



## The Year of the Word Scripture Reflection

The study of the sacred Scriptures  
Must be a door open to every believer.  
It is essential that the revealed word  
Radically enrich our catechesis and  
All our efforts pass on the faith ...  
EVANGELI GAUDIUM, 2013

During the Year of the Word we have been asked to focus on the use of sacred Scriptures – principally St Matthew's Gospel:  
But why and what is a Gospel?

The word Gospel originates from the Greek evangelion or Latin evangelium – meaning to evangelise or spread the Good News.

The prime sources for the knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth are the four canonical Gospels in the New Testament of the Bible. The first three Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke – are closely related in form, structure and content; because they can be studied in parallel columns called synopsis they are known as the Synoptic Gospels. Today it is thought that Mark's Gospel was probably used by Matthew and Luke, who may also have used the Q Gospel (so called from the German Quelle, "source": Q is the hypothetical Gospel that is the origin of common materials in later Gospels.) John differing in both pattern and content, appears richer in theological interpretation but also preserves good historical information; is a selective, symbolic, eyewitness account of the person and ministry of Jesus, written so that all may believe in Him as the Christ, the Son of God, and thus have life in His name – Eternal Life.

The Gospels were written to serve the religious needs of the early Christian communities. Legendary and apologetic (defensive) motifs, and various preoccupations of the communities for which they were first produced, can readily be discerned as influences upon their narratives. Although many details of the Gospels remain the subject of disagreement and uncertainty, the scholarly consensus accepts the substance of the Gospel tradition as a truthful account.

Therefore, we have four Gospels, each with a distinctive view of the ministry of Jesus, his teaching and preaching, his death, resurrection, and beyond:

Matthew's Gospel is the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Mark's Gospel is the Gospel of the Ministry of Jesus;  
a transcript from life.

Luke's Gospel is the Gospel of the Church.

John's Gospel is the Gospel of Faith and Divinity;

We tend to create a fifth Gospel, picking up this and that out of each Gospel and assembling our own take on who Jesus is, why God sent Him to our world, and what He means in terms of our final destiny. Spending time referring to the original source again gives us the opportunity to re-evaluate our understanding and re-engage in our relationship with God.



"She will bear a Son,  
and you shall call His name Jesus,  
for He will save His people from their sins."  
(Mt 1:21)

### St Matthew's Gospel

In the second century AD, the Gospel of Matthew was placed at the very beginning of the New Testament as it was believed to be the first Gospel written, though we now know that the Gospel of Mark dates earlier. Matthew's Gospel became the most important of all Gospel texts for first- and second-century Christians because it contained all the elements important to the early church: the story about Jesus's miraculous conception; an explanation of the importance of liturgy, law, discipleship, and teaching; and an account of Jesus's life and death. So, the Gospel of Matthew has long been considered the most important of the four Gospels because it is the Gospel most intensely concerned with issues related to Judaism, and hence it provides an appropriate transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament in the Christian Bible.

Though second-century church tradition holds that the author of the Gospel is Matthew, a former tax collector and one of Jesus's Twelve Apostles, also known as Levi, scholars today maintain that we have no direct evidence of Matthew's authorship. Because the Gospel of Matthew relies heavily on the earlier Gospel of Mark, as well as late first-century oral tradition for its description of events in Christ's life, it is unlikely that the author of the Gospel of Matthew was an eyewitness to the life of Christ. Instead, the author was probably a Jewish member of a learned community in which study and teaching were passionate forms of piety, and the Gospel was probably written between 80 and 90AD.

Matthew's Gospel has a single overriding idea: the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom is mentioned fifty-four times and it is the defining concept in our most cherished prayer: The Our Father with "Thy kingdom come".

What the Kingdom means is explained in the prayer by "thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven." God's purpose in sending His Son is to initiate a programme whereby the will of God, and not the will of humanity, will be done on Earth. The message for us from Matthew is: God rules: O.K? Or, as Jesus declares in his very first words, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.'

Matthew's Gospel is arranged in seven parts.

- An introductory segment gives the story of Jesus's miraculous birth and the origin of his ministry – the Gospel traces Jesus's ancestors back to the biblical patriarch Abraham, the founding father of the Israelite people. Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah (Mt 1:1), the promised descendant of King David who would bring God's Kingdom to Earth and establish a time of peace and justice. Matthew quotes the Old Testament extensively, and places special emphasis on Jesus' fulfilment of prophecies. The Gospel is a phenomenal work of literature, arranged in a way that presents Jesus as the ultimate Jewish hero: the Messianic son of David, the prophet who surpasses Moses, and the seed of Abraham that blesses all the nations.
- In the middle are five structurally parallel sections. In each section, a narrative segment—interrupted occasionally by dialogue and brief homilies—tells of Jesus's miracles and actions. Closing each section, Jesus preaches a long sermon (discourse) that responds to the lessons learned in the narrative section. The Sermon on the Mount, which introduces the basic elements of the Christian message, follows Jesus's first venture into ministry gaining followers along the way (5:1-7:29). The Mission Sermon, which empowers Jesus's apostles, follows Jesus's miracles and recognition that more teachers and preachers are necessary (10:1-4:2). The mysterious Sermon in Parables responds to Jesus's frustration with the fact that many people do not understand or accept his message (13:1-52). The Sermon on the Church responds to the need to establish a lasting fraternity of Christians (18:1-35) once Jesus has been revealed as the Son of God. Finally, the Eschatological Sermon, which addresses the end of the world and teachings of judgement in the Kingdom to come, responds to the developing certainty that Jesus will be crucified (23:1-25:46).
- The conclusion or climax gives the story of the Last Supper, Jesus's trial and crucifixion, and the resurrection: Jesus' sacrifice, victory, and commission to his disciples (Mt 26-27)

### Readings for Christmas Reflection

The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah  
Mt 1:1 - 17

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah  
Mt 1: 18 - 25

