

## The Personalities of the Four Evangelists

From talk to Dominican Laity, Sunday, March 8, 2015

The Gospels are different from each other.

- Mark is the shortest at 16 chapters.
- John has 21 chapters,
- Luke 24, and
- Matthew 28.
- The styles differ. Mark is short and blunt; John goes into long involved discourses between his characters.

“To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while He employed them in this task, made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more” (*Dei Verbum* 11).

## Matthew

- Ethnicity: Jewish
- One ancient source, Papias, says that Matthew “compiled the sayings of the Lord in the ‘Hebrew’ language.” Hebrew and Aramaic are both Semitic languages and are very close to each other, so that a Greek-speaking Gentile like Papias might call Aramaic “Hebrew.”
- In 1983, Claude Tresmontant, a philosophy professor at the Sorbonne, published a study claiming that all four gospels were either written or translated from Hebrew so as to preserve the underlying Hebrew. Matthew is his poster child. Matthew’s Greek reflects Hebrew word order (such as *Immanu El*, “with us God”), expressions meaningless in Greek (“friends of the bridegroom”) but richly expressive in Hebrew (“children of the nuptial tent”) and syntax (“You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins” – *for* [“because”] makes sense only in Hebrew, where *Jesus* means “God saves”).

Matthew Facts	Proof	What does this say about him?
Agenda: Jesus is the Messiah expected by the Jews.	Shows Jesus to be the promised Messiah ( <i>mashiah</i> , anointed) of Israel	Hopeful, as an Israelite
Still patriotic about the Messiah coming from David’s line	Mt is especially interested in the title “Son of David,” using it ten times (John never does; Mark & Luke 4x in passages parallel to each other.	Traditional
Left all when Jesus said “Follow Me”	Matthew 9:9	Impulsive and generous, open to Jesus
Knows Palestinian Jewish customs	Assumes readers to know Jewish Torah (Sermon on the Mount), hand washing and other rituals	He is an observant Jew
Has an infancy narrative	Ch. 1-2	Has a source unknown to the other evangelists
Well educated, knows and uses the Old Testament precisely and frequently	1. Use of a genealogy 2. Infancy narrative mirrors the birth and flight of Moses 3. Sermon on the Mount, by deliberate design, mirrors the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai	Careful, does not want to make a mistake about this.

Matthew Facts	Proof	What does this say about him?
Very correct with details	He is careful with details with which Mark is not. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John the Baptist as quoting Isaiah <i>and</i> Malachi</li> <li>• Will the real High Priest please stand up?</li> <li>• Mark 2:23-28 vs. Matthew 12:1-8, Luke 6:1-5</li> </ul>	Careful
Precise when writing Hebrew	Ps. 22:1 in grammatical Hebrew	Precise
Organized and symmetrical in his writing	1+5+1 organization Five books symbolic of the Torah	Wants to imitate Torah for his readers
Themes of parables are usually about the end of time, God sorting out good and bad	See Chapters 13 and 25	He is a tax collector, with practice in sorting coins!

## Mark

- Ethnicity: Jewish, a Levite and a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10)
- NB: *Mark* (Marcus) was the most common name in the Roman Empire
- Not one of the Twelve; may have been one of the 72 (Luke 10:1-12)
- Seems to have been young and even to have grown up in the young Christian community: His mother hosted a house church (Acts 12:12); Paul took him on his first missionary journey, but there was a quarrel or misunderstanding and Mark went back to Jerusalem (13:13). Later Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus on a mission (15:38).
- He makes mistakes in historical details. (Maybe he didn't like to study?)
- How is his Greek? Simple Greek with run-on sentences joined by a simple "and" (*kai* parataxis) and fragments.

