

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPELS (THE GOOD NEWS)

1. INTRODUCTION

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16)

Dei Verbum (18) from Vatican II tells us

It is common knowledge that among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special **preeminence**, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness for the life and teaching of the incarnate Word, our savior.

As we study Sacred Scripture we must avoid two pitfalls. One such pitfall is called **rationalism**. This is where we only believe things that can be demonstrated to our reason, a faith devoid of mystery and denies divine revelation. The result to accept nothing that goes beyond reason or anything that goes beyond what natural science can tell us. Scientism, the principle that scientific method is the best or only means to truth, is a form of rationalism. As Catholics we fully reject that

There's another pitfall called **fideism**. This rejects the use of reason. It says that faith doesn't have to be reasonable. This pitfall is more common and far more dangerous than rationalism in matters of faith. Some reject Christianity because believers don't take objections to the faith seriously. We should be prepared to respond when people have difficulties with matters of faith. The truth has nothing to fear.

We will learn much here from Protestant scholars. St. Jerome studied extensively with Rabbis, not Christians. He immersed himself and even lived in the Jewish sector of Rome. He didn't believe everything the rabbis believed, but he knew that they knew the Hebrew scriptures better than anybody in the Christian world at that time which was primarily speaking Latin. He wanted to learn. We shouldn't be afraid of truth.

And one of the problems that we have in the Church today is that for too many people their understanding of scripture is on a very low intellectual level. Many are smart people who are interested in theology and may even read famous 20th century theologians. If they are interested in the question of science and faith, they will read all kinds of books on quantum physics and how it relates to theology or books that offer rational scientific explanations for miracle stories. But when it comes to books on scripture, they want the 30-second sound bite. And then they complain that they don't get anything out of Mass.

I love Thomas Aquinas, and Saint Augustine and Saint Therese of Lisieux, but we will never read Thomas Aquinas or Saint Augustine or Saint Therese of Lisieux at mass instead of the Gospels.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says the gospels are the heart of the scriptures because they're our principal source of knowledge about the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. It's why we stand up at Mass when the gospel is read. As Brant Pitre said, "We sit for Paul, but we stand for Jesus."

The gospels are of primary importance, and so we need to devote ourselves to them. If we knew only the gospels but didn't know anything else, we'd be fine. If we knew everything else but didn't know the gospels we'd be in trouble.

Jesus was a teacher, and we are disciples. The word disciple means student. What students do? They study.

Here, we will study, specifically the gospels. Though all scripture is inspired by God, the gospels are the heart of the scriptures because they give us the life and deeds and words of our Lord Jesus Christ, the fullness of revelation.

We will have recourse to the Old Testament, reading of the New Testament in light of the Old, and the Old and light of the New, something that scholarship out of the 18th, 19th, and most of the 20th century really neglected (though the father of the Church did this). This is one of the fruits of modern biblical studies.

Some recommended texts there are many!

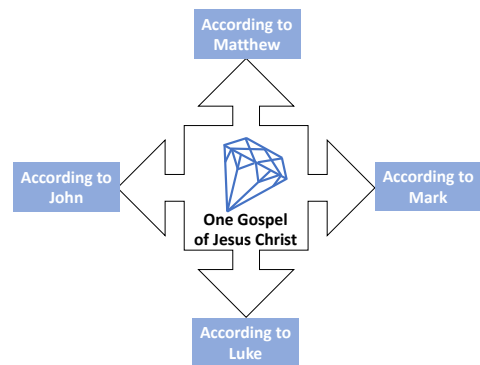
1. The Trilogy of Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), Jesus of Nazareth:
 - *The Infancy Narratives*
 - *From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*
 - *From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*All published by Ignatius Press.
2. Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, Baylor University Press, 2017.
Hays was a pioneer of reading New Testament in context with the Old Testament. His book, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of St. Paul*, became very influential in the reading of Paul.
3. Joel Green and Nicholas, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, InterVarsity Press, 2013.
4. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2017.

One of our major goals during these sessions will be to dispel the myth that the gospels are just that, myths made up by the church, or are of unknown origin or authorship, or are unreliable, or have radically changed over the centuries, or any number of other things one hears today.

