

Readings: *Ephesians 4: 1 – 7, 11 – 13; Psalm 18 (19): 1 – 4; Matthew 9: 9 – 13.*

Today's celebration is of an apostle and of an evangelist – the 'author' of the gospel which is printed first in the New Testament.

The call of a tax collector to follow Jesus is found in three of the gospels. He is called Matthew in the gospel which bears his name, while in Mark & Luke he is called Levi. In the lists of the twelve apostles in these three gospels and in Acts the name 'Matthew' appears. One explanation is that, like Peter, he was given a new name – meaning 'gift of the LORD' – when he became a disciple. An author at the end of the first, or beginning of the second, century says that Matthew collected sayings of the Lord and preserved them in the Hebrew language. But it is clear that our 'Gospel of Matthew' was written in Greek, and that the 'author' used the pre-existing 'Gospel of Mark' as a main source for his work. It is also clear that the Gospel was written for a church which included Jewish converts to Christ, who needed to be taught that Jesus is the fulfilment of the religion of Israel and what place Jesus gave to the Jewish Law. It is therefore likely that the 'author' was himself a Jewish convert to faith in Jesus

The Gospel was probably written after the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the Romans in AD 70, and for a congregation in Syria or Palestine. It presents Jesus as the heir of David – and so as the anointed one – the Christ, whose life fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Covenant. He is also presented as the 'new Moses', revealing God's will in the 'Sermon on the Mount', just as the first Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai.

In the Gospel of Mark the disciples frequently misunderstand Jesus, but in Matthew's Gospel they are presented as models for the members of the Matthean congregation. The author is more concerned than the other evangelists with the structure and discipline of the Christian community. He is the only one of the four to use the word 'church' (*ecclesia*) of the community.

Like the other three evangelists, Matthew has traditionally been given one of the four beasts attending on the throne of God, as described by Ezekiel and John the Divine. Matthew is shown with, or represented by, a winged man. The usual explanation for this choice is that his Gospel begins with a genealogy, showing the human descent of Jesus from Abraham and David.