. In his description of *Plymouth Plantation*, William Bradford recounts this episode for a decidedly different purpose, to contrast the mercy shown Paul by the Milesians with the harsh welcome shown the Puritans by the Indians. Charles Wesley ("He Shook Off the Beast") found in the miraculous snakebite episode (Acts 28:3–6) a reference to the divine protection of Methodists and the venomous insults of their detractors.

Acts 28 furnishes a strangely open conclusion to Acts, with Paul's house arrest and preaching to convert others. In a similar way, let Newman's *Callista* summarize for us the literary reception of Acts. In Pauline and Augustinian fashion, the eponymous heroine picks up the Bible and reads Acts in prison. In this way she is finally converted to Christianity.

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## V. Visual Arts

Narratives from the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles have inspired a vast amount of works of art. Beside the fact that Luke-Acts make up over a quarter of the New Testament, the works are highly descriptive, providing the visual arts with a wealth of invaluable narrative details.

The Infancy Gospel in particular provides a great quantity of unique and evocative accounts, which were both very popular among the public and inspiring and useful for artists from the very early beginnings of Christian art onwards. The Infancy includes episodes such as the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Nativity and Adoration.

The Annunciation (1:26–38), the announcement of Jesus' birth to the Virgin, has been rendered by numerous artists. Artistic visualisations of the scene vary from a simple conversation between Mary and the angel to a more extensive image including details from the Gospel, showing the Virgin's gestures of astonishment and acceptance. Sources also include apocryphal writings, such as the *Protoevangelium* of James, leading to images showing the Virgin

spinning, referring to her upbringing in the temple, or reading a book, which might refer to the prophecy by Isaiah (7:14). Often a flower, sometimes held by the angel and referring to spring as the season in which the conception took place, is depicted in the scene. A lily also symbolizes Mary's virginity. The conception itself is visualized by a dove or even a little child flying down from heaven towards the Virgin. The Merode Altar Piece (1225–28, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Cloisters) shows the Virgin humbly sitting on the floor and reading a book while the angel kneels in front of her. A vase with a lily is placed on the table. Through the window a little boy, carrying a cross on his back, dives down towards the Virgin.

The Visitation (1:36–56) is likewise easily recognizable, showing two pregnant women – Elisabeth, mother of John the Baptist, and Mary, mother of Jesus – speaking or kissing each other in greeting. From the Gothic era onwards, the fact that Elisabeth is older than Mary starts to be reflected in her portrait, for instance in the sculptural rendering of the event at the west portal of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Reims (ca. 1230–65). In the North Rhine Altar Piece (1410, Utrecht, Catharijneconvent) the children in the women's wombs are visible. They look at each other and leap for joy, anticipating the relationship they will have in later life. The Visitation has been less popular in contemporary art, although Bill Viola created a video work on this subject in 1995, inspired by Jacopo Pontormo's painted *Visitation* (1528–29).

The Nativity and the Adoration of the Shepherds (2:6–20) might be one of the most beloved narratives in the infancy sequence. In the course of the centuries, the story has been embellished with a great number of apocryphal details. Starting as a simple scene showing Mary lying on a bed, accompanied by Joseph, while the Christ Child lies in the manger mentioned by Luke or in a symbolic sarcophagus, as for instance on one of the gilded copper plates of the Verdun altarpiece by Nicholas of Verdun (1181, Klosterneuburg, Klosterneuburg Monastery), the scene quickly transformed in art into a lively gathering. Not only the shepherds come to adore the Child, but also the Magi and the star they observed – elements only described by Matthew – are often added to the scene. Origen furnished the iconography of the Birth of Christ with an ox and an ass. In his *Hom. Luc.* 2.13–16, he refers to the words of Isaiah (1:3): "The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand" connecting them to the Nativity. Additionally, two midwives, derived from the *Protoevangelium* of James and its Latin version by Pseudo Matthew, live up the depiction and now and then Isaiah enters the scene to visit Joseph and comfort him by referring to his prophecy, symbolized by the scroll in his