LIFE FOR GOD

THE INFANCY GOSPEL OF THOMAS

Reading edition

EARLY CHRISTIAN APOCRYPHA

English translation
Mark M. Mattison

Reading edition · Life for God



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About this edition

The Infancy Gospel of Thomas recounts Jesus' childhood and concludes with the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple. It survives in several recensions. This edition follows Mark M. Mattison's reading version, based principally on the Greek manuscript Hagios Saba 259 (1089/1090), with clearly marked chapters supplied from the later tradition. This is a separate work, not a continuation of the collection of 114 sayings of Thomas. The name Thomas in the prologue does not establish the historical author.

The English text reproduces Mark M. Mattison's translation, expressly dedicated to the public domain. The Russian text is a new reading translation of that English version. Chapter 19 was additionally compared with the Greek text printed by Tony Chartrand-Burke in the appendix to "Completing the Gospel" (2008, pp. 118–119). No complete collation with the Greek manuscript or independent scholarly review is claimed. Recensional differences and difficult passages are explained below.

The 19 chapters and numbered passages follow the English edition; passage number 1 has been added to the unnumbered prologue. These numbers support reading and links. Chapter 10 occurs after chapter 16 in Hagios Saba 259, while chapters 17–18 come from the later Greek tradition. Parentheses mark editorial additions; /…\ marks an editorial revision; <…> marks an unintelligible word; square brackets mark textual damage and proposed restoration.

English translation: Mark M. Mattison, Gospels.net. The translator expressly dedicated the translation to the public domain for unrestricted use and modification.

The Russian translation was prepared by Priest Sergey Koudy for Life for God.

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Sources

1. Mark M. Mattison — The Infancy Gospel of Thomas
The English source and explanation of its editorial choices. The translator expressly dedicated the translation to the public domain. Its complete English wording is retained; paragraphs are grouped under their passage numbers.

2. Tony Burke — Infancy Gospel of Thomas (NASSCAL)
Scholarly catalogue of the work's manuscripts and recensions.

3. NASSCAL — Jerusalem, Hagios Saba 259
Description of the Greek manuscript, dated 1089/1090; this work occupies folios 66r–72r.

4. Tony Chartrand-Burke — Completing the Gospel: The Infancy Gospel of Thomas as a Supplement to the Gospel of Luke (2008)
The appendix, pp. 118–119, prints the Greek text of chapter 19 from Sabaiticus 259. Consulted only for an additional check of this chapter; the author's modern English translation is not reproduced.

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Chapter 1 · Prologue

1. I, Thomas the Israelite, thought it necessary to make known to all the Gentile brothers (and sisters) all the things done by our Lord Jesus Christ in the village of Nazareth, after he was born in our region of Bethlehem. This is the beginning: [1]

Chapter 2 · Jesus Makes Sparrows

1. The child Jesus was five years old. After it rained, he was playing at the ford of a flowing stream. And stirring up the dirty waters, he gathered them into pools, and he made them clean and excellent, ordering them by word alone – and not ordering them by a deed.

2. Then, having taken soft clay from the mud, he formed twelve sparrows from it. But it was the Sabbath when he did these things, and many children were with him.

3. But a certain Jew saw the child Jesus with the other children doing these things. He went to Joseph his father and slandered the child Jesus, saying that “he made clay on the Sabbath, which isn’t permissible, and formed twelve sparrows.”

4. And Joseph went and rebuked him (Jesus), saying, “Why are you doing these things on the Sabbath?”

But Jesus clapped his hands, ordering the birds with a shout in front of all, and said, “Go, take flight like living beings!” And the sparrows, taking flight, went away squawking.

5. And having seen this, the Pharisee was amazed, and he reported it to all his friends.

Chapter 3 · Jesus Curses Annas' Son

1. And the son of Annas the high priest said to him (Jesus), "Why are you doing such a thing on the Sabbath?" And having taken a willow twig, he destroyed the pools and drained the water which Jesus had gathered, and he dried up their gatherings.

