

MARY IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE: THE ARK AND PROPITIATION FOR SINNERS

Introduction: Foundations of Mary as Ark of the Covenant

Luke the Evangelist skillfully rearranged his material in his Gospel's initial chapters to make the strongest possible of parallels between "the Mother of the Lord" and "the Ark of the Lord."¹ In comparing Old Testament to Luke, he clearly depends directly on the Greek Old Testament (LXX) for his vocabulary and phrases. Let's take a look: The pious Old Testament figure of Obbedom, his wife, and children, had the honor of housing the Ark at David's command:

And [David] went to the Ark of the Lord...on the mountain...and David was playing... "How will the Ark of the Lord enter unto me?" (2 Sam 6:2, 5, 10)	Mary went to the mountain...and it happened as Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the child [John] leapt in her womb...and she said... "Whence this happening to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk 1:39-44)
And the Ark of the Lord rested three months in the home (οἶκος)... (LXX 2 Kings [2 Sam] 6:11)	So, Mary remained with her for three months and returned unto her own home (οἶκον). (Lk 1:56)

The Visitation to Elizabeth, by itself, is sufficient to establish Mary as the Ark! Yet, the incarnation is Luke's central mystery in Luke chapter 1. Unsurprisingly, the Annunciation and Incarnation replay of the **glory** of YHWH descending onto **the propitiation/mercy seat** in cloud and overshadowing. The purpose of Elizabeth's miraculous conception (Luke 1:24) was related by Luke with one eye on LXX 2 Kings [2 Sam] 6:12-13:

The Lord blessed all the entire house of Obbedom and all of his substance...*'The Lord blessed the home of Obbedom and all of its substance because of the Ark of God'* (ἔνεκεν τῆς κιβωτοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ). (LXX 2 Sam 6:11-12)

When we read Luke chapter 1 (in light of 2 Sam 6, as Luke anticipated a Jew to do),² we note that the Baptist's conception (= blessing for his household) is *because of* the Ark of God. Thus, Elizabeth is blessed with child to fulfill or complete the model from Obbedom's family who received the Ark: "Whence this happening to me that the Mother of my Lord [viz., YHWH] should come to me?" The parallelism between Old and New Testament is exact. Intriguingly, "Mother of God" registers as a rare title within the earliest patristic commentaries, even though "the Mother of God (ἡ Μήτηρ τοῦ Θεοῦ)" should naturally be inferred from the Evangelist's typology that she is: "the Ark of God (ἡ κιβωτός τοῦ Θεοῦ)."

¹ See Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmeyer, and Roland Murphy, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1st ed. (Englewood NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 2:120:

Not only does Luke 1-2 begin and end in the Temple and reach its climax in the presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple, but Mary herself is compared to the Temple or Ark of the Covenant (Luke 1:35, 43, 56), and Jesus' first recorded words refer to his Father's house (Luke 2:49). The overshadowing of the divine presence (Luke 1:35) brings to mind the reference to the Temple in John 1:14.

² The Semitic pedigree of the infancy narrative Gospel has long been established in Brown, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 116.

Nonetheless, while Mary is called Ark nearly everywhere in the early Christian church, it took time for the inference of “Mother of God” to become a natural next step as a written norm in the early church literature. In early tradition, the Fathers expressed this verbal parallelism between “Ark of God” and “Mother of God” potentially first in Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306-373).³ Elsewhere, this Syrian Doctor of the Church wrote several masterful hymns on the incarnation of Christ, noting often the role of Mary as Ark of the Covenant.⁴ Throughout Church history, some of the greatest saints saw the Virgin Mother and her role in salvation history as crucial in emphasizing her as an incredible example of sanctity. In a work attributed to third-fourth century saint and Father Methodius, we read that Mary was Ark and therefore “queen” worthy of veneration.⁵ In the early fifth century, Hesychius of Jerusalem made that ancient connection between Mary as Ark and Mother of God.⁶ In the golden era of John Damascene (d. AD 753), the tomes written on the Dormition of our Blessed Lady normatively identify Mary as Ark of the Covenant. In Damascene’s words, Mary was the Ark that entered heaven and was the cause for great celebration by the heavenly hosts.⁷ Saint Andrew of Crete, writing also in the eighth century, noted how the Mary was able to carry the creator of the whole universe in her body, like the very Ark of salvation (of Israel).⁸ The imagery of celebration in heaven for the entrance of the

³ Ephrem the Syrian (*graecus*), *Prayer 8*, in *Ἄσσιον Ἐφραίμου τοῦ Σύρου ἔργα*, Ed. K.G. Phrantzoles (Vol 6; Thessaloniki: To Perivoli tis Panagias, 1995), 351.

⁴ Ephrem the Syrian, *Nineteen Hymns on the Nativity of Christ in the Flesh*, eds. P. Schaff & H. Wace, trans. J. B. Morris & A. E. Johnston, Gregory the Great (Part II), Ephraim Syrus, Aphrahat 13 (New York: Christian Literature, 1898), 239. Company. “Blessed be Thy Nativity, Thou Head of Workmen, the impress whereof the ark bore, after which was fashioned the Tabernacle of the congregation that was for a time only!”

⁵ Attributed to Methodius of Olympus, *Oration concerning Simeon and Anna*, In *Fathers of the Third Century: Gregory Thaumaturgus, Dionysius the Great, Julius Africanus, Anatolius and Minor Writers, Methodius, Arnobius*, vol. 6, eds. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, & A. C. Coxe, trans. W. R. Clark (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 386–387:

For if to the ark, which was the image and type of thy sanctity, such honour was paid of God that to no one but to the priestly order only was the access to it open, or ingress allowed to behold it, the veil separating it off, and keeping the vestibule as that of a queen, what, and what sort of veneration is due to thee from us who are of creation the least, to thee who art indeed a queen; to thee, the living ark of God, the Lawgiver; to thee, the heaven that contains Him who can be contained of none? For since thou, O holy virgin, hast dawned as a bright day upon the world; and hast brought forth the Sun of Righteousness, that hateful horror of darkness has been chased away; the power of the tyrant has been broken, death hath been destroyed, hell swallowed up, and all enmity dissolved before the face of peace; noxious diseases depart now that salvation looks forth; and the whole universe has been filled with the pure and clear light of truth.

⁶ Hesychius, *Sermones V* (PG vol. 93, col. 1460): “Arise Lord unto thy rest thou and the *ark of thy sanctification*, which is very evidently the *virgin mother of God*.”

⁷ Saint Andrew of Crete, *On the Holy and Glorious Dormition and Transformation of Our Lady Mary, Mother of God and Ever-Virgin*, in *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies*, vol. 18, ed. J. Behr, trans. B. E. Daley (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press (1998), 205:

Today the holy, living ark of the living God, the one who carried her own maker within herself, comes to her rest in the temple of the Lord not made by hands. David—her ancestor and God’s—leaps for joy (2 Samuel 6:4; 1 Chronicles 15:25); the angels join in the dance, the archangels applaud, the virtues give praise, the principalities rejoice with them, the powers exult, the dominations delight, the thrones make festival, the cherubim sing their hymn, and the seraphim glorify God. John.

⁸ Andrew of Crete, *On the Holy and Glorious Dormition and Transformation of Our Lady Mary, Mother of God and Ever-Virgin*, in *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies*, vol. 18, ed. J. Behr, trans. B.

