

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On Saturday we celebrate the Feast of St. Matthew the Evangelist and Apostle. Of the four gospel writers, St. Matthew, along with St. John are the only two who were appointed apostles by Our Lord. St. Mark was a disciple and friend of St. Peter and the early church fathers record that his gospel was based on the memories and preaching of St. Peter while St. Luke was a companion of St. Paul, and his gospel is influenced by St. Paul's mission to the non Jewish Christians.

St. Matthew is generally recognized as the tax collector named Levi who was called by Jesus to be his disciple. Scholars disagree about the authorship of Matthew's gospel. Liberal scholars assign the authorship to an anonymous Christian writer in the second half of the first century, but all of the earliest teachers in the church affirmed that Matthew—one of the twelve apostles was the author. It seems unlikely that scholars two thousand years and continents removed from the ancient writers would get it right while those who were closest to the events somehow made a mistake.

What is most interesting about Matthew's gospel is that it is written in Greek like the rest of the New Testament. This is surprising since the earliest witnesses say Matthew's gospel was written in Hebrew or Aramaic. Ancient sources said Matthew's was the first gospel to be written and called this Hebrew/Aramaic version the Gospel to the Hebrews. Some believe this Hebrew gospel was Matthew's first attempt and that it was just a collection of Jesus' teachings, stories and sayings. The theory is that this early form of Matthew's gospel—sometimes called "proto-Matthew" was a source for Mark and Luke as they composed their gospels, and that Matthew (or another editor) re-wrote this first draft in Greek in its present form, and that by then Luke and Mark had written their accounts, and Matthew used their works as he re-wrote his earlier collection of Jesus' sayings and teachings.

What we do know about Matthew and his gospel is that it was written to the Jewish population to convince them of the claims of Jesus and to encourage the Jewish believers. One of the controversies in the early church was whether the Gentiles were welcome in the church or whether Jesus was only for the Jews. Matthew is the only gospel writer who includes the account of the Magi worshipping the Christ child, and his inclusion of this story shows us on which side of the controversy Matthew was. By including the Gentile Magi, Matthew indicates that Jesus is for the whole world—not just for the Jews.

Your Pastor,  
Fr. Longenecker