

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The four weeks of Advent provide a time of teaching in preparation for the great feast of the Nativity of Our Lord. This year I would like to focus on the four gospels and how they help lead us to Christmas.

Who wrote the four gospels and how are they connected? Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the “synoptic” gospels. “Synoptic” means “looking the same”. They are called “synoptic” because these three gospels contain many of the same stories and sayings of Jesus. Sometimes the stories are word for word the same.

However, each of the synoptic gospels contain stories and sayings that are unique to that particular gospel. Scholars like to debate how the synoptic gospels are interdependent and how they came to be written.

John’s gospel is a unique composition which we’ll discuss in the fourth Sunday of Advent.

Matthew’s gospel has always been placed first because tradition teaches that it was the first to be written. Tradition also teaches that it was written by Matthew the apostle. However, its composition is not straightforward.

The gospel as we now have it was written in Greek—which was the international language of the time. However, it seems that some sections of the gospel may have been translated from Hebrew and Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus and his followers.

This would connect with a very early tradition that Matthew collected the stories and sayings of Jesus in his own tongue. We can therefore conclude that there was a very early version of Matthew’s gospel which was a collection of the stories and sayings about Jesus, and that this collection was compiled within about ten or fifteen years after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Because Matthew’s gospel also seems to rely on Mark and Luke, we can guess that there was a later Greek version of Matthew’s gospel which put together the early Aramaic-Hebrew version with the stories from Luke and Mark.

Matthew’s audience is the Jewish believers in the area of Judea. Matthew makes it a point therefore to explain how the birth of Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecy. His account of the Nativity is told from the point of view of St. Joseph who is presented as being in the line of the Old Testament patriarchs. Matthew is also the one who tells the story of the visit of the Magi—which also fulfills Old Testament prophecies.

Matthew’s gospel is therefore also a perfect link between the Old Testament and the birth of the Savior.

Your Pastor,  
Fr. Longenecker