Why are there four gospels? In fact, there is only ONE gospel.

The four is interesting number.

- There are four rivers in the Garden of Eden.
- In the Old Testament there traditionally are the four corners of the world.
- There are the four horsemen in Zachariah that are patrolling the world.
- In Ezekiel there are the four living creatures, four great angels that are before God's throne in heaven.



The fathers of the church, such as Irenaeus, Jerome, and others, reflected early on as to why there was four gospels. They saw this as part of God's plan, a sense of completeness, a wholeness, a sense of catholicity. The four gospels are seen as these four rivers of the New Eden that are to go out and water and nourish, spiritually, the entire world.

In the catacombs below the church in Rome of St. Paul Behind the Wall, one sees the mosaic of four rivers streaming out Eden along with the four gospel writers and the four major prophets above them, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel. It's an image that the early Christians reflected on.



Distinctions among the gospels

The three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are known as the **synoptic gospels**, Synoptic is Greek for “one view”, meaning they give similar views of the ministry and life of Jesus.

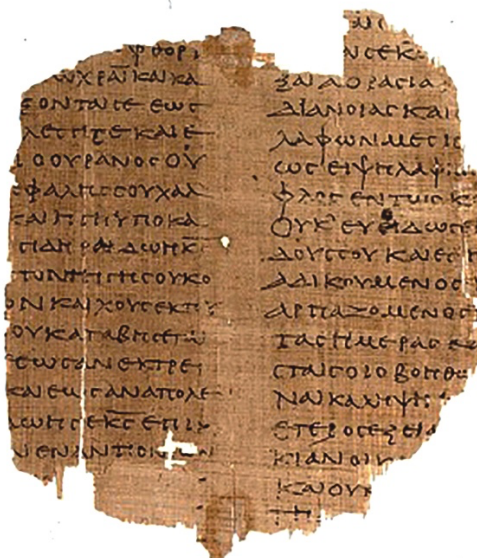
They all follow the life of Jesus - but with differences.

Matthew and Luke give infancy narratives while Mark doesn't. Mark begins with the baptism of Jesus. Still, they all follow Jesus' progression from his ministry in Galilee, his journey to Jerusalem, then the climax of his entry into the temple and his death and resurrection.

Then the gospel of John is unique. John tells of a three-year ministry by describing three Passovers. John takes a very different perspective than the synoptic gospels. Though there is some overlap of John's gospel and the synoptics, Luke's in particular, but John is distinctive in style and in focus, so John is seen as different from the synoptic gospels.

The order of the gospels.

The canonical order is Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We will look more at this later. The tradition in the Church is that Matthew's gospel was the first gospel written and was originally written in Hebrew (or perhaps Aramaic). Aramaic was the popular language of the Jews, while Hebrew is their scholarly language. Matthew was composed for a Jewish community and has a very Jewish feel to it. It uses scripture far more than any of the gospels, with over 50 clear citations and direct references to the Old Testament.



Possibly the earliest known manuscript of the Gospel of Mark

The *inclusio*.

Ancient manuscripts didn't have spaces between words, punctuation, or chapter or section headings. The manuscripts of New Testament are written entirely with upper-case letters. In Greco-Roman writing, a literary device called an *inclusio* was often used as a way of bracketing a set of materials by using a pattern(s) of repetition to accomplish sectioning.

Ancient writings would often introduce their main idea by framing it with a key phrase which serves as a thesis statement found at the beginning and end of the writing, what today we might call keywords.

For example, this is seen in the gospel of Mark where he uses the theme of "*the way*." Jesus was on "*the way*."

Mark 8:22-27¹

And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the village; and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands upon him, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" And he looked up and said, "I see men; but they look like trees, walking." Then again he laid his hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and saw everything clearly. And he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village. And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And **on the way** he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

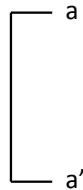
Mark 10:46-52:

And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." And Jesus said to him, "**Go your way**; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him **on the way**.

