

## MATTHEW: STORY AND TEACHING

**Matthew among the four gospels:** From early times Matthew's has been first in the order of the Gospels and the most prominent in the Church's teaching and liturgy. Yet the great majority of scholars think that Mark's was written first and that Matthew adapted and expanded Mark to make a more practical manual for church teaching. Many also think that Matthew (and Luke) had access to a collection of sayings of Jesus, known as 'Q' (short for *Quelle*, German for 'source').

**The shape of the gospel:** Matthew explains much that seems mysterious in Mark's gospel and also abbreviates many of Mark's stories (compare for instance Mark 5:1-20 & Matt 8:28-34). But he nearly doubles the length of his book by adding much more of *Jesus' teaching*. This is mainly presented in five large 'sermons', each ending with the formula 'When Jesus had finished these sayings...' (chapters 5-7; 10; 13:1-52; 18; 24-25). These may correspond to the five books of the Law of Moses, and Matthew may be seeing Jesus as the replacement or fulfilment of Moses or of the Law itself.

**Who was Matthew?** Traditionally, the tax-collector and disciple of Jesus (9:9), but this is unlikely. Whoever he was, he was well versed in the Hebrew scriptures and in the rabbis' interpretation of them, but was also involved in controversy between Pharisees and Christian Jews. Some think 'Matthew' was not an individual but a scribal 'school'. The Gospel probably originated in a Jewish-Christian community in Syria.

**When was it written?** Probably at the time of the permanent split between synagogue and church that occurred gradually in the 80s and 90s CE (see the bitter 'woes' in chapter 23). A major concern of Matthew is to define the Christian position vis-à-vis Judaism and the Torah (see especially Matt 5:17-20).

**Why was it written?** As well as the task of the Church's self-definition, Matthew takes on the task of outlining with Jesus' authority the nature of discipline, teaching and mission in the Church. It is as though Jesus speaks directly to the readers two (or sixty?) generations later. When Matthew is compared with *Mark*, several of his distinctive emphases emerge, for example:

- *the disciples understand* Jesus' teaching (unlike Mark's dullards) and are charged with handing it on (13:51-52; 28:19-20);
- there is stress on the *rewards* for right behaviour (6:20; 19:27 - 20:16), but also on the horrors of *hypocrisy* (7:21-23; 23:1-36): integrity and single-mindedness are a persistent theme, especially in the 'Sermon on the Mount' (chapters 5-7);
- followers of Jesus are expected to *adhere to the Law* and even to go beyond it (5:17-48; contrast Mark 7:1-23);
- *Jesus is present* in and with the Church (18:20) and the Gospel opens and closes with the promise of 'Emmanuel' (1:23; 28:20 - contrast Mark's stress on the absence of Jesus);
- there are detailed instructions about *mission* (chapter 10) and about *church discipline* (chapter 18), and Matthew's is the only gospel to use the word *ekklesia* ('church');
- *the Old Testament* is seen as being 'fulfilled' in many precise ways, often with explicit quotations introduced by a standard formula (e.g. 1:22; 2:17; 4:14; 13:35).

**So Matthew's can be seen as the most ecclesiastical of the four Gospels; as the most Jewish but also the most anti-Jewish.**