



The Childhood of Jesus

Decoding the Apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas

Reidar Aasgaard

The mid-second-century apocryphal infancy gospel, the Gospel of Thomas, which deals with the childhood of Jesus from age five to age twelve, has attained only limited interest from scholars. Much research into the story has also been seriously misguided—especially study of the story's origin, character, and setting.

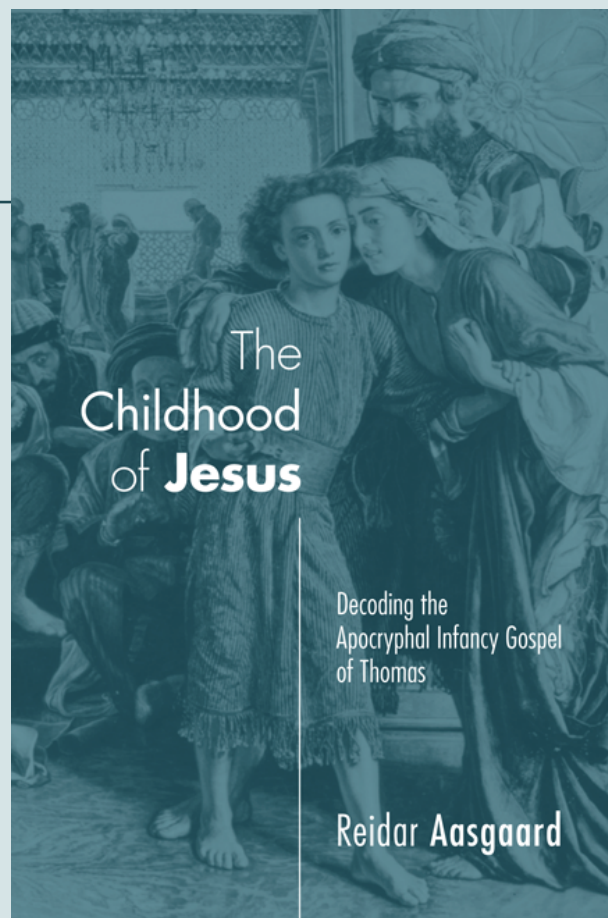
This book gives a fresh interpretation of the infancy gospel, not least by applying a variety of new approaches, including orality studies, narrative studies, gender studies, and social-scientific approaches.

The book comes to a number of radically new conclusions: The Gospel of Thomas is dependent on oral storytelling and has far more narrative qualities than has been previously assumed. The narrative world depicted in the gospel is that of middle-class Christianity, with the social and cultural ideas and values characteristic of such a milieu.

The gospel's theology is not heretical—as has often been claimed—but mirrors mainstream thinking rooted in biblical tradition, particularly in the Johannine and Lukan traditions. Jesus is portrayed as a divine figure but also as a true-to-life child of late antiquity.

The audience for the Gospel of Thomas is likely to have come from the rural population of early Christianity, a milieu that has received little attention. A main audience for the story was children among early Christians, making this—at least within Christianity—the oldest-known children's tale.

The book provides a Greek text and a translation, and several appendixes on the story, along with other early Christian infancy material.



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REIDAR AASGAARD is Associate Professor of Intellectual History at the University of Oslo, Norway. Among his publications is *My Beloved Brothers and Sisters! Christian Siblingship* in Paul.

“Although the Infancy Gospel of Thomas has long been enjoyed by readers interested in the Gospels that did not make it into the New Testament, there has been a dearth of scholarship on most of the pressing textual, historical, and theological issues it raises. Reidar Aasgaard has done the scholarly world a real service by presenting a full, interesting, and informed discussion of all these major questions. Scholars will now turn to this study before any other when they want to explore the Infancy Gospel and its traditions.”

—**BART D. EHRMAN**, James A. Gray Professor of Religious Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

“This thorough and outstanding volume addresses a wide-range of historical, literary, and theological questions about the Infancy Gospel of Thomas and offers a fresh interpretation of this baffling text. A highly valuable resource for those interested in biblical studies, early Christianity, the history of childhood, and religious understandings of children.”

—**MARCIA J. BUNGE**, Professor of Humanities and Theology, Valparaiso University

“Informed by current research on orality and narrative structure, Aasgaard not only furthers our understanding of the content of the document itself including its theology and ethics, but also breaks new ground in reconstructing its social setting and audience . . . Drawing upon his extensive expertise, Aasgaard also argues that the document was intended for early Christian children and contributes substantially to the emergence of the investigation children and childhood as a key interdisciplinary subfield within early Christian studies.”

—**MARGARET Y. MACDONALD**, Professor, Religious Studies, St. Francis Xavier University