

Lives of Saints

St Matthew

Feast day: 21st September



“The centurion,
together with the
others guarding
Jesus...said, ‘In
truth this man was
son of God.’”

(Matthew 27:54)

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I am spoken of five times in the New Testament; first in Matthew 9:9, when called by Jesus to follow Him, and then four times in the list of the Apostles, where I am mentioned as the seventh one (Luke 6:15, and Mark 3:18), and again as the eighth (Matthew 10:3, and Acts 1:13). I was a Jew from Galilee. My father was Alpheus and my name was originally Levi. I used to work for the occupying Roman forces, collecting taxes from other Jews in Capernaum. As a “publican,” I was generally hated as a traitor by my fellow Jews. The Pharisees considered us grave “sinners.” So it was shocking to them to hear that Jesus had called me to be one of his intimate followers.

I got Jesus into more trouble by inviting him to a party and having tax collectors and those known as sinners there as well, which greatly distressed the Pharisees. As a disciple and an Apostle I followed Christ, accompanied Him up to the time of His Passion and, in Galilee, was one of the witnesses of His Resurrection. I was also amongst the Apostles who were present at the Ascension, and afterwards at Pentecost (Acts 1:10 and 1:14).

My Gospel was written for my fellow countrymen, both believers and unbelievers. I wanted to encourage believers in the trials that were to come, and I wanted to convince non-believers that the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus. I tried to answer the question put by the disciples of St. John the Baptist, “Are You He Who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

I composed my Gospel in my native Aramaic, the “Hebrew tongue” mentioned in the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. My apostolic activity was at first restricted to the communities of Palestine. But soon afterward, about the time of the persecution of Herod Agrippa I in 42 AD, I took my departure for other lands, and travelled to Ethiopia, Parthia and Persia to preach the good news.