Mary into the heavenly abode is also present in Saint Theodore of Studium, who celebrates Mary as the “Ark of holiness” who has gone to her heavenly rest with the saints and angels.⁹ Mary, being the Ark of the Covenant, is also necessarily associated with meeting **tent** of Israel’s faithful where divine worship is carried out (this naturally leads to associating Mary with Solomon and his Temple’s tent that covered the Ark with skin/flesh as a prefigurement/type of YHWH descending onto his Ark covered in flesh or the Incarnation):

LXX Exodus 40: 1-39:	Luke 1: 27-35, 37-38:
<p>The Lord spoke to Moses...Set up the tent (τὴν σκηνὴν) of the Law and put there the Ark (τὴν κιβωτὸν)...and cover (σκεπάσεις) the Ark with the curtain (τῷ καταπετάσματι). [...] And Moses did all, just as the Lord commanded him...and a cloud covered (ἐκάλυψεν ἢ νεφέλη) the tent of the Law and the tent [she] was made filled of the Lord’s glory (δόξης). Moses was also not able to enter into the tent of the Law, because the cloud was overshadowing upon [her] the tent (ἐπεσκίαζεν ἐπ’ αὐτήν)...made full of the Lord’s glory. Yet, whenever the cloud would rise from the tent, the sons of Israel moved off with their possessions...for the cloud was upon the tent during the day and far was upon it during the night...</p>	<p>The angel went [to Mary] and said, ‘Greetings...You will conceive and give birth to a son and you are to call him Jesus...and he will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.’ Mary asked the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon (ἐπελεύσεται) you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow (ἐπισκιάσει) you.” So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God</p>

Mary, who provides the physical flesh or metaphorical skin-of-the-tent to Jesus, is always to be associated with the **glory** of the Lord, as someone accompanied by his presence as united to her flesh for nine months. Contemporary scholarship affirms Luke chapter 1 as a clear arrangement of the infancy narrative in direct relation to the Temple and its worship.¹⁰ While Moses and Joshua (LXX Deuteronomy 34:9), Elijah and Elisha (LXX Sirach 48:12) were “filled with the Spirit (ἐπλήσθη τοῦ πνεύματος),” the tent and Ark was uniquely filled with the divine cloud and **glory** itself, God’s proper attribute. Later, Mary too is “filled with the Spirit” at Pentecost (Acts 2:4) but only when she no longer is constantly at the side of Jesus, her **glory**, for the divine “**glory**” once filled her, not at all like an inferior prophetic operation or influence. Luke designates Mary (Luke 1:35) to experience the “**power** (δύναμις)” of God filling her womb. The Evangelist likely recalls Paul’s (his teacher’s) epithets for Jesus, “Christ the **power** of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24).

Daley (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 133. “What they all saw surely filled them with fear: the bearer of life, now borne away by death; her who spoke with God, now voiceless; her who bore life in her womb as in an ark, now dead, breathless, lying on a couch.”

⁹ Theodore the Studite, *Encomium on the Dormition of Our Holy Lady, the Mother of God*, in *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies*, vol. 18, ed. J. Behr, trans. B. Daley (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 250:

Today that ark of holiness, wrought with gold and divinely furnished, has been lifted up from her tabernacle on earth and is borne towards the Jerusalem above, to unending rest; and David, the ancestor of God, poet as he is, strikes up a song for us and cries, “Virgins”—meaning souls—“will be led to the King”—to you, O God—“behind her” (Ps 44:14 [LXX]).

¹⁰ Brown, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 123.

1. God's Power, Glory, and Wisdom Regarding the Annunciation (Luke 1:35)

'The **glory** of the Lord' unquestionably signifies a theophany (God showing himself to humans), whereby God reveals himself to a human onlooker. Exodus 40 (above) cannot be read in isolation. Mosaic ritual worship of the Angel of the Lord (often considered the Lord himself) happened when YHWH appeared as the Angel in the pillar of fire and cloud (LXX Exodus 13:21-22; 14:24), who leads the Israelites out of Egypt. Exodus 40 culminates the theophany (God's self-revealing) from Exodus 16:19, whereby the people "come near before YHWH" by looking upon the **glory** of YHWH in the cloud. Of course, this will be reenacted by the overshadowing cloud that first was in Mary at the Transfiguration in Luke's Gospel! "The Law," mentioned multiply in Exodus 40, was dictated to Moses on Sinai, where God was present in cloud and fire (LXX Exodus 24: 9-18). Scholars have firmly established that the first Israelite experiences of YHWH culminate in the Lord's worship rituals dictated to Moses for the precincts of the tent and Ark.¹¹ Carrying out the Lord's ritual prescriptions typically results in the coming of the **glory** of the Lord, who is present in cloud and fire at the exercise of the priesthood. In subsequent times God's proper attribute of **glory** underwent greater anthropomorphization (describing God in physical-human terms) in LXX Ezekiel 1:26-28. The **glory** of the Lord took the form of a man riding the divine chariot-throne of the cherubim. Furthermore, this man-like being is surrounded by fire and smoke. Finally, the **glory** of YHWH is identified as the very man on the throne (LXX Ezekiel 1:28). It is all but impossible to avoid the conclusion that the Angel of the Lord and the **glory**-man of Ezekiel's vision are the same (cf. LXX Ezekiel 8:2). Afterwards, in the vision of Daniel, Christians of yore found their point of intersection between Jesus and "the **glory** of the Lord" (which encompasses the Ark; cf. John 1). If Jesus shares in or identifies with **glory**, then he must be the Angel of the Lord. In Daniel's vision, 'a son of man' is seen coming on the clouds of heaven. The son of man is presented to 'the Ancient of Days' and is given dominion, **glory**, and kingdom for eternity (cf. Rev 4:11; 5:12-13; 7:12). Luke will also connect these biblical passages of Mary's identity as the Ark of glory to the Transfiguration (!) (e.g., Mt 17; Mk 9; Lk 9); originally a Marian feast?

Hence, unsurprisingly, some early Christian communities (Jude 1:14) thought the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*¹² to be inspired, as it identified the son of man as Enoch, who had ascended into heaven. Within this same text, the Ancient of Days and "the son of man" interact (1 Enoch 48; 71) in a way that continues Ezekiel's and Daniel's imagery and even fuses it with the image of hypostasized divine Wisdom (1 Enoch 48:6; 49:1).

In this vein, Charles Gieschen writes: "One of the most intriguing angelomorphic [Angel-as-YHWH's-Jesus] aspects of Wisdom in *Wisdom of Solomon* is its relationship to the divine throne."¹³ The author establishes the following: (1.) Wisdom became hypostasized (personal) (LXX Prov 1:20; 8:1-36; 9:3-6), (2.) for through it the world was created (LXX Proverbs 8:22-31; 3:19-20), and (3.) it is distinct from God and creation (LXX Proverbs 8:22-31; cf. Sir 1:9).

¹¹ Charles Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents & Early Evidence* (Arbeiten zur Geschichte...42; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 78-80.

¹² James Charlesworth, ed., *1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch*, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Vol 1; Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1983), 5-89.

¹³ Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 93.

