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The Gospels

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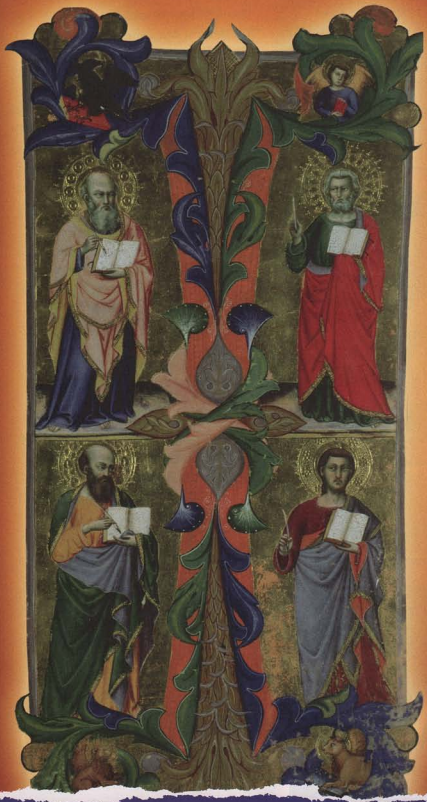


FAITH FOCUS

Why were the accounts of the Gospel written?

FAITH VOCABULARY

Gospels
Synoptics
disciples
Evangelists
Fourth Gospel

Think about someone who has impacted your life in a significant way.

Everyone knows people who have had a significant impact on their lives. Sometimes one or more of these people influence us to the point that we decide to make changes in our lives. When someone is truly significant to us, we naturally tend to share news or views about that person with others.

The writers of the four Gospels share with us the significance of Jesus for their lives and the lives of all people.

What are the names of the four writers of the Gospel? What is their main message about Jesus?

Four Evangelists, Byzantine style painting. Jacopo di Cione (1330–1398), Italian painter.

[M]ake known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.
EPHESIANS 6:19

Bible Background

Winged man, symbol for Saint Matthew

Winged lion, symbol for Saint Mark

Winged ox, symbol for Saint Luke

Winged eagle, symbol for Saint John

The Gospels

The first four books of the New Testament are called the **Gospels.** The word *gospel* means "good news." The "good news" of the Gospels and the entire New Testament is that Jesus, the Son of God, suffered, died, and was raised from the dead to save us from sin and death. Jesus, Lord and Messiah, is the Savior of the world.

The Gospel transformed the lives of the first followers of Jesus. They wanted the lives of all people to be transformed as their lives were transformed by faith in Jesus Christ.

The Evangelists

The writers of the four Gospels are called **Evangelists,** a name that means "sharers of the Good News." Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Evangelists wrote down the Good News of Jesus Christ, their Lord and Master, for future generations. The four Evangelists are:

- Saint Matthew the Apostle
- Saint Mark
- Saint Luke
- Saint John the Apostle

The Evangelists came from different backgrounds. Each wrote their account of the one Gospel for different communities of believers. The center of all four Gospels is the Passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, each Evangelist has chosen specific details from the life of Jesus to emphasize and pass on to the Church.

The Synoptic Gospels

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are the most similar. For the most part, these three writers of the Gospel (or Evangelists) follow the same sequence of events in each of their accounts. For this reason, these three Gospels are described as the **Synoptics.** This is a Greek word that literally means "seeing with the same eye."

John, on the other hand, writes his Gospel in a manner that is noticeably different from the Synoptics. John's Gospel is so distinct from the Synoptics that it is often simply referred to as the **Fourth Gospel.**

The Heart of Sacred Scripture

The four Gospels are the center and heart of all Sacred Scripture. The Church places the four Gospels at the beginning of the New Testament. They have that place of importance because of the significance of Jesus, not because they were the first books of the New Testament to be written. Jesus Christ is the fullness of divine Revelation. He is the center and heart of God's plan of creation and salvation.

The Old Testament is a preparation of humankind for Jesus Christ. The New Testament revolves around the Person of Jesus Christ and his saving significance for the world. Each of the Evangelists writes to invite people to faith in Jesus. They invite the world to believe and hope in Jesus as the most significant Person in their lives.

Christ in Majesty. Stavelot Bible (1093–1097), Romanesque manuscript illumination, Mosan school.

Did you Know...

Symbols of the Evangelists

Christian tradition has assigned a symbol for each of the Evangelists. These symbols are based on the four living creatures in the Book of Revelation that surround the throne of God. Matthew is depicted as a man, Mark as a lion, Luke as an ox, and John as an eagle.

FAITH CONNECTION

Describe how hearing the Gospel has changed your life for the better.

The Message of the Evangelists

The very first words offered by each of the four Evangelists give us a clue as to the author's unique perspective on Jesus Christ.