Mark Facts	Proof	What does this say about him?
Breathless pace—the word “at once” or “immediately” or “behold” frequent as transition between episodes	II. Throughout	Impatient and in a hurry to get to the Truth of the Gospel
No narrative of Jesus as an infant or child. Begins abruptly	1:1	Impatient and in a hurry to get to the Truth of the Gospel
Bare-bones story line, almost all action, only one sermon (Ch. 4) and very few “sayings” by Jesus	Read Chapter One	Simple
Bluntly represents Peter and the other apostles as having faults, especially being dense and slow-witted about the identity of Jesus	4:10-12 parables 6:45-52 Jesus walks on the water 8:17-21 the yeast 9 32 2nd Prophecy of the Passion 9:33-37 “Who is greatest?” argument 10:32 3 <sup>rd</sup> Prophecy of the Passion 10:35-40 James & John’s ambitions	Uninhibited, blunt
Jesus keeps the Messianic Secret	3:12 After exorcisms 8:30 After Peter’s Confession	Suspenseful

<b>Mark Facts</b>	<b>Proof</b>	<b>What does this say about him?</b>
Colorful language and detail and human realism not used by the others	1:41, 43 Jesus' compassion and strong displeasure 4:38 Cushion 6:5 surprise at lack of belief 8:12 deep sigh 9:3 Bleacher 10:14 indignation 10:21 Love for young man	Observant
Markan sandwiches ("framing")	8:22—blind man at Bethsaida Three prophecies of the Passion 10:46ff—Blind Bartimaeus @ Jericho	Creative, likes symmetry

## Luke

- St. Luke is said to have been born in Syrian Antioch and is the only Gentile among the four evangelists. The body in his tomb in Padua, Italy has been found to have DNA typical of modern residents of Syria.
- Was indeed a physician (Col. 4:14)
- Spoke Syriac (a dialect of Aramaic) natively and certainly Greek by education.

Fact	Proof	What does this say about St. Luke?
Formal tone and rhetorical skill	Hellenistic preface	Good Greek education
Educated in the Greek tradition (“liberal arts”), notably drama—his well-crafted narrative scenes have entrances, exits and dialogue	inserts speeches as editorial comment (often during meals: 7:36-50, 22:24-38). “Dramatic scenes” with entrances and exits: Ch. 1-2 Infancy narrative diptychs 10:38-42 Martha & Mary 17:11-19 The ten lepers 24:13-32 Conversation on the Road to Emmaus Acts 8: 26-40 Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch Acts 9—Saul’s conversion	Good Greek education
Colorful, varied characters in his little dramas	<i>Real people:</i> Luke’s infancy narrative: Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, Virgin Mary all well-rounded characters 19:1-10—Zacchaeus 23:39-43--The Good Thief <i>Fiction</i> 15:11-32 The Prodigal Son vs. Matthew’s 21:28-32 The friend at midnight The crafty steward The unjust judge—all three do the right thing for the wrong reason	Represents real people’s personalities accurately and creates believable fictional characters Sense of humor
Literary patterns and structures based on art	The diptych is typical of both Greek (Byzantine) and Syrian art. Luke’s parallel plots form diptychs	Good writer and knowledgeable in art

Fact	Proof	What does this say about St. Luke?
Unique to Luke	Good Samaritan Prodigal Son Dives and Lazarus Widow of Nain Zacchaeus Women of Jerusalem on Via Dolorosa Good Thief	Cosmopolitan, unbigoted, ready to forgive sin even in deathbed confession, believes that poor are in better shape than rich, compassionate
Has a physician's eye for certain details	Bloody sweat in Gethsemane	Indeed a medical doctor

## John

- Galilean by birth (brother of James, son of Zebedee of Caparnaum)
- Became a close friend of Peter during the Lord's ministry
- Refers to himself as the Beloved Disciple