Unsurprisingly, intertestamental literature placed Wisdom with the angels and angelic descent because the work angel (MLK) means “sent”:

Wisdom could not find a place in which she could dwell; but a place was found for her in the heavens. Then wisdom went out to dwell with the children of men, but she found no dwelling place. So wisdom returned to her place and she settled permanently among the angels. (1 Enoch 42:1-2)

In his detailed exegesis of wisdom literature, Gieschen notes the angelic motif of Sirach 24:2. Wisdom is in the assembly of the Most High and elsewhere it is collocated “beside him” (LXX Proverbs 8:30; Sirach 1:8-9) as an angel. Wisdom is definitively equated to an Angel of Lord, being identified as the pillar of cloud and fire that led the Hebrews out of Egypt (LXX Wisdom 10:17). Eventually, Wisdom is revealed to possess fully divine character.¹⁴ Luke’s Jesus identified this as sent-Wisdom and associates it with the prophetic sacrifice of Abel.¹⁵ Luke likely has in the background the first-century intertestamental literature that attested to Wisdom as the first Angel (of the Lord) of creation responsible for forming the second angel of Adam.¹⁶ Therefore, the Annunciation (Luke 1:35) has a traditional formula: *Sent-Wisdom or Sent-Angel-of-the-Lord goes into the tent and onto the Ark-mercy seat and results in YHWH-presence-glory.* This is what happens to Mary!

There is one last point that needs to be understood to know what is behind Luke chapter 1: God’s self-revelation in the Septuagint (LXX) and in Luke is by the Greek word ‘name’ (ὄνομα), or God’s ‘power’ (δύναμις). Gieschen writes: ‘Name-theology developed in which God’s presence with his people was described through expression involving dwelling of his *shem* [name], especially in the sanctuary [of the Temple with the tent and Ark in it].’¹⁷ God established Mount Zion for his name to be invoked. God’s presence filled the Holy of Holies (LXX 2 Chronicles 6:5; 1 Kings 5:5).

****Note well!** God’s “name” was especially present on the propitiation/mercy seat (ἰλαστήριον) of the Ark (LXX Exodus 25:22), as when David received the Ark as ‘prefiguration’ (historical hint of something better to come!) of Luke 1:35.¹⁸ This will have implications below, for *if the inanimate Ark demands gifts and presents in honor of YHWH, what more does the living Mother of God demand?* The answer lies in the mystery of the prophetess Elizabeth who says in the Holy Spirit: “How is it that the Mother of my Lord [vs. Ark of the Lord; 2 Sam 6] should come to me?” (Luke 1:44). *If the king is present, why honor the king’s mother? If God is present why not mention him in utero, and instead in the Holy Spirit honor his***

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 90-2. Cf. LXX Wisdom 7:21-9:

Wisdom, the fashioner of things, taught me. For in her there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold...distinct...penetrating through all the spirits that are intelligent and pure and most subtle.... a breath and the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty... a reflection of eternal light...

¹⁵ Abel’s sacrifice was consumed by theophanic fire (cf. LXX); in vogue as late as Dydimus the Blind. See Sebastian Brock, ‘Fire from Heaven,’ *Studia Patristica* 25 (1993), pp. 231-2. Cf.:

The wisdom of God said: ‘I will send (ἀποστελῶ) into the very prophets and apostles...and they will kill...some of them... that the spilt blood be demanded [cf. Rev. 18:24]...from the foundation of the world...[i.e.,] from Abel to Zachariah, slain between altar and house (τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου καὶ τοῦ οἴκου).’ (Luke 11:49-51)

¹⁶ See James Charlesworth, ed., 2 (*Slavonic Apocalypse of Enoch*), in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1983), 102-221.

¹⁷ Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 72.

¹⁸ LXX 2 Samuel 6:2; 1 Chronicles 13:6.

mother alone? If the propitiation/mercy seat has YHWH on it, why honor the Ark upon which YHWH rests? The answer is that the Holy Spirit clearly associates honoring the Ark with honoring Him who is present on the Ark! Honoring Mary at her presence with the fetal Christ implies honoring the God whom she bears and in whom she believes and whom she represents as His Ark!

Returning to “The name,” the mere name Lord or YHWH is strangely just like a person, for a name “comes” (LXX Isaiah 30:27), it “is a strong tower” (LXX Proverbs 18:10), etc. “The name” (of YHWH) was consistently understood in Jewish literature to be associated with the creative command: “Let there be...” (MT Genesis 1:3; 6, 14).¹⁹ “The name” is that by means of which God created the world.²⁰ In fact, the name is explicitly understood to be the creator of heaven and earth in the intertestamental literature (Jubilees 36:7; 1 Enoch 69:17-18). The divine name is also capable of being *in* a Sent-Angel: “My name is in him” (MT Exodus 23:20).

Naming YHWH can bring about a theophany; it is typical for obtaining the name’s power in the Psalms: “My help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (LXX Psalm 123:8). The authors of the New Testament knew the name’s power, as for example: “At *the name* of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven on earth and under the earth” (Philippians 2:10).²¹ Consequently, the overshadowing of Mary (the Ark) through the archangel Gabriel is understood by the fact that the Lord’s name is “in him [Jesus].”²² Later, in the New Testament, we will see the name saves in traditional language, as for example: “I will make an epiclesis (ἐπικαλέσομαι) to the Lord and I will be saved” (LXX Psalm 17:3)?

The name Gabriel translates into “power of God,” appropriately qualifying him to explain to Mary what is “the power of the Most High” (Luke 1:35). Gabriel is also associated with creation in Jewish literature.²³ What is more, popular Christian literature of the second century (e.g. *The Ascension of Isaiah*) carried on tradition that Gabriel functioned as “the Angel of the Holy Spirit.”²⁴ Lastly, Gabriel is significant, within inter-testamental Jewish literature, for “overseeing the cherubim” (1 Enoch 20:7). It is possible that 1 Enoch exercised influence on the Evangelist Luke (1 Enoch 48:4; cf. Luke 2:32). Also, Raymond Brown notes that Luke appears to be aware of the Gospel of John’s Word-theology and its theophanic accounts of Christ “the Word,” whose flesh is the Temple (John 1:14; 2:19).²⁵ John’s Word-theology supposes that Jesus is the Word, who made an angel-like descent, was clothed, as the Ark had been clothed in skin-flesh, and claimed that –if his body be destroyed (like the first Temple?)– he will be resurrected like the second Temple(?). Conspicuously, as the Ark of the *first* Temple disappeared or “arose to its place” (LXX 2 Chronicles 6:41; Psalm 131:8); so too will the enfleshed Word (of God) clothed in the tent (skin) and its Ark (Mary [!]).

¹⁹ Gabriel and Mary’s statements signify the eternity or creative effectiveness of God’s “word” in Luke 1:37-8. This Jewish doctrine was upheld in Ps 103; 148, emphasized in 1 Enoch 69.

²⁰ Gieschen, *Anthropomorphic Christology*, 74.

²¹ See also: “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31); “Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20).

²² This is word play in the Hebrew. When God sends his angel and puts his “name in him” (Exodus 23:20). Known angels (Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael) not only announce the presence of God but the last syllable in each of their names (*el*) means “God.”

²³ Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 133-4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 231.

²⁵ Brown, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 120.