2. But having seen what had happened, Jesus said to him, "Your fruit (will have) no root, and your shoot will be withered like a scorched branch in a violent wind!"

3. And immediately that child withered away. [2]

Chapter 4 · Jesus Curses a Careless Child

1. From there he was going with his father Joseph, and someone running struck his shoulder. And Jesus said to him, "Cursed be you because of your leader!"

And immediately he died.

And the people who saw that he had died immediately cried out and said, "From where was this child born, that his word becomes deed?" [3]

2. And when the parents of the dead child saw what had happened, they blamed Joseph his father, saying, "From wherever you have this child, you can't live with us in this village. If you want to be here, teach him to bless and not to curse, because our child has been taken away from us."

Chapter 5 · Joseph Confronts Jesus

1. And Joseph said to Jesus, "Why do you say such things, and they suffer and hate us?"

And the child said to Joseph, “Since you know wise words, you’re not ignorant of where they came from; /they were spoken about a five-year-old.\ And they won’t be raised, and these will receive their punishment.”

And immediately those accusing him became blind. [4]

2. And Joseph took his (Jesus’) ear and pulled hard.

3. And Jesus said to him, “It’s enough for you seek and find me, and not, beyond that, to scourge me by having taken on a natural ignorance. You haven’t clearly seen me, why I’m yours. Look! I’ve been subdued before you.”

Chapter 6 · First Teacher, Zacchaeus

1. A teacher named Zacchaeus (was) standing (there), hearing Jesus saying these things to his father Joseph, and he was very amazed.

2. And he said to Joseph, “Come, give him (to me), brother, so that he may be taught letters, and so that he may know all knowledge, and learn to love those his own age, and honor old age and respect elders, so that he may acquire a yearning for children, teaching them in return.”

3. But Joseph said to the teacher, “And who can control this child and teach him? Don’t think of him as a small person, brother.”

But the teacher said, “Give him to me, brother, and don’t let him concern you.”

4. And the child Jesus looked at them and said to the teacher this speech: “Being a teacher comes naturally to you, but you’re a stranger to the name with which you’re named, because I’m outside of you and I’m within you on account of

the nobility of my birth in the flesh. But you, a lawyer, don't know the law."

And he said to Joseph, "When you were born, I existed, standing beside you so that as a father you may be taught a teaching by me which no one else knows or can teach. And you will bear the name of salvation." [5]

5. And the Jews cried out and said to him, "Oh new and incredible wonder! The child is perhaps five years old, and oh, what words he says! We've never known such words. No one – neither a lawyer nor a Pharisee – has spoken like this child."

6. The child answered them and said, "Why are you amazed? Or rather, why don't you believe the things I've said to you? The truth is that I, who was created before this world, know accurately when you were born, and your fathers, and their fathers." [6]

7. And all the people who heard this were speechless, no longer able to talk to him. But he went up to them, skipped around, and said, "I was playing with you because I know you're small-minded, and amazed with small things."

8. Now when they seemed comforted by the child's encouragement, the teacher said to his father, "Come, bring him into the school. I'll teach him letters."

And Joseph took his hand and led him into the school. And the teacher flattered him, brought him into the school, and Zacchaeus wrote the alphabet for him and began to teach him, saying the same letter frequently. But the child didn't answer him.

And the teacher became irritated and struck him on the head.

And the child became irritated and said to him, “I want to teach you rather than be taught by you, since I know the letters you’re teaching more accurately. To me these things are like a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal that don’t bring out the sound, nor the glory, nor the power of understanding.”

9. When the child’s anger ceased, he said all the letters by himself, from the alpha to the omega, very skillfully. And looking straight at the teacher he said, “If you don’t know the nature of the alpha, how can you teach another the beta? Hypocrite! If you know, first teach me the alpha, and then I will trust you to speak of the beta.” Then he began to teach the teacher about the first element. And he couldn’t say anything to him.

