Lucan scholarship has become increasingly conscious of the influence of the Old Testament scriptures on the composition of the gospel, especially in the nativity stories. It is now clear that such influence extends far beyond direct quotations and obvious parallels to rather subtle verbal reminiscences and allusions. Most attention has hitherto been directed to parallels from the prophetic books, but it would seem reasonable to expect the birth narratives of Genesis to provide an obvious model for the evangelist. In fact, the language and events of some fifteen chapters of Genesis, from the birth of Jacob’s children through their migration to Egypt, are remarkably paralleled by Luke i-ii.

The three canticles (i 46-55; i 68-79; and ii 29-32) already point us back to the patriarchs, for each one speaks of Jacob:

- ‘He has helped his servant Israel’ (i 54)
- ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel’ (i 67)
- ‘... and the glory of his people Israel’ (ii 32)

Whether these were pre-Christian psalms taken over by Luke or original compositions, they seem only slightly adapted to their ostensible settings. Mary’s hymn is a jubilant thanksgiving for a reversal of fortunes—more appropriate, in fact, to Elizabeth (to whom a few MSS attribute it) or equally to Rachel, who was barren (Gen. xxix 31) but conceived when God ‘remembered’ her (xxx 22; cf. Luke i 54). The hymn of Zechariah similarly dwells on deliverance ‘from those who hate us’ and the sending of one ahead to prepare the way: ‘to guide our feet into the way of peace’. In terms of Genesis, one is reminded of Jacob’s escape from Laban (xxxii 17 ff.) and his preparations, including sending ahead messengers, for his potentially hostile encounter with his brother Esau (xxxii 3 ff.).

1) Cf. e.g. R. Laurentin, Structure et Théologie de Luc I-II, Paris, 1957, pp. 64 ff.
With these hints to go on, a number of verbal and thematic parallels can be discovered:

**Luke i-ii**

An angel appears to Zechariah in the temple and promises that his wife will bear a son.

Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel, who is sent ‘from God’:

*ὅ ἄγγελος Γ’ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ* (26)

The angel says, ‘Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you’:

*ὁ χάριτος μετὰ σου* (28)

(at 48b Mary says, ‘all generations shall call me blessed’)

Mary is afraid, but the angel reassures her, ‘Be not afraid’:

*μὴ φοβοῦ* (30)

Mary is to bear a son and call his name Jesus:

*καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν* (31)

He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever:

*ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰακώβ* (33)

Moreover, her kinswoman Elizabeth ‘has conceived’:

*ἴδοὺ Ἐλισάβετ . . . αὕτη συνέληφεν*, although she ‘was called barren’:

*τῇ καλουμένῃ στεφάνῳ* (36)

Mary says, ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord’:

*ἴδοὺ ἡ δούλη κυρίου,*

and ‘let it be to me according to your word’:

*γένοιτο μοι κατὰ τὸ ἤμα σου* (38)

Mary arises and goes into the hill country:

*ἐπορεύθη εἰς τὴν ὄρειν* (39),

where her kinswoman Elizabeth greets her warmly (vv. 40 ff.) and says, ‘Blessed is the fruit of your womb’:

*ὅ καρπὸς τῆς κοιλίας* (42),

**Genesis xxvii-xlili**

Isaac blesses Jacob and sends him to Laban to find a wife.

Jacob in a dream sees a ladder with the angels of God:

*ὁ ἄγγελος τοῦ θεοῦ* (xxviii 12)

The angel says, ‘I am the Lord . . . I am with you’:

*ἐγὼ χάριτος* (13) . . . *ἐγὼ μετὰ σου* (15)

He says ‘by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves’ (14)

Jacob is afraid (vv. 16-17), but the angel reassures him, ‘Be not afraid’:

*μὴ φοβοῦ* (13)

Jacob sets up a pillar and calls the name of the place Bethel:

*καὶ ἐκκλήσεν Ἰακώβ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ τόπου ἐκείνου ὦ θεός* (19)

Jacob prays to return to his father’s house in peace:

*ἴς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ πατρὸς μου* (21)

(at xxix 25 Jacob mistakes Leah for Rachel, and she conceives:

*ἴδοὺ ἦν Λεία . . . συνέλεξεν Λεία* (32)

although Rachel ‘was barren’:

*Ραχήλ, δέ ἦν στεφάνι* (31)

(Cf. xxx 3, ‘Behold my handmaid’:

*ἴδοὺ ἡ παθίσκη μου,*

and xxx 35, ‘let it be according to your word’:

*ἐστώ κατὰ τὸ ἤμα σου.*)

Jacob journeys to the land of the east:

*ἐπορεύθη εἰς γῆν ἀνατιλῶν* (xxix 1)

where his kinsmen greet him warmly (vv. 4 ff.). Rachel has been deprived of ‘the fruit of the womb’:

*χαρτῶν κοιλίας* (xxx 2)