2. Earliest Christian Observations about Luke’s *Marian* Gospel: “Mary, **Be Propitious!**”

Origen significantly affirmed a common early exegesis of Luke 1:35, wherein “the Power of the Most High” signifies Jesus the Son,²⁶ who performs a self-incarnation and sending his “overshadowing” Spirit on Mary.²⁷ Origen of Alexandria identified (c. 222) Christ with Old Testament Wisdom sent into the world, just as we saw with Jews and their literature.²⁸ Origen additionally asserted (c. 233) that Son-who-is-Power-of-YHWH and his Spirit were reducible to distinct powers of God.²⁹ Lastly, Origen was extremely attentive to Greek LXX vocabulary. After thoroughly investigating Origen’s *Homilies on Luke* and his *On First Principles* and commentary on *Song of Songs*, Emmanuel Hirschauer convincingly concludes:³⁰

Quoting and interpreting Lk 1:35, it seems that Origen distinguishes the overshadowing of the Most High and the very shadow of Christ...We say that the “overshadowing of the Most High” is precisely the overshadowing of the *Power* of the Most High, that is, the overshadowing of the Son himself, the Word... Origen’s interpretation supposes “overshadowing” (ἐπισκίασις = ἐπισκιάζω) to be the function proper to a divine person. Besides the overshadowing of the Ark in Exodus 40, Origen referred to other passages of overshadowing in the Greek Bible used by Luke (LXX).³¹ First, let’s quote the Psalm 117 in the Greek:

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we have blessed you. The Lord God **has appeared (ἐπέφανεν)** to us. Organize together the festal procession in protective **overshadowing [of cloud]** (πυκάζουσιν) up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will confess you; you are my God, and I will exalt you. (LXX Ps 117:26-29)

²⁶ Origen supposes 1 Corinthians 1:24: ‘Christ the power of God.’ For Origen’s explicit doctrine, see Farag, “Δύναμις,” 64.

²⁷ Hirschauer, “Origen’s Interpretation of Lk 1:35: ‘The Power of the Most High will Overshadow You,’” *Scrinium* 4 (2008), 34. Even Athanasius’ *Epistles*, relying on Origen, continue this exegesis of Luke 1:35. See Johnson, “The Archaic Nature of the Sanctus,” 89-90.

²⁸ Hirschauer, “Origen’s Interpretation of Lk 1:35,” 36.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

³¹ Origen, *Selecta in Psalmos (fragmenta e catenis)* (PG vol. 12, col. 1585).

Notice the presence of “the name of the Lord” and “the house of the Lord” as in Luke chapter 1:

[Verse 26:] “Blessed is he who comes, etc.” The Evangelists also extracted this phrase to be a prophecy about Christ...who “comes in the name of the Lord”...He is not indifferent about angels who come as the Lord’s servants...and each of the angels says...”The Lord sent (ἀπέστειλέ) me.” Yet, he is who comes “in the name of the Lord” and has been blessed. [Verse 27:] “The Lord God too has appeared to us, etc”...His act of coming is not to change place, but **to be manifest** (ἐπιφανῆναι). Now, he exists invisible, formerly unseen. By the fact that he is the icon of the unseen God, after he took the form of a slave [cf. Phil 2], the Word became flesh, was seen, so that –after having appeared thus– he might lead us back through this knowledge to behold unto his **glory**, i.e., ‘the **glory** of the Only begotten from the Father, full (πλήρης) of grace and truth.’ [Verse 28:] ‘Organize together the festal procession among overshadowing branches (ἐν τοῖς πυκάζουσιν), etc’...These ‘**overshadowing**’ (πυκάζοντα) items carry leafy branches and fruit...He says that the Cherubim ‘**overshadow**’ (ἐπισκιάζοντα) **the propitiation/mercy seat (τὸ ἱλαστήριον)**. This is the meaning of ‘πυκάζουσι,’ for ‘πυκάζειν means ‘to cover’ (σκέπειν). The Cherubim covered (ἔσκεπον) with their wings the **propitiation/mercy seat**. (Ps 117:26-29 *Fragments*)

Also notice that the notion of **appearance** is an Angel-of-the-Lord moment, known as a theophany or epiphany. Origen’s exegesis is hardly superficial.³² Though the Masoretic Text only supposes the (**theophanic**) **appearance** of light and procession of palms in hand, the Greek LXX correctly interprets the original Hebrew as a full-fledged theophany; a normal meaning of πυκάζω in Greek is to cast a protective shadow or to cover. Origen is on solid ground when he associates this meaning with the Psalm, since **theophanic** elements include: “the name of the Lord,” “overshadowing-covering,” and **manifestation**. *This is rather amazing! This would explain why Luke’s Gospel transitions from Mary the Ark and the **Mercy Seat** of YHWH to Jesus’s passion and descent into Jerusalem where they shout and process like Psalm 117 unto the altar of Jesus’s sacrifice under overshadowing branches singing: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”* This moment reminds us of the overshadowing presence of the “power of the Most High” (Jesus) in Mary’s womb in Luke chapter 1 (Jesus is overshadowed by branches as the altar during procession to Jerusalem!) as now is sung at the transformation of bread and wine (like Mary’s womb) into the body and blood of Jesus at the Mass during the Eucharistic prayer.

Above, Origen recognized the pedigree of the (two) metaphorical Cherubim claiming that these “overshadowing” (ἐπισκιάζοντα) angels have the identity of the two Cherubim of Exodus 40, who are the only beings otherwise overshadowing (συσκιάζοντα) according to the Luke’s source, the Greek Old Testament (LXX). Origen knew also that Hebrews 9:1-5 parallels Luke 1:35. The implications are obvious when comparing the texts:

³² If Origen’s authorship questions remain, the passage reflects exactly Origen’s *mens* and Alexandrian tradition. See *Corpus Christianorum Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, ed. M. Geerard (vol 1; Turnhout 1983), 153 (# 1427). NB, Athanasius, *Exposition on Psalm 117* (PG 27, col. 476, 480): “It is necessary that the help be prayed to by calling on the name/epiclesis (ἐπικαλεῖσθαι), who is the enfleshed Word of God...aid sent along from heaven...”

This is ominously eucharistic; Athanasius later repeats Origen’s doctrine of verses 27-9: “He fills the divine tent (σκηνή)... of the altar (θυσιαστηρίου)... while Cherubim **overshadowing** (πυκάζοντα)... **overshadowing the propitiation/mercy seat**...i.e., ‘to cover’ (σκέπειν). The Cherubim were covering **the propitiation/mercy seat** with their wings.”

LXX Exodus 25:20-2:	Epistle to the Hebrews 9:1-5 (cf. Ex 40):
Two Cherubim will stretch out their wings from above, together overshadowing (συσκιάζοντες) with their wings the propitiation/mercy seat , and their faces toward one another... The Cherubim's faces will be in the direction of the propitiation/mercy seat ... Place the mercy seat from above onto the Ark and place into the Ark the tablets of the Law... I will be known by you from that place above the propitiation/mercy seat in the middle of two Cherubim, who are upon the Ark...just as I myself ordered.	Now, the first tent (σκηνή) was prepared in which there was the lampstand, and the table, and the proposition of breads, called the holy things. Then, afterward, the second curtain, called the tent (σκηνή), i.e., the Holy of Holies, which holds the golden altar and the Ark of the Covenant (τὴν κιβωτὸν τῆς διαθήκης), which has been covered from everywhere in gold, in which a gold vessel holds the manna and in which is the rod of Aaron, which sprouted forth, and the tablets...Yet, over the Ark (αὐτῆς) were glory's Cherubim (Χερουβείν δόξης), who 'overshadows' (κατασκιάζοντα) the propitiation/mercy seat .