10. While many listened, he said to the teacher, “Listen, Teacher, and understand the arrangement of the first element. Now, notice how it has sharp lines and a middle stroke, which you see pointing, standing with legs apart, coming together, going out, dragging behind, lifting up, dancing around, <…>, in triple rhythm, two-cornered, of the same form, of the same thickness, of the same family, raised, balanced, isometric, of equal proportions. These are the lines of the alpha.” [7]

Chapter 7 · Zacchaeus’ Lament

1. When the teacher heard such good familiarity (and) such lines of the first letter Jesus talked about, he was baffled by such teaching and his defense. And the teacher said, “Woe is me! Woe is me! I’ve been baffled and am miserable. I’ve brought shame on myself, taking on this child.

2. “Take (him) away from me, brother, because I can’t bear his gaze, nor the clarity of his word. This child is simply not of this earth. He can even tame fire! Perhaps this child existed before the creation of the world. What kind of womb bore him? What kind of mother raised him? I don’t know. Woe is me, brother! He stupefies me. My mind can’t follow him. I’ve deceived myself, thrice-unhappy as I am. I thought to gain a disciple, and I’m found having a teacher.

3. “Friends, I ponder my shame, old man that I am, that I’ve been defeated by a child. I should be cast out and die, or flee this village because of this child. I can’t be seen any longer among everyone, especially those who saw that I was defeated by a very small child. But what can I say or tell anyone about the lines of the first element? The truth is that I don’t know, friends, because I understand neither the beginning nor the end!

4. “Therefore, brother Joseph, lead him away with salvation into your house, because this child is a great thing – whether a god or an angel or whatever else I might say – I don’t know.”

Chapter 8 · Jesus’ Response

1. The child Jesus laughed and said, “Now may the barren bear fruit, the blind see, and the foolish in heart find understanding: that I’m here from above, so that I may deliver those below and call them up, just as the one who sent me to you has ordered me.”

2. And immediately all who had fallen under his curse were saved. And no one dared to provoke him from then on. [8]

Chapter 9 · Jesus Raises Zeno

1. And again, after many days, Jesus was playing with other children on a certain roof of an upstairs room. But one of the children fell and died. And the other children saw this and went into their houses. And they left Jesus alone.

2. And the parents of the child who had died came and accused Jesus, saying, “You pushed down our child!”

But Jesus said, “I didn’t push him down.”

3. And they were raging and shouting. Jesus came down from the roof and stood beside the body and cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Zeno, Zeno” – because this was his name – “Rise and say whether I pushed you down.”

And he rose and said, “No, sir.”

And they saw and were amazed.

And again Jesus said to him, “Fall asleep!”

And the parents of the child praised God and worshipped the child Jesus. [9]

Chapter 10 · Jesus Heals a Woodcutter

In Hagios Saba 259, this passage appears after Chapter 16.

1. Again, a certain young man was splitting wood into equal parts. And he split the bottom of his foot, bled out, and died. [10]

2. A commotion arose, and Jesus ran there. Forcing his way through the crowd, he seized the stricken foot, and immediately it was healed. And he said to the young man, “Go, split your wood.”

3. And the crowds saw and were amazed and said, “For he saved many souls from death, and he will continue to save all the days of his life.”

Chapter 11 · Jesus Carries Water in his Cloak

1. And the child Jesus was about seven years old, and his mother Mary sent him to fill up water. But there was a great crowd at the water cistern, and the pitcher was struck and broke.

2. But Jesus spread out the cloak he was wearing, filled it with water, and carried it to his mother. And Mary saw what sign Jesus had done. She kissed him, saying, “Lord, my God, bless our child,” because they were afraid lest someone bewitch him. [11]

Chapter 12 · Miracle of the Harvest

1. And at the time of the sowing, Joseph sowed seeds, and the child Jesus sowed one measure of wheat.

2. And his father reaped a hundred great measures. And he gave graciously to the poor and the orphans. But Joseph took from Jesus’ seeds.

