

Editor's note: Each month, we publish excerpts from Father Oscar Lukefahr's book, *A Catholic Guide to the Bible*.

PERRYVILLE, Missouri – The Gospel of Matthew was written in Greek, as were the other books of the New Testament. Its title, “The Gospel According to Matthew,” does not come from the author but was added later. (The titles of the other gospels are also later additions.)

Some early writers asserted that the apostle Matthew authored this gospel, but there are reasons to doubt such a statement. It is difficult to explain, for example, why the apostle Matthew would have used Mark's Gospel as a source, when Matthew was an apostle and Mark was not. It is possible, however, that Matthew was named as author because an earlier work he wrote in Aramaic was a source for this gospel or because Matthew was a part of the tradition that created the Gospel.

The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament hopes and prophecies. Its structure seems to be patterned on the five books of the Pentateuch. Because of its attention to the Old Testament, the Gospel of Matthew seems to have been written for Christians who had converted from Judaism. These people had probably believed that all Jews would eventually put their faith in Jesus.

Scripture scholars say that a likely community for the development of the Gospel of Matthew would have been Antioch, the capital of Syria. Here there would have been Jewish Christians and Gentile converts. The time of composition is usually given as around 80-85 A.D., after the destruction of Jerusalem.

As we read Matthew's Gospel, we are led to see Jesus as the Messiah long awaited by Israel.

### The Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark was the first gospel to be written. It is the shortest of the gospels and focuses more on the active ministry of Jesus than his teaching. Mark's Gospel is a whirlwind of miracles and service, of human relations and confrontation.

Traditionally, the author of this Gospel has been held to be John Mark, whose mother's house was a place where Christians gathered. Most scholars date the Gospel of Mark around 65-70 A.D. Mark's original audience is uncertain but may well have been gentile Christians faced with persecution because of their beliefs.

As we read Mark's Gospel, we are challenged to believe in Christ, still misunderstood and rejected by the worldly wise.

### The Gospel of Luke

The Gospel of Luke was written as the first half of a two-part work that included the Acts of the Apostles.

Traditionally, the author has been identified as Luke, a Syrian from Antioch who is mentioned several times in the New Testament and who may have been a traveling companion of Paul.

The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles have the same purpose, to show that Christ came to save the whole world. These works were written in excellent Greek and are literary masterpieces. They seem to have been composed after the destruction of Jerusalem, perhaps between 80 and 90 A.D.

Luke views the Old Testament as prophecy foretelling Christ and he showed that faithful Jews had indeed accepted

Christ. Christianity was the true religion, Luke assured his readers, and God had sent Jesus for the salvation of the world world.

Luke's gospel invites us to put our faith in Jesus, our gentle, compassionate savior, to meet him in the Scriptures and in the breaking of the bread.

The Gospel of John

The author of the Gospel of John has been the subject of much discussion since ancient times. Parts of the Gospel show a familiarity with Palestine and apparently originate from an eyewitness of the events described. However, there is evidence that the Gospel does not come from a single author. Scholars, therefore, believe the present work shows signs of editing and multiple authorship.

It seems likely that John the apostle was the original source of the material found in this Gospel. Many scholars date the Gospel around 90 A.D., to allow for the development of its thought and organization.

The Gospel of John is a work of art, complex in its thought, symbolic meanings, and dramatic structure.

John's Gospel is the result of the Church's reflection on the significance of Jesus' words and deeds. In it we hear Christ speaking through the Christian community that has been guided and directed by the Holy Spirit. There are many layers of meaning, and to appreciate the complexity of thought, artistic development, and the carefully composed dialogue of John's Gospel, readers should study it carefully and perhaps consult a good commentary.

He ends by inviting people to put their faith in Christ.

We who study John's Gospel today will receive insights into the humanity and divinity of Christ, the doctrine of the

Trinity, and the meaning of the sacraments. We can reflect for a lifetime on these and the many other truths taught in John's Gospel.