Origen knew and affirmed Hebrews as essentially Pauline and Scriptural. Hence, calling the two Cherubim of the Ark the divine Son and Spirit is scripturally justified by him. The Epistle to the Hebrews intensifies the phraseology of Exodus 40. "Glory's Cherubim" implies that "cherubic" is a characteristic of divinity. This description perfectly harmonizes with Hebrews' participle (*κατασκιάζοντα*) describing the Cherubim as intensely overshadowing the Ark. "Overshadowing/*Kataskios* (*Κατάσκιος*, -ον)" is a more sacrosanct Greek Old Testament (LXX) term than "overshadow together (*συσκιάζω*)." For example, the Prophet Zachariah underwent a full theophany with an Angel of the Lord "in him," where he saw a man riding a fiery horse between *two* mountains that casted a shadow over him.³³ The Epistle to the Hebrews interprets the Cherubim of Exodus 40 like the two divine mountains that overshadow "the man" (Jesus), mentioned above. This is transferred to Luke 1:35, for Gabriel's heralds the divine presence at the Annunciation, just as Zachariah's Angel of the Lord (YHWH?) who had been "in" the Prophet.³⁴

Inspired by the famous phrase: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,"³⁵ Luke associates this phrase with Jesus having angelic wings as Angel-of-the-Lord.³⁶ Therefore,

³³ Zachariah 1:8-10:

I (Zachariah) saw the night and, behold, a man rode upon a fiery horse and this man stood in the middle of two mountains (ὄρέων) shadowing over (κατασκιάζων) him and behind him multitudinous white horses...And the angel in me was speaking, he said: 'I will show you...' The man, who stood, answered in the middle of the mountains and said to me: 'These are the horses whom the Lord sent out (ἐξάπεσταλκεν) to patrol the earth.'

³⁴ A singular New Testament instance of ἐπισκιάζω records non-divine Peter bearing his 'overshadowing shadow' (Acts 5:12). Peter patrols the Temple vicinity. Knowing his route, invalids lie in his path hoping that Peter's 'shadow' (σκιά) 'overshadow' (ἐπισκιάση) them with marvels. This perhaps fulfills Zachariah 1:8-10, where the divine man sent his horses, themselves under overshadowing of two mountains, to patrol the earth. *Acts* 5 reports Peter, as 'angel of death,' to Ananias and Sapphira (as horses in LXX Zachariah 1:11). Afterward, Peter brings fear on the assembly in a phrase common to angelophany. At any rate, Peter has no role as Mary (Ark), but he possesses a shadow casting a shadow within a Temple motif. For the Jewish belief in Apostles as angels (cf. Isaiah 6:6), see Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 176-80.

³⁵ Another mention of ἐπισκιάζω in LXX has an epiclesis/calling on the name of YHWH's saving presence: "Lord, Lord, my salvation's power, who overshadowed (ἐπεσκίασας) upon my head in the day of war."

³⁶ Cf. Mt. 21:9; 23:39, Mk. 11:9, Lk. 13:35. Jesus attributed wings to himself as angel: "on his lower back he **will overshadow** (ἐπισκιάσει) you, and under his **wings** (τὰς πτέρυγας) will you hope" (LXX Psalm 90:4). Clearly, this angelic figure brings to mind the winged cherubim. Hence, this angel of the Lord

Origen perfectly interprets the ideas behind Luke chapter 1. After Mary’s Visitation and Elizabeth’s prophetic response, Mary then proclaims:

Proverbs 18:11-12:	Luke 1:46-54:
The name of the Lord is from great power (μεγαλωσύνης). The just (δίκαιοι)... are exalted (ὕψοῦνται)...the substance of a rich man is a strong city (πόλις ὀχυρά) and its glory overshadows (ἐπισκιάζει) mightily... man’s heart is exalted (ὕψοῦται) and he is humbled (ταπεινοῦται) before glory ...	My soul magnifies (μεγαλύνει) the Lord (cf. overshadowing ; Luke 1:35)... and my spirit has rejoiced in regard for God my savior because he looked upon the humility of his handmaid... and his name is blessed... he made the kingly power [of David’s sovereignty = city] (κράτος) in his right arm... he has scattered about the prideful in the considerations of their hearts ...He has cast down the powerful from their thrones and exalted (ὑψώσεν) the humble (ταπεινοῦς).

Mary seems to expand on the overshadowing of God in Proverbs. Only the mythically-divine or falsely-divine overshadowing of the rich man opposes Mary’s poor but divine overshadowing in humility.³⁷ Thus, Luke applies this lesson from Mary in chapter 1 of Luke to the rule of prayer and its value later when recounting the story of the Pharisee and humble tax collector:

Two men went up into the Temple... The Pharisee stood praying to himself [**in his heart**]: “O God, I thank you that I am not like others...as this tax collector...I always tithe from as **much [riches]** as I own.” Now, the tax collector stood afar off. He did not wish to raise his eyes unto heaven but struck his breast, saying [**in his heart**]: “O God, be **propitious (ἰλάσθητι)** to me the sinner.”³⁸ I tell you, this one went down [from the Temple] **justified** ...because each **who exalts himself** (ὁ ὑψῶν ἑαυτὸν), **will be humbled** (ταπεινωθήσεται), but he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 18:10-14)

Luke records Mary’s *Magnificat* (occurring at Jesus’ embryonic life in utero of Mary) to inspire Jesus’s adult parable so that Mary’s prophetic liturgical hymn, its vocabulary, and phraseology, are Jesus’s very paradigm for explaining acceptable Temple worship. Mary exemplifies an acceptable “thanks/eucharist” to God, for the tax collector asks for forgiveness “at **the propitiation/mercy seat** of the Ark” in the Temple. The tax collector says before the place of the **propitiation/mercy seat**: “Be **propitious**” or “**ἰλάσθητι**” before the place where the Ark (now missing should be). What is happening here? If we turn to Luke’s source for Ark language, then the tax collector takes refuge in the **propitiation** of the Ark of the Covenant. Turning to 1 Kings 5 (LXX) we find the following:

(Cherub) prefigures Christ.

³⁷ This is perhaps an expansion of the evil overshadowing that is associated with false cult (aka fornication) in which three sacred trees, or at least one, cast a shadow of false cult (Hos 4:13; Jer 2:20; Ez 20:28).

³⁸ Exegetes notice the *hapax legomenon* (**be propitious; ἰλάσθητι**) of the New Testament is referred to in Luke 23:48, after a centurion declares Jesus innocent, when the crowds respond by finally “beating their breasts.” In this scene the women and true disciples appear “at a distance,” but they are not beating their breasts, presumably because they are already “just” or “justified” (viz., innocent) at **the propitiation/mercy seat** of the Cross. The Evangelist echoes Paul (Romans 3:25) and Hebrews 9:5 referring to the cross as the **mercy seat (ἰλαστήριον)** of redemption. The LXX contains only three such imperatives: (a.) from a prayer (τῆς δεήσεως) for mercy in a liturgical epiclesis (ὕμνωμέν σου τὸ ὄνομα) (Ezras 4:17), (b.) from a prayer of forgiveness in an epiclesis of “the name of **glory**” (LXX Ps 79:9), and (c.) from the epicletic prayer in the ‘LXX’ of Theodotion: “Make (ποίησον) this...o my God, since your name has been called (ἐπικέκληται) upon the city and upon the people” (LXX Daniel 9:19).