The Gospel According to Matthew

Matthew's Gospel opens:

> The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. . . . Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah.
>
> MATTHEW 1:1, 16

Matthew spends sixteen verses giving us a genealogy, or family tree, of Jesus. Jesus is the kingly Messiah, announced and promised to the Jewish people. In Jesus the old Covenant is fulfilled.

Jesse Tree, genealogy of Jesus, stained glass

The Gospel According to Mark

Mark's Gospel does not ease us into the message with a genealogy and a narrative about Jesus' birth and infancy as Matthew's and Luke's Gospels do. This Gospel gets right to the point. It opens:

> The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ [the Son of God].
>
> MARK 1:1

Jesus is the Son of God—first verse! From here we are off and running to discover this Revelation.

Mark's Gospel moves rapidly from place to place, leaving us almost breathless in its pacing. We are given the impression that God in Jesus is completely overtaking the world, overpowering it by the force of good. In only twelve verses Mark's Gospel tells us about John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus, and the temptation of Jesus. We are then plunged immediately into the public ministry of Jesus. The tone of urgency in Mark's Gospel is clear.

> After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."
>
> MARK 1:14–15

The Gospel According to Luke

Luke's Gospel makes it known that it was written carefully and will set forth an account that will produce certainty in the reader. Luke opens:

> Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.
>
> LUKE 1:1–4

Luke's telling of the Good News will convince the reader to believe and trust in God's love. The Greek name *Theophilus* literally means "lover of God." Luke paints a portrait of Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, as the One in whom we will come to know the depth of God's love for all humankind.

The Gospel According to John

The opening of John's Gospel echoes the first verse of the story of creation. John begins:

> In the beginning was the Word,
> and the Word was with God,
> and the Word was God.
> He was in the beginning
> with God.
> All things came to be through him,
> and without him nothing came
> to be.
> What came to be through him
> was life,
> and this life was the light
> of the human race;
> the light shines in the darkness,
> and the darkness has not
> overcome it. JOHN 1:1–5

Jesus, the eternal Son of God the Creator, gives us life. Without him we would not exist. The work of Jesus in John's Gospel will make that point clear. John tells us:

> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of [his] disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may [come to] believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.
>
> JOHN 20:30–31

Briefly describe the importance of the opening verses of each of the four accounts of the Gospel.

Did you Know...

Titles for Jesus

The Gospels profess the faith of the Church in Jesus by the names and titles they used to address him. Among these titles are Christ, Lord, Messiah, Savior, Son of David, and Son of God. Together they profess that Jesus, the Savior of the world, is true God and true man. He is the second divine Person of the Holy Trinity who became fully human in all things except sin while keeping his divinity.

The Youth of Jesus. James J. Tissot (1836–1902), French painter.

One Faith, One Lord

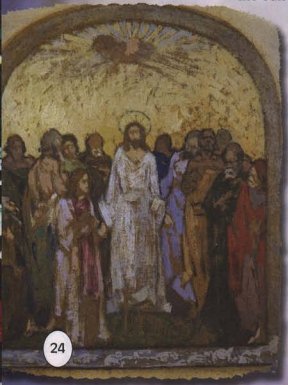
As we read and compare the four Gospels, we can see that they all use similar kinds of literary building blocks to share the good news of God revealed in Jesus. These similarities include:

- General narrative: writings that report "he went here" or "he did this"
- Passion narrative: sections detailing the suffering death of Jesus
- Resurrection narrative: accounts of the appearances of the Risen Lord to his **disciples**, the followers of Jesus
- Short sayings: insightful remarks by Jesus
- Preaching: extended sermons of Jesus
- Questions: interrogatives Jesus asks
- Parables: stories told by Jesus
- Miracles: miraculous healings by Jesus

A photographer can take a series of photos of a person that show different aspects of that person's life. For example, photos can be taken of a woman as a wife, a mother, a teacher, and a grandmother. Each of the photos presents that same person in a true, but different, light.

Even though each of the Evangelists' accounts of Jesus is somewhat different in perspective, all four Evangelists pass on the faith of the Apostles and the apostolic Church in Jesus. They do this in similar but different ways. They all present the truth of Jesus Christ so that faith in Jesus Christ and new life in Jesus Christ might blossom and take root in all people.

Which of the four accounts of the Gospel of Jesus appeals most to you? Share the reasons you chose that Gospel account.



Jesus and His Disciples, oil on paper. Arturo Gordon Vargas (1883–1944), Chilean painter.

