



Year of the Word

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Gospels tell the Good News of salvation

By *Mary Beth Huba*

The New Testament begins with four books called the Gospels according Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each evangelist presents the “good news” of the coming of God’s kingdom as proclaimed by Jesus Christ whose ultimate suffering, death, and resurrection bring salvation to the world. While centering on the life of Jesus of Nazareth, these narratives do not fit our modern concept of a biography or history. Rather the message of Jesus told by four distinct voices to four different audiences is a single story, a call to repentance and conversion, the bedrock of our Christian faith and mission.

An oral tradition of Jesus’ teachings, miracles, parables, and especially his death and resurrection preceded any written accounts. Most scholars now believe that the Gospel according to Mark was the earliest recording (65-70 A.D.) and was known to the authors of both Matthew and Luke, who wrote around 70 to 90 A.D. Because of their commonality, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the “synoptic” Gospels, a word deriving from the Greek meaning “to view together.” In addition, Matthew and Luke share material not found in Mark. Known as “Q” from the German Quelle or source, this was probably a collection of the sayings of Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark is frequently credited to a disciple of Peter whose audience was Gentile and most likely the persecuted church in Rome. Short and intense, Mark lets the actions of Jesus make his point. He shows his audience a Messiah who is more suffering servant than king, one who is in conflict with both demons and the religious leaders of his time, and one who will die to achieve his mission. From Mark we learn that to be a disciple of Jesus means to embrace his suffering and death. Even if we misunderstand his teaching and run away in a crisis, there is hope because Jesus forgives and loves us in spite of our shortcomings.

At one time Matthew the apostle was thought to be the evangelist, however, recent studies propose that this Gospel writer was more likely a Greek-speaking Jewish Christian addressing other Jewish Christians possibly from Antioch in Syria.

Matthew is a teacher. He shows us the promised Messiah who fulfills the prophecies of the old Testament and concentrates on Jesus’ teachings and the fulfillment of the old Law. Matthew speaks to us as the church: The spirit of Jesus will be with us as we work for the coming of the kingdom by living according to the will of the Father.

Luke is a Gentile, possibly a companion of Paul, and his view is that of a historian. While not an eyewitness, his research produces not only the Gospel but the Acts of the Apostles. His Jesus is the Son of Man, merciful and compassionate whose ministry includes women, the poor, and the outcast. Everyone can know the joy of salvation. The message that Luke has for us today is to embrace Jesus’ example of active concern for our brothers and sisters who are less fortunate. Luke also introduces us to Mary, the perfect example of discipleship.

John, the non-synoptic Gospel, is dated 90-100 A.D. While there is evidence of an eyewitness, the highly original content indicates that it was created independently of the others by a disciple or disciples within the Johannine community. The author speaks as a theologian to all of Christianity, emphasizing Jesus’ divinity. With symbolic images-- the vine and branches, the Good Shepherd and others, John urges his hearers to believe in Jesus, God’s Word made flesh, in order to be saved. Today we are challenged to faith in the God-Man who is gift of the Father’s love and to respond with love for one another.

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