¹ This story of the healing of the blind man with Jesus having to act twice as he did is found only in Mark's gospel. We will return to the significance of this once we understand a bit more about why the individual gospels were written.

On the way, Jesus heals a blind man in Mark 8:22-26. Jesus then goes on “the way.” In 10:46-52 Jesus again heals a blind man, Bartimaeus, who then follows Jesus on *the way*. So, Jesus is on “*the way*.” On the way to where? On the way to Jerusalem and to the cross. Three times on *the way* to Jerusalem Jesus will give a passion prediction which frames a section. The repetition of the phrase on “*the way*,” and the healing of the two blind man frames the Mark’s gospel.

So, an *inclusio* is framing something by a and a’:



Another example of an *inclusio* is found in Paul’s letter to the Romans 1:5 where he says,

... this is to bring about the *obedience of faith* for all the nations.

Paul then repeats this phrase, *the obedience of faith*, in Romans 16:22-23. The thesis of Paul's letter to the Romans is *the obedience of faith*. At the heart of his plot, in Romans 5, he talks about the disobedience of Adam versus the obedience of the new Adam (Jesus). Paul is using a framing device to give the sense of his overall thesis.

Each of the gospels has an *inclusio* that frames the gospel and gives an overview of the thesis.

The *inclusio* for Matthew

For the gospel of Matthew, at the beginning, the title of the child to be born is called Emmanuel. Emmanuel means God with us. Verse 23:

Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel, which means *God with us*.

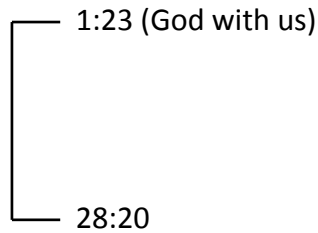
Matthew makes certain you understand that Emmanuel means, “God with us.” He defines it for the reader.

In the very last line of the gospel Jesus promises:

I will be with you always to the end of the ages.

And so, the child who is God with us heard in the beginning of the gospel along with the last thing Jesus says as he's ascending, and this forms an *inclusio*.

For Matthew, the *inclusio* is the good news that God is with us.

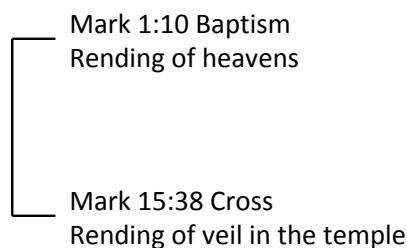


This also gives a big hint about Jesus' identity as God. For Matthew, the good news is that God is with Israel in the person of Jesus Christ.

Inclusio for Mark

Mark begins his gospel with the baptism of Jesus and says that the heavens are opened, but Mark uses a different word than does Matthew or Luke to describe the opening up of the heavens. Mark uses the word *schizomonous*² (σχίζομενους), which means to tear asunder, to rip open.

In Mark 1:10, as Jesus comes up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened, literally torn asunder, and the Spirit descended upon him like a dove. Later, in Mark 15:38, we get another occasion of that same word, *schizomonous*, when the veil of the temple is torn at Jesus' death. In Mark 15:38, as Jesus breathes his last, the veil in the temple is torn from top to bottom. In this way Mark links Jesus's baptism with the cross, framed as an *inclusio*. Mark is the most dramatic of the gospels.



So, there's a parallel here between the heavens and the temple veil. The historians Philo and Josephus mention that the temple veil had the cosmos depicted on it. That's not an accident. The temple veil represented the cosmos that separates God and man. Mark communicates the relationship between temple-and-heavens and baptism-and-cross. Recall that St. Paul sees baptism as crucifixion (Gal 3:27).