Jesus, Rising from the Dead

OUR CHURCH MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Parish Communities

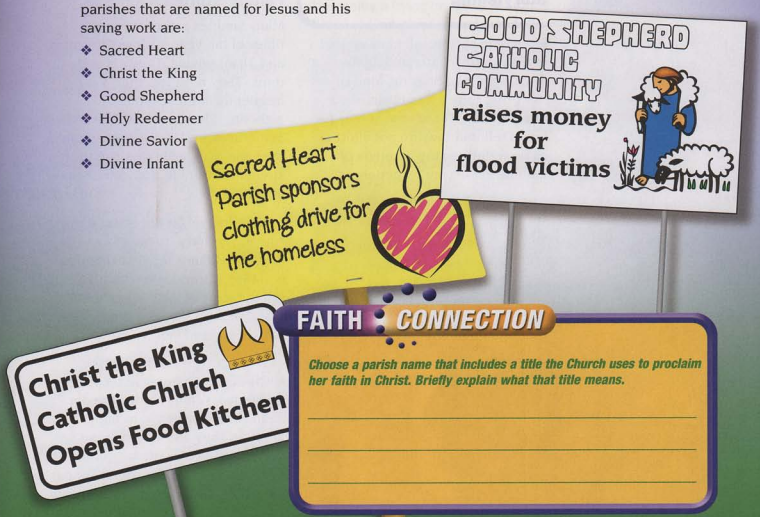
Catholic parish churches are a striking proclamation of the Good News. While many parishes are named after saints, such as Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Monica, and Saint Stephen, others bear the name of Christ. These names come from images found in the accounts of the Gospel and in the other writings of the New Testament. They proclaim to all the world the significance of Jesus. They are witnesses to the Church's faith in Jesus and share with others the good news of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Some of the more common titles for parishes that are named for Jesus and his saving work are:

- Sacred Heart
- Christ the King
- Good Shepherd
- Holy Redeemer
- Divine Savior
- Divine Infant

When Catholics say, "I belong to Sacred Heart Parish," they are proclaiming the Gospel. They are sharing with others the good news of Jesus' love for all people. Jesus' heart is so overflowing with love and grace that our hearts are transformed.

When Catholics say, "I belong to Divine Savior Parish," they are proclaiming the Gospel. They are sharing the good news that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. He is both human and divine. In him is the fullness of God's love. Jesus is our Redeemer who renews and re-creates us. In him is the promise and hope for eternal life with God.



FAITH CONNECTION

Choose a parish name that includes a title the Church uses to proclaim her faith in Christ. Briefly explain what that title means.

WHAT DIFFERENCE

Does Faith Make in My Life?

Storytelling

From time to time, all of us engage in the activity of storytelling. We are not talking about the kind of story that comes totally out of our imaginations. Those stories may be fun to tell, but they do not affect us as powerfully as the accounts of real-life events and experiences.

Family Stories

Many families gather at special times of the year, such as Christmas and Thanksgiving. They eat and drink. They relax together. Very frequently in these types of gatherings, family stories are told. Sometimes we tell the same stories over and over again because they strengthen our life and identify us as a family.

Grandma might tell about leaving "the old country" to travel to America—where she met Grandpa and they married. Mom and Dad tell the story of the birth of their first child and the long search for just the right name.

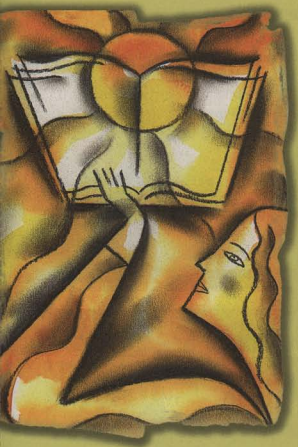
We never get tired of these kinds of stories because they are *our* stories. Family stories fire our hearts and connect us to one another. They are rooted in the past. They give us identity in the present. They set the course for our future. In short, they make us family.

The Gospels

The four accounts of the Gospels are no different. We tell them again and again. Telling and listening to the Gospels form us as a Church family.

Have you ever invited a friend over for Thanksgiving or, for that matter, for Christmas? Did your family share their memories of the events that are important to your family—even though a guest was in your midst? And did that guest not only enjoy hearing them but—for that moment—feel a part of your family?

The whole point of becoming familiar with the Gospel accounts of Jesus is to make them part of who we are. That is why we hear them over and over again at Mass. We hear them in the quiet of our heart and pray over them. We study them and make them part of who we are.



Telling Others About Jesus

Like Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the Church continues to pass on her faith in Jesus. We do this by our own words and deeds. We hope that others will strive to live as Jesus taught.

Telling others about Jesus does not simply mean reciting the Gospel accounts word for word on a street corner. Rather, it means living the Gospel. It means hearing and giving our hearts to the Gospel so that we are changed and transformed. It means living as Jesus did, more and more every day, at home, in school, and at play. It means becoming a living image of Jesus, the Word of God, the Light of the world.

Faith Decision

In small groups discuss why telling the story of Jesus means bringing the Good News to a world deafened by the sad and bad news of conflict, division, sin, anger, war, pain, and death.

