



Vox Populi
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Today is the feast day of St Matthew the Evangelist, one of the 12 apostles. He was a Jew who worked for the occupying Roman forces, collecting taxes from other Jews. Consequently his fellow Jews were not impressed, and lumped Matthew in with “sinners”. They were equally shocked when Jesus saw Matthew at his tax collector’s booth at Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee, and said “Follow me”, and Matthew got up and followed Him.

Even worse at a send off or going-away dinner a number of “sinners” were present. The Pharisees questioned how could a supposedly great teacher associate with such immoral people? Jesus replied, “For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” (Matt 9:10-13)

Matthew is the first of the three synoptic Gospels in the New Testament. Mark and Luke all have similarities in structure and wording, while the fourth, Gospel of John, covers a different time span, locates much of Jesus’ ministry in Judaea and relates long discourses on theological matters.

However Matthew does have specific differences. Scholars believe it was originally written between 42 to 50AD and in Aramaic, for a Jewish audience, with many references to the Old Testament.

Matthew begins with a detailed genealogy of Jesus, His birth (he is the only one to mention the Maji), childhood, education, and goes on to record Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

The major theme that Jesus Christ came to establish His kingdom on earth is reinforced when Matthew introduces Jesus as "messiah". And he includes key central tenets of Christianity discipleship – the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, and what Jesus called the first and greatest commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.....you shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Matt 22:34-40)

We can learn much from St Matthew on Jesus' teachings, especially during times of dissent, notably His teachings of love, forgiveness, the importance of serving others, and the call to be compassionate and merciful.