Towards the end of chapter 10 of Mark, when John and James' mother approaches Jesus and asks if her sons can sit at Jesus left and, on his right, Jesus tells her,

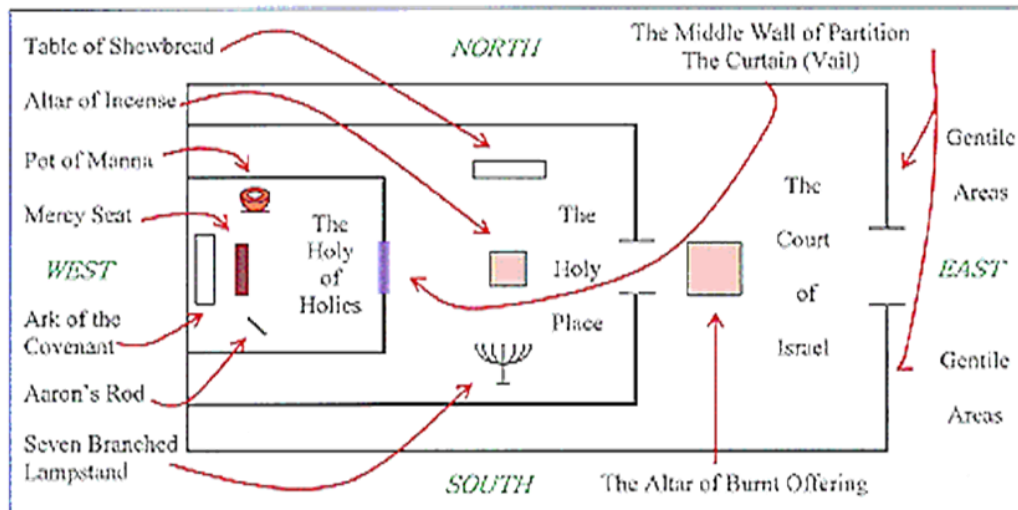
“You don't know what you're asking.

² *Schizomonous* is where we get the English word schism. A schism means a tearing.

And they say, yes, we can and Jesus responds,

“Can you drink the cup with which I'm to drink? And **can you be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized?**”

Jesus is connecting his passion and cross with baptism as seen in this dialogue. So, for Mark's gospel, the good news is that the barrier between heaven and earth has been torn asunder by Jesus's actions. The rending of that barrier between heaven and earth yields the Holy Spirit.



The temple veil separated the Holy of Holies, God's dwelling, where only the high priest could go and only once a year on Yom Kippur.

Jesus' act of atonement on the cross becomes the new Yom Kippur that ends the barrier between God and his people. The actions of baptism and the cross are together a tearing down barriers of separation between heaven and earth.

So Mark is similar to Matthew, but with a different emphasis. For Matthew it's God as Emmanuel. Matthew is more about fulfillment. All that happened was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, that the child should be called Emmanuel, God with us.

These *inclusio* are following what Hebrew writers routinely used, from Genesis onwards, and are especially used in the Psalms as a literary device that leads to deeper meaning.

But don't think that "God with us" or the sense of "rending" discussed covers the full meaning. There's a depth to the mystery that Jesus's baptism is about his dying on the cross. Mark tries to make clear what Paul preaches in Romans 6:3:

Beloved, don't, you know, that all you who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. And if you've been baptized into a death like his, so likewise shall you rise with him in a resurrection like his.

There is something mysterious about Jesus' baptism that has to do with the whole identity of the Christian life, and that's what Mark's trying to allude to. There's a depth to the gospels that takes a lifetime of prayer to plumb and beauty that we can never exhaust.

Inclusio for Luke

Luke is the master storyteller. He's a physician, well-educated, and writes in masterful Greek, which is his primary language. Interestingly, his prologue is masterful and sophisticated, written in high-level Greek. But from verse five onwards (in the days of King Herod, the King of Judea), the Greek level drops to simplistic Greek in imitation of First and Second Samuel in the Septuagint and follows that that pattern.

Luke purposely does this to show that the story of Jesus is a continuation of the story of Israel. The books of Samuel are about how David becomes king, and the gospel Luke is about how Jesus becomes the new David, so Luke imitates that literary style.

The *inclusio* that Luke gives at the beginning of the gospel is when the angel appears to Zachariah as he's serving at the hour of incense. In 1:10:

And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside of the hour of incense.

One of the greatest privileges is to serve at the altar of incense in the sanctuary, and this fell to Zachariah by lot. Except for the high priest, it is as close as anybody gets to the presence of God.