Chapter 13 · Miracle of the Bed

1. Now he (Jesus) was about eight years old. And his father, being a carpenter who made ploughs and yokes, took a bed from a certain rich man so that he might make it very great and suitable. And one of the beams, called the (…), was shorter; it didn’t have the (right) length. Joseph was grieved, and didn’t know what to do.

The child came to his father and said, “Set down the two boards and line them up on your end.” [12]

2. And Joseph did just as he said to him. And the child Jesus stood at the other end and seized the short board and stretched it. And he made it equal with the other board.

And he said to his father, “Don’t grieve, but make whatever you want to.”

And Joseph embraced and kissed him, saying, “Blessed am I, that God gave this child to me.”

Chapter 14 · Second Teacher

1. And Joseph saw his (Jesus’) wisdom and understanding. He didn’t want him to be unacquainted with letters, but gave him over to another teacher.

And the teacher wrote the alphabet for him (Jesus) and said, “Say alpha.”

2. And the child said, “First you tell me what the beta is, and I’ll tell you what the alpha is.”

And the teacher became irritated and struck him. And Jesus cursed him, and the teacher fell and died.

3. And the child went into his house to his parents, and Joseph called his (Jesus’) mother and ordered her not to set him (Jesus) free from the house so that those who provoke him may not die.

Chapter 15 · Third Teacher

1. And after some days, again another teacher said to his (Jesus') father Joseph: "Come, brother, give him to me in the school so that with flattery I can teach him letters."

And Joseph said to him, "If you have courage, brother, take him with salvation."

And the teacher took the child by the hand and led him away with much fear and concern. And the child went gladly.

2. And entering the school, he (Jesus) found a book lying on the lectern. And he took it, but he didn't read what was written in it, because it wasn't from God's law. But he opened his mouth and uttered words so impressive that the teacher seated opposite heard him very gladly and encouraged him so that he might say more. And the crowd standing there was amazed at his holy words.

3. And Joseph ran quickly to the school, suspecting that this teacher was no longer inexperienced and suffered. But the teacher said to Joseph, "So that you know, brother, I indeed took your child as a disciple, but he's full of much grace and wisdom. Therefore, brother, lead him away with salvation into your house." [13]

4. And he (Jesus) said to the teacher, "Since you spoke correctly and testified correctly, the one struck down will also be saved because of you." And immediately that teacher also was saved. And taking the child, he (Joseph) led him (Jesus) away into his house. [14]

Chapter 16 · Jesus Heals James' Snakebite

1. And James went into the grove to tie up sticks so that they might make bread. And Jesus went with him. And as they were gathering the sticks, a terrible snake bit James on his hand.

2. And he was sprawled out and dying. And the child Jesus ran to James and blew on the bite, and immediately the bite was healed. And the beast was destroyed, and James was saved.

Chapter 17 · Jesus Heals a Baby

Hagios Saba 259 lacks Chapters 17 and 18. Consequently, the two chapters presented here are based on later Greek manuscripts.

1. And after these things, in Joseph's neighborhood a certain baby was sick and died. And his mother wept very much.

But Jesus heard that there was great grief and commotion, and he ran quickly. And he found the child dead, touched his chest, and said, "I say to you, baby, don't die, but live, and be with your mother."

And he (the baby) looked up immediately and laughed. And he (Jesus) said to the mother, "Take your child, give him milk, and remember me." [15]

2. And the crowd standing there was amazed, and said, "The truth is, this child is a god or an angel, because his every word becomes a deed!"

And Jesus went away again and played with the children.

Chapter 18 · Jesus Heals a Builder

Like the preceding chapter, this chapter is absent from Hagios Saba 259 and is supplied from the later Greek tradition.

1. And after some time, a building was being constructed. There was a great commotion, and Jesus got up and went there.

And seeing a man lying dead, he (Jesus) seized his (the man's) hand and said, "I tell you, man, rise and do your work." And he (the man) immediately rose and worshipped him. [16]

2. And the crowd saw and was amazed and said, "This child is from heaven, for he saved many souls from death, and he will continue to save all the days of his life."