Fact	Proof	What does this say about him?
Gospel is carefully structured	The seven days of the first week Book of Signs and the Book of Glory	An organized writer
Prefers indirection to direct declarations (cf. Mark)	Never refers to himself by name; 1 <sup>st</sup> -person narration in 3 <sup>rd</sup> person Christ's Baptism is told indirectly by John The Agony in the Garden is implied rather than described	Subtle
Likes word play	<i>Word play</i> : "from above/again"; "flowing/living" water <i>Irony</i> They wanted to make Him king (Jn 6:15) "Do you want to become His disciples too?" (9:27) Caiaphas' prophecy (11:50)	Complex literary mind
Likes types and symbols	Lamb of God, Temple, Moses' bronze serpent, manna, Good Shepherd, fruitful vine; opening week of Gospel imitates Genesis	Complex literary mind
Only John traces three full years of Christ's ministry	Three Passovers are recorded	Attentive to Jewish liturgy
Thinks outside the box	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Day and time of the Crucifixion different from Synoptics</li> <li>• No infancy narrative; "begins" in eternity</li> <li>• The only evangelist to choose seven miracles ("Signs") rather than more of the 25 possible recorded miracles</li> </ul>	Unconventional thinker



Fact	Proof	What does this say about him?
The seven Signs are associated with particular religious feasts of the Jews	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cana=a wedding</li> <li>2. Official's son= Passover I</li> <li>3. Cripple= a Sabbath</li> <li>4. Multiplication of the Loaves= Passover II</li> <li>5. Walking on water= Passover II</li> <li>6. Man born blind= Feast of Booths</li> <li>7. Lazarus= Feast of Hanukkah</li> </ol>	Selective writer for his purpose
Long discourses in between or with miracles	Throughout	Either took notes (I mean that!) or had an unusually good memory or added in theological points later as an old man who had pondered them
He uses arguments with the Pharisees or other uncomprehending groups to bring out points of theology	E.g., the healing of the cripple at the Pool of Bethesda in Ch. 5. The authorities object because it is the Sabbath. John's Jesus establishes his authority.	Feisty debater, so he used this to good purpose in recording the arguments
In this Gospel, Jesus is represented most strongly as King & God		Sublime thinker

## Summary Chart

<p>Matthew is a little on the stiff academic side bordering on the egghead—the cold-blooded precision needed by the tax collector, the face pale from being in the books all the time—but here, the study is crucial and has riveted him to his purpose to spread this gospel, a force to change the world.</p> <p>He arranges his story of Jesus to echo the story of Moses’ childhood, the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, and overall in five parts like the five books of the Torah.</p>	<p>Careful and correct            Traditional            Precise            Organized            Hopeful, as an Israelite</p>
<p>Mark is the <i>enfant terrible</i> of the evangelists—he speaks his mind and wastes no time. I think of him as youthful, because of this, lacking tact.</p>	<p>Impatient            Simple            Uninhibited            Blunt            Suspenseful            Observant            Creative, symmetrical            Occasional word play</p>
<p>Luke has the bright clear mind and <i>joie de vivre</i> of the Greek. His tender heart makes him the most overtly compassionate evangelist. Many of our favorite episodes and parables are his: the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Good Thief, the Blessed Virgin Mary.</p>	<p>Highly intelligent (“critical thinker”)            Broad education            Skilled writer            Sensitive            III. Observant            Humorous            Formal rhetorical tone when necessary</p>
<p>John: The “Son of Thunder” of the Synoptics is an organized writer with a complex literary mind that can see types and symbols and enjoys word play. He is choosy about what he includes (the seven Signs). He wants to make definite points about Jesus’ identifying Himself (the Book of Signs) and being lifted up on the Throne of His Cross (the Book of Glory).</p>	<p>Subtle writing implies the hand of the Beloved Disciple, who peers out of the text like Fra Angelico or Michelangelo. As contrasted with Luke’s subtlety in the personalities of his characters, John’s is in the text itself.</p> <p>Detail-conscious            Unconventional            Deep, often sublime thinker (what we’d call the melancholic temperament)            Feisty debater (choleric temperament; cf. his nickname “Son of Thunder” in the Synoptics)</p>