The altar of incense is set up next to the curtain that was torn in Mark. Zachariah goes in and prays at the altar of incense and the angel appears to him. The key point to this story is illustrated in the book of Sirach Chapter 50, we hear of the high priest going in to offer sacrifices in the temple:

Greatest of his family, the glory of his people, was SIMEON the priest, son of Onias (the NAB gives the name as Jochanan) in whose time the house of God was renovated, in whose days the temple was reinforced. In his time also the retaining wall was built ... How splendid he was as he looked out from ... behind the veil! Like a star shining among the clouds, like the full moon at the festal season; like sun shining upon the temple of the King, like a rainbow appearing in the cloudy sky; ... (your get the idea) vested in sublime magnificence ... as he ascended the glorious altar and lent majesty to the court of the sanctuary. When he received the portions from the priests while he stood before the sacrificial wood, ... with the offerings to the LORD in their hands, in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel.

Once he had completed the service at the altar and arranged the sacrificial hearth for the Most High, and had stretched forth his hand for the cup, to offer blood of the

grape, and poured it out at the foot of the altar, ... the sons of Aaron would sound a blast, the priests, on their trumpets ... as a reminder before the Most High.

All the people with one accord would fall with face to the ground in adoration before the Most High, before the Holy One of Israel. Then hymns would re-echo, and over the throng sweet strains of praise resound. All the people of the land would shout for joy, praying to the Merciful One, as the high priest completed the service at the altar by presenting to God the fitting sacrifice.

Then coming down he would raise his hands over all the congregation of Israel; The blessing of the LORD would be upon his lips, the name of the LORD would be his glory. The people would again fall down to receive the blessing of the Most High.

So, he's coming out with splendid robes and he looks glorious. He receives the sacrifices of the people from the hands of the priests and he offers them up. Then he reaches out his hand, he pours out the wine, and then all the people shout and there's the blowing of the trumpets in verse 16. And then in verse 17, people gather with haste. They fall to face down the ground and worship the Lord, and then the singers sing with their chorus. And then the people besought the Lord, the most high in prayer before him who was merciful till the order of liturgy, the order of worship of the Lord was ended, so they completed his service. Then Simon came down and lifted up his hands.

Simon raises his hands and he gives a blessing over the whole congregation of the sons of Israel to pronounce the blessing, the priestly prayer of Aaron,

May the Lord (Yahweh) bless you and keep you and make his face shine upon you.

It was the only time a Jew could pronounce the name of God, Yahweh. A priest in the temple liturgy could pronounce the name Yahweh to invoke his presence, and the temple is the place where God was to be present. Once the Jews lose the temple, then they can no longer pronounce the name, but the priests had the privilege of pronouncing the name of Yahweh.

The priest officiates in Sirach is the high priest. In Luke it's Zachariah, who by lot is the officiating priest. The priest then comes out and now represents God to the people.

So, for the first half of the liturgy, as a priest, he represents the people to God. After the service, he comes out of the sanctuary (where God dwells) and now he represents God to the people, and so he's able to pronounce the name of God and impart God's blessing upon the people.

So, the priest, as a mediator, represents Israel to Yahweh, and then Yahweh to Israel. So Zachariah is supposed to come out and pronounce this blessing. When he pronounces the blessing of the Lord the people bow down and worship and receive the blessing of the most high.

This would be the climax for any pilgrim coming to the temple. They could hear the name of their God pronounced in a blessing at the end of the liturgy, maybe for the only time in their life. But Zachariah, when he comes out of the temple, he can't impart the blessing because he's mute. He didn't believe God's word and so he can't represent God to the people. He can't glory in the name that he didn't trust and believe in.

So, the beginning of Luke's gospel starts in the temple with the Old Testament liturgy and a blessing that is not able to be given because of Zachariah's lack of belief.

The last thing that happens in Luke's gospel is 24:50:

Then he (Jesus) led them as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands he blessed them. And while he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven and they worshiped him.