Chapter 19 · Jesus in the Temple

1. And when Jesus was twelve years old, his parents went, according to custom, to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. But during their return, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. And his parents didn't know.

2. And assuming him to be in the traveling company, they went a day's journey and searched for him among their known relatives. And not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem and searched for him.

And after three days, they found him in the temple sitting in the middle of the teachers, and listening to them and questioning them. And those hearing him were surprised how he questioned the elders and explained the main points of the law and the riddles and the parables of the prophets. [17]

3. And his mother said to him, “Child, what have you done to us? Look, we’ve been searching for you in pain and grieving.”

And Jesus said, “Why were you looking for me? Didn’t you know that it’s necessary for me to be in the place of my Father?” [18]

4. And the scribes and the Pharisees said to Mary, “You’re the mother of this child?”

She said, “I am.”

And they said to her, “Blessed are you that the Lord God has blessed the fruit of your womb, because we’ve never seen such wisdom of praise and glory of virtue.”

5. And Jesus stood up and followed his mother from there, and was obedient to his parents. And she treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.

And Jesus advanced in wisdom and maturity and grace before God and humans. To whom be the [glory …]. [19]

Translation notes

1. 1:1 The narrator identifies himself as Thomas; this literary attribution does not establish apostolic authorship. This is not the Gospel of Thomas containing 114 sayings.

2. 3:3 “Withered” retains the plant imagery of the preceding speech. Russian does not identify a particular affected body part, since the selected English version does not do so.

3. 4:1 The reference to a “leader” is difficult. Mattison’s wording is followed without supplying an identity for that figure.

4. 5:1 The words between /…\ are a reconstruction adopted by Mattison from Reidar Aasgaard, not an unambiguous reading. The following pronouns “they” and “these” have uncertain referents.

5. 6:4 The language about being “outside” and “within” the teacher, a name and birth in the flesh is retained without an added explanation; its sense is not fully clear in the selected version.

6. 6:6 “Created before this world” follows the selected English translation. It is a character’s statement within this apocryphon, not a doctrinal definition supplied by the editor.

7. 6:10 Alpha and beta are the first Greek letters. The speech describes features of alpha’s shape; some expressions are obscure, and <…> retains an unintelligible word. No modern geometric explanation is substituted.

8. 8:2 This general statement reverses the earlier curses. Separate accounts of each victim’s restoration are not added.

9. 9:3 “Fall asleep!” is retained from the selected recension; later Greek recensions omit this command. Russian “господин” follows “sir”; Mattison notes that kyrios can also be understood as “Lord” or “Master.”

10. 10:1 This episode is relocated: in Hagios Saba 259 it follows the snakebite story, chapter 16 in the numbering used here.

11. 11:2 Russian “сглазил” conveys the fear expressed by “bewitch.” The plural “they” is retained without inventing a further named participant.

12. 13:1 The parentheses (…) preserve the missing term for the part of the bed. No name for it is conjectured.

13. 15:3 The awkward English phrase about the teacher no longer being inexperienced is rendered as Joseph’s fear that the teacher has experienced the child’s power for himself.

14. 15:4 “That teacher” is the second teacher, struck down in chapter 14; the earlier curse is reversed here.

15. 17:1 Chapters 17–18 are absent from Hagios Saba 259. Their inclusion follows Mattison and is explicitly marked so that they are not mistaken for text present in that manuscript.

16. 18:1 The selected text does not explain how the man died. A story about the builder falling is not supplied from other manuscripts.

17. 19:2 The printed Greek separately names relatives and acquaintances; Russian retains that distinction, whereas “known relatives” in the English compresses it.

18. 19:3 The Greek idiom refers literally to being “in what belongs to my Father.” Russian “у моего Отца” retains the spatial interpretation of the English without adding “temple” to the speech.

19. 19:5 The closing doxology is damaged. The supplied word and remaining gap are retained in square brackets.

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