The hand of the Lord came against the city (πόλει)...They sent out (ἐξαποστέλλουσιν) the Ark of God...so that it entered into Askalon and they **cried aloud** (ἐβόησαν)... Send out the Ark of God to Israel... and it went down unto its place...and a **cry** (ἡ κραυγή) arose in the city toward heaven...Certainly, do not send the Ark out **empty** (κενήν)... then you will be healed, and [sin] will be **propitiated** (ἐξιλασθήσεται)... For what do you weigh your hearts down, as Egypt and Pharaoh weighed down their heart?

Notice that Mary's hymn in Luke chapter 1 or *Magnificat* is about those sent away empty like Pharaoh's people at the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. Also, the notions of **crying aloud** and **crying** could be the same kind of activity associated with the reception of Jesus with overshadowing branches in Jerusalem (Palm Sunday). More importantly, it is gifts and offerings before the Ark that are a **propitiation** acceptable to God. The inference in Luke's Gospel is that the Ark of the Covenant (viz., Mary) in chapter 1 is a **propitiation** as sinners, like unto the tax collector in Luke 18. Prayer in front of the place (though empty) where the Ark should be, though it has arisen into the heavens like the Psalm, is able to obtain reconciliation, peace, and divine favor. The inference made from this is to offer gifts to Mary in prayer, and even symbolic offerings of gifts, to obtain from YHWH **propitiation/mercy seat** after the time of the Incarnation (Luke 1:35). It is exactly in this light of the aforementioned interpretation of Scripture that –as early as the fourth (if not fifth century)– we see Ephrem (*graecus*) composing this prayer to Mary as the Ark:

O inexhaustible sea of all divinely-worthy charisms and marvels: We beseech and pray you: “**Be propitious**’ (ἰλάσθητι) to us” o most sympathetic Mother of the Lord lover of mankind “who are **humble** (ταπεινοῦς)’ and your unworthy servants.”³⁹

Only three times in the Old Testament does this petition: “**be propitious**” get used (LXX Esther 4:17; Psalm 78:9; Daniel 9:19), but only by appealing to God's “name.” The only time “**be propitious**” is associated to “**humble/humility**” is once in the New Testament of Luke 18. Obviously, Luke's singular use of this rarest of imperatives was taken up by the Fathers, starting with Ephrem (*graecus*), to petition the New Ark or Mary, to intercede like prayers and gifts before the Old Ark had been able; with Mary we do not leave empty-handed but with the mercy, reconciliation, and peace of YHWH!

3. Mary and the Transfiguration: Understanding Mary in Luke's Transfigured Jesus

Origen elsewhere finds Biblical interpretations of this **propitiation/mercy seat**-Ark to Mary useful for all Christians, where Christians participate in Mary's overshadowing. There is a nebulous or “cloudy overshadowing (νεφέλη ἐπισκιάζουσα)” of persons at the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor. This is an occasion for Christians to finally participate in Mary's (Luke chapter 1) Annunciation experience.⁴⁰ The Transfiguration leads to Peter the Apostle to suggest

³⁹ Ephrem the Syrian, *Prayer 11*, in *Ὁσίου Ἐφραίμου τοῦ Σύρου ἔργα*, vol. 6, ed. K.G. Phrantzoles (Thessalonica: To Perivoli tis Panagias, 1995), 411.

⁴⁰ Origen, *Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei*, in *Origenes Werke*, vol. 10.2, ed. E. Klostermann (*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller* 40.1-40.2; Leipzig: Teubner, 1937), bk. 12.42. Compare *Didache*, in *Prax Euch.*, 66: ‘Give thanks as follows: “Father...on behalf of your holy **name**, which you **pitched a tent** (κατεσκήνωσας) in our hearts...to you **glory** forever” (εις τοῦς αἰῶνας)!’ Jesus promises that prudent servants will have “eternal tents”: “εις τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς” (Lk 16:9). Christian tent-experience (theophany) fulfills the Mosaic type of theophany (κατὰ τὸν τύπον ὃν ἐώρακεῖ = Acts 7:44; cf. Hebrews 8:5), whereupon Moses ordered the people of God into tents. The Word is the new tent-theophany (John

building **tents** around Mary's **tent** (the Ark: Jesus is flanked on his seat by two beings: Moses and Elijah substituting for the Cherubim!). She is the New Testament Ark and **tent** to experience the overshadowing and blinding light. However, Moses and Elijah, though appearing as if they are the divine Cherubim of the Son and Spirit symbolized by the overshadowing wings on the Ark, are clearly not divine, for the **overshadowing** on Tabor clearly comes from the Father's cloud directly and not from Moses or Elijah who flank Jesus. This shows an important distinction between divinity and humanity. Only two times does the New Testament use the exact word: "overshadow," and the Fathers saw that Mary is the culmination of Old Testament overshadowing of the divinity in her womb, while the Transfiguration is our chance, like the apostles, to experience overshadowing outside of any womb in an experience of the living and glorified Christ on the mountain. This experience is like the Annunciation where Mary was the **propitiation/mercy seat**.

Origen recognized that Mary was prefigured or hinted at in the Old Testament references to overshadowing and that she fulfills what was lacking in Old Testament liturgical worship. She provides **propitiation/mercy** or forgiveness, as did the Ark, among Christians who imitate her and model themselves upon her. Origen sees the Ark to have upon it the concelebrating (ἐπισκιάζοντα) Cherubim, whom he identifies as in the Jewish tradition of Philo the Jew (going back to the 40s AD) as divine "angels (sent beings from heaven and the Father) of the Son and Spirit, i.e., of two divine powers in Luke 1:35, who had been prefigured in Exodus 40. Origen was attentive to the Greek vocabulary:⁴¹

These Seraphim that stand around God, who only say mentally: "Holy, holy, holy," guard the mystery of the Trinity, since they are themselves holy...Who are these two Seraphim...**this Seraph was my Lord Jesus Christ, who is sent by the Father...**He came that you might know the unity of the divine Trinity...(Homily on Isaiah 1.2)⁴²

Origen additionally confirms his interpretation of the Greek LXX by Habakkuk:

In the midst of *two* living beings (ζώων) he shall be known...God will arrive from Temon and the holy one is of the **overshadowing** (κατασκίου) forest. (Habakkuk 3:1-2)

1:14; ἐσκηνοσεν ἐν ἡμῖν), who give participation in overshadowing; namely, we dwell in desert-tents awaiting glory to show itself. Jesus came to the remnant of the fallen, olden "tent of David" after it made an "epiclesis/calling of the name" (Acts 15:16-7). God restores human tent-participation in glory at Transfiguration (σκηνάς τρεῖς = Lk 9:33; cf. Mt 17:4; Mk 9:5). After death, as a type for us, Christ's flesh in the tomb "pitches a tent in hope" to see God's face (Acts 2:26). Whence, Paul asserts that our earthly "tent" (bodies) pass away but we enter the heavenly "house not-made-by-human-hands" (anagogical tent-Temple fulfillment) (2 Corinthians 5:1; cf. Hebrews 8:2-5, 9:11). As "tentmaker" (Acts 18:3), Paul makes for us glory! When eschatological Jesus 'on the throne' places his tent in the saints (σκηνώσει ἐπ' αὐτούς), he pastures them from the heavenly throne forever (Revelation 7:15-7). After all, whoever meritoriously "pitches tents," is like "winged birds [angels] of heaven" (Luke 9:58, 13:19; cf. Matthew 8:20, 13:32; Mk 4:32).