The story of Luke begins in the temple with an old covenant priest, Zachariah, who displeased God and so is mute and unable to speak the blessing. And it ends with Jesus, the new high priest, raising his hands and giving the blessing with the disciples falling down in worship – not in the temple, because now there's something that transcends the temple and transcends the old covenant priesthood.

This is Luke's *inclusio*. For Luke, the good news is the blessing. The blessing that Jacob longed for and that Jacob, not Esau, received. We follow the blessing throughout the book of Genesis. God blesses the man and the woman, then Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob, then Joseph. For Luke, who even as a Gentile knows the story of Israel quite well, traces out the blessing and shows that we've moved from the old temple, from old covenant priesthood of Zechariah, which is mute and disbelieving, to the new thing God's going to do, and that Jesus himself is the new high priest who imparts the blessing.

Reading Luke's gospel shows how Jesus is priestly and shows the nature of the priestly blessing he imparts.

The theme of the blessing is the *inclusio* for the gospel of Luke.

Inclusio for John

Read the (beautiful) prologue to John's gospel.

John's gospel begins *in the beginning*, an echo of Genesis. God is speaking a word for each day of creation. God spoke and it was. In Genesis there is *the word*, there is *in the beginning*, and with creation theme of light and darkness.

John brilliantly and subtly designs his gospel using these themes. In chapter one John gives four days just as in Genesis chapter one. There is a day, verse 19, where John the Baptist gives testimony. Then in verse 29 is the next day when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him.

In verse 35 is the next day, and in verse 43 is the next day. Counting up, there are four days.

Chapter 2:1 begins “on the third day there was a marriage.” So, three days plus four days gives seven days, echoing Genesis with the seven days of creation.

And on the seventh day is the wedding feast at Cana, another echo to creation Genesis (to be looked at later). For now, we jump to chapter 20 to see the *inclusio*. Chapter 20 begins with the resurrection with: “Now on the first day of the week.”

So, John gives a week of creation *in the beginning* with the echo of the old creation account, and then with the resurrection on the first day of the week, showing that the resurrection is the beginning of a new creation.

Notice, on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb early while it was still *dark*, so John plays on the themes of light and darkness in his echoes to the creation account in the prologue. Verse 11:

And Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept, she stopped to look into the tomb and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had laid, one out the head and one at the feet. And they said to her woman, why are you weeping? And she said, and because they have taken away, my Lord, I do not know where they have laid him. Saying that, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. And Jesus said to her woman, why are you weeping?

There are many echoes to the garden of Eden in John. They're in a garden tomb. Then Mary supposes Jesus to be the gardener. John loves irony. Jesus is the gardener who planted the garden of Eden because in the prologue we learn that everything was created through him. Jesus is the gardener in a way that is truer, so true that Mary is wrong in what she thinks. There's a truth to what she's saying, but she is not grasping the depth of that truth.

And notice that Jesus says to her, woman, so again the idea of woman in the garden with echoes and illusions to creation here.

The inclusio:

Matthew	→	God with us (man)
Mark	→	Rending veil between God and man (lion)
Luke	→	Priestly blessing (bull)
John	→	Creation/new creation (eagle)

Four gospels, four different *inclusio* for different views, but the same plot. It's Jesus who is God with us. It's Jesus who is rending the barriers. It's Jesus who's imparting the blessing. It's Jesus who is the agent and the creator of a new creation. They all say the same thing, but looking at it from different angles.

Images of the Evangelists



In Ezekiel 1, the prophet Ezekiel has a vision of four living creatures with four different faces; a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. For St. Irenaeus and in the Catholic tradition the four gospel writers are depicted by these symbols and relate to how each gospel begins. According to Saints Irenaeus and Jerome, Matthew begins with a genealogy, an exciting thing if you're a Jew.

Matthew's genealogy reveals the mystery of the incarnation. God has become man; a Virgin conceives and bears the child, Emmanuel. **Hence, the symbol for Matthew is a man**, showing that God has taken on human nature. He's the God-man, with us in human flesh, not in a tabernacle, but in human flesh.

Mark's gospel begins with Jesus in the wilderness with the wild beasts after his baptism, so **the symbol for Mark is a lion**.