- **How can we be messengers of hope, joy, and goodness by the example of our lives?**
- **Who needs this kind of good news?**

This week I will be a modern-day evangelist. I will be a live, faith-in-action story by

_____

_____

_____

_____.

PRAY and REVIEW

A Litany of Praise

Leader: Jesus promised, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" *(Matthew 18:20).*

Lord Jesus, in your presence we pray: Jesus, you are the only Son of God,

All: **we praise and honor you.**

Leader: Jesus, you are the Word of God, who became flesh and dwelt among us,

All: **we praise and honor you.**

Leader: Jesus, you are true God and true man,

All: **we praise and honor you.**

Leader: Jesus, you are the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God,

All: **we praise and honor you.**

Leader: Jesus, you are Lord,

All: **we praise and honor you.**

Leader: Jesus, you are the Lamb of God, the Savior of the world,

All: **we praise and honor you.**

Leader: Lord God, Father of all, send the Holy Spirit to help us honor the name of your only Son both by our words and our deeds.

All: **Amen.**

FAITH VOCABULARY

Define each of these faith vocabulary terms:

1. Gospels
2. Evangelists
3. Synoptics
4. Fourth Gospel
5. disciples

MAIN IDEAS

Choose either (a) or (b) from each set of items. Write a brief paragraph to answer each of your choices.

1. (a) Describe what it means to say that the four accounts of the Gospel pass on the faith of the Church in the Good News of Jesus Christ.
   (b) Compare the Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel.
2. (a) Compare the openings of two of the four accounts of the Gospel with each other.
   (b) Illustrate ways that you can be a Gospel in action.

CRITICAL THINKING

Using what you have learned in this chapter, briefly explain this Scripture verse:

> If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it!
> 1 Corinthians 9:16

FAMILY DISCUSSION

How do we use the Gospel to make family decisions? What are some of the ways our family is a live-action Gospel?

For more ideas on ways your family can live your faith, visit the "Faith First for Families" page at **www.FaithFirst.com**. Also check out "Make a Difference" on the Teen Center.

UNIT ONE REVIEW

A. The Best Response

Read each statement and circle the best answer.

1. What are the two major parts of the Bible?
   A. the Old Testament, which centered around God's Covenant with Israel, and the New Testament, which centered around Jesus, the new and everlasting Covenant
   B. the Psalms and the Gospels
   C. the prophets and the letters of Saint Paul
   D. none of the above

2. What are the Synoptic Gospels?
   A. Matthew, Luke, and John
   B. Matthew, Mark, and Luke
   C. Matthew, Mark, and John
   D. Luke, Mark, and John

3. Why is Jesus seen as the new Moses in Matthew's Gospel?
   A. Moses delivered the Law of God to his chosen people, and Jesus gives a new spiritual law.
   B. Moses parted the Red Sea, and Jesus parts the heavens.
   C. Moses led God's people to the Promised Land, and Jesus opens the gates of heaven.
   D. all of the above

4. The four parables in Luke's Gospel that are not in the other Gospels focus on turning our lives back to God, or _____.
   A. salvation
   B. reconciliation
   C. conversion
   D. resurrection

5. What is the purpose of the accounts of Jesus' ministry in the Book of Signs in John's Gospel?
   A. an invitation to believe in Jesus, the Son of God
   B. making known the saving presence of God at work in Jesus
   C. an invitation to come to faith
   D. all of the above

UNIT ONE REVIEW

B. Matching Words and Phrases

Match the faith terms in column A with the descriptions in column B.

Column A	Column B
_____ 1. Fourth Gospel	a. the Bible, God's word to us
_____ 2. symbolic language	b. covenant
_____ 3. testament	c. the writers of the Gospels
_____ 4. Apostles	d. heaven on earth
_____ 5. Beatitudes	e. the first five books of the Old Testament
_____ 6. Jerusalem	f. the Gospel of John
_____ 7. kingdom of God	g. statements that describe people who are truly blessed
_____ 8. Sacred Scripture	h. a symbol of the people of Israel in Luke's Gospel
_____ 9. Torah	i. the chosen witnesses of Jesus' Resurrection
_____ 10. Evangelists	j. figures of speech

C. What I Have Learned

Using what you learned in Unit One, write a two-sentence reflection about each of the following:

1. The literary building blocks of the Gospels

_____

_____

2. The Beatitudes

_____

_____

3. Conversion in Luke's Gospel

_____

_____

D. A Scripture Story

On a separate sheet of paper do the following:

By now you are familiar with many of the accounts of Jesus' miracles and teachings. Become an evangelist. Pick a literary style and rewrite your favorite Gospel story about Jesus in your own words. Use language and references your peers would understand. Be prepared to share your story with the class.