1. **(a) Explain why it is difficult to harmonise the events in the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke. [20]**

It is difficult to harmonise Matthew and Luke’s birth narratives as there are several inconsistencies between the accounts, ranging from the events that take place to the emphasis placed on different characters within each of the narratives. For example, in Matthew’s account of the birth narratives there are a number of events he includes which are not found in Luke. For example, the massacre of the infants as described in Matthew whereas in Luke’s account although he mentions Herod he does not include this key event. Matthew also refers to Jesus and his family escaping to Egypt (but there is no such account in Luke). It is also difficult to harmonise Matthew and Luke’s accounts as they appear to be written for different audiences. Matthew's story appears to be written for a Jewish audience. He refers to Jesus as “he who has been born ‘king of the Jews’”. Matthew clearly wanted to Jesus to appear to follow in the footsteps of other great Jewish heroes such as Moses and King David - (see Matthew 2:18-23) - quoting Isaiah 7 – “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God with us’)”. Luke’ story appears to be more focussed on a Gentile audience. Another reason why it is difficult to harmonise Matthew and Luke’s accounts is because of the importance placed upon different characters within each of the two accounts, which appear to reflect their target audience. In Matthew's gospel, the significant characters are Herod and Jesus' visitors - the wisemen, who bring gifts fit for the King of the Jews. Whereas in Luke's gospel the significant characters are Elizabeth, Zechariah, Simeon, Anna and the shepherds. The shepherds visit in a lowly stable – in keeping with Luke's target audience - the Gentiles whom the Jews of the time would have considered to be outcasts. Both writers refer to different locations during their accounts. Matthew's version tells us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but after this Joseph, Mary and Jesus flee to Egypt. They stay there until after Herod's death and then settle in Nazareth. Whilst Luke agrees that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he states that the Mary was living in Nazareth, and Joseph and her travelled to Bethlehem from Nazareth. After his birth Jesus is then presented by his parents in the Temple in Jerusalem, before returning home to Nazareth. 2 A further problem which is encountered when trying to harmonise the accounts is the timings of the events. In Matthew's account the visit of the wise men to Jesus appears to have been nearly two years after his birth,whereas Luke has Jesus return to Nazareth after the 40 days of purification. Finally there are other minor differences which make it difficult to harmonise the two accounts. For example Matthew says Jesus was visited by the wisemen at a house, whereas Luke has Jesus being born in a stable.

**Example 2 1. (a) Explain why it is difficult to harmonise the events in the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke. [20]**

The word ‘incarnation’ derives from the Latin word, ‘incarationem’- meaning ‘becoming flesh’. The story of the incarnation can only be found in the accounts of two of the gospel writers: Matthew and Luke. In both versions of the birth narratives, Jesus is born in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph in the time of Herod. Mary is a virgin, and conceived by the Holy Spirit. The accounts appear to have a number of significant differences. It is for this reason why some would say that it is difficult to harmonise the events in the birth narratives in Matthew and in Luke. For example, these differences include: conflicting timescales and locations, and the fact that Matthew and Luke appeared to aim their versions of the story of the Jesus' birth at different audiences. In Matthew and Luke’s versions of the birth narrative, the locations used within the story conflict. In Matthew’s version of the birth narrative, we learn that “Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judea” (Matthew 2:1). After the birth of Jesus, Matthew says that Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt with Jesus, after the angel of the Lord tells Joseph that King Herod is searching for Jesus in order to get rid of him. They did not leave Egypt until after Herod’s death, when they settled in Nazareth. Although Luke’s version does agree that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he assumes that Mary and Joseph come from Nazareth; and travelled to Bethlehem for the census. Also, Luke’s gospel does not say that they journeyed to Egypt to escape Herod. The difference in locations is very evident within the two stories, this makes it difficult to harmonise the events in the two birth narratives, as the differences are so severe. Matthew's version is from the perspective of Joseph, whereas Luke’s version is given from the point of view of Mary. This is because the each of the gospel writers aimed their accounts at different people. In this case, Matthew’s gospel is aimed at the Jews. Therefore, his account is written from the perspective of Joseph in order to provide a link between Jesus and King David. Luke’s gospel is more aimed at the lowly people in society- such as women and shepherds. Hence this explains why he tells the story from Mary’s perspective. Not only this, but it may be the case that Luke’s account was told to him first hand by Mary herself. Therefore, it would be only natural that the story comes from her view of events. Also in Matthew’s gospel, he talks about how the kings came to visit Jesus; but in Luke’s version there is no mention of the kings, and he is instead visited by shepherds. 3 It is difficult to harmonise the events in the birth narratives in Matthew and in Luke, because there are so many differences between the two accounts. These inconsistencies mean that many people find it difficult to be able to link the two stories. Although the basic story in both of the two birth narratives is the same, there are many differences in the detail which makes it difficult to harmonise the events of the two birth narratives.

