

# THE FOUR EVANGELISTS AND THE WORD OF GOD

## INTRODUCTION:

Over the coming months, we will share a series of short essays devoted to each of the four Evangelists, or the “bringers of God News.” We offer these short essays to encourage you to engage—or re-engage—in a continuing, prayerful dialogue with our Lord and God’s Word in Sacred Scripture.

We begin here with Matthew as in this liturgical year, our gospel readings focus on the Gospel of Matthew.

## PART 1: ST. MATTHEW



About the year 85 AD, the author known as Matthew composed his work, drawing on a variety of sources, including Mark, and from a collection of sayings that scholars later called "Q", for *Quelle*, which is German, meaning “source.”

It was long believed that Matthew’s gospel had been written before the other gospels and was therefore placed first at the beginning of the New Testament by the Church Fathers. Although most scholars now believe Mark’s gospel is the oldest of the four, Matthew’s remains the first book of the New Testament. Matthew’s focus is on Jesus as the fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures; his gospel provides a smooth transition from the Old Testament story to the New.

Matthew’s gospel is written in a style that is both clear and appealing. The sayings and parables included in it have become some of the most famous and familiar teachings of Jesus. Matthew’s use of language is also distinct. He frequently uses the phrase “kingdom of heaven,” which is unique to his Gospel. He alone among the four evangelists uses the word “church” in his Gospel: the church of Jews and Gentiles.

The Gospel of Matthew is concerned with the early Christian church within Israel, and in its relationship to Judaism. He focuses on Jesus’ teachings and presents Him as a wise teacher and the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy. For Matthew, it is very important that Jesus is fully a man *from Israel*. Thus Matthew begins his gospel by listing the genealogy of Jesus. This genealogy signifies that Jesus is the fulfillment and the goal of all of Israel’s history. For Matthew, Jesus is not just the son of David, he is also the son of Abraham - truly a man from Israel.

Matthew also emphasizes the importance of following Jesus' teachings and living a life of "righteousness." He includes several teachings by Jesus, such as the Sermon on the Mount, which outline the moral principles that Jesus' followers should live by.

Finally, Matthew's Gospel emphasizes the Kingdom of Heaven, which is both a present reality and a future hope. Jesus' teachings and actions bring about a new era of salvation and hope for all people who follow his commands.



Matthew frequently cites Old Testament Scripture to demonstrate how Jesus' life and teachings fulfill what was foretold by the prophets, far more often than the other gospel writers do. In fact, scholars have determined that there are over 60 references to the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

It is important to remember that Matthew was not attempting to write an account of the life of Jesus which would be historically accurate. Rather, he was bringing out the meaning of Jesus' life and teachings and to show that Jesus was and is indeed the King, Israel's long-awaited Messiah.

*Figure 1: St. Matthew the Evangelist*

#### Resources:

*St. Matthew*, J.C. Fenton

*Matthew, A Guide for Scripture Study*, John P. Meier

*The New Interpreter's Study Bible*

Figure 1: Saint Matthew the Evangelist is from the 8<sup>th</sup> century illuminated manuscript, *Lindisfarne Gospels*.