



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Deep Dive:
Where and when was
Matthew written?

Talking to the Kids

Week 2: Matthew chapters 3 and 4

The Gospels tell us a lot about Jesus, but they are not written during Jesus' actual life time. The Gospel of Matthew was written 50 to 60 years after Jesus died and rose from the dead.

Take a moment to remember and write a story about something that happened yesterday. Then take a moment to write a story about something that happened a month ago. And then try one more story writing exercise where you write about something that happened last year.

How well do you remember the different events? How many details make it in your different stories? When we read the Gospels, know the Holy Spirit helped the writers tell the stories we need to come to believe in Jesus.

You might think that because the Gospels come first in the New Testament that they are written before the letters. But actually, they are listed first not because of the order they were written, but because someone long ago thought our New Testament should start with the important Jesus centered stories of the Gospels. Historically speaking, the letters by Paul are the earliest writings of the New Testament, with evidence showing Paul was writing in the late 40's and early 50's through the early 60's CE.

The earliest Gospel written is most likely Mark. Matthew's and Luke's Gospels borrow a tremendous amount from Mark, and share a common source that is not Mark, and each have their own sources for stories. Scholars generally agree that Mark's Gospel was written in the late 60's, around the time that Jerusalem was under siege during an uprising. This means that Matthew and Luke were written after 70, and maybe even as late as the mid 80's.

Why such uncertainty around the exact dating? We do not have the very first original hand-written copy. We only have copies. We also have citations from other church leaders that talk about Gospels and quote them in the form we have them now. Clues and themes found in the Gospel help scholars identify issues the writer was addressing and correlate that with events taking place in the late first century CE.

As for where Matthew's Gospel was written, this comes with even more uncertainty. But again, clues within the text help scholars narrow down possible locations. The most agreed to place of writing is Antioch of Syria. Antioch was a city with a large Jewish population and Greek was the dominant language. Matthew's Gospel seems to have a favorite place for Peter, who was also prominent in Antioch. Matthew introduces Syria into the Gospel story. These reasons, along with other textual clues, lead most scholars again to identify Antioch of Syria over other locations that have claims to Matthew's community in Palestine or Egypt.

Does it matter where the Gospel was written or when it was written? It does. While reading the Gospel today may feel like something written directly to us, knowing where it was written helps us understand the themes being expressed and the reasons why this author included certain stories by not others. Understanding the political realities of the era again opens us to seeing how these stories connect with our own age, as well. So, yes, it does have some bearing on how we approach reading the Gospel.

Gathered by God, we live our faith with: Compassion, Grace, Gratitude, and Joy

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