**Example 1 1. (b) 'The birth narratives have nothing to do with the doctrine of the incarnation." Evaluate this view. [30]**

'Incarnation' is a term meaning "became flesh" and Christians believe that in the incarnation, the divine nature of the Son was perfectly united with human nature in one divine person. However it is claimed that neither Matthew, nor Luke specifically refer to Jesus as God incarnate, or God in human form. They both only refer to Jesus as Christ, e.g. "… is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11). This term is ambiguous and can be translated either as being a divine figure, or one who was simply someone favoured by God. Whilst Luke does refer to Jesus as "Son of God" this term was used at the time to imply great (political) leaders or someone belonging to God without necessarily implying divinity. Both Matthew and Luke place importance on the humanity of Jesus. For example in Luke, his birth is not described as supernatural. This could make some people think that as he had a human birth, he is human and not a divine being. Although there are some so-called 'supernatural elements' implying divinity in both of the birth narratives, this could also be argued by some people to be coincidental, e.g. the appearance of the star which leads the wisemen to Jesus in Matthew’s version of the birth narrative. However, many claim that both of the birth narratives specifically refer to the incarnation. For example, in Matthew, Jesus is referred to as "Immanuel", meaning "God is with us". Also why would the wisemen want to worship Jesus if he was not divine? It has been claimed that Matthew uses a mistranslation of an Old Testament prophecy when referring to Jesus' virgin birth (which implies his divinity). He quotes from Isaiah 7:14: "..., a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" The original Hebrew text of Isaiah uses the word "almah" (a young woman of marriageable age), not the word "bethulah" (which means virgin). Matthew used the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures) and not the original Hebrew version as his source material. As a result he used the Greek word "parthenos" meaning virgin (implying Jesus' divinity). Despite this claim, it appears that both Luke and Matthew state that Jesus was conceived through the Holy Spirit. They imply that Jesus was indeed God in human form (Luke and Matthew). Matthew when he quotes Isaiah 7:14 precedes this in 2:21 with "She will bear a son, and 4 you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins", further implying that Jesus was indeed divine. Despite the arguments which suggest that the birth stories have nothing to do with the incarnation, it seems more likely that they do. Both Matthew and Luke were writing for different groups of Christian believers, and they themselves clearly regarded Jesus as being God incarnate as they used various titles such as "Christ", "Saviour", "Son of God" and "Immanuel". The references to Jesus' virgin birth (even though the birth itself was not supernatural), Jesus' miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit (Luke), the references made to an angel announcing Jesus' birth (Luke and Matthew) also appear to indicate that is the case.

**Example 2 1. (b) ‘The birth narratives have nothing to do with the doctrine of the incarnation.’ Evaluate this view. [30]**

We are told by the doctrine of the incarnation that Christ was the Son of God, and that he was both fully divine and fully human. An argument in support of the statement is that neither Matthew or Luke specifically refer to Jesus as ‘God’, For example, in both Matthew and Luke, Jesus has a very lowly and natural birth in Bethlehem. In both Matthew and Luke’s account, we are told that Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary (who is fully-human), and conceived by the Holy Spirit (considered to be fully-divine). As a result of this, many would say that this would make Jesus only semihuman and semi-divine, he was not fully God and fully human simultaneously. On the other hand, there are a number of arguments which disagree with the statement – Jesus is considered to be God in human form by many, as he appears to fulfil the prophecy of the Old Testament. For example Luke (Chapter 2) confirms that Jesus is God in human form when Mary and Joseph take Christ to the Temple. At the Temple, Jesus is immediately recognised by Anna and Simeon. This was intended to show the reader that Jesus is God in the flesh, as it is the only real valid explanation of how they immediately recognise him as being the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. Luke also specifically refers to Jesus as the ‘Son of God’ (Luke 1:35). However, this does not necessarily mean that he is saying that he is God in human form, as at the time, the term ‘son of God’ was open to interpretation. It was not just used refer to those from the divine; but it was also used when referring to the great leaders of the time. Another argument which refutes the statement given is the fact that in Matthew 1:23, Jesus is referred to as ‘Immanuel’. ‘Immanuel’ means ‘God is with us’. Hence, by using this term, Matthew is implying is that Jesus is God in human form. In conclusion, I can see why people may agree or disagree. Personally, I would say that I agree with this statement. I would agree because it is difficult to say that the versions of the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke prove that Jesus is God in the flesh, and fully human and fully divine simultaneously.