

Matthew reveals Jesus' ministry

THE STOCKINGS are hung in the closet with care, and we've all settled down to a long winter's Ordinary Time.

We're now getting our first non-Christmas look at Matthew's Gospel this year. Each year the Sunday scriptures highlight one of the first three Gospels; 1996 features Matthew. Advent and Christmas have already brought excerpts from his story of Jesus' birth. Lent and Easter will turn to John's Gospel. But all through the rest of the year, beginning next Sunday, we flip through the pages of Matthew from start to finish. We won't hear every verse, but we'll hear the most important parts in the same sequence Matthew followed.

Just who was Matthew? No one knows for sure. In fact, we don't even know his name. The first copies of the Gospels circulated for several generations before someone attached the names of some authors to them. Matthew appears as a tax-collector called by Jesus (Mt 9:9) and in the list of the twelve apostles (10:3), but nowhere does the Gospel itself imply that he is the same figure who wrote the text.

COULD THE WRITER have been the tax collector? It's not too likely. Scholars tell us that the Gospel was composed around 80 A.D., and that the writer incorporated almost all of Mark's Gospel, adding some other material at hand. It's as if somebody took a short story and expanded it by a few chapters. If the writer of this Gospel had been the tax-collector, an eyewitness to Jesus, he wouldn't have needed Mark's Gospel to get started.

Still, this Gospel is a wonderful testament to the activity of Jesus and the faith of the early Church.

Although our bibles divide Matthew into 28 chapters, Matthew himself had a different division in mind. His Gospel is a collection of five books in two parts each, with an introduction and a conclusion to the whole work. We've already heard parts

of the introduction in the last two months — the story of the birth of Jesus. And we'll hear the conclusion during Holy Week. (I don't want to spoil the ending for you, but Jesus dies and rises again.) In the middle are five books.

Each book has two parts — a story and a speech. The Gospel for next Sunday comes from the story part of the first book. The speech which follows it is perhaps the most famous speech ever recorded in human history, the Sermon on the Mount. We'll hear several passages from it before Lent begins next month.

Normally on the Sunday after Epiphany we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord and hear that Gospel story. This year the baptism gets squeezed over to a weekday because Christmas falls on a Monday. The feast will be back on Sunday next year.

THE STORY for next Sunday (4:12-23) basically answers the question, "How did Jesus get started?" Matthew answers it several ways:

- The influence of John the Baptist. Jesus picks up where John left off. He learned from John, was baptized by John, left Nazareth for Galilee to fill John's shoes when Herod had him arrested, and proclaimed the same message as John (3:2): "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

- The fulfillment of prophecy. According to Matthew, Jesus gets his start almost by destiny. Isaiah had foretold that the people in Zebulun and Naphtali by the sea, blinded in the darkness of the Gentiles living there, would see a great light (Is 9:1-2, cf. the first reading). Matthew believes Jesus fulfills that prophecy. (He's stretching — Capernaum lay in ancient Naphtali, but not in Zebulun, and Isaiah's sea was the Mediterranean, not the Sea of Galilee, but we overlook those details.)

- The call of followers. Jesus begins his ministry with the help of some friends. In fact, Peter, James, and John will all become key players — a sort of leadership team among the others.

- A foreshadowing of Jesus' future ministry. Matthew explains the beginning of Jesus' ministry with a summary of what he'll be doing: teaching, proclaiming, and curing. So we see in the first story the hint of what will follow in all the others. □

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Fr. Paul Turner



the
Good News
God's word in
everyday living

Daily Scripture Readings

**Second Sunday
in Ordinary Time
Sunday, January 14**
Isaiah 49:3, 5-6
Psalms 40:2, 4, 7-10
1 Corinthians 1:1-3
John 1:29-34

Monday, January 15
1 Samuel 15:16-23
Psalms 50:8-9, 16-17, 21, 28
Mark 2:18-22

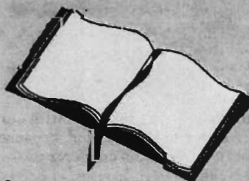
Tuesday, January 16
1 Samuel 16:1-13
Psalms 89:21-22, 27-28
Mark 2:23-28

Wednesday, January 17
1 Samuel 17:32-33, 37, 40-51
Psalms 144:1-2, 9-10
Mark 3:1-6

Thursday, January 18
1 Samuel 18:6-9, 19:1-7
Psalms 56:2-3, 9-14
Mark 3:7-12

Friday, January 19
1 Samuel 24:3-21
Psalms 57:2-4, 6, 11
Mark 3:13-19

Saturday, January 20
2 Samuel 1:1-4, 11-12, 19,
23-27
Psalms 80:2-3, 5-7
Mark 3:20-21



**Third Sunday
in Ordinary Time
Sunday, January 21**
Isaiah 9:1-3
Psalms 27:1, 4, 13-14
1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17
Matthew 4:12-23