⁴¹ Bucur suggests "Isaiah saw his glory" (John 12:41) means Jesus to sit on the throne. In light of John 12:44-45, I suggest that Jesus is the glory of the Father (John 1), i.e. sent-glory. The throne may be the Father's, while the glory and sent-Seraph of Isaiah might be thought of as the same kind of complementarity as when YHWH's "name" is "in" a sent-angel. Justin, Irenaeus, and Clement, and Eusebius of Caesarea, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, and Jerome have all been found to designate Jesus as the one on the throne. See Bogdan Bucur, "I saw the Lord": Observations on the Christian Reception History of Isaiah 6," *Pro Ecclesia* 23 (2014), 310-1.

⁴² Origen, *Homily on Isaiah*, translated by Bucur, "I saw the Lord", 316.

Origen asserts: “We think...the expression which occurs in Habakkuk...ought to be understood of Christ and the Holy Spirit” (*On First Principles* 1.3.4).⁴³ In view of Zachariah 1:8-10, Origen described two overshadowing mountains over “the man upon a fiery horse.” In Habakkuk, the Lord shall be recognized from his coming out of a shady-forest between two beings. Again, the dual mountains have an application to the two beings coming to Mary in Luke 1:35. Origen’s view of Isaiah’s prophecy of the Incarnation (Luke 1:35) notes the divinely good versus evil overshadowings in contrast to each other in the Old Testament:

Nephalim beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles...people walking in darkness, you see a great light! A light will shine on you, the dwellers in the country and in **the shadow** (σκιά) of death...because a child was born to you and a son was given to you, whose sovereignty is upon his shoulder, and his name is called ‘angel of Good Counsel’⁴⁴...His sovereignty is mighty and there is no limit to his peace upon the throne of David and his kingdom...from now unto the epic time. The fervor of the Lord Sabaoth will do these things. (LXX Isaiah 9:1-6)

Origen’s commentaries explicitly contrasted Mary’s overshadowing in Luke 1:35 to “the shadow of death” in the prophecies of the Old Testament (cf. Luke 1:79; Matthew 4:16).⁴⁵ Furthermore, his exegesis of Isaiah 6:1-6 harmonizes with the sent-Seraphim (Isaiah 6) and the “Angel of Great Counsel” (Isaiah 9:6) to be sent to Galilee beyond the Jordan. The light (of the star; Matthew 2:2) and angelic theophany (to the shepherds; Luke 2:8-15) betoken the child born. Origen is justified to assume that the Father is “the Lord’ in both Isaiah and Habakkuk, given the fact that the Lord Sabaoth sends the child. In short, Origen’s understanding of the Old Testament boasts of a consistency to interpret prophecy with ease.

For Philo the Jew in the 40s AD the two Seraphim of Isaiah 6:3 are also, like Origen, angels of Ezekiel. In fact, in light of Origen’s exegesis of Habakkuk’s two “living beings,” we may have the key to understand a sort of Biblical formula symbolically: 2 Seraphim = 2 Cherubim = 2 living creatures:

The spirit took me up and I heard from behind me the sound of mighty earthquake, “Blessed the glory of the Lord from his place.” I also saw the voice of winged living beings fluttering, the first [sounding] to second... (Ezekiel 3:12-13)

The Jewish and Christian tradition, as Bogdan Bucur notes, saw the angels of Ezekiel to be accompanying and holding up the cherubim-throne.⁴⁶ This accounts for the different representations of these two beings in Isaiah, Habakkuk, and Ezekiel. Combined with Jesus’s identity as “Angel of Great Council” (Seraphim) in Isaiah 9:6, Christ vocation is to be “sent” directly from the cherubic throne as the Father’s glory. Therefore, when Origen uses the participle **overshadowing** (ἐπισκιάζοντα) to talk about the Old Testament two Cherubim (Ps 117), he properly associates them with the dual Seraphim, and dual “living beings,” i.e., Ezekiel’s Cherubim. Lastly, the prophecy of the Incarnation (Isaiah 9:6) removes all shade (σκιά) of the Old Testament paganism (compare: Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5, 10:1), while the prophecies of a theophanic “Angel of the Lord” (Jesus) are fulfilled with the incarnate Angel of Good Counsel or “manifestation” of the divinity to Mary womb.

⁴³ Bucur, “I saw the Lord,” 314.

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.* MT: ‘wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, prince of peace.’

⁴⁵ Hirschauer, ‘Origen’s Interpretation of Luke 1:35,’ 41.

⁴⁶ Bucur, “I saw the Lord,” 313-4.

4. Origen’s Biblical Origin for the term *Theotokos*: Hints in Proclus of Constantinople

Proclus of Constantinople (c. 431) exclaimed about the formally defined doctrine of *Theotokos*:

She is the new **wagon** (ἄμαξα; see below!) of the faithful, which is carrying the ensouled **Ark** (κιβωτὸν; see below!) of the [incarnate] economy by means of her **cows bearing only first born sons** (διὰ τῶν δαμάλεων, πρωτοτοκουσῶν; see below!); (sons) of the two covenants, directed toward the unending path of salvation. She is the **tent** (σκηνὴ) of witness, whence Jesus, being the youth who came forth, after the nine-month time of embryonic existence.⁴⁷

Whence is this doctrine of Mary as **heifer** and as a **wagon** and the Ark? Origen’s works must have inspired Proclus, for he was first to employ the term “Godbearer (*Theotokos*)” from seeing the relation between “Mother of God” and “Ark of God.” Origen’s exegesis of Luke chapter 1 strengthens this possibility. The word: *Theotokos* is based upon the Greek Old Testament (LXX), where Origen first used the word “**bear** (*tok-*)” to speak of a divinely seedless pregnancy:

1 Kings, chapters 5-7 (<i>passim</i>):	Origen’s Commentary on Luke 1:
<p>The hand of the Lord came against the city (πόλις)...They sent out (ἐξαποστέλλουσιν) the Ark of God...so that it entered into Askalon and they cried aloud (ἐβόησαν)...Send out the Ark of God to Israel... and it went down unto its place...and a cry (ἡ κραυγὴ) arose in the city toward heaven... Certainly, do not send the Ark out empty (κενήν)... then you will be healed, and [sin] will be propitiated (ἐξιλασθήσεται)... For what do you weigh your hearts down, as Egypt and Pharaoh weighed down their heart? ...Make a new wagon and two heifer-bearers of firstlings (βόας πρωτοτοκούσας)...Yoke the heifers on the wagon and lead the offspring (τὰ τέκνα), behind them, home (εἰς οἶκον)... The heifers made straight on the way (κατεύθυναν ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ)...they walked (ἐπορεύοντο)...and the Lord’s Ark shall arise (ἀναβήσεται) from you and they send angels toward the dwellers...and they lead the Ark of the Lord’s Covenant and lead it into the house of Aminadab on the mountain (ἐν τῷ βουνῷ).</p>	<p>Elizabeth was prophetically calling out (ἀνεβόα)... at the time the Mother of Jesus came...It was necessary that blessed Mary, who was ascending (ἀναβαίνουσαν), after the advent-dwelling of Gabriel, went up (ἀναβῆναι) onto the mountain (ἐπὶ τὴν ὄρεινὴν). She walked went with haste, led by the Spirit in her, who came upon her (ἐπεληλύθει), when overshadowing (ἐπισκιάζης) her and there was the power of the Most High. ... [Luke 1:43] ‘Whence to me this; namely, that the Mother [of my Lord] come [to me], etc.?’ Elizabeth utters loudly in harmony with her son, for she says that she is unworthy of the Theotokos, who is come (τῆς παρουσίας τῆς Θεοτόκου)...She again calls the Virgin, ‘Mother,’ anticipating, through prophetic discourse, the accomplishment...Elizabeth was convinced, and her own paradoxical conception that was seen in her...according to voice of the angel...that Elizabeth believe more strongly...I assert, that the childbirth (τοκετόν), from the very same Virgin, was seedless (ἄσπορον).⁴⁸</p>

Like Proclus later understands, Origen’s Old Testament exegesis inferred for Christians the term “Godbearer’ (**Θεοτόκος**)” to be applicable to Mary. If Mary is “Mother of the Lord” and “Mother of Jesus,” then she is “Mother of God” as transferred from 2 Samuel 6: “Ark of God.” Origen’s comments on Luke 1 never mentions explicitly: “**God** (**Θεός**),” as in **Theo-tokos**. How did he plausibly apply the new term ‘**Θεο-τόκος**’ (and how did Proclus see the connection)? The Old Testament provides familiar passages as the background to Luke chapter 1. Luke 1:26 might rename “city (πόλις)” above as town, which appears evocative of the Ark’s city travels in 1 Kings

⁴⁷ Proclus, *Laudatio (de) genetricis Mariae*, in *L’homilétique de Proclus de Constantinople*, ed. F.J. Leroy, Studi e Testi 247 (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1967), 17.8-9

⁴⁸ Origen, *Comments on Luke* (PG 17: cols. 321).

5-7. God’s strong arm crushing a bad city is reminiscent of the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:51). There, Mary refers to God “scattering them in their hearts,” which corresponds to Egypt’s and Pharaoh’s weighed down heart, just as mentioned above. The theme of “being sent out” is properly what God does with angels, and now with the Ark. Origen’s paradigm seems to be as follows: **bearing a first-born** (πρωτοτοκοῦσα) = **bearing God** (θεοτόκος). “Mother of God” is not exactly “Theotokos/Θεοτόκος” that is “begetter/bearer of God.” The Ark in 1 Kings acts as if it is the Angel of destruction, or Angel of blessing, depending on people’s merits and place in which they live. Origen’s vocabulary in his comments on Luke or *Scholia in Lucam* betray his likely sources for replacing the Elizabeth’s “she said (εἶπεν)” (Lk 1:42) – inspired by 1 Kings’ “**she shouted** (ἐβόησαν)” – with the similar “**she shouted out** (ἀνεβόα).” The command not to send out the Ark “empty” (μὴ...ἐξαποστείλητε...κενήν) appears in the *Magnificat*: “He has sent out the rich ‘empty’” (ἐξαπέστειλεν κενούς) (Lk 1:51). Whereas afflicted people send the Ark away with precious items, Pharaoh and Egypt had weighted down the Hebrews’ wagons with treasure. The fact that by gifts to the Ark, above, “[sin] will be **propitiated** (ἐξιλασθήσεται)” explains the inspiration for Luke’s “**ἰλάσθητι**” (Luke 18: **Propitiation!**) in the tax collector’s prayer for **propitiation** by praying before the space that should contain the Ark. Also Mary (Luke 1:56), like the Ark, went to “her home.”

The heifer-bearers, just as Mary to Elizabeth, go “straight away” to their destination (Luke 1:39; μετὰ σπουδῆς) (eventually Obededom). Each **heifer has firstborn offspring** (πρωτότοκόν τεκνον). As Mary goes (ἐπορεύθη) unto the hill country (εἰς τὴν ὄρεινὴν), so do the heifers lead the Ark. Curiously, the passage of Luke does not employ: “**I go up** (ἀναβαίνω)” for Mary’s ascent but Origen uses 1 Kings term, “**She arose** (ἀναστᾶσα).”⁴⁹ Origen opts for other vocabulary in his comments on Mary, in Luke, reminiscent of 1-2 Kings and the Ark. Hence, “*Theotokos*,” as likely invented by Origen (or better first applied by Origen to the Christian Mary) might derive from “the Ark of God” described by the sacred heifer-bearers of the Ark, who bring the lost Ark back to Israel. Philologically, the Greek term is not original to Christians (nor is μήτηρ τοῦ θεοῦ) but is apt, given the language of 1-2 Kings.

“*Theotokos*” appears as an uncontroversial term in Origen’s published writings. If we combine the multiple fragments of Origen’s works,⁵⁰ the testimony of Socrates (d. 450),⁵¹ and burgeoning evidence for a third-century date of the Marian prayer: “Underneath your refuge (*Sub tuum praesidium*),”⁵² scholars appear cautiously optimistic about a third-century origin of

⁴⁹ Luke’s strange use of ‘to rise up’ in place of *Kings*’ typological ‘to go up’ is not random. Luke merely calls to mind Mary’s identity as Ark from another source: “Arise (ἀνάστηθι), Lord, into your rest, you and the Ark of your holiness (LXX Psalm 131:8).”

⁵⁰ Scholars generally hesitate to affirm any of the half-dozen fragments mentioning employing title. See John McGuckin, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville KY: Westminster, 2004), s.v. “Mary.”

⁵¹ Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 4 vol., in *Socrate de Constantinople, Histoire ecclésiastique* (bk 1-7), ed. P. Maraval and P. Périchon (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2004-2007), 7.32.14: “Origen openly examined in the first tome on Paul the Apostle’s Epistle to the Romans how ‘Theotokos’ is predicated.”

⁵² For a new evidence and commentary, see M. Francesca Perilla, “*Sub tuum praesidium*: Incomparable Marian Encomium,” in *MFC*, 138-69: 140: “[ὕ]πὸ τὴν σὴν εὐσπλαγγνίαν, καταφεύγομεν, Θεοτόκε· τὰς ὑμῶν] ἱκεσίας...”

“*Theotokos*” in Greek-speaking Alexandria.⁵³ The term might simply be an application the Ark-bearing-Heifer(s) to Mary. This might sound odd to us, but Mary is identified with the Heifer of the Old Testament rituals in the famous Akathist Hymn or 6th century (or so), which Christians of the Greek East in honor of Mary and to which Proclus of Constantinople might have contributed.

⁵³ Adrien Malo, “La plus ancienne prière à Notre-Dame,” *De primordiis cultus mariani* 2 (Rome: 1970), 475-85; Gabriele Gamberardini, *Il Culto Mariano in Egitto: secoli 1-6* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975).