The symbol for Luke is the ox. Luke begins in the temple, at the time of the תָּמִיד, the daily offering, so, the symbol for Luke is the ox symbolizing Old Testament temple sacrifice. The ox as sacrifice can't impart the blessing, but Jesus offers himself as a sacrifice on the cross and will impart a far greater blessing than anything that was seen in the Old Testament.

John is signified by the eagle, because like the eagle, John soars. He begins with the prologue,

In the beginning was the Word.

The phrase "In the beginning" echoes Genesis which begins, "in the beginning." John is giving us a new beginning with Jesus and hearkening back to the most ancient of beginnings,

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 were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

The idea of the Eagle is that John is taking an Eagle's eye view. looking at the big picture. Even before the water and the land are separated in Genesis 1:2, in the beginning was Jesus, who is the Word who was with God and is God.

The Ordering of the Gospels

The Church gives a cycle of readings, years A (Matthew), B (Mark) and C (Luke). John is interspersed throughout, but especially in the year with Mark where we have John at key points because mark is relatively short.

- Matthew's gospel is the most copied.
- The most fragments and manuscripts of Matthew's gospel exist from the early church.
- Matthew's gospel was the favorite of the early church.

Matthew was seen as the first catechism in Christianity. It contains the sermon on the Mount, which St. Augustine said if we lost all the New Testament but had the Sermon on the Mount, we would have enough to know how to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Sermon on the Mount is given in five discourses as found in chapters five, six, and seven. Matthew shows that Jesus is the new Moses. Moses gives us the five books of the Torah, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Ironically, Mark calls Jesus with the title teacher, but doesn't provide much of the content of Jesus' teaching and Jesus is not busy teaching. He's busy doing.

Mark assumes you know Jesus' teaching and so is very terse. The Sermon on the Mount is not found in the gospel of Mark. Mark 4 gives four parables, but they are an abbreviated version of the seven parables in Matthew 13. There is an eschatological discourse in Mark 13, but again, it is brief.

So, Matthew's gospel served as the first catechism and is more systematic in his teaching. We'll discuss this in more depth when we talk about the structure and outline of the gospel of Matthew.

The tradition was Matthew's gospel was first. The vast majority of scholars believed that Mark's gospel was the first written, an idea has been dominant for the last 200 years, but a growing minority of mainstream biblical scholars today disagree. They say Matthew's gospel had to precede Mark's because Mark's gospel is assuming that you've been catechized and know the teaching found in Matthew. Matthew's gospel is an introduction to Jesus Christ and to his teaching, whereas Mark's gospel challenges you to take up your cross and realize that discipleship is cruciform.

Matthew is concerned with basic formation while Mark's concern is about being a blind, deaf as a disciple and not taking up your cross.

Finally in Luke, after Matthew's catechization and Mark challenge to take up one's cross, one needs to know that discipleship is first and foremost about God's mercy. As disciples we all fall short, so Luke is about being released from the debt of sin by God's mercy so as not to despair.

Luke is about mercy, and he uses the theme of a **jubilee**, a key theme for Luke, to emphasize this mercy along with the idea of a great banquet to which we are invited. One only needs to say yes to the jubilee that releases one from sin, and yes to the invitation to the banquet. Like the prodigal son who has been disobedient, the sinner can come back and be invited into the feast, into the Father's embrace, because the Father is merciful. We will return to the idea of jubilee later.

There is a pedagogy that Church has in ordering the gospels in the way she does; Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The word for disciple in Greek means a student or a learner. We learn with Matthew. We need to be challenged by Mark because we are afraid of suffering, afraid of the cross. Mark's fundamental message is that the only thing that works is to embrace the cross. With Luke, having been challenged, we all have fallen short, so we need to accept God's mercy and accept the invitation of release from sins, the invitation to the banquet, to the wedding feast. We take up that invitation, not by what we've learned (Matthew) or what we've done (Mark), but by who God is (Luke). Luke, a disciple of Paul, is the gospel of grace and mercy.

Next, we will examine the origin of the gospels.